

# **RUNNING**

## **The Human Machine**

**The Need for Theology and Ethics**



**Dr. James T. Reuteler, Ph.D.**

Covenant Bible Studies

Aurora, Colorado

2015

This is a different kind of book.  
It's impossible to write about Theology and Ethics  
without disagreements.  
I don't expect anyone to agree with all my conclusions,  
but I do expect everyone to respect them.  
My purpose is to apply Theology and Ethics  
to the circumstances of life.

For me the Word of God is primary,  
and this effort includes defining the Word of God,  
so that I can apply it to run the Human Machine.

*Dedicated to all those who may not think alike,  
but do their best to love alike.*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>THEOLOGY .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1. The Trinity (Who is God?) .....	9
2. The Incarnation (Who is Jesus?) .....	13
3. Grace (Who are We?) .....	15
<b>SCRIPTURE.....</b>	<b>17</b>
4. The Origin of the Bible.....	19
5. Canonizing the Bible .....	25
6. The Inspiration of the Bible.....	29
7. Interpreting the Bible .....	39
<b>JESUS .....</b>	<b>45</b>
8. The Messianic Claim .....	47
9. The Kingdom of God .....	59
10. The Cost of Discipleship .....	67
11. The Law and Gospel .....	79
12. The Spiritual Disciplines .....	87
13. The Apocalyptic Message.....	99
<b>ETHICS.....</b>	<b>117</b>
14. The Law.....	119
15. Grace.....	123
16. Principles .....	127
<b>SOCIETY .....</b>	<b>131</b>
17. Marriage and the Family .....	133
18. Gender, Race, and Class .....	139
19. Economics .....	145
20. Politics: Dual Citizenship .....	149
21. War and Revolution .....	153
22. Life and Death Issues.....	159

<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>165</b>
The Trinity .....	166
Deuteronomy: The First Scriptures.....	167
Ezra’s Religious Reforms .....	169
The Reforms of Ezra (in Nehemiah) .....	173
The Hebrew Bible Canon .....	175
The Apocrypha.....	176
Summary of the Apocrypha .....	177
The Protestant Canon .....	180
Summary of the New Testament.....	181
The Ten Commandments Compared .....	183
The Ten Commandments Contrasted .....	184
The Parables of Jesus.....	185
The Seven Covenants .....	186
The Seven Churches .....	188
John Wesley and the Bible.....	189
The General Rules .....	190
The Rule of Discipleship .....	193
The Seven Deadly Sins .....	194
The Purpose of Life .....	195
The Purpose of Marriage .....	196
A Chart on Ethics.....	197
<b>A WORD TO THE READER .....</b>	<b>199</b>
<b>OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR .....</b>	<b>201</b>

## INTRODUCTION

This is a different kind of book. It consists of my own reflections on Theology and Ethics and their application to running the human machine, which of course is us. Theology and Ethics cannot be separated. As I thought about the purpose of Ethics, I could not get away from some words written by Juan Luis Segundo:

*Our falsified and inauthentic ways of dealing with our fellow [human beings] are allied to our falsifications of the idea of God. Our unjust society and our perverted idea of God are in close and terrible alliance.*

Our theology has a powerful influence on our moral or immoral behavior, so as I try to develop an Ethic, I cannot forget about Theology. Theology affects our moral behavior, but what is our reason for developing an Ethic? Why do we even need one? C.S. Lewis said it best:

*Moral rules are directions for running the human machine. Every moral rule is there to prevent a breakdown, or a strain, or a friction, in the running of that machine.*

I'd like to start by taking a look at the three most important theological doctrines, which form the foundation for Christianity. They are the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and Grace. My reason for starting here is simple. I am a Christian and my interest is in Christian Ethics. I don't think a Christian Ethic can be developed apart from its theological foundation. While there are other theological doctrines that affect ethics, they are not as important as the Trinity, the Incarnation, and Grace. The Trinity defines who God is, the Incarnation defines who Jesus is, and Grace defines who we are.

I believe that God was in Jesus Christ, reconciling the world to himself. If I did not believe this, it wouldn't make any sense to proceed with the origin and canonizing of Scripture. I might study the teachings of Jesus as a man of great insight and wisdom, but those teachings would not be as significant. Since I have concluded that God was speaking to us through Jesus Christ, I must also conclude that Jesus is the Word of God. Scripture is that which has been written about him. The divinity of Jesus (325 C.E.) and the canonization of Scripture (367 C.E.) occurred about the same time in history.

If Jesus is the Word of God, then we need to know what Jesus taught. I have divided his teachings into six categories. They are: his

Messianic Claim, the Kingdom of God, the Cost of Discipleship, Law and Gospel, Spiritual Disciplines and his Apocalyptic Message. What Jesus taught is important if we're going to apply his teachings to our lives and to our society. Because of the above conclusions, I feel compelled to accept John Wesley's approach to drawing conclusions, using Scripture as primary and then taking into consideration, tradition, reason, and experience.

My next step is to make a brief definition of Ethics, as I understand it. I'm not trying to define Ethics for everyone. As I attempt to apply Ethics to six circumstances in Society, I will appeal first to the teaching of Jesus. Sometimes I will appeal to Paul, who was responsible for writing a good share of the New Testament. In my opinion, Paul had a deep understand of who Jesus is and what he taught. I'm sure that many will disagree with some of my conclusions. Perhaps that can help us enter into a constructive dialogue.

Dr. James T. Reuteler, Ph.D.  
Aurora, Colorado  
[Jim@Reuteler.org](mailto:Jim@Reuteler.org)  
[www.Jim.Reuteler.org](http://www.Jim.Reuteler.org)

# **THEOLOGY**





# 1. THE TRINITY

## Who is God?

*The three persons of the Trinity  
always work inseparably,  
for their work is always the work of the one God.*

*Everything the Trinity does  
is done by Father, Son, and Spirit  
working in unity with one will.*

### **Tertullian (160-220 C.E.)**

The Trinity is the central doctrine, or teaching, of Christianity. Those Churches that reject the Trinity are not recognized as Christian Churches. Some see the Trinity in Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, where he says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

While these persons make up the the three persons of the Trinity, they were not called a Trinity until Tertullian's time. Tertullian was the first one to use the word Trinity, which was defined and adopted at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E.<sup>1</sup>

### **Augustine (354-430 C.E.)**

Augustine was the first theologian to define a simple Trinity everyone could understand, even if his definition was incomprehensible. Augustine's Trinity can be stated in seven simple statements everyone can understand. They are as follows:

1. The Father is God.
2. The Son is God.
3. The Holy Spirit is God.
4. The Father is not the Son.
5. The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
6. The Holy Spirit is not the Father.
7. There is only one God.

---

<sup>1</sup> Some would say that Theophilus of Antioch was the first Christian writer to use the word *Trinity*, speaking of God, his Word, and his Wisdom.

Each statement by itself can be easily understood, but when you put them all together, they become incomprehensible. Some would say that they become a mystery.

### **Arius (256-336 C.E.)**

In the Gospel of John, “the Son” is referred to as “the Logos.” At this time everyone believed that there is the Creator and the created. If God is the Creator, and we are the created, then what is the Logos? Arius, who was a Presbyter in Alexandria, taught that the Logos was higher than the created world, but lower than the Father, who is the Creator. The Logos is not the Creator. Arius’ favorite statement was: “There was once when he was not.” In other words, the Logos or the Son was created.

### **Athanasius (296-373 C.E.)**

Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, disagreed with Arius, and taught that the Logos or the Son was not created, but was eternally begotten from the Father. The Son is of the same essence (substance) as the Father. He is *homoousious* (of the same essence) with the Father. The Father has always been a Father and has always had a Son. There was never a time when this relationship did not exist. The Son was never created. He was begotten, not made.

### **Two Ecumenical Councils**

The First Ecumenical Council, which met in Nicaea in 325 C.E., decided in favor of Athanasius’ teaching. The Son is *homoousious* (of the same essence) with the Father. He is begotten, not made. The Nicene Creed stated the relationship between the Father and the Son as follows:

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God, begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father.*

The Second Ecumenical Council, which met in Constantinople in 381 C.E., concluded that the Holy Spirit is also of the same essence with the Father. The Holy Spirit, however, is not begotten, but proceeds from the Father.

### **Gregory of Nyssa (335-394 C.E.)**

Why are we not talking about three Gods? The answer is that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all have the same will and action. They are one God.

They are three *hypostases* (Greek) or three *personas* (Latin). In the fourth century *persona* (*person*) referred to masks that were used in the theater. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were differentiated by their relations or roles. The Father is the Creator, The Son begotten by the Father, is the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father (and the Son) is the Sanctifier.

### **The Double Procession**

In 1054 C.E., the Western and Eastern Churches reached a dividing point over the doctrine of the double procession. The Western version of the Nicene Creed came to say that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father “and the Son.” *Filioque* is Latin for “and the Son.” The Eastern Church refused to make this addition for two reasons. First, it undermined the monarchy of the Father, the doctrine that states that the Father is the sole source of divinity. Secondly, it objected to adding anything to the Nicene Creed without the authority of an Ecumenical Council.

The double procession is an Augustinian doctrine that the Western Church officially defended. Augustine argued that because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, he proceeds from the Father and the Son together. Consistent with the doctrine of the double procession is Augustine’s teaching that the Spirit is the love shared by the Father and the Son. Anselm (1033-1109 C.E.) argued that without the double procession, there is no way to differentiate the begetting of the Son from the proceeding of the Holy Spirit. Without an Ecumenical Council, the Western Church inserted “and the Son” within the Nicene creed. The whole sentence reads as follows:

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father (and the Son),  
who with the Father and the son  
is worshipped and glorified,  
who was spoken through the prophets.*

### **An Experiential Trinity**

I would suggest that the Trinity is best understood when we speak of it in terms of images we experience. Tertullian, for example, compared the Trinity to the sun:

When a ray is projected from the sun it is a portion of the whole sun; but the sun will be in the ray because it is a ray of the sun; the substance is not separated but extended. So from spirit comes spirit, and God from God, as light is kindled from light.

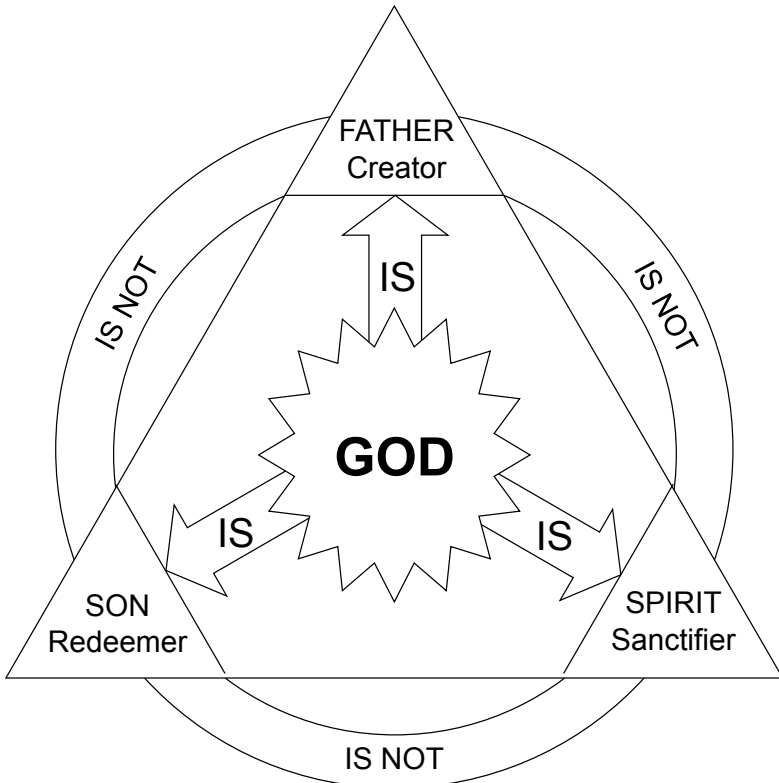
Joseph Girzone, who wrote the *Joshua* series of books, defined the Trinity in a similar way to Tertullian. He compares the Trinity to the Sun.

Look at the sun. The sun is one and it is simple. However, there is the sun itself, and there is the heat and the light that touches our lives. We know the sun when its rays disperse the darkness of night. A blind person knows the sun by its warmth. They are different, but they are expressions of the same being. It is the same with God. His oneness cannot be defined by our understanding of oneness.

As much as I like comparing the Trinity to the sun, I prefer to use theological terms that point to the various ways we experience the Trinity. My favorite terms for experiencing God, would be:

1. As our Creator
2. As our Redeemer
3. As our Sanctifier

My graphic would look as follows:



## 2. THE INCARNATION

### Who is Jesus?

*Remaining what he was, he assumed what he was not.*

#### Gregory of Naziansen

Trinity and Incarnation are the two most important doctrines in Christianity. The doctrine of the Incarnation is the centerpiece of Christology, which concerns the person and work of Jesus. Two key points about the Incarnation were resolved within Nicene orthodoxy in the fourth century. Those two points are that Christ is fully divine and fully human.

In becoming incarnate in Jesus, the divine Word of God did not cease to be fully God. As Gregory of Naziansen (329-390 C.E.) put it, “Remaining what he was, he assumed what he was not.” For Gregory, Christ was fully human, assuming a human soul (or mind) as well as a human body. Not everyone accepted the full humanity of Christ. One group that rejected it was called Apollinarianism, after the Alexandrian theologian, Apollinaris (390 C.E.), who taught that Christ did not have a human *soul* (rational mind). According to Apollinaris, Christ had a human body and a divine mind, Gregory disagreed and affirmed the full humanity of Christ.

In the fifth century, Cyril of Alexandria (376-444 C.E.), pointed out that the one who is “of the same essence with the Father” is the same one who is also “born of the Virgin Mary and made human.” This means that he had two different kinds of births. He is begotten from the Father in his divinity, and he is born of Mary in his humanity. Because Mary gave birth to the same one who is “God from God,” she is rightly called *theotokos*, “God bearer” or “mother of God.”

The Incarnation is a *hypostatic* union, because it unites the divine and the human in one *hypostasis* or person. Because of this union there is a sharing of attributes (*communicatio idiomatum*), which means the divine Word has human attributes and the man Jesus has divine attributes. He is fully human and fully divine.

Cyril’s Christology was developed in opposition to Nestorius (368-451 C.E.), archbishop of Constantinople. Nestorius divided the humanity of Christ from his divinity, as if Christ were not one person, but a combination of two separately-acting principles or persons. Nestorian-

ism was rejected at the third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431 C.E.

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 C.E. affirmed that in Christ there are two distinct natures, divine and human. To emphasize the unity of these two natures, Cyril spoke of his being “one incarnate nature of the Word.” There is only one Christ, and the two natures are not separate in him. These two natures, divine and human, are inseparable and do not act apart from one another.

After Chalcedon, it became common to speak of Christ as “two natures” in one person.” Nature and essence (*ousia*) became equivalent terms in the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. In the Trinity there are three persons in one nature (essence), and in the Incarnation, there are two natures in one person. The Monophysites, which means “one nature” in Greek, refused to accept Chalcedon, and insisted that Christ had only one nature and it was divine. Both Nestorian and Monophysite churches were excluded from Eastern Orthodoxy.

The third Council of Constantinople (the Sixth Ecumenical Council) in 681 C.E. taught that Christ has two wills, divine and human. If he is fully human, he must have a human will; but at the same time, if he is fully God, then he must also have a divine will. This point was illustrated in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus submits his human will to his divine will by praying, “Not my will, (human will) but Thine (divine will) be done.”<sup>1</sup>

Two questions remain. Many of us ask the first question, “Is Jesus God?” I think that this is the wrong question. The right question would be, “Was God in Christ reconciling the world to himself?” My answer would be, “Yes, God was fully in the human Christ reconciling the world to himself.”

The second question is, “Did God suffer on the cross?” One answer is that God the Son suffered on the cross, not in his divine nature, but in his human nature. The difficulty with this question is that Christ was fully human and fully divine. The human and divine natures are inseparable. God the Father did not experience physical suffering because he was not incarnate in Christ, but that does not mean that God the Father didn’t suffer as they nailed God the Son on the cross. Humanity may cause God to suffer, but humanity cannot kill God.

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke 22:42

### 3. GRACE

#### Who are We?

*Grace causes the will to fall in love with what makes us truly, eternally happy—our one true love.*

**Augustine**

#### The Necessity of Grace

The doctrine of grace is about who we really are as human beings. The primary concern is how believers become children of God. The fundamental metaphor is *adoption*. Only Christ is the Son of God by *nature*. The rest of us become children of God through grace. Christ is the Son of God by *nature*. Believers are *adopted* children of God. *Adoption* is not just a change of status, but a change in human *nature*. Grace involves the gift of eternal life, and eternal life means a “participation in the divine *nature*.” The author of 1 Peter 1:3-4 put it as follows:

By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,

This led to the formula: “God became human so that humans could become divine.”

#### Augustine’s Shift from overcoming Death to overcoming Sin

Augustine shifted the nature/grace distinction from overcoming death to overcoming sin. This put him into conflict with Pelagius (390-418 C.E.), who taught that believers had no need of any transformative divine grace to be saved. All they needed was to be properly taught. Augustine rejected Pelagianism for three reasons.

1. Prayer. Christians pray for God to change their will and give them a deeper love for God and neighbor. Why pray if all one needs is to be properly taught.
2. Infant Baptism. Baptism is about the forgiveness of sins. Since infants have not committed any actual sins, they must be guilty of original sin. Why baptize infants if they don’t need it?

3. Law. The Law without grace terrifies us. Telling us what to do does not help. We need an inner gift of delight in God. Roman 5:5 describes what we need: “The love of God poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit is given to us.” What we need is not the inward instruction of the letter of the law, but the inward grace of the Spirit.

### **Operative (Transforming) Grace**

Augustine insisted with Paul that we are justified by grace through faith, but Augustine does not teach that we are saved by faith or grace alone. For Augustine Faith gets us on the right road, and grace moves us along. Although our salvation requires merit as well as grace, operative (transforming) grace works a change in our hearts, turning us toward the good.

Grace causes us to fall in love with what makes us truly, eternal—our one true love. In healing the disorder of the will, grace restores the true freedom of the will, which has been undermined by sin. Augustine put it as follows:

Thou has formed us for thyself,  
and our hearts are restless  
till they find rest in thee.

### **Conclusions**

I believe that God was in Christ trying to reconcile the world to Himself. My next step in connecting Theology and Ethics is to examine the Scriptures, for it is in The Scriptures that we find the building blocks for Theology and Ethics.



# SCRIPTURE



## 4. THE ORIGIN OF THE BIBLE

*Oh how I love your law!  
It is my meditation all day long,*

**Psalm 119:97**

*All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching,  
for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness,  
so that everyone who belongs to God  
may be proficient, equipped for every good work.*

**2 Timothy 3:16**

### The Bible is a Library

The word “Bible” comes from the name of an ancient city in Lebanon. The name of that city was Byblos. The Greeks applied “Byblos,” to the papyrus, which they imported from Byblos. Today, this city goes by the name of Jubayl.



The Bible is not a single book. It is a library of sacred books, which went through the human process of writing and editing. All of these books were written between 1450 B.C.E., and 150 C.E. The Old Testament books were written between 1450 and 400 B.C.E., while the New Testament books were written between 45 and 150 C.E.

### **Events of Divine Origin**

These books were considered to be authoritative and of divine origin. In Exodus 34:27 we find God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses, who, in turn, was to share them with the people. The LORD said to Moses, “Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you broke.” In Deuteronomy 6:1-3, Moses passes the message onto the People:

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children’s children, may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

Following the Law, the literary prophets appear to interpret the meaning of the Law. They seem to have an intimate connection with God, for they frequently cry out, “Thus says the Lord.” They feel compelled to write down their messages. In Jeremiah 30:1-2, God tells Jeremiah to write it down.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. For the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah....

As the Law became Scripture, now the writings of the prophets became Scripture. We even find God commanding people to write down their stories in the Apocrypha. One example of this can be found in chapter 12 of Tobit, where, an angel named Raphael, reveals himself to Tobit and Tobias. When they prostrate themselves before the angel (a messenger of God), the angel says, “So now get up from the ground,

and acknowledge God. See, I am ascending to him who sent me. Write down all these things that have happened to you.” (Tobit 12:20) This became a tendency among the Jews, to write everything down. This tendency led to the recording of the revelation of God’s will as the written word. Out of such an emphasis developed the idea of Sacred Scripture.

When we come to the New Testament, the primary focus is on the crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection three days later. Many of the New Testament books claim to be written by eyewitnesses. Although Paul was not an eyewitness, his letters preceded the Gospels, which tell the story of Jesus crucifixion and resurrection. The early church had three criteria for including or excluding books for the New Testament. (1) First, the books must have apostolic authority. They must have been written by the apostles themselves, who were eyewitnesses to what they wrote about, or by associates of the apostles. (2) Second, the books must conform to what was called the “rule of faith.” Books must be congruent with the basic Christian doctrines that the church recognized as normative. (3) The books had to enjoy continuous acceptance and usage by the church at large. *The Gospel of Thomas*, for example failed to meet these criteria. The book was written around 140 C.E., and was not written by Thomas. None of the early church fathers quote from it, and up to 1945, only a single fifth-century copy in Coptic had been found. Then in 1945 a Greek manuscript was found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt. This compares very poorly to the thousands of manuscripts that authenticate the Four Gospels.

John Chrysostom appears to be the first writer, in his Homilies on Matthew, to use the Greek phrase “Byblos” (books) to describe both the Old and New Testament together. Chrysostom delivered this homily between 386 and 388 C.E.

### **The Accuracy of the Bible**

Scholars admit that there are over 200,000 variants in the New Testament alone. These variants are not only errors. Every misspelled word or an omission of a single word in any of more than 5,600 manuscripts would be counted as a variant. One would expect more variants than that, and one would also expect the variants to affect the contents. The 200,000 variants have not affected a single article of Christian doctrine. The New Testament has not only survived in more manuscripts than any other book in antiquity, but it has survived in a purer form than any other great book. Westcott and Hort, in the 1870’s, stated that the New Testament remains 98.3 percent pure, and scholars Norman Geisler and William Nix conclude that it is 99.5 percent pure.

The writers of the New Testament, which was written in Greek, looked to the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The original manuscripts of the Old Testament were either in Hebrew or Aramaic. This new Greek translation was finished around 250 B.C.E. and was called the Septuagint. It is sometimes designated LXX, which is the Roman numeral for “70.” It was believed that 70 to 72 translators worked to translate the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. There is also a legend that the 72 translators, 6 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, worked in separate cells, translating the whole, and in the end all their versions were identical. In fact there are large differences in style and usage between the Septuagint’s translation of the Torah and its translations of the later books in the Old Testament. The Septuagint was often used by the New Testament writers when they quoted from the Old Testament, and it was the translation of the Old Testament that was used by the early church. Greek was the international language of the world.

We do have manuscripts in Hebrew that can be compared to the Septuagint. In 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. The manuscripts date from 200 B.C.E. to 70 C.E., and they contain the entire book of Isaiah and portions of every other Old Testament book but Esther.

In 380 C.E. St. Jerome translated the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament into Latin. This was called the Latin Vulgate. The Latin Vulgate became the Bible of the Western Church and remains the authoritative translation of the Roman Catholic Church to this day.

During the Protestant Reformation the Bible was translated into the common language of the people. The Bible was divided into chapters in 1227 C.E. by Stephen Langton and into verses in 1551 C.E. by the French printer Robert (Estienne) Stephanus.<sup>1</sup>

The first English translation of the Bible was done by John Wycliffe in 1380 C.E. Wycliffe was forced to translate from the Latin Vulgate because he did not know Hebrew or Greek. His was a translation from a translation and not a translation from the original Hebrew and Greek. When Gutenberg printed the first Bible in 1456 C.E., it was the Latin Vulgate. In 1514 C.E., Erasmus published the first New Testament in Greek.

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Langton was professor at the University of Paris. Later he became the Archbishop of Canterbury. Robert Stephanus’ last name is sometimes spelled “Stephens” and “Estienne.”

In 1611 C.E. the King James Version of the Bible was translated directly from the Hebrew and Greek. A flood of translations and paraphrases followed. The Revised Standard Version of the Bible (RSV) was intended to be readable and literary accurate. The New Testament was published in 1946, the Old Testament in 1952, and the Apocrypha in 1957. It was replaced by the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV) in 1989. The New International Version (NIV) was published in 1983. It is more of a thought-for-thought translation than a word-for-word translation. The latest revision was published in 2011.

Is the Bible accurate? Homer's *Iliad* was written about 800 B.C.E. It was as important to ancient Greeks as the Bible was to Christians. There are over 650 manuscripts of the *Iliad*, but they date from 200 to 300 C.E., which is over a thousand years after the *Iliad* was written. There are over 5,664 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament dating as early as 125 C.E. and a complete New Testament that dates around 350 C.E. The Bible is accurate enough for me. What's your bet?





## 5. CANONIZING THE BIBLE

*Your word is a lamp to my feet  
and a light to my path.*

**Psalm 119:105**

*Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire,  
let us thine influence prove,  
source of the old prophetic fire,  
fountain of life and love,*

**Charles Wesley**

### **The Canonization of the Old Testament**

The first five books (the Torah) were recognized as Scripture around 400 B.C.E. Shortly after 200 B.C.E. the prophetic books were regarded as Scripture. In addition, a third collection of books, called the writings, was gradually taking shape. Around 90 C.E. a council of rabbis convened in Jamnia, on the coast of Palestine, to consider what writings would be authoritative for the Jewish Faith.

Several things contributed to the urgency of their task. With the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., there arose a fear that their traditions would be distorted or obscured. This demanded that some kind of standard or “canon” be established. Two other factors added to the crisis. There was (1) the excessive popularity of the apocalyptic writings, and (2) the wide circulation of the Christian writings.

There was a great deal of uncertainty as to how to draw the boundaries. The Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, and the Pseudepigrapha<sup>1</sup> were very popular after 200 B.C.E. Some of these books were included in the Qumran library. The main problem was to decide which books belonged to the Writings.

The first principle to be applied was the need for harmony with the Torah. The book of Esther posed difficulties. Besides its secular character, it deals with a festival (Purim), for which there is no provision in the Torah. Even the book of Ezekiel was questioned by some rabbis, for at some points it conflicts with prescriptions of the Torah. The Pharisaic freedom of interpretation, based on the oral law, meant that

---

<sup>1</sup> Spurious writings attributed to Jewish patriarchs and prophets.

the principle of harmony with the written law could be applied with flexibility.

The second principle had to do with the doctrine of prophetic inspiration. According to this doctrine, prophecy began with Moses and ended in the post-exilic period with Ezra (according to Josephus) or in the time of Alexander the Great (according to the Talmud). Finally, the rabbis rejected all of the books written in Greek, since that language was not employed in the period of prophetic inspiration. This meant that all of the books of the Pseudepigrapha<sup>1</sup> and the Apocrypha were rejected. Although the rabbis rejected the Apocrypha, Jerome included it in his Latin Vulgate, which meant that some of these books would be accepted in the future by the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Most Protestant Churches followed the Jewish lead and rejected them. At any rate, the Old Testament Canon was closed at Jamnia around 90 C.E.

### **The Canonization of the New Testament**

The concept of the New Testament first appears in the Old Testament<sup>2</sup> (Hebrew or Jewish Bible). In Jeremiah 31:31, we read, “The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new *covenant* (testament) with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.” The words “covenant” and “testament” are alternative translations. Either one can be used, but we have used “testament” for so long, that it would be difficult to exchange it for “covenant.” Christians understand this New Covenant (testament) to be the fulfillment of the Old Covenant (testament). I personally prefer Covenant, but for the sake of clarity, I’ll use Testament.

The New Testament does not contain as much material as the Old Testament, nor did it take as long to canonize. The Letters of Paul, the Catholic (General) Epistles, the Four Gospels, The Book of Acts, and the Book of Revelation make up the New Testament or the New Covenant. I mention the Letters of Paul first because they were the first New Testament books to be written, and read in the churches.

According to Irenaeus in the late second century, the four Gospels were joined to the other collections and single works in different com-

---

<sup>1</sup> Pseudepigrapha has to do with spurious or pseudonymous writings, especially Jewish writings ascribed to various biblical patriarchs and prophets, but composed within approximately 200 years of the birth of Jesus Christ.

<sup>2</sup> Christians call it the Old Testament. Jews call it the Hebrew or Jewish Bible.

binations to form the various forms of Christian canons of Scripture. Irenaeus also asserted the necessity of the four Gospels:

It is not possible that the gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the church is scattered throughout all the world, and the “pillar and ground” of the church is the gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh.

Although all these books were floating around, Christianity still lacked a canon that was universally accepted.

Marcion, a layman from Sinope, Pontus, attempted to create a canon of Scripture in 140 C.E. He was the first one to create a canon of Scripture, but he was unable to obtain popular support. The canon of Marcion rejected the Old Testament, but included a modified version of the Gospel of Luke, and ten letters of Paul. Marcion’s canon was increasingly rejected by other groups of Christians; and yet, the church gradually formulated the New Testament canon in response to the challenge posed by Marcion. Let’s remember, however, that Marcion’s theology and ethics was, and still are, considered to be heretical.

Origen may have been using the twenty-seven books, which we consider the canon in our time, but there were still disputes over the canonicity of the Letter to the Hebrews, the Epistle of James, 2nd Peter, 2nd John, 3rd John, and the Book of Revelation. Origen was responsible for the *collection of usage* regarding the texts, which ultimately supported the New Testament. Eusebius got his information about which texts were accepted and which ones were disputed from Origen. While Origen did not try to create a canon of the accepted books, Eusebius did attempt to create a canon of twenty-two books. Origen would have included in his list of “inspired writings” other texts, which were kept out by Eusebius. Those texts are the Epistle of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, and 1st Clement. While Origen was not the originator of the idea of a Biblical canon, he certainly gave philosophical and interpretative underpinnings to the idea. While the Church struggled to create a canon of acceptable books, Constantine commissioned Eusebius to order fifty Bibles, to be paid for by the Empire. This may have been the motivation for making the final decisions about which books would be accepted and which books would be rejected.

The information used to create the famous 4th century Easter Letter was probably based on the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius of Caesarea, but it was Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, who sent in his Festal Easter Letter (#39) of 367 C.E. the completed list of the twenty-seven books, which would become the New Testament. The first Council to accept the canon of the New Testament was the Synod of Hippo in North Africa. The acts of this council are lost, but a brief summary of the acts was read and accepted by the two Councils of Carthage in 397 C.E. and in 419 C.E. These councils met under the influence of Augustine, who regarded the canon closed.

Following the councils of Hippo and Carthage we have the reconfirmation of the twenty-seven-books of the New Testament in the Roman Catholic Church's Council of Trent in 1545-1563 C.E., the 39 Articles of Religion in 1563 C.E. for the Church of England, the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1647 C.E. for Calvinism, and the Synod of Jerusalem in 1672 C.E. for Eastern Orthodoxy.

Although it is tempting to say that the church councils determined what books would be included in the biblical canon, a more accurate reflection on this matter would indicate that the councils only recognized or acknowledged those books that had already obtained prominence from usage among the various early Christian communities. Scholars suggest that when these bishops and councils spoke on the books of the Bible, they were only ratifying what had already become the mind of the Church.

<b>The New Testament</b>	
140 C.E.	Marcion's List
325 C.E.	Eusebius' List
367 C.E.	Athanasius' Letter
393 C.E.	Council in Hippo
397 C.E.	1st Council in Carthage
419 C.E.	2nd Council in Carthage

## 6. THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

*Were not our hearts burning within us  
while he was talking with us on the road,  
while he was opening the scripture to us?*

**Luke 24:32**

*No one can truly say that Jesus is the Lord,  
unless thou take the veil away  
and breathe the living Word.*

**Charles Wesley**

### **The Right Question**

Is the Bible, including the Old Testament, and the Apocrypha, inspired? That may be the wrong question. Let's look at two of the thirty-nine Articles of Religion in the Anglican Church:

*Article VI. Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation*

**Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation:** so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.

*Article VII. Of the Old Testament*

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for **both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ**, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, **no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.**

The right question might be posed: Are the Scriptures sufficient for leading us into a relationship with God and one another? The answer is: They are because they point us to Jesus Christ, the only mediator

between ourselves and God. In entering into that relationship, which we call Salvation, Christians are not obligated to obey the Ceremonies and Rites of the Old Testament, nor are we obligated to the Civil Precepts of the Old Testament. We are, however, committed to the Commandments, which are moral.

### **The Manger that holds the Christ**

“The Bible,” as Martin Luther put it, “is the manger in which we find Christ, the swaddling clothes in which he is wrapped.” This manger includes both the Old and New Testaments. Don’t be surprised when you find some straw in the Bible. How can that be, we ask, if the Bible is the inspired Word of God? E. Stanley Jones answers our question when he says, “The Bible is not the revelation of God. It is the inspired record of the revelation. Otherwise, the revelation—the Word become flesh—would be printer’s ink. The revelation is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.” Edward P. Blair summarizes:

Since people wrote about their experiences with God, we ought not to expect inerrant fact and perfect understanding from their writings. When light shines through a glass, there is inevitably some distortion of the light. God took the risk of human distortion in order to communicate with us in our language and forms of thought. The clearest revelation, of course, came through those persons in whom there was the least opaqueness and imperfection. Only through the one perfect human personality, Jesus Christ, did the light shine without distortion.

Jesus, not the Bible, is the Word of God. The Bible, both the Old and New Testaments contain the Word of God. Therefore, as we read the Bible, we must always analyze what we are reading through the light or prism of Jesus Christ, the Living Word of God.

### **Divine Events and Multiple Authors**

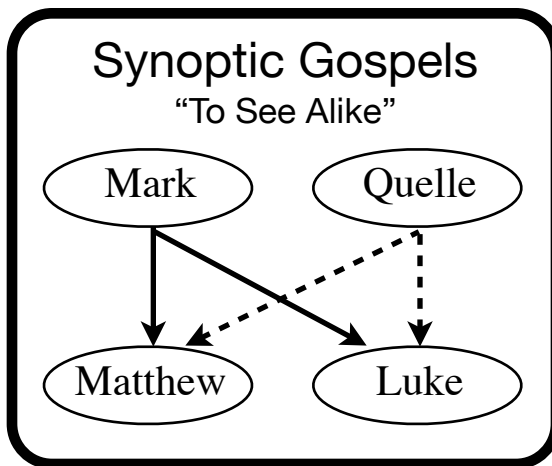
Certain divine events stand at the center of the inspiration of the Bible. In the Old Testament those events are God’s deliverance of the Hebrew slaves, the giving of the Ten Commandments through Moses, and the building of the Tabernacle and eventually the Temple. In the New Testament, those events are Jesus’ death on Good Friday, his resurrection on Easter Sunday, and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Around these divine events, we find many authors and editors, whose writings we call Scripture. Some of them were firsthand witnesses, but this cannot be said of all of them.

The Documentary Hypothesis is only one example of multiple authors and editors who wrote the Books of the Law. In the Documentary Hypothesis, we find four authors or editors. We recognize their different writing styles and the different words they use for God. Below is a brief description of those differences that distinguish them:

- J: An author who uses Jahweh for God.
- E: An author who uses Elohim for God.
- P: An Author who writes as a Priest.
- D: An author who uses a different style.

In the New Testament, we find Paul's letters (49-62 C.E.) being written before the four Gospels. Mark was the first Gospel, followed by Matthew and Luke. John was the last Gospel to be written. We call Mark, Matthew and Luke the synoptic Gospels because of their similarity. The word *synoptic* means "to see alike." It is obvious that Matthew and Luke copy parts of Mark's Gospel, but they also seem to have a common source not used by Mark. This unknown source is referred to as *Quelle*, the German word for "source."

- Mark: 65-70 C.E.
- Matthew: 80-90 C.E.
- Luke and Acts: 80-90 C.E.
- John: 100 C.E.



### Three Themes in the Bible

In addition to multiple authors and editors, we find various themes. Three such themes have been of particular interest. They have to do with Light, Covenants, and the Temple. Since light is the simplest theme, I'd like to begin with Light.

*Light.* According to Genesis 1:3-5, light was the first thing God created.

Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

Light and darkness are not only used to describe day and night. Light is also used to describe those liberating special events. Light is to be taken to those who live in darkness. Two examples can be found in Isaiah 42:6-7 and 49:6:

I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

This same theme is taken up in the New Testament, where Jesus says in one of his seven I AM statements, found in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” In Matthew 5:14 and 16, Jesus says to his disciples, “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ... In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Maybe we can’t be the light of the world in the same sense as Jesus, but we can be mirrors, who reflect that light into the darkness of this world.

This theme comes to its conclusion in the final chapters of the Book of Revelation, where we read in Revelation 21:23-26 and 22:5:

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.



And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

*Seven Covenants.* The second theme has to do with seven covenants that run through both the Old and New Testaments. The word “Testament” could be translated as “Covenant.” I think it would be more accurate to rename the two sections of the Bible, “the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.” I haven’t been consistent with this because the majority of people seem to prefer the traditional terms of Old Testament and New Testament.

The seven covenants that run through the Bible are as follows:

1. The Covenant through Noah (Genesis 9:8-17)
2. The Covenant through Abraham (Genesis 15:9-21)
3. The Covenant through Moses (Exodus 19-24)
4. The Covenant through Phinehas (Numbers 25:10-13)
5. The Covenant through David (2 Samuel 7:5-16)
6. The Covenant through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34)
7. The New Covenant through Jesus (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-23)

In the Covenant through Noah, God promises never to destroy earthly life with a natural catastrophe. The symbol is an upside down Bow, which becomes a Rainbow. In the Covenant through Abraham, God blesses Abraham for his faith and promises to shape his descendants into a nation, giving them a land of milk and honey. The symbol of this is Circumcision. In the Covenant through Moses, God sets Abraham’s descendants free from slavery in Egypt, and gives them the Ten Commandments, which will help them to maintain their freedom. The symbol of the Covenant through Moses is the Ten Commandments written in Stone. In the Covenant through Phinehas, a promise is made with the zealous priest to provide Israel with a perpetual priesthood. No symbol is suggested. An appropriate symbol might have to do with the equipment of the priesthood. The covenant through David was an unconditional promise to establish and maintain the Davidic dynasty forever. An appropriate symbol would be the Star of David. The Covenant through Jeremiah is a promise of God to forgive his rebellious people and establish a new relationship with them by writing his Law in their hearts. The final covenant, to which Jeremiah refers, is the covenant through Jesus to forgive sin and offer eternal life to all who accept his free gift of grace. The appropriate symbols would be the Cross and the Bread and Wine, which symbolize Jesus’ broken body and shed blood, the price paid for Divine Grace.

All the covenants are fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and in the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Kingdom of God (the Promised Land) is open to Jew and Gentile alike, for according to Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus sends his disciples out to make disciples of all nations, not just Israel.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

The Commandments, which were written in stone, are now written in the heart, and in Mark 12:30-31 they have been reduced to two: "...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." According to 1st Peter 2:9 we move from the covenant through Phinehas to the universal priesthood of all believers. "...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Here the themes of light and covenant merge. There will still be pastors and deacons, but every Christian is a priest. Everyone is called to proclaim the mighty acts of God, calling people out of darkness into God's marvelous light.

*The Human Temple.* The third theme running through the Scriptures has to do with how we experience the presence of God, who promises to be with us always, even to the end of the age. Do we experience him in nature, history, the tabernacle, the temple, or in our heart? The answer lies in all of the above. The Old Testament begins with nature, that is in the Garden of Eden. Human disobedience drives the first couple out of the Garden, but nature is still important. God gets fed up with human disobedience and decides to punish his creation with a flood. We still call acts of nature, "acts of God."

With the call of Abraham, we begin to experience God in history. We read in Genesis 12:1-2: "Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." Abraham was doing something unique. Most travelers would worship the god in the new country, but Abraham continues to worship the same God who called him to move to a new land. Although he probably believed that

other gods existed, he worshipped the one who called him. This God promised to make of his descendants a great nation.

The emphasis on history continues with the story of Moses and the Exodus, although God seems to work through nature right along with history. It's at the burning bush and on top of Mount Sinai that Moses encounters God and is given the Ten Commandments. Nature and history seem to be working together, but nature can't be relied upon in the desert. God will have to provide the manna and the water to sustain them on their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. In Exodus 25:17-22, God instructs them to build an Ark for their covenant, the Ten Commandments.

Then you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its width. You shall make two cherubim of gold; you shall make them of hammered work, at the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub at the one end, and one cherub at the other; of one piece with the mercy seat you shall make the cherubim at its two ends. The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings. They shall face one to another; the faces of the cherubim shall be turned toward the mercy seat. You shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark; and in the ark you shall put the covenant that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the covenant, I will deliver to you all my commands for the Israelites.

The Ark of the Covenant plays a huge role in their relationship with God, but the Ark is housed in a Tabernacle. After David unifies the twelve tribes into a United Monarchy, with his capitol in Jerusalem, he begins to dream of housing the Ark of the Covenant in a Temple. But God said to David, "You shall not build a house for my name, for you are a warrior and have shed blood." (1 Chronicles 28:3) The Temple would finally be built by Solomon from 970 to 964 B.C.E. It was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E. and rebuilt around 515 B.C.E. In Jesus' time the Temple was being remodeled and expanded. When Jesus breathed his last breath on the cross, the curtain of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.<sup>1</sup> The Ark of the Covenant lay exposed. In 70 C.E., the Temple was destroyed by the Romans,

---

<sup>1</sup> See Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; and Luke 23:45

never to be rebuilt; and today, no one knows where the Ark of the Covenant is.

Was or is the Temple really needed? In Jeremiah 31:31-34, the prophet said that God would write his commandments on the heart. No Tabernacle or Temple would be needed. When Jesus talks about the Temple, he refers to himself. When the Jews asked him for a sign, Jesus said:

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word Jesus had spoken.<sup>1</sup>

The Apostle Paul follows Jesus’ thinking about the Temple and equates the Church as the Body of Christ with the Temple. Two examples should suffice:

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? (1 Corinthians 6:19)

### **The Conclusion**

The light and covenant themes now merge with the temple theme. According to Revelation 21:22-26, the covenant with God is fulfilled, in Jesus, the Lamb, and there will be no Temple, for it will not be needed. Like the Light, God’s presence will be everywhere.

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will

---

<sup>1</sup> See John 2:18-22

never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

Is the Bible inspired? Yes it is, but one must understand the divine events and be able to follow the various themes through the Bible. The Old Testament is the foundation for the New Testament. One cannot insist upon inspiration of a word, phrase, or sentence without looking at its context and how its related to the divine themes in the Bible.

Is the Bible accurate? Is the Bible inspired? I'm betting it is both accurate and inspired? What is your bet?



## 7. INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

*And she gave birth to her firstborn son  
and wrapped him in bands of cloth  
and laid him in a manger.*

**Luke 2:7**

*Beyond the sacred page I seek thee, Lord;  
my spirit pants for thee, O Living Word!*

**Mary A. Lathbury**

### **The Bible is a Manger**

I agree with Martin Luther. “The Bible is the manger in which we find Christ,” and there is plenty of straw in a manger. Luther also suggests that we read the Bible backwards, beginning with the stories and teachings of Jesus. This task is not as difficult as one might think. The place to start is with the four Gospels, and the place to find the central teachings of Jesus is in the Sermon on the Mount, which consists of three brief chapters.<sup>1</sup> We need this knowledge of Jesus to help us understand the rest of the Bible. We certainly need it to interpret the Old Testament, but we also need it to interpret the letters to the churches.

There is plenty of straw, in the Bible. Marcion saw the straw and concluded that the God of the Old Testament was not anything like the God revealed in Jesus. He also found some straw in some of the books which make up the New Testament, and so he made up his own list of acceptable books, which included a modified version of the Gospel of Luke and the ten Letters of Paul.

### **Straw in the Old Testament**

Some of the most objectionable straw found in the Bible is God’s commanding Joshua to destroy everything and everyone in Jericho, but the prostitute Rahab and her family, who hid Joshua’s spies in her house. Joshua 6:24-25 describes what they did:

They burned down the city, and everything in it; only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. But Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, Joshua spared.

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5-7

This was only beginning of the slaughter. It gets worse as one reads through the Old Testament.

A young man in our congregation came to me for advice on reading the entire Bible. I warned him of the straw that he would surely find, and I suggested that he start with the four Gospels. “Read the Bible backwards,” I suggested, but he wanted to start with Genesis. At the beginning of his journey he emailed me every day with the count of how many people God killed or commanded people to kill. The number went way beyond the number of people killed in the World Trade Center. The young man slowly got discouraged and gave up his desire to read the Bible from cover to cover. Now, I’m not opposed to reading the Bible from cover to cover, but it should be done with someone who is theologically trained, or with someone who has already read the New Testament. I read through the New Testament twenty-eight times before delving into the Old Testament.

The prophets tried to make some corrections. Amos, for example, contrasts God’s desire for righteousness and justice over offerings and liturgies. In Amos 5:21-24, God spoke through the prophet saying:

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

### **Straw in the New Testament**

There is, however, some straw in the New Testament as well. Luther called the book of James an “epistle of straw.” He was afraid people would conclude the necessity of works to obtain salvation, when Luther was placing the emphasis on “faith alone.” Then, there’s the book of Revelation with what appears to be a different description of Jesus. The most vivid description is recorded in Revelation 19:11-16:

Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in **blood**, and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a **sharp**



*sword* with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

This description of Jesus appears to be very different from the one we find in the Gospels and on the Sermon on the mount, until we realize that the *blood* on his robe is his own *blood*, and the *sharp sword* symbolizes the Word of God. The cross is the most powerful weapon in the world and it will triumph over human power and violence.

### Jesus is the Prism

*Thomas Jefferson*

All of the canon of Scripture is important, even the straw, but we must approach Scripture through the prism of Jesus. Jesus is the Word of God, and if a Biblical story is inconsistent with Jesus, it is not the Word of God, even if it claims to be. It looks as if I’m in agreement with Thomas Jefferson, who said, “Picking the teaching of Jesus out of the Bible is like picking diamonds out of a dunghill.” In the latter years of Jefferson’s life, he created the *Jefferson Bible*, or *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*. He did this by cutting and pasting with a razor and glue numerous sections from the New Testament as extractions of the doctrine of Jesus. He excluded all the miracles by Jesus and most mentions of the supernatural, including sections from the four Gospels which contain the story of the Resurrection.

*Benjamin Franklin*

A few weeks before his death at age 84, Benjamin Franklin summarized his religious beliefs, attempting to get rid of the straw he found in the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

You desire to know something of my religion. It is the first time I have been questioned upon it. But I cannot take your curiosity amiss, and shall endeavor in a few words to gratify it.

Here is my creed.

- I believe in one God, the creator of the universe.
- That he governs by his providence.
- That he ought to be worshipped.

---

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Franklin, Letter to Ezra Stiles, March 9, 1790, in John Bigelow, ed., *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, at 12:185-86 (New York: Putnam’s, 1904)

- That the most acceptable service we render to him is doing good to his other children.
- That the soul of man is immortal, and will be treated with justice in another life respecting its conduct in this.

These I take to be the fundamental points in all sound religion, and I regard them as you do in whatever sect I meet with them.

As to Jesus of Nazareth...

- I think his system of morals and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes,
- and I have, with most of the present dissenters in England, some doubts as to his divinity;
- though it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now, when I expect soon an opportunity of knowing the truth with less trouble.
- I see no harm, however, in its being believed, if that belief has the good consequences, as probably it has, of making his doctrines more respected and more observed;
- especially as I do not perceive that the Supreme takes it amiss, by distinguishing the unbelievers in his government of the world with any peculiar marks of his displeasure.

I wouldn't go as far as Jefferson or Franklin, but I do agree that there is straw in the Bible.

### **The Bible as a Book of Theology**

Jefferson and Franklin viewed Jesus as a teacher of morals, but they didn't believe in his divinity or that he was the Word of God. They wanted to set theology aside. I agree with James Sanders, who said:

One must read the Bible theologically before reading it morally. The primary meaning of redemption is that God has caught up human sinfulness into his plans and made it part of those plans. This theologem pervades the Bible, OT and NT, and so all texts must be understood theologically (in the light of that theologem) before any indication of obedience can be drawn from it.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> James Sanders, "Hermeneutics," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary Volume, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976) p. 406.

The Bible is first of all a book of theology. It is a mistake to view it as a book of history, a book of science, or even a book of morals. There are historical references in the Bible, and there are moral teachings in the Bible, but it is first of all a book of Theology.

As a book of Theology, the Bible belongs to the Church, which is the Body of Christ. The Bible cannot be understood apart from this connection. Claude Thompson, my professor of Systematic Theology in Seminary, put it this way: “The Bible is a book of the Christian community and must be interpreted within that community, the peculiar sphere where the Holy Spirit operates.” Apart from that community, the Bible will make little sense. Yes, there is straw in this manger, but there are diamonds too. There may even be a dunghill, but we need to see the whole picture. The end of our study of Scripture is not knowledge, but discipleship.

### **Questions for Bible Study**

Here are some of the questions we should be asking as we read both the Old and New Testaments, which I prefer to call Covenants. When we enter into a Covenant with God we become disciples. The questions follow:

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about Jesus?
3. Is there a promise for me to claim?
4. Is there a command for me to follow?
5. Is there a sin for me to avoid?
6. Is there an example for me to follow?
7. Is there a difficulty for me to explore?
8. Is there something in this passage I should pray about?

Another approach might ask the following questions:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. How does this passage affect my life?

The Bible is a book of theology. Ask the theological questions before asking the moral questions! It’s okay to ask the historical questions, but remember, this is not a book of history, even though historical references permeate the Bible.

The Bible is the Church’s Book, and the congregation that isn’t struggling with the Bible is choking itself to death. Bible Study never ends, but treasures can be discovered daily. Augustine, the greatest of the Western theologians put it this way:

Such is the depth of the Christian scriptures that even if I were to attempt a study of them, and nothing else, from boyhood to a very old age, with talents greater than I have, I would still be making progress in discovering their treasures daily.

**JESUS**



## 8. THE MESSIANIC CLAIM

*My kingdom is not of this world.  
If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews.  
But now my kingdom is from another place.*

**John 18:36**

**In Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30)**

The Synagogue in Nazareth was not the first place, in which Jesus preached, but it was in his own hometown and that provided him with some difficulty. Synagogue worship consisted of the following three parts: (1) prayers, (2) scripture, and (3) teaching. In the reading of Scripture, a priest, if present, was expected to read from the Law, but anyone was welcome to read from the Prophets. Visitors were frequently asked, and on this special day, Jesus participated by reading from Isaiah 61:1-2 (and 58:6). After he finished reading, he sat down, as was the custom, to teach. In his teaching he claimed to have fulfilled the prophecy from Isaiah. While Isaiah was referring to the liberation of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity, Jesus taught that he was about to liberate all people from the captivity of sin. This means that he was claiming to be the Messiah and that the proof was in what he was about to do. This in itself did not alienate him from his listeners. People expected a Messiah, but on their own terms. They expected the Messiah to relate only to the Jews.

It was obvious to Jesus that everyone wanted to see some sign or miracle, and so he quoted the proverb: "Doctor, cure yourself!" In contrast to this proverb, he quoted another: "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown." These two proverbs are joined together in the Gospel of Thomas, where they read: "No prophet is acceptable in his village; no physician heals those who know him." Apparently Jesus was unable to perform the same kind of miracles in Nazareth, which he performed in Capernaum, and he attributes his failure to their lack of faith. Luke has not mentioned any of Jesus' ministry in Capernaum, and so we can only conclude that this incident in Nazareth is out of chronological order, or else that Luke has not recorded everything Jesus did. Mark 6:1-4 seems to indicate a different chronological order, for he has Jesus involved in ministry prior to the incident in Nazareth.

The two illustrations Jesus uses from the Old Testament make the congregation angry. The first is a reference to Elijah, who provided never-failing meal and oil for the widow from Zarephath near Sidon

(1 Kings 17:8-24), and the second is a reference to the way in which Elisha healed Naaman the Leper from Syria (2 Kings 5:1-27). Not only does Jesus imply that they experience no miracles in Nazareth because of their lack of faith, but that the Gentiles do experience miracles through their faith and that God moves among those who are open to Him. This alienates the people of Nazareth enough to want to kill him, but he moves through the middle of the crowd safely.

### **To John the Baptist**

#### *The Messengers from John (Matthew 11:2-19)*

After John was imprisoned by Herod Antipas, (the younger son of Herod the Great), he sent some of his own disciples to ask Jesus if he really was the Messiah. He seems to have had doubts about Jesus, doubts, which were prompted by a different understanding of what the Messiah was supposed to do. Jesus did not fit into the *judgmental* role that John expected. John was the last of the Old Testament type prophets, a kind of latter-day Elijah. In fact Malachi 4:5 predicts such a person, not as a literal return of Elijah, but as a prophet like Elijah. Jesus saw John as more than a prophet, one who prepared the way for his own coming; and yet, the least in the Kingdom of God will be greater than John (11:11). This was not a criticism of John the Baptist, but a way of stressing the radical character of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus had a high regard for John, but John still represents a different generation. He answers John's disciples by giving them a list of the signs of the Kingdom, which were: (1) the blind see, (2) the lame walk, (3) the leper is cleansed, (4) the deaf hear, (5) the dead are raised, and (6) the poor are vindicated. The old expectation was that the Kingdom would be taken by violence and force, but Jesus proclaims its establishment by justice and love. Therefore a warning is necessary. Jesus advises caution so that they will not be led astray. John's response of fasting was fitting, but so was Jesus' response of feasting. The old has passed, and the new has begun.

#### *The Messianic Question (Luke 7:18-35)*

John sends two of his disciples to ask the Messianic Question, which according to Luke 7:19 is: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus' response in Luke 7:22 is: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them." These are the signs of the Kingdom.



Following Jesus' answer there is a shift of emphasis to who John is. He is more than a prophet; he is the *forerunner* of the Messiah. Jesus' reference in verse 27 to Malachi 3:1 confirms this. Because he belongs to the old age, he is less than those who belong to the new age. In the transition people have difficulty identifying with either age. In the case of John, the Pharisees and Lawyers think of him as being possessed by a demon; and in the case of Jesus, they accuse him of being a glutton, drunkard, and friend to tax collectors and sinners. Through John we have moved beyond the prophets, and in Jesus the prophetic message has been fulfilled. He is the Messiah, the Anointed King of the New Age.

### **In Caesarea Philippi**

#### *Peter's Confession (Mark 8:27-33)*

Caesarea Philippi was not only located outside of Galilee, it was also a center of pagan worship. Philip, the son of Herod the Great, built it in honor of Caesar and himself. One can still see evidence of its pagan past by visiting the area today.

It was on the way to Caesarea Philippi that Jesus asked his disciples whom they thought he was. Peter replied, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but Peter's understanding was less than complete. Jesus acknowledged that he was the *Messiah* (Hebrew) or *Christ* (Greek), which means, "anointed king."

Following his acceptance of Peter's confession, Jesus began to define what it would mean. The Messiah would have to suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. This was not part of the Jewish Messianic expectation. The idea of a suffering Messiah could be found in Isaiah 53, but the concept of a triumphant Messiah found in Isaiah 11 caught on more easily. For Jesus, the suffering preceded the triumph, and so he began the first of three predictions of his suffering and death, which can be found in Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:33f. He saw Peter's words as a continuation of Satan's temptation. Nothing personal was meant by his scathing remark to Peter. Peter was still to become the leader of the Church, but he had a great deal to learn.

In Mark 8:31, Jesus refers to himself as the *Son of Man*. This was the way in which he usually referred to himself. The Son of Man was an image he took from Daniel 7:13-14 and refers to a heavenly figure at the end time, who comes as God's representative to act in the final judgment. No one else calls Jesus the Son of Man, but he uses the title many times to describe himself. He may be trying to reinterpret the disciples' mistaken concept of the Messiah.

*Peter's Confession (Luke 9:18-22)*

Since there seems to be confusion as to who Jesus is, Jesus asks his own disciples if they know. They replied that others were equating him with a risen John the Baptist, Elijah, or some other prophet. When Jesus pressed them further, Peter replied that he believed him to be the Messiah.

Jesus told him not to tell anyone because he feared that it would not be understood. His reference to himself as the “Son of Man” indicates that he is trying to remove the *political* connotation from the Jewish concept of the Messiah. Jesus took his reference to the “Son of Man” from Daniel 7:9-22, who will suffer, die, but be raised again. No one had this kind of a concept of the Messiah.

Luke differs from Mark in that he supposes that this confession took place on Israelite soil. Mark, on the other hand, locates it in Caesarea Philippi, which would have been on pagan soil.

*Peter's Confession (Matthew 16:13-20)*

This is the turning point of the Gospel. From here on in, the shadow of the cross begins to rise. It is very interesting that Peter makes his profession in Caesarea Philippi, a Gentile community. This community got its name from Philip the Tetrarch, who changed its name from Paneas to Caesarea Philippi to honor Augustus Caesar and himself. He added his own name to distinguish the city from other communities named after the emperor. It was the site of the pagan shrine to the Greek god, Pan, and lies outside of the bounds of Jewish Palestine.

In this setting Jesus asks his disciples who they think he is, and they tell him that some people are saying that he is John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah. As we have seen in Matthew 14:2, Herod Antipas thought that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Others thought that Jesus might be the prophet Elijah, as predicted in Malachi 4:2; but John the Baptist has been identified as Elijah, although he denies it (John 1:21). Some thought that he was Jeremiah, not because it was predicted, but because Jeremiah talked about the establishment of a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-40), which Jesus did indeed come to establish. There never was however any suggestion that Jeremiah would return from the dead.

Peter speaks for all the disciples when he professes that Jesus is none of these, that he is the Messiah (Christ), the Son of the Living God. Jesus admits it, and states that the Holy Spirit prompted Peter to make his profession. What follows, is a little play on words as Jesus

gives Simon the name of *Peter*. The Aramaic name is *Cephas*, and the Greek name is *Petros*. They both mean *rock* or *stone*. He is to become the rock or foundation stone of the Church (Ekklesia). Church, as it is used here, is referring to the community of faith rather than an ecclesiastical organization. That the powers of death will not prevail against it is a sign that the church will be on the offensive. Other translations of the Bible refer to the powers of death as a fortress with gates, which lock in death and lock out any potential rescue. In Matthew 12:29, Jesus tells Peter that the domain of Satan has been plundered by himself; and in Matthew 16:18, he suggests that in the future it will be plundered by the Church.

Peter is also told that he will hold the keys of the Kingdom. This echoes the words of Isaiah 22:22, where authority is turned over to Eliakim. A similar authority is to be given to Peter, but it is not a power to withhold the Good News of the Kingdom from anyone. He is given the power and authority to proclaim the Gospel (Kerygma) and formulate Christian teaching (Didache). It does not mean that God binds himself to what Peter says, but that Peter will do these things in accord with the will of Christ. Neither the naming of Peter as the Rock nor the bestowing upon him the keys makes him the first pope. He does however become the first apostolic witness to the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:5).

Matthew has taken the above account from Mark 8:27—9:1, but he has added the discussion about the Church and Peter's role in it.

### **In Jesus High Priestly Prayer (John 17:1-26)**

The theme of this prayer is *GLORY* and it can be divided neatly into three parts—for himself, for his disciples, and for the church.

#### *The Prayer for Himself (John 17:1-5)*

Parts of this prayer are obviously the work of John. Jesus would not pray as he does in verse three. This is John's definition of eternal life. Jesus' purpose for coming into the world was indeed to give eternal life to believers, but this does not make up the essence of his prayer for himself. He has finished his work and expects to be glorified.

#### *Prayer for the Disciples (John 17:6-19)*

As Jesus ascends to heaven, he intends to leave the disciples in the world; hence, this prayer is vital to their survival. They will face the full onslaught of evil, and Jesus does not intend to prevent it; instead, he prays that they might experience his joy, be led by his truth, and experience his victory.

Only one—Judas—will be lost, and that fulfills Scripture. It is not that God decided that one had to be lost, but he knew human nature well and still does. He desires all to be saved, but he knows that many will take the wide path, which leads to destruction.

When Jesus prays for their sanctification, he is asking God to set them apart for his divine mission, even as he himself has been set apart. Such “setting apart” will involve a foundation in God’s Word, which is Truth. Divine Revelation and Sanctification cannot be separated. Those who have received the Revelation are set apart to share it with others. As Christ is the Light of the World, so are his disciples.

*Prayer for Future Believers—the Church (John 17:20-26)*

The prayer, for those who will believe through the disciples’ word or message, is also a prayer for the unity of the Future Church. Jesus prays that this church might find the same unity that exists between the Father and the Son, and that it might express divine love and fulfill the mission to which God has called it. The mission is to call everyone to believe, have faith, and be reconciled to God. In this way everyone will be glorified, even as Jesus himself has been glorified.

**In The I Am Sayings**

*Jesus as the Bread of Life (John 6:35)*

The crowd followed him to Capernaum, where he spoke in the Synagogue. He knew that they were only impressed by his ability to give them bread and that the desire to make him king was related to the Roman oppression. He saw a deeper oppression and promised them spiritual deliverance from sin. In John 6:35, he claimed to be the bread of life, which would give them eternal life. This was the first of the seven “I AM” sayings, which they took literally.

*Jesus as the Light of Life (John 8:12 and 9:5)*

This is a continuation of Jesus’ teaching during the Feast of Tabernacles. On the eighth day of this feast the four great golden candelabra were lit in the Court of women, which symbolized the pillar of fire by which God guided his people through the desert (Exodus 13:21). The “I AM” which Jesus uses as part of the divine name (Exodus 3:14), and his use of it was considered as blasphemy (8:58-59).

*Jesus as the Gate (John 10:1-9)*

The first six verses of chapter 10 make up John’s only Parable, or should we say Allegory. In an Allegory there is much more symbolism. The Gatekeeper is not identifiable, but the Door is Jesus. The Shepherd

served as a door to protect the sheep from danger. Thieves and Robbers were messianic pretenders with temporal ambitions.

*Jesus as the Good Shepherd (John 10:10-15)*

The hireling symbolized false teachers and the wolf symbolized Roman persecutors. The Good Shepherd had the best interests of the sheep at heart. John 10:10 tells us Jesus' reason for calling us into his fold, to give us *abundant life*. For this he lays down his life, something thieves and robbers, hirelings and wolves would never do.

*Jesus as the Resurrection (John 10:20-27)*

Lazarus represents every believer who loves Jesus and is loved by Jesus. All who believe will be raised to new life in the present and to eternal life in the future. This is the message of the fifth and almost perfect sign. The perfect sign of course will be Jesus' own resurrection, which will redefine the meaning of the Passover itself. The Raising of Lazarus supports the fifth claim of Jesus to be the Resurrection and the Life.

*Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:5-14)*

We are told in this passage that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the only way to know God; and apart from him, there is no salvation. Christians believe that God is known through the person, words, and works of Jesus; but our faith in him must be linked with love, which leads us to obeying his commandments and teachings. Those who come to know him will experience his presence, peace, eternal life, and answers to their prayers. Praying in Jesus name means much more than repeating his name at the end of a prayer. Our wills must conform to his, and that assures answers to our prayers. This does not mean immediate answers, but God will accomplish his will, no matter how long it may take. We are to pray according to his will and consistently with his teachings. This discussion is continued in John 15:7, where prayer is tied in with one's very relationship with Jesus.

*Jesus as the Vine (John 15:1-6)*

The image of the vine had been used to describe Israel, but Israel fell short of fulfilling God's purpose. Jesus claims *that* fulfillment for himself and for his followers. If they are to bear fruit, they will have to be connected to the vine; otherwise, they will dry up and will be fit for nothing but burning. This is not a discussion about salvation and so the fire mentioned does not symbolize hell. Jesus is talking about bearing fruit, such as that mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23. If they abide in him, they will find his kind of joy (15:11).

<b>THE SEVEN “I AM” SAYINGS</b>
1. I AM the Bread of Life (6:35)
2. I AM the Light of the World (8:12; 9:5)
3. I AM the Gate (10:7, 9)
4. I AM the Good Shepherd (10:11, 14)
5. I AM the Resurrection and the Life (11:25)
6. I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6)
7. I AM the Vine (15:1, 5)

### **To Pilate**

#### *Jesus before Pilate (Mark 15:1-5)*

In the morning, the Sanhedrin confirmed the illegal decision it had made the night before; and since it could not carry out the execution, sent Jesus on to Pilate. Pilate, who normally lived in Caesarea, happened to be in Jerusalem. According to Luke, noticing that Jesus was a Galilean, Pilate referred him to Herod. Nothing is said of Jesus’ appearance before Herod in the Gospel of Mark.

Pilate’s jurisdiction was Judea. The charge made against Jesus was that of political insurrection, and so Pilate asked him if he claimed to be a King, specifically of the Jews. Jesus’ answer in Mark 15:2 was ambiguous, but it is generally believed that he said, “Yes.”

#### *Jesus before Pilate (Matthew 27:11-26)*

Pilate was the Roman Governor of Judea and Samaria from 26 to 36 C.E. His official headquarters was located in Caesarea. He just happened to be in Jerusalem at the time, and so they brought Jesus before him. The name of his Jerusalem residence was the *Praetorium*.

Pilate’s question in Matthew 27:11 was strictly political. Not being convinced that he was dangerous, he presented an even more dangerous man to the crowd—Jesus Barabbas. The name itself is ironical. *Jesus bar Abbas* means “Jesus, son of the Father.” Tradition suggests that Barabbas was an insurgent or revolutionary. Perhaps Pilate hoped that the crowd would release Jesus instead of Barabbas, but he was wrong.

*Jesus before Pilate (Luke 23:1-5 & 13-25)*

When the charge was presented to Pilate, it had to be translated into political terms. Instead of blasphemy it became insurrection and treason. Pilate seems to have seen through what they were trying to do. He did ask Jesus if he were a King, but he took Jesus' evasive answer as a negative. Actually there had been a double charge, that of calling himself a King and encouraging others not to pay tribute to Caesar. Pilate never seemed to have taken the secondary charge seriously, for Jesus was known to have taught the people to pay Caesar what he was due (Luke 20:25). Pilate tried his best to set Jesus free.

The pressure from the crowd became too great, and Pilate yielded by setting free Barabbas, a convicted insurrectionist; but not before he turned Jesus over to Herod Antipas. He did this because he recognized that Jesus was a Galilean, and Herod ruled over that territory.

*Jesus before Pilate (John 18:28-40)*

(6:00 a.m.)

Jesus is sent to Pilate in the Praetorium (the Governor's residence) because the Sanhedrin cannot carry out the death penalty. The dialogue, which takes place between Jesus and Pilate, revolves around Jesus' kingship. Does Jesus' claim to be the Messiah really challenge the kingship of Caesar? In answer to Pilate's question, Jesus only claims to rule a spiritual kingdom. This is beyond Pilate's comprehension.

Jesus connects his kingdom to truth, something Pilate would never have done. Pilate would have made the connection to power. Secular royalty has a difficult time seeing the necessity of relating its authority to truth. This is further illustrated in Pilate's desire to deal with the problem by offering the crowd the opportunity to choose between Jesus and Barabbas. Pilate recognized the innocence of Jesus three times (18:38; 19:4; and 19:6),<sup>1</sup> but desired popularity over truth. Barabbas was no ordinary robber. He was a *bandit-patriot*. Barabbas, not Jesus, was guilty of the charge of insurrection. Perhaps that is why the crowd favored him over Jesus, whose claim to kingship was not of this world. The crowd saw more hope for Israel in Barabbas than in Jesus. The people preferred a political revolutionary to a spiritual king.

---

<sup>1</sup>Luke records this same threefold statement of Jesus' innocence (Luke 23:4, 14, and 22).

## The Teachings of Paul

### *The Proper Response Of Faith (Romans 10:5-13)*

God's children are made up of all who respond to his Grace by Faith. Paul makes a distinction between "faith-righteousness" and "legal-righteousness." The *accent* in "legal-righteousness" is on human activity; but in the case of "faith-righteousness" the *accent* is on trust in divine activity. There is no distinction. Jew and Gentile stand on the same ground. Both must respond in faith. The key baptismal confession is given in Romans 10:9, which excludes faith in or worship of all other gods. Calling Jesus Christ Lord is the irreducible essence of what it means to become a Christian, and this was the minimum required by those submitting themselves for baptism.

The discussion about bringing Christ down from heaven or up from the abyss is taken from Deuteronomy 30:11-14, where the point is made that God's commandment is written in the heart and only requires the appropriate response. The same is true for Christ. One does not have to climb into heaven or descend into the abyss to reach him. He is in our heart and on our lips, and all we need to do is to respond by trusting him. For Christians the supreme gift of God is not the Law, but Jesus Christ. This gift is given to Jew and Gentile alike. No distinction is made and all who call upon the Lord will be saved.

### *Life in Christ (Philippians 2:5-11)*

Paul calls upon the Philippians to set aside all human arrogance and begin to live and work and think like Christ. The heart of his advice is expressed in an early Christian hymn, which he quotes. The following is an attempt to reconstruct the hymn:

[Who] though he was in the form of God  
Did not count it robbery  
To be equal with God  
But emptied himself,  
Taking the form of a servant,  
Coming into existence in the likeness of men;  
And being found in human form  
He humbled himself  
And became obedient to the point of death  
Therefore God has highly exalted him  
And bestowed on him the name  
Which is above every name,



That at Jesus' name  
Every knee should bow —  
In heaven and on earth and under the earth —  
And every tongue confess  
“Jesus Christ is Lord”  
To the glory of God the Father.

The above hymn appears in verses 6-11 and consists of two halves. The first half (6-8) begins with his equality with God and descends to the low point of his death on the cross. The second half of the hymn (9-11) celebrates the dramatic act of God in exalting him as the sovereign of the universe. Behind this exaltation lies the resurrection, which crowns him King of kings and Lord of lords. In the midst of the darkness of this world, such Christians will shine like stars (2:15).

The hymn is not to be systematically analyzed, but simply to be sung in praise of Jesus as Lord. If the Philippians, and all other Christians, will focus their minds on Christ alone, they will be set free from all pettiness and division, for they will have comprehended the grace of God, which has been revealed in the humble but exalted Christ.

*The Supremacy of Christ (Colossians 1:15-23)*

In addressing the problems of the Christians in Colossae, Paul begins with a hymn, which stresses the supremacy of Christ. In this hymn Christ is lifted up as the image of God, the creator, sustainer, and redeemer of the world. As the very agent of creation, he also is to be considered the agent of the new creation; hence, mystic visions and ascetic regulations are unnecessary.

*Paul's Message of Transformation (2 Corinthians 5:11-21)*

This is a beautiful message about reconciliation, transformation, and friendship with God. The love of God compels us (5:14) and the presence of Christ transforms us (5:17). This message of God's friendship is open to everyone, and now is the time to respond to it (See 2 Corinthians 6:2).



## 9. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

*The person who puts the Kingdom of God first  
will have some troubles,  
but the person who puts the Kingdom of God second  
will have nothing but troubles.*

**Anonymous**

### **Jesus First Message about the Kingdom**

*The Message of Jesus (Mark 1:14-15)*

According to Mark Jesus did not begin his public ministry until after the arrest of John the Baptist. This would make John a true forerunner of the Messiah. *Repent and believe the Gospel* is the heart of Jesus' message and everything that follows in the Gospel of Mark is an expansion of that proclamation.

*The Message of Jesus (Matthew 4:12-17)*

Following the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus initiated his ministry in the Galilee. Why did he wait for the imprisonment of John to begin his ministry? No answer is given. Their messages had been the same. (Compare Matthew 3:2 with Matthew 4:17.) There might have been a disagreement in how they would carry out their messages. Jesus made friends with sinners and the religious outcasts. This would have been abhorrent to John, who proclaimed a message of doom to sinners. In spite of this, there is no reason to suppose that Jesus and John had any major disagreements. Perhaps it was the circumstance of John's arrest that forced Jesus to begin his public ministry alone, but why does he choose to do that in the Galilee? According to Matthew he was doing this to fulfill Scripture (Matthew 4:14-16). Isaiah 9:2 predicts that the Galilee would be the place where the Messiah would begin his work. This is with good reason. The Galilee lies in the North, and when Israel fell, it was the Galilee, which fell first. Since the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali (the Galilee) were the first to fall, they would also be the first to see the Light of God's deliverance.

*The Message of Jesus (Luke 4:38-44)*

Instead of working among those who have little faith, Jesus now goes to Capernaum, which becomes the headquarters for his Mission in the Galilee. He is able to cast out demons and heal the sick, including the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. The crowds flock to him, but he retreats to reevaluate what he is doing, and decides to move on to other

towns. His primary task is not that of healing, but of proclaiming the Good News of the coming Kingdom of God.

Jesus' ability to exorcise the demons seems to inaugurate his ministry. He has the power to destroy the demonic completely, but he only exorcises it from people. The demons recognize who he is and fear their own demise. Even though they cry out, "You are the Son of God!" he silences them. It is too soon for this announcement to be made; and besides, the demons are not the ones commissioned to proclaim it to the world. Even Jesus' own disciples will have to keep it a secret until they fully understand what it means.

### **Seven Parables on the Kingdom in Matthew**

#### *Parables (Matthew 13:1-3a)*

Of the five major sections in the Gospel of Matthew, this is the only one told specifically to the crowd. In this chapter he tells seven parables about the Kingdom of God to a crowd at the Galilean lakeside. The crowd was so large that he had to sit in a boat (13:1-2).

A parable is a story told to make *one* spiritual or moral truth. It differs from an allegory, where every detail must be analyzed and decoded. In a parable the details are not that important. The early church turned the first two parables, the Sower and the Weeds, into allegories. They required something Jesus rarely gave—an interpretation.

The reason for telling parables is confusing. Jesus assures the disciples that they will understand, but unbelievers will not. Parables are not instruments of evangelism, but a kind of inside language. That most people may hear the story but miss the point is a fulfillment of Isaiah 6:9-10. Another reference to the fulfillment of prophecy is Matthew 13:34-35, where the quotation is taken from Psalm 78:2. Since the author of this Psalm is Asaph, and Asaph according to 1 Chronicles 25:2, was considered to be a prophet, Matthew is correct in quoting him as one of the prophets.

Those who do understand, insists Jesus in Matthew 13:10-17, will repent and become part of the Kingdom. The final imagery of the householder has to do with the disciple's ability to connect the Old Testament tradition, based on the Law and Prophets, with Jesus' new proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

The primary purpose of this teaching section is to define, or sort out just who the true disciples of the Kingdom of God are.

*The Seed and the Soil (Matthew 13:3b-9) (13:18-23)*

That the disciples did not understand this parable is astounding. The seed (the Word of God) is the same, but the various kinds of soil (the hearts of people) are different. The path, the rocky ground, the thorns, and the good soil refer to the various kinds of people who come in contact with the Gospel: the casual, the shallow, the worldly, and the responsive.

The main point made in this parable is that the disciple should sow the message of the Kingdom of God with assurance. Not everyone will accept it, but some will. The latter explanation of the parable shifts to the slightly different meaning of the fruitfulness of the good person (soil). One should ignore the questionable farming methods of sowing before plowing, or even before the land has been cleared. These have nothing to do with the main points of the parable, which are encouragement and fruitfulness.

*The Wheat and the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30) (13:36-43)*

This parable follows closely on the heels of the seed and the soil. The disciple is to be encouraged by it to carry on the work of the Kingdom faithfully in spite of how difficult it is to eliminate evil. God allows good and evil to exist together until the close of history; and if that is the case, then the Church will have to do the same.

This does not mean that the Church should not exercise discipline on itself. The field is not the Church, but the world. When the Church does exercise discipline, it should not at the same time judge. The Son of Man will do the judging at the end of history. It is not the Church's task.

*The Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32)*

Although the beginnings of the Kingdom are small, those beginnings will grow into enormous results. This does not mean that the Kingdom will grow slowly, like seeds grow into trees. Jesus is contrasting the smallness of a seed with the largeness of the tree. He preached the sudden breaking in of the Kingdom, and his followers expected it to happen quickly.

*The Leaven (Matthew 13:33)*

Working in a hidden way, the Kingdom will penetrate a person's life giving it a new quality.

*The Treasure in the Field (Matthew 13:44)*

A true disciple will respond with wholehearted dedication to Jesus' message. Such a person would be willing to give up everything for the privilege of obtaining the treasure (the Kingdom of God). That secrecy is involved is not significant. This is a parable, not an allegory.

*The Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:45-46)*

In comparing the Kingdom to other claims, the true disciple recognizes how much more the Kingdom of God is worth and is willing to give up those claims to be part of it.

*The Fisherman's Net (Matthew 13:47-52)*

This parable has some similarity to the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. God and his angels will carry out the final judgment. We do not have to exercise judgment. It is not our task.

There is a natural progression in these seven parables of the Kingdom. One might sum them up as follows: (1) The Seed and the Soil: Individuals respond differently to the Word's invitation. (2) The Wheat and the Weeds: Citizens of the Kingdom live among the people of the world, growing together until God's final harvest or judgment. (3) The Mustard Seed: The Kingdom begins insignificantly, but its greatness will be revealed. (4) The Leaven: The Kingdom penetrates our lives with purpose and meaning. (5) The Treasure in the Field: The Kingdom possesses a hidden attraction. (6) The Pearl of Great Price: The Kingdom demands the abandonment of all other values. (7) The Fisherman's Net: The Kingdom will be fully established with the final separation of the unrighteous from the righteous.

**Other Parables on the Kingdom in Matthew**

*The Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)*

The owner of the field, not the disgruntled workers, illustrates Matthew's point, that God bestows grace upon us. The workers are hired at five different hours (6:00, 9:00, Noon, 3:00, and 5:00), and each agrees to go to work in the field for a fair wage, which was one denarius (a day's wages for a common worker).

Payment could have been by the hour, for there were smaller denominations of money available; but this parable does not have economic justice as its focus. It runs counter to our sense of fairness when considered in that way. The point is that God deals with us with his standard of grace and not according to our standard of merit. The attitude of the workers is similar to that of the elder son in the parable of

the prodigal son. Jesus is trying to get them and us to welcome people into the Kingdom of God.

### *The Marriage Feast (Matthew 22:1-14)*

The marriage feast symbolizes the messianic (royal) invitation to Israel, who rejected it. The invitation has two stages: (1) the announcement, and (2) the final urging to come. Weak excuses were given, and so the King sent his troops in to destroy those who were invited. This destruction might be a historical reference to the Roman troops entering Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

Others are compelled to attend the feast, but even after they arrive, they are inspected; and those without *a wedding garment* are cast out. There can be no excuse for not wearing it. The host always provided the wedding garment. Those who refused to wear it insulted the host. The wedding garment symbolizes *righteousness*, and those who reject it are those who think that they can believe without expressing their faith through works. The way into the Kingdom is still narrow, even though the invitation is inclusive.

### *The Question about Marriage (Matthew 22:23-33)*

After the Pharisees had their turn, the Sadducees proposed a question concerning the general resurrection, which they rejected, since it was not supported in the Torah (the first five books of the Law). Some scholars believe that Exodus 3:6 is a reference to the general resurrection. The verse names God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all of whom had already died. If this is a reference, it is somewhat vague.

The Sadducees propose what was probably the standard skeptical question: “What about Levirate marriage?” Levirate marriage had to do with a man’s responsibility to his brother’s widow. He was supposed to marry her. But, the Sadducees inquire, what happens if she runs through seven men? Whose wife will she be in the resurrection? Jesus’ answer is that there will not be any marital relationships in the resurrection. Men and women will live like angels.

### **The Parables of the Kingdom in Mark**

Mark is not as interested in parables as Matthew and Luke. In contrast to Matthew’s fifteen and Luke’s nineteen, Mark only includes four. The theme of Mark is action, and so instead, he uses eighteen miracles to express Jesus’ activity.

### *The Four Soils (Mark 4:1-20)*

A parable is a story to illustrate a teaching, but this parable seems to have a slightly different purpose. Its point is to explain why Jesus' teaching was not successful. The explanation given in verses 13-20 represents a later development of the church to explain why everyone has not accepted Jesus' teachings.

The sower is represented as one of the apostolic preachers and the Word is the Gospel about Jesus Christ. Those who are good soil not only hear and believe, but also bear fruit. Verses 10-12 indicate that the truth made plain in a parable is a riddle to those who do not yet believe. A faith relationship is required, and without it, the whole message appears as foolishness. Jesus compares his use of parables to the commission received by Isaiah to preach to people who not only will not listen but will be openly hostile. It takes faith to continue such a ministry.

### *The Seed Growing Secretly (Mark 4:26-29)*

The point of this parable is that the emerging Kingdom is a divine act. It is not accomplished by human toil. Therefore we must be patient. God will establish it in his own time.

### *The Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-34)*

The Kingdom of God grows gradually and naturally. It does not emerge suddenly and dramatically. Its final establishment may be dramatic, but that is not the way it grows.

## **The Parables on the Kingdom in Luke**

### *The Parable of the Soils (Luke 8:4-15)*

The seed represents the Word of God, which is planted in various kinds of soil (people). There is the seed that fell on the path and is constantly walked over, where birds devour the seeds. The birds represent the devil, who takes the words out of people's hearts. Secondly there is the seed that fell on the rocky soil, in which the Word begins to grow, but soon withers away because it cannot take root. There is no depth. Next there is the thorny soil, which represents people's fascination with the cares, riches and pleasures of this world. The Word is choked out. Finally there is the good soil, in which the word not only takes root, but matures and bears much fruit.

Parables such as this both reveal and conceal the Kingdom of God. Since parables will increase as Luke continues with Jesus ministry, it might help to stop for a moment to define just what a parable is and to contrast it with allegory and metaphor. A parable is a picture story that



conveys *one* thought. One cannot take every element of the story too seriously. While an allegory has a similar purpose to a parable, every element of an allegory has meaning and must be carefully interpreted. The Parable of the Soils comes very close to an allegory, but most of Jesus' parables do not. A metaphor is a figure of speech. Jesus' parables go far beyond that.

*Parables of the Kingdom (Luke 13:18-21)*

These two parables teach us that the Kingdom has small beginnings and big endings. It may seem to grow slowly, but it is indeed growing.

*The Kingdom is in Your Midst (Luke 17:20-21)*

When Jesus says that the Kingdom will come without any dramatic signs, he is talking about his own inauguration of it. It has come in his ministry. There are signs of its coming, but these signs are not as dramatic as they will be in his second coming.

While there is a difference of opinion as to whether Jesus meant the "Kingdom of God is within you" or the "Kingdom of God is among you," it is clear that it has come in Jesus himself. It is only *within* those who allow Jesus to rule over them.



## 10. THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves  
and take up their cross and follow me.*

**Mark 8:34**

### **The Beatitudes according to Matthew**

*Introduction (Matthew 5:1-2)*

Technically what follows is not taken from one sermon; rather, it represents the teachings of Jesus taken from many sermons or teaching situations. Jesus traditionally retreated into the mountains in order to escape the crowds. This seems to be the case here. He did not go into a mountain to gain a better vantage point, but to withdraw from the crowds. He sat down, as was the custom of Jewish teachers, and he shared with his disciples his vision of the Kingdom of God. Matthew's version is an extension of what we find in the Gospel of Luke, where the sermon is on the plain to a great crowd.

*The beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12)*

The first major section is called the Beatitudes, which are eight descriptions of that which brings happiness or blessedness.

*The Poor in Spirit (Matthew 5:3)*

The poor in Spirit are not those who are spiritually weak, but those who, like the Psalmist (Psalm 34), does not live out of his own resources, but relies upon God alone. Poverty of Spirit is best described as humility (Isaiah 66:2).

*Those Who Mourn (Matthew 5:4)*

Those who mourn are not simply grieving over the loss of a loved one, but bewail the present state of affairs in the world. They long for the coming of the Kingdom of God, in which they will find their comfort.

*The Meek (Matthew 5:5)*

Both Moses (Numbers 12:3) and Jesus have been described as meek, and so *meekness* cannot be equated with *weakness*. It would be better to say that the meek are *gentle*. This beatitude is not new with Jesus, but was already described in Psalm 37:11.

*The Righteous (Matthew 5:6)*

The emphasis is clearly on those who hunger and thirst for (seek) righteousness. Matthew 6:33, confirms this and places it at the center of the Christian life.

*The Merciful (Matthew 5:7)*

Mercy is only available to those who express mercy, and those who express it find that mercy blesses those who express it and those who receive it. No one has expressed this double joy, that is experienced by the merciful, like Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice*. (Act 4, Scene 1)

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

Though justice be thy plea, consider this,  
That in the course of justice none of us  
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
The deeds of mercy.

*The Pure in Heart (Matthew 5:8)*

Purity of heart means “single-minded.” Those who seek God with all their hearts are pure in heart. They shall not be disappointed. They shall see him.

*The Peacemakers (Matthew 5:9)*

It is not that peacemakers become the children of God, but that the children of God are quite naturally peacemakers. To be the children of God is to be involved in what God is doing and God is involved in peacemaking.

Unfortunately the English language lacks a word for peace. Biblical peace is more than the absence of conflict. It has to do with harmony and wellbeing. This is why so many people use the Hebrew word *Shalom* to talk about the Biblical concept of peace.

*The Persecuted (Matthew 5:10-12)*

Persecution is not a sign of God's disfavor, but a sign that his people are walking in the shoes of the prophets. They have reason to rejoice, even though they do not seek persecution.

The above beatitudes are not moral laws, but eschatological promises. At the same time that they are promises about God's coming Kingdom, they are also instructions on how to live the Christian life now.

### **The Beatitudes according to Luke**

#### *The Beatitudes and Woes (Luke 6:17-26)*

Luke has both beatitudes and woes. Matthew only includes the beatitudes, but he also gives the beatitudes spiritual interpretation, which Luke does not do. Luke talks not about the poor in spirit, but about the poor, the hungry, those who mourn, and the persecuted. Luke shows a more intense bias for the poor of the land than does Matthew.

The woes are for the rich, the full, those who laugh, and those who never have to face persecution for their faith. Luke shares with us a contrast between those who follow Jesus and those who do not.

#### *The Tasks of Discipleship: Salt and Light (Matthew 5:13-16)*

Israel had been given the task of being a Light to the Nations. Christians, as the New Israel, are to fulfill this ancient covenant (Isaiah 42:6). In addition to the image of light, salt is used. Not to fulfill this task is to act foolishly against God and one's own interests. Salt and Light exist to be used, and when they are not used, they are worthless.

### **Discipleship and the Cross**

#### *Discipleship and the Cross (Mark 8:34-9:1)*

Jesus also calls his disciples—past and present—to join him in bearing the cross of suffering. This chapter concludes with the remark that the current generation will see him return with the holy angels. Did Jesus expect the end of history to come in his own time? The Church certainly expected an early return (1 Corinthians 7:26-31 and 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18).

It is remarkable that this saying of Jesus, which was not fulfilled, was included in the Gospel. Those who felt that the prediction was fulfilled looked for that fulfillment in one of four possibilities: (1) the transfiguration of Jesus, (2) the resurrection of Jesus, (3) the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., or (4) the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The fourth possibility comes closest to fulfilling the prediction, but a fifth possibility exists. Jesus was simply wrong. The end did not come within the generation of his twelve disciples, as he expected. Albert Schweitzer suggested this fifth conclusion.

*Jesus talks about Discipleship (Luke 9:23-27)*

Not only was Jesus ready to suffer and die, he also expected his followers to be ready. This does not mean that they should seek death. The inclusion of taking up the cross *daily* might have been an effort to discourage martyrdom in the early Church; nevertheless, every disciple must set the right priorities. What good would it do to gain the world, but lose one's soul (life).

The final reference that some of them would not taste death before seeing the Kingdom of God does not refer to the end of history, but to the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. Could this be the transfiguration or the resurrection? No one knows for sure. What is meant is that they will see evidence of the coming Kingdom before they die and they will know that their discipleship has not been in vain.

*The First Prediction of the Cross (Matthew 16:21-28)*

This is the first prediction by Jesus of his upcoming death. The other three are found in Matthew 17:22-23; 20:17-19; and 26:1-2. Both the death and resurrection of Jesus took the disciples by complete surprise; and even though Jesus tried to prepare them for both, they did not seem to hear him. When Peter did hear him, he thought that Jesus misunderstood his role as the Messiah. Jesus however pointed out that he is the Messiah in the sense of Isaiah 53, which describes the Messiah as a suffering servant. Not only does Jesus see a cross in his future, but in the future of every disciple as well. This does not mean that he expects crucifixion for every disciple, but he does expect every disciple to voluntarily take up the stigma attached to the cross. Disciples are to share in Jesus sufferings.

The Good News in all of this is that beyond the cross God will have the last word, for he will raise Jesus—and all future disciples—from the dead. Matthew 16:28, suggests that this will happen before many of Jesus' disciples have died. What does this mean? It certainly cannot be referring to the end of history, for Jesus rejected any such prediction of that (Acts 1:6-7). He must be talking about their vision of him after he is raised up from the dead, or their experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. These events will be God's confirmation of his Kingdom, even if that Kingdom still must exist within the context of worldly kingdoms.

## Mission of the Twelve

### *Missionary Instructions (Matthew 10:1–11:1)*

*Commissioning the Twelve (10:1-4).* Twelve apostles are commissioned. The number twelve was no accident. There were twelve tribes in the past, and according to Matthew 19:28, they anticipated twelve judges in the last day. The term *apostle* meant “one commissioned by the King to fulfill a mission in his name and with his authority.” The term was probably not used prior to the resurrection, and then it referred primarily to eyewitnesses of the resurrection, although it was not restricted to them. The lists of the twelve vary, but Matthew’s is as follows:

The Twelve	
1. Simon (Peter)	7. Thomas
2. Andrew	8. Matthew (Levi)
3. James (Son of Zebedee)	9. James (Son of Alphaeus)
4. John (Son of Zebedee)	10. Thadeus (Lebbaeus)
5. Philip	11. Simon (the Cananaean)
6. Bartholomew	12. Judas (Iscariot)

There is some confusion in this passage over the terms *apostle* and *disciple*. The twelve were not generally called *apostles* until after the resurrection. At this point in time it would be more correct to refer to them as *disciples*. The term *disciple* has the connotation of a learner or follower; whereas, an apostle connotes one who is sent on a mission. While the twelve are indeed sent on a mission, they are still learning what that mission is. They are apprentices to Jesus; and during their apprenticeship, their mission will be limited.

*The Mission of the Twelve (Matthew 10:5-15).* The twelve were to go first to the Jews (Matthew 10:5) and were warned not to go to the Samaritans and Gentiles. According to Matthew 15:24, Jesus saw the mission to the lost sheep of Israel, the disobedient Jews, as being primary. He did recognize and commend the faith he found among Samaritans and Gentiles, but the mission to them had to wait until the time was right. In Matthew 28:19, following his resurrection, the time was right.

The twelve were to announce the nearness of the Kingdom of God as their primary message (Matthew 10:7), which was the same as the message of John the Baptist and Jesus, and they were to perform the same signs (Matthew 10:8) of the breaking in of the Kingdom, which consisted of (1) healing the sick, (2) raising the dead, (3) cleansing lepers, and (4) casting out demons.

They had to travel light, and to this extent they became models for the first circuit riders, even though they used no horses. They took no baggage, no money, and were expected to survive on the generosity of those who would receive their message. They were to go directly to those who were *worthy*, which means *receptive to them*. While they were to extend freedom to others to accept or reject both them and their Lord, they were also to recognize the seriousness of such rejection. It could only be compared to Sodom and Gomorrah's rejection in Abraham's time.

When they encountered such rejection, they were to shake the dust off their feet. This idea came from the Jewish practice of shaking the dust off their feet whenever they returned home from traveling through Gentile lands. They did not want to defile their native land with dust from pagan lands. Houses where they were not received were to be considered heathen and unclean. God's people would certainly have responded to God's message, and those who did not, could only be considered heathen.

*The Perils Involved in Missions (Matthew 10:16–11:1)*. What follows is a series of teachings concerning the perils of missionary work. Persecution will inevitably follow, but God will enable his missionaries to speak with the help of the Spirit (Matthew 10:19-20). These verses were designed to encourage God's missionaries. They were never intended to give excuses to pastors to preach without adequate preparation.

A particularly troublesome verse has to do with Jesus' promise that the Son of Man (the Messiah) would come before they had finished fulfilling his mission. Albert Schweitzer concluded that Jesus was mistaken. Some have suggested that this verse is not an authentic saying of Jesus, but others have felt that this prediction had to be fulfilled in some unknown manner. If the latter is the case, it might be a reference to the resurrection of Jesus or the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. The primary point Jesus is making however is that his disciples will also have to suffer (Matthew 10:24-25). The obligation is to proclaim the Kingdom of God (Matthew 10:17), and all who confess Jesus will



be accepted and those who deny him will be rejected (Matthew 10:32-33).

Responses to Christ will even divide the family, which was the center of Jewish faith and life. While Christians must obey the commandment, which requires that they “honor their father and mother,” they must first honor their “heavenly father.” Primary allegiance goes to God.

### **The Mission of the Seventy**

#### *The Sending Out (10:1-12).*

The number 70, or in some cases 72, could refer to the number of non-Jewish nations thought to exist. It is more likely to refer to Moses’ choosing of the 70 in Numbers 11:16-17, 24-25, a practice that ultimately led to the formation of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Court. The Sanhedrin also consisted of 70 members. By choosing 70 people to help him, Jesus imitates Moses.

This story most certainly symbolizes the later mission of the Church. Every town and place was to be evangelized, even though the laborers were few. Disciples were to go out in pairs, traveling light, and when rejected, move on to other places. They were to salute no one on the road. This simply meant that they were not to get bogged down in the complexities of oriental greetings. Their mission was urgent. They were to heal the sick and proclaim the Kingdom of God. They were to tie social concern and evangelism together.

#### *The Woes on Palestine (Luke 10:13-16).*

A warning is given here that the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon, had they seen and heard Jesus, would have repented long ago. Jewish cities, such as Chorazin and Bethsaida, had the privilege of seeing him and hearing him; therefore, their unresponsiveness will bring them to a fate similar to that of Sodom.

Of all the cities that should have been responsive, Capernaum leads the list. Capernaum is where Jesus made his headquarters, and where most of his teachings were heard and miracles performed. Its people are without excuse, and so their fate is Hades.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The place of the dead: Hades (Greek) and Sheol (Hebrew)

*The Return of the Seventy (Luke 10:17-24).*

When the 70 return, they confess that Jesus truly is the Lord. In his name they have had great success in casting out demons. In this they see the ultimate defeat of Satan himself (Revelation 12:7-10).

Jesus cautions them, and tells them that they should rejoice not in their success, but in the fact that their names have been written in Heaven. They have seen and heard what prophets and kings desired to see and hear. What a privilege?

**Discipleship and the Family**

*The Would-be Disciples (Matthew 8:18-22)*

When some would-be disciples approached Jesus concerning following him, he called for an immediate response. Discipleship was so urgent that they had to give priority to it over home and family obligations.

Jesus' reference to himself in Matthew 8:20, as the *Son of Man*, points beyond his mere humanity (Daniel 7:13-14). He has the authority to call people away from their homes and family obligations.

The man's father was not yet dead. He just wanted to be excused until after his father's death so that he would be free of family obligations. Jesus was not willing to excuse him. Discipleship demands commitment beyond all other obligations, including family responsibilities.

*Discipleship and the Family (Matthew 10:34-37)*

Responses to Christ will even divide the family, which was the center of Jewish faith and life. While Christians must obey the commandment, which requires that they "honor their father and mother," they must first honor their "heavenly father." Primary allegiance goes to God.

*Discipleship and the Family (Luke 9:57-62)*

Two men express a willingness to become a disciple, but they want to take care of family obligations first, such as taking care of an aging father, or saying goodbye to one's family. All this may seem harsh, but Jesus' point is that nothing can stand in the way of discipleship, not even family obligations.

*On Excuses (Luke 14:15-24)*

These verses signify how people react to God's invitation in Jesus Christ. Some people will consider all kinds of worldly involvements as

more important than the Kingdom of God. That is why they use weak excuses such as having purchased a field, or some oxen, or they have just gotten married.

Their answer to the invitation is not, "I cannot," but "I will not." What Luke is trying to lift up here with Jesus' teaching is that the Jews have rejected his message; therefore, the message will be taken to the Gentiles, who will accept it.

### **The Great Commissions**

All four of the Gospels have their Great Commission, but Mark's is part of what has been called the Longer Ending (Mark 16:15-16). All of these Great Commissions have the common theme of proclaiming Jesus' call to repent and believe in the Good News of God's Kingdom, which of course includes his own resurrection as the Messianic King. The Apostles are commissioned to continue what Jesus has started. They will be his physical body in the world.

#### *The Epilogues (Mark 16:9-20)*

What follows creates one of the major textual problems of the New Testament. The longer ending is not present in the codices *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus*, the oldest New Testament manuscripts. Four other less important manuscripts contain a shorter ending, and so that leaves us with two epilogues.

The longer epilogue summarizes Jesus' appearances to the two walking to Emmaus, to the eleven, and his giving of the Great Commission. Unlike Matthew, the Great Commission is not set in Galilee. These summaries are followed with the account of his Ascension. The shorter ending is but a summary of their faithfulness in spreading the Good News of eternal salvation to the ends of the earth.

What happened, and why does Mark come to such an abrupt conclusion? Three possibilities exist. First, the ending was mutilated and could not be restored. What exists now might be two attempts, on the part of others, to summarize his ending. The second possibility might be that Mark never had a chance to finish his Gospel. Persecution might have stopped him. A third possibility might be that he did indeed finish his Gospel, but had no intention of saying more. Although Jesus told his disciples in Mark 14:28 that he would see them in Galilee after his resurrection, Mark does not describe any such appearance. Perhaps Mark believed that Jesus was talking about the Parousia, or his second coming, which had not yet taken place. This would mean that he ended his Gospel while the followers of Jesus were still living in expectation

of the second coming, which he believed would take place in Galilee. This of course goes against the tradition that Jesus would return to Jerusalem. Of the three possibilities, the first sounds the most convincing.

Even though everyone seems to agree that Mark did not write either of the endings, early scholars agreed that in spite of grammatical and theological peculiarities, they were consistent with Mark's work; hence, they were included in the New Testament canon. They were probably inserted in the middle of the second century.

The signs to follow Jesus' disciples must be mentioned. They are five in number: exorcism, speaking in tongues, snake handling, drinking of poison, and healing. According to Acts 8:7; 2:4; 28:3-5; and 28:8 all of these are fulfilled in the New Testament Church except for the drinking of poison.

#### *The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)*

Not every one of the eleven remaining disciples had an easy time believing. Thomas' doubt is well known, but not mentioned by Matthew. Perhaps others also had doubts. There is nothing wrong with doubt as long as it is *creative* and motivates one to continue the search for truth.

The name of the mountain, where they met with Jesus is not named. Four mountains have been mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew. They are the Mount of Temptation, the Sermon on the Mount, the Mount of Transfiguration, and now the Mount of the Great Commission. Jesus, like Moses before him, gives direction to God's people from a mountain somewhere in Galilee, but the name of the mountain is less important than the directions Jesus gave from the mountain.

The commissioning includes three tasks: (1) To make disciples of people from all nations, (2) To baptize people from all nations, and (3) To teach people from all nations. The most Jewish of the four Gospels, closes with an opening to people from every nation on earth.

The Trinitarian formula, which suggests baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, may reflect the later liturgical experiences of the early Church, but the ideas that lie behind it most certainly belong to Jesus.

The closing is accompanied with the promise of God's unceasing, though invisible, presence. The promise of his presence was made in the beginning when the announcement was made in Matthew 1:23 that Jesus would be called *Emmanuel*, which means "God is with us." That

presence will accompany his people to the end of history and beyond, right on into eternity.

*The Commissioning of the Disciples (Luke 24:36-49)*

This passages resembles Matthew 28:16-20 and John 20:19-23. The main difference is Matthew's locating of the event in Galilee. It is possible that the commissioning was done on several occasions. The main point here is that Jesus is indeed alive, which is proven by his eating boiled fish.

All of the above has been talked about in Scripture, identified here as the Law, Prophets, and Psalms. Actually, the Psalms were not yet officially adopted as Scripture, but they were in common use. Jesus is the fulfiller and interpreter of Scripture, and his resurrection is God's way of moving the world in a new direction, which requires a worldwide missionary effort.

*Sunday Evening (John 20:19-23)*

By Sunday evening the disciples were afraid, and so they gathered behind locked doors. Jesus appeared in the midst of them, and said, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19) He revealed his hands and side to them as proof that he was indeed the one who had been crucified and was now risen. Three concise statements are made to them, which reveal what he expects of them. They are sent (John 20:21); empowered (John 20:22); and told that forgiveness depends upon their faithfulness (John 20:23). It is no minor mission that has been entrusted to them. This is the Great Commission in the Gospel of John.

*The Purpose of the Gospel (John 20:30-31)*

The above three events build to the climax of the Gospel of John. The story is told that the reader might believe—not simply know about—and gain life in the name of Jesus. JESUS IS THE CHRIST, in whom everyone can believe and find a rich and fulfilling life in this world and eternal life in the world to come. He may not reign fully now, but in the future, he will rule forever and ever. Much more could be said, but John is convinced that he has shared enough to lead anyone to faith.



## 11. THE LAW AND GOSPEL

*The law indeed was given through Moses;  
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

**John 1:17**

*The only man who has the right to say  
that he is justified by grace alone  
is the man who has left all to follow Christ.*

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

### **From the Sermon on the Mount**

*The Permanence of the Law (Matthew 5:17-20)*

The Law (the first five books of the Old Testament) was made clear in the prophets and fulfilled in Christ. God's purpose was not to do away with the Law, but to make it clear and fulfill it through Love. There is no relaxation in the fulfillment of the Law. God's children are to surpass the Scribes and Pharisees in their zeal for fulfilling the Law. This is not accomplished by obeying the *letter* of the Law. It is accomplished only by living according to the *spirit* of the Law.

*The Meaning of the Law (5:21-48)*

Five statements illustrate the meaning of the Law. They give the Law an inward and spiritual dimension, which was precisely what Jeremiah predicted for the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

#### *1. Murder and Anger (5:21-26)*

*The Law regulates murder, but God is concerned with anger.* The intent of the Law (Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17) against murder is fulfilled only as we learn how to deal constructively with anger. Both God and Jesus expressed anger, and we, being made in the divine image, will express anger too. Anger must never focus on hurting other persons. We can constrain people without intentionally hurting them. This Law is fulfilled when we make friends with our adversaries.

#### *2. Adultery and Lust (5:27-30)*

*The Law regulates adultery, but God is concerned about lust.* The intent of the Law against adultery (Exodus 20:14 & Deuteronomy 5:18) is fulfilled only as we learn how to deal with lust. Lust may be present, but that is no reason to give in to it. We fulfill this Law by not

allowing it to dominate us. Human relationships are more important than our getting what we lust after.

### 3. *Divorce, Remarriage, and Faithfulness (5:31-32)*

*The Law permits divorce, but God is concerned with faithfulness.* Matthew's comment is less radical than Mark's (Mark 10:2-9), but Mark gives the divine purpose for marriage, which is that "two shall become one flesh." Matthew deals with this later (Matthew 19:3-9).

Some scholars think that Matthew permits divorce and remarriage when one party has committed adultery, but the Law also called for the stoning of the guilty party, in which case divorce would not be necessary. Jesus does not seem to allow for divorce under any circumstances, and he suggests that remarriage involves other people in the adulterous relationship.

### 4. *Swearing Oaths, and the Truth (5:33-37)*

*The Law demands binding oaths, but God is concerned with truth.* In the ninth commandment (Exodus 20:16), we are always to speak the truth when bearing witness. *Swearing* and *oaths* should not be necessary among God's people. We do not need to add to the force of our words by appeal to God or anything God has created. James 5:12 makes clear that our words, without the need for *swearing* and *oaths*, are committed to *truth* and can be trusted.

### 5. *Retaliation and Love (5:38-48)*

*The Law permits revenge, but God seeks a people who will love their enemies.* The ancient Law requiring an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Exodus 21:23-25) was actually an improvement over the tribal law that existed previously. According to tribal law a single offense permitted the wholesale destruction of the offending tribe; but this new law limited retaliation to getting even. The two examples concerning the right cheek and the cloak both have to do with exceptions to what was expected. The blow on the right cheek was considered an insult, and to give up the cloak was to give up the more expensive garment, which served as protection against the elements and was used as bedding for the night.

While many may agree that the individual should encounter evil with grace, there is much disagreement when it comes to discussing how the State should confront evil. What must be remembered is that we are not talking about nonresistance as the fulfillment of the Law, but Love. Love is not to be equated with nonresistance, nor is love to be divorced from force.



The way to fulfill the Law—any law—is through love. This involves the performance of a positive good in the face of evil. It is to do the unexpected. Evil is to be overcome by Grace. This is the reversal of the old pattern that suggested love for the friend and hatred for the enemy. Most Jewish scholars note that the Old Testament does not command hatred of the enemy. Some of the Psalmists do call upon God to bring judgment down upon Israel's enemies, but the Old Testament contains no direct command to hate them. Such an appeal has turned up in the Dead Sea Scrolls, however; and so it may well be this tradition to which Jesus is referring. God's way of love is to become the standard.

The final call to perfection could be a call to maturity and completeness, or it could connote peace and wholeness. If it is the latter, then we are all called to share in God's reconciling work (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). To be perfect is to confront evil with mercy. In the end Jesus is not against the Law. He is only against some rabbinic interpretations of it, which have not gone far enough. When it is carried out to its proper end, the Law is fulfilled through the power of Love. Hence Jesus is calling his people to make the shift from the love of power to the power of love. We are being called to the high ideal of perfect love.

## **Law and Gospel**

### *Law and Gospel (Luke 16:14-17)*

The era of the Law and Prophets continued up to John the Baptist's time; after which, the era of the Kingdom of God began. The beginning of the Kingdom however does not mean the end of the Law. It only means that the Law is sharpened with new insight. An illustration concerning divorce follows.

### *Divorce and Adultery (Luke 16:18)*

The point is painfully clear. Divorce followed by remarriage is defined as adultery. Jesus sharpens the law on divorce and adultery, but he also makes the man more responsible. According to Jewish Law adultery was something a woman committed against her husband or one man against another, but now it is something a man commits against a woman as well.

### *Marriage, Divorce, and Celibacy (Matthew 19:1-12)*

The Pharisees decided to test Jesus by asking him his opinion about divorce. There was disagreement within Judaism concerning this matter. Some, mainly the followers of Hillel, believed a man had a right to divorce his wife for any reason; others, the followers of

Shammai, believed that he could only do so within carefully defined restrictions. With whom would Jesus agree? Jesus avoided the dilemma and pushed them back to Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, God's intention in creation, which stated that marriage was to be a permanent union between husband and wife.

The Mosaic Law represented a lowering of the ideal, but even the permission to divorce one's wife because of adultery would be a lowering of the ideal. Jesus tends to set aside all reasons for divorce. Mark 10:11 is an earlier version of Jesus' teachings. It is believed that the church was not able to live up to it, and so Matthew 19:9 is a modification of Jesus' teaching to make it easier to apply to everyday life. Even remarriage was considered to be adultery.

The teachings of Jesus on this subject are hard, and it is difficult to know whether we should treat them as a new law, which prohibits divorce. The early church did not understand them as a new law, but it did begin to see celibacy as somehow being holier than marriage. The Lutheran Reformation reversed this tendency. Holiness is not a question of remaining single or getting married, but of living out God's intention for human life. If one marries, according to Jesus, the proper intention is to form a permanent union.

#### *The Question about the Resurrection (Matthew 22:23-33)*

After the Pharisees had their turn, the Sadducees proposed a question concerning the general resurrection, which they rejected, since it was not supported in the Torah (the first five books of the Law). Some scholars believe that Exodus 3:6 is a reference to the general resurrection. The verse names God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all of whom had already died. If this is a reference, it is somewhat vague.

The Sadducees propose what was probably the standard skeptical question: "What about Levirate marriage?" Levirate marriage had to do with a man's responsibility to his brother's widow. He was supposed to marry her. But, the Sadducees inquire, what happens if she runs through seven men? Whose wife will she be in the resurrection? Jesus' answer is that there will not be any marital relationships in the resurrection. Men and women will live like angels.

### **The Great Commandment**

#### *The Question about the Greatest Commandment (Mark 12:28-34)*

Finally we have a sincere scribe who asks Jesus how to sum up the 613 laws. Jesus ties Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18 in a three-

fold statement about worshiping one God, loving him with all one's heart, and loving the neighbor as oneself. The scribe agrees that this is better than burnt offerings and sacrifices, and Jesus affirms him by telling him that he is not far from the Kingdom. This stopped all questioning.

Jesus' reply was really quite orthodox and in line with the teachings of the prophets. In fact he was not even the first one to put these commandments together. Other examples can be found in Judaism, one being the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. What is different about what Jesus does is the interpretation he gives it, especially the interpretation he gives of the neighbor. We are not to look for someone who might be acceptable as our neighbor, but we are to be a good neighbor. That is how we would want others to love us.

*The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:34-40)*

The Pharisees and Sadducees join together to ask Jesus which commandment is the greatest of them all. An expert lawyer, representing them, puts this question straight to him. The joining together of the commandment to love God (Deuteronomy 6:5) with the commandment to love the neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) was not new, but the deeper definitions of love and the neighbor were. Love did lie in the heart of the Old Testament, but its proper definition had to wait for Jesus. The same can be said of the neighbor.

*A Question about Eternal Life (A Lawyer) (Luke 10:25-37)*

The first question begins with an inquiry into eternal life and ends up being a question on how to define one's neighbor. In Luke's Gospel the man who asks the question is a Lawyer. In Jewish terms, he would have been a Scribe, whose job it was to study and interpret the Law. Since Gentile readers would be more familiar with *Lawyer*, Luke uses a word they would understand.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan was Jesus' answer to the Lawyer's question, which was: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" With the help of Jesus' follow up question, the Lawyer answered his own question. The answer was to love God and one's neighbor.

For the Lawyer this raised a second question concerning the definition of his neighbor. This was the wrong question, and so Jesus illustrated his point with a Parable. Everyone in the Parable seems to be going from Jerusalem down to Jericho, a city 17 miles away and 3,300 feet lower in elevation. Jerusalem is 2,500 feet above sea level while Jericho is 800 feet below sea level. Half way down this route stands the ruins of the Inn of the Good Samaritan, a building dating back to Ro-

man times. This is not the Inn of Jesus' story. We must remember that Jesus is illustrating his point with a story, which is not necessarily related to actual places. He of course does relate his story to commonly known practices.

Jericho was the home of many of the priests who served in the Temple, and so we know that the Priest and Levite were not on their way to perform priestly duties. In his parable, Jesus points to Priests and Levites (lay associates), who represent the highest religious leadership, who walk right on by. This is disappointing because, of all people, we would expect them to help.

The Samaritan, a foreigner not expected to show sympathy to a Jew, stops and helps. The oil and wine he pours on the wounds were the only medication known at the time. Not only does the Samaritan help, but, he seems to expect nothing in return. After helping the wounded man, he just disappears.

In the end Jesus asked the Lawyer a different question. "Which of these three," he says, "do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The answer was then obvious. It was the man who showed mercy. The crucial question is not, "Who is my neighbor?" but "To whom will I be a neighbor?" This is the route to eternal life and the fulfillment of the Great Commandments to love God and the neighbor.

## **Fasting**

### *Fasting or Feasting? (Matthew 9:16-17)*

When questioned as to why he feasted while John fasted, Jesus indicated that the time of fasting would come. This was an indirect reference to his impending death. For the time being, however, it was a time for feasting. The Kingdom had been inaugurated in him, and that called for celebration.

Two parables illustrate conflict between the Old and New Kingdoms. A new patch could not be put on an old garment, nor could new wine be poured into old wineskins. Something new has come, and the old is no longer adequate. God is doing a new thing, and the old Jewish customs will be shattered, as the new breaks forth.

### *The Question of Fasting (Mark 2:18-22)*

Fasting was common in Jewish Religion. That neither Jesus nor his disciples fasted raised some serious criticism, but Jesus answers it by making sharp distinctions between Judaism and his message of the Kingdom of God. He was proclaiming something new, something that

needed to be celebrated. The present time was a time for rejoicing, not fasting. When the early Church fasted it did so as a memorial to his death; but if he is indeed risen, fasting is just as inappropriate today as it was then.

### *Jesus' Attitude towards Fasting (Luke 5:33-39)*

The Scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus for not taking up their own practice of fasting twice a week. He defended himself by stating that a new era had begun in which it was inappropriate to fast. The comparison he makes is with guests mourning at a wedding. Joy would be a more appropriate attitude than fasting. Fasting will have to wait until those days between his death and resurrection.

Two illustrations are used to describe the tension between the old and the new. No one patches an old garment with a piece from a new garment, and no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Verse 39 is a bit of irony. It describes the unbelievable attitude of the conservatives who hang on to the old when the new has come. How can one mourn when there is reason to rejoice?

## **The Sabbath**

### *Jesus and the Sabbath (Mark 2:23—3:6)*

In addition to blasphemy, Jesus gets accused of violating the commandment on the Sabbath. The problem was that so many rules grew up around the proper observance of the Sabbath that the true meaning of the Sabbath got lost. The purpose of the Sabbath was for: (1) physical rest, and (2) spiritual nourishment.

Jesus is accused of violating the Sabbath in two ways. The first is for threshing grain (2:23-28) and the second is for healing (3:1-6). Neither is justified. The intention of the Sabbath was never to prevent people from eating, nor was it to prevent the sick from being healed. The intent was physical rest and spiritual nourishment. The Pharisees however took these as serious violations of the Law of Moses, and joined forces with an unlikely ally—the Herodians. The Herodians were Jews who favored the Herodian dynasty, which in turn supported Rome. These Pharisees must have feared political fallout from Jesus' claims and teachings. They were right to fear such fallout, but they were wrong to seek his death.

Jesus makes a mistake in illustrating his point with the story of David and his rebels. Abiathar was not the high priest at the time. It was Ahimelech. 1 Samuel 21:1-6 tells the story and names the high

priest. How can this be explained? It might be a scribal error, but then again, Jesus might have misquoted 1 Samuel 21:1.

*The Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-14)*

Jesus violated the Sabbath Law by picking and eating grain and by healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. Although the Sabbath was the most sacred and distinctive of all Jewish institutions, the Rabbis did permit its violation in life-threatening emergencies. The difficulty with the two Sabbath violations in this chapter is that they were not emergencies. Jesus' disciples were not starving to death, and the man with a withered hand could have waited until the next day.

The point being made by Jesus is that compassion is more important than legalism, and if David could get away with eating the sacred bread in the Temple (1 Samuel 21:1-6), surely the Messiah (Jesus himself), could pick and eat some grain on the Sabbath. After all, he is greater than the temple, and he is the Lord of the Sabbath. The Pharisees would have considered both these claims the ultimate blasphemy.

*Jesus' Attitude towards the Sabbath (Luke 6:1-11)*

Jesus and his disciples ate some grain on the Sabbath. This angered the Scribes and Pharisees, who were concerned about keeping the Law and saw the Law concerning the Sabbath as one of the most important Laws. Jesus rejects their legalism by reminding them that David himself ate the bread of the presence, which only the priests normally ate. Luke carefully omits the mistaken reference to Abiathar as the High Priest of the time.

A second apparent violation of the Sabbath takes place when Jesus heals a man with a withered hand. Healing on the Sabbath was permitted if the illness was life threatening. Jesus claimed that the Sabbath was the time to do good. While the Scribes and Pharisees would have agreed, Jesus went beyond their concept of doing good. For him failing to do good when one had an opportunity to do so was in itself an evil. This was not the case for the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus was trying to show them that Scripture does not adhere to their rigorous legalism.

## 12. THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

*In the morning, while it was still very dark,  
He got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.*

**Mark 1:35**

*Man wants to travel to the moon. That is not far enough  
He must first travel to the depths of his own soul.<sup>1</sup>*

**Charles de Gaulle**

### **The Sermon on the Mount**

*Religious Observances (Matthew 6:1-18)*

While the latter part of Matthew 5 deals with how the New Kingdom compares with the teaching of the scribes, the beginning of Matthew 6 contrasts the New Kingdom with the teaching of the Pharisees. The main point is that what really counts is the motive, whether we are talking about the commandments (the Law) or religious observances. To give (alms), to pray, and to fast must all be done in secret. These were the three pillars of Jewish religious observance, which carry over into the New Kingdom with a new interpretation.

We are most familiar with the Lord's Prayer, which contains seven petitions. The first three have to do with God's name, God's Kingdom, and God's Will. The final four have to do with human needs, such as daily bread, forgiveness, temptation, and deliverance from evil.

The Opening Invocation. (6:9) "Our Father..."

The Three Petitions to God. (6:9-10)

1. Hallowed be your name
2. Your Kingdom come
3. Your will be done

The Four Petitions for Human Need. (6:11-13)

1. Daily Bread
2. Forgiveness
3. Temptation
4. Deliverance from the evil one

The Doxology. This was not part of the original text. It was something the early Church used in worship. The emphasis was on the coming of God's Kingdom.

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Emerson Colaw, *Beliefs of a United Methodist Christian* (Discipleship Resources: Nashville, 1978, p. 96.

The only petition that is difficult to understand is the one asking for deliverance from temptation. The word *temptation* could be translated “tribulation.” It is a petition asking God for strength in the time of persecution and tribulation, which will come just prior to the end of history. The Lord’s Prayer looks towards God’s future Kingdom, and for this reason, we call it an eschatological prayer.

*Material Possessions (Matthew 6:19-34)*

What follows is a collection of the sayings of Jesus that call his disciples away from anxiety over money, possessions, and common everyday needs, such as food, drink, and clothing.

The passage about light (6:22-23) does not seem to fit. Perhaps it was placed in the midst of these teachings to illustrate what disciples, who were set free from such anxieties, would be like. They would be light in the darkness. The Gospel of Thomas, found in 1945, helps to make clear the intent. “Within a man of light there is light and he lights the whole world. When he does not shine, there is darkness.” Those who seek the Kingdom of God first in their lives (6:33) are set free of all these anxieties, and they are light, which illuminates the whole world.

Two other confusing words used in older translations are *mammon* (6:24) and *cubit* (6:27), which in the newer translations are rendered *wealth or money* and *a single hour*. Since a cubit refers to the distance between one’s elbow and the tip of one’s finger, it hardly makes any sense to talk about adding a cubit to one’s life, but it does make sense to talk about adding a cubit to one’s property, just as it makes sense to talk about adding a day to one’s life. The newer translations focus on the latter, thinking that this would be easier for us to understand today.

*Attitudes towards Others and God (Matthew 7:1-12)*

*Towards Others (Matthew 7:1-6)*. We are not to judge others. The reason is because we cannot see clearly enough, and so judgment belongs to God alone. Any attempt to judge others will turn in on ourselves. This will become obvious to us as we take the log out of our own eye. Instead of enabling us to judge, this act will render us unwilling to pass judgment.

The reference to dogs and pigs in verse six has to do with the receptivity of Gentiles, and not, as the early church supposed, sinners. The early church used this verse to withhold the Lord’s Supper from those it judged as unworthy. The point being made here is that timing is important. We must deal with others according to their capacity to receive our message. Holy things cannot be forced on people.



*Towards God (Matthew 7:7-11).* We are to pray constantly. God is more ready to answer our prayers than we are to pray. This does not mean that he will fulfill every request, but he will indeed answer every prayer. We do not always know what is best for us, but he does and answers our prayers accordingly. We should never give up praying.

*The Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12).* Our attitude towards others and God should be controlled by the Golden Rule. This was not new. The Golden Rule had been known within Judaism, and many other religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, for centuries. It was even present in Greek and Roman moral teachings, but Jesus gave it new depth when he made a positive command out of it. Other versions of the Golden Rule had always put it into a negative form.

While Jesus saw the Golden Rule as the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets, it can also be seen as a general rule for behavior or as practical advice on how to succeed in the world.

*The Demands Of The Kingdom (Matthew 7:13-29)*

*The Narrow Gate and Way (Matthew 7:13-14).* There are two gates and two ways. The gate that leads into God's Kingdom is narrow, and only a few will choose it. The gate that leads away from God's Kingdom is broad, and many will choose it. The former is unpopular and hard; while, the latter is popular and easy. The Kingdom of God demands the restricted gate and the road less traveled, but only a minority will choose them.

In teaching about the Narrow Gate and Way, Jesus is simply drawing upon some Old Testament images found in Deuteronomy 11:26-29, Joshua 24:15, and Jeremiah 21:8. Jesus' description of the two ways makes clear to us that he is in no way trying to avoid the strictness of the Law and the Prophets. In fact the Sermon on the Mount reminds us of how much more difficult it is to follow Jesus than it is to follow to Moses.

*The Necessity of Good Works (Matthew 7:15-23).* Since false prophets (wolves) appear in sheep's clothing (confessing Jesus as Lord), they represent a very real danger. How does one recognize them? As a tree bears good fruit, true disciples bear good works. They can be known by their good fruit. They do the will of their heavenly Father.

None of this means that we save ourselves by our good works. This passage is not a rejection of Justification by Grace through Faith; rather, it affirms the necessary fruit of faith. Faith produces the fruit of

good works, or it is not authentic faith. To call Jesus Lord is to submit to his reign.

*The Wise and Foolish Builders (Matthew 7:24-27).* This is a final warning to take the narrow gate leading to the way of life and to bear the good fruit of works in harmony with the Kingdom of God. All this will adequately prepare us for the final judgment and establishment of God's Kingdom. To go through the wide gate, taking the popular way, and bearing evil fruit, inconsistent with the Kingdom, leads to judgment and destruction.

This is a typical eschatological parable, reminding us of the consequences of our decisions. If we take the wrong way, or build on the wrong foundation, all that we can expect is the collapse of our lives and society. Faith causes us to take the right way and build on the right foundation. This means that faith is both a decision and a gift. The decision is based on a revelation from God. We do not dream up the wisdom that is expressed in this eschatological parable, but we must respond to it.

*Conclusion (Matthew 7:28-29).* The Sermon on the Mount ends with the phrase: "Now when Jesus had finished saying these things..." The next four collections of Jesus' teachings will end as does Matthew 7:28. (See 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; and 26:1) This ending adds impact to Jesus' authority. What is unique about Jesus is that he did not have to appeal to other authorities. His person and words rang with authority within themselves, and this astounded the crowds.

What might be puzzling here is the mere mention of the crowds. The Sermon on the Mount began with Jesus instructing his disciples. Nothing is said about any crowd until the end. Did the crowds find him and join in, or is Matthew simply suggesting that what was true for the disciples, is true for everyone who would follow Jesus. Certainly these teachings were spread to the crowds, who then responded to them with astonishment.

### **The Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:27-49)**

What follows is a collection of Jesus' sayings, which were delivered in various places. Matthew expanded the collection in the Sermon on the Mount. Luke's collection is probably more accurate. Keeping the mountain as a place for prayer and visions, Luke has Jesus teaching on the plain.

### *The Golden Rules (Luke 6:27-36)*

The primary principle is found in Luke 6:27, where Christians are told to love their enemies. Their enemies are those who persecute them. Two examples are given. Christians love their enemies by resisting the urge to retaliate and by going the second mile with a readiness to give and be helpful to the enemy.

All of the above is summed up in Luke 6:31, which we call the Golden Rule. This was indeed a revolutionary idea. It was the rejection of the principle of mutuality, where one only loves those who will return their love. Christians act without the hope of an earthly reward, but they do, of course, hope in the heavenly reward. They believe that by loving their enemies, they will be loved by God.

### *Christian Behavior (Luke 6:37-45)*

How we treat others is how we can expect to be treated by God. Disciples of Christ are therefore people (1) who do not judge, (2) who see clearly, and (3) who bear fruit. Their hearts are in right relationship with God.

### *The Two House Builders (Luke 6:46-49)*

Like Matthew, Luke has Jesus telling a parable about two house builders. The parables are slightly different. Luke keeps in mind his Gentile audience, who would not be familiar with the torrential rains of Palestine. Instead they would be familiar with the swelling of some important river in some non-Palestinian urban setting.

In spite of the differences, the teaching of Jesus is the same. His words are to be obeyed. When we depart from them, we build our lives on shaky foundations, which will bring them crashing down.

### *Questions about Prayer (The Disciples) (Luke 11:1-13)*

Apparently other teachers taught their disciples (pupils) how to pray, and so the twelve disciples ask Jesus to do the same for them. Perhaps they noticed how he constantly withdrew to pray. Jesus responds to their request with the Lord's Prayer.

Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is closer to the original words of Jesus than Matthew's. The address *Father* is easy to misunderstand. It is not a formal but personal address. The Aramaic word was *Abba*, which is similar to our "daddy." This would have been offensive to pious Jews, who considered the name *Yahweh* so sacred that they substituted the more generic term *Adonai* for it. *Adonai* however was still a formal term and lacked the intimacy of *Abba*.

The petition calling for the Kingdom to come in this world is a recognition that the future Kingdom is being established now. What is most difficult to understand about this prayer is the choice of sins, debts, or trespasses in the petition concerning forgiveness. Debts might have been the choice in a culture in which money was seen as the key value. Trespasses might have been chosen in a society in which property was viewed as most important. I prefer Luke's use of "sins" because what Jesus has in mind is the path to faith. Without a willingness to forgive, one cannot be forgiven. We are not talking about money or property, but sin, even if our modern culture prefers to ignore the word.

Jesus illustrates God's willingness to answer prayer with a story that seems to say the opposite. It would be a mistake to equate God with the man who was awakened from his sleep. Jesus' point is that God would be much more willing to help than was this man. He is eager to answer prayers, but his answers are better than our requests. We do not always ask for that which is good for us, but he only wants to give us good gifts. When we unconsciously ask for serpents and scorpions, he purposely gives us fish and eggs. It is not God who is negligent in prayer. We need to learn how to pray, and Jesus has given us a model prayer. The prayer is not to be memorized, but prayed. Every word teaches us how to pray for the right things.

### **On Giving**

*Miletus (Acts 20:35)*

Paul did not want to stop in Ephesus because he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem to observe the Day of Pentecost. Going to Ephesus would have involved changing ships in Miletus and the possibility of more riots in Ephesus over his presence. Both of these things would have delayed his departure for Jerusalem, where he wanted to deliver an offering to the poor (Romans 15:25-32); therefore, he sent a letter to the elders in Ephesus, asking them to meet him in Miletus. There, on the seashore, he told them that he would never see them again. He closed his sermon with the only words of Jesus written outside of the four Gospels: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (20:35) They were all very sad. They knelt down and prayed together, and then they hugged and kissed one another as he left them.

### **Bonhoeffer's Criticism of Cultural Christianity**

*Cheap and Costly Grace*

*Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church.*

*We are fighting to-day for costly grace.*

*Cheap Grace.* This is what we mean by cheap grace, the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs. Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin which frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

*Costly Grace.* Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "Ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.

Costly grace is the sanctuary of God; it has to be protected from the world, and not thrown to the dogs. It is therefore the living word, the Word of God, which he speaks as it pleases him. Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

#### *How Costly Grace became Cheap Grace*

As Christianity spread, and the Church became more secularized, this realization of the costliness of grace gradually faded. The world was Christianized, and grace became its common property.

Luther had said that grace alone can save; his followers took up his doctrine and repeated it word for word. But they left out its invariable corollary, the obligation of discipleship.

The justification of the sinner in the world degenerated into the justification of sin and the world. Costly grace was turned into cheap grace without discipleship.

We Lutherans have gathered like eagles round the carcass of cheap grace, and there we have drunk of the poison which has killed the life of following Christ.

We justified the world, and condemned as heretics those who tried to follow Christ. The result was that a nation became Christian and Lutheran, but at the cost of true discipleship.

But do we also realize that this cheap grace has turned back upon us like a boomerang? The price we are having to pay to-day in the shape of the collapse of the organized Church is only the inevitable consequence of our policy of making grace available to all at too low a cost. We gave away the word and sacraments wholesale, we baptized, confirmed, and absolved a whole nation unasked and without condition. Our humanitarian sentiment made us give that which was holy to the scornful and unbelieving. We poured forth unending streams of grace. But the call to follow Jesus in the narrow way was hardly ever heard.<sup>1</sup>

### *Baptism Into the Body of Christ*

The gift of baptism is the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit is Christ himself dwelling in the hearts of the faithful (2 Corinthians 3:17; Romans 8:9-11, 14ff; Ephesians 3:16f). The baptized are the house where the Holy Spirit has made his dwelling.

Baptism is similarly a public event, for it is the means whereby members are grafted on to the visible body of Christ (Galatians 3:27 f; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

When we join the Church we step out of the world, our work and family, taking our stand visibly in the fellowship of Jesus Christ. We take this step alone. But we recover what we have surrendered—brothers, sisters, houses, and fields. Those who have been baptized live in the visible community of Christ.

Baptism and the gifts it confers are characterized by a certain finality. The baptism of Christ can never be repeated.

This element of finality in baptism throws significant light on the question of infant baptism. The problem is not whether infant baptism is baptism at all, but that the final and unrepeatable character of infant baptism necessitates certain restrictions in its use. It was certainly not a sign of a healthy church life in

---

<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), pp. 47-58.

the second and third century when believing Christians deferred their baptism until they reached old age or were on their death beds, but all the same it shows a clear insight into the nature of baptismal grace, an insight which we sadly lack today. As far as infant baptism is concerned, it must be insisted that the sacrament should be administered only where there is a firm faith present which remembers Christ's deed of salvation wrought for us once and for all. That can only happen in a living Christian community. To baptize infants without a Church is not only an abuse of the sacrament, it betokens a disgusting frivolity in dealing with the souls of the children themselves. For baptism can never be repeated.<sup>1</sup>

### *Membership in the Body of Christ*

The Body of Christ is identical with the new humanity which he has taken upon him. It is in fact the Church. Jesus Christ is at once himself and his Church (I Cor. 12:12). Since the first Whit Sunday the Life of Christ has been perpetuated on earth in the form of his Body, the Church. Here is his body, crucified and risen, here is the humanity he took upon him. To be baptized therefore means to become a member of the Church, a member of the Body of Christ (Gal. 3:28); I Cor 12:13). To be in Christ therefore means to be in the Church. But if we are in the Church we are verily and bodily in Christ. Now we perceive the whole wealth of meaning which lies behind the idea of the Body of Christ.

Since the ascension, Christ's place on earth has been taken by his Body, the Church. The Church is the real presence of Christ. Once we have realized this truth we are well on the way to recovering an aspect of the Church's being which has been sadly neglected in the past. We should think of the Church not as an institution, but as a person, though of course a person in a unique sense.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Secret Disciplines*

*The Hidden Righteousness (Matthew 6:1-4).* Our activity must be visible, but never be done for the sake of making it visible. "Let your light so shine before men" (5:16) and yet: Take care that you hide it! There is a pointed contrast between chapters 5 and 6. That which is visible must also be hidden.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 259-261

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

How is this paradox to be resolved? The first question to ask is: From whom are we to hide the visibility of our discipleship? Certainly not from other men, for we are told to let them see our light. No. We are to hide it from *ourselves*. Our task is simply to keep on following, looking only to our Leader who goes on before, taking no notice of ourselves or of what we are doing. We must be unaware of our own righteousness, and see it only in so far as we look unto Jesus; then it will seem not extraordinary, but quite ordinary and natural.

*The Hiddenness of Prayer (Matthew 6:5-8)*. It matters little what form of prayer we adopt or how many words we use, what matters is the faith which lays hold on God and touches the heart of the Father who knew us long before we came to him.

Genuine prayer...is always the prayer of a child to a Father. Hence it is never given to self-display, whether before God, ourselves, or other people. If God were ignorant of our needs, we should have to think out beforehand how we should tell him about them, what we should tell him, and whether we should tell him or not. Thus faith, which is the mainspring of Christian prayer, excludes all reflection and premeditation.

The child asks of the Father whom he knows. Thus the essence of Christian prayer is not general adoration, but definite, concrete petition. The right way to approach God is to stretch out our hands and ask of One who we know has the heart of a Father.

True prayer is done in secret, but this does not rule out the fellowship of prayer altogether, however clearly we may be aware of its dangers.

True prayer does not depend either on the individual or the whole body of the faithful, but solely upon the knowledge that our heavenly Father knows our needs. That makes God the sole object of our prayers, and frees us from a false confidence in our own prayerful efforts.

Jesus told his disciples not only how to pray, but also what to pray. The Lord's Prayer is not merely that pattern prayer, it is the way Christians must pray.

*The Hiddenness of the Devout Life (Matthew 6:16-18)*. By practicing abstemiousness we show the world how different the Christian life is from its own. If there is no element of asceticism in our lives, if we give free rein to the desires of the flesh (taking care of course to keep within the limits of what seems permissible to the world), we shall find it hard to train for the service of Christ. When the flesh is satisfied it is



hard to pray with cheerfulness or to devote oneself to a life of service which calls for much self-renunciation.

How is it possible to live the life of faith when we grow weary of prayer, when we lose our taste for reading the Bible, and when sleep, food and sensuality deprive us of the joy of communion with God.

Asceticism means voluntary suffering: it is *passio activa* rather than *passiva*, and it is just there that the danger lies. There is always a danger that in our asceticism we shall be tempted to imitate the sufferings of Christ. This is a pious but godless ambition, for beneath it there always lurks the notion that it is possible for us to step into Christ's shoes and suffer as he did and kill the old Adam. We are then presuming to undertake that bitter work of eternal redemption which Christ himself wrought for us. The motive of asceticism was more limited—to equip us for better service and deeper humiliation.

Jesus, however, bids his disciples to persevere in the practices of humiliation, but not to force them on other people as a rule or regulation.

*The Simplicity of the Carefree Life (Matthew 6:19-24)*. The life of discipleship can only be maintained so long as nothing is allowed to come between Christ and ourselves—neither the law, nor personal piety, nor even the world. The disciple always looks only to his master, never to Christ and the law, Christ and religion, Christ and the world. He avoids all such notions like the plague.

Earthly goods are given to be used, not to be collected. ... where our treasure is, there is our trust, our security, our consolation and our God. Hoarding is idolatry.

But where are we to draw the line between legitimate use and unlawful accumulation? Let us reverse the word of Jesus and our question is answered: "Where thy heart is, there shall thy treasure be also." Our treasure may of course be small and inconspicuous, but its size is immaterial; it all depends on the heart, on ourselves. And if we ask how we are to know where our hearts are, the answer is just as simple—everything which hinders us from loving God above all things and acts as a barrier between ourselves and our obedience to Jesus is our treasure, and the place where our heart is.

Be not anxious! Earthly possessions dazzle our eyes and delude us into thinking that they can provide security and freedom from anxiety. Yet all the time they are the very source of all anxiety.

The way to misuse our possessions is to use them as an insurance against the morrow.

Anxiety is characteristic of the Gentiles, for they rely on their own strength and work instead of relying on God. They do not know that the Father knows that we have need of all these things, and so they try to do for themselves what they do not expect from God. But the disciples know that the rule is “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” Before we start taking thought for our life, our food and clothing, our work and families, we must seek the righteousness of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-201.

## 13. THE APOCALYPTIC MESSAGE

*See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me,  
to repay according to everyone's work.  
I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last,  
the beginning and the end.*

### **Revelation 22:12-13**

#### **The Little Apocalypse (Mark 13:1-37)**

This chapter has parallels in Matthew 24-25, Luke 21, and 1 Thesalonians 5:1-11. It is similar in purpose to Daniel 7-12 and the Book of Revelation, and that is why it has been called *the Little Apocalypse*. Jesus seems to be talking only to Peter, Andrew, James, and John, although this is not the case in Matthew and Luke.

Apocalyptic literature has the characteristic of being written for times of persecution. Jesus prepares his disciples for just such a time by predicting the destruction of the Temple, including Jerusalem, the end of the age, and the beginning of the Kingdom of God. No one knows when all this will take place, but there will be certain signs. Those signs will be related to war and natural disaster. They will also take place in the time of the desolating sacrilege (13:14), which has to do with idolatry and the possible placing of an idol in the Temple itself. This would indeed be a desolating sacrilege. The actual setting up of the desolating sacrilege took place under Antiochus Epiphanes IV, the Seleucid King of Syria. This was precipitating the Maccabean Revolt of 165 B.C.E. The historical event referred to by Mark, might be the attempt to do a similar thing by the corrupt Roman Emperor Caligula, who tried to set up his own image in the Temple in 41 C.E. All of this, according to Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11, will lead to three and one-half years of suffering. The time period should be understood in symbolic terms, but the suffering will be real.

Three terms that have become popular in Christian circles must be explained because they relate to the events described here in Mark 13. The first is the *Tribulation*, which can be defined as the suffering of the faithful. Christians were expected to live out their discipleship in an increasingly hostile environment. In addition to synagogue and political leaders opposing them, they would find divisions erupting in their own families. Such was the cost of discipleship, and Christians should expect such hostility. The Tribulation should be viewed as an opportunity for witness, prompted by the Holy Spirit.

The second term is the *Parousia*, which refers to the Second Coming of Christ, and was expected to take place following the Tribulation. No one but God knows when this will take place, but every Christian's task is to be ready for it whenever it happens. This does not mean that we are to do nothing while we wait. We are to be engaged in mission as we await the *Parousia*. These first two words are New Testament words and make up a valid part of Jesus' Apocalyptic message.

The third word is not in the New Testament, but many Christians have used the word to explain what will happen in the *Parousia*. The term is the *Rapture*. The *Rapture* refers to God's sending out his angels to collect his own, sparing them from the *Tribulation*. The idea is that Christ will claim his own as he promises to do in Matthew 24:36-41 and Luke 17:30-36.

The most puzzling verse in the chapter is Mark 13:30, which indicates that all these things will happen prior to the end of the present generation. Jerusalem was indeed destroyed in 70 C.E., but the end of the age did not come, nor was the Kingdom of God completely established. What could Jesus have meant? One suggestion has been that the Jewish race will survive until the end of the age, but a better suggestion is that Jerusalem would come to an end within the lifetime of the present generation. The signs of the end have more to do with the birth pangs of the new age than its final establishment. This would mean that the Kingdom of God is still breaking in on us, and that we are still awaiting its final and complete establishment.

### **The Coming of the Kingdom (Luke 17:20-37)**

#### *The First Coming (Luke 17:20-21)*

When Jesus says that the Kingdom will come without any dramatic signs, he is talking about his own inauguration of it. It has come in his ministry. There are signs of its coming, but these signs are not as dramatic as they will be in his second coming.

While there is a difference of opinion as to whether Jesus meant the "Kingdom of God is within you" or the "Kingdom of God is among you," it is clear that it has come in Jesus himself. It is only *within* those who allow Jesus to rule over them.

#### *The Second Coming (Luke 17:22-37)*

The second coming of the Kingdom, or its final establishment will be visible and dramatic; but first, certain things will have to happen, such as Jesus' own suffering and death, which he compares to Noah's

time. When that time comes, which no one can predict, one should not look back (as did Lot's wife).

The final judgment will be clear to everyone, both those who benefit and those who do not. Even families will be split up when judgment is exercised. The disciples wonder where and when all this will take place. Jesus' answer is that the place will be as clear as the time. When a corpse lies in the desert, the place is obvious to the vultures. The final establishment of the Kingdom will be obvious to everyone.

### **The Last Days (Luke 21:5-38)**

The End, according to Jesus, will come in two phases. In the first phase Jerusalem will fall and the temple will be destroyed. In the second phase Jesus will return to establish the Kingdom of God in all its fullness.

#### *The Fall of Jerusalem*

Along with the Fall of Jerusalem will come the Destruction of the Temple. This may be what he was talking about in Luke 21:32 when he said that the present generation would not pass away before these things took place. Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed in 70 C.E. Roman armies encircled it, just as Jesus suggests here. Was Luke writing after the fact, or was he telling of Jesus' prediction?

The destruction of the Temple was even more inconceivable at this time than it had been in the time of Jeremiah. It was bigger, stronger, and more beautiful; and people were determined never to let it happen again. The mere suggestion that the Gentiles would destroy the Temple was considered blasphemous. It is one of the main reasons why Jesus was crucified.

### **Jesus' Lament over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37—24:2)**

Jesus laments over the coming fate of Jerusalem, and compares his love for the city and its people to that of a hen for her chicks.

The Disciples of Jesus wonder about what he has just said, and so they ask him *when* all this will take place. Although he shares some signs with them, he never answers their question, primarily because he himself does not know. Only the Father knows.

The end of Jerusalem was close, for it would be destroyed in 70 C.E., but the end of the age would not come for some time, even though the signs were already present.

## **The End of History (Matthew 24:3-51)**

### *The Birthpangs of the Kingdom (Matthew 24:4-14)*

When a new Kingdom is born, there are always signs to be observed. Three of them are the emergence of (1) false messiahs [4:5], (2) war [24:6-7a], and (3) natural disaster [24:7b]. Before the old rule can pass away and the new rule be born, says Jesus in Matthew 24:14, the Gospel of the Kingdom must be proclaimed throughout the world.

### *The End of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15-28)*

The *desolating sacrilege* spoken of by Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11 was the erection of the pagan god Zeus in the Temple by the Syrian King Antiochus IV in 168 B.C.E. (1 Maccabees 1:54; 2 Maccabees 6:2). Jesus compares it to the upcoming desecration of the Temple by the Romans, who were about to lay siege to Jerusalem, the end of which would come in 70 C.E.

It is difficult to distinguish between when Jesus is talking about the end of Jerusalem and when he is talking about the end of the history. The image of the eagle refers to the Roman standards, which are about to swoop down on the rotting corpse of Judaism. Expecting that end, many Christians fled to Pella in 68 C.E. People should pray that this flight not be in winter, for the Jordan River would be at its highest level, and that would make flight very difficult.

### *The End of the History (Matthew 24:29-51)*

It sounds like the end of history will immediately follow the destruction of Jerusalem, but no one will know when it will take place, not even Jesus. Only the Father knows. All that anyone can do is prepare for it.

Three examples of the need for readiness are given. They are (1) the story of Noah, (2) the householder about to be burglarized, and (3) the servant placed in charge of his master's possessions. Those who are ready will be received into the Kingdom, but those who are not will weep and gnash their teeth in hell.

Chapter 24 is apocalyptic, which means that its purpose is to disclose a hidden meaning of events taking place in the world. It gives comfort and direction to people who are living in chaotic times. Mark 13 and Luke 21 are equivalent apocalyptic chapters.

## **The Parables of Judgment (Matthew 25:1-46)**

### *The Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-13)*

This parable has to be understood in the light of the marriage custom of the bridegroom fetching the bride from her parent's home. What is somewhat confusing in the story is that no mention is made of the bride. The delay of the bridegroom was a compliment. He was spending a long time haggling with the bride's parents, and that was a sign that he considered her a valuable catch.

The bridegroom is the Messiah, Christ himself, who will arrive unexpectedly. The point of the story is that his followers will have to be ready, and that their readiness cannot be lent to someone who is not ready. The delay of Christ is a good sign, for it indicates the depth of God's love and how in his patience he waits for people to prepare for him.

### *The Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)*

The term *talent* was originally used to describe a unit of weight of approximately 75 pounds; but by Jesus' time, it had become a unit of financial exchange, worth about fifteen years of wages for a common laborer. One talent was no small amount.

The whole idea of our *talents* comes from this parable in which the people of God are expected to invest the gifts God has given them. Not everyone's gifts are the same. Some have five talents, some two, and some only one; nevertheless, one is supposed to invest what has been given. The man with only one talent still had a remarkable gift. Our future depends upon how we use the precious gifts that God has given to us.

The move from money to spiritual gifts is valid. Although Jesus uses a financial term, this is not all that he means by it. We need to be investing both our financial and spiritual gifts. To whom much is given, much will be expected.

### *The Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46)*

At the end of history there will be a final judgment. Christ will come and judge all nations and individuals. All races and tribes will be present. Judgment will not be made simply by what one believes, but according to how that belief is expressed. This accounts for the presence of those who did not know of Christ. Some professing Christians will find their faith lacking, and some who never heard of Christ will find their faith accepted. Faith without works is dead. Faith that is alive always bears fruit.

These last three parables teach that God will pass judgment. At judgment time it will be too late for the five foolish bridesmaids, the man who refused to invest his one talent, and all those who failed to serve people with pressing human needs. The time for developing one's faith is *now*. Tomorrow may be too late. We should not be troubled by judgment, for it means reward as well as punishment. God knows how to divide those with faith from those without it, and his judgment will be just and fair. This passage affirms the reality of both heaven and hell. It also emphasizes the urgency of our task to proclaim the coming Kingdom of God and to invite people to make their responses to it now. Matthew 24 and 25 are both a warning and an invitation.

### **Jesus' Last Words on Earth (Acts 1:1-11)**

#### *The Promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1-5)*

John taught that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (See Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; and John 1:33). In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus himself promised that his Spirit would be with his disciples forever. The Holy Spirit can be described as the Spirit of Jesus, which is alive in the world through his followers.

Before Jesus' disciples received the Holy Spirit they were called disciples, which means that they were still learners, or students of Jesus. After they received the Holy Spirit, they became Apostles, and were given power to witness and teach. They became missionaries or ambassadors for Christ. Their authority and power came through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which means that they were filled with the Spirit of Jesus.

#### *Jesus Ascends into Heaven (Acts 1:6-11)*

Since Jesus' main message had been about the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15), his disciples asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) The disciples expected Jesus to establish his Kingdom and make Jerusalem the capital. They were hoping that the Jews would become the rulers, who would conquer the Romans. They did not yet understand Jesus' definition of the Kingdom. They thought he was going to rule on earth and did not realize that Jesus was establishing a spiritual Kingdom.

Instead of promising them political power, Jesus promised them spiritual power. He told them that they would become his witnesses. In the Greek language the word for *witness* is *Martyr* and it means "one who is willing to die for his faith." A Martyr is loyal up to the end, even if it means death. Jesus promised this kind of power to his disci-



ples. It is not power over others, but power to witness to the Kingdom of God. This witness to the Kingdom of God, according to Acts 1:8, was supposed to begin in Jerusalem and then spread to Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth. The end of the earth meant the whole Roman Empire, but today we would interpret it to mean the whole wide world.

After Jesus promised the power of the Holy Spirit, he returned to his Father in heaven. This happened forty days after his resurrection (1:3) in the Mount of Olives, which is about one-half mile East of Jerusalem. What did his return to heaven mean? It meant that although Jesus' body would no longer be present on earth, that his Spirit would be present throughout the whole world. If he established a political Kingdom in Jerusalem, people would have to go to Jerusalem in order to see him; but if his Spirit were alive throughout the whole world, then everyone could have fellowship with him at the same time.

### **Questions about the Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11)**

Two questions about the second coming are raised. They are (1) What will happen to those who have already died? and, (2) When will the Lord come?

The first question is answered in 4:13-18 and the second in 5:1-11. Neither the question nor the answer deals with the non-Christian dead. Both deal with those who have died in Christ. The question does not ask about the sequence of the resurrected dead, but Paul's answer concludes that the dead in Christ will rise first. The word *rapture* comes from the Latin translation of the phrase, "will be caught up." It does not mean only a few will be caught up in the air. According to Paul, everyone will meet Christ in the air. Sleeping was a common metaphor for the dead (Matthew 9:24 and John 11:11), and one gets the idea that we all wait for the coming of the Lord, both the living and the dead.

There is no specific answer to the second question. No one knows when the Lord will come; therefore, everyone must be ready at all times. He will come suddenly and unexpectedly. This calls for constant readiness. We must put on our breastplate of faith and love and wear for our helmet the hope of salvation. A time like this calls for encouraging one another and building one another up. This is what the Thessalonians have been doing.

Amos was the first to use the phrase "the day of the Lord" (Amos 5:18). This phrase means the same thing as "the second coming." Although "the second coming" was not used in the New Testament, it was

used in the early Church. Justin Martyr coined the phrase in the second century. Hebrews 9:28 comes very close to using the phrase, and so we must conclude that “the second coming” is indeed a biblical concept.

### **Jesus speaks to John (Revelation 1:8-20)**

Jesus speaks to his Church through John, who writes Jesus’ words in letters to seven churches. The word *seven* implies “wholeness and perfection.” The letters are not written only to seven specific congregations, but to all Christians everywhere, especially those facing persecution and death. The message to them is that the Lord is coming soon, and that everything will be made right. In the opening vision to John, Jesus claims to be the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the “beginning” and the “end;” the one who is, who was, and who is to come. This is an expansion of God’s name as it was given in Exodus 3:14. The One who is coming, has made us His Priests, and so we can anticipate His coming.

#### *The Context (Revelation 1:9-11)*

The vision took place on the Island of Patmos, a six by ten mile Rocky Island in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Western Turkey, to which John had been exiled. It was on the Lord’s Day (Sunday) while he was in the Spirit (worshiping) that he had a vision of Christ. This is the first time that “the Lord’s Day” is used in the New Testament, although “first day of the week” has been used. Jesus described worship to the Samaritan woman in terms of “in the Spirit.” (John 4:24) The context for this worship then seems to be on the Lord’s Day on the Island of Patmos. Was anyone else present? No one is mentioned.

#### *The Vision (Revelation 1:12-20)*

A great deal of imagery is used to describe this vision, but the essence of it is the presence of Christ in the midst of his Churches (Lampstands). Albrecht Durer has attempted to recreate this vision in one of his famous woodcuts, “St. John’s Vision of Christ and the Seven Candlesticks.” Below is a list of some of the imagery to look for in the woodcut.

- Seven Golden Lampstands
- The Son of Man (Daniel 7:13 and Mark 2:10)
- The Long Robe
- A Golden Girdle around his breast
- Head and hair white as wool and snow (Daniel 7:9)
- Eyes like a flame of fire (Daniel 10:6)
- Feet like burnished bronze (Daniel 10:6)
- Voice like the sound of many waters (Ezekiel 43:2)
- Seven stars in his right hand

A two-edged sword in his mouth (Isaiah 49:2 and Hebrews 4:12)  
His face like the sun shining in full strength (Daniel 10:6)

As John beheld this vision he fell prostrate, as dead, before Christ. This reminds us of how Isaiah felt when he saw a similar vision in Isaiah 6:5.

Two questions come to mind as we see Jesus standing in the midst of the seven Churches. First, these Churches are highly valued, for the lampstands, which symbolize them, are priceless as gold; and their function is to give off light (Matthew 5:14-16). Secondly, these Churches are connected not by Apostolic Succession or Government or Polity, but by the living presence of Christ in their midst. Christ is dressed as a King to remind John's readers of just who he is. He is the King of the coming Kingdom of God.

### **Jesus speaks to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2:1—3:22)**

There is a similar structure in each of the seven letters to the seven churches, and I would like to highlight that fivefold structure. While there are elements missing in some letters, the structure is present in most of them.

#### **1. Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7)**

##### *Danger: Losing Our First Love*

Ephesus had a population of 250,000 people and was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. It was also the most important of the seven cities. Not only was it the capital city of Asia Minor, but the famous trade route from the Euphrates terminated there. It contained the Temple to Diana (or Artemis), which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The Temple contained one hundred columns, which were fifty-five feet high, and they stood on a platform which measured approximately one hundred thousand square feet. The Amphitheater seated 25,000 people. In addition to all this, the Church in Ephesus had the advantage of a rich tradition of Christian leadership, beginning with the Apostle Paul, Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, and ending with the Apostle John himself.

##### *The Descriptive Phrase*

“...him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.”

##### *The Commendation*

The Church is commended for (1) sound teaching and (2) resistance to false teachers. The false teachers are identified as the *Nicolai-*

*tans*, who felt free to eat food offered to idols, but practiced immorality in the name of their religion. They are also mentioned in the Letter to Pergamum (2:15), where they are identified with idolaters who hold to the teachings of Balaam a sorcerer and opportunistic false prophet.

Irenaeus, one of the early Church fathers, said that the Nicolaitans were followers of Nicolaus of Antioch, one of the seven chosen by the Apostles in Acts 6:5. If he is correct, then Nicolaus fell from Grace and lost his Faith. Clement of Alexandria acknowledges the connection, but insists that Nicolaus himself remained faithful and that the Nicolaitans only claimed him as their teacher. Nothing can be known for certain except that the name *Nicolaitans* flourished as a designation for false teachers.

### *The Condemnation*

In spite of the Church's doctrinal purity, it suffers from the absence of love. It has abandoned its first love, and this is a most serious charge, for without love, faith and even sacrifice amount to nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

### *The Exhortation*

Repent or lose your lampstand (status as a Church). Recover the true center of your faith, or your faith is in vain. "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches." Jesus frequently used this sentence when he wanted to emphasize something. Although it is not used at the same place, it is included as an exhortation to every one of the seven congregations. Sometimes it calls people to repentance, and sometimes it reminds them of the promise God makes to them.

### *The Promise*

Those who *conquer*, that is, recover what has been lost, will be given the right to eat from the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God. Ephesian coins in this period contained carvings of a sacred tree used in nature worship. This promise assured Christians of a far deeper source of life than that gained from the nature goddesses. The ban on the Tree of Life would be lifted (Genesis 2:9,17 and 3:22-24).

## **2. Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11)**

### *Danger: Fear of Poverty and Suffering*

Smyrna was a coastal city located some thirty-five miles north of Ephesus. It was known as a strong center for emperor worship. The Temple of Roma was built in 195 B.C.E. and the Temple of Tiberius in

23 (26) C.E., both of which were built on the acropolis in the midst of other Temples. All of this produced a dramatic visual effect, which became known as “the Crown of Smyrna.” Bishop Polycarp worked in this city, but was executed in Rome in February of 156 C.E. Smyrna still exists today, but its modern name is Izmir.

#### *The Descriptive Phrase*

“These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life...”

#### *The Commendation*

The congregation, due to its faith, lives in poverty and will experience suffering; but the suffering will not last long. The threat does not come only from the Roman Empire, but also from misguided Jews. The Synagogue of Satan refers to the hostility of some Jews in Smyrna, and does not imply that Judaism itself is demonic. Ten days is not a lengthy period (Daniel 1:12), and so the suffering will not last long.

#### *The Condemnation*

Smyrna was one of two Churches not condemned for anything. The other one was Philadelphia.

#### *The Exhortation*

“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” These are words of encouragement to remain faithful even as the suffering comes.

#### *The Promise*

Those who “conquer” will not be hurt by the “second death.” The phrase “second death” is not used elsewhere in the Bible, although it is alluded to in Matthew 10:28; but it does appear three more times in this Book (Revelation 20:6; 20:14; and 21:8). It means that the power of evil is not the final power. Human and cosmic evil cannot overcome the power of Almighty God. Those who trust in this God will be given a Crown of Life more glorious than the Crown of Smyrna (the Temples on the acropolis).

### **3. Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17)**

#### *Danger: Doctrinal and Moral Compromise*

Fifty miles north of Smyrna was Pergamum, which had been the capital of the Roman Province of Asia (Asia Minor) since the second century before Christ. Although Augustus moved the capital to Ephesus, Pergamum remained a major center for emperor worship.

There were shrines to Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and especially Asclepius, for which the city was famous. The serpent was Asclepius' symbol, which is still represented in the caduceus, the insignia of medical associations. To John however this was a symbol of evil.

Temples were built to Roma and Augustus in 29 B.C.E. While some think of the pagan shrines as the "throne of Satan," it is generally considered to be a reference only to those shrines demanding Emperor Worship.

The city also had a library housing more than 200,000 parchment rolls. Alexandria was so jealous of this library that Egypt refused to ship any more papyrus to Pergamum. As a result a new kind of writing material had to be developed, which was named "pergamenta charta," which we simply call "parchment."

#### *The Descriptive Phrase*

"These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword..."

#### *The Commendation*

Since they held fast to the Lord's "name" and their own "faith," the members of this Church are commended. About *Antipas*, nothing is known, except that he seems to have been a martyr who inspired the faithful. According to Tertullian, Antipas was slowly roasted to death in a bronze kettle (bull) during the reign of Domitian. They were trying to force him to profess Caesar as Lord, but like Polycarp, he had no reason or will to deny Christ.

#### *The Condemnation*

The condemnation is against those who hold to the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. Balaam was a seer summoned by Balak, King of Moab, to curse Israel prior to its entrance into Canaan. Instead he pronounced a series of blessings, affirming the present and future pre-eminence of Israel (Numbers 22-24). With the exception of Micah 6:5, all other biblical references to Balaam are unfavorable. His journey to Moab is considered motivated by desire for gain and he is blamed for the defection of Israel to the Moabite Baal at Peor (Numbers 25:1-3; 31:16 and Revelation 2:14). The teaching of Balaam then has to do with "idolatry" and "immorality." Since the Nicolaitans were accused of the same sins, they are tied in with the followers of Balaam, but they might have been two separate groups within the Church. Because of these two groups, there was great immorality in the Church. Only Corinth rivaled it in immorality.

### *The Exhortation*

Repent or face the sharp two-edged sword in the Lord's mouth. This sword represents "ultimate authority," which is greater than that of the Emperor. "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

### *The Promise*

To those who "conquer," will be given "hidden manna" and a "white stone," with a new name on it, which no one knows. The first image is a familiar Old Testament one, and the second a first-century Roman one. The "manna" might be identified with Jesus' claim to be the "bread of life" (John 6:31-35). The "white stone" was a symbol in the Roman world used in legal trials, academic grading systems, and at athletic events. A Stone with the Roman letters SP imprinted on it was given as an award for valor. The Stone was also a symbol of identity. Patients recovering from a serious illness would take a new name to signify their complete recovery. Those who resist "idolatry" and "immorality" will be sustained by "hidden manna" and given a new identity, symbolized by the "White Stone."

## **4. Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29)**

### *Danger: Moral Compromise and Tolerance*

Forty-five miles inland from Pergamum, with no high-fortress land formations, was located the military outpost town of Thyatira. Not suitable as a major city, it existed to protect the road from Pergamum to Sardis. In the first century it was primarily a commercial center for weavers, leather-workers, potters, and bronze-workers. William Ramsey observes: "More trade guilds are known in Thyatira than in any other Asian city." Along with their presence was also the pressure to worship the idols of the various city temples, the most popular of which was the one to Apollo. This was also Lydia's home town (Acts 16:14).

### *The Descriptive Phrase*

"These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze..." This makes a vivid contrast to Apollo, the special deity of Thyatira. Apollo was the son of Zeus and twin brother of Diana (Artemis). He was the God of light and purity, and could reveal the future through his oracle at Delphi. Jesus is all of that and more.

### *The Commendation*

A number of good things are mentioned, such as love, faith, service, and patient endurance; and the latter works of this congregation exceeded the former works. There existed an upward progress in spite of the presence of someone like Jezebel and her followers. The concern is that this one rotten apple might make the whole barrel rotten.

### *The Condemnation*

The congregation is condemned for tolerating Jezebel, who like her namesake in the Old Testament, offered food to idols and involved herself and her followers in gross immorality. While the name is used symbolically, it may well refer to a real person and a specific situation in Thyatira. Since “idolatry” and “immorality” are mentioned as the sins to be condemned, it has been suggested that the Nicolaitans are here too. Since the various temples in Thyatira were related to the trade guilds, we become aware of the fact that an economic price would have to be paid for faithfulness. The more subtle challenge to faith does not originate in public amphitheaters, but in the daily places where we earn the money we need to live.

### *The Exhortation*

While the word “repent” is missing, there is a call to “hold fast” until the Lord comes. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

### *The Promise*

To those who “conquer,” will be given the Lord’s “power” (a rod of iron) and “presence” (the morning star). “The morning star” is an Old Testament image of hope for the morning and the coming of the Messiah.

## **5. Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6)**

### *Danger: Spiritual Deadness*

Sardis is thirty miles southeast of Thyatira. The city occupies a proud acropolis (1500 feet high), which commands the intersection of five highways. It was a city with a famous past, but a declining future. In the sixth century B.C.E., King Croesus reigned there with his treasures, but the glory of those days was long gone. Twice the city was totally surprised and humiliated militarily, first by Cyrus (Persians) in 549 B.C.E. and then by Antiochus (Greeks) in 214 B.C.E. Both times the city was taken by complete surprise in a night attack by soldiers, who scaled its steep and seemingly impregnable fortress walls. Finally



the earthquake of 17 C.E. destroyed the city, but through the kindness of Tiberius Caesar, the city was rebuilt. It competed for the Temple of Tiberius in 23 (26) C.E., but lost out to Smyrna. In the latter half of the first century, Sardis experienced some prosperity with its dyeing and woolen industries.

### *The Descriptive Phrase*

“These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars...” These words symbolize Christ’s spiritual source of power (seven spirits) and his sovereign control over all the churches (seven stars).

### *The Commendation*

Nothing good is said about the congregation, except that there exists within this “dead” congregation a “faithful few.” There are a few who have not “soiled their garments.”

### *The Condemnation*

While the Church has a reputation for being alive, it is now accused of being dead. Its main problems were apathy and indifference. It had fallen asleep.

### *The Exhortation*

The congregation is told to repent while there is still time, for eventually, the Lord will come like a thief in the night. Since they will not know when, they better be ready at all times.

### *The Promise*

Those who take heed and “conquer” will be “clothed in white garments.” The Lord will confess their names before the Father and his angels. White was the color for purity, but it was also the only color a slave could afford to wear. This promise made a sharp contrast in the minds of those who lived in Sardis, where the main vocation was that of making colorful and luxurious woolen goods.

## **6. Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13)**

### *Danger: Failure to Keep Jesus’ Word*

Philadelphia, the smallest of the seven cities, was very young, having been founded in 150 B.C.E. Attalus II Philadelphos, one of the kings of Pergamum, established it to spread Greek culture around. It was a border town, where the provinces of Mysia, Lydia, and Phrygia met, and was located about thirty-five miles southeast of Sardis. Like Sardis, it had been destroyed by the Earthquake of 17 C.E.; and having

received a generous donation, it was rebuilt, but not on as grand a scale as Sardis. At this time the name was changed in honor of Tiberius to Neocaesarea, but during the reign of Nero (54-68 C.E.), the name was changed back to Philadelphia. Some think this is a good argument for dating the Book of Revelation to the time of Nero, for the name was again changed during the reign of Vespasian (70-79 C.E.), only this time to Flavia. The land nearby was good for growing grapes, and so the area produced wine in abundance.

#### *The Descriptive Phrase*

“These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens....” The key of David symbolizes authority. A similar key was entrusted to Eliakim (Isaiah 22:20-22). The entrustment of the key is a Messianic reference, which ties the Messiah into the line of King David. The Messiah has authority to open or shut the door into the New Jerusalem.

#### *The Commendation*

The Christians in Philadelphia have “kept the word” and “not denied the Lord’s name.” They are true to the name of their city, which means “brotherly love.”

#### *The Condemnation*

Like the congregation in Smyrna, this congregation is not condemned. Everything is on the positive side.

#### *The Exhortation*

Their witness to the Jews will bear fruit, and they will come to them. The congregation will be spared much of the suffering that will overtake the whole world. “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

#### *The Promise*

Those who “conquer” will be made “pillars” of the Temple (in the New Jerusalem). The only difficulty with this image is that the New Jerusalem will not have a Temple (Revelation 21:22), but then we should not take any of this imagery too literally. The main point is that they will live out their lives in the presence of God who writes his name upon them. He is their God, and they are his children.

## 7. Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22)

### *Danger: Lukewarmness*

Laodicea had been founded as a major urban center around 250 B.C.E. by Antiochus II (Syria) and named after his wife “Laodice.” It was located forty miles southeast of Philadelphia, and one hundred miles east of Ephesus, on the south bank of the River Lycus. The city became known commercially for its black wool and carpets, banking, and its famous medical center, which had developed a well known eye salve called Phygian ointment.

Although the city lacked an adequate water supply, a stone aqueduct was built to bring water from Hierapolis, some six miles away. Laodicea was the most affluent of the seven cities. Following the earthquake of 61 C.E., its citizens rejected help from Rome, and rebuilt the city using their own resources. The congregation was founded by Epaphras in Paul’s day (Colossians 2:1; 4:13-16), and was yoked in a special friendship to the congregations of Colossae and Hierapolis.

### *The Descriptive Phrase*

“The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation....” “The Amen” is Jesus Christ himself, who is the Word of God, who was with God at creation (John 1:3 and Colossians 1:15 and 18).

### *The Commendation*

Nothing good is said about the congregation, and yet there still exists hope for the faithful.

### *The Condemnation*

This congregation receives the most serious condemnation of all. Like its water, after it has traveled the six miles from Hierapolis, it is good for nothing, but to be spit out. The congregation is neither hot nor cold; and although it lives in prosperity, it is really spiritually poor. The decline of this church may well be directly related to its affluence.

### *The Exhortation*

Because God loves them, he calls them to repent. Repentance for them means receiving the salve that will enable them to see, and open the door, allowing Christ to come in. In spite of all their apathy, God still wants them to share in the Messianic Banquet of the coming Kingdom; but he will not force them. They must open the door from the inside of their hearts. When that is done, they will no longer be luke-

warm. “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

### *The Promise*

The final promise to those who “conquer” is a place beside Jesus on his throne.

### **A Summary**

Bruce Metzger in his book, *Breaking the Code*, sums up the seven lessons to be learned from these seven churches.

The seven churches provide examples of the kinds of things that can go wrong in any church. These are the danger of losing the love that one had at first (Ephesus), fear of suffering (Smyrna), doctrinal compromise (Pergamum), moral compromise (Thyatira), spiritual deadness (Sardis), failure to hold fast (Philadelphia), and lukewarmness (Laodicea).<sup>1</sup>

### **Jesus’ Final Words (Revelation 22:7, 12-16, 20)**

Jesus has warned us three times that he will come soon (22:7, 12, and 20). Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* offers some good advice: “We live each day as if it were our last, and each day as if there were to be a great future.” With this kind of an attitude, we are ready to offer our final prayer. The final prayer of the Bible contains three words: “Come, Lord Jesus!” This prayer is also found in 1 Corinthians 16:22 and in the Didache (10:16):

May grace come and may this world pass away.

Hosanna to the God of David.

If any man is holy, let him come;

If any man is not, let him repent; Maranatha. Amen.

The Greek word *Maranatha* simply means “Our Lord has come,” or “Our Lord, come!” It can be either a statement or a prayer, which indicates that we are ready for his coming.

In describing the Christian’s relationship to Scripture, Karl Barth concludes with John’s final benediction: “Christians are the people under the Gospel. We are biblical Christians. Finally, ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.’” This final reference to the grace of God, his unearned love, makes a fitting conclusion to the Bible.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 46.

# ETHICS



## 14. THE LAW

*In the perfect and eternal world the law will vanish,  
but the results of having lived faithfully under it will not.*

**C.S. Lewis**

### **The Commandments**

When I think about doing God's Will, the first thing that comes into my mind are the Ten Commandments. They make up the heart of the Old Testament, which was Scripture for early Christianity. They are as follows:

1. You shall have no other gods
2. You shall not make graven images
3. You shall not take God's name in vain
4. Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy
5. Honor your father and mother
6. You shall not murder
7. You shall not commit adultery
8. You shall not steal
9. You shall not bear false witness
10. You shall not covet

The first commandment is designed to help us overcome idolatry. We are to have no other gods, only the one God who alone exists. The first four commandments deal with God's intended relationship with us. The Shema, located in Deuteronomy 6:4-6, spells out where our ultimate allegiance is supposed to be.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

The difficulty is that both the Ten Commandments and the Shema need to be interpreted, and so the Ten Commandments became 613 commandments. Even the Commandment of the Shema needed clarification. How does one love God? The answer is obvious. Obey the Ten Commandments! As soon as we take the Ten Commandments seriously, we get into trouble as we interpret what they mean to us in practical terms. That's why the 613 commandments emerged. They were commentaries on the Ten Commandments. Commentaries of Commen-

taries also emerged, and so did spiritual pride. Not all of these commentaries agreed, and many thought they had the scriptural truth.

One might bring in the whole sacrificial system as a way of dealing with disobedience (sin), but for the most part, the sacrificial system merely absolved people of guilt. It was the Law that was supposed to guide people in obeying God's Will. It was like a schoolmaster, directing people to take the right path. This is clearly stated in Psalm 1:1-2:

Happy are those  
who do not follow the advice  
of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
or sit in the seat of scoffers;  
but their delight is in the law  
of the LORD,  
and on his law they meditate  
day and night.

Psalm 119, the longest book in the Old Testament, emphasizes the importance of the law in guiding people to live according to God's Will. Two examples from Psalm 119 should suffice:

Happy are those whose way is blameless,  
who walk in the law of the LORD.

**Psalm 119:1**

Your Word is a lamp to my feet  
and a light to my path.

**Psalm 119:105**

**The Prophets**

The difficulty was that neither the interpretation of the Law, nor the sacrificial system worked very well. That's why it took the prophets to give a meaningful interpretation. Three examples from the prophets point to what God wanted to see happen, and it had little to do with sacrifices or living according to someone's interpretation of the letter of the Law. It had everything to do with holiness, perfect love, and justice. God was trying to perfect his people to love perfectly. Amos, Hosea, and Micah strike at the heart of what God intended for his people.

Let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness  
like an everflowing Stream.

**Amos 5:24**



For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,  
the knowledge of God  
rather than burnt offerings.

**Hosea 6:6**

What does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

**Micah 6:8**

Of course the preaching of the prophets fell on deaf ears, and so they were as ineffective as the interpretations of the Law and the sacrifices. The only difference was that the prophets were right. Their prophetic utterances were consistent with the Will of God. Something new was needed, and for that we'll have to turn to the New Testament.



## 15. GRACE

*Once we have experienced grace,  
there can be no more talk of human merit.*

**George Morris**

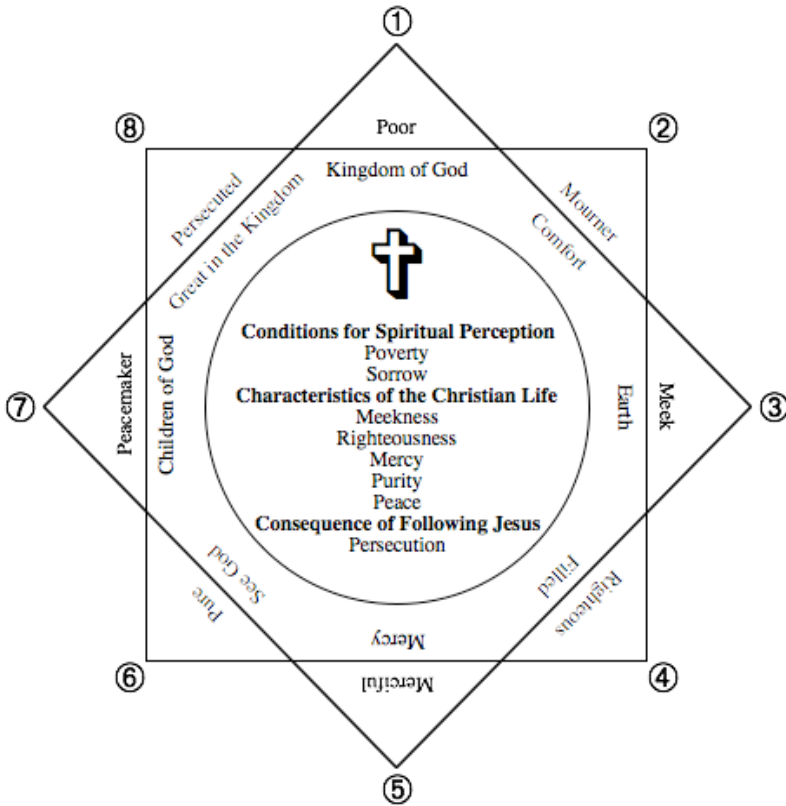
### **The More Difficult Way**

Most people think that the Commandments of Moses were more difficult than the teachings of Jesus, but to follow Jesus is much more difficult. The way of Jesus can be summarized in one word, and that word is GRACE. Touched by Grace, faith produced what the prophets proclaimed. The main passage of Scripture which puts it all into focus is Ephesians 2:8-10, where Paul wrote:

For by **grace** you have been saved through **faith**, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for **good works**, which God prepared before hand to be our way of life.

Those who obeyed the Law in the Old Testament may have thought that their reward would be wealth and long life, but that is definitely not the case in the New Testament. Jesus describes the characteristics of his disciples in the opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount, which we commonly call the Beatitudes. They promise anything but wealth and long life. They promise poverty, persecution, and possibly death. Those touched by divine grace will aim at holiness and as a result, they will find blessedness (happiness) even if they do end up poor and die early. The eight characteristics of Jesus' disciples, and that includes us, are described in Matthew 5:2-12. A chart follows which illustrates the relationships.

Blessed are the poor in spirit.  
Blessed are those who mourn.  
Blessed are the meek.  
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.  
Blessed are the merciful.  
Blessed are the pure in heart.  
Blessed are the peacemakers.  
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.



The Beatitudes are not Laws. They are descriptions of people who have experienced the grace of God. Right after giving this description of his disciples, Jesus makes a reference to the Law in Matthew 5:17, where he said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish but to fulfill.” In Matthew 5:20, he adds, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” It is not enough to obey the letter of the Law; rather, one must fulfill the Law by living out the spirit of the Law. That is precisely what those do who have experienced the grace of God.

Jesus gives several examples of commands that call for the spirit of the Law. In doing this, he contrasts the letter of the Law with the spirit of the Law. Four such examples follow:

1. You shall not murder, but I say do not be angry!
2. You shall not commit adultery, but I say do not lust!
3. You shall not swear falsely, but I say do not swear at all!
4. You shall love your neighbor, but I say love your enemy!

What is clear from these examples is that it is much easier to obey the letter of the Law than the spirit. That means that one must rely completely upon grace, and grace is that unmerited love bestowed upon us as a gift. Loving the enemy, for example, is no longer something we are capable of doing. It is through grace that God loves the enemy through us. Grace transforms us into different persons. Without grace we wouldn't even think of loving the enemy, but grace makes it possible. In Matthew 5:44-46, Jesus stated clearly that his disciples were different. They had been touched by grace.

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

Jesus then closes his comparison of the letter and spirit of the Law with the following command: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48) Through grace, Jesus intends to perfect his followers. Because of grace they will not be doing it themselves; Jesus will do it through them.

### **Perfect Love**

Jesus then goes on to describe how one loves perfectly. The first step is the Golden Rule, which states in Matthew 7:12: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." This is how the letter of the law is fulfilled by the spirit of the law. Without any benefit, one treats others as they would like to be treated. There is no promise, however, that the enemy will reciprocate the action of love. In Matthew 22:35-40, Jesus names two commandments as the fulfillment of both the Law and the prophets.

You shall love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
and with all your soul,  
and with all your mind.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

On these two commandments  
hang all the law and the prophets.

The key to understanding Jesus' interpretation of these two commandments can be found in what he means by loving the neighbor as you love yourself. Realizing that we all do not love ourselves as he

loves us, he changes the second commandment, strengthening it to command us to love one another, including our enemy, as he loved us. He says this in John 13:34-35 and 15:12-13:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

The experience of divine grace caused Augustine to give the following moral advice: "Love God and do as you please." He knew that those touched by grace would do what pleased God. That would be their primary aim in life. In a letter to Diogenetus, an anonymous writer wrote in defense of Christians who had been transformed by grace: "They obey the laws that men make, but their lives are better than the laws." Grace succeeds in helping us resist sin; whereas, the Law failed. Even though it is easier to obey the letter of the Law than it is to obey the spirit of the Law, grace enables us to do what we could not do on our own. This doesn't mean that our love has been made perfect, but through grace our love is being made perfect. This can only happen as we open our will to the Will of God, who wants to fill us with grace more than we desire it. We can resist that grace, but it is always there, trying to enter into our lives to perfect us in love. Perfect love and holiness is the same thing.

We are moving from being created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), which we have resisted, to being part of God's new creation (Revelation 21:5), which requires the cessation of all resistance so that grace can take over and operate through us. We cannot do it on our own, but as we submit to the grace of God, it will be done through us. The grace of God, working in us, moves us towards God's new creation. We pray for that new creation to be established on earth as it already operates in heaven.

## 16. PRINCIPLES

*Expedients are for the hour;  
principles for the ages.*

**Henry Ward Beecher**

### **Christian Principles**

Christian principles are driven by grace. Jesus taught us to obey *not* the letter, but the spirit of the Law. Obeying the spirit of the Law is actually far more difficult than obeying the letter of the Law. That is precisely why grace is needed. Grace is the unmerited love of God which enables us to resist sin and aim at holiness or perfect love. I call this process sanctification. We are not able to achieve perfect love on our own. As we open ourselves to grace, God's spirit begins to shape us and move us towards holiness. We are now able to do what God wants us to do, but we do not do it on our own. God's grace empowers us to resist sin and desire his Will. In opening ourselves to his Will, we become part of his new creation.

Our principles need to be as simple as are the teachings of Jesus. John Wesley came up with three principles, which he called the General Rules. They were three simple principles, which had brief explanations. The General Rules were in a very simple pamphlet, which Christians could carry in their pockets or purses. The rules were: (1) Do no harm, (2) Do good, and (3) Attend all the ordinances of God, which had to do with worship, the spoken word, the Lord's Supper, prayer, the Scriptures, and fasting or abstinence. It was believed that if one followed these simple principles, one would indeed experience the grace of God and aim at holiness and undergo the process of being made perfect in love. These three General Rules were not practiced in isolation but in religious societies, classes, and bands. In these small groups Christians watched over one another in love, held one another accountable for their discipleship and helped one another mature in their faith.

In modern Methodism the General Rules have become a historical document. An attempt has been made to modernize the concept with a New General Rule, which is really a principle. The New General Rule consists of a statement, "to witness to Jesus Christ in the world and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." The details that Wesley included under each of the three rules are not included. The

details are still around, but they no longer fit in one's pocket or purse. They are now in a much longer document called "The Social Principles," which bears some resemblance to the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." The social principles are for the most part "principles." They are not laws. The point of them is to help Christians find their way in a very complex and non-Christian world. Charles Wesley expressed the desire in one of his hymns:

I want a principle within  
of watchful, godly fear  
a sensibility of sin,  
a pain to feel it near.  
I want the first approach to feel  
of pride or wrong desire,  
to catch the wandering of my will,  
and quench the kindling fire.

### **The Will of God**

The purpose of the General Rules, the New General Rule, and the Social Principles, is to do what the Law did in the Old Testament and grace did in the New Testament. It was to make clear the Will of God to those, who wanted by the grace of God, to live according to the spirit of the Law. In a complicated world, discovering the Will of God is not an easy task, even if one desires to live according to that Will and is willing to face persecution and death for it. Finding the Will of God is an important task, especially in light of what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21:

Not everyone who says to me,  
"Lord, Lord,"  
will enter the kingdom of heaven,  
but only the one who does  
the will of my Father in heaven.

Leslie Weatherhead wrote a classic book, *The Will of God*, during World War II. In that book he suggests that we must look at the Will of God in three different ways. Weatherhead attempts to summarize each of the three ways in which Christians must view the Will of God. He does so in relation to Jesus and the cross.

Weatherhead begins with **God's Intentional Will**. Was it not God's intention, he asks, that men and women should follow Jesus, not crucify Him? The discipleship of men and women, he answers, not the death of Jesus on a cross, was the intentional or ideal Will of God.



Things did not go as God planned. Instead of following Jesus, men and women rejected and crucified Him. Under these circumstances, Weatherhead suggests **God's Circumstantial Will**. When the circumstance wrought by human evil set up such a dilemma that Jesus was compelled either to die or run away, then, in those circumstances the cross became the Will of God, but only in those circumstances. The cross was never the Intentional Will of God.

Sometimes we can only follow God's Circumstantial Will, or to put it in another way, to choose the lesser of two evils. The cross was certainly an evil Jesus did not cherish. In fact, he asked to be delivered from that choice, but rather than flee, he accepted God's Circumstantial Will.

Desiring to do the Will of God is noble, but it's not easy, especially in a complicated world. Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount are faithful descriptions of God's Intentional and Ultimate Will, and we need to heed them. Jesus gives us a fair warning in Matthew 7:24-25:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.

We need to realize that sometimes we will have to be satisfied with the Circumstantial Will of God, even though we long to follow the Intentional Will of God. We can do so with the confidence that the Ultimate Will of God will prevail. Our goal will always be to build on rock, knowing that we can do so with the help of God's grace.

### **The Circumstances of Life**

Just as we need directions to run the human machine, we also need directions to run society. How do we apply God's intentional Will to the various areas of our life together? There will be Christians who take the position that the teaching of Jesus are *against culture*; and consequently, they will separate from culture. On the other hand, there will be Christians who take the position that Christ is *in* our culture; and consequently, they will conform with culture. Between these two groups will be those Christians who believe that Christ has come to *transform culture*.

I happen to believe that Christ came to transform our culture. That's why we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." Just because our culture accepts something as being legal, does not make it moral. The teachings

of Jesus will be in conflict with every culture and society. At this point I would like to look briefly at six circumstances of life. They are:

1. Marriage and the Family
2. Economics
3. Gender, Race, and Class
4. Politics: Dual Citizenship
5. War and Revolution
6. Life and Death Issues

There are obviously more circumstances in life than these, but these are the ones I have chosen to examine from the perspective of Jesus as the Word of God.

Before examining the various circumstances of life, it is necessary to state that personal and social morality cannot be separated. The personal always affects the social and the social influences the personal. We are like a fleet of ships, moving together towards the port. Our goal is to maintain the individual ships, keeping them seaworthy, and to keep the ships from running into one another. The first we call personal morality and the second social morality.

Three concerns emerge. The first concern has to do with the goal or purpose of human life. Are we all moving towards a common port, or are there many ports? Christianity assumes that we are all moving towards the same port, which Jesus defined as the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. In the Book of Revelation it is called the New Jerusalem. We want to prepare for life in the eternal port by putting into practice its principles while we are sailing towards that port. In order to do this, we will need to make sure that every ship is seaworthy. Therefore, our second concern has to do with harmonization within the individual, that is, personal morality. We don't want any ships to sink. Our third concern is to keep the ships from running into one another. This we call social morality. One thing I have not mentioned, and that is private morality. There is no such thing. There is personal morality, but it's never private.

# **SOCIETY**



## 17. MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

*If love is the basis of a thriving marriage,  
friendship is what makes it work.*

**Beppie Harrison and Ronna Romney**

*Grow old along with me,  
the best is yet to be;  
the last of life for which  
the first was made.*

**Robert Browning**

### **Defining Marriage**

Let's look first at marriage and the family. Jesus defined marriage in several places. In Mark 10:6-9, he said

...from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.

Although Jesus defined marriage in the context of rejecting divorce, he did indeed define marriage.

From Jesus' definition of marriage, we can discern at least four components of marriage. The first component is that two persons, the man and the woman, become one flesh. The second component is that these two persons make a covenant, a sacred promise, to one another. That promise begins with a feeling of love that starts the union, but it takes love as a choice to maintain the union and keep the covenant. Although Jesus does not mention children in his definition, it is clear that Jesus took his definition from the book of Genesis, where the first couple is told to be fruitful and bear children. The third component of marriage is to provide a home for children. This does not mean that every couple has to have children. It only means that providing a home for children is one of the components of marriage. The fourth component of marriage is implied in Jesus' definition, and that is the permanency of the marriage covenant. This covenant is intended to be for life.

Let's take a moment to review some of the scriptural passages from Genesis, from where Jesus took his definition of marriage. There is first

the purpose of marriage found in Genesis 1:27, which states: “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” The function of marriage is then given in the very next verse: “God blessed them, and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.’” The primary function of marriage is procreation or reproduction. The form of marriage is given in Genesis 2:18, where the Lord God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” I would call procreation the function of marriage and fellowship the form of marriage. Since form follows function, procreation is primary and fellowship is secondary, but both are important. Without procreation the human race would cease to exist, and without fellowship, marriage would cease to exist. In Genesis 2:24, we find the purpose of marriage summed up: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” In defining marriage, these are the scriptures to which Jesus refers.

Jesus also insisted that the marriage covenant was to be permanent. Adultery breaks the oneness of the marriage covenant. In my experience there are at least seven things that will help to cement the oneness of the marriage covenant. Without going into detail, these seven things can be put into seven commandments of marriage.

1. Worship with one another!
2. Pray for one another!
3. Accept one another just as you are!
4. Love one another!
5. Communicate with one another!
6. Share with one another!
7. Forgive one another!

I placed the commandment to love right in the middle. Worship is the first commandment. Scripture never opposes interracial marriage, but it does oppose marriage between unbelievers. Even when couples share the same faith, they need the direction of what it really means to love one another. Love is not simply a feeling, it is a decision to act on the best interest of the other person. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is the best definition ever given of the meaning of love, and that includes marital love.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

## Living Together

Having made an attempt to define marriage, we need to look at some of the aberrations of marriage. The first aberration is commonly practiced today, that of simply living together or cohabitation. When couples live together for a certain period of time, some States consider them married. This is called a common law marriage, but is it a Christian marriage? My conclusion is that it cannot be called a Christian marriage. I would agree with C.S. Lewis' conclusion on living together.

If people do not believe in permanent marriage, it is perhaps better that they should live together unmarried than that they should make vows they do not mean to keep. It is true that by living together without marriage they will be guilty (in Christian eyes) of fornication. But one fault is not mended by adding another; unchastity is not improved by adding perjury.

Most States want to control marriage and divorce, for there are all kinds of financial issues at stake. When there are children, there is the question of custody. These quickly become legal matters. If living together is tolerated, then neither party has any legal claims, should they decide to go their separate ways, unless, of course, they make such claims on the basis of common law marriage. C.S. Lewis has made the suggestion that there should be two kinds of marriage:

There ought to be two distinct kinds of marriage: one governed by the State with rules enforced on all citizens, the other governed by the Church with rules enforced by her on her own members. The distinction ought to be quite sharp, so that a man knows which couples are married in a Christian sense and which are not.

Lewis' suggestion might work if Christianity is the only religion, but what if a State has multiple religions? Perhaps it would be better to have standards for marriage set by the State without reference to Christian marriage. Since not everyone in any State is Christian, Christianity can hardly expect to have State marriage laws reflect Christian morals. Christians, on the other hand, have no right to violate State laws. The State also has a concern for keeping the various ships in the fleet from bumping into one another. There does need to be some kind of order. The State not only has to concern itself with secular marriage, but also with civil unions. Perhaps secular marriage and civil unions could be one and the same. This, of course, brings up another aberration of marriage, gay marriage.

## Gay Marriage

Jesus did not include within his definition of marriage the possibility of marriage between two men or two women. Some would suggest that Jesus was silent on the issue of homosexuality, and that scripture, for the most part, only mentions homosexual rape. Before looking at homosexual unions, we must first examine whether or not homosexuality can be accepted as a moral act. Those who think that it can be a moral act insist that homosexuals are born that way. It is like being born with blue or brown eyes. There is nothing immoral about having blue or brown eyes; hence, having been born as homosexuals, they cannot be accused of immoral behavior. They have been created as homosexuals and so participating in homosexual behavior cannot be considered immoral behavior. Homosexuality is in their genes, and they cannot help themselves. That's the way they were created.

Whether some people are homosexuals by creation or by choice is difficult to prove, and so scholars disagree on the subject. I don't think it's a question of creation or choice. To illustrate what I mean, I'd like to turn first to a scientist and then to a person of faith. The scientist is Francis Collins, who draws the conclusion that although homosexuality is not predetermined, it is a predisposition. He draws this conclusion from a study of twins. Let me quote Collins in full:

Evidence from twin studies does in fact support the conclusion that heritable factors play a role in male homosexuality. However, the likelihood that the identical twin will also be gay is about 20 percent (compared with 2-4 percent of males in the general population), indicating that sexual orientation is genetically influenced but not hardwired by DNA, and that whatever genes are involved represent predispositions, not pre-determinations.

Alcoholics have a predisposition to addiction to alcohol, but their addiction can be controlled. No one would say that they should feed their addiction just because they have a predisposition to it. The predisposition to alcohol addiction is no more a sin than the predisposition to homosexuality. We all have predispositions to something, and we have to make moral choices. Support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous offer help in making choices, and Christian support groups offer help in making moral choices. It may seem easier to give in to your predispositions, but that's what civilization is all about. We rise above our predispositions and our addictions to live in a civilized and moral world. We help one another to stay afloat and join the other ships in the fleet to move towards the common port.



Let us now turn to a person of faith. I'm reluctant to call C.S. Lewis a theologian, since he does not consider himself to be one. Yet, he was a person of faith, and he did write about theology and ethics. He also had something to say about homosexuality and choice.

When a man makes a moral choice two things are involved. One is the act of choosing. The other is the various feelings, impulses and so on which his psychological outfit presents him with, and which are the raw material of his choice. Now this raw material may be of two kinds. Either it may be what we would call normal: it may consist of the sort of feelings that are common to all men. Or else it may consist of quite unnatural feelings due to things that have gone wrong in his subconscious. ... The desire of a man for a woman would be of the first kind: the perverted desire of a man for a man would be of the second. Now what psychoanalysis undertakes to do is to remove the abnormal feelings, that is, to give the man better raw material for his acts of choice: morality is concerned with acts of choice themselves.

On the basis of Francis Collins and C.S. Lewis, I would conclude that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. I am reluctant to call it a sin. It is certainly not the worst sin. I prefer to call it an aberration. I agree that homosexuals have a predisposition to homosexuality, but they can also make choices, difficult as they might be. As far as marriage is concerned, it should be between a man and a woman. That is certainly true for Christian marriage. If the state wants to provide civil unions or secular marriage for homosexuals, I have no objection. Christian marriage, however, is another matter. It is defined as a permanent covenant between a man and a woman.

### **Chastity before Marriage**

Another aberration is premarital sex. There must be a predisposition to premarital sex since it is so commonly practiced. C.S. Lewis suggests that chastity is the most unpopular of the Christian virtues.

Chastity is the most unpopular of the Christian virtues. There is no getting away from it: the old Christian rule is, "Either marriage, with complete faithfulness to your partner, or else total abstinence." Now this is so difficult and so contrary to our instincts, that obviously either Christianity is wrong or our sexual instinct, as it now is, has gone wrong. One or the other. Of course, being a Christian, I think it is the instinct which has gone wrong. But I have other reasons for thinking so. The bio-

logical purpose of sex is children, just as the biological purpose of eating is to repair the body. ... Contraceptives have made sexual indulgence far less costly within marriage and far safer outside than ever before, and public opinion is less hostile to illicit unions and even to perversion than it has been since Pagan times.

Fornication refers to sexual relations before marriage and adultery refers to sexual relations outside of marriage. Within Christianity both are considered immoral acts, no matter how strong the instinct is. C.S. Lewis puts the whole thing in perspective:

...the centre of Christian morality is not here. If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity as the supreme vice, he is quite wrong. The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual.... For there are two things inside me, competing with the human self which I must try to become. They are the Animal self, and the Diabolical self. The Diabolical self is the worse of the two. That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither.

The sexual sins, if that's what we want to call them, are not the worst sins. The great sin is spiritual pride or arrogance. I prefer not to call homosexuality, unchastity or adultery sins. They are aberrations or symptoms of sin, which infects us all. The real sin lies in arrogance, and spiritual arrogance is the worst of all. It's diabolical.

## 18. GENDER, RACE, AND CLASS

*Whom you would change, you must first love.*

**Martin Luther King**

### **Equality**

I'm intentionally putting gender, race, and class into one topic. According to Paul, we are all one in Christ. Paul may have been reluctant to criticize some traditions, but he undercut those traditions in Galatians 3:26-28, where he wrote:

In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

This does not mean that we are equal in everything. We still have different functions to fulfill and spiritual gifts to express. We are not, however, to lord it over those with a different function or a different spiritual gift. In Philippians 2:5-7a, Paul tells us whom we must all imitate:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave....

If Jesus could be humble about his status, we should imitate his humility in our relationships with one another. Our equality exists in the fact that all of us have been created in the image of God. Genesis 1:27 states this clearly: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

### **Intelligence**

If we are created in the image of God and if we are all created equal, why do some appear to be more intelligent than others? It seems clear that some of us are more intelligent than others. Does intelligence have anything to do with race? E. Clinton Gardner says, "No."

There is no authentic evidence so far as science is concerned that the three major racial groups—Mongoloid, Negroid, and Caucasoid—differ either in the average or in the range of their innate mental capacities.

If human intelligence is not related to race, is it inherited? It is difficult to answer this question because it is difficult to measure human intelligence. Whenever we try, we find culture and learning affecting our attempts to measure intelligence. Francis Collins sums up the problem:

While disagreement about how to define intelligence and how to measure it remain a hot topic in social science, and while the various available IQ tests clearly measure a bit of learning and culture, not just general cognitive ability, there is clearly a strong heritable component in this human attribute. At this writing, no specific DNA variant has yet been shown to play a role in IQ. ... As with other aspects of human behavior, no single variant is likely to make more than a tiny contribution (perhaps one to two IQ points).

The main point to be made here is that human intelligence is not related only to one racial group. Intelligent people can be found within every racial group. There are also intelligent women as well as men. Intelligence may have something to do with the genes, but it also has something to do with learning and culture.

### **Interracial marriage**

If we are all created in the image of God, and if we are all equal, what's wrong with interracial marriage? The answer is "Nothing." Interracial marriage may create some cultural and social problems, but it is not forbidden in Scripture. "Racial intermarriage as such," wrote E. Clinton Gardner, "does not seem to be either prohibited or advocated in the Bible."

What is forbidden in scripture is marriage between believers and unbelievers. Reasons are given in both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. In Deuteronomy 7:3-4, we read: "Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods." In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul warns Christians in Corinth: "Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness?" While it isn't a sin for believers to be married to unbelievers, the two lack a solid foundation. They may have some things in common, but they lack agreement on the deepest things in life, such as their faith.

## Gender: Equality or a Head?

Does equality extend into the marriage relationship? C.S. Lewis comments on equality being the ideal, but under certain circumstances, someone has to take the lead. Who will it be, the husband or the wife?

The need for some head follows from the idea that marriage is permanent. Of course, as long as the husband and wife are agreed, no question of a head need arise; and we may hope that this will be the normal state of affairs in a Christian marriage. But when there is a real disagreement, what is to happen? Talk it over, of course; but I am assuming they have done that and still failed to reach agreement. What do they do next? They cannot decide by a majority vote, for in a council of two there can be no majority.

Does the New Testament provide a solution? It does, even if we have difficulty today accepting its solution. We usually reject the solution because it is given by Paul. It is difficult to appeal to Jesus because he is silent on the issue. Let's examine the only solution presented in scripture. The solution is threefold.

*Mutual Submission.* "Be subject to one another," we read in Ephesians 5:21, "out of reverence for Christ." Thus far it sounds like there is to be some form of equality in marriage, where both husband and wife submit to one another. They do so out of reverence for Christ, that is to say, in the Spirit of Christ. This is the ideal.

*Leadership.* When there is disagreement, which they can't sort out, what do they do? I suppose they could seek a third party or go to counseling, but the New Testament offers another solution. Someone has to lead, and Ephesians 5:22-23 suggests the husband.

Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior.

*Agape Love.* Although the husband is given the authority to lead, he is not given the authority to dominate. As the wife has the responsibility to submit when there is a disagreement, the husband has an even greater responsibility. His responsibility is to love his wife even as Christ has loved the Church. This we read in Ephesians 5:15-27:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or any-

thing of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.

Does the above seem unfair? It's a matter of function. Scripture and Tradition have placed the husband in the role of provider and the wife in the role of nurturer. Biology does the same thing. The woman bears the children and is the natural nurturer. That doesn't mean these roles can't be modified or reversed, but men cannot bear the children, even if they have a nurturing role. Wives can also help to provide, but that is not their primary task. Even when there are separate functions, there is still the need for mutual submission, humility, and equality. Even though Jesus does not take on the issue of the roles for the husband and wife, he does state that his followers are not to lord it over one another. In Mark 10:42-45, he said:

You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve....

When it comes to the call into Discipleship, Jesus issues that call to everyone, regardless of gender, race, or class. In Matthew 28:19-20 he gave the great commission to everyone, not just the twelve and the women who followed him.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

### **The Dream**

In Christ gender, race, and class mean nothing. This does not mean that they are eliminated. Gender and race will always exist, but all are one in Christ. What about class? This too will always exist. There will always be those who rise in status because of money and power. Within the Church the rich and powerful are not better than the poor and the weak; in fact, Jesus favors the poor<sup>1</sup> and insists that the meek will in-

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke 6:20

herit the earth.<sup>1</sup> In his “I Have a Dream” speech, Martin Luther King, Jr. summed it all up:

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. . . . I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:5





## 19. ECONOMICS

*Making the workplace into a holy place  
where one finds encounters of love is essential  
for the character formation of the people who work there.  
In today's world what happens in the marketplace and in the factory  
is probably even more important spiritually  
than what happens in the church.*

### **Socialistic Leanings**

The first thing that must be said is that Christianity can survive in any economic system, but at its heart Christianity has socialistic leanings. We find this at the very beginning of the establishment of the Church. In Acts 4:31-32, we read:

When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.

This leaning towards holding everything in common does not mean that some people were not expected to work. No one got a free ride. Everyone was expected to contribute to the common good. In 2 Thesalonians 3:10-13, we read:

For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.

What is different here is that Christians are expected to work with a higher motivation than money. Christians are motivated to use their spiritual gift(s) to produce something for the common good. C.S. Lewis describes the Christian concept of work.

Christianity tells us that there are to be no passengers or parasites: if a man does not work, he ought not to eat. Everyone is to work with his own hands, and what is more, every one's work is to produce something good: there will be no manufac-

ture of silly luxuries and then of sillier advertisements to persuade us to buy them.

In addition to preaching, Jesus was a carpenter, Peter was a fisherman, and Paul was a tentmaker. They contributed to the common good by producing things that were needed. Even though Paul considered preaching a task deserving a salary, he supported himself by making tents.

This does not mean that Christianity only approves of producing the basic necessities of life. The function of economic life, insisted Emil Brunner, goes beyond the basic necessities:

The function of the economic life is not merely to meet [a person's] physical needs, much less simply to provide the barest necessities for physical existence; rather, it is "to place at [a person's] disposal a surplus of goods possible." Its function is to enable [a person] not just to live, but "to live in a human way."

### **Sin and Criminal Behavior in the Economic Systems**

We should not be under any illusions. If everyone were truly Christian, Christian socialism would work, but even Christians are infected with sin and that will pervert any economic system. Bertrand J. Coggle and John P.K. Byrnes describe the problem:

The truth is that unredeemed man will pervert any system. Education merely provides him with more ability to pursue his selfishness or to camouflage it more effectively. The failure of Society, Communism or of the British Welfare State to make a perfect society should not be a surprise to a Christian. The conception of man as a sinful being needing divine help and forgiveness should safeguard us from dangerous illusions.

Sin, defined as arrogance and selfishness, has a way of creeping into every economic system. Some activities are clearly immoral, such as stealing, but other activities are in the shady area, such as gambling and prostitution. One activity that seems legal and moral has been condemned by all three monotheistic religions—charging interest to the poor. "If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy," says Exodus 22:25, "do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest." C.S. Lewis goes even farther than the three major religions:

There is one bit of advice given to us by the ancient Greeks, and by the Jews in the Old Testament, and by the great Chris-

tian teachers of the Middle Ages, which the modern economic system has completely disobeyed. All these people told us not to lend money at interest; and lending money at interest is the basis of our whole system.

The ancient Greeks, the Jews, Christian teachers of the Middle Ages, and Muslims all agreed that charging interest, especially to the poor, was immoral, but our society thrives on paying and earning interest. We don't view it as immoral as long as we don't charge or pay too much, but what is too much?

Even Christians don't agree on what kind of activity is immoral. Churches use various forms of gambling to raise funds. Is gambling immoral? Like charging interest to the poor, gambling takes more money from the poor than from the rich. Both interest and gambling could be defined as immoral and thus described as criminal behavior.

We all reject criminal behavior, but we don't all agree on what criminal behavior is, or whether criminal behavior is chosen or inherited. Francis Collins asks the penetrating question:

Could criminality even be influenced by inherited susceptibilities? In a way that is both obvious to everyone but not usually considered in quite this context, we already know this to be true. Half of our population carries a specific genetic variant that makes them sixteen times more likely to end up in jail than the other half. I am, of course, referring to the Y chromosome carried by males. The knowledge of that association, however, has not undermined the social fabric, nor has it been used successfully as a criminal defense by guilty males.

While we still hold criminals responsible for criminal behavior, as we have defined it, there is some evidence that like sin, it's in the genes. Collins demonstrates this with a study of a family prone to criminal behavior.

A particularly interesting example has already appeared, beginning with the observation of a single family in the Netherlands where the incidence of antisocial and criminal behavior among many of the males in the family stood out dramatically, and was consistent with the pattern of inheritance one might see for a gene on the X chromosome. ... But even in this situation, the findings are significant only on a statistical basis. There were plenty of individual exceptions to the rule.

Like alcoholism and homosexuality, there may be in some people a predisposition to certain kinds of behavior, but it's no excuse. We still

hold people responsible for their behavior. We all have freedom to choose, even when we have to make choices opposing our predispositions, governed by our genes.

### **The Need to Give**

Is there something in our social and economic life together that helps us to overcome our predisposition to arrogance and selfishness? John Wesley thought so, and gave the following advice:

Gain all you can, Save all you can, and Give all you can.  
Money never stays with me, it would burn me if it did. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible, lest it should find its way into my heart.

Within Christianity the question always comes up: How much do we need to give? Although most Christians don't give it, they believe the answer is ten percent, or a tithe. John Wesley insisted that a tithe was not the correct answer. Everything belongs to God, he said, and we are to give as much as we can. That's why he said gain all you can, save all you can (through frugality), so that you can give all you can.

C.S. Lewis agrees with Wesley that the correct answer is not a tithe. In dealing with the question of how much the Christian should give, Lewis concluded:

The only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. ...if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving too little.

The reason Christians need to give is so that they can overcome the sinful tendency of selfishness. Even in a world where the poor no longer exist, Christians need to give. The primary economic motive for Christians is socialistic, to look after one another. That of course can be done within any economic system, but Christianity has socialistic tendencies, even when everyone has sufficient resources to live a fully human life.

## 20. POLITICS: DUAL CITIZENSHIP

*The sad duty of politics is to establish justice  
in a sinful world.*

**Reinhold Niebuhr**

### **Mutual Responsibility**

Christianity has existed under many different political systems. Christians will always be dual citizens. This means that Christians will always bear some responsibility to the State and that the State, regardless of the political flavor of its government, will always bear certain responsibilities to its citizens.

The first and primary responsibility of every Christian will always be to God. In Acts 5:29 the Apostles stated their primary responsibility clearly: “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” This does mean that they had no responsibility to the State. Mark 12:7, Romans 13:1-7, 1 Timothy 2:1-2, and 1 Peter 2:13-17 define Christian responsibility to the state in terms of paying taxes and praying for political rulers. 1 Peter 2:13-17 also states the purpose of government:

For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

The State has two primary responsibilities: to maintain order and to establish justice. To maintain order the State needs a police force and a military force. Establishing justice is more complicated, but without justice, violence within the State is inevitable. Justice is achieved when citizens gain certain rights and opportunities. The primary rights and opportunities are listed below:

Rights:

- To own property
- To speak freely
- To assemble
- To exercise citizenship (vote)

## Opportunities:

- To obtain an education
- To support oneself
- To be secure: Health Care and Social Security

## **Church and State**

There have been many different kinds of relationships between Religion and the State, beginning with people who followed Moses and Aaron through the Wilderness. Moses represented the political and Aaron, as High Priest, the religious. The political and the religious were integrated. This integration lasted right up through the Monarchy. When Christianity was accepted by Constantine in the fourth century, State and Church began a new integration, which at one time consisted of government domination and at another time religious domination. The goal was a theocracy, but no one really knew how to make that work. The end result was the separation of Church and State. Below I have listed the various kinds of relationships that Religion and the State have experienced. These relationships still exist in various part of the world, whether we're talking about Christianity or some other Religion.

1. Integration
2. Government Domination
3. Alliance
4. Religious Domination
5. Theocracy
6. Separation

These relations, however can be reduced to three: Separation, cooperation, and integration. Of the three, my vote would be for cooperation. This would help to keep either the State or the Church from trying to dominate the other.

## **Christianity and Politics**

Neither Jesus nor Paul attempted to set up an integral relationship between Christianity and the State. The Roman Empire already had its gods, and Christianity was a small minority in the first and second centuries. There is no model in scripture for a Christian political program. C.S. Lewis suggested the following four conclusions:

1. Christianity does not profess to have a detailed political program.
2. The Clergy, including the Bishops, are not trained to set up a political program.

3. The application of Christian principles must come from Christian Laity trained in the various disciplines of society. There may be Christian politicians, but no Christian government.
4. Christianity can survive under any political system.

While Christianity can survive under any political system, some systems are more friendly to Christianity, than others. Some form of socialism, not communism, is most consistent with Christian economic principles. Capitalism and Christianity have enjoyed a friendly relationship, but Capitalism and Christian economic principles are in conflict. It has been said that Christianity created Capitalism, but at the same time, one must admit that Capitalism created a new kind of Christianity in its own image.

### **Dual Citizenship**

If there is to be any integrity in our discipleship, then we are going to have to recognize that we are dual citizens. We are citizens in the country in which we live, but we owe our first allegiance to the Kingdom of God. When they came to arrest Jesus, his disciples were ready to take out their swords and defend him, but Jesus said, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? (Matthew 26:52-53) When Pilate asked Jesus if he was a King, Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” (John 18:36) If our first allegiance is to the Kingdom of God, what do we do when our nation calls upon us to do things in conflict with our primary citizenship? This brings up the subject of violence, revolution and war.

### **Conclusions**

Much more could be said about politics, but I’m not the one to say it. My purpose is simply to point out some references to politics from the words of Jesus and from Scripture. The task of politics is exceedingly simple. Hubert Humphrey put it this way: “Life is not to be endured but to be enjoyed. The purpose of government is to bring about the happiness of the (American) people.” Accomplishing the goal is extremely complicated. Jerry Brown said that it was like paddling a canoe. “You lean a little to the left and then a little to the right in order to always move straight ahead.” Religion is like that as well. Instead of a canoe, one tries to walk down the center of a narrow road, avoiding the ditch on the left and the ditch on right.





## 21. WAR AND REVOLUTION

*Truth is the first casualty of war,  
and war is the ultimate negation of all ethics.*

**Gordon Poteat**

*I know war as few other men now living know it,  
and nothing to me is more revolting.*

*I have long advocated its complete abolition,  
as its very destructiveness on both friend and foe  
has rendered it useless  
as a method of settling international disputes.*

**Douglas MacArthur**

### **The Problem of Violence**

Violence is not new. It's been around for a long time. In James 4:1-2, we read:

Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask.

From James we discover the source of violence, but we also discover how unnecessary it is. What we need to ask for is the peace that passes all understanding. Once we have that, we can deal with our inner cravings that erupt in violence. The problem of violence is this. We don't know how to end it. Perhaps if we better understood it, then we might be ready to ask for that peace that will put an end to it.

There are basically two kinds of violence, personal violence and institutional violence.

Personal violence can be broken down into physical and psychological violence. Personal physical violence is the use of physical force to injure somebody or something. Personal psychological violence is the use of the psychological manipulation of words to injure someone. This kind of violence is used against persons rather than things.

The second kind of violence is institutional. It too can be broken down into physical and psychological violence. An example of institutional physical violence is war, and an example of institutional psycho-

logical violence is denying human rights to people. The latter may not seem like violence to those who are guilty of it, but it is certainly recognized as violence by the victims. It's very important to understand these two kinds of violence in order to understand the various attitudes and responses to war and revolution.

### **Attitudes toward War**

Throughout history there have been three attitudes toward war, and there have been Christians that have held all three. The three attitudes are the Crusade or the Jihad, the Just War, and Pacifism. Every attitude is an attempt to deal with conflict, but every attitude approaches the conflict with a different method. The primary issue in all three attitudes has to do with the method or means to achieve that goal or end. The issue is frequently put in the form of a question: Does the end justify the means, or does the method accomplish the goal?

In the Crusade or the Jihad, any method may be used to accomplish the goal. The end always justifies the means. In the Just War, some methods may be used to accomplish the goal, but there are methods that should never be used. The end justifies some means. To better understand all three of these attitudes, we will have to look at the Just War in greater detail. It is the most complicated of the three attitudes. The final attitude, which is Pacifism, is easy to understand, and it was the position of early Christianity for the first three hundred years. It was only after Christianity became the State Religion that Christians were expected to support the State and to become soldiers. The attitude of Pacifists is that only good methods are able to achieve the goal. Corrupt means corrupt every end. Violence is totally rejected as a method to settle differences and conflicts. Taken to the extreme, we are not even allowed to protect ourselves from those who would harm us.

The Just War was and is an attempt to provide a middle way between the extremes of the Crusade or Jihad and Pacifism. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas are well known for their advocacy of the Just War. Defining a Just War can be a complicated task. I'm going to suggest four main points in the Just War, but under the final point, more clarification will be needed.

The first point in a Just War is the necessity to have a ***Just Cause***. Just what would be a Just Cause? Self-defense is the primary Just Cause, but it is not the only one. Fighting for human rights is also a Just Cause, but it is much more difficult to define. It is easy to define self-defense. A nation has a right to defend itself against an invader, but when one suggests human rights as a Just Cause, a nation may become

the invader. In that case, the nation which has been invaded and guilty of human rights violations, appeals to the right of self-defense.

The second point in a Just War is called the *Just Intention*. The intention in fighting a war must be to restore peace or right a wrong. This sounds a little like the Just Cause, which justifies war on the basis of self-defense or human rights. The difference lies in the word intention. The intention must be to restore peace or right a wrong. It can never be to occupy or to destroy another country. Decisions to go to war over human rights might be based on faulty intelligence. Gathering intelligence is not an exact science. In spite of the errors made, the intention must be honorable and just.

The third point has to do with a *Competent Authority*. This point can be as vague as the first two. A Competent Authority would be the legal authority, but what or who represents the legal authority? In a democracy, the legal authority would consist of those who have been elected to represent the nation. The legal authority, however, does not always represent the people, and in such cases, one could claim to be the Competent Authority on the basis of popular or social support.

The war must also be fought with *Just Conduct*, the final point to be made in fighting a Just War. In fighting a Just War, three principles of conduct must be followed. The first principle makes two assumptions. War must be fought as a last resort and there must be a reasonable hope of victory. The second principle is that of proportion. The damage caused by the war should be minimized. If the destruction is too great, the war may not be worth it. The final principle is that of discrimination. A distinction should be made between soldiers and civilians. That same distinction should be made between military and non-military targets. Schools and hospitals would not be considered military targets and should be spared.

### **Problems with Just War**

As one can see, identifying a Just War is no simple matter. A great deal of interpretation goes into the process, and one does not always have accurate intelligence on which to base one's decisions. Although it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between interpretations and violations of the Just War, some violations stand out so clearly that they cannot be ignored. I would like to mention two of them.

The first is the use of nuclear weapons. While the intent might be to destroy military targets, nuclear weapons are too powerful to be that precise. They generally destroy much more than military targets. With

their destructive abilities, they tend to violate both the principles of proportion and discrimination.

The second problem is just as difficult as the first one. Insurgency warfare has made it difficult for armies that are trying to abide by Just War principles. According to insurgency warfare, there are no civilians. Everyone is a combatant. Insurgents don't claim to be fighting a Just War. They know that they are engaged in a Crusade or Jihad. Knowing that the other side is trying to fight a Just War, the insurgents will place military targets next to schools and hospitals to undermine the other side's claim to abide by Just War principles.

### **The Covenant of Justice**

Are there situations that justify an insurgency or revolution? The right to rule is a covenant between God, the ruler, and the people. If a ruler breaks the covenant, the people have a right to overthrow them." We must obey our princes," said John Calvin, "who are set over us, but when they rise against God they must be put down and held of no more account than worn out shoes."

Does this mean that the people have the right or responsibility to go so far as to assassinate the ruler who has violated his or her three way covenant? Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was implicated in the plot to assassinate Adolph Hitler, said "Yes." "It is not only my task," wrote Bonhoeffer, "to look after the victims of madmen who drive a motor-car in a crowded street, but to do all in my power to stop their driving at all." How could he have come to such a conclusion? It was easy with Bonhoeffer's concept of sin. There is the sin of commission and the sin of omission. Killing Hitler was a sin of commission because killing is wrong, but to allow Hitler to continue murdering millions of Jews was the sin of omission. One must do something, and sometimes one only has a choice between two sins, the sin of commission and the sin of omission. Which one is worse? Bonhoeffer would rather commit the sin of commission than the sin of omission. While Bonhoeffer did not have any direct involvement in the assassination attempt, he like many others, was implicated in it.

### **International Cooperation**

The problem of violence is everyone's problem. That's one of the reasons for the formation of the united Nations. While maintaining peace in the world is one of the goals of the United Nations, the *organization* itself sometimes prevents it from accomplishing its goal. Should it become a world government, which would enable it to exercise power? Should it depend upon world cooperation to create peace

in the world's trouble spots? It used to be that a balance of power secured the peace, or at least prevented war.

At any rate, every nation will continue to be concerned about its own national interest. That self-interest is not only about territorial integrity and self-defense. It is also about its political integrity and its independence. No nation can stop with territorial and political integrity. In a global village every nation is also concerned about its economic integrity and its own economic institutions.

### **A Final Comment on Violence and War**

I am not a pacifist, neither do I think Jesus was a pacifist. He never told any soldier to leave the army, nor did he preach against the establishment of an army. This does not mean that he justified violence and war. Wars may have to be fought as the lesser of two evils, but no war should ever be justified as Christian. If Christians have to fight let them at least attempt to follow the principles of the Just War as closely as they can, but let them not justify the use of violence. Violence can never be equated with the Will of God. There can be no such thing within Christianity as a Crusade or Jihad, nor is any war ever just. The best we can say is that we have taken the course of the lesser of two evils in order to avoid the sins of omission.



## 22. LIFE AND DEATH ISSUES

*There is no way to prevent dying.  
But the cure for the fear of death  
is to make sure that you have lived.*

**Harold Kushner**

### **The Task of Medicine**

Finally we come to life and death issues. In between birth and death, medical science has at least six tasks to fulfill. There may be more, but I would like to list the following six:

Do no harm!  
Save life!  
Heal diseases!  
Alleviate pain!  
Reduce the ill effects of incurable diseases!  
Prevent sickness and improve the overall quality of life!

### **Birth Control and Cloning**

Let's begin with birth. I stated earlier that the primary function of marriage was to propagate the human race. This does not mean that every couple can and will bear children. While I see nothing immoral with preventing a birth by natural or artificial means, I do see a problem with abortion. Our United Methodist Social Principles sum up the problem:

Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion. But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother, for whom devastating damage may result from an unacceptable pregnancy.

We cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection.

In addition to the threat to the mother's life, I would accept incest and an abnormal fetus as legitimate reasons for an abortion.

What about those who would like to give birth, but cannot? I don't have any moral issues with artificial insemination, but I can see no rea-

son to resort to it. Scripture does not command every couple to bear children.

Although I don't see cloning as being related to birth control, it does raise similar moral issues. Our United Methodist Social Principles takes a clear position:

We welcome the use of genetic technology for meeting fundamental human needs for health, a safe environment, and an adequate food supply. We oppose the cloning of humans and the genetic manipulation of the gender of an unborn child

When cloning is used to manipulate the gender of an unborn child, it has gone too far. Scripture may not say anything about cloning, but I consider it an immoral act.

### **The Beginning of Life**

The main issue in the abortion debate is when life begins. While the obvious answer to me is at conception, other suggestions have been made. Some would suggest when the nervous system begins (around the 15<sup>th</sup> day), some would suggest when the heart begins to beat (around the 25<sup>th</sup> day), others would suggest when there is brain activity or when all of the essential organs are present (around the 8<sup>th</sup> week).

The process of life begins at conception. All these other activities are simply part of the process of the development of life. The real issue is not when life begins, but when a fetus or baby should be given full rights as a human being. Is it at conception, or at some time during the process of development, or after birth? How does one make that decision? There is no easy answer, and that's why there is so much disagreement. I favor at conception, but that makes me inconsistent in allowing abortions when the mother's life is at risk, when there has been a rape, or when an abnormal fetus is developing. My answer is that abortion, like war, is always a moral problem; but, sometimes we have to make decisions on which is the lesser of two evils. We don't always have the choice between what is right and what is wrong.

### **Stem Cell Research**

Another moral issue that has been affected by the question of when life begins and when the fetus or baby should be granted full human rights is stem cell research. Francis Collins defines both what stem cell research is and the problem it has with the embryo before it has been



classified as a fetus.<sup>1</sup> First let's look at Collins' summary of stem cell research and its value:

A stem cell is one that carries within it the potential to develop into several different types of cells. In the bone marrow...a stem cell can give rise to red blood cells, white blood cells, bone cells, and even... heart muscle cells. This type of stem cell is commonly referred to as an "adult stem cell," to distinguish it from one derived from an embryo.

Collins has no difficulty with adult stem cell research. The problem comes into view when embryonic stem cells are used. Embryo stem cells have more potential, but the embryo is destroyed in the process. If full human rights are to be granted from conception on, then there is a moral issue. Collins suggests not only one, but two moral dilemmas:

If one believes unequivocally that life begins at conception, and that human life is sacred from that very moment onward, then this would be an unacceptable form of research or medical care.

To be consistent, in vitro fertilization (IVF) would also have to be unacceptable because in this process human embryos are also destroyed.

Collins does not make a decision. He does not say that life begins at conception and that human life is sacred from that moment onward. He only describes the moral dilemma for us. I happen to believe that life begins at conception and that the embryo, the fetus, and finally the baby are entitled to full human rights from conception on. I realize that this decision is inconsistent with the acceptance of abortions under certain circumstances. I appeal to the fact that moral decisions cannot always be made on the basis of what's right and what's wrong. Sometimes the decisions are based on what is less wrong. This is the lesser of two evils principle. I don't like it, but I see no way around it, short of denying human rights to a developing embryo, fetus, and baby.

---

<sup>1</sup> After eight weeks an embryo is classified as a fetus. When Collins talks about an embryo, he is talking about that stage of development that lasts approximately eight weeks. As I have mentioned before, by the end of the eighth week, there is brain activity and all of the essential organs have been formed.

## **Organ Transplants**

When it comes to organ transplants, Scripture is not helpful, but there are moral issues involved. The first issue has to do with which organ can or should be transplanted. This is a question for medical technology. The second issue is a moral one. How do we choose the recipients? Are they to be chosen by need or by their ability to pay? I agree with the conclusion of our United Methodist Social Principles:

We believe that organ transplantation and organ donation are acts of charity, agape love, and self-sacrifice. We recognize the life-giving benefits of organ and other tissue donation and encourage all people of faith to become organ and tissue donors as part of their love and ministry to others in need.

The principle for selection should be that of need, not whether or not one has the ability to pay. Of course this brings up a third issue: Who should bear the cost? The more expensive the organ transplant, the more complex the issue of cost becomes.

No one has a right to an organ transplant. Organ donation is an act of love and self-sacrifice. While most donors offer their organs upon their death, there are donations that can be made while one is living. No one has a moral obligation to give up an organ while he or she is living, and no one has a moral right to ask anyone to do so. Since organ donations are acts of love and self-sacrifice, it would be morally indefensible to sell one's organs.

Organ transplants are expensive and so everyone needs insurance, but limits need to be set. Here is where the wealthy have an advantage, but if organs are given according to need, this would minimize their advantage. No one should be able to purchase an organ for him or herself. There are other resources besides that of insurance. There are government funds, private donations, and fund raisers. Let me state the principle again. No one has a moral obligation to give an organ and no one has a moral right to demand one. Organ donation is an act of love and self-sacrifice.

## **The End of Life**

We are all mortal beings. Someday we will all die. Death is something we need to learn to accept. This may be difficult when the dying person is a child or in the prime of their life. Regardless of the age, I can see no moral obligation to keep someone alive when they are dying. There is no moral obligation to keep someone alive who has become a vegetable unless there is hope for recovery.

When someone has offered his or her organs for transplant, the question arises: When is that person dead? Since some organs need to be taken quickly, this can be an important, perhaps, a moral question. There are three indicators of death: when one stops breathing, when the heart stops beating, and when brain activity ceases. One might say that death occurs when all three activities have ceased, but if the heart is to be used in a transplant, then it must be taken while it is still functional. Remember, organ donations are acts of love and self-sacrifice, not moral obligations. We should make decisions about life and death issues while we are of sound mind. We should not leave those decisions for our loved ones to make in a time of crisis.

What about suicide and euthanasia? These are two separate issues. Scripture and Tradition have generally rejected suicide as an appropriate way of ending one's life, but euthanasia is a different issue. Euthanasia seems like an act of compassion. One desires to end his or her life due to intense suffering. How can this be immoral? Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that some people in such a position are not capable of ending their own life without help from someone else. The United Methodist Social principles conclude:

We believe that suicide is not the way a human life should end.  
...nothing, including suicide, separates us from the love of God. (Romans 3:38-39)



# APPENDICES

# **THE TRINITY**

## **1. God Creates**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

(Genesis 1:1)

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image,  
in our likeness...

So God created man in his own image,  
In the image of God he created him;  
Male and female he created them.

(Genesis 1:26-27)

## **2. God Redeems**

In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
And the Word was God.

He was with God in the beginning.  
Through him all things were made;

Without him nothing was made that has been made.  
In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

(John 1:1-4)

## **3. God Sanctifies**

But the Counselor,  
The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name,  
Will teach you all things and will remind you of everything  
I have said to you.

(John 14:26)

# **DEUTERONOMY: THE FIRST SCRIPTURES**

## **The Book of the Law is Found 2 Kings 22:1-20**

Josiah was Judah's best King and is mentioned as a reformer along with Hezekiah. He began his reign at the tender age of eight and ruled for 31 years. In the eighteenth year of his reign (622-621 B.C.E.), he ordered the Temple repaired, and as workmen were repairing it, Hilki-ah—the high priest—found the Book (Scroll) of the Law (Deuteronomy) either in a collection box or among the rubbish. Josiah was immediately notified, after which he appointed a committee of five (Hilki-ah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah) to seek divine direction concerning it. The men went to Huldah, a prophetess, who told them to tell Josiah to put this book into practice. Part of her prophecy was that Josiah would die in peace (22:20), but this did not happen. Josiah was to die on the battlefield.

Two well-known prophets were active during this time. They were Jeremiah and Zephaniah. The story of Huldah, a female prophet, is more believable because these well-known prophets are not mentioned. It would have been unusual for the King to seek advice from a female prophet. If someone were making this story up, they most certainly would have had him seeking advice from someone like Jeremiah or Zephaniah. In addition to that, the error concerning Josiah's death would have been covered up.

## **The Reforms of Josiah 2 Kings 23:1-25**

The following are the reforms accomplished in Josiah's time. Notice that some of the reforms were made in what was once the Northern Kingdom (Israel). He had Jeroboam's altars and the high places of Samaria removed.

1. Public reading of the Book.
2. Renewal of the Covenant with God.
3. Removal and burning of the Idols.
4. Firing (perhaps killing) of idolatrous priests.
5. Elimination of male cult prostitution.
6. Elimination of child sacrifice (at Topheth).
7. Removal of the shrine at Bethel.
8. Centralization of worship.
9. Renewal of the Passover Celebration.
10. Elimination of mediums and wizards.

## **The Death of Josiah** **2 Kings 23:26-30**

In spite of all Josiah's reforms, Judah is doomed. The reforms came too late. Assyria was in a state of collapse and the Neo-Babylonian Empire was rapidly taking its place. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell in 612 B.C.E. In order to maintain a balance of power, or to extend his own influence over Syria, the Egyptian Pharaoh, Neco, went to help Assyria make a final stand against the Babylonians at Carchemish. For some misguided reason, Josiah tried to oppose the Egyptian army at Megiddo in 609 B.C.E. and lost his life. Huldah's prediction that he would die a peaceful death did not come true (22:20).

The decisive battle took place at Carchemish in 605 B.C.E. The Egyptians were defeated, and the Babylonians began to extend their influence over Judah, much to the dismay of prophets like Habakkuk, who could not understand why God was using the wicked Babylonians to punish Judah.



# **EZRA'S RELIGIOUS REFORM**

**Ezra 9:1—10:44**

## **The Problem of Mixed Marriages**

**Ezra 9:1-15**

No sooner did the exiles return than they began to intermarry with pagans. This was against the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 7:1-5), which was opposed for religious rather than racial reasons. Foreign wives had led Solomon astray and threatened to do the same to the exiles. Some had even divorced their Jewish wives to marry pagans (Malachi 2:10-16). The issue was not race, but idolatry, and even the priests, Levites, and chief officials were deeply involved in this sin. Ezra repented and pulled out his hair as he expressed his remorse over the sins of his people before God. The prayer had sermonic value to it, but that was probably intentional.

## **The Agreement to Divorce their Wives**

**Ezra 10:1-44**

While Ezra was weeping and confessing “their” sins, a large group of Israelites gathered. Shecaniah proposed a way out of the situation by suggesting a renewal of the covenant and by casting out the foreign wives and their children. Ezra made the people promise to do this and then went into Jehohanan’s quarters, where he spent the night. Jehohanan was the high priest. A message was sent out to all the people to gather in Jerusalem within three days. Anyone who failed to attend would forfeit his property and be banned from the congregation. They all gathered on the twentieth day of the ninth month (Chislev) (November/December), which was the beginning of the rainy season. Ezra addressed the crowd concerning their sins. The people agreed, but felt that what needed to be done could not be accomplished in one or two days. A plan was suggested that the officials stay in Jerusalem and meet one by one with those who had taken foreign wives. Jonathan and Jahzeiah opposed this plan, with Meshullam and Shabbethai joining with them; nevertheless, the plan went into effect on the first day of the tenth month (Tebet) (December/January), and the divorces were finalized by the first day of the first month (Nisan) (March/April).

The chapter ends with a list of those persons who had taken foreign wives. The list includes priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and lay families of Israel. Both the foreign wives and their children were cast aside. The list adds up to 111 with the following breakdown:

- 17 Priests
- 10 Levites (6 Levites, 1 Singer, 3 Gatekeepers)
- 84 Lay

Sending the foreign wives and their children away may seem cruel to us, but we must recall why these people had gone into exile. It had to do with the Canaanization of Yahweh worship; and foreign wives, such as Jezabel, had much to do with that. Foreign women could be incorporated into Judaism, as was Ruth, but it meant accepting Yahweh. Early Christianity took the same position as can be seen in Paul's letter to the Christians in Corinth, who were dealing with the same issue. The specific verse is 2 Corinthians 6:14. Although nothing is said specifically about conversion, we must conclude that conversion to stay in the marriage would not have been sufficient. Only genuine conversion would insure loyalty of husband and wife to Yahweh. We have much to learn from Ezra.

### **Rebuilding the Family God**

When the Exiles returned to Jerusalem, they rebuilt the altar, the Temple, and the city walls. They were attempting to restore the glory of Solomon's Temple as a way of rebuilding the family of God. They really believed that God wanted a Temple, and that a Temple would revive them as the people of God.

What God wants is not a beautiful Temple made of cedar and stone decorated with silver and gold, but people to be a living Temple in which he himself might dwell. As the Apostle Paul put it, we are to become Temples of the Holy Spirit, in whom God lives (1 Corinthians 3:16 and 2 Corinthians 6:16). This seems like a rather individualistic approach. Each individual is a Temple in him or herself, but that would be a misreading of Paul's writing and the intention of both the Old and New Testaments. Peter does away with the individualistic approach to the Temple when he calls individuals to be living stones in a spiritual Temple (1 Peter 2:4-5). This is not, as we shall see, inconsistent with Paul's teachings on the subject.

According to Ezra, who did not oppose the rebuilding of the Temple, the place to begin the rebuilding of the family of God is within the family unit itself. In Ezra's prayer and confession before God he refers to the heart of the problem by asking: "...shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations?" (Ezra 9:14) The answer is clearly negative, for such would bring the people of God to ruin, without even a hope of a remnant. Although Ezra never objects to the rebuilding of the Temple and the city walls, he clearly sees the rebuilding of the family of God

within the family unit itself. Husband and wife must make their covenant with God first, and then with one another. Any other solution undermines the family of God, and is to be rejected by the community of faith.

Paul teaches a consistent message. He is no individualist in these matters. Marriage and the family must be together in matters of faith. His most pointed teaching on the matter can be found in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16, where he says:

Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Although Paul does not call for an outright rejection of spouses, husbands or wives, who are not Christian, he does not approve of intentional marriage between Christians and unbelievers. Christians have nothing in common with unbelievers, for unbelievers can only tempt their partners with idolatry.

Although Paul wished that everyone would remain single, as he was (1 Corinthians 7:7), he does permit marriage (1 Corinthians 7:9). His problem with marriage had to do with his expectation of the return of Jesus within his lifetime. Those who married prior to becoming Christians were to remain married. They were not to divorce their wives, or husbands, but they were not to give up their faith either. If their spouse died they were to try singleness in light of their expectation of the Lord's coming (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). While they were not to initiate a divorce, they were allowed to permit it. If unbelieving partners wanted to separate, they were to be given their freedom (1 Corinthians 7:15). Paul did not take the hard line approach of Ezra, but his thoughts on the importance and significance of marriage are similar.

The issue raised by Ezra and Paul, is not racial, but one of faith. Foreign wives would corrupt the faith. Jezebel's influence over Ahab was a prime example, and such temptations were to be avoided at all cost. The family of God cannot be built on such weak foundations, and every family either contributes to or detracts from the building of the corporate family of God. Ezra understood that and so did Paul. Why do we have so much trouble understanding it? They were not rejecting

foreigners, but persons who threatened to corrupt the family of God. If Jezebel was the prime negative influence, Ruth was the prime positive influence. She committed herself to the Lord prior to her marriage to Boaz, and not simply to marry Boaz. What seems like such a cruel act in Ezra is only an attempt to save the family of God from corrupting influences. Nothing is said about rejecting wives who had made a covenant to the Lord. Ezra is dealing with pagan wives.

This brings us to the problems of contemporary marriages. Inter-denominational marriage is certainly not a problem. The assumption is that both partners have committed themselves to the Lord. Even marriages to Jews and Muslims are not in the same league if one assumes that Jews and Muslims commit themselves to God. What is to be rejected is marriage with someone engaged in idolatry, and we must admit that even baptized Christians are sometimes idolaters. The same could be said of some institutional Jews and Muslims. The problem lies not in marrying believers, but unbelievers. For an unbeliever to be converted for the sake of the marriage is insufficient. This would not have been acceptable to Ezra and Paul, and it should not be a practice taught by contemporary Christians. Ruth did not follow the Lord in order to marry Boaz. She converted because she thought it was the right thing to do for herself. Her mother-in-law even advised her to remain in Moab and worship her Moabite gods.

While love might be the reason why we marry a particular person, faith is the only foundation on which the family of God can be built. This is why the theologian Emil Brunner, said: "To build marriage on love is to build on the sand." If he is right, then our society is building its house on sand, and great will be its fall. The only foundation on which the family of God can be built or rebuilt is on the solid rock of faith. What Jesus taught for individuals is also true for families, nations, and particularly the church itself (Matthew 7:24-27).

# THE REFORMS OF EZRA

## Nehemiah 7:73b—10:39

At this point the memoirs of Nehemiah seem to break off and Ezra appears as the main character. This may be a misplaced portion of the Ezra narrative.

### **Ezra Reads the Law (Nehemiah 7:73b—8:18)**

The people gathered before the Water Gate on the first day of the seventh month (Tishri) (September/October) to hear the law read. If this refers to Ezra's first year in Jerusalem, this was done only two months after his arrival. He probably did not read the whole Book of the Law (Pentateuch), but portions of it. He read it in Hebrew and had the Levites translate it aloud in Aramaic, the common speech of post-exilic Palestine. From this procedure there developed the Targums, the Aramaic translation of the Old Testament. The Law was read from morning until midday from a wooden pulpit. Upon hearing it, the people wept, for they had not been following it. Ezra comforted them by telling them it was a holy day and that they need not grieve.

On the second day of the seventh month, as the Law was read, they discovered that they had not been keeping the Feast of the Seventh Month (Feast of Booths/Tabernacles) since the days of Jeshua (Joshua), and so they built booths as a reminder of the days of the desert wanderings. Things seemed to center around the squares of the Water Gate and the Gate of Ephraim (Old Gate).

Since the synagogue emerged out of the exilic days, we can see some of its traditions developing, such as the pulpit, standing for the reading of Scripture, and the position of prayer.

### **The Great Confession (Nehemiah 9:1-37)**

On the twenty-fourth day of the month, the people assembled with fasting and sackcloth and earth on their heads. They gathered together to read again from the Law and to make their confession to God. The fact that they separated from foreigners (9:2) has led some scholars to conclude that this chapter is out of place, and that it should follow Ezra 10. They suggest that separation from foreigners only makes sense in relation to Ezra's concern over mixed marriages and the subsequent divorce proceedings. Other scholars simply indicate that non-Jews or foreigners did not participate in such things as a confession of sin for the violation of the covenant.

One-fourth of a day (three hours) was spent reading the law and another one-fourth of a day (three hours) was spent in confession and worship. They recited their personal history from the creation to the conquest. This was followed with a recitation of their disobedience and subsequent demise.

### **The Renewal of the Covenant (Nehemiah 9:37—10:39)**

Both secular and religious authorities sealed the Covenant. The list of persons involved begins with Nehemiah and Zedekiah, the secular authorities, and includes the Levites and priests, the religious authorities. Ezra, however, is not mentioned.

The covenant was described in terms of an oath to walk in God's law. The oath was to keep the Sabbath (every week and every seven years), avoid mixed marriages, keep up the Temple, and support the Levites and priests. Tithes were to be given in terms of the first fruits of the land and the firstborn sons and animals from their flocks and herds. One-third of a shekel (one-eighth of an ounce of silver) was to be given to keep up the Temple. At first this was voluntary, but it later became an obligatory (one-half shekel) tax. (See Exodus 30:13; Matthew 17:24.)

# THE HEBREW BIBLE CANON

## 1. The Law (Torah)

Genesis  
Exodus  
Leviticus  
Numbers  
Deuteronomy

## 2. The Prophets (Nebhiim)

Joshua  
Judges  
Samuel  
Kings

Earlier  
Prophets

Isaiah  
Jeremiah  
Ezekiel  
12 Minor Prophets

Later  
Prophets

## 3. The Writings (Kethubhim)

Psalms  
Proverbs  
Job

Canticles  
Ruth  
Lamentations  
Ecclesiastes  
Esther

The 5 Rolls

Daniel  
Ezra and Nehemiah  
Chronicles

## THE APOCRYPHA

And the other Books the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine; such are these following:

Additions to Esther  
Azariah, Prayer of  
Baruch  
Bel and the Dragon  
Ecclesiasticus  
1 Esdras  
2 Esdras  
Esther, Additions to  
Jeremiah, Letter of  
Judith  
Letter of Jeremiah  
1 Maccabees  
2 Maccabees  
3 Maccabees  
4 Maccabees  
Manasseh, Prayer of  
Prayer of Azariah  
Prayer of Manasseh  
Psalm 151  
Sirach, Wisdom of Jesus, Son of  
Song of the Three Jews  
Susanna  
Tobit  
Wisdom of Solomon

I personally think all of these books should be read. There may be a lot of straw in these books, but some of them contain nuggets of gold or even diamonds.



## SUMMARY OF THE APOCRYPHA

1. **Esdras** was written to emphasize the contribution made by Josiah, Zerubbabel, and Ezra to the reform of worship in Judah. (History)
2. **2 Esdras** (4 Ezra) deals with the theodicy question, that is, “How can we reconcile God’s wisdom, justice, power, and goodness with the presence of evil in the world?” Chapters 3 through 14 contain seven revelations given to Ezra in Babylon. These were written about 100 C.E. Pierre d’Ailly, Archbishop of Cambrai, wrote *Image of the World*, in which he stated that 6/7th of the world consisted of earth and 1/7th consisted of sea. Columbus had a copy of this book and managed to get support for his journey on the basis of 2 Esdras 6:42, 47, 50, and 52. Martin Luther rejected this book and threw it into the Elb River. He didn’t translate it. (Apocalyptic)
3. **Tobit** describes the difficulty of living out the Jewish faith and morality in a pagan land. (Story)
4. **Judith** encourages the Jews to stand fast against the onslaught of Greek religion and culture. (Story)
5. **Additions to the Book of Esther** add a religious dimension to the Book of Esther and supplies more details to the original story. (Addition to Esther)
6. **The Wisdom of Solomon** has been called the most important of the Apocryphal books. It recognizes the attraction of Greek art, literature and philosophy. The author does not reject everything Greek, but tries to make an accommodation with the Greek world. This book is important for the development of some theological ideas we still find prevalent in Western Religion, such as the resurrection of the body (1:15-16 and 3:1-4), the blaming of death and illness on the devil, who tempted the first couple in Eden (2:24), and the description of wisdom as God’s agent in creation (7:22—8:1). This last idea penetrates the New Testament in John 1:1-4; Colossians 1:15-17; and Hebrews 1:2-3. The book was written in the last part of the first century B.C.E. and some parts were written in the first century C.E. (Wisdom)
7. **Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach)** bridges the gap between the early wisdom teachers of Proverbs and the later rabbis of the Talmud. This includes the rabbinical schools of the

Pharisees and Sadducees. Wisdom is defined as “the fear of the Lord.” What is unique in Ecclesiasticus is the connection of wisdom to the Law (24:23). The book was written in Hebrew around 180 B.C.E. and translated by the author’s grandson fifty years later. (Wisdom)

8. **Baruch** is a confession of Israel’s sin, followed by a call to submit to foreign domination. It ends by asking where wisdom can be found, and it answers its question by equating wisdom with the possession of the Torah (the Law). Baruch 3:36-37 has been taken by Christians to refer to the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. (Prophetic)
9. **The Letter of Jeremiah** warns the Jews not to take seriously the practice of idolatry that they will see taking place all around them. The key verse is 6:65, which indicates that the idols are not to be feared, for they are not gods. (Prophetic)
10. **The Prayer of Azariah** and **The Song of the Three Young Men** are additions to the Book of Daniel.
  - a. **Azariah** (Abednego) blesses God for exercising true judgment on Israel and reminds God of his part in the Covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He pleads with God to deliver the faithful and give glory to his own name.
  - b. **The Song of the Three Young Men** was sung by Shadrach (Hananiah), Meschach (Mishael), and Abednego (Azariah) in the fiery furnace. The three young men call heaven and earth to join them in blessing God. By blessing God they mean loving God. (Addition to Daniel)
11. **Susanna** is a fable set in Judah, where Daniel began his life, but was then taken into exile to Babylon. The fable teaches that God saves those who hope in him. (Addition to Daniel)
12. **Bel and the Dragon** are two stories that encourage the Jews to fight against ruthless kings, like the Syrian Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who was out to Hellenize Palestine. He was another Bel or Dragon who needed to be destroyed. (Addition to Daniel)
13. **The Prayer of Manasseh** is an example of how God can forgive the vilest of sinners. (Devotional)
14. **1 Maccabees** describes the Maccabean or Jewish resistance against Syrian power between 175 and 135 B.C.E. That main power was located in Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who tried to Hellenize Palestine and eliminate the three distinctive traits of Juda-

ism: the reading of the Law, circumcision, and the observance of the Sabbath. The books of Daniel and Ecclesiasticus were written within this same period. (History)

15. **2 Maccabees** is a theological interpretation of history. The author is interested in the rise of the Hasmonean House, which grew out of the Maccabean revolt led by Mattathias, Judas, Jonathan, and Simon. 1 Maccabees tells the story of all four heroes. 2 Maccabees tells only the story of Judas. Several theological emphases have emerged from this book:
  - a. the resurrection of the body (7:9, 11, 14; 14:46);
  - b. prayers for the dead (12:43-45);
  - c. the intercession of the saints (15:12, 14);
  - d. the intervention of angels (3:25-26; 5:2-3; 10:29-30; 11:6-8);
  - e. the example of martyrdom (6-7; 14:37-46); and
  - f. the doctrine of creation out of nothing (7:28). Martin Luther said that this book was not unworthy to be reckoned among the books of Scripture. (History)
16. **3 Maccabees** encourages Egyptian Jews to keep their faith in God in the midst of Egyptian persecution under Ptolemy IV Philopator (221-203 B.C.E.). This persecution took place prior to the events in 1 and 2 Maccabees. (Miscellaneous)
17. **4 Maccabees** is a philosophical lecture given at a festival commemorating the Maccabean martyrs. The point of the lecture is that reason can control emotions. This is illustrated by the martyrdoms of Eleazar, the seven brothers, and their mother. This is an expansion of the martyrdoms we read about in 2 Maccabees 6:12—7:42. Another point made is the emphasis on the immortality of the soul (14:5-6; 16:13; 17:12; 18:23; and Luke 16:22). 2 Maccabees echoes the Persian belief in the resurrection of the body and 4 Maccabees echoes the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul. (Miscellaneous)
18. **Psalm 151** was found in Qumran, Cave #11. It claims to have been written by David and it describes his divine call and his subsequent killing of the Philistine giant, Goliath. (Miscellaneous)

# THE PROTESTANT CANON

## BOOKS OF THE LAW

Genesis,  
Exodus,  
Leviticus,  
Numbers,  
Deuteronomy,

## BOOKS OF HISTORY

Joshua,  
Judges,  
Ruth,  
The First Book of Samuel,  
The Second Book of Samuel,  
The First Book of Kings,  
The Second Book of Kings,  
The First Book of Chronicles,  
The Second Book of Chronicles,  
The First Book of Esdras,  
The Second Book of Esdras,  
The Book of Esther

## BOOKS OF WISDOM,

The Book of Job,  
The Psalms,  
The Proverbs,  
Ecclesiastes or Preacher,  
Cantica, or Songs of Solomon,

## BOOKS OF PROPHECY

### Major Prophets

Isaiah  
Jeremiah  
Lamentations  
Ezekiel  
Daniel

### 12 Minor Prophets

## THE GOSPELS

Matthew  
Mark  
Luke  
John

## HISTORY

Acts

## EPISTLES

Romans  
1 Corinthians  
2 Corinthians  
Galatians  
Ephesians  
Philippians  
Colossians  
1 Thessalonians  
2 Thessalonians  
1 Timothy  
2 Timothy  
Titus  
Philemon  
Hebrews  
James  
1 Peter  
2 Peter  
1 John  
2 John  
3 John  
Jude

## APOCALYPSE

Revelation

## SUMMARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

**GOSPELS:** Describe Jesus' teaching, ministry, death and resurrection  
Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke share much material in common, each with a different emphasis

**Matthew:** Proclaims Jesus as the Jewish Messiah

**Mark:** Proclaims Jesus as the Servant and Son of God

**Luke:** Proclaims God as coming to save sinners

**John:** Proclaims Jesus as the Eternal Word who reveals the Father

### HISTORY

**Acts:** Describes the origin and development of the early church

### LETTERS OF PAUL

**Romans:** Comprehensive statement of the Gospel

**1 Corinthians:** Problems in the church: division, immorality, errors in doctrine and worship

**2 Corinthians:** Gives comfort and encouragement in trouble; God is strong in our weakness

**Galatians:** Salvation is a free gift of God's grace received by faith

**Ephesians:** Mystery and nature of the Church

**Philippians:** Joy and confidence in the Christian life, regardless of circumstances

**Colossians:** Acceptance before God through Christ alone, not any human religion or philosophy

**1 Thessalonians:** Christ is coming again in judgment on the unjust

**2 Thessalonians:** Christians should work and lead godly lives until Christ comes

**1 Timothy:** Advice on organization and doctrines of the church

**2 Timothy:** Importance of sound doctrine in the church

**Titus:** Advice on organization and doctrine in the church

**Philemon:** Letter of advocacy for a runaway slave

### UNIVERSAL LETTERS

**Hebrews:** Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic Law, Priesthood, and Sacrifices

**James:** Relationship of faith and works in the Christian life

**1 Peter:** Encourages Christians under persecution

**2 Peter:** Truth of Christianity against false teachers

**1 John:** God is light, truth, and love; Christians should develop these virtues

**2 John:** Encouragement and warning to a small group of Christians

**3 John:** Letter of commendation of one Christian to another

**Jude:** Denounces false teachers

## **APOCALYPSE**

**Revelation:** God rules history and will bring it to a triumphal climax in Jesus Christ

# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS COMPARED

## Exodus 20:1-17

JEWISH	PROTESTANT	CATHOLIC/LUTHERAN
1. One God (20:2)	One God (20:2-3)	One God (20:2-6)
2. No Images (20:3-6)	No Images (20:4-6)	No Blasphemy (20:7)
3. No Blasphemy (20:7)	No Blasphemy (20:7)	Observe the Sabbath (20:8-11)
4. Observe the Sabbath (20:7)	Observe the Sabbath (20:8-11)	Respect Parents (20:12)
5. Respect Parents (20:12)	Respect Parents (20:12)	No Murder (20:13)
6. No Murder (20:13)	No Murder (20:13)	No Adultery (20:14)
7. No Adultery (20:14)	No Adultery (20:14)	No Stealing (20:14)
8. No Stealing (20:15)	No Stealing (20:15)	No False Swearing (20:16)
9. No False Swearing (20:16)	No False Swearing (20:16)	No Coveting a man's wife (20:17a)
10. No Coveting (20:17)	No Coveting (20:17)	No Coveting a man's Property (20:17b)

# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS CONTRASTED

## Exodus and Matthew

<b>YE</b>	One God		Our Father (Matthew 6:9)
<b>HAVE</b>	No Images		No forms needed at all (Matthew 6:7)
<b>HEARD</b>	No Blasphemy	<b>BUT</b>	Hallowed be Thy Name (Matthew 6:9)
<b>THAT</b>	Man made for the Sabbath	<b>I</b>	Sabbath made for Man (Mark 2:27)
<b>IT WAS</b>	Honor Your Parents	<b>SAY</b>	And also all good people (Matthew 12:50)
<b>SAID</b>	No Murder	<b>UNTO</b>	No Anger (Matthew 5:22)
<b>BY</b>	No Adultery	<b>YOU</b>	No Lust (Matthew 5:28)
<b>THEM</b>	No Stealing		Give Freely (Matthew 5:42)
<b>OF OLD</b>	No False Swearing		No Swearing (Matthew 5:34)
<b>TIME</b>	No Coveting		Covet Righteousness (Matthew 5:6)



# THE PARABLES OF JESUS

<b>PARABLES IN ONE GOSPEL</b>	<b>MATTHEW</b>	<b>MARK</b>	<b>LUKE</b>
1. Tares (Weeds)	13:24-30		
2. Treasure in the Field	13:44		
3. Pearl of Great Price	13:45-46		
4. Net	13:47-50		
5. Unmerciful Servant	18:23-35		
6. Laborers in the Vineyard	20:1-16		
7. Two Sons	21:28-32		
8. Wedding Feast	22:2-14		
9. Ten Virgins	25:1-13		
10. Talents	25:14-30		
11. Seed Growing Secretly		4:26-29	
12. Absent Householder		13:33-37	
13. Two Debtors			7:41-43
14. Good Samaritan			10:30-37
15. Importunate Friend			11:5-13
16. Rich Fool			12:16-21
17. Servants Watching			12:35-40
18. Faithful Steward			12:42-48
19. Barren Fig Tree			13:6-9
20. Great Feast			14:16-24
21. Building a Tower and a King going to War			14:25-32
22. Lost Coin			15:8-10
23. Prodigal Son			15:11-32
24. Dishonest Steward			16:1-13
25. Rich Man and Lazarus			16:19-31
26. Unprofitable Servant			17:7-10
27. Unrighteous Judge			18:1-8
28. Pharisee and the Tax Collector			18:9-14
29. Pounds			19:11-27
<b>PARABLES IN TWO GOSPELS</b>			
30. Two Builders	7:24-27		6:47-49
31. Leaven	13:33		13:20-21
32. Lost Sheep	18:12-14		15:3-7
<b>PARABLES IN THREE GOSPELS</b>			
33. Lamp under a Bushel	5:14-16	4:21-22	8:16-17 11:33-36
34. New Cloth on an Old Garment	9:16	2:21	5:36
35. New Wine in Old Wineskins	9:17	2:22	5:37-38
36. Sower	13:3-23	4:2-20	8:4-15
37. Mustard Seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19
38. Wicked Tenants	21:33-45	12:1-12	20:9-19
39. Fig Tree	24:32-44	13:28-32	21:29-33

# THE SEVEN COVENANTS

## 1. THE COVENANT THROUGH NOAH (Genesis 9:8-17)

The first Covenant was made with Noah and his descendants. It consists of the unconditional promise made by God never to destroy earthly life with a natural catastrophe. The symbol of this first Covenant is the rainbow.

## 2. THE COVENANT THROUGH ABRAHAM (Genesis 15:9-21 and 17:1-27)

The second Covenant was made with Abraham and his descendants. God promised in this Covenant to bless Abraham for his faith, shape his descendants into a nation, and give them a land of milk and honey. The Covenant is conditional, that is, it is dependent upon Abraham's faith and the faith of future descendants. The symbol of this second Covenant is circumcision.

## 3. THE COVENANT THROUGH MOSES (Exodus 19-24)

The third Covenant was made with Moses and the children of Israel (Jacob) at Mount Sinai. God would deliver his people from slavery and take them into the Promised Land if they would consecrate themselves totally to him. The symbol of this third Covenant is the 10 Commandments, which signify both the theological and ethical foundation of God's people.

## 4. THE COVENANT THROUGH PHINEHAS (Numbers 25:10-13)

The fourth Covenant was made with the zealous priest named Phinehas. It was an unconditional promise made by God to provide his people with a perpetual priesthood. While no specific symbol emerges to designate this Covenant, it has been called the Covenant of Peace. Perhaps a symbol of peace would be appropriate, or some symbol of the priesthood.

## 5. THE COVENANT THROUGH DAVID (2 Samuel 7:5-16)

The fifth Covenant was made with David. It was an unconditional promise to establish and maintain the Davidic dynasty on the throne of Israel. This means that God would forever provide his people with a godly king like David. The symbol of this Covenant is the Star of David.

**6. THE COVENANT THROUGH JEREMIAH** (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

The sixth Covenant was made through Jeremiah just as God was expelling his rebellious people from the Promised Land because of their unfaithfulness. It was an unconditional promise to forgive his people and establish a new relationship with them by writing his law on their hearts. This Covenant was to be based on pure grace.

**7. THE NEW COVENANT THROUGH JESUS** (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; and Luke 22:7-23)

The seventh Covenant was made through Jesus on the night before his death on the cross. God made an unconditional promise to forgive sin and offer eternal life to all who would accept his grace, which he revealed through the death of Jesus on the Cross. This is the Covenant of pure grace. Bread, Wine, and the Cross are the symbols of this Covenant.

# THE SEVEN CHURCHES

## THE SEVEN CHURCHES (2:1 – 3:11)

THE SEVEN CHURCHES	EPHESUS (2:1-7) Doctrinal Purity, but lost love	SMYRNA (2:8-11) Facing Poverty and Suffering	PERGAMUM (2:12-17) Doctrinal and Moral Compromise	THYATIRA (2:18-29) Moral Compromise and too Tolerant	SARDIS (3:1-6) Spiritual Deadness	PHILADELPHIA (3:7-13) Holding Fast to Jesus' Word	LAODICEA (3:14-22) Luke-Warm Attitude
IMAGES FROM THE VISION OF CHRIST	7 Stars 7 Lampstands (1:12-13) (2:1)	First/Last Death/Life (1:17-18) (2:8)	The Two-edged Sword (1:16) (2:12)	Flaming Eyes Bronze Feet (1:14b & 15a) (2:18)	7 Spirits (1:16a) (3:1)	The Key of David (1:18) (3:7)	Amen (Jesus Christ) True Witness Creation (3:14)
THE COMMENTATION	Good Works (Morality) True Teachings (Orthodoxy) (2:2-3 & 6)	Poverty Suffering (2:9)	Faithfulness (Antipas) (2:13)	Works: Love and Faith Service Endurance (2:19)	Nothing Good but there are a Faithful Few (3:4)	Kept the Word and Refused to deny the Lord (3:8)	Nothing Good They live an Illusion (3:17)
THE NEGATIVE IMAGES	Nicolaitans	Synagogue of Satan Tribulation	Satan's Throne Balaam/Balak Nicolaitans	Jezebel		Synagogue of Satan	
THE CONDEMNATION	Lost Love (2:4)		Idolatry Immorality (2:14-15)	Tolerate People who practice idolatry and immorality (2:20)	Apathy Indifference (3:1b)		They are Luke-warm Neither cold nor hot (3:15-16)
THE EXHORTATION	Repent (2:5)	Be Faithful (2:10b)	Repent (2:16)	Hold Fast (2:25)	Repent (3:3)	Hold Fast (3:11)	Repent (3:19-20)
USE YOUR EARS	Listen (2:7a)	Listen (2:11a)	Listen (2:17a)	Listen (2:29)	Listen (3:6)	Listen (3:13)	Listen (3:22)
THE PROMISE	CONQUER: Tree of Life God's Paradise (2:7b)	CONQUER: Crown of Life Second Death (2:10 & 11b)	CONQUER: Manna White Stone (2:17b)	CONQUER: Rod of Iron Morning Star Power/Presence (2:27-28)	CONQUER: White Garments Book of Life Good/Angels (3:5)	CONQUER: Pillar New Name (3:12)	CONQUER: God's Throne (3:21)

## JOHN WESLEY AND THE BIBLE

The sum of what I spoke was this:

- I love plain-dealing. Do not you? I will use it now. Bear with me.
- I hang out no false colours; but show you all I am, all I intend, all I do.
- I am a member of the Church of England: But I love good men of every Church.
- My ground is the Bible. Yea, I am a Bible-bigot. I follow it in all things both great and small.
- Therefore,
  1. I always use a short private prayer, when I attend the public service of God. Do not you? Why do you not? Is not this according to the Bible?
  2. I stand whenever I sing the praise of God in public. Does not the Bible give you plain precedents for this?
  3. I always kneel before the Lord my Maker, when I pray in public.
  4. I generally in public use the Lord's Prayer, because Christ taught me, when I pray, to say...
- I advise every preacher connected with me, whether in England or Scotland, herein to tread in my steps.

O give me that book! At any price give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be a man of one book.

If I am a heretic, I became such by reading the Bible. *John Wesley*

Scripture is our authority, fundamental and decisive. The quadrilateral is not a geometric metaphor, as if the square had four sides, all equal. Rather, Scripture is normative. Tradition is the collective discipline used in judging the credibility of all interpretation. Experience is to the person what tradition is to the whole Christian community. Tradition, reason, experience are ways of understanding and interpreting Scripture. But Scripture is central and normative. *Albert Outler*.

## THE GENERAL RULES

### The Nature, Design, and General Rules of Our United Societies

In the latter end of the year 1739 eight or ten persons came to Mr. Wesley, in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired, as did two or three more the next day, that he would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That he might have more time for this great work, he appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely, on Thursday in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), he gave those advices from time to time which he judged most needful for them, and they always concluded their meeting with prayer suited to their several necessities.

This was the rise of the **United Society**, first in Europe, and then in America. Such a society is no other than "a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."

That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called **classes**, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in a class, one of whom is styled the **leader**. It is his duty:

- 1 To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order: (1) to inquire how their souls prosper; (2) to advise, reprove, comfort or exhort, as occasion may require; (3) to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the preachers, church, and poor.
- 2 To meet the ministers and the stewards of the society once a week, in order: (1) to inform the minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly and will not be reprov'd; (2) to pay the stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding.

There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies: "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." But wherever this is really fixed in the soul it will be shown by its fruits.

It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

*First:* By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced, such as:

- The taking of the name of God in vain.
- The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work therein or by buying or selling.
- Drunkenness: buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity.
- Slaveholding; buying or selling slaves.
- Fighting, quarreling, brawling, brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the using many words in buying or selling.
- The buying or selling goods that have not paid the duty.
- The giving or taking things on usury—i.e., unlawful interest.
- Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation; particularly speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers.
- Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us.
- Doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as:
- The putting on of gold and costly apparel.
- The taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus.
- The singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God.
- Softness and needless self-indulgence.
- Laying up treasure upon earth.
- Borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.

It is expected of all who continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

*Secondly:* By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men:

- To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison.
- To their souls, by instructing, reproofing, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine that "we are not to do good unless our hearts be free to it."
- By doing good, especially to them that are of the household of faith or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others; buying one of another, helping each other in business, and so much the more because the world will love its own and them only.
- By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed.
- By running with patience the race which is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them falsely, for the Lord's sake.

It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

*Thirdly:* By attending upon all the ordinances of God; such are:

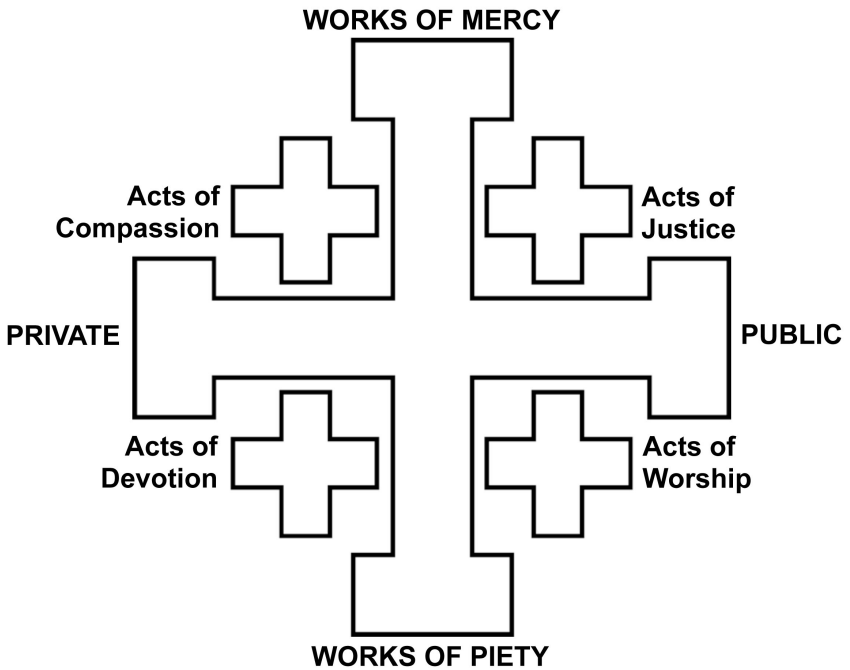
- The public worship of God.
- The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded.
- The Supper of the Lord.
- Family and private prayer.
- Searching the Scriptures.
- Fasting or abstinence.

These are the General Rules of our societies; all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written Word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know his Spirit writes on truly awakened hearts. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be known unto them who watch over that soul as they who must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways. We will bear with him for a season. But then, if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.



# THE RULE OF DISCIPLESHIP

is to witness to Jesus Christ in the world  
and to follow his teachings  
through acts of compassion, justice,  
worship, and devotion  
under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



## THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

THE DEADLY SINS	THE POSITIVE VIRTUES
1. Pride	1. Humility
2. Covetousness	2. Liberality
3. Lust	3. Chastity
4. Anger	4. Meekness
5. Gluttony	5. Tolerance
6. Envy	6. Love
7. Sloth	7. Diligence

THE DEADLY SINS	THE NEW NAMES
1. Pride	1. Success
2. Covetousness	2. Lawsuit
3. Lust	3. Expression
4. Anger	4. Indignation
5. Gluttony	5. The Good Life
6. Envy	6. Regulation
7. Sloth	7. Freedom

# THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

## Creation

God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. *Genesis 1:27*

## Holiness Code

Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them; You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. *Leviticus 19:2*

You shall not take vengeance or bear a rudge against any of your people, you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. *Leviticus 19:18*

## Sermon on the Mount

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. *Matthew 5:44-45*

Be perfect (holy), therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (holy). *Matthew 5:48*

Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness. *Matthew 6:33*

“Those who do not seek the Kingdom of God first do not seek it at all.” *Richard Foster*

“A lukewarm Christian is no Christian at all.” (Revelation 3:16) *William Barclay*



## THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

*Genesis 1:27*



### PROCREATION

#### *Function of Marriage*

God blessed them,  
and said to them,  
“Be fruitful and multiply,  
and fill the earth....”

*Genesis 1:28*

### FELLOWSHIP

#### *Form of Marriage*

Then the Lord God said,  
“It is not good that the man  
should be alone; I will make  
him a helper as his partner.”

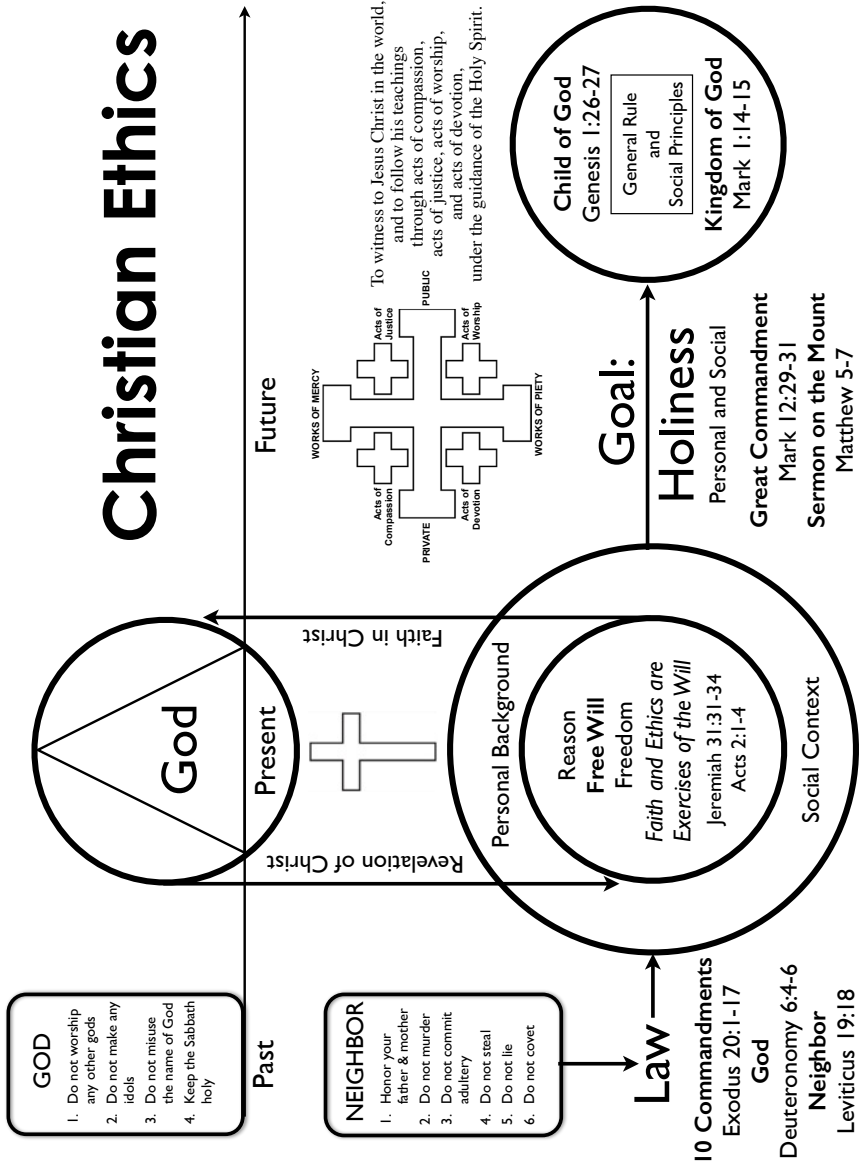
*Genesis 2:18*

### *Form follows Function*

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother  
and clings to his wife,  
and they become one flesh.

*Genesis 2:24*

# A CHART ON ETHICS





## A WORD TO THE READER

If the reader would like to know more about how I do Theology and Ethics, I would suggest two books in which I have gone deeper into both subjects. I deal with Theology in, *Faith is a Choice*, and I deal with Ethics in, *The Light*.

I write from the perspective of a pastor, not a scholar; although, I believe that a pastor should also be a scholar, and a scholar should have a pastor's heart. It isn't easy to bring these two disciplines together, or to separate them. I think John Wesley was right when he said, "Let us now unite the two so long divided, knowledge and vital piety." That's all that I am trying to do.

The difficulty is that it takes a great deal of time to be both a pastor and a scholar. I consider it a strength to have had the privilege of doing both. I also consider it a strength to have done both in another language. My wife and I continue to read the Bible and sing Hymns in the Iban language. To me the Hymns contain as much Theology and Ethics as does the Bible.

Another experience that I have found to be very helpful is my time working in a Machine Shop. I spent four years working as an Apprentice and another four years working as a Journeyman Machinist at the Kearney and Trecker Corporation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. My Certificate of Apprenticeship hangs right along side of my Ph.D. Degree.

Now that I'm retired, I apply my experience to leading small discipleship groups and volunteering with Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver. In 2013 I had the opportunity of working on the same project as former President Jimmy Carter, who was in his nineties. No matter how old we are, there is always something for us to do to make a better world.

Neither are we too old to take constructive criticism. I would value your comments on any subject. I have done my best to reflect on Theology and Ethics and how to apply these very important disciplines. I have also attempted to find a new way of interpreting Scripture. Feel free to send me an e-mail.

Dr. James T. Reuteler, Ph.D.  
Aurora, Colorado  
[Jim@Reuteler.org](mailto:Jim@Reuteler.org)  
[www.Jim.Reuteler.org](http://www.Jim.Reuteler.org)





## OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

### BIBLE STUDY GUIDES

- 1. The Bible as Sacred History:**  
Survey of the Bible
- 2. The Struggle with God:**  
Genesis through Deuteronomy
- 3. Sacred Stories:**  
Joshua through Esther
- 4. The Search for Wisdom:**  
Job through Ecclesiastes
- 5. Time is Running Out:**  
Major and Minor Prophets
- 6. Between the Testaments:**  
Books of the Apocrypha
- 7. The Messengers:**  
The Four Gospels
- 8. An Explosion of Faith:**  
Acts and Revelation
- 9. The First E-Letters:**  
All of the Letters
- 10. The Second Creation:**  
Revelation (Formatted: 6x9)
- 11. A Vision of Hope:**  
Revelation: (Formatted 8.5x11)
- 12. New Testament Photos 1**
- 13. New Testament Photos 2**

### BOOKS

- 1. Ignited for Mission:**  
A Call to Missions
- 2. Reformulating the Mission of the Church:**  
A Theology of Missions
- 3. Our Spiritual Senses:**  
Five Spiritual Senses
- 4. Our Spiritual Disciplines:**  
Six Spiritual Disciplines
- 5. The Ordinary Christian Experience:**  
Fourteen Common Experiences
- 6. Faith is a Choice:**  
Choosing Faith and Morality
- 7. A Brief Story of the Christian Church:**  
A Survey of the Church
- 8. The Heart of Methodism:**  
Renewing the Church
- 9. The Light:**  
Our Moral Compass
- 10. Does God Exist?:**  
Five questions about God
- 11. Running the Human Machine**  
The Need for Theology and Ethics
- 12. Jeremiah**  
The Optimistic Prophet

### EDITED BY THE AUTHOR

- 1. Foundational Documents:**  
Basic Methodist Documents
- 2. Instructions for Children:**  
by John Wesley
- 3. Speaking Iban:**  
by Burr Baughman
- 4. The Essentials of Methodism:**  
Basic Methodist Beliefs

