

UNITED STATES BIBLE STUDY SPONSORS

*The following public servants sponsor the
Capitol Ministries Bible studies led by Ralph Drollinger.*

WHITE HOUSE CABINET, AMBASSADORS, AND GOVERNORS

Alex Acosta WASHINGTON, D.C.
Mike Braun INDIANA
Phil Bryant MISSISSIPPI
Dr. Ben Carson WASHINGTON, D.C.
Mike Dunleavy ALASKA
Greg Gianforte MONTANA
Mark Gordon WYOMING
Pete Hegseth WASHINGTON, D.C.
Mike Huckabee WASHINGTON, D.C.
Sarah Huckabee Sanders ARKANSAS
Mike Keboe MISSOURI
David Perdue WASHINGTON, D.C.
Sonny Perdue GEORGIA
Rick Perry TEXAS
Jim Pillen NEBRASKA
Tate Reeves MISSISSIPPI
Kim Reynolds IOWA
Brooke Rollins WASHINGTON, D.C.
Kevin Stitt OKLAHOMA
Scott Turner WASHINGTON, D.C.
Russell Vought WASHINGTON, D.C.
Scott Walker WISCONSIN
Glenn Youngkin VIRGINIA

SENATORS

John Thune, Senate Majority Leader
Marsha Blackburn TENNESSEE
Katie Britt ALABAMA
Ted Budd NORTH CAROLINA
Bill Cassidy LOUISIANA
Kevin Cramer NORTH DAKOTA
Steven Daines MONTANA
Joni Ernst IOWA
William Hagerty TENNESSEE

Cindy Hyde-Smith MISSISSIPPI
James Lankford OKLAHOMA
Markwayne Mullin OKLAHOMA
Mike Rounds SOUTH DAKOTA
Tim Scott SOUTH CAROLINA

REPRESENTATIVES

Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House
Mark Alford MISSOURI
Robert Aderholt ALABAMA
Rick Allen GEORGIA
Brian Babin TEXAS
Don Bacon NEBRASKA
Nick Begich ALASKA
Michael Bost ILLINOIS
Josh Brecheen OKLAHOMA
Tim Burchett TENNESSEE
John Carter TEXAS
Juan Ciscomani ARIZONA
Rick Crawford ARKANSAS
Jake Ellzey TEXAS
Ron Estes KANSAS
Glenn Grothman WISCONSIN
Pat Harrigan NORTH CAROLINA
Kevin Hern OKLAHOMA
Richard Hudson NORTH CAROLINA
Bill Huizenga MICHIGAN
Dusty Johnson SOUTH DAKOTA
Jim Jordan OHIO
Doug LaMalfa CALIFORNIA
Nathaniel Moran TEXAS
Gary Palmer ALABAMA
August Pfluger TEXAS
David Rouzer NORTH CAROLINA
John Rutherford FLORIDA
Marlin Stutzman INDIANA
Glenn Thompson PENNSYLVANIA
Tim Walberg MICHIGAN
Randy Weber TEXAS
Daniel Webster FLORIDA
Bruce Westerman ARKANSAS
Roger Williams TEXAS
Rob Wittman VIRGINIA
Steve Womack ARKANSAS
Rudy Yakym INDIANA

Oaks in Office

FOREWORD BY
MIKE HUCKABEE

Oaks in Office

*Essential Bible Studies
for Political Leaders*

Ralph Drollinger



Oaks in Office

Essential Bible Studies for Political Leaders

Copyright © 2025 Ralph Drollinger

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, scanning, or otherwise—without permission in writing from Capitol Ministries.

Published by Capitol Ministries, Santa Clarita, California, capmin.org

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB®), Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. lockman.org.

Scriptures noted NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scriptures noted ESV are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scriptures noted NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.* Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Editor: Deborah Mendenhall
Editor, proofreader: Terry Cuzzo
Design: Leslie Colgin

ISBN 979-8-9879718-2-6

Printed in the United States of America

To Danielle, my sounding board,

who is *sensible* and *pure*,
who *works* tirelessly, who is *kind*,
and who *honors the Word of God*

—your *love*, faithfulness, and
companionship encourage and bless
me in this work we undertake together.

CONTENTS

Foreword.....	xiii
Preface	xv
Acknowledgments	xxi
Introduction	xxiii

PART I – BUILDING A SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SERVICE

1. The Missing Mandate in Modern Missions	3
2. Why Believers Should Be Involved in Politics	15
3. How to Maximize Your Influence on The Hill	31
4. Is Studying the Bible All That Important?	43
5. How to Effect Change and Growth in Your Life	55
6. The Preeminence of Love.....	71
7. The Essentiality of Knowledge	85

PART II – SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY

8. Understanding Epistemological Presuppositions	95
9. Critical: Sound Doctrine When Ministering to Public Servants... ..	105
10. Hermeneutics: Can You Make the Bible Say What You Want?.....	117
11. Rationalism, Rationality, and the Scriptures	129
12. The National Consequences of Rejecting the Doctrine of Sin	139

PART III – GODLINESS IN PUBLIC SERVICE

13. Does the Bible Inform Your Values?	151
14. Differentiating Between Spiritual Infancy, Spiritual Maturity.....	165
15. The Personal and Cultural Implications of Galatians.....	177
16. Understanding the Separation of Church and State	191
17. Do You Grieve or Quench the Holy Spirit?	201
18. Dealing with Pride: In Life and in D.C.	215

19. Anger and Office	229
20. The Profound Theological Importance of Husband-Wife Marriage	243
21. Sexual Sin and the Aphrodisiac of Power.....	257
22. Alcohol and Office.....	263
23. The Importance of Parenting and the Course of the Nation	269
24. Need I Forgive Someone Who Is Unrepentant?	281
25. The Personal and Cultural Benefits of Truthfulness	293
26. Learning to Better Discipline Your Mind	305

PART IV – BUILDING BIBLICALLY BASED CONVICTIONS ABOUT TODAY’S SOCIAL ISSUES

27. Ministry Versus Political Activism.....	317
28. Liberal Theology’s Struggle with Modern Archaeology	325
29. Theological Liberalism: How Bad Theology Leads to Bad Policy.....	339
30. Coming to Grips with the Religion of Environmentalism.....	355
31. Is God Judging Nations Today?.....	369
32. Does Real Change Begin with the Left or the Right?	383
33. God’s View on Babies—Inside and Outside the Womb	391
34. The Biblical Case for Defending Israel (Part 1).....	407
35. The Biblical Case for Defending Israel (Part 2).....	417
36. What the Bible Says About Our Illegal Immigration Problem	431
37. Scripture’s Clear and Convincing Case Crushes the Same-Sex Marriage Debate	449
38. The Bible on When War Is Justifiable.....	463
39. The Remedy for Racism.....	475
40. What Does the Bible Teach Regarding Capital Punishment?	489

PART V – BUILDING BIBLICALLY BASED CONVICTIONS ABOUT TODAY’S ECONOMIC ISSUES

41. Capitalism versus Communism	497
42. God’s Institutions and Their Roles on Earth	511
43. Resource Development.....	529

44. Free Markets and Regulation	543
45. Debt, Money, and Inflation	555
46. Solomon on Debt Solutions	569
47. Five Biblical Principles for Tax Policy	583
48. The Rich and the Poor	601
49. God's Design for a Societal Safety Net	611
50. Righteous Leadership Exalts a Nation	625

PART VI – THE PUBLIC SERVANT: AN EVANGELIST TO HIS COLLEAGUES

51. Vitally Important: Unity Amongst Christian Public Servants! [Ephesians]	641
52. Understanding All the Biblical Descriptors of Salvation	659
53. Is Salvation by Faith Alone?	677
54. Should You Argue from the Bible in a Secular Capitol?	699
55. How to Respond to Scripture Rejectors	715
56. Becoming More Like the 12 Amongst the 535	725
57. Nine Characteristics of Tares—The Believer's Enemy	737

PART VII – SUSTAINING EFFECTIVENESS IN OFFICE

58. Maintaining Health and Wellness after the Elections	753
59. Weak-Kneed Believers: Surveying 2 Timothy	767
60. Mastering the Fascinating Book of Proverbs!	783
61. How to Choose a Good Pastor	791
62. Who Are Your Counselors in the Capitol?	799
63. Four Common Characteristics in Three Uncommon Leaders	813
64. Are You Praying Effectively for the Elections?	825
65. How to Resist the Schemes of the Devil	837
Conclusion	851
About the Author	853

FOREWORD

Staying true to one's faith and following Jesus Christ is difficult enough, but to do so while serving in the shark-infested waters of public office requires the help and encouragement of mentors whose only agenda is to provide spiritual counsel in total confidence. Ralph Drollinger is not a household name and that's the way he likes it. Although he walks and talks with the most powerful men and women in the nation and leads three separate weekly Bible Studies for Members of the White House Cabinet, Senate, and House in Washington, D.C., and for Governors via Zoom, he does it behind the curtain so as to protect the confidence of those he ministers to.

Drollinger's new book, *Oaks in Office*, gives the reader a glimpse into what can make a powerful person yield to Christ and seek to live with integrity and honor. But you don't have to be a White House Cabinet Member, Senator, Congressman, or Governor to be blessed by *Oaks in Office*. Jump headfirst into this great series and get a blessing intended for rulers, but applicable to all.

MIKE HUCKABEE

U.S. Ambassador to Israel, former Governor of Arkansas, host of "Huckabee" on TBN, NYT bestselling author, and leading commentator

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special thank you to those who have helped bring this tome to life. First and foremost to Deborah Mendenhall, who has for years tirelessly edited and critiqued the weekly Bible studies that I write: We publish fifty-two, eight- to twelve-page studies per year for our in-person teaching ministry in Washington, D.C., to Members of the White House Cabinet, U.S. Senate, and House and via the internet our Governors weekly Bible study. The sixty-five chapters herein are derived from those studies that Deb has scrubbed into shape with me through a back-and-forth electronic volley, as I travel almost all of the time. Deb's editing skills have been of tremendous value to me and to our ministry.

I am so grateful, too, for Leslie Colgin, our graphic designer. I have known Leslie since she was a little baby (one of the daughters of Linus Morris, who discipled me when I was a student at UCLA). I have watched Leslie grow up, not only physically and spiritually, but vocationally. A highly skilled and talented designer, she has taken *Oaks in Office* under her care and created a layout that is not only attractive, but workable for all who are desirous of interacting with the content.

And saving the best for last, I am filled with gratitude for my precious, godly wife, Danielle, who provided love, support, friendship, and encouragement, served as a sounding board, and shouldered more than her share of the day-to-day tasks so that I may have the protected time needed to devote to writing those weekly studies which are the basis of this book.

I am so grateful to God for raising up such a spiritually mature, fun, and enjoyable team to produce *Oaks in Office* for His glory and purposes. A heartfelt thanks to each of you!

PREFACE

Oaks are amazing trees. We have several huge oaks bordering our primary residence in Southern California. Oaks, I believe, provide a great metaphor for mature-in-Christ public servants. Their roots go deep, they possess internal fortitude, and the leaves of some varieties do not wither (cf. Psalm 1:3). They stand up to drought, fire, wind, and floods. They are statuesque and noble, providing strength and shelter to their surrounding environs. They are a fitting picture of what God desires of His servants whom He has placed in public office.

The mighty oak tree spends the majority of its strength fortifying its infrastructure so that its roots will sustain the long sweeping branches that it will push up to twenty-five feet outward and parallel to the ground. In fact, underground, its root ball is as big as its canopy! It drives its roots deep into the earth, anchoring it firmly so it may stand steadfast in powerful storms that topple weaker, neighboring trees. Only a small bit of its energy is spent on external growth, expanding its trunk and stretching its boughs toward the sky.

It is our prayer to mature the Christian public servant in this way, by developing the inner person. A steady diet of sound Biblical doctrine will grow public servants in their faith. Consistent Bible study will help policy makers develop critical discernment that will guide and sustain them in battles over controversial and trendy issues. Anchored in truth and righteousness, they will stand resolute and unwavering amid the storms of political debate. Scriptural truth and God's precepts that have rooted in their hearts will lead them as they create public policy. This is our prayer and the reason for this book.

Since 1996 I have been writing in-depth Bible studies for public servants. Back then, my wife Danielle was the executive director of a powerful political action committee (PAC) in California that had as its primary objective to recruit, train, and help believers get elected to the legislative body of the state of California. This all occurred during what was commonly known as "the Gingrich revolution" in Washington, D.C. Her PAC rode that wave of

change, investing in and winning thirty-six political races in the California legislative body over a six-year period, or three election cycles.

But it was obvious something was lacking from their formula and their attempt to change the direction of California. The Members they had helped get elected, many being very young in Christ, went to Sacramento and seemed to not make any difference. In fact, some who were elected seemed to lose their testimony for Christ altogether while being away from their home, church, and communities for four days a week, seven to eight months a year. Danielle was frustrated with this outcome.

At the same time, I was heavily involved in the booming American sports ministry movement. I was serving as the president of the trade organization of America's sports ministries. By the time I arrived, the organization already had thousands of churches that were using sports to grow their congregations. Those churches had created eighty-four national parachurch sports ministries as outposts for Christ on most every high school, college, and professional sports team in America. Full-time chaplains, or better, Bible teacher/disciple-makers, had been placed on those teams, which created a focused and directed ministry that purposed to evangelize and build athletes in Christ. The American sports ministry movement was wildly successful in reaching athletes for Christ and still flourishes to this day through ongoing well-established parachurch ministries such as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Athletes in Action, and Pro Athletes Outreach.

One day the solution dawned on Danielle and me. Danielle realized that political leaders needed someone to minister to them while in office—a Bible teacher, if you will—on their Capitol campus. I had a good understanding of how that is best accomplished, at least in the athletic world. We realized we could form a new ministry that would create outposts for Christ on the campuses of political leaders! To our knowledge going in, nothing of that sort that was true to Scripture existed, at least on a national or international scale. We would later find out that was indeed true. In America, only five state capitols had some sort of disciple-making ministry.

In 1996, sensing a very strong call of God, we both quit our jobs to found Capitol Ministries in the California State Capitol in Sacramento. In the twelve ensuing years of ministry in the California Capitol, I found that written Bible studies were necessary in order to best serve Members of the California Assembly, Senate, and Constitutional Officers who might not otherwise, due to schedules, be able to participate in our weekly in-person Members Bible studies in the Capitol.

As I began the discipline of writing in-depth Bible studies every week—studies that were not only exegetically sound, but contained an application relevant to a public servant—I soon realized that there were little if any equivalent materials available with good theology.

All the more, I began to form earnest convictions that if our state and national leaders did not have a clear understanding of what God's Word has to say regarding matters, they could not be expected to lead in the best direction. This is especially true as our culture slips away from its Judeo-Christian heritage and into postmodern secularism. And in fact, fewer and fewer churches serve a high-protein diet of the Word of God to their congregants, which results in even the best Christian public servants being woefully untaught in the precepts of God's Word. Sobering to this reality in my California Capitol ministry created a deep unction in my heart as to how important my Bible teaching ministry was—or at least should be to the lawmaking process in a republic/democratic form of civil government—and how important written Bible studies are to the life of overbooked public servants. To use the summary thoughts of Chuck Colson in this regard, he stated it best, I think, when he said that in essence the Bible and Bible studies are “pre-political.” What Colson meant by that coined phrase is this: that before the political process begins, every legislator and every public servant should know what the Bible has to say regarding a given matter. How can we expect a lawmaker who doesn't know God to make policy according to His precepts? Biblical illiteracy amongst public servants poses a serious threat to the health and direction of any nation, state, or local government. It is the foundational reason why America has been in such decline.

It is now twenty-nine years later as Capitol Ministries publishes the second edition of *Oaks in Office*. Having written hundreds of Bible studies aimed at helping public servants know the mind of God on issues, I have chosen sixty-five of those studies that I believe are most pertinent to Christian understanding and growth. Preceding *Oaks in Office* is our prerequisite book, *Elected in Eternity*, which contains fundamental Bible studies for those who are young in Christ. I recommend that even mature-in-Christ believers study that book before delving into *Oaks in Office*. In my experience, most public servants will not be able to digest the high protein diet of *Oaks in Office* without first studying *Elected in Eternity*.

As you will notice from studying the Table of Contents, I have created sections that build on one another. The progression of the material suggests

that the spiritual maturity and character formation of the public servant leads to the development of godly positions on issues while serving in office. In order to be sustaining and strongly influential in the political realm, the most valuable proficiencies a public servant can develop is to be biblically informed and biblically correct on the issues. That is why *before and after* Part IV, “Building Biblically Based Convictions About Today’s Issues,” there is much content intended to forge Biblical character in the life of the political leader. This cannot be overstated! Yes, it is critically important to the direction of the nation that every elected or appointed official does not do what is *right in his own eyes* (Judges 21:25), but rather that they bring every vote *captive to the obedience of Christ* (2 Corinthians 10:5). But of even greater importance is the formation of Christlikeness in the life of the individual. Therein only is found the sustainability necessary for godly influence in office over the long run. *Oaks in Office* therefore addresses both personal godliness and corporate righteousness.

By God’s doing, it is now twenty-nine years from the time Danielle and I birthed Capitol Ministries in the California State Capitol. Since then we have watched our Lord establish many more ministries in other U.S. state capitols (44, in fact) and Federal capitols (85, in fact) throughout the world with similar emphasis on teaching the Word of God and making disciples. Having delegated ministry duties in the California Capitol to a capable CapMin Bible teacher, for the past 13 years we have been in Washington, D.C., where I have had the God-given privilege of teaching weekly Bible studies to Members of the White House Cabinet and senior staff, many Senators, and many House Members—along with a growing internet-based Governors Bible study. This advancement of the ministry is not my doing, but God’s. And it has been quite the ride, quite the adventure! Capitol Ministries and its expansion have much more to do with God honoring the explication of His Word than it does with me and my limited abilities. To Him be the glory!

It is appropriate and customary in a tome like this to thank God for the tremendous influences He has placed in my life that have in a human sense equipped me for such a task as this. Those influences that follow are in no particular order of importance. Coach John Wooden of UCLA fame, for whom I had the privilege of playing as a member of his last two national championship teams. Coach was hugely influential in my character formation, understanding of industriousness and the necessity of preparedness. Dr. Bill Bright, whom I had the privilege of serving and

being on his staff for many years through playing basketball for Athletes in Action (a ministry of then Campus Crusade for Christ, now CRU), during my sports ministry days. Dr. Bright hugely influenced the visionary side of my thinking and ministry, creating in me by his modeling a capacity, understanding, and confidence that God can use ordinary people to reach around the globe with the Gospel. He taught me not to think small, but to trust God for things beyond personal ability and comprehension. Dr. John MacArthur, who personally gave me a passion and ability, and through the seminary he founded, The Master's Seminary, to carefully, skillfully, and responsibly exegete the Word of God with week-in and week-out tenacity, precision, industriousness and perseverance. He created a realization in me best summarized many, many years ago by the personal words of my friend, Dr. David Jeremiah: "Ralph, God honors His Word. Therefore be about explicating His Word if you expect Him to increase your ministry." Dr. Francis Schaeffer and the summers of exposure I had to him at L'Abri in Switzerland during my college days that also included overseas evangelistic basketball teams and mountain climbing in the Alps. Schaeffer's in-person lectures and writings taught me to think deeply about the applications and implications to and on the culture of convictional biblical thinking. Lastly, is my father, Ralph Andrew Drollinger, who started a mountaineering equipment manufacturing and retail store in San Diego called Adventure 16. He modeled entrepreneurship and risk taking that subsequently I have always highly valued and taken for granted.

I would like to think that I am a combination, to a much lesser degree, of these individuals and their respective strengths. Apart from Christ, they are the human influences He has given me whom I continually model the most. They have been the underlying influences that help to explain best what Capitol Ministries is all about, and I thank God for allowing me to rub shoulders over many, many years with each of them.

My prayer is that *Oaks in Office* will be used by God to help shape the character and direction of the next generation of political leaders, not only in America but throughout the world. Presently my weekly written Bible studies are translated into six other languages, and it is our hope and prayer that *Oaks in Office* will soon be translated into other languages as well for use in our emerging and growing international ministries.

Here then are sixty-five of my most pertinent Bible studies, reformatting into book form, that are intended to be the training curriculum not only for existing political leaders but even more for the next generation

of up-and-coming public servants. May God use *Oaks in Office* to form a Christian worldview in those who have emerging political careers, those men and women who will someday lead our great nation and those in other nations as well.

Oaks in Office is particularly designed to be used by Capitol Ministries trained ministry leaders who sense a call to reach local government leaders for Christ. We call this division of our ministry Local Government Ministries (LGM) and we have produced *Oaks in Office* primarily for them: to equip our LGM leaders with excellent, homogenous Bible-study materials that are custom designed to best minister to up-and-coming political leaders who desire to please God with their life and service. Enjoy the book if you are one of these people studying this material! Our most focused prayer is that God will use *Oaks in Office* to mature you in Christ as you serve Him in His institution of civil government.

RALPH DROLLINGER

INTRODUCTION

During my college basketball days at UCLA, I experienced a strong calling into ministry. So strong was the calling that I decided to preach the Gospel with a Christian basketball team, Athletes in Action (AIA), rather than play professional basketball in the NBA. For the next four years I traveled the world with AIA, playing other national teams and preaching the Gospel at the halftimes. After that I continued in sports ministry, leading Sports Outreach America, which at the time was the umbrella group for all of America's sports ministries.

From the vantage point afforded me by those ministry opportunities, I experienced the very fabric of the American sports ministry movement. I could see that the tremendous number of athletes living for Christ and talking openly in the media about their faith was directly related to the number of full-time sports ministers God raised up to disciple athletes. These were and are disciple-making, Bible-teaching evangelists on the campuses of high schools and colleges, and closely affiliated with professional athletes. During those years I watched God raise up hundreds of sports ministers throughout America, who, in turn, were fueling the conversion and spiritual growth of thousands of athletes.

Those experiences and insights were what inspired my wife Danielle and me to found Capitol Ministries in 1996. With a similar vision, we thought, why not place disciple-making, Bible-teaching evangelists on the campuses of political leaders as well? In fact, very few state capitols, city governments, or federal capitols around the world had full-time ministers who were intent on building public servants in Christ. Why not do the same amongst them as we had seen done successfully for athletes and coaches?

So off we went to Sacramento to start Capitol Ministries in the California Capitol. In the last several decades we have expanded the ministry from there into many U.S. state capitols, Washington, D.C., and foreign federal capitols throughout the world, all by God's grace.

At the very heart of all that growth are solid Bible-teaching materials that lead the public servant into a deeper walk of faith and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That is the purpose of *Oaks in Office*: to

provide in-depth Bible studies with custom applications to the life of a public leader. *Oaks in Office* consists of sixty-five carefully selected Bible studies from the hundreds that I have written over the past twenty-nine years, presented in such an order that progressive study will mature you in Christ and teach you a Biblical perspective—a Christian worldview—that you can apply as you serve Him through your career. The tome has been organized into seven divisions.

- PART 1 — Lays a biblical foundation for public service
- PART 2 — Studies sound biblical precepts
- PART 3 — Provides a biblical perspective on personal character issues
- PART 4 — Investigates social problems through a biblical lens
- PART 5 — Investigates economic problems through a biblical lens
- PART 6 — Explores the primacy of being an evangelist to your colleagues in office
- PART 7 — Addresses how you can sustain and build your personal ministry in office

We at Capitol Ministries are intent on finding and training solid disciple-making, Bible-teaching evangelists to take the Gospel to their leaders in all of the capitols of the world. But that endeavor will only make disciples to the degree that sound doctrine is taught. *Oaks in Office* is designed to address that need, to challenge and mature Christian public servants who are just starting their Christian walk, as well as those who are mature in their faith. ***So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ***, states Romans 10:17.

We encourage you to gather with other public servants in a small group and meet weekly to tackle each study together. The studies are in-depth and comprehensive. It can easily take three weeks for each Bible study to be absorbed, so don't be in a hurry to move on. Read *Oaks in Office* with a pencil in hand, so that you can interact with the text. The interaction among those in your group will prove most helpful, as we have found in our Bible studies with Members of the White House Cabinet, U.S. Senate, and House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. Embark on the journey with us and let us all grow in Christ together!

Now more than ever we need godly public servants. You are privileged to have been called as one, but you also bear a responsibility to represent the God of the Bible according to His Word. As you mature in Him, watch what God will accomplish in and through your life in the years ahead! Romans 12:1–2 urges us to *be transformed by the renewing* of our minds. May God transform and bless you as you become a strong and stalwart oak in office.

PART I

***BUILDING A SCRIPTURAL
FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE
PUBLIC SERVICE***

CHAPTER 1

The Missing Mandate in Modern Missions

The foremost need of public servants is to know Christ. This need is why Capitol Ministries is focused on changing hearts by sharing the Gospel. Good legislation is important, but men and women can hardly be expected to make policies in accordance with sound, biblically based principles if they are at odds with the Author of Scripture. Only the Gospel has the efficacy to change a heart. We believe that foremost in the Capitol community is the objective of evangelizing and discipling political leaders. We need more disciplers!

Consider whether there is a biblical basis or calling to minister to political leaders. If so, how important is this pursuit in the mind of God? I think you may be in for a surprise.

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a biblical mandate that includes public servants as an integral part of modern missions! This study is intended to show you that truth as it runs throughout the Bible—and help you to build a conviction regarding this certainty.

A study of this mandate should fascinate public servants! Inasmuch as political leaders are essential to the Great Commission, it follows that you must be heavily involved in its fulfillment! The best way to reach other public servants with the Gospel of Jesus Christ is through evangelistic efforts! So let's explore and closely examine this biblical mandate to reach political leaders with the Gospel.

II. EXPLORING THE MANDATE

The following three portions of the New Testament (NT) provide the best initial understanding of this missiological emphasis that runs throughout the Word of God.

A. 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

The Apostle Paul *urges* Timothy to pray evangelistically not only for all men in general, but also for *kings and all who are in authority* specifically. Very importantly, verse 1 begins, *I urge*. These English words come from the original Greek language: *parakalo* is a compound word comprised of the preposition *para* and the verb *kaleo*. *Para* means “to come alongside” while *kaleo* means “to call.” Together, *parakalo* is an emphatic verb in the first-person singular that means “to call alongside.” *I urge* [you, Timothy].

Paul heightens this command with *first of all*, or *protos* (in Greek), to indicate its priority. *Protos* is used to signify “first in priority” rather than sequence. In other words, Paul wanted Timothy to join him in praying evangelistically for *kings and those in authority*. (You’ll notice that the last portion of this passage, verse 4, indicates the aforementioned command to pray is all to be taken in the context of evangelism.)

The command of these verses is not an afterthought in Paul’s mind. Concern for political leaders was an emphasis that ran throughout his ministry and was born in his Damascus Road conversion. Notice this significance in the following Acts 9:15 passage:

B. ACTS 9:15

But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.”

From the inception of Paul’s calling, the Lord revealed to Ananias that Paul would be His “*chosen instrument ... to bear [His] name before the*

Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.” Ananias was Jesus’ surrogate messenger to Paul, who, at that time, was known as Saul.

It is important to note that kings were one of the specific people groups that God called Paul to evangelize.

Many cities in the Roman Empire had not heard the Gospel. So a question for the curious should be asked: how did Paul decide where he would next travel? Certainly, many factors needed to be considered, but one of those was the presence of political leaders. The list that follows shows that his calling informed his travels, i.e., what cities he would include in order to establish churches. Understanding this connection is very important: the vast majority of cities Paul chose to visit stemmed from his Acts 9:15 calling. Note that those cities were capital cities in the Roman Empire.

- Paphos was the capital city of Cyprus.
- Perga was the capital city of Pamphilia.
- Pisidia Antioch was the capital city of southern Galatia.
- Iconium was the capital city of Lyconia.
- Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia.
- Athens was the capital city of modern Greece.
- Corinth was the capital city of Achaia.
- Ephesus was the capital city of proconsular Asia.

Paul ministered to both Jews and Gentiles, but it is important not to overlook the fact that in this passage Paul was also called to be a missionary to evangelize kings. For that reason, he went to these capital cities—as we shall see next.

C. THE BOOK OF ACTS

In that regard,

Of the thirteen individual
conversions recorded by author
Luke in the book of Acts, seven
are politically related people.

This emphasis of reaching governing leaders is vividly illustrated in the 28-chapter narrative. It is insightful to note that Luke is writing Acts for Theophilus (cf. Acts 1:1), in that he calls him *most excellent* (Luke 1:3), a title used to address governors (cf. Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25). Possibly Luke is writing this account, as well as the Gospel of Luke (cf. Luke 1:3), for the purpose of persuading one government leader to come to faith in Christ. This would explain why over one-half of the individual conversion accounts recorded in the book of Acts involve politically related people. Luke's purpose could be either to relate to Theophilus that other governmental leaders had come to Christ or to illustrate the fulfillment of Paul's call in Acts 9:15, if not both. Note the common vocation among the following conversions:

- The Ethiopian eunuch was the treasurer of Candace, the queen of Ethiopia (8:27).
- Cornelius the centurion was a military leader of 100 men (10:17).
- Blastus was the king's chamberlain (12:20).
- Sergius Paulus was a Roman provincial governor (13:7).
- The Philippian jailer was the official government guard (16:27).
- Dionysius was the Areopagite judge (17:34).
- Publius was the governor of Malta (28:7).

Paul's Acts 9:15 calling gives insight as to why he desired to visit Rome and, subsequently, even travel as far as Spain. In Acts 23:11 the Lord revealed to Paul that he must testify of Him in Rome:

“Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.”

The apostle longed to fellowship with the church in Rome (cf. Romans 1:10–12), but he had at least one other reason for making the voyage: evangelism. This intention is evident from Acts 27:24, where the Lord adds that Paul *must stand before Caesar*. Therefore, out of obedience to his calling, Paul was compelled to take the Gospel to Caesar. History evidences that Caesar did not get saved, but Philippians 4:22 indicates that Paul had been used by God in a powerful way in the emperor's palace:

All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

Paul was a man governed by the vivid memory of his conversion as recorded in Acts 9—and the specificity of his calling to reach the leaders of the world with the Gospel.

As a political leader,
you are specifically qualified
to follow in Paul's calling.

Assuming Paul's mission to Spain somehow aligned with his calling is reasonable, and it did. Spain was a mineral-rich colony on the westernmost extent of the Empire. A population of Jews and Gentiles who hadn't heard the Gospel were living there.

Did Spain have a contingency of political leaders? Yes. The orator Quintilian, the writer Martial, and the statesman Seneca resided there. The Roman emperors Trajan and Hadrian were born in Spain as well. According to Clement of Rome (writing in AD 95), Paul reached Spain and "gave his testimony before the rulers."¹

The apostle labored to reach political leaders with the Gospel. His deep concern for their salvation perhaps explains why he gave such an emphatic mandate to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:1–4. Political leaders serve as book-ends to the emphasis in and of the ministry life of Paul. To recap, Paul instructed Timothy to pray for the salvation of Rome's political leaders. The same principle applies for all believers today: Christians should desire to see their political leaders come to know Christ. In fact,

From Genesis to Revelation,
God's people pursue an
evangelistic ministry to political
leaders in foreign nations.

This consuming evangelistic zeal encompassed Paul's life after his Damascus Road conversion. The same emphasis exists throughout Scripture.

III. EXPANDING THE MANDATE

In addition to the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Peter exemplified this emphasis of ministry in the New Testament. Moving forward from the Church Age and after its close, tribulation saints will have a ministry to unbelieving kings.

Looking the other way in the Bible, the Old Testament (OT) nation of Israel, God's chosen people under the old covenant, was meant to be a beacon—a representative of Yahweh's glory, shining forth unto all the Gentile nations of the world. And in this regard, even more specifically, the nation Israel was meant by God to testify of Him to the political leaders in those Gentile nations! This mandate can be seen in some select passages that follow.

The ministry of reaching political leaders runs prominently throughout all of Scripture. Summarily states one of God's choice servants in this regard, *I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be ashamed* (Psalm 119:46).

IV. EXEMPLIFYING THE MANDATE

The proposition that today a mandate is missing in modern missions, namely, reaching political leaders as a first priority, can be demonstrated from the following epochs of biblical revelation. These passages indicate an historic thread of emphasis near to the heart of God that is woefully underemphasized in today's Christian missiology.

A. THE MINISTRY OF OLD TESTAMENT ISRAEL

God promised Abraham he would one day receive land, have numerous descendants, and be blessed by God (cf. Genesis 12:1–3). Four centuries passed as Abraham’s descendants grew from one family into 12 tribes and finally into the nation Israel. The Lord called them out of the world to be His *own possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation* (Exodus 19:5–6). Extrinsically, Israel was called to proclaim the excellencies of God to all the surrounding nations.

God intended for His people to become a light to the Gentile nations in a general sense; and more specifically, He expected His people to be a light to the leaders of those nations. Isaiah 60:3 states in this regard:

*“Nations will come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your rising.”*

Isaiah 49:6–7, along with 62:1–2, suggest the same type of ministry for Israel. The Lord expected Gentile leaders to take notice of His chosen people—a nation uniquely set apart for His purposes. Yet the only way this would happen is if Israel pursued some form of evangelistic ministry to them. However, in an overall historical sense,

Israel failed in her ministry to the
foreign nations and their leaders.
Nevertheless, the Old Testament
does provide several examples
where God’s people obeyed.

One illustration of Israel’s obedience to Yahweh’s calling to reach political leaders takes place during the Queen of Sheba’s visit to Israel during the reign of Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 10:1–9). The queen had traveled 1,400 miles to see the splendorous city of Jerusalem, and she would not leave disappointed. 1 Kings 10:5 (ESV) says that because of the visit, *there was no more breath in her*. (“No more breath in her” is an OT phrase similar

to saying today, “She was simply blown away!”) The queen was amazed and overwhelmed and proceeded, as a result, to praise the Lord (cf. 1 Kings 10:9). Luke 11:31 implies that during this time, she was converted. The point is plain: at this time in Solomon’s life, his testimony proved compelling as he evangelized this foreign leader.

A second illustration of Israel’s obedience to her calling to reach political leaders from Gentile nations happened when Solomon finished the temple. He gave thanks to God. During his thanksgiving prayer, he reminded Israel that the Lord blessed them for a purpose: so *“that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no one else”* (1 Kings 8:60). In keeping with the purpose of proclaiming God to the nations, the temple itself even included a court in which the Gentiles could worship Yahweh. As the nations saw Israel’s light, the hope was that, like the Queen of Sheba, the people would come from afar, led by their kings, to worship the God of Israel. States Isaiah 60:11 in this regard:

Your gates will be open continually;

They will not be closed day or night,

So that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations,

With their kings led in procession.

The thanksgiving prayer over the temple also illustrates that God wanted Israel to be magnetically attractive to Gentile nations and their leaders.

This idea is further illustrated in another way by the prophetic ministry of Jonah. Though a reluctant Jewish minister, Jonah eventually went (in a “whale” of a roundabout way) to the Gentile city of Nineveh and called upon its citizens to repent of their wickedness. Many listened, and soon Jonah had the opportunity to call the king to repentance. The king also listened and then ordered the entire city to follow suit in a very profound passage of Scripture (cf. Jonah 3:3–9).

Summarily, as illustrated by the three previous passages, Israel possessed a great calling to reach the nations of the world with Yahweh’s glory—and an important aspect of that was to reach the leaders of those Gentile nations.

B. THE MINISTRY OF JESUS AND THE DISCIPLES

In addition to the previously seen mission illustrated by Paul and the three examples within Old Testament Israel, when Jesus commissioned

His twelve disciples, He told them they would be *“brought before governors and kings for My sake as a testimony to them”* (Matthew 10:18). Accordingly, He sent out His disciples with a charge to evangelize political leaders.

C. THE MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLES

As a crescendo to the various politically related conversions in the book of Acts as already mentioned, remember that Paul sought to minister to Caesar and his household by visiting Rome. And in magnum-opus fashion, he desired to visit Spain to preach the Gospel to leaders residing there (cf. Romans 15:23–24). Therefore, Paul’s subsequent charge to Timothy (1 Timothy 2:1–4) and Titus (Titus 3:1) underscores the importance of carrying forth this mandate today in the Church Age.

Paul, however, was not the only apostle with an embedded passion to minister to kings; Peter had the same aspirations, albeit evidenced not quite as directly.

In 1 Peter 2:12, Peter exhorted his audience to live exemplary lives among the Gentiles for one purpose: that they may *glorify God in the day of visitation*. This Petrine language is Peter’s way of saying that he desired that the Gentiles with whom they came in contact be saved: he wanted to see Gentiles come to know Christ. He knew that poor conduct in the church would lead to a poor testimony in the community and that such would stand in the way, i.e., such poor conduct would ruin their testimony.

Interestingly, verses 13 and 14 of 1 Peter 2 expand upon this idea with respect and specificity to political leaders. Simply and summarily stated, evangelism to Gentile kings and governors will only be effective to the degree that believers humbly submit themselves to them and the laws they enact (so long as they are not patently unbiblical, of course).

Submit yourself for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as one in authority, or to governors as sent by him.

So 1 Peter 2:13–14 is set in the context that the reason for such submission to lawmakers is for the main purpose of being a good witness to them. This insight is usually not gleaned from this text; nonetheless, this observation is important to the thesis of this Bible study.

D. THE MINISTRY OF TRIBULATION SAINTS

During the Olivet Discourse in Mark 13, Jesus taught on events that would unfold during the tribulation. Wars will erupt, natural disasters will occur, and persecution will be common for Christ's followers. Mark 13:9 concludes this description by adding:

“But be on your guard, for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them.”

I hope we are raptured before this, my friend, and if we are—and I believe that followers of Christ will be raptured before then—this Scripture speaks of those who come to Christ during the tribulation, and that they will be the witnesses to governing leaders.

It is interesting that among the limited details Jesus provided regarding the tribulation, He made specific mention of evangelizing political leaders.

What a worthy point to make! Mark 13:9 states that believers ***“will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them.”*** Thus, the thread of ministry to those in the political arena continues even during this future epoch of great upheaval.

E. THE MINISTRY OF MILLENNIAL SAINTS

After Christ's Second Coming, God's people will no longer minister to kings for they will become kings themselves (cf. 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10, 20:4, 6). Those who have been redeemed will be given the privilege to rule on earth. When Christ returns and His kingdom has come, He will grant believers the governing positions similar to those who hold them today. Believers will then rule with perfection under the authority of *the*

King of kings (1 Timothy 6:15). The perfect political leadership by Christ and His called-out ones is a characteristic lacking in all the prior political leaders in today's fallen world (cf. Genesis 3). Praise God for the future day!

The type of ministry will change—from one of pursuing to one of being—but God's keen interest in governmental leaders will nonetheless remain intact even during the millennial kingdom.

V. ENGAGING THE MANDATE

The Great Commission includes a specific and, I believe, strategic element of emphasis on reaching political leaders throughout the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This insight becomes quite evident and important from the passages examined in this study. Capitol Ministries is a missional response to this mandate. We welcome your partnership in this God-specified calling! Are you pursuing what is of foremost importance—*protos*—relative to the fulfillment of the Great Commission?

1. Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: William Heinemann, 1919), 17.

Why Believers Should Be Involved in Politics

The Bible teaches that believers are to impact the *world* around them with God's precepts and for His glory. We are called to have an influence for God in our chosen field. The ways in which this impact happens vary, according to the call God has placed on each believer.

While some churches teach that believers should be involved only in evangelism and abstain from a career in politics, that philosophy is not what the Bible teaches. "*You are the salt of the earth,*" and "*You are the light¹ of the world*" (Matthew 5:13, 14) indicate that all believers are to have a here-and-now influence in addition to evangelism and discipleship.

Think about the implications of this "evangelism-only" Evangelical teaching: if every believer adhered to this somewhat popular instruction, there would be no believers in office! There would be no biblically based preservation or illuminating influences whatsoever in a representative form of government.

I believe Scripture supports believers' being involved in the political arena (as they are in nearly every other vocation) versus being against it or isolated from it. The way to change the direction of a nation is for believers to be involved. Someone's morality will be the basis of law and culture; why not God's?

What follows are the biblical arguments for participation in the state in ways beyond evangelism.

I. INTRODUCTION

That believers should affect the *world* in which they live (versus isolating themselves) is evident from the Sermon on the Mount. Note Matthew 5:13–16:

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

When Jesus *lights* a *lamp*—when He brings an individual to true, saving faith in Himself (cf. Ephesians 2:8–9)—what results is a person who *gives light to all who are in the house*. Deciphering what this passage means is not difficult. The word *house* (v. 15) is another way of expressing two previously used words in the passage. This usage simply means a believer will affect people on the *earth* (v. 13) and people in the *world* (v. 14). This passage teaches that it is normative for believers to affect the physical *earth/world* or land in the here and now.

But notice the progression of the whole chapter. Verses 13–16, as previously quoted, follow verses commonly known as Jesus’ Beatitudes (vv. 1–12). The Beatitudes teach concise virtues (listed in the opening portion of His Sermon on the Mount) emblematic of His mature followers, i.e., character qualities such as *gentleness* (v. 5), *righteousness* (vv. 6, 10), *mercifulness* (v. 7), *purity* (v. 8), etc. Per the progressive nature of them, a person’s manifestations of *salt* and *light* (similitudes expressing the idea that believers are to be preservers and illuminators in the *earth/world*) will be in direct proportion to the degree these previously listed characteristics inhabit the believer. Over the long run, a believer cannot affect his surroundings in a godly way unless he first possesses godly character.

Who a person is and how he affects
his *world* are intrinsically intertwined.

Such an interpretation of the meaning of this passage is supported by the following key grammatical understandings. First, the twice-used verbs at the beginning of verses 13 and 14 are **You are** (in Greek: *humeis este*). These verbs are present active indicatives in the Greek language, which contrasts with their being imperative verbs or commands from Jesus. This subtle but important distinction means we are Christlike in culture (agents of the preservation and illumination of truth) to the degree “we are” beatitudinal, i.e., mature in the Savior. Jesus is not saying, “Be **salt** and **light**!” Rather, He is teaching that the degree to which a person internally manifests Christlikeness is the degree to which he will externally affect his **world** or, in the case of the Capitol community, its people and its laws and, in the case of this study, the economic well-being of the nation! William Wilberforce changed the slavery laws of England because he was beatitudinal and Christlike to a high degree over many years in office!

Why is this interpretation so important? Again, allow me to repeat the profundity of this exegetical insight. Jesus is not saying, “You must be **salt** and **light**!” Jesus is not speaking in the imperative. Rather, the use of **you are** means **you are** preserving and illuminating in society to the degree **you are** beatitudinal! **You are** is based on what Jesus has already said in the Sermon on the Mount!

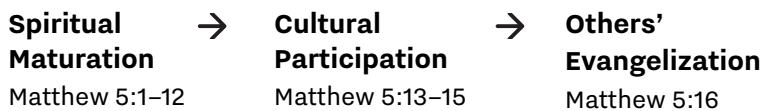
Indicative of beatitudinal character
always connected to Christlike maturity
are preservation and illumination
manifestations in the **world** today!

There is no way around this plain meaning and connection in this passage. Such is the cadence of this passage.

Secondly, notice in the original language the beginning of verse 16. The adverb at the start of the passage further evidences Jesus’ sequential thinking relative to what He has previously delineated. In the passage **Let your light shine before men in such a way**, the phrase **in such a way** (*houtos*) means “in this way” or “thus.” The verb **shine** (*lampro*) is an imperative, meaning God is commanding you. In other words, our light must

shine in *this* way. And that way is for others to see your godly character and your resulting cultural preservation and illumination. What follows is that others *glorify your Father who is in heaven*. Following this biblical sequencing, you become a powerful witness in a fallen *world* through your cultural participation—not your absence! Here is a graphic summation:

The Biblical Sequence for Believers



Personal spiritual maturation will be *indicated* by each person's cultural participation, which then testifies of God in an onlooking *world*. This progression reveals the biblical formula for having an effective testimony of glorifying God in a fallen *world*.

Summarily of the introduction, to those who say, “The believer should only be about evangelism in the political arena,” this passage evidences their omission of a vital and necessary step. Cultural participation in the *world* is a necessary ingredient to becoming an effective witness! (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:21–23). You can't be an “evangelism-only” advocate in the political arena without cultural participation! It is a complete misnomer.

Can any evangelist be effective who
shuns connecting to another's *world*?²

Neither Matthew 5 nor Jesus Himself supports that idea. This passage lends to correcting such erroneous thinking. The believer must be a preserver and illuminator on the *earth* and in the *world* if he desires to be a good evangelist. To further strengthen this already sufficient introductory argument are eight additional biblically supported reasons why believers should be involved in politics.³

II. “EVANGELISM ONLY” IS TOO NARROW AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE MISSION OF JESUS

In the Great Commission passage of Matthew 28:19–20, Jesus commands His followers to teach others more than just the truths of the Gospel (as primary and important as that is to the mission of Jesus). He teaches believers to go way beyond evangelism and make disciples. How is the believer to do that? By *teaching* [others] *to observe all that I commanded you*. Paul echoes the necessary breadth of instruction above and beyond the truths of the Gospel when he says to the Ephesian elders, *For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God* (Acts 20:27). Furthermore, regarding all of his biblical writings, *the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment* (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Peter says regarding his “more-than-salvation teachings” *that you should remember ... the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles* (2 Peter 3:2). Accordingly, Jesus wants others to know *all* of His instruction, which means He wants His followers to learn about marriage, family, Church, commerce, and government. Such is required to *make disciples*—the main *command* of the Great Commission. Conclusively, while the primacy of Jesus’ mission is to convert the lost, the entirety of His message encompasses *making disciples*.

That the believer should only evangelize political leaders (and not get involved in politics) represents ultra-myopic, unbiblical thinking. It follows that the evangelist in the Capitol would need to counsel his convert to immediately leave office! If an evangelist won every elected leader to Christ, the government would have to turn off the lights (assuming the janitor didn’t get saved!).

So what does Jesus teach? What is *the whole counsel of God* (Acts 20:27 NKJV) regarding civil government? Among other elements, this: Jesus Himself created it (Genesis 1:26; Colossians 1:16). He ordained it (Romans 13:1). He sustains it (Colossians 1:17). And His *whole counsel* is intended to moralize a fallen *world* (Romans 13:4) and provide justice (1 Peter 2:13–14). In addition to His saving grace, Jesus purposes, compelled by a heart of compassion for the lost (Matthew 9:36), to manifest common grace and restraining grace to all through this ordained institution (cf. Matthew 5:45). How great is His love!

The aforementioned descriptors and supporting passages clearly reveal that Jesus has a purpose in addition to evangelism for believers within the

institution of government. Accordingly, one of the leading advocates for the “all-evangelism, no-politics” viewpoint is propagating too narrow an understanding of the mission of Jesus when he states:

[Jesus] did not come to earth to make the old creation moral through social and governmental reform but to make new creatures (His people) holy through the saving power of the gospel and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.⁴

What this author says does not represent the *whole counsel* of God relative to His purposes for His institution of civil government as previously listed. As primary as the role of evangelism by the believer is to government, there must always be the aforementioned broader understanding of all Jesus taught regarding His larger purposes for this institution. The believer must be about teaching *all* that Scripture says about civil government and, even more specifically, teaching these truths to civil government leaders themselves!

In an expansive and parallel sense, to say that Jesus’ overall purpose and mission was solely about salvation is to imply that Jesus possesses no instruction about marriage, family, Church, or commerce. Therefore, the believer as well, should only be about evangelism to those ordained-by-God institutions. Should believers engage in marriage counseling or merely evangelize those who desire to get married? Should believers seek to grow godly businessmen in Christ or solely evangelize them? You get the point. Why is the institution of government, or government leaders, deemed evil and not considered in the biblical objective to *make disciples* in the *whole world*?

Another error of this same influential Christian author is his tendency to spiritualize away the importance of good civil government relative to the propagation of the Gospel. He states:

The ideal human government can ultimately do nothing to advance God’s kingdom, and the worst, most despotic worldly government in the end cannot halt the power of the Holy Spirit or the spread of God’s Word.⁵

In an ultimate sense and in view of the grandeur and sovereignty of God, what is said here is true, but is this a tenable argument for noninvolvement

in civil government by believers? A person need not be an avid student of current geopolitics, history, or historic missions to know that Middle Eastern countries, as well as North Korea, Cuba, and Russia, among others, have suppressed the growth of the body of Christ to a much greater degree than non-suppressive countries. How many missionaries have come forth relative to the cause of Christ from these lands? Practically speaking, why have 90 percent of missions in the past century been funded by America? Shouldn't believers be involved in politics if for no other reason than to preserve missionary-sending countries for the purposes of spreading God's Word? The ideal country can advance God's kingdom more so than a non-ideal country.

Good government is therefore
important to achieve and
maintain if for no other reason
than the fulfillment of the
Great Commission.

The present and historic impetus for much of the fulfillment of the Great Commission stems from countries that honor freedom. That means the believer's role in sustaining a country's health and well-being, which includes its economic viability, is a noble and important task and is certainly in keeping with *all that* Jesus *commanded* us.

To illustrate one of many possible results of living by too narrow an understanding of the mission of Jesus, radio preachers must now edit their radio broadcasts in Canada so as not to include any mention of Romans 1.⁶ This now off-limits chapter introduces a life-changing book that addresses the severity of sin, the principle of justification, the importance of faith, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, and many other major issues of faith. The restriction of this chapter is due to Canadian laws that were not influenced by Christians. What will become of the great radio ministries in America that have so affected our culture for good and evangelized the lost if the laws, unaffected by Christian influence, also begin to prohibit the Church from evangelizing here? How will the church of the

pastor quoted above, who advocates this limited understanding of governmental involvement, pay his salary if they lose their tax-deductible status?

Governments indeed either facilitate or
hinder the advance of God's kingdom.

Again, and worth repeating, believers should be involved in civil government if only for the sake of the Great Commission! Church leaders should applaud, respect, support, sustain, prepare, and elect more Christian political leaders to create and/or preserve the preachers' freedoms to propagate the Gospel.

Christian public servants view themselves
in a partnership with pastors. Should not
pastors view themselves in partnership
with Christian public servants?

Should the Church, with the same passion and enthusiasm that it places on raising up godly pastors, wives, husbands, children, and businessmen, raise up young men and women—disciple them—to run for office? Absolutely yes! Evangelism only is too narrow an understanding of the mission of Jesus.

III. THE MISSION OF JESUS INCLUDES A TRANSFORMATION OF NATIONS

Note the Great Commission passage in Matthew 28:18–20 as follows, as well as the use of the word *nations*:

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

The word *nations*, as included by Jesus in His Great Commission passage, cannot and should not be overlooked. The mission of Jesus has a sum total intent of transforming societies or, as they are called in the Great Commission passage, *nations* (*ethnos*). The Great Commission passage is clear: believers are to affect *nations*! Those who advocate too narrow a view of Jesus’ mission are forced to interpret *ethnos* to mean only “people groups,” so as to comport the passage to their viewpoint of non-civil government involvement. But for those who hold a bigger view of Jesus’ mission, individual evangelism and disciple making are inescapable—as is the objective of affecting geopolitical *nations* for good. If *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you* is the overall purpose for Christ’s coming to *earth*, as previously seen (the Gospel ministry being a vital part of that [cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3–6] and the starting point for *making disciples*), then just as important, the mission of Jesus has an eye toward and includes the transformation not only of individuals but also, as a result of that, *nations*.

IV. WHICH PARTS OF THE BIBLE SHOULD THE CHURCH NOT PREACH ABOUT?

From the previous points, the pastor or believer who holds to a limited, “do-evangelism, not-politics” understanding of Jesus’ mission must decide what portions of the Bible should be taught. Does the believer omit teaching from Genesis 9:5–6, John 19:11, Acts 25:11, Romans 13:1–7, or 1 Peter 2:13–14 since these passages address believers impacting government? More specifically, does the believer avoid teaching about Joseph’s influence on Pharaoh’s government or Daniel’s on Nebuchadnezzar’s government? What parts of the *whole purpose of God* (Acts 20:27) should the Bible teacher omit? Foisting too narrow of an understanding of the mission of Jesus inevitably leads to editing what portions of Scripture you will either teach or omit—and creates a huge ensuing incongruity in light of 2 Timothy 3:16: *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching*, and Acts 20:27: *declaring to you the whole purpose of God*.

V. GOD LEAVES CHRISTIANS HERE ON EARTH BOTH TO EVANGELIZE AND TO DO GOOD FOR OTHERS

Akin to the first point regarding believers' being illuminators and preservers in the *world* to the degree we are spiritually mature, God tends to leave His saints on *earth* after He saves us for this purpose. So after we are saved, what are we to do? Should we only evangelize others for the remainder of our *earthly* lives?

What about Matthew 22:39, which says, “***YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF***”? This command is listed six other times in the New Testament. Like the Great Commission command, this is also a command from Jesus! The spirit of what Jesus is teaching us to do demands that we consider the following kinds of issues (as they relate to tangential ways of *loving your neighbor*): 1) make sure the law punishes thieves who could otherwise rob my *neighbor*, 2) work to create and enforce laws pertaining to Internet protection of my *neighbors* from hackers who would otherwise steal their credit card information, and 3) create policies that ensure those who educate my *neighbor's* child cannot teach them evil things. You get the idea.

How could these policies that are so compatible with the mandate of Scripture *to love your neighbor* be accomplished if those who believe in the moral truths of Scripture are not involved in policy making? Galatians 6:10 reinforces this same, important idea of *loving thy neighbor* in the here and now: *So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially those who are of the household of faith*. Ephesians 2:10 further underscores the believers' societal responsibility when it says, *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them*. *Good works* has a present and broader meaning and application than evangelism only.

“Why should churches teach their people
how to do good works in hospitals,
and in schools, in businesses, and in
neighborhoods but not in government?”⁷

The biblical connection between *loving* our *neighbor* and the necessity of being involved in civil government is strong and unavoidable.

VI. GOD ESTABLISHED BOTH THE CHURCH AND THE STATE TO RESTRAIN EVIL

When a believer, through the power of the Holy Spirit, wins someone to Christ, such internal regeneration should quell evil in the heart of the convert (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17). However, history and present observation indicate that not everyone comes to Christ, nor are those who do completely and immediately sanctified in their manifest actions. Accordingly, God has instituted, in addition to the Church, civil government to restrain evil using force and punishment in a fallen *world*.

Romans 13:4 is clear about this wherein Paul speaks of government, *But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil*. First Peter 2:13–14 states similarly, *Submit yourselves ... to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers*.⁸ These passages serve to illuminate the fact that God mediates His reign by vesting His authority in and through civil government (Romans 13:1) in order to restrain evil in a fallen *world*. Whereas the Church is God's conduit of saving grace, the state is God's conduit of restraining grace. Reviewing these passages while considering this point is important. Such a realization necessitates the believer's involvement in civil government since it is part of Jesus' overall mission and institutional invention. It would also seem to follow that some are called by God to serve Him in His institution of government, just as, and to the same degree, that some individuals are called to serve Him in His institution of the Church, albeit their institutional objectives differ as to how they achieve restraining evil.

One other point worth mentioning is that Christian isolationists⁹ too often harbor a sense of self-righteousness, as if the authority of the Church is over the authority of the state. The Church is not preeminent to the state, and in many instances, the Church must submit to the state. The glaring historical and embarrassing American illustration of this submission is the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. The abolition of slavery did not come from the institution of the Church via evangelism. The state birthed

a human being's freedom from another person's ownership. Sometimes the state restrains evil more effectively than does the Church!

A more pointed current illustration of this church vs. state submission is seen when the Church does not report sexual abuse on its campus to governmental authorities, believing they, the Church, should be the exclusive and final adjudicator in such matters.

Yet another example of a failed church-state theology was the total lack of punctuality of church leaders relative to the canonization of the New Testament. The state motivated NT canonization! Not until Constantine in the early fourth century demanded it from Eusebius did the Church get around to sewing the 27 books together (so to speak)! These are but a few illustrations of God's using His institution of the state in ways that indicate its meaningfulness and importance to Him.

Therefore, it stands to reason that we believers should respect the unique role of the state (and not harbor condescending superiority attitudes toward it) and thus be involved in civil government versus isolating ourselves from it. Otherwise, we may end up inheriting a lawless, bankrupt country, wherein we most likely lose our religious freedoms to perform "evangelism only."

VII. CHRISTIANS HAVE INFLUENCED THE STATE POSITIVELY THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Standing in sharp contrast to the idea of noninvolvement by believers in the state other than evangelism are the following examples of at least three categories of the historical influence of believers on the state. These accounts are numerous and well documented by authors Schmidt¹⁰ and Colson¹¹ in their wonderful works. The following is a summary:

A. THE DIGNITY OF MANKIND

The historic spread and impact of Christian influence on the state by Christians' being involved in the state has been responsible for many victories:

- Christian involvement in the state's influencing the outlawing of infanticide, child abandonment, and abortion in the Roman Empire (374)

- Christian involvement in the state's prohibiting the burning alive of widows in India (1829)
- Christian involvement in the state's ending slavery in the British Empire (1840)
- Christian involvement in the state's stopping the binding of women's feet in China (1912)
- Christian involvement in the state's outlawing racial discrimination in America

These examples are but a few of the historic contributions of beatitudinal, mature-in-Christ believers, God's called-out agents of preservation and illumination—the result of their being engaged in politics!

B. THE CONSTITUTIONS OF MANKIND

Christians involved in politics were influential in the writing of the Magna Carta in England in 1215, the Declaration of Independence in America in 1776, and the Constitution of the United States in 1787. These, the most important documents known to mankind in the history of governments, were significantly influenced by believers and are the basis not only of prosperous countries but also of the ensuing Christian missions movement worldwide. These advanced views of government have birthed individual freedoms, justice, freedom of religion, and the institutional (but not influential) separation of church and state.

C. THE EDUCATION OF MANKIND

Believers involved in the state have greatly influenced the development of higher education in America.

Ninety-two percent of the
182 colleges and universities in
America in 1932 had been founded
by Christian denominations.

Such influence has led to the advancement of a society heretofore unknown in history, a society that has accelerated the Great Commission to levels of accomplishment equal to that of the first-century Church.

These serve as but a few illustrations of Christian influence on the state above and beyond evangelism only. Therefore, when a prominent Christian author reasons in 2000, “God does not call the church to influence the culture by promoting legislation and court rulings that advance a scriptural point of view” and “Using temporal methods to promote legislative and judicial change ... is not our calling—and has no eternal value,”¹² believers would have to wonder how he could arrive at such a narrow (and aberrant) understanding of the mission of Jesus.

In his much earlier commentary on Matthew 5:13–16 (1985), this same author said, “Christians can have a powerful influence on the welfare of the world.”¹³ And therein he quotes Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who said,

“[What saved England was that] the political situation was affected, and the great Acts of Parliament which were passed in the last century were mostly due to the fact that there were such large numbers of individual Christians found in the land.”¹⁴

Unfortunately, in the year 2000, this same writer wrote a book to attempt to influence pastors to avoid governmental involvement (ref. end note 3). Christian influence on the state throughout history, as well as the contextual argument of Matthew 5:1–16 (presented in the introductory section), favors this author’s previous, biblical, 1985 position.

VIII. DOESN'T THE BIBLE SAY THAT PERSECUTION IS COMING?

When studying eschatology, the doctrine of future biblical events, the student could reason, “Since things are going to get worse in the end times (cf. Matthew 24:9–12, 21–22; 2 Timothy 3:1–5), why should anyone attempt to improve government today?” The answer is simple! In the meantime, the believer is to be *salt* and *light* (Matthew 5:13–15), to *love your neighbor* (Matthew 22:39), to *do good works* (Ephesians 2:10), and to evangelize the lost (Matthew 5:16). The believer cannot disobey the clear commands of God in the here and now in lieu of end-time passages—a “prophetic

determinism” that overshadows and expunges any sense of a present-day biblical obedience.

The fatalistic future of the *world*
tomorrow is no excuse for societal
disenfranchisement today.

Scripture explicitly mentions that no one knows the exact time of Christ’s second coming anyway (Matthew 24:36; 25:13); therefore, the believer should influence civil government for good as long as he or she is able.

IX. WILL POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT DISTRACT BELIEVERS FROM THE MAIN TASK OF PREACHING THE GOSPEL?

Evangelism-only advocates frequently argue that political involvement by the Church today serves to distract believers from the main task of preaching the Gospel to the *world*. Such could occur, and I have witnessed that to be the case in the political arena by religious-right advocates. But the question isn’t whether political involvement by the Church will divert energy away from preaching the Gospel if indeed God has called the believer to be *salt* and *light* as a predicate for the most effective form of evangelism, which He has. Genuine involvement in people’s lives over time leads to soul winning.

X. SUMMARY

For these reasons, the “do-evangelism, not-politics” understanding of the Christian is a false dichotomy and an incorrect understanding of Church and state. Believers should be involved in politics in ways similar to the way they’d think about making their marriage better, their family better, their business better, or their church better. Running for office and serving in civil government is no less spiritual than going into full-time ministry, getting married, raising a family, or building a business.

1. This is also a present active indicative verb.
2. In 1 Corinthians 9:22 the Apostle Paul states, *I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some*. This appropriate supporting passage is relative to the scriptural understanding of cultural involvement. Paul was willing to get involved in the lives, professions (including the political arena, e.g., Philippians 1:13; cf. 4:22), and cultures of others without compromising biblical truth to evangelize the lost. How can today's church evangelize politicians if it is unwilling to connect with politicians?
3. This outline is used by permission from Dr. Wayne Grudem, who has addressed these same issues in his excellent book, *Politics According to the Bible*. With his permission, relative to the brevity that he had (in terms of overall book page count in this book), he gave me permission herein to develop each point more fully, which I have done.
4. John MacArthur, *Why Government Can't Save You: An Alternative to Political Activism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 11–12. Worth noting is MacArthur's exposition of Romans 13:1–7 in 1994 wherein he states respective of ordination and moralization: "Human government is ordained by God for the benefit of society. ... In order to promote and protect the good in society, human government must punish the evil" (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans 9–16* [Chicago: Moody, 1994], 218, 225). Implicit in his comments is his seeming admission to a broader role of the mission of Jesus (cf. Colossians 1:16). Unfortunately, his later incongruous thinking of "do-evangelism, not-politics" has influenced many.
5. *Ibid.*, 7.
6. Many leading Christian thinkers believe one of the major reasons America has not gone the way of Europe is due to the presence and power of Christian radio.
7. Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 48. Note that I am utilizing Dr. Grudem's respective chapter outline (with its much-appreciated comprehensiveness) in this study with his permission.
8. The one exception to obedience to the authority of the state is when civil authority would necessitate disobedience to God's Word (cf. Exodus 1:17; Daniel 3:16–18; 6:7, 10; Acts 4:19).
9. Christian isolationists are those who believe in the institutional superiority, exclusivity, and preeminence of the institution of the Church.
10. Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).
11. Charles Colson, *God and Government: An Insider's View on the Boundaries between Faith and Politics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). (Previously published as *Kingdoms in Conflict*.)
12. *Ibid.*, 130; 15.
13. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1–7* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 243.
14. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 1:157, quoted in John MacArthur, *Why Government Can't Save You: An Alternative to Political Activism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

How to Maximize Your Influence on The Hill

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount He states, "*You are the salt of the earth. ... You are the light of the world*" (Matthew 5:13–14). Often, well-meaning believers invoke this passage as a means of encouragement and prodding others to step up to the plate and affect the world.

In this study, I desire to provide you with a greater understanding of the Greek verb that Jesus uses. "*You are*" is not an imperative command; it is an indicative verb. This distinction is very important and necessary to make as we seek to better understand what the Bible means. Such precision leads to proper, God-glorifying application to one's life.

My prayer is that the meaning of this passage will become increasingly clear as you study what follows.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the three-chapter Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), Jesus denounces the legalism of the Pharisees. In contradistinctive juxtaposed alliteration, the thesis of the sermon is this: a person cannot be saved by keeping the law of Moses.

In that the Pharisees fashioned themselves as the astute spiritual experts of Israel, habitually piling on extrabiblical commands (with their accompanying odious stench of superiority), Jesus' objective in the three-chapter sermon is to pop their bubble. He begins His sermon with pithy, short statements intended to contrast their posturing. These beatitudes¹ are all direct opposites to pharisaical arrogance and ideology. In other words, if I

may paraphrase what Jesus is saying, “You think your ways will change the world? You’ve got it backward!”

That summation of Jesus’ sermon should give a hint as to how these chapters relate to the topic of this Bible study: *How to Maximize Your Influence on the Hill*. By the time a believer arrives at Jesus’ conclusion in the Beatitudes (vv. 13–14, point V. in this outline) the formula for an effective, God-honoring life that impacts the world has been laid. The two “**You are**” statements also serve as apt summaries of the aforementioned—indicative of the prior “beatitudinal” attitudes in action! Conversely,

Isolating Jesus’ **salt**-and-**light** statements
and using them as if He were commanding His
followers to be salt and light with no reference
or consideration to what precedes the summary
statements is to miss the crux of the passage.

It is to state the summations without the method. Taking such license would be like commanding a staff member to achieve a certain function without instruction. In order to be effective in their vocations, speech writers must first know how to write, webmasters must first know HTML coding, and schedulers must first know Microsoft Office. In a similar fashion, the public servant must first know what will make him into a preserver and an illuminator (**salt** and **light**, respectively) while serving in office. This point is both simple yet profound: Jesus’ summation of being **salt** and **light** is a codification of all He has previously taught. The preceding seven beatitudes need be thoroughly examined and understood in order to accomplish this goal. The following insights are to aid in maximizing one’s influence on the Hill.

II. SEVEN REQUIRED ATTITUDES (5:1–9)

When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, ... (v. 1).

During the time of Christ, four prevalent religionists focused on matters other than what Jesus mentions in this passage: an emphasis on the inner man, one's attitudes. Notice these four groups and think about their parallels to today:

The Religionists of Jesus' Day

- The **PHARISEES** insisted on a fastidious adherence to the mosaic law (and all that they had added).
 - The **SADDUCEES** were akin to theological liberalism of today. They discounted the supernatural, conforming everything to within their reasoning abilities.
 - The **ESSENES** were ascetics, believing in dualism, i.e., the material world being evil and to be avoided.
 - The **ZEALOTS** believed the end game of all religion was political activism. Theirs was a call to take up arms against Rome.
-

This list contains the expanded competitive theological landscape wherein Jesus spoke the following seven attitudinal descriptors that are *blessed*: pleasing to self, God, and others. In studying what follows, pay special note to the progression and how each one builds on the former: there is a definite accumulation of thought here. That's to say the Beatitudes which follow are not a buckshot scattering of somewhat unrelated nice sayings.

A. IF YOU BREAK OVER PERSONAL SIN

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 3).

True spirituality in God's sight and the first necessary component for long-lasting influence is humility. The Greek word Matthew selects and is translated into English as *poor* (*ptochos*) was used in association with a beggar, connoting the idea of material *poverty*. In this verse, Jesus uses the word in a spiritual context: being spiritually *poor*, i.e., one who is begging

God for his salvation. Foundational to a person's relationship to self, God, and others is the need for him to come to grips with his abject spiritual poverty—his inner realization of his lost hopelessness apart from God's intervention. Fundamental to effective influence is attribution to God (versus self) and His divine enablement. This understanding stands in opposition to the person who possesses a spirit of being self-strong—the seedbed of personal pride.

Paul reflects on this attitude in Philippians 3:7–9 when he describes his personal righteousness in comparison to God's as *rubbish*. Isaiah 64:6 puts it this way: *And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment*. Summarily, counter-intuitively, worthiness in this world cannot be attained without a sense of personal unworthiness. One need only take his eyes off of self and *regard one another as more important* (Philippians 2:3). Without our having genuine *humility* others will rightfully conclude that we believe, “it's all about me,” which vastly diminishes one's influence. Such was the wrap on the Pharisees. The *poor in spirit* (akin to being repentant) are *blessed* because, after taking personal inventory, they've concluded a need to depend on God for their salvation. Jesus concludes, *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

B. IF YOU MOURN OVER PERSONAL SIN

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (v. 4).

The contextual progression of thought pertaining to *mourning* (*pen-theo*) has to do with sorrowfulness over personal sin. Written in the present participle, this word embodies an outlook of continuous action—reflective not only of personal repentance leading to salvation, but also an ongoing attitude of *nothing good dwells in me* [us], *that is, in my* [our] *flesh* (Romans 7:18). The person who is *poor in spirit* realizes his personal bankruptcy, which necessitates personal *mourning*, grief, and agony over his plight before a holy and all-righteous God. James underscores this perspective on self when he writes: *Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you* (4:9–10). Per this passage, *mourning*, i.e., longing for a life free from sin and to be with our Maker (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:2, 8), in turn, implores God's attention and empowerment: *for they shall be comforted*.

Contrary to the ways of the
Pharisees, the emptying of self
permits the filling of God.

For when I am weak, then I am strong is the similar counter-intuitive paradoxical declaration of 2 Corinthians 12:10. It is spiritual bankruptcy, being *poor in spirit*, that leads to continual personal *mourning*. That *mourning* in turn facilitates Jesus' conclusion of this Beatitude: *comforted* (*parakaleo*, which means "to call alongside") (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:3). The same word is used elsewhere for the Holy Spirit, which can be translated "Helper." To paraphrase, *Blessed* are those who *mourn* for they shall ensure to themselves the help of God. Do you desire greater influence on the Hill? Here is the biblical prescription: sober up to your abject personal spiritual *poverty*. Once you realize you're not so great, you position yourself for effective service; it is at this point, God aids you.

Whereas the first two Beatitudes focus on a person's proper assessment of self, the following two pertain to a proper assessment of oneself to God.

C. IF YOU DESIRE GOD'S APPROVAL

"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth" (v. 5).

If being *poor in spirit* and *mourning* over sin means a believer has forsaken personal merit in exchange for the economy of God's gracious impartation, then it follows that he will possess a humble, *gentle* spirit in view of the holiness of God.

Gentleness (also translated in other English Bibles as "meekness") has as its object the awe and respect of God. It means not self-strong. The Greek word for *gentleness* (*praos*) carries the idea of focusing on the holiness of God. Contextually then, this Beatitude is not so much about being *gentle* with others; rather, its focus centers on being humbled by and in the presence of the reality of who God is! I am meek when I compare my sinfulness to God's holiness. In contrast the Pharisees were full of hubris and depending on their personal merit whereas the redeemed are full of meekness in awe of God's majesty and holiness.

Resultant is the fact that *they shall inherit the earth*. In terms of being *salt* and *light* today, the existence of “not being self-strong” and being desirous of God’s approval is an indispensable component of your possessing an inherited-from-God influence on the Hill.

D. IF YOU SEEK AFTER GOD’S WAYS

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (v. 6).

After having given himself a vote of no-confidence, the believer will be awestruck, i.e. meek in view of His holiness, and also *hunger and thirst* after His *righteousness*. Voiding self, he desires to be filled with God’s ways! Show me a Member who *hungers* for God’s *righteousness*, and I will show you a Member who is effectuating change in society; however, the inverse is also true.

Hungering and *thirsting* connote a strong passion in the soul. Herein is proper ambition: not zeal to be famous or to create a brand, but first directed to know God! The more a person crucifies and empties self (Galatians 2:20, the first two beatitudes), the more he will desire and have the ability to be filled with God’s ways. One cannot grab hold of God’s pearls until he releases the pop beads of self.

Such is the means of ultimate *satisfaction* in this life, and such are the foundational ingredients of those who will be effective agents of preservation and illumination in culture.

To be effective in influencing others in a positive way, the four prerequisites must be in place.

E. IF YOU HELP OTHERS

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (v. 7).

Mercy (*eleemon*, from which the English word *eleemosynary* is derived) means “beneficial or charitable.” It follows that the person who has received much *mercy* via the pardon of sin on the cross should, in his realization, display *mercy* or charity to others.

The person who is despondent
over his sin resulting in a
whole-hearted pursuit of God,
will show mercies to his fellow man.

Mercy carries the idea of “not giving a person that which he deserves.” God is *merciful* to the sinner in this way; He pardons the sinner. In this same way, the “beatitudinal” believer displays *mercy* toward his fellow man. Such teachings by Jesus flew in the face of the smug Pharisees who were condescending and void of *mercy* toward those who failed to measure up to their standards. The amount of influence a Member has on the Hill will be largely calculated by his willingness, attempts, and successes to *personally bless* the lives of others.

States Jesus, the specific result of a person’s characteristic *mercifulness* is that *he will receive mercy*. James 2:13 states this same promise in an opposite fashion: *For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy* (cf. Matthew 6:14–15). This is not to suggest that people gain salvation by being *merciful*; such is accomplished not by personal merit, but only by God’s grace through trust in Christ. Rather, the idea is this: the degree to which the believer is *merciful* to his or her fellow man is the degree to which God is *merciful* to him in daily living. What goes around comes around. The idea is one of sowing and reaping: the one who sows *mercy* will reap *mercy*.

F. IF YOU ARE GENUINE WITH OTHERS

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (v. 8).

When Jesus spoke these words in the Sermon on the Mount, Israel was in desperate straits. With a ripe history of disobedience to God, they found themselves under the control of an occupying foreign country (Rome) and an economy in shambles. They were under the religious misguidance of the religionists mentioned in the introduction. In that light, Jesus’ stating verse 8 must have been liberating for those to whom He preached. The Pharisees in particular were not *pure in heart*, but pious in *heart* toward their fellow man. Theirs was a guilt-trip religion of never-ending proportions.

The Progression of the Seven Beatitudes

The first two relate to a person's proper relationship to self; these next two relate to his proper relationship to God. Now notice the following three: the stage is set for a proper relationship to others. Herein is the progression of thought, i.e., Jesus' path to effective influence.

Given these insights and the contextual progression of the passage, Jesus was proclaiming in a positive way, "Don't be pious toward your fellow man!" **Pure** (*katharos*) means "cleansing from dirt and contamination." The Greek word is the basis for the English word *catharsis*, i.e., the purgation ("to purge, evacuate of the emotions"). To be **pure in heart** means to be real in every way—especially emotionally! Don't coat your relationships with a thick morass of pharisaical super-spirituality as though you are perfect when everyone including yourself knows that you are not! Be authentic with others! The person who truthfully communicates a sense of transparency regarding personal brokenness over sin, but who is nonetheless passionate toward God and manifestly loving vis-à-vis others, is most attractive and influential in life! Genuine people become the greatest preservative and illuminative people in a nation. This is the kind of person others want to be around—versus phony spiritual know-it-alls with plastic spirituality—who act like they have it all together! Ugh!

The result is intimacy with God: **they shall see God**. This phrase is in the future indicative tense and in the middle voice, which means they shall be continuously seeing God for themselves. Herein then in the respective order of the Beatitudes is intimacy and **blessing** with self, God, and others. What more could anyone desire?

G. IF YOU RECONCILE OTHERS TO GOD

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (v. 9).

The third aspect of personal relationship skills listed in the progression of the Beatitudes is that of being a messenger of **peace** to others. In that the believer himself has made **peace** with God, such is the ambassador of

God's *peace* to and for others. Every believer is an evangelist, sharing God's salvation with others: he is a *peacemaker* in the vertical sense. Again, note the progression: within the confines of horizontal relationships where the believer helps and is genuine comes the ability to effectively share Christ. This ability represents the ultimate in cultural preservation and illumination, reconciling people to God in an eternal sense.

The Greek word used in this verse for *sons* (*huios*) "expresses the dignity and honor of a child to his or her parents." Synonymous with being an ambassador for Christ as depicted in 2 Corinthians 5:20 is the idea in this passage of being a *son of God*. Both are descriptors of being God's honorable representatives.

One would think the previous seven
building blocks of virtue would
result in great praise by others.

Hardly.

What results is exactly the opposite reaction by the world.

III. TWO RESULTING ACCUSATIONS (5:10-11)

The biblical litmus test relative to effective "beatitudinal" execution is this: to the degree a believer is being *persecuted* and *falsified* is the degree that person is "beatitudinal." Given the progression of this passage, if the believer is living an effective Christ-centered life characterized according to the seven preceding indicators, he will be *persecuted* and *falsified*. Expect nothing else, my friend. This will be the world's response (as well as the response of tares in the Church) to your godly living.

If what follows is not your experience, then how spiritual—according to Jesus' definition—are you?

A. THEN YOU WILL BE PERSECUTED

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 10).

Second Timothy 3:12 stereophonically underscores this same idea: *All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

Persecution is the evidence of true salvation and “beatitudinal” living. There will always be reaction, resentment, and jealousy for those who live godly in Christ Jesus. Come to expect it; it is the believer’s badge of authenticity.

B. THEN YOU WILL BE FALSIFIED

“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me” (v. 11).

Expect abusive words behind your back. If it was said of Jesus, *“Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!”* (Matthew 11:19), should you or I expect anything less? It follows that being *falsified* for Christ’s sake is a badge of authenticity.

IV. ONE RESPONSIVE APPROPRIATION

“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (v. 12).

Matthew 5:11 and 12 do not state that the person who is *persecuted* and *falsified* for living “beatitudinally” should endure it. No, it says you should feel *blessed*. This promise is worth underscoring!

Note in the beginning of this verse the same idea: *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great.* Tune your emotional response in times of *persecution* and *falsification* to align with how God sees the matter! Don’t be down! God views you as honorable! Commentator Pink states adroitly, “It is strong proof of human depravity that men’s curses and Christ’s blessings should meet on the same persons.”²

The believer is to *be glad* (*agalliao*), which is an imperative command meaning “to be overjoyed” in response to *persecution*. The KJV better captures this message when it translates *be glad* as *be exceeding glad*. The believer is commanded to respond not with doubt or sorrow over

persecution, but rather to skip and jump with happy excitement! Such actions surrounding your life are indicative that you are building eternal *rewards*.

Reacting maturely to others' negative responses to your godly living should be the norm in your life as illustrated by *the prophets who were before you*. What great company to keep!

V. TWO RESULTING ASSESSMENTS (5:13–14)

A. RESULTING IN PRESERVATION TO SOCIETY

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men” (v. 13).

Salt is an appropriate metaphor in an ancient, non-refrigerated society. *Salt* was applied to meat in order to cure it and keep it from spoiling. In a similar sense, summarily indicative of the believer who lives godly will be his influence for good on others and society. Spirit-filled Christians retard moral and spiritual spoilage by their measured maturity in Christ. Their character, actions, and policies are for the betterment of all in this world in the here and now.

What follows in this passage, *but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again*, is a reiteration and summation of the failure of the previously mentioned “beatitudinal” progression studied. Said another way, if you are not “beatitudinal,” in reality, you are not a pre-server of society.

B. RESULTING IN ILLUMINATION TO SOCIETY

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden” (v. 14).

The second indicator of the believer's spiritual maturity, “beatitudinal” living, can be measured by his luminal output, i.e., how much *light* does he cast on his surroundings? In that *salt* works to preserve behind the scenes, *light* openly illuminates and *cannot be hidden*. Indicative of a “beatitudinal” believer is his conspicuous presence! The believing public servant need be about proclaiming the excellences of Him who called him. States 1 Peter 2:9:

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Illumination of God's ways is normative behavior for Christ's ambassadors. Many more are needed in D.C.!

VI. SUMMARY

I read an article that quoted the Pew Research findings that Congress is composed (since the November 2016 elections) of 91 percent Christians. The article concluded, "Then why aren't things different?" An updated 2023 Pew Research study shows that 88 percent of the current 117th Congress identify as Christian, still a majority.³ While the definition of "Christian" may include many who do not really follow Christ, the point remains, could it be that the believers on the Hill are not living out the progressive order of Jesus' Beatitudes? If believers were, they would be the preservation and illumination of America! The influence of *salt* and *light* are an indication and equal to the "beatitudinal" maturity in the life of the believer. Pray the Holy Spirit will impart the progressive order of "beatitudinal" characteristics in your life so as to maximize your influence on the Hill. The degree to which you are "beatitudinal" is the degree to which you are influential.

1. "A declaration of a specific condition for being blessed or gaining a kind of bliss"
2. Andrew Fuller quoted in Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 39.
3. "Faith on the Hill, the religious composition of the 117th Congress," January 4, 2021, Report, Pew Research Center <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/01/04/faith-on-the-hill-2021/>

Is Studying the Bible All That Important?

In my years of ministry in D.C. and before that in the California State Capitol, I have often heard the following excuses surface regarding Bible study:

“Some people worship the Bible rather than Jesus.”

“Right now in my life, fellowship is more important to me than studying the Bible.”

“Studying doctrine can be divisive, so I’d rather just love Jesus.”

Do any of the following thoughts come to mind as you ponder this subject? Notice I didn’t include “I just don’t have the time.” Elected leaders are all too smart to suggest this because both they and I know that time is a function of priorities—to mention that excuse is to admit Bible study is not a priority.

So, in this week’s study I will attempt to address each of these three excuses, hoping to stir your mind in this regard. I will also explore some practical benefits from a habitual lifetime of study. As a result, you will gain a greater conviction to diligently study the Word of God and develop a habit for a lifetime!

I. INTRODUCTION

In keeping with our occasional studies from the Old Testament (OT) book of Proverbs, this week I would like you to take notice of all that Solomon has to say about the importance of God’s Word.

Each of the aforementioned excuses is sometimes used as a “spiritual” reason why someone refrains from involvement in serious Bible study.

Before addressing each one of these individually, notice what Jesus said in the Great Commission (the last words of instruction spoken by Him to His followers prior to His ascension into heaven) in Matthew 28:19–20:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.”

One of many implications of this passage is God’s expectation that we will know His book, i.e., ***teaching them*** combined with the word ***all***. This point is further underscored by the Apostle Paul in the book of Acts (20:27). Luke records Paul’s interaction with the visiting Ephesian elders, where Paul said to them:

“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”

From these two passages, we get the powerful message that God expects His followers to know His Book—in ***all*** and in ***whole***!

Beloved, it stands to reason that you cannot live by God’s precepts if you don’t know them.

On the other hand, if you choose to obey only a portion of them, you deem yourself to be the final authority and not the Lord whom you claim to serve!

Further, in the Great Commission passage, God calls us to be His ***disciples***. Knowing exactly what the word ***disciple*** means is important. ***Disciple*** is the Greek word *mathetes*, which means “a learner.” Better, *math* (the root of the English word “mathematics”) means, “thought accompanied by endeavor.” Perhaps you can see where I am going with this explanation:

Believers who are intent on spiritual growth must, by definition, be in a state of continual biblical thought accompanied by endeavor.

Better perhaps, I like to think of the Greek word *mathetes* in terms of someone who can calculate. A *disciple* is someone who can calculate the world in which he lives through the lens of Scripture. That is what it means to be a *disciple*, and lest you think you might have to go it alone, God has given believers pastor-teachers to equip the believers in and with the Word of God in order to become wise at calculating all matters in life through Scripture. Ephesians 4:11–12 states this:

And He gave some ... as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

In Scripture *mathetes* is often juxtaposed with *didaskalos*, meaning “teacher.”

A *disciple* then is biblically defined as an endeavoring biblical, calculating thinker who is sitting under at least one God-given *pastor-teacher*. Summarily, posturing ourselves as maturing believers while failing in our dedication to regular Bible study is biblically incongruous. And to the other side of the equation, it is important to add that unfortunately today, many American churches serve up sermons devoid of much in the way of serious Bible study. All that to say, I realize being a *disciple* is not that easy—and rationalizing away serious Bible study per any one of the three aforementioned excuses is impossible.

II. YOU MUST NOT RATIONALIZE AWAY THE WORD OF GOD

Regarding the three common myths about Bible study as stated in the introduction, let us take them on one at a time:

A. “SOME PEOPLE WORSHIP THE BIBLE RATHER THAN JESUS.”

In negation of this spiritualized excuse, notice the inseparability of God from His Word in the following two passages. Psalm 138:2 (KJV) states:

I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.

God and His Word are inseparable in this Psalm. Additionally, the connection between Jesus and the Word and how they are used interchangeably in the first chapter of John's Gospel is evidenced by the interchangeability of the following verses:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (v. 1).

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth (v. 14).

As if those two passages were not convincing enough, Psalm 33:6 credits the Word of God with creation; God literally spoke the universe into existence:

***By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
And by the breath of His mouth all their host.***

But in addition, Colossians 1:16 credits Jesus with creation:

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Many similar passages and deductions could be cited, but suffice it to say that trying to separate Jesus from the Bible and the Bible from Jesus is an attempt to build a false dichotomy relative to worship—a ludicrous and naive position. To worship Jesus is to worship His Bible, and to worship His Bible is to worship Jesus. Second Timothy 3:16 cements the point:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

The Greek word for **Scripture** is *graphe*, meaning “written,” and the Greek word for **inspired** is *theopneustos*, which means “the essence of God.” In this passage, Paul is saying the graphic Word of God is the very essence of God. Therefore, saying a person can love Jesus while ignoring the Bible simply doesn't make sense!

To disregard or discount the Word
is to disregard or discount Jesus.

**B. "RIGHT NOW IN MY LIFE, I THINK FELLOWSHIP
SHOULD BE MORE IMPORTANT TO ME THAN
SERIOUS STUDY OF THE BIBLE."**

I have heard this statement bantered about in the Capitol frequently through the years, and I sometimes wonder who is propagating it. The convolution of the statement begs the question of what true Christian *fellowship* is. Without elaborating in a lengthy citing of passages, Philemon 6 states:

And I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.

Paul is instructing Philemon that true *fellowship*, i.e., one believer with another, is directly related to a person's *knowledge* of his own identity in Christ. This *knowledge* and the basis of its genuineness can only be gained via the diligent study of the Word of God. First John 1:7 states in this regard:

But if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another.

The degree to which we are illuminated by His Word is the degree to which we can achieve genuine *fellowship* with one another. And lastly, Scripture is clear that true *fellowship* can only be achieved between true believers. Note 2 Corinthians 6:14:

What fellowship has light with darkness?

It follows then that *fellowship* groups devoid of authoritative Bible study accomplish little in terms of spiritual maturity in the life of individuals. They can be directly likened to folks who say they want to get in shape but go to the coffee house rather than the gym.

**C. "STUDYING DOCTRINE CAN BE DIVISIVE,
SO I'D RATHER JUST LOVE JESUS."**

This statement is an oxymoron (a combination of contradictory or incongruous words). Why? Because the person who names the name of Jesus is representing some kind of doctrine! Who exactly *is* the One you are mentioning and you say you love? Is He God incarnate? Is He the Lord of the universe? Does He call people to repentance? Is Jesus the only way to God? Notice what Jesus Himself said about divisiveness in Matthew 10:34:

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

Later, in the same chapter and in the same context, Jesus talked about how following Him may even cause division in one’s earthly family:

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (v. 37).

For those who are intent on following Christ, the objective is to proclaim who He is—not to represent Him in such a way that you can garner the greatest personal acceptance. Therefore, to reason that the believer should avoid Bible study because he might hear doctrine that others might disagree with is simply biblically uninformed rationalization. The Jesus of the Bible did not come to teach us about some fuzzy, New-Age, humanistic idea of “love.” To the contrary,

The Jesus of the Scriptures calls men
and women to redemption in Himself
via repentance from sin, and such
confrontation of man’s depravity will
inevitably create divisions among people.

That some could differ doesn’t mean we shouldn’t be loving in our proclamation of Jesus. I am only saying that in proclaiming Jesus, others might be offended. As a matter of fact, Jesus actually said in Matthew 10:22 regarding this subject:

“You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.”

Like doctrine, Jesus too calls people to make decisions about what they believe, which inevitably leads to divided opinions about Him.

These excuses are only three of the many “spiritualized” pretexts people offer for avoiding serious Bible study. Rather than spend any more time examining how some people rationalize away the prominence, priority, and

authority of the Word of God, let's examine from the book of Proverbs what God Himself states about the Word of God. In other words and in context, what did Solomon point out to a future political leader (Rehoboam, his son, to whom most of Proverbs is written) regarding the Word of God? I think you will find the passages to be quite fascinating!

III. YOU MUST REGARD HIGHLY THE WORD OF GOD

He who gives attention to the word will find good,

And blessed is he who trusts in the LORD (Proverbs 16:20).

In contrast to those who rationalize away the Word, notice the term *gives attention* (*sakal*), meaning "to be prudent." *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the English equivalents in this way: "to concern oneself with or take notice of something: have regard or pay attention." The leader who highly regards *the Word will find good*. Many additional proverbs underscore and elaborate on this principle, including the following:

He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul,

But he who is careless of conduct will die (Proverbs 19:16).

One of the repetitive themes of Proverbs is the disciplined, prudent inner life. When you make a habit of *keeping* God's *commandments* and living in reverence of Him, you will generally find a *good* life in this world. Often, if not always, those who lose their soul have a lifelong history of aggressive or passive rebellion toward the precepts of God.

It is important to note from this proverb (and all the others) that Solomon emphasizes to Rehoboam the need to give attention to and regard his inner life. Missing is any kind of parallel emphasis for him to stress governmental programs in his future state leadership. Such a prioritization should be true of you as well. This is how you keep from *dying*, so to speak, while holding office with all its various pressures.

IV. YOU MUST RELY HIGHLY ON THE WORD OF GOD

Every word of God is tested;

He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him (Proverbs 30:5).

Again, in stark contrast to the elected leader who rationalizes away the prominence the Word of God in his life, this passage is a tremendous

confidence builder for the public servant who instead chooses to base his or her political ideology on the Word of God! Why? Because the Word of God is already **tested** (*tsaraph*), meaning “to smell, refine.” To the degree you properly understand the Scriptures, you can rely on them to inform you as to how to vote. The Word of God can smell out an issue for you, refining and directing your thinking. This means you can argue for scriptural positions in public debate and later never find yourself in want for having taken the wrong position! God’s Word, in that it is previously **tested**, can be a wonderful **shield** to your political ideology if you will rely on it! There is peace and **refuge** in holding to biblical positions—peace that is not felt by foolish members of Congress who cast biblically uninformed votes that can end up, and often do end up, severely harming themselves and the country! In a sense,

God has already done much
of your thinking for you.

In support of the notion for leaders to hold to biblically explicit positions on policy matters, Psalm 119:2, 4, and 46 contextually states powerfully and poignantly:

How blessed are those who observe His testimonies.

*You have ordained Your precepts,
That we should keep them diligently.*

*I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings
And shall not be ashamed.*

Therein is the confidence Solomon and David had in holding to the tested Word of God in their public life as state leaders! As a result, they were never ashamed of a position they took! Today’s lawmakers can rest their heads at night when their positions are steeped in the precepts of God’s Holy Word. When you rely on the Word of God as you cast your vote, you will not be ashamed.

V. YOU MUST BE RESTRICTED BY THE WORD OF GOD

Do not add to His words

Or He will reprove you,

And you will be proved a liar (Proverbs 30:6).

It is important not to read into the Word of God in an attempt to justify life decisions or policy positions that are not biblically explicit. Doing so is tantamount to **adding** to the Word of God. Where Scripture is dogmatic, the believer must be dogmatic; where it is more of a compass than a road map, the believer should look to using and incorporating its principles to support policy positions. Reason *from* Scripture versus reading *into* Scripture what you want it to say. Solomon echoes a directive in this proverb that recurs throughout the Bible: God's revelation is not an open matter. Scripture is no longer being written. Note Revelation 22:18–19 in support of this point and application:

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

The point of application is not to play loose with the Scripture in support of policy when Scripture speaks to the contrary or does not speak specifically to an issue. Often, if not explicit, Scripture will provide principles that may serve to support or else deny a policy. And if that is the case, those principles should be cited. But do not attempt to make Scripture state something that it does not. When members parachute in on passages—grossly out of context—while debating on the floor, I often think of this passage from Revelation. In essence, the presenter is **adding** something that is not there to Scripture. There should be—and there are—restrictions to our use of the Word. Don't be flippant with it, lest God **reprove you** for mishandling His book (cf. James 3:1).

VI. THE RESULTS OF OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD

The one who despises the word will be in debt to it,

But the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded

(Proverbs 13:13).

God ***rewards*** those who are students of His book!¹ Ostensibly, in this proverb Solomon is instructing every state leader with contrasting ***truths***: destruction awaits those who ***despise*** God's revelation versus ***rewards*** for those who ***fear*** the Bible. There are ***rewards*** from God inuring to the life of the believer who studies and obeys God's ***Word***. Duane A. Garrett aptly comments on the meaning of this proverb:

Every person desires to see his or her longings fulfilled. In the wisdom of the world, the way to success is through diligent effort. There is truth in this. ... Yet the Bible goes beyond the secular wisdom of relating success to hard work and more fundamentally ties it to the development of a mature, virtuous soul by submission to wise teachers. Diligence is thus the fruit of a soul that has cultivated goodness, and success follows naturally.²

This is a wonderful summary of Proverbs' formula for ***success***. The Psalmist echoed these sentiments when he penned 119:11 and 97:

***Your word I have treasured in my heart,
That I may not sin against You.***

***O how I love your law!
It is my meditation all the day.***

Surely there is ***reward*** for those who make the regular intake of the Word a priority—a priority that is difficult to keep, apart from studying under good, motivational, solid Bible ***teachers*** whom God has given to His people. God has placed them in the world to help you ***meditate*** on His Word! Utilize them!

Athletes do not reach
their potential apart from
coaches nor do believers
apart from Bible teachers.

VII. THE BIBLE IS REVELATION FROM GOD

The repeated internal testimony of the Bible is that it is the written revelation from God to mankind. This is the clear testimony of its writers as Paul and Peter state in the following Scriptures:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Peter 1:20–21).

Thousands of other passages attest to the godly origin of the Bible. “The Bible Is Revelation from God” is a simple truth, yet it is easy to overlook the profundity of what our response and allegiance to that truth should be. Much can be gained from Solomon’s insights on this specific subject. In these passages from Proverbs, the wisest human who ever lived is attempting to pass along his own awed and humble view of Scripture to his son who would become king. Given this close context to your life, don’t rationalize or spiritualize away the prominent position Scripture must have continually in and throughout your life. May the study of these Scriptures inspire you to a lifetime of reading and studying God’s Word.

1. At capmin.org, see the Bible study, “Benefits of Consistent Bible Study,” published December 11, 2023.
2. Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1993), 14:137.

How to Effect Change and Growth in Your Life

What you are about to read is not anything that you will find in typical, secular, pump-you-up, self-help seminars.

It has nothing to do with what personal growth gurus hawk in countless audio series, their volumes of books, or in fiery seminars after they roll into town with much fanfare and bluster to teach you how to live in the moment, aim for the stars, and grow into your greatest and most powerful self.

What you are about to read has nothing to do with any of that panoply. What follows instead is the biblical formula for growth, which stands in dire and stark contrast to the world's notions of how to achieve that.

Unlike the idealistic commodities that are bought and sold today, the biblical formula for growth is not pleasant, nor is it ego-gratifying. Rather, it's hard work and has everything to do with coming to the end of yourself and understanding the critical need for *repentance* and turning from sin.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Bible has much to say about how a person can change; as a matter of fact, the Scriptures reveal that those who are in Christ will change for the better.¹ But how exactly does this change happen? Or better, how is the believer—to use the appropriate theological term—sanctified? In addition to all the secular theories regarding achieving personal growth and change for the better, at least four major historical/theological views are proffered

in answer to this question. But as you will see, only one of them has a solid biblical basis. Very briefly they are as follows:

A. TOTAL PERFECTIONISM

The first, known as Christian Perfectionism, stems from Charles Wesley, the historic English leader of the Methodist movement. Herein, a supposed second work of grace, post-salvation, catapults the believer into a state of “sinlessness.” Another name for this flawed view is “entire sanctification.” The believer may make mistakes, but supposedly he is no longer sinning. Spiritual growth is indicated by increasing good works. Simply put, in a real-world sense, Wesleyan Perfectionism is problematic in that the perfect person’s spouse only needs to be asked if he or she is perfect. Practical reality suggests that total sanctification/perfectionism is not achieved by any believer in this life, nor is such a view supported by Scripture.

B. PASSIVE GROWTH

A second widely held view of sanctification is the Keswick (pronounced “Keh-zuhk”) school of thinking. In this understanding, believers passively grow in their relationship to Christ. A believer needs only “surrender” to grow spiritually. Just keep drinking in the Bible, and you will mature. “Let go and let God” is an appropriate summary of this way of thinking. But as will be seen in the following two views, God’s grace enables human responsibility in the sanctification process. There is a biblical expectation for the enactment of human volition in the achievement of spiritual growth.

C. PENANCE AND REMORSE

This third position, which is commonly practiced in cults, is known as *penance*. Whereas the previous two positions are practiced in error among those with a biblical soteriology (i.e., a proper understanding of what the Bible teaches about true saving faith), *penance* is the idea of imposing something as a punishment for sin. In other words, penance is a human attempt to balance the scales. In the world of penance-seekers, neither justification (one’s salvation) nor sanctification (one’s spiritual growth) is imputed from God via His enablement (as per the truths of 1 John 1:9 and many other

passages). Rather, a person's salvation and his sanctification are earned via self-effort or personal merit. In this way of thinking, it follows that if a person is saved by personal merit then he grows by personal merit. An individual is sanctified by conducting offsetting good deeds, works or prayers in order to propitiate (satisfy) his wrongdoings; in other words, he is "guilted" into changing. The problem is, likened to the former positions, there is no substantiated biblical basis for such a belief or practice.

D. PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

The fourth position on sanctification is the view supported by Scripture: Progressive Sanctification. The Bible repeatedly reveals that a lifelong cycle of *repentance* and renewal progresses a believer toward Christlikeness, and this process of growth will only be complete when the believer goes home to be with the Lord. There is no perfection this side of heaven. Growth and change are accomplished through the active participation and discipline of the believer whom the Holy Spirit prompts and energizes for the task. Philippians 2:12–13 and many other passages support this summation on sanctification:

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Notice this passage closely. *Work out* (the Greek word *katergazomai*) is not referring to salvation by works² (cf. Romans 3:21–24; Ephesians 2:8, 9; John 1:12; Romans 10:9) but rather is descriptive of the responsibility that the believer need possess after being saved by God's grace. And the fact that *God is at work in you* evidences the causal agent (God) who engenders and empowers the *working out* of sanctification in the life of the believer after being saved. Other passages that support the biblical teaching of Progressive Sanctification include Philippians 3:13, 14; Romans 6:19; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, 15:58; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 6:7–9; Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 3:1–17; Hebrews 6:10–11, 12:1–2; and 2 Peter 1:5–11. Each passage underscores Progressive Sanctification, wherein *God who is at work in you* is the One who prompts the believer, and his responsibility is to *work*, i.e., taking personal responsibility to achieve spiritual growth as God directs in his heart.

II. SCRIPTURAL BASICS RELATED TO SANCTIFICATION

The aforementioned listing of Bible passages are all worth noting and pondering before moving further along in the development of this study (but are in accumulation, too lengthy to include in a study of this length). In summary, human responsibility, i.e., *working* at your sanctification is catalytic to change. But more specifically, how? What follows are the four fundamental scriptural basics related to Sanctification.

A. ALL CHANGES SHOULD ALIGN WITH SCRIPTURE

Since the Bible is inspired by God, it is the basis of all truth. “He is there, and He is not silent,” wrote Francis Schaeffer. In other words, God has not only revealed Himself to man in the advent of His Son Jesus Christ, but also in His Holy Word. Scripture therefore need be the sole epistemological source (that is, the sole grounds for knowledge) as it relates to a person’s faith, practice and changes. Notice Scripture’s internal testimony regarding itself as it relates to change:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Greek construct of this important passage is best translated as follows: “All Scripture is given by inspiration.” One of the specific purposes God *inspired* Scripture is for proper *teaching, reproof, correction and training*; all these words connote change that is informed and guided by scriptural truths. Add to this understanding the following:

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Scripture states of itself that it intends to *perform a work in you*—that is, to change those who believe in it. Accordingly,

Since the Bible is God’s Word to man,
then every change a believer desires to
make should align with His ordinances.

Importantly and to the point in our outline, the Scriptures are the basis for achieving right changes. Second Corinthians 10:5 echoes and summarizes this first point when it says, *taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*.

B. ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER WITH SCRIPTURE IN ORDER TO PRODUCE CHANGE

The second fundamental scriptural basic related to change can be gleaned from 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Paul states, *We urge you, brethren, admonish [noutheteo] the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone*. Change occurs when a believer is confronted by the truths of God. Change results, according to 1 Corinthians 1:18, because God's Word has power—power to change individuals when they are confronted by it:

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Isaiah 55:11 amplifies this same astounding truth:

*“So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”*

It, therefore, follows that the Word of God is the conduit that needs to be utilized in counseling or mentoring (or better, *admonishing*) another to change.³ States Hebrews 4:12 in summary of the importance of the Word to create change, *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword*. God often uses other believers through their friendship or writings to amplify His Word in our lives. Looking for this amplification and being open to it is how God intends to create biblically based change in your life.

C. THE REACTION TO SCRIPTURAL ADMONITION NEED BE REPENTANCE

Building from the first two points relative to scriptural basics on change is how a person responds to being *admonished* by the Word of God. How

you respond to the *admonition* from the Word of God is very important if you are to grow. Pivotal to this understanding is 2 Timothy 2:25, which says:

With gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.

The proper biblical response to the *admonitions* of the Word of God is not “I don’t need to change; I am already perfect,” nor “I’ll just let go and let God” nor “I’ll balance the scales myself.” To the contrary of these aforementioned aberrant views of the sanctification process, this passage reveals that *repentance* (*metanoia*) which means “a change of mind, direction and purpose” is the key to the believer’s growth process. Importantly, Scripture reveals here and elsewhere (cf. Acts 5:31, 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:9,10; Ephesians 2:7) that *repentance* is produced by God’s sovereign grace: *if perhaps God may grant ...* (2 Timothy 2:25). In other words, like the faith to believe in Christ (e.g., Ephesians 2:8–9),

Repentance is also a gift from God!
The person trapped in sin, desiring to
change should therefore cry out in humility,
“God, have mercy on me and grant me
the gift of ***repentance*** from my sin!”

Repentance leads to lasting change; it is the key element in Progressive Sanctification! Underscoring this truth is Jeremiah 13:23. It states that any change apart from God-given *repentance* is futile:

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil.”

Sinners in and of themselves cannot change the essence of their very nature is Jeremiah’s point. Therefore, the only way a believer can achieve lasting change is with God’s help, which is why crying out to Him in brokenness and contrition is the only way to enact change for the better. If you are following me in the development of this study, “How to Effect Change

and Growth in Your Life” has much to do with understanding exactly what biblical **repentance** is—in great detail—since that is pivotal to attaining growth, or sanctification, in the here and now.

D. THE RECURRING PAULINE SOUNDBITE DESCRIBING CHANGE

In Paul’s letters to the Roman, Ephesian, and Colossian churches he often speaks of spiritual growth, i.e., *sanctification* or change in terms of “putting off” and “putting on.” He is saying that to grow spiritually, the believer must put off the old self and put on the new self, which is best capsulized in Ephesians 4:22–24 wherein Paul states:

That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Key to our study and relative to how the believer effectuates change in his life is the idea of *laying aside the old self*, or “putting it off.” And synonymous with “putting off” or *laying aside* is the Greek word for **repentance**. It means “to turn 180°,” to put something off or out of your life that is not pleasing to God.

It follows then that **repentance** or “putting off” is an essential, key element for Christian growth. Given basics related to sanctification and what leads to it, how can we best understand what is characteristic of true **repentance**? What follows may seem a bit “in the weeds” on this subject, but precisely and thoroughly understanding what the Bible means by **repentance** is of utmost importance since it effectuates spiritual growth! It is the starting point of spiritual growth! Accordingly, to fail at understanding this point is to fail at growing spiritually.

What are the biblical indicators
of **repentance**? What is the
difference between human
sorrow and true **repentance**?

Second Corinthians 7:9–11, which is perhaps the best passage in the New Testament that carefully delineates the characteristics of genuine *repentance*, reveals how to best understand that passage.

III. THE CONTEXT OF THE INSTRUCTION ON TRUE REPENTANCE

The following passage delineates, details, and defines the various components of true *repentance*:

I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter (2 Corinthians 7:9–11).

In this portion of the second book of Corinthians, Paul is tracing over the past relationship he has had with the body of believers in Corinth. In brief summary, during his second missionary journey, he spent 18 months personally establishing this church. Sometime after having planted this church, he sent his emissary, Timothy, to Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10, 11). As a result of that, Paul found out that self-styled false apostles now inhabited the assembly, and in their zeal for power, they had castigated Paul and had tried to persuade the congregation to no longer follow his teachings.

When he learned of this mutinous news, Paul immediately departed from Ephesus to visit Corinth. To his deep chagrin, upon his arrival he soon tasted of the bitter fruit of the false teachers, experiencing the *disloyalty* of so many in the flock—a flock he had labored so hard to establish. Accordingly, and reactively, upon his return to Ephesus, he authored what is now commonly referred to as the “Severe Letter” (ref. 2 Corinthians 2:4), sending it to Corinth via his beloved, loyal disciple Titus.

Upon their eventual reconnection, Titus gave a surprisingly warm report to Paul as to the Corinthian church's acceptance of Paul's "Severe Letter." Specifically, many had *repented* of their rebellion against the apostle! Paul was overjoyed to learn of this (as per the text under study herein in 2 Corinthians). In this broad context the words of 2 Corinthians chapter 7 need to be understood. As a result of the mutiny and the congregation's later *repentance* from their disloyal behavior, the Holy Spirit is affording to all *what connotes true repentance in the life of a believer*. Again, perhaps no better passage in the entire Bible can be found than this one in 2 Corinthians 7:9–11 that unveils poignant insights all followers of Christ need to possess relative to the make-up of true *repentance*.

IV. EIGHT ASPECTS OF GENUINE REPENTANCE

True, genuine *repentance* and change, states Paul, is characterized by at least eight attitudes and related actions that are motivated by God's sanctifying presence in the life of the believer.⁴ "Paul expands [on the matter of godly sorrow] into a whole series of acts or dispositions, all of which are inspired by that sorrow, according to God."⁵ These characteristics follow from the words used by Paul in the 2 Corinthian passage.

A. EARNESTNESS (*SPOUDE*)

When a believer expresses *sorrow* in a godly manner, there will be a manifest sense of *earnestness* on his or her behalf to pursue a righteous course eagerly and assertively. There will be, as one commentator puts it, "speed involved in the carrying out of a matter ... a willingness to do good will."⁶ Herein is the initial reaction of genuine *repentance* that is born from above.

The first earmark then, of genuine
repentance is that godly sorrow,
when present and given by God, will
produce a sense of effort and urgency
that is self-motivated from within.

There is a resolution that becomes a reality—an internal motivation, an *earnestness* to “*bear fruit in keeping with repentance*” (Matthew 3:8).

B. VINDICATION (*APOLOGIA*)

States the New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT) in regard to this specific characteristic of *vindication*:

“When they [the unrepentant Corinthian believers] thought of the infamy which sin had brought upon the church, they were quite eager to clear themselves of complicity in it and angry with themselves that they had ever allowed such a thing to be.”⁷

Here is the second mark of true *repentance*, as one commentator puts it: “A desire to clear one’s name of the stigma that accompanies sin, the *repentant* sinner restores the trust and confidence of others by making his genuine *repentance* known.”⁸ There exists an *earnestness* to outwardly rectify, i.e., to *vindicate* that which the sin caused. Conversely,

The falsely *repentant* are characterized
by an attitude that remains on self—far
more concerned about damage to personal
image than promptness to remedy.

This unrepentant person remains preoccupied with himself and the ramifications to self that stem from his actions: his reputation and his standing among peers remains far more important. True *repentance* is always characterized by a God-given *desire* to immediately *vindicate* a *matter*, seeking out others whom they have offended, asking for their forgiveness, and thereby exonerating the wrong done. Put another way, to the genuinely *repentant*, outward self-preservation is less important than God-glorification. When an unction to *vindicate* is missing, a person is really not *repentant*.

C. INDIGNATION (*AGANAKTESIS*)

This same Greek word translated here into English as *indignation* is used elsewhere in several other Gospel narratives and carries the idea of a person's being angered by his own wrongful actions. The Early Church father, Chrysostom, interpreted this portion of the passage to mean that the authentically *repentant* believer will be characterized by a personal *indignation* or anger "because of the scandal he had permitted to continue unchecked in the church and the consequent affront to the holy name of God." Herein is another clear indication of genuine *repentance*: the believer will possess an internal hatred and anger over his sin and a discontentment relative to the *indignity* it has brought on the Lord's name and His church.

In actuality, this self-*indignation* is a blessing from God that can be likened to the internal molten pressure found in a volcano. An authentic self-hatred will brew inside the believer's heart—a self-hatred that can only find its release through total rectification with offended parties.

D. FEAR (*PHOBOS*)

In addition to their internal compunction, the wayward Corinthian believers *feared* the apostolic authority of the one to whom they had been disloyal. They *feared* that he could seek retribution for their sinful ways, in fact, *with a rod* (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:21). A manifest characteristic of true *repentance* means there will not only be a healthy *fear* of God but of those the sin has wronged.

To summarize the first four points:

The genuinely *repentant* are those who
possess an earnestness to vindicate
themselves with an offended party.
This motivation stems from self-*indignation*,
and also present is fear of the retributive
judgment of a holy and righteous God.

E. LONGING (ZELOS)

Zelos is the Greek word from which we derive the English word “jealousy.” At its root, it means “a strong *desire*.” In the context of this passage, it means “a *yearning*” or “a strong *desire* to restore a relationship with someone who has been sinned against. Akin to No. 2 (the *vindication* of self which has in mind the forensic, outward detail given to clearing up the *matter* and situation), the *longing* mentioned here relates more to a vehement *desire* stemming from an internal aspiration of the heart.”⁹ The Corinthian believers, in their genuine *repentance*, manifested an internal *zeal* to honor Paul and his apostolic authority. In addition, they strongly *desired* to repudiate the false intruders in the church. More deeply, they possessed a *yearning* to follow Paul’s example—one of wholehearted devotion to the cause of Christ.

All of these attitudes express a motivated-by-God compunction to do the right thing. Why? John Murray states, “[True] regeneration is the renewing of the heart and mind, and the renewed heart and mind must act according to their nature.”¹⁰ The genuinely *repentant* will always *yearn* and *long* for right relationships with other people. In Romans 12:18 Paul summarily embodies the aforementioned characteristics when he states, *If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*

F. ZEAL (EPIPOTHESIS)

Another attitude that is consistent with true *repentance* is the *zeal* that the Corinthian believers possessed to take up Paul’s defense and stand against the false teachers who had taken over the Corinthian Church. States NICNT, [the Corinthian believers *desired*] “to see the restoration of their former relationship of trust and affection.”¹¹ Their response to Paul’s “Severe Letter” was not one of anger, but one of soberness, acceptance and the realization that they had been disloyal to the apostle. They adopted Paul’s view toward the false teachers, taking up Paul’s cause as their own! God-enabled genuine *repentance* produces this kind of *zeal* to do an about-face on a *matter*. They possessed *zeal* to reaffirm their love and allegiance for him. To the contrary, people who are unrepentant or humanly *sorrowful* in a selfish way will remain disloyal and avoid adopting the contrary opinion regarding an offense. They are characterized by not admitting to any wrongdoing and continue to blame the other party.

G. AVENGING OF WRONG (*EKDIKESIS*)

Perhaps the strongest indication of true *repentance* is the one that is hardest to perform by means other than God-given. In God-empowered *repentance*, the sinner thinks not of protecting himself or herself. The overriding concern is for justice to be done. States one commentator, “he wants to see the sin avenged no matter what it might cost him.”¹² Whether or not Paul was referring in our home passage to the Corinthians’ *avenging of the wrong* relative to their interpersonal relationship, or the Corinthians’ *avenging of wrong* in having allowed the false apostles to lead in the church does not matter relative to this study. In both cases, the now-humble Corinthian believers had a *desire* to seek reconciliation! The all-consuming objective was to put their house in order—no matter what the cost. When this is the believer’s attitude, then spiritual growth is in view:

Such an attitude is indicative of
an earnest desire never to do that
again—and therein is spiritual growth;
progressive sanctification is achieved.

H. INNOCENT IN THE MATTER (*HAGNOS*)

The last characterizing word that Paul chooses under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to choose what typifies true *repentance* is the Corinthians’ *innocence* relative to their past sin. The Greek word here for *innocent* means “clear” or “pure, holy.” He chose this word because the connotation of it has to do with a ritual purity. Without going into greater details or illustrations of early word usage, the idea carried here is that if a procedure is followed, then purity results. And that is exactly why Paul chooses this word last on his list of identifying characteristics. Paul’s word choice displays a beautiful, human illustration of the theology behind 1 John 1:9, which states:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

In Paul's mind, the Corinthian believers were now *innocent of the matter* because they had *confessed* and *repented* of their sin as was more than evident by the seven previous new attitudes and actions indicated in and by this insightful passage. Important also to note is that Paul doesn't rehearse the sin here; he simply calls it *the matter*. Why? In that they had satisfactorily taken care of their sin as evidenced by their actions of *godly sorrow*, in Paul's mind, the past had been made "*as white as snow*" (Isaiah 1:18) because they had borne "*fruit in keeping with repentance*" (Matthew 3:8). In Philippians we learn that Paul practiced *forgetting what lies behind* (Philippians 3:13). Since the past had been made right, it was time to move on—not relive it. Paul is expressing an attitude of exhilaration over the completion of *the matter*. This passage then is a beautiful narrative of the achievement of spiritual growth:

Indicative of real spiritual
growth is this, dehabitation and
rehabitation have been achieved.

V. SUMMARY

These eight characteristics of genuine *repentance* are basic to spiritual growth—correctly and completely turning away from the past and moving toward what is right in the future. Putting off and putting on is a dehabitation and a rehabitation.

A worldly kind of self-centered *sorrow* over sin will manifest few if any of these attitudes characteristic of true, genuine *repentance*. Furthermore, such a response to sin—holding on to it—is stagnating to a believer's spiritual growth. Remember the Greek word for *repentance* means "a change of mind" whereas *lupe*, the Greek word for *worldly sorrow*, means, "pain of body."

Repentance is the fundamental key to a life of change and growth. As such, a believer matures in his Christian life through genuine **repentance**. So then, as God places things on your heart that need to change, pay close attention! Turn from them in **earnestness** and put them behind you forever as you put off and put on and move on toward sanctification in Christ! Amen!

1. Second Corinthians 5:17 states, “*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*”
2. Since salvation is explicitly revealed in Scripture to be a gift to those who will by faith repent and receive Jesus Christ as Lord.
3. Note that the term Nouthetic Counseling comes from this reference. This form of pastoral counseling is totally Bible based and focused solely on Christ, renouncing conventional psychology and psychiatry as humanistic because so often they are opposed to biblical principles.
4. As stated, repentance is actually a gift from God, given along with the ability to believe in Christ, at the day of one’s salvation. Importantly and additionally, this gift of repentance is ongoing in its operation—not only in salvation, but in sanctification (throughout the life of the believer) as inferred by the apostle in this passage under study.
5. James Denney, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Vol. 38, *The Expositor’s Bible* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1894), 256.
6. Moisés Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* [NIDONTT] (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2014).
7. Denney, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Vol. 38, 256.
8. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2006), 1743.
9. Whenever Paul spoke of a good desire in the NT (as he does 13 times), he uses this Greek word that is translated as “longing.” (Conversely, when he speaks of a wrong, lustful desire he uses *epithymia*.)
10. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 106.
11. Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* [NIDONTT].
12. MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*, 1773.

The Preeminence of Love

Without *love* as the center of your faith, your trajectory in office will be less than it could be otherwise. For you to be influential, your spouse, family members, and colleagues must know in their heart of hearts that, first and foremost, you are a *loving* person. Paul states in the opening portions of 1 Corinthians 13, without *love I am nothing*. What then are the defining aspects of *love* that both you and I need to be continually working on and growing in? This study will take a close look at this element to consider.

I. INTRODUCTION

Contextually, chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians is sandwiched between two chapters of instruction by Paul to the Church at Corinth whose members, in their carnality, emphasized the practicing of certain spiritual gifts above the practicing of Christian *love*. Paul instructs them that *love* is preeminent. Again, charity, or *love* is what ties people together.

Of special note are the *love*-defining verbs from verses 4–7 that follow under the second outline point: “The Elements of *Love*.” All 15 are in the present continuous tense “denoting actions and attitudes which have become habitual, ingrained gradually by constant repetition.”¹ Born from this, and worthy of saying again,

These defining characteristics of **love** are worthy of constant review and practice, especially with our spouses, family members, office staff, and professional colleagues; after all, **love** is what ties us together and sustains our relationships.

Given that repetition is the key to learning and ingraining, I like to review this study often. Akin to skills needed for driving a car, these specific, measurable aspects of **love** should become habitual responses in our lives—even though they are more difficult and take much longer to cultivate than the rote habits of driving a car.

Before examining the fundamental aspects germane to objectifying **love**, Paul first emphasizes, and appropriately so, the superiority of **love**. So let's look at that first.

II. THE ESSENTIALITY OF LOVE (1 CORINTHIANS 13:1–3)

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

In these three opening verses, Paul makes three stark comparisons in order to underscore the incomparability of **love**. These introductory remarks exclaim the dominance of **love** as a virtue over all other character traits. It is important, motivational, and insightful to note that the three respective comparisons are related to qualities necessary from a human perspective for one to succeed in the Capitol community! One must possess speaking skills (13:1), leadership (13:2) and self-sacrifice (13:3). As critical as those are,

Love—from God’s perspective—
is of greater importance!

As interesting a comparison as this is, let’s elaborate on each. The first comparison in verse 1 is to a person’s oratory abilities.

A. LOVE OVER ORATION (1 CORINTHIANS 13:1)

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

One’s **love** for others is more important than his speaking abilities. The metaphorical meaning of *becoming a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal* relates to empty philosophizing. Someone who knows and exclaims all the right answers but has no **love** is akin to the Church of Ephesus as described in Revelation 2:1–7. That church had all the right doctrine but had lost their **love** for God.

Proverbs 3:3 summarizes the necessary virtues a public servant needs to possess: both a herald of **truth** and a man or woman of **love**. *Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.* Solomon’s use of the words **neck** and **heart** bespeak of both **love** (**kindness**) and **truth** as being a part of a person’s outward and inward adornment. The meaning of the Hebrew word for **heart** (*leb*) includes the aspects of one’s intellect, emotion and will.

The mature believer
possesses **love** and truth
simultaneously in full measure.

Because the **loving** public servant’s priorities are straight, he or she is neither inwardly nor outwardly *a noisy gong or clanging cymbal*. Even when heralding the **truth** on the floor, such speech should be couched in words of **love**.

How to Become a Marginalized Public Servant

In my 12 years of ministry in the California State Capitol and the 14 years in the U.S. Capitol, I have observed certain members who become marginalized, ineffective, and discarded by others because they double down on **truth** at the expense of **love**. I beg you not to follow in their footsteps. It is essential that you are as **loving** as you are **truthful**!

B. LOVE OVER LEADING (13:2)

If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

Interpreting the second verse of chapter 13 to be a statement of the primacy of **love** over leadership is not a stretch. A public servant who knows the Word of God, possesses **faith** and is acutely **knowledgeable** of all the policy issues—visionary leadership for his or her personal and party’s future—but does not possess a genuine, heartfelt **love** for people amounts to **nothing**, the Scripture states emphatically. The phrase **so as to remove mountains** is Pauline hyperbole² (also seen in verse 7) and intended to emphasize the conveyable meaning “to make what seems impossible possible.”³ You may already be a great leader or aspire to be one in American government—a man or woman of great **faith** who may be able to achieve what others deem impossible—but never forget that **loving** people is more important. Especially **love** those who have nothing to do with helping you to accomplish your leadership objectives. Don’t kid yourself into thinking that people don’t take notice of self-centeredness.

C. LOVE OVER SELF-SACRIFICE (13:3)

And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Most assuredly, a person who gives sacrificially of time, talent, and treasure is to be exalted above the those who do not. But in comparison to *love*, sacrificial qualities are of lesser significance. In fact, a life of personal sacrifice for whatever objectives wanes in comparison to a life of *loving* others. The individual who lacks *love* is woefully deficient.

**“*Love* is the indispensable
addition which alone gives worth
to all other Christian gifts.”⁴**

Lord, help us to get this—to work on being more loving!

Life in the Capitol, in the community, or in the home without *love* is *nothing* (*oudeis*), which means “nothing at all.” How are you doing as a preeminently *loving* person—a *lover* of people and especially your spouse if you are married?

What follows the essentiality of *love* in the inspired mind of the Apostle Paul are the biblically-objective indications of *love*, and they should help to answer the question “Am I a *loving* person?” The biblical objective supersedes analyzing subjective feelings that may or may not accurately reflect one’s real *love* quotient.

III. THE ELEMENTS OF LOVE (1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7)

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

After first stating for openers what *love* is—*love is patient* and *kind*—Paul then describes the characteristic elements of *love’s* non-existence. The following seven descriptors on this inspired-by-God passage list what *love is not*. Sometimes the best way to describe something is to state what it’s not.

After briefly examining and defining all of these virtues in 1 Corinthians 13, I want to review Colossians 3:12–14 for additional insights relative to the emotional aspects of *love* in order to round out the study because *love* is emotive as well. (However, I want to be careful not to get the cart before the horse.)

Keep in mind that emotions, both good
and bad, always stem from a person's
thinking, both proper and improper.

Given our cultural misunderstanding of *love*, it is essential to approach and teach on *love* in this order: 1 Corinthians 13 before Colossians 3.

A. LOVE IS PATIENT (*MAKROTHUMEO*)

Patient literally means “suffers long.” This first characteristic is the ability to be taken advantage of by a person many times and not be upset. The root word means “to persevere.” James uses this same Greek word in describing the attitudinal response of the prophets of old whose words went unheeded by their peers (cf. James 5:8). Program your mind with Philippians 1:6:

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

The *truth* of this passage will help sober you to the fact that God is not through sanctifying the other person—nor is He through sanctifying me! So be *patient*, not condemning nor judgmental! Remember too that since Christ forgave your sins—past, present and future—you must find room in your heart to forgive others who have wronged you. To be longsuffering and *patient* with another person's shortcomings is to be categorically *loving*!

B. LOVE IS KIND (*CHRESTEUOMAI*)

The counterpart to *patience* is *kindness*. The Greek word means “to show oneself mild.” This characteristic willingly forgoes vengeance and gives

gentleness to others, including his or her enemies. The Greek root means “one desires and works for another’s welfare.” **Kindness** embodies the idea of good will, generous responses and actions in contradistinction to holding onto past bad memories and thence being bothered by another in the future, i.e., “He or she gets on my nerves.”

C. LOVE IS NOT JEALOUS (*ZELOO*)

Literally the root means “earnestly desire.” Contextually, **jealousy** is similar to covetousness as it is used in this passage, carrying the idea of envy. **Jealousy** is a desire to have what another possesses as well as fearing that someone will take what you have. To the contrary,

Scripture commands us not to want
what another possesses but rather
to give to others what we possess.

We are to **rejoice with those who rejoice** (Romans 12:15). Choose to be glad for those who have—be they more talented, successful, popular, or beautiful—versus being **jealous** or envious.

Are you the biggest cheerleader of your spouse, children, grandchildren, and colleagues?

D. LOVE DOES NOT BRAG (*PERPEREUOMAI*)

Literally, **brag** means “to talk conceitedly.” The mature in Christ have forgotten about self-importance. They center on others—not self. Proverbs 27:2 states:

***Let another praise you and not your own mouth;
A stranger, and not your own lips.***

Furthermore, be characterized by asking sincere questions of others, i.e., cultivate personal curiosity while talking little about self. Don’t be quick to add your personal stories to every conversation in the crowds in which you circulate. Everyone already gets the point; they don’t need to hear your

long-winded illustration that includes individuals about whom they know nothing. Spending your time asking questions of others and giving short answers when asked a question is far better. *Love does not brag.*

When joining a conversation,
think, “What can I learn from
this person?” versus “What
can I tell them about me?”

E. LOVE IS NOT ARROGANT (*PHUSIOO*)

The word *arrogant* literally means “to puff or blow up.” The missionary, William Carey, who translated the Bible into 34 languages, was once belittled at a banquet. An *arrogant* man said to him, “Mr. Carey, I understand that you were once a shoemaker.”

Carey replied, “I was not a shoemaker, only a shoe repairman!”

Strive to be big-hearted, not big-headed. Make it a habit to deemphasize self in the presence of others. Proverbs 16:18 states:

*Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before stumbling.*

Reciprocally, keep in mind James 4:6:

God ... gives grace to the humble.

F. LOVE DOES NOT ACT UNBECOMINGLY (*ASCHEMONEO*)

This characteristic describes someone who cares so little for those around him that he acts without proper decorum for the occasion; he acts rudely or impolitely and perhaps even in a crude manner.

Work always on showing sensitivity for others. Always display respect for another regardless of the person’s position or ability to assist in your objectives.

G. LOVE DOES NOT SEEK ITS OWN (*ZETEO HEAUTOU*)

Jesus *did not come to be served, but to serve* (Matthew 20:28). Be occupied with others' needs—not yours. Philippians 2:3 states:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.

Herein is boilerplate Christianity! Are the objectives of your spouse or your colleagues *more important* to you than your own?

What will you do by way of time,
talent, and treasure for your spouse
or colleague that will spell out to her
or him in no unmistakable actions that
you cherish her or him above yourself?

One of the measurable aspects of *love* is not seeking your self-interests continually. Coach John Wooden stressed adopting the daily habit of doing a *kind* deed for someone who in no way could recompense the person. That habit is an excellent one because it keeps reminding us: *love does not seek its own*.

H. LOVE IS NOT PROVOKED (*PAROXUNO*)

Literally, *provoke* means “to irritate, arouse to anger.” *Love* guards against being upset, irritated or angered. Remember, *love* is *kind*. People who are intent on having their own way are easily *provoked* when denied what they want.⁵

I. LOVE DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT A WRONG SUFFERED (*LOGIZOMAI*)

The Greek word has the idea of not “ledgering” the *wrongs* someone has done and keeping a log. To the contrary,

An important early church father, Chrysostom, remarked that a wrong done against **love** is like a spark that falls into the sea and is extinguished forever.

The famous saying, “Don’t get mad, get even,” illustrates the opposite idea to Paul’s intent in this passage. If you are a Christian, your response must be to forgive and forget. Do not engender in yourself a memory akin to that of an elephant. Praise God He takes not into consideration our past sin! When a person tightly clasps the virtue of Christ’s forgiveness, he is enabled to forsake the bondage of bitterness. Don’t keep a log; it is not *loving*. Paul, who was more ill-treated than you or I will ever be, declared, *forgetting what lies behind* (Philippians 3:13). Can the same be said of you? Do you instead *press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 3:14)?

J. LOVE DOES NOT REJOICE IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS (*ADIKIA*)

Isaiah warns, *Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil* (5:20). Sacrificing *truth* is not *loving*. The presence of sin in another person should not be applauded. For sure, the biblical concept of **love** is not emotional sentimentality devoid of *truth*.

K. LOVE REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH (*ALETHEIA*)

Love cares that what another believes is *truthful*. Allowing another to be hurt by lies is not *loving*. What an individual believes (and then acts upon) is determinative to personal, familial, and national destinies. Therefore, **love** does not *rejoice* with erroneous thinking.⁶

The following remaining four elements of **love** are stated in a literary device known as hyperbole, i.e., exaggeration in order to make a strong point. (See endnote 2.) The repetition of the phrase *all things* therefore relates to *all things* within the confines of God’s righteousness, will and tolerance.

L. LOVE BEARS ALL THINGS (*STEGO*)

Literally, the word *bears* means “to cover.” *Love covers a multitude of sins* (1 Peter 4:8; cf. Proverbs 10:12).

You can measure your *love* for another
by how quickly you are willing and
apt to forgive and forget, to move
on relative to another’s faults.

God’s nature, and hopefully the believer’s actions, must emulate God’s revealed character in Psalm 103:12:

*As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

Accordingly, in order for us to be as *loving* as Jesus expects us to be requires our being forgiving and forgetful.

M. LOVE BELIEVES ALL THINGS (*PISTEUO*)

Love trusts and is confident, without suspicion or cynicism. Even after past hurts for having trusted, *love* still trusts. Keep taking risks in your relationships! Far better to trust and be hurt again than to end up living life alone and bitter.

N. LOVE HOPES ALL THINGS (*ELPIZO*)

Hope literally means “to anticipate with pleasure.” Jesus did not take Peter’s failure as final. The believer continues to *hope* that sinners will someday turn from their sin and that believers will someday mature in Christlikeness, for to lose *hope* is equivalent to losing *love*. Again, and similar to the virtue of *patience*, Paul said in Philippians 1:6, *I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus*. Remember, as long as God’s grace remains operational in this

world, human failure is never final. People do learn from their mistakes; *hope* for the best in a person relative to his or her future. To carry in you such an optimistic attitude toward others is to be *loving*!

O. LOVE ENDURES ALL THINGS (*HUPOMENO*)

This Greek word was used in reference to an army that held its position no matter what the cost! *Love* holds fast to the one it *loves*, standing against all opposition. *Love* remains loyal—even when the object of *love* is less than perfect.

Though these fifteen virtues may
seem somewhat mechanical, they
will however produce the emotions
of *love* that are critically important
to every human being and necessary
to tying us together for the long run!

Keep in mind, theologically speaking, all of these attributes of *love* already and completely exist in the life of the child of God per Colossians 2:10, *and in Him you have been made complete*. The believer is made positionally perfect before God at the point of salvation. How well a person responds to his new God-given, *loving* positional perfection in his everyday practice is a matter of obedience. All that explanation is to say this: no believer can rightfully reason, “I am just not a very *loving* person.” All believers are perfect in their *love*: how obedient you are to your new nature in Christ is the more appropriate self-analysis.

IV. THE EXUBERANCE OF LOVE

Colossians 3:12–14 speaks to the passions of *love*:

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint

against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

In light of all the perfect and sacrificial **love** Jesus Christ has displayed to and for the world (John 3:16), God expects nothing less in response from His followers.

The phrase, **heart of compassion** (*splagchnon oiktirmos*) speaks of the seat of emotions. These elements that follow in this passage are very similar to those previously listed in 1 Corinthians 13 but are listed in Colossians in the context of having a heart of compassion.

God's exuberant, supernatural **love**
is poured out via the indwelling
Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

Again, and importantly, all of the elements of **love** presently exist in the believer's heart (cf. Ephesians 1:3; Colossians 2:10; 2 Peter 1:3–4). It isn't a matter of gaining these attributes; it is a matter of taking ownership and using them!

The essential, elemental, and exuberant aspects of **love**, as listed in 1 Corinthians and Colossians, are all characteristic ingredients of the truly redeemed, and these attributes should naturally flow forth in and from the life of every Spirit-filled follower of Christ!

V. THE ETERNITY OF LOVE

I want to address the closing passages on **love** as found in 1 Corinthians 13.

A. LOVE NEVER FAILS

Love is permanent. It is an attribute of God, which means it never withers or decays. It is not as if **love** is important to one generation and not to another.

The believer should view this permanence of *love* as a communicable attribute from God. *Love* is to be present and active in the life of every believer at all times and in every generation. Likened to Jesus we need to possess eternal, unfailing, ever-present *love*! *Agapé love* is part of the believer's very nature!

May these virtues be increasingly unfolding in your life! May you conscientiously and regularly cultivate and develop the habitual traits of Christ's unending *love*!

The 1 Corinthians 13 passages go on to contrast the importance of *love* with the spiritual gifts in the body of Christ (another study with a great deal of complexity).

May God help you to put on the very nature every believer already possesses: the essential, elemental, exuberant and eternal aspects of *love*. Amen!

1. David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, The Bible Speaks Today Series (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 1985). 229–30.
2. In the literary genre of Scripture, as in the best of writing today, various figurative devices are inculcated to communicate both effectively and artfully. These devices would include the use of simile, allegory, ellipsis, metaphor, paradox, irony, euphemisms, etc. In 1 Corinthians 13:2 and 7, Paul uses the figurative device of hyperbole. In ancient times, the people of the Middle East used intensified exaggerated expressions to convey a thought with more force. An additional example would be what the Apostle John states in his Gospel about the life of Christ: "I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written" (21:25). [cf. E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (London: Messrs. Eyre, and Spottiswoode, 1889), 171ff.] Such insights defy a wooden literalistic approach (of which Evangelicals are often falsely accused) to biblical interpretation/hermeneutics.
3. H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 1922–1928, As quoted in C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The Black's New Testament Commentary Series (London: Hendrickson Publishers, 1968), 301.
4. Ibid, 303. This quote in its tightest context relates to the point of chapter 13 in comparison to chapters 12 and 14. The application of the quote is nonetheless an appropriate capstone as used in the placement of these notes.
5. The exception to not being provocative is when a person maligns or contradicts God's Word. Being provoked over such is akin to righteous indignation.
6. Herein biblical Christianity conflicts with Postmodernism in that the Christian faith is based upon perspicuous moral absolutes as explicated in and through propositional *truth*, i.e., infallible and inerrant biblical revelation.

The Essentiality of Knowledge

The Scriptures are replete with verses that emphasize how the believer must be characterized first and foremost by *love*. *Love* is essential and preeminent! A close second to *love* is the believer's lifetime pursuit of *knowledge*. In fact, Proverbs calls those who are lacking in *knowledge* *simpletons*, whereas those who have *knowledge* are called *wise*.

A public servant can be neither unloving nor a *simpleton* if he or she wants to be a good witness for Christ, as well as be effective in office. This study will seek to develop and further enhance the importance of the pursuit of *knowledge* in the life of the believer.

I. INTRODUCTION

The primacy of *love* over *knowledge* is underscored in 1 Corinthians 13:1, wherein the great apostle states, *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal*. Elsewhere, in 1 Corinthians 8:1 (NKJV), Paul concludes similarly. In comparing *knowledge* to *love*, he states *knowledge puffs up, but love edifies*. For sure, *knowledge* as a personal pursuit should take a back seat to the priority of *love*. *Loving* our Savior and *loving* others must be the primary pursuits of the believer's life. But having stated that rationale, we cannot conclude that to be in a constant pursuit of *knowledge* deems a person to be *unloving*.

II. THE FALSE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE

An important clarification is in order relative to the tension between *love* and *knowledge*: in stating the preeminence of *love* over *knowledge*, to assert that someone who is *knowledgeable* and in the pursuit of *knowledge* is therefore somehow less than *loving* is improper. To diminish the importance of *knowledge* relative to spiritual maturity in favor of only being *loving* is to do a public servant a great disservice.

In fact, I was recently with someone who said he thought that one of America's greatest theologically conservative seminaries was more of a "cemetery" than a "seminary." Such thinking serves to make the point that this tragic mindset is ever-increasing in American Christianity today. To illustrate this point metaphorically,

Can you say that someone who eats
an enormous breakfast each morning
is an overeater when he is preparing
to compete in the Tour de France?

In a spiritual sense, the mental preparedness, the gaining of *knowledge*, is quite essential for any important kingdom assignment, such as serving Christ in city, county, state, or national government. In fact, nutrition is a prerequisite for performing with excellence. So don't be misled by those who would have you diminish your pursuit of *knowledge*, especially *knowledge* of God's ways per His Word! The believer in office, or any citizen for that matter, can be both *knowledgeable* and *loving* at the same time. Those who pursue *knowledge* are not necessarily *unloving*; to say otherwise is to propagate a false dichotomy.

III. THE UNDERLYING MOTIVES OF GAINING KNOWLEDGE

The appropriateness or otherwise sinfulness of the pursuit of *knowledge* depends largely on motives. As previously stated from 1 Corinthians 8:1, *knowledge* can *puff up*, meaning it can be the pursuit of a proud heart in

order to appear superior. However, as stated in the previous point, *knowledge* can be equivalent to preparedness.

In the book of Proverbs, the word *knowledge* appears 40 times and is always related to and descriptive of a *wise* person.

Proverbs 1:22 states in this regard:

*“How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded?
And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing
And fools hate knowledge?”*

In Proverbs 1:28–29, *knowledge* is directly related to finding God:

*“Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
They will seek me diligently but they will not find me,
Because they hated knowledge
And did not choose the fear of the LORD.”*

These passages are but two of the many that characterize the pursuit of *knowledge* in a positive light. Accordingly, the underlying motive for gaining *knowledge* is often a determinative factor as to whether it is a holy pursuit. If we possess the right spirit of glorifying God, building His kingdom, winning the lost to Christ, and being a preserver and illuminator in culture, then our quest for *knowledge* is undoubtedly a wonderful pursuit that is both God-honoring and God-blessed!

IV. SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS DEPENDENT ON KNOWLEDGE

Perhaps the most powerful way to illustrate the point being made here—that the Bible teaches that our faith in Christ must be cognitive as well as *loving*—is to examine the three biblically identified stages of the believer’s spiritual growth as listed in 1 John 2:12–14. What is contained in this passage illustrates the proposition that *knowledge* is extremely important to the Christian’s life and growth in Christ! In fact, without the pursuit

of biblical *knowledge*, there will be no maturation in Christ. Carefully observe how each of the following stages of spiritual growth is dependent on *knowledge*:

A. SUMMARY OVERVIEW OF 1 JOHN 2:12–14

¹²I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. ¹⁴I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

The following chart is an attempt to sort out the twice repeated, three distinct stages of spiritual maturity as delineated by the Apostle John in this passage. Observe what titles John places on each: *little children*, *fathers*, and *young men*. Think of John's communication style here to be similar to someone's painting a wall with two separate coats in order to obtain the desired outcome:

In John's biblical analogy of physical maturation to spiritual maturation, the Greek words used to describe the believers' stages of growth are not intended to relate to their physical age, but rather to their spiritual maturity. Again, keep in mind the overall point for delving into this exercise: each of these stages of spiritual growth relates to and are dependent on *knowledge*! With this foundation in mind, look more closely at each of the three stages:

GROWTH STAGE AND VERSE	CHARACTERIZED BY
Child (vv. 12–13)	Sins forgiven; You know the Father
Young Man (vv. 13–14)	Overcome the Evil One; You are strong The Word of God abides in you
Father (vv. 13–14)	You know Him who has been from the beginning

B. LITTLE CHILDREN OF THE FAITH

Little children are saved, but they only possess a rudimentary understanding of God: “Jesus *loves* me! This I *know*, for the Bible tells me so!” accurately depicts their very minimalistic level of understanding of salvation. Children possess limited biblical *knowledge*. Nonetheless, they possess enough biblical *knowledge* to be genuinely saved as compared to an unsaved person who does not possess this saving *knowledge*.

Satan can and often does wreak havoc
on *little children* because they have
little *knowledge* of his wiles.

Christian cults often target *little children* in the faith because they are tenderhearted toward spiritual matters but very naive. Ephesians 4:14 is descriptive and admonishing to infant believers:

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.

Spiritual babes, this passage states, should not remain in such a state of infancy. They should not remain naive or unknowledgeable of the *winds, trickery*, and *craftiness* that have the potential to make them highly unstable as newborn babes in Christ. In opposition to those who say that *knowledge* in the life of the believer is unimportant or of lesser importance, this passage points to the opposite: Scripture says *knowledge* is absolutely critical to spiritual maturity!

C. YOUNG MEN OF THE FAITH

Young men are those who, while not yet having walked with God over a longer period of time and gotten to *know Him* (as is the case with a *father* who has experienced the truths of His Word firsthand), do *know* sound doctrine (in contrast to the *child* of the faith). *Young men* are strong against sin and error because *the word of God abides in* them, which is

synonymous with having *knowledge* of His Word. Per the descriptors given of a *young man* in this passage, this believer, via his *knowledge*, has *overcome* the deceitfulness of the *evil one*.

D. FATHER OF THE FAITH

The *father* of the faith is the one John depicts as the most spiritually mature; he has a deep, abiding *knowledge* of the eternal God. John twice states that he *knows Him*. This descriptor is commensurate with Philippians 3:10, wherein the Apostle Paul states regarding himself (as a *father* of the faith), *that I may know Him* Accordingly, the following is true:

The height of spiritual maturity is to
know God in His fullness via His Word,
as well as the firsthand *knowledge*
of having personally experienced the
truths of His Word in our lives.

V. SUMMARY OF THE THREE STAGES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

All three of the aforementioned stages of spiritual growth are related to commensurate *knowledge*. The point again, that which makes this passage worth mentioning at length, is that one can only become a *father* in the faith and have profound intimacy with God by first becoming a believer, who herein is termed a *little child* in the faith. The *little child* then grows to become a *young man* by being *strong in the Word*, which implies obtaining *knowledge*. From this vantage point he becomes a *father in the faith*. Proverbs 22:17 is a fitting summation: *apply your mind to my knowledge*.

VI. CONCLUSION

Herein lies the biblical case for the noble pursuit of *knowledge*: in a nutshell, *knowledge* is tantamount to spiritual maturation and God's glorification!

Biblical and vocational **knowledge** is extremely important, foundational, and critical in the life of every believer and especially those who serve in leadership. Proverbs 3:3 states very fittingly that both **knowledge** and **love** are essential to the life of the believer:

***Do not let kindness and truth leave you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart.***

Accordingly and importantly relative to spiritual growth, don't let anyone lead you into thinking that the Christian life does not include a hearty pursuit of **knowledge**—as if the pursuit of mastering God's Word is less than spiritual. No!

PART II

SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY

Understanding Epistemological Presuppositions

Epistemology is “the division of philosophy that investigates the nature and origin of knowledge” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*). I like what *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* adds in the formation of a working definition: “The study of the method and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity.” It is extremely important to take the time to consider the limitations or non-limitations, the validity or invalidity of a thinker’s sources of knowledge and what it is he deems authoritative.

The study of epistemology uncovers what an individual relies on and what informs his thinking as to what’s right and wrong. Are his presuppositions valid? As we get older we subconsciously rely on our ingrained epistemological habits. Wise are the individuals who can discern not only their own, but another’s epistemological presuppositions when analyzing something. Wise is the citizen who can discern a candidate’s epistemological presuppositions before casting his or her ballot. Heightening your awareness and abilities regarding “starting points” is what this Bible study is all about.

I. INTRODUCTION

Epistemology is closely related to Ontology. Whereas Epistemology asks questions about the origins and validity of knowledge, Ontology asks

questions about the nature and origin of being. Both philosophical disciplines attempt to address and study these basic issues regarding life on earth: “Why do I exist and what should inform my beliefs?”

The Christian answers those questions with the presupposition that Scripture is the final authority; the Bible informs his thinking regarding Epistemological and Ontological concerns. On the other hand, the secularist is informed by other sources. Our presuppositions—i.e., what we utilize to formulate our answers in relation to these two disciplines—are as multiple as they are variant. For instance, many people habitually rely on the values they learned in their upbringing to inform their thinking and decisions for today; they consciously or subconsciously rely on their upbringing as the final authority in the decisions they make in living their lives. Others rely on their current experiences and conditions, i.e., the presenting situation; still others are guided by the ideology of their teachers and professors who taught them, or the books they have read.

Therefore, wise is the individual who can identify not only another’s presuppositions in life (think of a presupposition as an assumption made in advance) but his own! What informs his thinking? What determines his actions?

To think through things with
a curiosity and investigative
quest and to understand their
epistemological basis is to be
both discerning and wise.

What informs that belief or action? The wisdom to ask these questions and answer them accurately is critically important, especially where the future course of a nation is determined. To live and think with epistemological discernment is the sheer opposite of what the Book of Proverbs characterizes as a simpleton. Discipline yourself to be a deep and discerning thinker!

II. CONTRASTING VALID AND INVALID PRESUPPOSITIONS

The growing Christian is conscientiously *putting off* and *putting on*. He is leaving behind invalid and limited epistemological presuppositions and in their place he is reprogramming worldly thinking with a biblical epistemology. Note this in Ephesians 4:22–25:

[I]n reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you.

This internal growth process is synonymous with what Paul tells the otherwise worldly believers in Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 10:5 the Apostle states:

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

This passage is in the same context of Paul's earlier pronouncements regarding the fallacy of human reasoning apart from divine revelation (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18–25, Job 5:13, and Psalm 94:11). The word *speculations* carries with it the idea of the world's ways of reasoning, its philosophies and its false religions. All of these bombardments are attempts by the evil one to shelter the seeker of *truth* from the witness of his conscience and the ever-beaconing call of the Gospel of Christ. In summary, it is normative behavior, and the full-on expectation of God that His called-out representatives hone in exclusively on a biblical epistemology, forsaking all other presuppositions of *truth*. Every way of thinking must be brought *captive to the obedience of Christ*.

A. THE ROLE OF FAITH IN PRESUPPOSITIONS

It is *by faith* that all hold authoritative their beginning points of reasoning—or presuppositions regarding what is right and wrong. In respect to the aforementioned, one assumes *by faith* the correctness and authority of his parental, experiential, professorial, authorial, or revelational epistemology. This is an important distinction to make up front because in the

illustrations that follow, non-believers will often state (in a game of one-up-manship) that the faith-based beginning point of Christians is not the case with them.

B. TRUTH FROM THE INSIDE

Now let's go a step further. Two additional epistemological starting points that may be a bit more difficult to understand are called Rationalism and Empiricism. Rationalism begins with reasoning—internally reasoning outwardly from the human mind by the use of deduction and logic. Empiricism calls on man's senses to gather knowledge and information which in turn is processed in the human mind and is utilized as the basis for determining what is right and wrong. What they have in common is the assumption (*by faith*, I might add) that the human mind—all by itself—can be relied upon to discern **truth** from falsehood. This is a huge presupposition! In contradistinction, the Christian believes:

The origin of **truth** is outside of the
human mind. It is found in God's
revelation to man: The Bible.

The presupposition of the believer is that the human mind is biased toward sin and given to irrationality and partiality due to the fall of man in Genesis 3. In that the fall impaired man's abilities to think **truthfully** at all times (theologically this is called *the noetic effect of sin*), the human mind is not a trustworthy source of certitude. To hold to an epistemology that assumes right and wrong, that moral **truth** can be determined by the use of one's sensory perceptions, is to work in a contaminated laboratory. The Bible says we cannot trust ourselves to come up with the right answers. In other words, absolute **truth**, what is right and what is wrong, cannot be derived consistently and accurately from a secular humanist epistemology. In fact, the closer the matter being reasoned out is related to moral **truth**, the more biased the fallen human mind becomes.

C. TRUTH FROM THE OUTSIDE

The testimony of Scripture is this: *truth* must be derived from an external epistemological source untainted by fallen and defective human reasoning. The fallen sin nature of man is the reason why God had to reveal Himself to man outside of man. Both Jesus Christ and the Scriptures are testimony to that. God has revealed His plan to us not only through His incarnate Son, but through the external, objective written source that is untainted by sin called the Bible. In this way He purely communicates the message of redemption and objectively conveys *truth* throughout the course of time.

It follows then that the degree to which man studies God's revelation is the degree to which he possesses the certitude of *truth*, right thinking, and a proper ontological understanding of life's purpose.

Rejected by the unregenerate, and embraced by the believer, the Bible is the only reliable and certain epistemology in the universe; all other sources are tainted to some degree by the bias of endemic sin. Furthermore, to differ with this evaluation is to exalt one's opinions over and above the authoritative teachings of the Bible. Of course, self-authority is the popular trend, and one does not have to look very far to see it playing out in American culture.

One example of secularists'
epistemological hubris is the ardent
reaction to Dan Cathy's (Chick-fil-A)
statement regarding God's
definition of marriage as being
between a man and a woman.

Secularists loudly assert that their latest cause du jour is morally superior to biblical authority, saying in essence, "We have a better understanding of marriage than God does." The problem is this: unbelievers whose reasoning flies in the face of divine revelation confront the daunting task of proving their beliefs have a stronger, more reliable basis than the Word of God. What authority or basis—what is the presupposition that informs their opinion? Is it not subjective?

D. TRUTH PERSONIFIED

We have seen that *truth* comes from an external, untainted source: Notice what Jesus adds to this understanding in John 14:6:

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

The Scriptures not only proclaim that the certitude of absolute, authoritative *truth* is outside of fallen man, but that Jesus, Himself, the second member of the Trinity, is the personification of *truth*. In other words, since one of the attributes of God is *truth*, one must accept God to know the *truth*; therefore, to reject God is to reject *truth*.

E. CIRCULAR REASONING

Under the first point of this outline, I mentioned that starting points for any and all of man’s bases of authority are held by faith. That means that every epistemological argument is circular in nature. The fact that the Christian uses the Bible to uphold his premise—that the Bible is God’s Word—is no different than the evolutionist utilizing fossil evidence in an attempt to support his world view. Whereas the theory is informed by the source, the theory also informs the source. Why, then, should one understand the Christian’s epistemology to be superior? It is for this reason:

In direct contrast to Christianity’s theistic *intervention* is humanistic *invention*. Whereas the former is imported from the *outside*, the latter is manufactured from *within*. This stark difference must be emphasized and underscored by the theistic defender (the Christian apologist). Put another way, by way of cogent argumentation, unbelievers need to realize the absurdity of their epistemology—theirs is a belief informed by *internal estimation*, whereas ours is a belief informed by *external revelation*. Christian epistemology is informed by the *infallible* mind of God, whereas Humanism is informed by the *fallible* mind of man. For this reason, the believer’s by-faith starting point, his presupposition, is superior. In essence, it’s not all about me, it’s all about God.

III. ILLUSTRATING VALID AND INVALID PRESUPPOSITIONS

In order to create a better working understanding of the aforementioned, several narrative illustrations are in order.

A. DONAHUE AND MOHLER

Years ago, Dr. Albert Mohler debated Phil Donahue on the latter's television program. Dr. Mohler is the dean of a leading Evangelical seminary. Donahue pressed Mohler regarding the justice of a Nazi murdering a Jew, the Jew's going to Hell and the Nazi's remaining in possession of the ability to possibly obtain Christian salvation. Rather than allow Donahue's reasoning to place Mohler on the defensive, in my humble opinion Mohler should have challenged Donahue regarding his epistemological basis for his stated assumption that murder was wrong in the first place! What basis of authority did Donahue possess for assuming that murder was wrong in the formation of his question? The point being that Donahue borrowed from Mohler's scriptural presuppositions in formulating his charge of theistic injustice (as though God were not fair—arrogantly implying that he was more fair-minded than the God of the Bible). Had I been in Mohler's position (and without all the pressure of live TV), I would have said, "It's obvious from your statement that you believe murder to be wrong. That is certainly my position, but what is your basis of authority to conclude that murder is wrong?" Donahue was clearly borrowing principles from Mohler's playbook without attribution, while simultaneously discounting the veracity of the author of the Book! Donahue can't have it both ways. Such hypocrisy should have been brought to the surface.

Properly and lovingly interrogated, Donahue would have to state that he believed murder was wrong based on his own thinking. (The Humanist will typically attempt to counter this conclusion with "everyone thinks murder is wrong, therefore it is wrong," which can be summarized as an *argument from convention*.) The problem with postulating an argument from convention is that not everyone believes murder is wrong: witness Saddam Hussein and, of course, Adolph Hitler—they both headed up conventions of people who thought similarly. So then what's Donahue's basis of authority other than self-opinion for thinking he is right?

B. SUMMARIZING DONAHUE AND MOHLER

Apart from the Scriptures, Donahue possessed no moral authority other than his personal opinion to wage his attack on Mohler. Mohler could have carried the day had he stated that Donahue's morality was a matter of his own interpretation to begin with. Unless a man borrows from the

presupposition of Scripture's teaching, i.e., in this case, *thou shall not kill*, he can only say that Hitler was wrong to murder the Jews based on a personal opinion. Conversely, the believer can authoritatively and congruently proclaim murder is wrong based upon an objective source outside of himself that is applicable to all, not just himself. For the unbeliever to remain congruent he must say, "I believe murder to be wrong, but it may not be wrong to you, so I cannot tell you to not murder someone."

In summary of this illustration, developing and utilizing epistemological discernment will enable you to wage your battles further upstream where guns aren't loaded, and opponents are the least fortified and equipped to defend themselves.

It's not your word against mine:
it's your thinking versus God's.

The believer is said to be God's *ambassador* (2 Corinthians 5:20). To the degree believers represent the Book, they speak with the authority of God. Apologist Greg Bahnsen summarizes leading Reformed apologist Van Til's epistemological genius when he states, "[Unbelievers] face the challenge of justifying [their source of knowledge] with good reason."¹ The unbeliever is his only source for concluding what is right and wrong and his opinions are thus devoid of any authority other than themselves and not enforceable on anyone outside of themselves. In fact, many an epistemology "is informed by an ethical hostility toward God."² When considering a bill in subcommittee or voting, take this into account.

Is this bill or the candidate's viewpoint
rooted in Scriptural *truth* and principle—
or is it based on what someone
subjectively thinks is right or wrong?

What is the underlying epistemology related to the presenting matter? That is the question! If you develop a smell for this, you will be wiser in the days and years ahead.

IV. SUMMARY

In subscribing to an epistemology based on outside revelation, I am always excited to get to the point in a discussion with a nonbeliever where I can ask the philosophical haymaker question, “So who should I believe—your opinion or that of the Bible?” This is the essence of epistemological authority. And then it is always good to lovingly and kindly follow up with the comment, “Something to think about, isn’t it?”

The believer does the unbeliever a great service in helping him to clearly understand that his basis of authority is self and self only. It is this sobering exercise that can bring a person toward repentance from arrogant pride and lead him toward faith in Christ. Paul had this same thought in mind when he wrote to the Corinthian believers in 1 Corinthians 2:14:

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him.

Why? In John 3:19, Jesus says:

“[M]en loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.”

Jesus goes on to say in the next verse that the reason unbelievers do not come to the light is that they do not want their sin to be exposed. Probing someone’s epistemology can, hopefully, help him begin to see the foolishness revealed by his lack of any objective basis for what he believes. Romans 1:22 states in this regard:

Professing to be wise, they became fools.

Humility is a necessary (God-given) first step in conversion to Christ, and effective apologetical argumentation can often serve to achieve those ends. Before some piece of legislation gets your support or some candidate gets your vote, will it or they face your challenge of their need to justify the source of their knowledge?

1. *Van Til’s Apologetics* Phillipsburg, New Jersey, P&R Publishing, 1998.
2. *Ibid.*, 157.

Critical: Sound Doctrine When Ministering to Public Servants

The legitimacy of the Christian *faith* rests on the finished work of Christ on our behalf. His conquest over sin is authenticated by His rising from the dead; therefore, the resurrection is the crux of Christianity. In contrast to other major religions of the world—all of which are works-based soteriological systems—it follows that without the resurrection an individual remains in his or her sin, unacceptable to a holy, righteous God. In our study I want to concentrate on this biblical understanding of *faith*—which Scripture refers to as *the faith*. Specifically, I want to examine the biblical passages that relate to *the faith* and the fact that believers have been entrusted as His ambassadors with *the faith*.

What are the implications of *the faith* in your life?

I. INTRODUCTION

Many are those who hold to some kind of religious “*faith*.” However, we must all ask this discerning question: “Is my *faith* saving *faith*?” The Bible says directly that not all *faith* is saving *faith* (cf. Matthew 7:21–23). Therefore, the basis of our *faith* is vital. For that reason I do not like the

phrase that is often bandied about in politeness: “He or she is a person of *faith*.” That statement is far too broad and doesn’t really mean anything in terms of accurately telegraphing a person’s eternal destiny. You can be a person of *faith* but not saved! *Faith* is an *indefinite* term. The Bible says the proper object of our *faith* must be what is repeatedly referred to as *the faith*, adding the *definite* article *the*.

II. UNDERSTANDING THE TERM: THE FAITH

If Scripture refers to true and saving *faith* in Jesus Christ as *the faith*, what then does God expect of His followers in terms of their responsibility regarding *the faith*? This study will attempt to answer that question.

Notice in this regard Jude 3 in the NT:

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

Jude’s epistle is best summarized as “The Acts of the Apostates.” Jude was Jesus’ half-brother and converted after the resurrection of Christ (contra. John 7:1–9; Acts 1:14). In his one-chapter NT epistle, he outlines the characteristics of false *faith* (which eventually defects) and calls all believers, even those in the Capitol community, to fight for *the faith*—*the* one and only true *faith*.

This important word combination *the faith* is hugely pregnant with this special meaning as it is used repeatedly throughout the NT. *The faith* means “the whole body of revealed salvation truth contained in the Scriptures.”

Again, *faith* is used in Scripture
with a definite article (the),
not an indefinite one, in order to
emphasize the biblical singularity
of true saving *faith*.

Scripture knows nothing of a religious philosophy that says, “All roads lead to heaven.”

The Greek construction of the last clause of Jude 3 literally reads, *the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints*, emphasizing the finality of God’s revelation of true saving *faith*. The Scriptures reveal the way of true salvation and are not to be added to or deleted from (cf. Revelation 22:18–19). That is to say, *the faith* is inalterable! In contrast, cults always have three common alterations: an additional, supposedly authoritative “revelation” which in turn redefines two inalterable aspects of true saving *faith*: the person and work of Christ.

The term *the faith* appears in the following NT passages:

A. GALATIANS 1:23

But only, they kept hearing, “He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.”

This verse refers to Paul, who after his conversion, resided in Arabia where he received three years of instruction from the Lord. When he returned, the above passage was the response of the churches. Notice they called belief in Christ *the faith*.

B. EPHESIANS 4:5

There is *one Lord, one faith, one baptism*.

This emphatic statement by Paul to the Ephesian Church declares there is only *one* legitimate saving *faith*.

C. EPHESIANS 4:11–13

And He gave some ... as pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man.

Notice the contextual use of *the faith*. The word and idea of unity precedes it. Without doctrinal homogeneity, i.e., a common understanding of what *the faith* consists of, there cannot be visceral unity in the body of Christ. True biblical unity stems from a common belief in *the faith*, (or

as we will see, the synonym “sound doctrine”). Notice further from this passage that unity in *the faith* stems from the under shepherds God has given to His Church, i.e., pastor-teachers. As they teach God’s Word, the followers of Christ are grounded in *the faith*, resulting in a unified body of believers. A failure to teach the emphatic singularity of genuine, saving *faith* only leads to doctrinal confusion and division and subsequent disunity of the body.

D. PHILIPPIANS 1:27

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

In this passage *the faith* and *the gospel* are synonymous terms with a singular, definite article and understanding. Note what precedes these synonymous terms in the passage: *striving together* (*sunathleó*), which means, “to labor.” The word connotes a team’s struggling for victory against a common foe. Jude puts this same emphasis with *the faith* in Jude 3 (as previously mentioned). Again, note what it states here:

I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

One Greek word (*epagónizomai*) used in this passage is translated into two English words: *contend earnestly*, which means “an intense contest.” The recurring application is that the believer is to *strive* and *contend* with others who are misleading in order to accurately preserve and convey *the faith* to believers and unbelievers alike. Jude, likened to Paul at the conclusion of 2 Timothy, is writing to refute the false teachers who were misleading many who needed to know the way of true salvation. Accordingly, believers are to wage spiritual war against apostates, i.e., those who preach a counterfeit gospel, which deceives and leads others astray. To cower from this task is to be less than spiritually mature in Christ and to play into the hands of Satan, who is the father of lies, (cf. Revelation 20:1–3).

It is, therefore, critical for ministries among public servants to be careful to teach sound doctrine. Not only are individual spiritual destinies at stake, but so are national policies.

E. 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-2

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars.

Paul's instruction to Timothy, who is pastoring those recovering from false teachers in Ephesus, presents a clear contrast between true saving *faith—the faith*—and the prevalence and reality of the existence of un-saving, false *faith*, i.e., the deceiving false doctrines of salvation propagated by *lying, hypocritical* spiritual leaders. *The later times* refers to the period between the first and Second Coming of Christ (cf. Acts 2:16–17; Hebrews 1:1–2; 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20; 1 John 2:18). Therefore, this passage is descriptive of the prevalence and realities of false *faith* and that such will be common in the age in which we live, which is known as the Church Age.

III. THE BELIEVER'S RESPONSIBILITY TO THE FAITH

First John 2:12–13 is a wonderful passage relative to our self-evaluation of spiritual maturity in regard to ascertaining true saving *faith—the faith*—from false *faith* that deceives and does not save. Notice that such discernment is a determining factor relative to a person's level of spiritual maturity.

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men because you have overcome the evil one.

From the above passage, what does John say are the three biblical levels of spiritual maturity and what characterizes each? Note the answer in the table.

Level of Maturity	Characterized By
Little child	Knows his sins are forgiven
Young man	Has overcome the Evil One
Father	Knows Him

The *little child* in Christ knows his sins are forgiven and that Jesus loves him. However, false doctrine easily deceives him because he has little spiritual discernment. He knows neither the Scriptures nor the singularity of saving *faith*—nor that the *evil one* is out to deceive him.

In fact, this discernment is what differentiates the *young man* from the *child*. The *young man* no longer falls prey to Satan's trickery of false doctrine! He is spiritually perceptive to sound doctrine! Lastly, the *father* is more mature than the *child* and the *young man* because the *father* in *the faith* has both a biblical and experiential understanding of God in his life. My point is that *young men* and *fathers* can discern truth from error; they are wise to Satan's schemes. Babes are not. Accordingly, how do you score your spiritual maturity?

Again, Ephesians 4:5 states there is *one Lord*, and *one faith*. Is not Paul declaring this to the recovering from false doctrine Church at Ephesus in large part to set straight and defend the purity of *the faith* from erroneous *faith*? That is precisely the same purpose in Jude's epistle wherein he calls the Church to *build yourselves up on your most holy faith* (v. 20). *Build* (*epoikodomeó*) literally means, "to build a house."

Could you compete in a congressional election if you hadn't first prepared?

How can you succeed as a believer if you do not prepare yourself with Scriptural truth? Peter adds perspective as he underscores this same idea in his epistle to believers, charging them to *always being ready to make a defense* (1 Peter 3:15). *Defense* (*apologia*) can be translated as “answer.” The English word “apologetics” comes from this Greek word, which means “the branch of theology that deals with the defense and proof of Christianity.” Combined, Jude and Peter charge believers to build themselves up with answers in order to maintain the message of the Gospel that is biblically accurate and salvific to the souls of individuals!

These aforementioned passages—and their sheer volume regarding the importance of sound doctrine—serve to illustrate the necessity of ministries and ministers in the Capitol being about the same!

False worship brought a curse on
Israel in the Old Testament. How
important then is it that ministers
and ministries on the Hill be
characterized by sound doctrine?

It follows that God hates false doctrine and that false teachers who teach a false saving *faith* actually serve to harm not only the spiritual life of individuals but also the health of a nation. Sound doctrine is essential to God blessing our nation! What then are the implications of *the faith* relative to a teacher’s efficacious ministry on the Hill? I see at least three significant points:

A. THE PUBLIC SERVANT MUST KNOW SOUND DOCTRINE

Ephesians 4:14–15 says: *As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming: but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.*

One commentator states well the intent of this passage:

Spiritually immature believers who are not grounded in the knowledge of Christ through God's Word are inclined to uncritically accept every sort of beguiling doctrinal error and fallacious interpretation of Scripture promulgated by deceitful, false teachers in the Church. They must learn discernment.¹

What a superb, powerful quotation! First Thessalonians 5:21–22 echoes this warning to know sound doctrine from false doctrine: *examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.*

Similar to the public servant's scrupulous analysis of every new bill presented in committee, the believer in the Capitol must examine the veracity of every proffered philosophy. How? Colossians 3:16 states:

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another.

The mature-in-Christ public servant is characterized by his or her motive and discipline for studying the Word of God. No longer is he or she dominated by a "What's-in-this-book-for-me?" idea of God's Word, or "What devotional thought might it have for me today?" That is all fine and good, but a personal quest for Scripture must go way beyond that mindset. In order to best do the job of serving our nation, the public servant must possess an attitude of, "How can I learn the Word in order to ascertain truth from error?" (cf. 2 Timothy 2:2). There must be more to our pursuit of Bible study than self-help; we pursue Bible study to gain and maintain sound doctrine.

B. HE MUST BE ABLE TO DISCERN TRUTH FROM ERROR

Here is the second implication of *the faith* to a believer on the Hill. First John 4:1 says:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

This attitude characterized the Christians residing in Berea. Luke cites their craving and discernment regarding God's truth saying:

They received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11).

The word *test* (*dokimazō*) in 1 John 4:1 stems from the world of metallurgy, signifying the discipline of assaying the purity and value of metals. Similarly, believers need to test all doctrinal teachings against the Word of God, possessing a critical eye of approval or rejection in a spirit of love, not self-righteousness. Quickly I might add, critical judgment when based in a genuine love for people is not a negative characteristic. We assay nearly everything in life—from donut shops to marriage partners. What then is wrong with judging Bible teachers and their teachings according to the Scripture? After all, spiritual teachings harbor eternal destinies!

Matthew 24:5 and 11 add still more to our understanding of this matter:

“For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many. ... Many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many.”

The very nature of being misled or deceived is one’s failure to realize it, which stems from an underlying ignorance or naiveté of and concerning the Word of God.

In Acts 20:29 Luke records Paul as having said to the Ephesian elders before their failing encounter with false teachers:

“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.”

Even though Paul warned the Church leaders to “*be on the alert*” and even though he had spent three years building them up in “*the faith*” (v. 31), years later they were still deceived by false doctrine! Subsequent to the takeover by the false teachers, Paul handed Timothy the keys to the Ephesian Church. In 1 Timothy 1:20, we find that Paul had not tolerated these faithless men and had thrown them out! Believers must possess the personal and theological ability to ascertain spiritual truth.

The degree to which Satan is clever and
beguiling is the degree to which believers
need to be wise and discerning.

C. HE MUST BE ABLE TO CONFRONT ERROR

The third implication of *the faith* to the believer in the Capitol means not only that he knows sound doctrine and is able to discern truth from error, but that he is not passive. He is courageous in his confronting of false doctrine. Second Corinthians 10:5 states in this regard:

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Here again this verse reveals the aggressive character that is biblically appropriate in the war against false doctrine. In Hosea 4:6, God said of the spiritual leaders of Israel:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest.

This passage also applies to believers today. God expects His followers to be loyal to Him! He does not look kindly upon believers who take an apathetic or passive view relative to defending *the faith*! Mature followers of Christ are not to be ignorant nor cowardly, sitting passively by in the locker room while Satan's false teachers run the field! In 1 Timothy 1:18 Paul says to Timothy:

This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight.

Paul is charging Timothy to remember he is called of God to be a *fighter* for *the faith*. Every believer is called to protect the purity of true saving *faith*, which is this: for each of us to put our trust in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sin.

In 1 Timothy 6:12 Paul echoes the same directive: *Fight the good fight of faith*. The word *fight* (*agónizomai*) is the root from which the English word *agonize* is derived, which means "to contend perseveringly against opposition and temptation." It refers to the concentration, discipline and extreme effort needed to win. In a larger sense, *the good fight of faith* refers to the spiritual conflict with darkness—a fight in which all mature believers are engaged.

Finally, Paul provides Timothy with capstone insights into successfully entering and winning the battle for *the faith*. Second Timothy 1:13–14 states:

Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

These are two of my favorite verses, and I think they sum up one of the most poignant aspects of leadership in God’s work. *Guard* (*phulax*) means “to protect.” Paul refers to *the faith* as a *trust* of which Timothy is to be a protector. The word *entrusted* is comprised of two roots, *para* “with” and *tithémi* “to put.” Combined they mean “to put with” or a “deposit.”

He calls *the faith* the *treasure*. God has *placed with* us, i.e., *put with* us, a *treasure*, and we are to *guard* it! Herein is a beautiful picture portraying a tremendously serious responsibility. Properly understood this trust means every believer—especially one who is a leader—has a sacred responsibility to be a “protector of the deposit.” That responsibility implies warding off those who attempt to steal *the treasure*.

IV. SUMMARY

Knowing our biblically mandated responsibilities, may we meditate on the gravity and sobering importance of every believer having been *entrusted* with *the faith*! Like all believers, we should crave sound doctrine and possess antennas for error; we must steadfastly guard and protect the purity of *the faith*. Remember it was our Lord who said of Himself, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father but through Me*” (John 14:6). Make no mistake here; every believer has been *entrusted* to protect and convey the singularity of true saving *faith*!

We cannot expect healthy Christians in the
Capitol if we do not first insist on biblically
accurate ministers and ministries!

Failing at this insistence means those who are charged with civil government leadership will be less than spiritually healthy and, therefore, less than effective in leading our great nation. Let us not compromise but insist on only the best Bible teachers and Bible teaching in our midst—if for no other reason than the health of the nation! Amen.

1. John MacArthur, *MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Version* (Thomas Nelson, 2006), 1778.

Hermeneutics: Can You Make the Bible Say What You Want?

How many times have you heard someone respond to your biblically based reasoning with, “Well, that’s a matter of your own interpretation”? How do you respond when someone tries to neutralize your authoritative use of the Bible? How should you respond? Perhaps you’ve even given up using the Bible authoritatively because of this feedback. This study should encourage and help you if that is the case.

At the risk of sounding like a “smarty-pants,” I typically ask a question in a loving response: “So, to what school of biblical interpretation do you subscribe?”

Understanding the five major schools of biblical interpretation is an important study to gain wisdom and better insight into another’s approach to Scripture—and how so often it affects personal beliefs and policy positions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Hermeneutics is the art and science of scriptural interpretation. In my years of ministry, I have discovered that most people do not even realize there are differing schools of biblical interpretation, let alone understand them. In this study I will attempt to educate you on today’s major hermeneutical schools and help you gain a rudimentary understanding of each. After all, how you interpret Scripture shapes your worldview. For public servants,

worldview is crucial because it informs the construct of policy formation! This chapter is therefore foundational to your wisdom quotient and your ability to properly ascertain why people think the way they do.

Hermeneutics determines the methods, techniques, rules and principles that the student of the Bible incorporates in order to arrive at his understanding of the following:

What does the Bible mean by what it says?

The science and art of hermeneutics attempts to answer this vital question. Likened to a proper and improper exegesis of the United States Constitution, there needs to be a learned and practiced discipline to be effective and congruous in discovering what the author of a particular book meant by what he said.

During the Supreme Court nomination process, the words *originalist* and *textualists* are often discussed and defined. Justices who hold to this philosophy of interpreting the U.S. Constitution are disciplined to discover authorial intent relative to what they have written, i.e., understanding what the author meant by what the author said or wrote is the goal of originalists/textualists. In a similar way, Bible interpreters in the same camp are those who ascribe to the Grammatical–Historical–Normative (GHN) school of biblical interpretation. They are intent on discovering what the Bible author meant by what he recorded. This school of biblical interpretation will be the final one explained in this study.

Now add to this explanation our past studies of the book of Proverbs. You may remember that Solomon often categorized people into three general groups when it came to wisdom (or a lack thereof): the simpletons, the scoffers, and the wise. As you study what follows, can you apply those monikers of distinction to the lives of those who subscribe to each of these hermeneutical schools? Keep that thought in mind as you work through this study.

The background of the word *hermeneutics* is quite interesting. Hermes was the Greek god who allegedly interpreted the message of the gods to mortals. Lest one think the word or idea of interpretation is a purely secular derivative, the word is used by Christ Himself in Luke 24:27:

Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

In this passage, the English word ***explained*** is the Greek word *hermeneuo* meaning “to interpret.” It comes from the compound term *dihermeneuo*.

Christ, the master of hermeneutics, the greatest interpreter of Old Testament (OT) Scripture, is talking to two disciples on the Emmaus Road. As He interprets from the OT the things concerning Himself, their hearts became enlivened and illuminated because of the Interpreter’s bringing the Scriptures alive to them (Luke 24:32):

They said to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?”

This passage serves to illustrate a profound introductory point. When proper hermeneutics is used sensitively by the Spirit-led believer, likened to Christ, vital life-and policy-changing results can occur in the lives of those with whom he comes into contact—both on the floor and throughout life. Conversely, to misinterpret Scripture is to void it of its self-proclaiming power per Hebrews 4:12:

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Hermeneutics is therefore a very important subject. A person’s hermeneutic will determine his worldview, or conversely, as is often the case with unbelievers’ attempting to do what is right in their own eyes, their worldview will determine their approach/hermeneutic to Scripture.

What follows is an evaluation of the five leading schools of hermeneutics. I will try to simplify and summarize each as best as possible for quick and easy understanding by analyzing each in a similar way: a quick overview, the history, an evaluation, and a summary. Can you identify which hermeneutic someone you may know is incorporating to justify an opinion? This study should aid in your ability to be more discerning. Of the five, I will save the best for last.

II. THE ALLEGORICAL SCHOOL

A. OVERVIEW

The Allegorical school of biblical interpretation regards the literal, grammatical, and historical sense of a passage as a mere starting point for discovering the presumed hidden meaning of the text, which is often thought to be deeper, more profound, and more spiritual. Herein it is believed that beneath the letter or the obvious, lies the real meaning. In his analysis and conclusions regarding this approach to understanding the Bible, A.B. Mickelsen says, "What the original writer [of Scripture] is trying to say is ignored. What the interpreter wants to say becomes the only important factor."¹ He goes on to say, rightfully so, that "Allegorizing is like a fog which at first renders objects indistinct and then finally blots them out altogether."² It is accurate to summarily state that in those who utilize this method of understanding God's Word, "imagination replaces observation."³ The interpreter is reading in his understanding of the passage. Such an approach leads to a much higher degree of subjectivity in understanding God's Word compared to the Grammatical-Historical-Normative discipline of interpretation (number 5 in this outline).

B. HISTORY

Many historic schools are allegorical in nature: Greek, Jewish, Patristic (early church fathers), and Catholic. One leading proponent of allegorical interpretation was Philo (20 B.C. to A.D. 54), who sought to give Scripture charm for unbelieving minds by discarding literal details that to him seemed offensive. He accomplished this intention via allegorizing those texts. Later, Christians applied Philo's principles in their own times. Some Patristic allegorists include Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and even Augustine.

C. EVALUATION

1. It is subjective; each man is a law unto himself.
2. It is rationalistic; the Scriptures are manipulated to suit man's reason.
3. It obscures Scripture by imposing eisegesis⁴ (reading in) in place of exegesis⁵ (determining authorial intent).

D. SUMMARY

Allegorists distort plain passages by reading in meanings which have no valid connection with the obvious, literal sense.

Allegorists deem the interpreter
of Scripture the authority, rather
than the Author of Scripture.

Allegory is *imposition* in place of exposition. Does the Bible really mean what the interpreter *thinks* it says?

III. THE LIBERAL SCHOOL

A. INTRODUCTION

Typically, the person who poses the retort, “But that’s a matter of your own interpretation” subscribes to this interpretive approach.

This view holds that human intellect is adequate to select between what is acceptable and what is erroneous in Scripture. The Theological Liberal approach to Bible interpretation presumes that Scripture can be true only when it harmonizes with man’s reason; final authority is therefore seated in man. Hence, “The final and supreme authority is transferred from God to the throne-room of the human mind.”⁶

Approximately 35 “Christian” denominations subscribe to this hermeneutic. Nationally and internationally The National Council of Churches and The World Council of Churches adhere to this interpretive approach.

B. HISTORY

Systems of men such as Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza, F.C. Baur and the Tubingen School of criticism are responsible for birthing this hermeneutic relatively late in church history. Albert Schweitzer and J. M. Robinson on the quest for the historical Jesus have also fostered this

viewpoint. Many others in early America, such as H. E. Fosdick and other purveyors of the Social Gospel movement bear responsibility as well.

Liberal hermeneutics grew in unison
with the Social Gospel movement,
aka Theological Liberalism.

C. EVALUATION

1. It is rationalistic.
2. Inspiration and supernatural are both redefined. For example, since the mind of man cannot explain miracles, the miracles of the Bible must therefore be discounted.
3. The presupposition of human accommodation redefines, if not erases, much historically accepted Bible doctrine.

D. SUMMARY

With a liberal hermeneutic, man quickly and arrogantly becomes the judge of Scripture versus Scripture's being the judge of man.

IV. THE NEO-ORTHODOX SCHOOL

A. INTRODUCTION

Neo-orthodoxy is an interpretive approach which denies propositional, objective, authoritative revelation. In justification of that premise, proponents of this school believe that the Bible is only infallible when revelation was given to the writers of the Bible, i.e., when God actually spoke it. And in its forward look, inspiration then only occurs subjectively "when God speaks to you through it now." It follows that Neo-orthodoxy states that the Bible has instrumental authority because it is an instrument pointing to Christ, but it does not have inherent authority.

B. HISTORY

Recognizable names associated with the germination of Neo-orthodoxy include Karl Barth (since its inception). Now splintered into several movements, other names associated with it are Emil Brunner and Reinhold Niebuhr.

C. EVALUATION

1. Neo-orthodoxy denies the Bible is the Word of God and claims it becomes the Word of God when God speaks to a man, and he responds.
2. Only that part of the Bible which witnesses to Christ is binding, and the seat of authority for deciding this is in man's mind.
3. Many Bible episodes are treated mythologically, i.e., as teaching serious theological principles but not as having literally occurred.

D. SUMMARY

In essence, this school ends up destroying objective spiritual experience because of being based on (by their own doing) an unworthy, unreliable book.

Keep in mind that both Theological Liberalism and Neo-orthodoxy were founded and based upon supposedly biblically contradictory archaeological and scientific evidence of several hundred years ago. These schools were germinated from false premises.

These respective disciplines and their discoveries have thence validated biblical accuracy time and time again. Accordingly, these two interpretive approaches were formulated in and from a seedbed of what has since been deemed outdated and myopic research. The rug has been pulled out from

under them. A rough parallel is illustrated by the discipline of geography: who would be deemed credible today if he postulated and extrapolated religious beliefs based upon a flat-earth presupposition?

V. THE DEVOTIONAL SCHOOL

A. INTRODUCTION

This view regards the Bible as a rich book primarily given to nourish the spiritual life of the believer. Emphasis is placed on the edifying aspect of Scripture.

B. HISTORY

Many are those who reduce Scripture primarily to a “What’s in it for me today?” book of devotions. Among them are Medieval Mystics, Pietists, Puritans, Quakers and familiar, specific names such as John Wesley, Matthew Henry, F. B. Meyer, and A. W. Tozer.

To develop but one, the Pietists Movement was a reaction to cold, stale, dead doctrine in the late 1600s and early 1700s centered in reaction to German Lutheranism.

C. EVALUATION

1. In essence, the Devotional school seeks application, which is essential and desired.
2. There are dangers in abuse—parachuting in on only certain segments of the whole counsel of God; therefore, a balance between the whole of Scripture and isolated application is essential. Abuses include allegorizing, excessive typology,⁷ and neglect of prior doctrinal bases. In simplicity, a person can isolate a passage in disregard for context, thereby misinterpreting the authorial meaning.
3. The overwhelming persuasiveness of doctrinal constructs gained through an in-depth study of God’s Word can be lost in terms of soul sanctification. A high carb diet is thought to build spiritual musculature over and above a high protein diet.

D. SUMMARY

These writers tend to pass over technical problems, difficult passages, and doctrinal emphases in exchange for securing a quick applicable thought that might further godliness in the life of the individual. Devotional hermeneutics tends to underemphasize—if not denigrate—scholarship for the gain of a quickly digestible, sweet, edifying idea. In terms of public servants and the need for scriptural bases in the formulation of good policy, the country is in dire need of biblical scholars who have a deep grasp of the whole counsel of God.

Do you aspire to be a man or a woman
of God who changes the course of our
nation? If so, you need more than a
devotional diet of the Word of God!

Also stemming from this minimalistic approach to understanding God's Word, the door is often flung wide open to eisegetical and typological forms of interpretation. In contrast, the Apostle Paul said in Acts 20:27: ***"I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God."*** Paul endeavored to get the big picture, and so should we.

Likened to the athlete who tends to habitually consume candy bars alone for quick energy, discounting a balanced, high-protein diet, an edifying only approach to Scripture does not benefit the aspiring man or woman of God over a long period of time—neither in personal edification nor in policy formation.

VI. THE GRAMMATICAL, HISTORICAL, NORMATIVE SCHOOL

A. INTRODUCTION

In this last school, the meaning of a passage of Scripture is determined by what was deemed to be the basic, customary, socially acknowledged designation of the terms used at the time they were penned. The literal sense is the basic meaning evidenced by the grammatical and historical factors at the time of authorship.

It is important to note what this school is not. It is not characterized by Letterism, or a Wooden Literalism.⁸ Rather, it allows for the author to utilize figures of speech, such as parables, metaphors, hyperbole, irony, euphemisms, paronomasia, proverbs, personification, oxymorons, etc. In Latin this utilization is referred to as *usus loquendi*, i.e., the semantics within a speech culture. In his classic textbook on hermeneutics, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, Bernard Ramm calls this “the literal stratum of language.”⁹ The GHN school of hermeneutics recognizes, and has in its mind, the existence of the literal stratum and use of language and attempts to deduce authorial meaning by the author’s use of figures of speech, parables, metaphors, etc.

B. HISTORY

Ezra, the Jews of Palestine, and Christ all incorporate this discipline as evidenced from and within Scripture itself. John Chrysostom, Martin Luther, and John Calvin ascribed to the GHN hermeneutic. Ezra, in particular, is the first OT example of such. The Jews had been exiled long enough in Babylonia to have lost their native tongue; they were now speaking Aramaic. Ezra therefore assembled the Hebrew people and explained the real, intended meaning of the OT text to them. Later, and in church history, the exegetical (lit. “to exit from”) approach to interpretation set the stage for the Reformation, as Calvin and Luther explicated what was actually in the Greek New Testament, which had recently become available to the common man via the invention of the printing press.

C. EVALUATION

1. This is the usual practice of interpretation of literature. Again, a Supreme Court Justice who applies this approach to constitutional interpretation is known as an “originalist/textualist.” To the opposite, a judge who reads his or her views into the document is deemed an “activist.”

In essence, the activist Bible interpreter
or today's activist judge believes he
knows better than the author.

2. A large part of the Bible makes sense this way.
3. It exercises a control on the imagination.

D. SUMMARY

“That is the true method of interpretation which puts Scripture alongside of Scripture in a right and proper way.”¹⁰ “It is the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.”¹¹

VII. CONCLUSION

The Grammatical-Historical-Normative school of hermeneutics needs be the thinking person's choice. This school allows the Bible to be innocent until proven guilty and to be objective versus subjective. The GHN school of interpretation is the usual practice of interpreting secular (both present and past) literature. This school is the only one with a controlling force over eisegesis—man's imagination foisted onto the Bible.

Whereas the Allegorical, Liberal, and
Neo-orthodox schools of hermeneutic are
the children of scoffers, the Devotional

school is the brother of simpletons; only
the Grammatical-Historical-Normative
school is the father of the wise.

When a friend or fellow public servant quips, “That is a matter of your own interpretation,” ask to what hermeneutical school he subscribes—and be prepared to debate the merits or lack thereof.

1. A. B. Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1963), 28.
2. *Ibid.*, 37.
3. James E. Rosscup, “Hermeneutics Syllabus” (unpublished manuscript, rev. April 1999), typescript. (Some of this study has stemmed from this godly man’s work.)
4. Eisegesis: the interpretation of a text (as of the Bible) by reading into it one’s own, (*The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*).
5. Exegesis: to explain, to interpret, determining authorial intent; a critical explanation of a text or portion of Scripture, (*The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*).
6. Rosscup, 41.
7. “[It] differs from a symbol or an allegory. It is a representation of an actual, historical reference. Often it relates to analogous fulfillment in Christ of OT stories and parallels. This was a very popular approach to interpretation in the Middle Ages.”
8. Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 123–27.
9. *Ibid.*, 35.
10. Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther: The Philadelphia Edition*, vol. III (Baker Book House, 1982), 334.
11. John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans* (Morrisville=, N.C.: Lulu Enterprises, Inc., 2005), 334.

Rationalism, Rationality, and the Scriptures

Here in the Capitol, you have chosen a career that is based on intellectual property. As a public servant, your ability to execute vocationally, therefore, is directly related to the agility you possess in reasoning. One observation I have made in ministry in the Capitol is that this quality—to quickly and effectively reason—separates the senior members of the community from the novice. Solutions to social problems, ideas to benefit your constituency, and the ability to persuade, debate, write, and speak, all depend on and are undergirded by your acumen to reason well. Without it, you're dust, as they say. With it, you're a star.

I. INTRODUCTION

Scripture, the foundation upon which all good reasoning is built, is the only reliable underpinning for logic and good judgment. The Bible is the only trustworthy basis for the beginning of thoughts, ideas, actions, and practices. The Word of God is intended to be the mind's bedrock, its compass.

II. RATIONALISM AND RATIONALITY

As important as this foundation is, however, a distinction must be immediately made between two close English words: *rationalism* and *rationality*.

Rationalism is an anti-biblical
philosophy that is condescending
toward biblical Christianity.

Biblically based rational thinking involves scriptural precepts—the presupposition of the Bible—informing our minds for what is ultimate *truth*. By contrast, the rationalist sets his mind and his ability to reason as both the source and final test of all *truth*. In the rationalist’s way of thinking, his mind becomes his “god” since he makes his personal mental faculties the authority over and above Scripture.

Accordingly, the rationalist denies *divine revelation*, the beginning point of all reasoning that puts forth Scripture as the preserved *truth*, untainted by the Fall of man,¹ wherein sin entered and affected the world. The entrance of sin impacted the world to such an extent that it tainted man’s ability to reason perfectly without a bias for sin.²

Scripture, on the other hand,
is unaltered by the Fall;
it is untainted by sin.

Scripture has traveled the long road of time and is unaltered; the Bible is unstained by sin and its noetic effect on the mind of man.

The imputation of sin in Genesis 3 not only brought spiritual death to the soul of man but also damaged his intellectual purity as well. Man possesses a fallen mind, which is evidenced by the fact that the closer he reasons in the arena of morality, the greater the noetic effect is evident. From the perspective of biblical revelation, the rationalist has not escaped the noetic effect of sin, and he is either naïve or rejecting of this biblical premise.

Those who worship at the altar of their brainpower (and in their pride of self-being) consider themselves the starting point for the discovery of *truth*. In so doing, they are categorically rejecting the biblical *truth* that the mind is fallen. In essence, they are attesting to the words the famous French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre penned, “No finite point has meaning without an infinite reference point” (although the atheist-Marxist probably didn’t mean it the way I am interpreting it).

In summary of the introduction, wherein we saw that the Christian rightly rejects the philosophical premise of rationalism, it must be made clear that he does not reject rationality.

Rationality is the use of the mind based
on God’s Word where every thought
has its foundation in Scripture.

Scriptural *truth*, as it is mastered by the public servant, becomes the always reliable basis for proper thinking, as well as the foundation that enables the ability to make wise judgments and good policy, not only in vocational pursuits, but also in personal life. Sound logic, clear thought, and common sense based upon the mastery of scriptural precepts are precisely what constitute *wisdom* and *discernment*. Scripture is the bulwark from which all good reasoning stems. Everyone in the Capitol needs to master the Scriptures to be truly wise in personal, familial, and vocational life.

Vocationally, to proffer policy that has no scriptural basis is to act foolishly and disserve the people of our most fabulous country. Reason apart from the Word of God inevitably leads to unsound ideas, whereas reason subjected to the Word of God is at the heart of wise spiritual *discernment* and policy formation. God wants us all to use our minds based upon His Scripture; He wants us to be wise and discerning in all we do.

The Westminster Confession of Faith clarifies this *understanding* when it states, “The whole counsel of God ... is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from

Scripture.”³ As you intently learn the Word, you will find that you are able to make sound and careful logical life decisions and policy formation because those abilities flow from knowing and embracing scriptural principles.

Interpret the text of Scripture accurately. Discover the context of the passage, the original authorial intent, and then apply its principles with sensible, careful, thoughtful, and Spirit-directed reasoning. These ingredients of *discernment* are the building blocks to crafting good policy. That’s rationality—not rationalism.

When Martin Luther was instructed to recant his teachings on what the Bible taught regarding true salvation and how to achieve it via faith alone (versus the payment of indulgences, etc.), his response as follows is illustrative of this very point.

Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason, my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience would be neither right nor safe. God help me. Here I stand, I can do no other.⁴

Luther’s reasoning was based on the convictions he’d gained from studying Scripture.

It follows then that those who spurn the *truths*, precepts, and great doctrines of Scripture—and sound reason based on the same—are not wise or discerning. Government leaders who deny the Scripture may think they are wise, but they are misguided. In the end, their policies, house-crafted brews void of scriptural precepts, will serve neither the leader nor the people well.

Now let us turn our attention to the biblical passages that underscore the premises of these definitions.

III. SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES ON THE NEED FOR WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT

In the passages that follow, note the repetition and inner-connectivity of the words *truth*, *knowledge*, *discernment*, *wisdom*, and *understanding* and how they stem from God and His Word.

A. PSALM 51:6

*Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,
And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.*

This passage appears right after David exclaims his sinful status, not only for himself, but also for all of mankind, wherein he states, *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me* (51:5). Even though man is innately sinful, God *desires* all to know His *truth* and then, as a result, live skillfully.⁵

B. PSALM 111:10

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
A good understanding have all those who do His commandments.*

The fear of the LORD, as this passage states, is the *beginning* point of living or legislating skillfully. A reverential awe and a submissive *fear of the LORD* are essential to *wisdom*. Without fear, man rejects God's Word, thinking and concluding matters with his own mind (rationalism), devoid of any heavenly plumb line, standard, or premise. As was stated in the introduction, he becomes his own god.

Dr. "Wellithink" becomes the
superior source of *knowledge* over
and above the God of the Bible.

To be wise, we must exchange our own attitudes, will, feelings, deeds, and goals for those of the true God Who has revealed Himself in Scripture. Such an exchange equates to *fearing the LORD*.

C. PSALM 119:66

*Teach me good discernment and knowledge,
For I believe in Your commandments.*

Note again the clear relationship between God's Word (*Your commandments*) and having *discernment* and *knowledge*. The premise of Scripture is that these abilities are intrinsically intertwined. A person cannot possess one ability without the other.

D. PROVERBS 2:2-6

*Make your ear attentive to wisdom,
Incline your heart to understanding;
For if you cry for discernment,
Lift your voice for understanding;
If you seek her as silver
And search for her as for hidden treasures;
Then you will discern the fear of the LORD
And discover the knowledge of God.
For the LORD gives wisdom;
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.*

Accordingly, the *knowledge of God* is only derived and achieved from and via the study and application of His Book. Further underscoring of the connection between the words of *His mouth* contained in Scripture and the *knowledge of God* is evidenced in what Paul states to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The Greek word for *inspired* is *theopneustos*, meaning "God-breathed."

The Scriptures are the actual
evidence of God's breath.

E. PROVERBS 4:7

*"The beginning of wisdom is:
Acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding."*

I prefer the more vernacular NKJV translation of this passage, which says, “*Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.*” This passage goes on to personify *wisdom* in 4:8–9 (NKJV) and list her benefits:

*“Exalt her [wisdom] and she will promote you;
She will bring you honor, when you embrace her.
She will place on your head an ornament of grace;
A crown of glory she will deliver to you.”*

These are the tremendous benefits inuring to believers who are *attentive, inclining, crying for, lifting their voices for, seeking, and searching* (cf. Proverbs 2:2–4) for God’s *wisdom*. Why would anyone avoid such blessings? Begin the habit of Bible study today and be blessed, my friend!

Now let us turn our attention to New Testament (NT) passages that underscore the necessity to reason from Scripture versus reasoning not from Scripture.

IV. SELECTED NT PASSAGES ON THE NEED FOR WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT

A. COLOSSIANS 1:9

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Paul prayed that the Colossian believers would *be filled with the knowledge of His will*, which is equated in this verse with possessing *wisdom and spiritual understanding*. Discerning God’s will with your mind and your rational faculties is quite easy when you have habitually and continually *filled* it with God’s precepts from regular study. A *wise* person can therefore be further understood as someone who has accumulated and organized God’s principles in order to automatically apply them in daily living.

Remember when you first learned to drive and how much concentration and effort it demanded? Now you drive almost subconsciously from regular practice and application of your state’s driving laws. *Wise* living is parallel to this illustration.

Whereas the world might call
you an ideologue, Scripture calls
you a person of conviction—
someone who has a sure rudder!

Inviolable principles stemming from God's Word are infallible and indefatigable.

B. COLOSSIANS 2:2-3

Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

This Pauline passage exclaims that *all the treasures of wisdom* are in *Christ*. Our sufficiency for *wisdom and knowledge* is not found extra biblically in some other form, rather in *Christ* alone.

This bold, contrasting statement is given in the context of Paul's declaration: contextually, the Colossian church was being attacked by Gnostic heresy. The Gnostics viewed the beginning point of *knowledge* as something they singularly possessed. The Gnostics were esoterics⁶ in their *understanding* of the origins of *knowledge*—ancient day rationalists, if you will. Paul herein is combating and refuting this erroneous idea of the beginning point of *knowledge*—as if the Gnostics possessed a secret source of *wisdom and knowledge*!

Like many rationalists today, they possessed an aura of elitism. They were the "haves," and others, in this case the believers in Colossae, were the "have nots." Paul discounts their falsities, stating that *all the wisdom* of God and *knowledge* about Him is revealed through *Christ* and His written Word!

The Word of God should be your preeminent basis for *knowledge* in policy formation and decision making—not human surveys, sociological or physiological analyses, self-thinking void of scriptural truths, etc.! Whereas the Word of God is unchanging, history reveals that the latter epistemological⁷ sources fluctuate over time. Their degrees of certitude are less than the total certainty of the Word of God.

C. 2 TIMOTHY 3:16

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

This passage, mentioned previously in relation to Proverbs 2, is deserving of stand-alone consideration in this study and outline. Literally, *inspired* means “God-breathed.” In essence, another way to state this is *all Scripture is given by inspiration*. God divinely *inspired* or “inspired” the writers of His Word. Therefore, Scripture is a reliable foundation from which we can reason and is our primary, superior basis for authoritative reasoning.

V. CONCLUSION

The wise public servant must regularly study the Word of God to have a lasting impact in service to the state. To craft policy that is not somehow rooted in Scripture is to have a temporal effect and is of disservice to the country. Choose to reason from Scripture rather than rationalize from your mind only.

1. The Fall of man is known as “The Fall” per Genesis, chapter 3.
2. Man’s inability to reason perfectly without a bias for sin is commonly referred to in theology as the *noetic effect* of sin.
3. S. W. Carruthers, ed., *The Confession of Faith of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster* (London, England: Publishing Office of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1946) Ch. 1, Sec. 6.
4. Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: The Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Meridian Publishing, 1955).
5. *Wisdom* is “the skill of living life for God’s glory.”
6. *Esoteric*: “knowledge that is restricted to a small group” [*Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “esoteric,” accessed February 15, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/esoteric>.]
7. *Epistemology*: “the study or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity” [*Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “epistemology,” accessed February 15, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epistemology>.]

The National Consequences of Rejecting the Doctrine of Sin

Many people currently do not believe in the total depravity of man; however, Scripture is clear that man is fallen. In fact, God ordained the institution of government primarily to restrain the latent sin nature of man: to believe the opposite—that man is basically good—is to reject scriptural truth.

The late Francis Schaeffer, in his classic work *How Should We Then Live?* spoke euphemistically regarding the statue of David (located in Florence, Italy), stating that it was and is the artistic epitome of humanistic ideology—that man is basically good. He quipped, “If a woman was to wait to marry a living statue of David, she would never marry.” Michelangelo’s statue, not to be confused with the biblical David, represents the humanist belief that mankind will ultimately ascend to perfection. But the humanists are wrong.

With the proliferation of violent groups rioting in the streets, looting, murdering, and attacking innocent and unarmed men, women, and children both in the United States and other countries, the thought that the *world* will become a better place through the use of reason is naive. It will not! God ordained government to use force to quell evil. Read on and learn

more about the doctrine of sin. You must know your stuff and have strong convictions about this subject!

I. INTRODUCTION

The necessity of any governing authority's proper understanding of sin cannot be overemphasized. Not only does the teaching of Scripture regarding this subject relate specifically to our personal life, but it also is foundational to the professional understanding of policy makers and law enforcers. Can you clearly think through the biblical answers to the following?

- How do you explain the dual nature of man?
- Does sin infect and affect more than just the person?
- Does sin infect and affect the whole *world*?

These and other important topics will be addressed in this chapter. A biblically accurate, informed understanding of what the Scriptures say about sin will help us in a myriad of ways! It is foundational as to how we view the *world* and is the proper remedy to national and international problems.

To improperly diagnose an
ailment is to fail to cure it.

Again, this study focuses on what the Bible teaches about the total depravity of man, the doctrine of sin. Since many passages on this subject can be found throughout Scripture, I would like to focus on certain aspects that I believe are most relevant, not only to your personal life as a public servant but also to your thinking and to the formation of public policy. How should a proper biblical understanding of certain aspects of sin inform and influence your thinking? This study is integral to the ability to form a Christian worldview.

First, we will explore an accurate biblical definition of *sin*, and then we will segue into how we should best understand its origin and transference. Once we establish both fundamental premises of the doctrine, we will quickly pivot to surveying sin's manifest nature in the *world* from an

individual to a corporate, national understanding. Stay with me, and this process will become easier than you may think.

II. SIN'S DEFINITION

When discussing what the Bible teaches about sin—and the fact that we live in a fallen *world*—an accurate understanding of what this means and does not mean is critically important.

I like conservative theologian Wayne Grudem's working definition of *sin*: "Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature."¹ The Sermon on the Mount repeatedly makes it clear that sin is more than outward conformity to God's moral standards; it involves attitudes as well. For instance, in Matthew 5:22 anger is deemed sinful; so is lust (Matthew 5:28). Additionally, in that we were by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3), God imputes a new nature into believers at the time of salvation and expects them to live according to their new nature (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17; 2 Peter 1:4). The Greek word for sin (*hamartia*) means "to miss the mark."

Sin is more than self-centeredness. I remember one of my mountaineering friends in the tent next to mine in the middle of the night (at 18,000 feet elevation, during a huge windstorm that lasted for three straight days, I might add) asking me to help him memorize some Scripture. Half-asleep with chilled half-breaths, my first thought was *how selfish of him!* Yes, he was being selfish, but he was expressing a good form of selfishness! In fact, much self-interest is approved in Scripture! So selfishness is not a good definition of *sin*. When we are seeking to grow in sanctification or to *discipline* [our] *body and make it* [our] *slave* (1 Corinthians 9:27), we are (empirically speaking) harboring and acting out selfish desires. But God heartily approves of such good selfish desires! On the other hand, our selfless devotion to a false religion will not please God, much less attain God's standard of sinlessness. So, selfishness is not a good one-word definition of *sin*.

Sin needs to be defined the way God defines it in His Word. Another way to say it is as follows: anything uncharacteristic of the communicable attributes of God present in an individual is sin. To miss the mark of His perfect acts, attitudes, and nature about everything and anything at all times is sin. No wonder then that Paul states in Romans 3:23: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

III. SIN'S ORIGIN

Sin was present in the angelic *world* before creation and the Fall of man. This is evidenced by the fact that Satan and his demons rebelled and were cast out of heaven (cf. Isaiah 14:12; Ezekiel 28:11–19; Luke 10:18) prior to the creation and Fall of man in Genesis 1 and 3 respectively. Sin then entered the created *world* via the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3:1–19). Eve trusted in herself, and then Adam trusted in himself over and above what God had specifically commanded of them. They thought they knew better than God, in essence placing themselves above God and His ways (Genesis 3:5) and rebelliously exchanging themselves for His place of sovereignty and authority.

IV. SIN'S MANIFESTATION IN THE INDIVIDUAL

The Bible is clear that Adam's sin spread to all mankind in the sense of individuals. Again, Paul states in Romans 3:23, *For all have sinned*. The psalmist says, *They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one* (Psalm 14:3), and Solomon adds, *Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins* (Ecclesiastes 7:20). All have sinned because sin is inherited from Adam. Paul explains that inheritance this way in Romans 5:12:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.

Later he adds, in v. 18, speaking respectively of Adam and Jesus:

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.

In Romans 5:19 he adds in reference to Christ's work on Calvary:

For as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

The best way to think about this is that when Adam was tested in the garden, he represented the total human race thereafter. Unfair? God is God, and He chose this economy.

If we reason that Adam's imputation of sin is unfair, then we must also reason Christ's imputation of righteousness as unfair.

Scripture teaches the imputation of both: the former by birth and the latter by believing faith. Notice both in the following passages: David best summarizes the existence of representational and inherent individual sin in Psalm 51:5:

***Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.***

John, in his Gospel, teaches the latter (1:12):

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.

Furthermore, every part of the individual being has been infected by and affected by sin. In that mankind possesses an inherent sinful nature, man has a predilection for and does sin. Created in the image of God, which explains man's goodness, he is nonetheless fallen, thus explaining his dual nature in a way unlike any other worldly philosophy can or does.

Imago Dei and simultaneous imputation best and uniquely explain the dueling nature found within man's existence since the Fall and throughout the ages.

The Fall affected more than the soul of man; in addition, it infected the whole of the *world*. Critically important is this: the governing authority must possess a working comprehension of not only the theology of *individual* sin, but the theology of *corporate* sin.

V. SIN'S MANIFESTATION IN THE WORLD

Many passages speak of sin's manifestation in the *world*, stating that the whole *world* is fallen, in contrast to limiting sin only to indwelt and fallen individuals. However, many conservative theologians stop at individual sin and do not develop the concept of corporate sin. And yet the biblical concept of corporate sin is an area especially important to the understanding of political leaders and their policy formation, e.g., as stated in the prologue, government exists in large part to quell sin and evil, per Romans 13:1–8 and 1 Peter 2:13–14.

Equally important then to the effect of sin on a personal basis is its effect on the whole *world*. Conservative theologian Millard Erickson puts it best:

The Bible teaches that evil has a status apart from and independent of any individual human will, a subsistence of its own. ... We occasionally refer to this reality as “the World” [*kosmos*].²

Geoffrey William Bromiley adds that the Greek word *kosmos* is often-times used in Scripture in juxtaposition to the kingdom of God, i.e., the *world* is used by the Bible writers to depict the very embodiment of evil.³

A. THE FOUNDATIONAL PASSAGE

This expansive idea of not only individual but also corporate manifestations of the Fall is supported from the beginning by the immediate results of the Fall. Notice God's response in Genesis 3:17–19:

“Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground.”

The Fall of Adam and Eve cursed not only them, but the whole earth as well. Have you ever wondered why nothing is easy in this life? It's hard to earn a living. It's hard to eat right. It's hard to stay in shape! It's hard to keep government on track! All serve to illustrate Genesis 3! Until Christ's return, mankind exists in a fallen *world*—both in an individual and corporate sense. Again and again, this hamartiological understanding and distinction is critically important for those who serve in government. The second law

of thermodynamics—entropy—came into existence with the Fall; everything is constantly moving toward disorder, not perfection, which means

The humanist's take on the statue of David is an artistic ideological misnomer.

The following passages teach the corporateness of sin via the word *world*:

B. THE FUNCTIONAL PASSAGES

Further building out the doctrine of sin, from Genesis 3 into the New Testament, this originally Old Testament concept of universal fallenness is depicted (in part) by the following passages:

1. John 7:7

“The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.”

2. John 15:18–19

“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.”

3. John 17:14

“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

4. 1 Corinthians 1:21

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

5. John 17:25

“O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me.”

6. John 1:10–11

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

7. Colossians 2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

8. John 8:23

And He was saying to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.”

9. John 18:36

Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”

10. James 1:27

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

11. 1 John 2:15–17

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

12. 1 John 5:4–5

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

States Erickson regarding the biblical use of the word *world*:

“The world represents an organized force, a power or order that is counterpoised to the kingdom of God.”⁴

This conclusion is clear from all of these passages. It is clear to see from a study of the use of the word *world* that sin has infected and affected both individuals and the earth as a whole.

VI. APPLICATION

A. TO THE PERSON

First John 1:9 states to believers, *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Believers need to walk with a clear conscience, keeping their sin account current with Christ. Believers cannot walk in the power and control of the Holy Spirit and at the same time continually quench the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Whenever the Holy Spirit convicts our conscience of the need to confess our wrongdoing to Him immediately in order to remain filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to do otherwise is to short-circuit His indwelling empowerment. We must keep a short leash on our sin, erasing it from our life, and thereby maximize our God-purposed potential in office and thereafter! It is normative for believers to be victorious over sin in their personal life.

B. TO THE PROFESSION

It is critically important for the public servant to view the *world* through the eyes of Scripture. Man is fallen, and government is meant by God to quell evil in the *world*. Government then is a manifestation of God's restraining grace in a fallen *world*.

To view the *world* as basically good and in need of my reasoning abilities—as if others will conclude to do what's right when convinced intellectually—is naive, unwise, and at the very least, viewing the *world* through rose-colored glasses. The recent riots across the United States and the unrest in so many other places around the globe serve to illustrate the premise of this Bible study: without strong governments intent on quelling evil, the fallen, sin nature of man will be increasingly on the rise. Governments and their leaders must send a constant message that sin will be punished. When I hear of government leaders trying to reason with terrorists who believe their deity commands them to kill us, I am reminded of Mark Twain's saying about trying to teach a pig to sing: you waste your time and annoy the pig!

May this basic conviction and understanding be yours relative to your God-given job as a leader in government; may your convictions be based upon a scripturally solid understanding of sin. May humanistic naivete come to an end not only in the White House but also on the Hill.

VII. CONCLUSION

Make no mistake: an America directed by the ideology of Secular Humanism will only lead to an increasingly chaotic *world*. Man is totally depraved in his nature—not totally good. That an America directed by leaders who understand the biblical doctrine of sin will lead to an increasingly peaceful *world* is clear from Scripture and history.

1. Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 490.
2. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 660.
3. Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3, 868.
4. Erickson.

PART III

GODLINESS IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Does the Bible Inform Your Values?

How you view the inspiration of Scripture—whether it was penned by God or a fabrication of man—is critically important relative to what is authoritative in your life.

Some time ago I was speaking to a friend on the Hill whom we all know. He said, “Ralph, you have almost convinced Congressman _____ that Scripture is *inspired* by God. But he realizes that if he agrees with you, then the Bible will become the final arbiter for his life and policy decisions. ... You’ve got him thinking!” He went on to encourage me to continue working through this with him.

What follows is the case for the inspiration of the New Testament, and as illustrated above, this study has huge implications: where you come down on inspiration will ultimately determine whether you are the judge of Scripture or Scripture is the judge of you. Heavy stuff, my friend! Inspiration is a watershed issue.

May God bless and buoy your confidence in His Book as a result of this week’s study.

I. INTRODUCTION

Several questions will help a public servant, or for that matter, any individual, address the question of God’s inspiration of Scripture.

First, what is the testimony of Scripture itself? Did the authors of the Bible know they were penning Holy Writ? Did they say they were writing God's words? Did they make this claim themselves or is this an idea later foisted onto them by others wanting that to be the case?

Second, what is the testimony of the early Church regarding the books that now make up the Bible? Were the Scriptures deemed God's Word by those closest to the human authors of the Bible?

And third, how exactly did our Bible get to be in the form we have today? It's not as if the Bible suddenly dropped out of the sky.

Again, and akin to my prologue, the answers to these questions are extremely important to our beliefs. *If the Scriptures are from God, that is to say they are inspired by Him to man, then the Bible is the last and final authority in one's formation of principles, values and policy.* Rightly so, the late Francis Schaeffer deemed inspiration to be the watershed issue of the Christian faith.¹ Accordingly this study is intended to build your understanding of, passion for, and conviction regarding the inspiration and authoritativeness of the whole of the Bible.

Holding to or else rejecting the
inspiration of Scripture greatly
impacts value formation.

When Paul said, ***"I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God"*** (Acts 20:27)², he was expressing to the Ephesian elders to whom he had ministered for over three years his conviction that what he was saying and writing was indeed *inspired* by God. Therefore, to fail to believe and teach Paul's declaration is irresponsible. Paul's statement assumes that God *inspired* what he was saying. It follows that such a statement is ridiculous if Paul did not believe his speech and writings were *inspired* by God and infused with His authority.

As Members of Congress, you face multiple demands on every hour of your time. Your regular participation in our Members Bible studies requires persistent and determined effort on your part to block and protect

your schedule (from your schedulers!) for the regular consumption of God's Book. Why would you do that if you don't believe it is God's Book? Conversely, why would you *not* discipline yourself and prioritize Bible study if indeed it is His Book? All that to say: your conclusions relative to inspiration even affect your weekly calendar!³

What follows are three reasons why a person can trust in the *plenary inspiration*⁴ of the Bible and more specific to this lesson, the 27 New Testament (NT) books.

II. THE TESTIMONY OF THE AUTHORS

If today the whole of the New Testament is to be taken as the plenary *inspired* authoritative, infallible, inerrant oracle of God, then it stands to reason that the writers would know this and would say so. Note the following NT writers in this regard:

A. THE APOSTLE PAUL (1 CORINTHIANS 14:37, 2:13; 2 CORINTHIANS 2:17)

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words (1 Corinthians 14:37).

For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 2:17).

Likened to Acts 20:27 quoted in the introduction, the Apostle Paul clearly understood he was speaking and writing for God.

B. THE APOSTLE JOHN (REVELATION 1:1-2)

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to

the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw (cf. Revelation 1:10–11; 21:5; 22:6; 22:18, 19).

This passage serves to indicate that the Apostle John (here referring to himself as *His bond-servant John*) realized as he testified herein, that he is penning what Jesus Christ told him to reveal.

C. THE APOSTLE PETER (1 PETER 1:12)

These things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.

Here the Apostle Peter testifies that he (and other apostles) who preached the Gospel did so via the *Holy Spirit*, the message being *sent from heaven*.

D. JESUS (JOHN 12:48)

“He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.”

Jesus speaks of God the Father’s judgment for the person who rejects what Jesus says.

The skeptic will often reason that since the written NT did not exist when these men penned the aforementioned testimonies regarding the inspiration of Scripture, that their statements must have been in reference to the Old Testament (OT), which was then existent in canonical form. In rebuttal of this reasoning, note that the apostles cross-pollinate one another. For instance, Peter testifies that Paul was writing Scripture, Paul testifies that Peter was writing Scripture, etc. Such affirmation is evident in the following passages.

E. PETER TESTIFIES OF PAUL (2 PETER 3:15, 16)

And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things

hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Peter directly testifies that what Paul wrote was *Scripture*. How do the skeptics discount the strength of this passage when they debate inspiration? Since this passage of the Apostle Peter's attesting to the Apostle Paul's writing of *Scriptures* (*graphe*) is so strong and straightforward, many liberal theologians of the *twentieth century* have tried to claim it was written much later, and not by Peter. However, 2 Peter was widely circulated and accepted by Church leaders in the *second century*! They were obviously much closer to the book's creation and publication, and they classified it as being *inspired* exactly as they did the other 26 books of the NT. They did not question its authenticity nor its date of authorship like those of more recent days!

F. PAUL TESTIFIES OF PETER (1 THESSALONIANS 2:13)

"For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."

Wow! How much more direct can you be? Paul is referring not only to himself but to the other apostolic preachers as recorded in the birth of the Church, the chronological account of which is located in the NT book of Acts. *Heard from us* refers to the other preachers, such as the Apostle Peter. What was *heard*? The *word of God*.

G. JUDE TESTIFIES OF THE APOSTLES (JUDE 17-18)

But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, "In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts."

An *apostle* is "someone who not only saw, but who spoke on behalf of the second member of the Trinity, Jesus Christ." As such, Jude is saying that the *apostles* spoke for God!

H. ALL OF SCRIPTURE

In addition to referring to their own and each other's writings as *inspired* by God, both Paul and Peter attest to the whole inspiration of Scripture—*all of Scripture*—elsewhere in their various letters. The following are several examples:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

This Scripture is another very clear and straightforward passage that again scores a knockout punch for “team inspiration!”

Of course, theological liberals interpret this important passage in another way. Here's their twist: this passage means *All Scripture inspired by God is* ... thereby leaving open the possibility that some Scripture is not *inspired*, and therefore, it is incumbent upon man to figure out what is and what isn't *inspired*—something they enjoy doing! Witness the “Jesus Seminar” wherein liberal “scholars” voted on what was *inspired* and what was not. Don't fall for their Scripture-twisting antics! Save a lengthy grammar lesson in Greek, it is clear from similarly constructed passages in the Greek NT (Romans 7:12; 2 Corinthians 10:10; 1 Timothy 1:15, 2:2, 4:4; and Hebrews 4:17) that such a translation is intentionally misleading. *All Scripture is inspired* is the proper translation.

Peter adds:

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Peter 1:20–21).

This passage clearly states that the Bible was not and is not the product of *human will*. Rather, the writers were carried or *moved* along by *God*.

To summarize this second Roman numeral point in the outline, the testimony of the inspired authors of Scripture roundly indicates that they knew that what they were writing was from God! In the attempt to convey the idea that inspiration was later foisted onto their ancient writings, a person cannot say that these men were unaware that when they wrote, God was inspiring their writings. These passages serve to indicate that they knew it when they wrote! Nor does it make sense to say these men were lying about what they wrote because of everything else that surrounds and comes forth from their writings. Obviously, these were men of great integrity!

Specifics on What Inspiration Actually Means

1. **It does not mean that the writers were *inspired* every minute of their lives.**

It is **All Scripture** (*graphe*) that is ***inspired*** (*theopneustos*) (or better, God-breathed, i.e., inspired). Specifically, it's not the writers; it's the **Scriptures** that are given by the breathing forth of God in and through them. When speaking and writing apart from the penning of Scripture, the writers of the NT were human and subject to fallibility and inaccuracy.⁵

2. **It means that God worked in unison with the writer's mind.**

Sometimes God dictated through the writer (Jeremiah 1:9, ***"Behold, I have put My words in your mouth"***), but most often God utilized the personality, education, and setting of His prophets and apostles.⁶ Note the following excerpt in this regard:

But, as clearly seen in Scripture itself, God's divine truth more often flowed through the minds, souls, hearts, and emotions of His chosen human instruments. Yet, by whatever means, God divinely superintended the accurate recording of His divinely breathed truth by His divinely chosen men. In a supernatural way, He has provided His divine Word in human words that any person, even a child, can be led by His Holy Spirit to understand sufficiently to be saved.⁷

3. **It means that only the original autographa⁸ were *inspired*.**

Being pro-inspiration implies the person believes only in the error-free original *autographa*. Critics point out that

none of the original manuscripts is in existence today. This is a challenge: copying scribes could and did err, but it does not decide the *inspiration* debate. Note the following in this regard:

The NT Scholar is not significantly hampered by the unavailability of the autographa, however, because of the science and art of textual criticism. The abundance of manuscripts of the NT or portions thereof and the earliness of their dates in relation to the original compositions places him in a better position to know precisely what was originally written than for any other ancient writing.⁹

IV. THE TESTIMONY OF THE SECOND-CENTURY CHURCH

The last book of the NT to be written was the apocalypse, which we call today the book of Revelation. Around AD 94–96, the Apostle John wrote this book. Thus, the era of the first-century church ended, and the writing of the NT was completed (cf. Revelation 22:18–19). Many of the NT books were known as encyclicals, meaning they were intended for more than one audience to read. Soon all 27 books would become encyclicals as the various papyrus¹⁰ manuscripts that contained the NT books were passed around and often recopied as they circulated from church to church during this period. Importantly, they were immediately viewed as authoritative because in addition to Christ's words, the apostles had always been seen as Christ's representatives, having been appointed by Him (cf. Acts 1:8). There was never any reason for the second-century church to doubt that the apostles were Christ's spokesmen. As a matter of fact, after the ascension and the day of Pentecost they were even given miraculous sign gifts by Him to further legitimize their appointment and authority. Given their own written affirmations (as previously mentioned), they were viewed and accepted by the early church leaders as authoritative. There was never any doubt.

Moreover, the apostles' writings contained commands that they be read in the church services. In that the early church patterned their services after those of the Jewish synagogues (where the *inspired* OT Scriptures were

given preeminence and authority by their regular reading in the worship service), the internal demand by the apostles to have their apostolic writings read alongside of the OT readings communicated a huge message both to the audience then and to the reader of the Bible today: their apostolic writings are equally Scripture! Note such apostolic commands to the early church in the following passages:

A. COLOSSIANS 4:16

When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea [Ephesus].

B. 1 THESSALONIANS 5:27

I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.

C. REVELATION 1:3

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

The second selection, 1 Thessalonians 5:27, especially underscores the idea of apostolic commanding. The Greek word for *adjure* (*enorkizo*) means “to put under an oath.” This is very forceful language: Paul put the Church at Thessalonica under oath by God to read his letter to them and in the main service! Again, *the fact that all of these verses explicitly say to read the apostolic writings in the church services is akin to placing these writings on par with OT Scripture.*

By the middle of the second century, “the authority of the apostles was accepted as equal to that of the OT apostolic writings were read in church services along with those of the OT. By the end of the period the principle of a fixed and written NT canon was established.”¹¹

By the *end* of the second, the classification of the NT writings as Scripture is evident in the apologetic writings of Irenaeus. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John. Irenaeus wrote to defend the faith from heretical teachings in his compendium of books titled *Against All Heresies*. In his treatment, he quotes 21 of the 27

NT books as his authority in refuting doctrinal errors. And his NT quotes far outweigh his use of the OT. As of yet, the 27 NT books had still not been formally “sewn together” in what is referred to as the canonization of Scripture. What is especially important about the aforementioned is the acceptance and adherence of the second-century church leaders and believers to the scriptural authority of the apostolic writers.

The second-century church had a
much closer vantage point than we
do: looking back they could see the
bakery through their binoculars

... so to speak. How can liberal theologians criticize the apostolic writings from their vantage point 2000 years later? How can they think they have a better perspective than the second- and third-century church leaders who personally witnessed and supervised the germination of the encyclicals into the formal canonization of the Scriptures? Comparatively speaking, today’s attempts to superimpose personal ideas on the clear pronouncements of apostolic authority, as well as first- and second-century church leader attestations, are not only arrogant but laughable!

V. THE TESTIMONY OF THE CANONIZING PROCESS

The canonization of Scripture did not occur until the early fourth century. From AD 200 to 300, the church knew of the basic contents of the NT and continued to view them as *inspired* and authoritative (although precise limits had not yet been defined). Prior to discussing the actual formalizing of the canon, pointing out what the word means is essential.

The English word *canon* is *transliterated* from the same word in Greek. Its etymology stems from its most literal understanding: “a cane or a reed” seguing into meaning a “rod” (since a cane or reed, like a yardstick could be used as an ancient measuring device). Over time it took on the meaning

of a “bar.” And since a reed became related to the idea of measuring, the word took on the metaphorical meaning of a “standard.” Used in literature, it means, “A list of works correctly attributed to an author.”¹² Used theologically today, it means the authoritative books accepted as Holy Scripture.

In a proper sense, the canon actually came into existence when the original penning of the *autographa* occurred—even though it took the church many years to *recognize* that. In other words, the authority is in the books themselves—not the body that later “canonized” them.¹³

Importantly, the canon consists of those God-*inspired* books when penned by God’s agents.

Much more could be said about the historical authenticating events that led up to the official recognition of NT canonization. This fascinating story is for another time. In this chapter, for the sake of brevity, I will cut to the chase.

Diocletian was the Roman Emperor at the dawn of the fourth century. He was a vicious man who ordered all religious books be burned in his attempt to have everyone worship *him* as god. Christians risked death by hiding a copy of Scripture. One person who lived through this ordeal was Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 270–340). He was a respected church leader and historian who spent an abundance of time and attention on the canon. The future of the Scriptures was at stake. In his book, *Church History*, he speaks much about the subject of the canon.

In 313 Constantine conquered the Roman Empire and declared Christianity as a legal religion. Soon thereafter he commissioned Eusebius to make him 50 copies of the NT. Eusebius followed through, and this led to the actual “sewing together” of the books of the NT. Until this time, the NT existed in various codices,¹⁴ and the criteria for determining which books would actually be in the canon had not been solidified. Eusebius may be credited with achieving that among the church leaders.

Athanasius then completed Eusebius' work. Therein the extent of the NT was codified and ratified by the Church Council of Laodicea in AD 365. The pronouncement of this gathering read, "Psalms composed by private men must not be read in the church, nor books not admitted into the canon, but only the canonical [books] of the New and Old Testaments."

Following the Laodicea gathering, in two subsequent church leader councils, the canon was further ratified throughout the world. These councils were The Council of Hippo in AD 393 and The Council of Carthage in AD 397. In this latter counsel, Augustine said the following:

"[It is decreed] that nothing except the canonical Scriptures be read in the church under the name of divine Scripture. ... Of the New Testament the four Gospels, Acts, thirteen epistles of St. Paul, the epistle of the same to the Hebrews, Peter (2), John (3), James, Jude, Apocalypse."

States Westcott:

"General accord with this decision was
evidenced in the practice of all the
churches from that point on."¹⁵

The NT was now canonized. The latently authoritative writings had now been formally recognized for what they always had been since their origination, collected, and bound. The church had assented unanimously—*inspired* by God!

VI. SUMMARY

Many still espouse Theological Liberalism. But I must add it is a dying breed because what results from their theology is little motivation to save or evangelize the lost. With too few converts, their churches are aging and merging.

Whether the Bible is *inspired* by God is a watershed issue. Where a person stands on inspiration will either solidify or discount the Bible as

authoritative in terms of his or her personal formation of principles and values, and for a public servant, his or her policy decisions. If you accede to inspiration, then it follows that the Word becomes authoritative in your life. If you reject inspiration, you conclude that you (or some liberal pastor) is the final authority.

When you think about it,

Rejecting inspiration means
you or some other human
stands in authority over God.

Intellectual arguments against inspiration could be a smokescreen for a heart in rebellion to God. If you argue against the authors and those who knew the authors, you are arguing against history and the internal attestation of Scripture itself! Submit to Scripture, submit to the revealed Christ of Scripture, and follow the precepts from His Book! Allow Jesus and His Word to inform and determine your thinking, your values, your decisions, and actions. He loves you, and His ways are always best for you and the nation! It is not as if God created mankind and left him without a manual to guide him personally—and in the governing decisions public servants must make for the betterment of a nation. All of the right solutions to our personal and national problems are right there in His *inspired* Book!

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple, states Psalm 19:7. God's Word will give you the skill to live life (wisdom). And He promises He will reward you if you obey Him. Verse 11 of the same Psalm states, *In keeping them there is great reward. Inspiration* is a pivotal, watershed issue! The Scriptures are the Word of God! Accede today to their authority in your life!

1. Schaeffer, Francis. *He is There and He is not Silent* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972).
2. Note too that Paul and other NT authors strongly condemned those who in any way adulterated or diminished the Scriptures (cf. Galatians 1:6–9; 2 Corinthians 2:17; 2 Timothy 4:3, 4; Revelation 22:18, 19).
3. Harold Lindsell's classic book, *The Battle for the Bible*, was penned after Fuller Theological Seminary had abandoned inerrancy. He went on to help found Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary with a high view of inerrancy. In his book he builds the case for how the abandonment of inerrancy leads to missiological atrophy. All that to say, inspiration determines a myriad of things in the Christian life: missions, national policy and even the discipline of Bible study attendance.
4. Plenary Inspiration is a historic reformation term that codifies the belief that God is the ultimate author of the Bible in its entirety. That is, God's superintending work in inspiration extends to the whole Bible and to each part of the Bible ... and that it is authoritative. [Cf. Stanley J. Grenz et al, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 1999).]
5. Nowhere in Scripture, including Matthew 16:18–19, supports the idea of ex-cathedra (Latin, "from the chair"), i.e., that supposedly a lineage of leadership stems from the Apostle Peter to a present-day church leader, who when he speaks ex cathedra, is speaking for God.
6. Sometimes this included the use of an amanuensis, which is a secretary to whom they dictated.
7. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 2 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1995), 143.
8. Autographs or manuscripts written by the author.
9. Dr. Robert Thomas, *The Canon of the New Testament*, excerpt article, 2.
10. This was (and still is) a sedge plant that was made into a primitive form of paper. Later, vellum or parchment, a processed animal skin that was much more expensive than papyrus, was used in the copying of NT books.
11. Dr. Robert Thomas, *The Canon of the New Testament*, excerpt notes, 13.
12. Merrill Tenney, *The New Testament, A Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 417.
13. In theology, this word is termed as "a collection of authoritative writings" versus "an authoritative collection of writings." Whereas the former stresses the latent authority of the documents, the latter stresses the authority of the collection agency, i.e., the church rather than the books.
14. A *codex* (plural: *codices*) was "an early, primitive form of a modern-day book, contrasted with a scroll, which was a rolled-up papyrus manuscript."
15. Brooke Westcott, *The Bible*, 189. 9. Dr. Robert Thomas, *The Canon of the New Testament*, excerpt article, 2.

Differentiating Between Spiritual Infancy, Spiritual Maturity

We all need to take an objective look at our level of spiritual *maturity*. Let us embark on a period of spiritual introspection. This chapter is my attempt to investigate with clarity and insight what the Scriptures reveal as the delineators between spiritual *maturity* and immaturity.

As I prepare this study for you, I pray it will aid the promptings of the Holy Spirit as you ponder your development in Christ. May God richly bless you as you embark on a journey of personal spiritual evaluation. I look forward to hearing your feedback.

I. INTRODUCTION

In at least four separate New Testament (NT) passages, an association exists between the two Greek words *teleios* and *nepios*. Whereas *teleios* means and is translated into the English word *mature*, the word *nepios* denotes a *child*. These passages then provide a clear and striking contrast. My purpose is to drive home the necessity for personal, continued spiritual growth in the life of every believer.

The contrast between the two words should not be interpreted as good versus evil because, after being saved, every believer goes through a period of spiritual infancy—not to mention that we all act immaturely at times, no matter our age in Christ. Complete sanctification only occurs when we go to

be with the Lord. The bottom line of these passages—and of the chapter—is this: we should not remain in a state of spiritual immaturity! Unfortunately for American Christianity, many believers are characterized by spiritual immaturity. How long have you known Christ as Lord and Savior? If it's been a good while, do you nevertheless remain in a spiritual fog?

Let's begin by looking at each of these four passages that illuminate this contrast, juxtaposing spiritual immaturity and spiritual *maturity*.

Passages Contrasting Spiritual Infants and Spiritual Adults

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? (1 Corinthians 3:1–3)

For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil (Hebrews 5:13–14).

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming (Ephesians 4:13–14).

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature (1 Corinthians 14:20).

Before looking more closely at each of these passages and observing how they illustrate the stark contrast between spiritual immaturity and *maturity*, you may be already asking yourself this question: how do we grow out of the former and into the latter? The first two verses of Romans 12 spell out how the believer grows from infancy to *maturity*:

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

As seen in this passage, spiritual growth occurs when you are *transformed by the renewing of your mind*. And the *renewing of your mind* happens at the rate by which you learn the Scriptures and obey them. Remember, importantly, Scripture states of itself in Hebrews 4:12:

The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Accordingly, since Scripture is *living and active*, it has the power to transform us from *childhood* to *adulthood* to the degree we allow the Word to renew our mind. Therefore, renewal and transformation are tantamount to knowing and obeying the Word of God. To elaborate further, 2 Corinthians 10:5 instructs us to take

every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Do you in any way block the Word from transforming your thinking? Is the Word—or the world—preeminent in your thinking? In a closer examination of these passages that contrast *adults* with *infants*, let's examine some of the specific revealed indicators that characterize each category. Which of these characteristics identify you?

II. THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRITUAL INFANTS

Let us now exegete particular portions of the aforementioned passages of contrast (in the order I have listed them) in order to underscore the following summary identifiers of spiritual infancy.

A. INFANTS DO NOT LISTEN

I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men (1 Corinthians 3:1).

Paul's use of the word *brethren* denotes that he is addressing believers in the Church of Corinth. His point was that even though they were saved, he couldn't communicate with them in a manner normal for *mature* Christians speaking with *mature* Christians. When both are *spiritual men* in Christ, believers can reason with one another from the Scriptures because both hold the Word in common as authoritative, the final arbiter for all of faith and practice. However, when a person says he is a believer but will not respond to the clear teachings and authority of the Word of God, classifying him or her as an *infant* is fair. Conversely, Paul had to speak to them as *men of flesh*, as *to infants in Christ*. He could only give them *milk to drink and not solid food for you* [they] *were not able to receive it* (1 Corinthians 3:1–2).

Milk contrasted with solid food is a fitting picture denoting the believer's inability to digest the Word of God. Many American believers today are like *children* who want candy and dessert versus a regular, nutritious meal that will supply their real needs for strong, healthy growth, i.e., carbs versus protein. That observation leads me to say this: the *mature* in Christ dine not only on the Word, but also on commentaries, systematic theologies, Church history, Christian biographies, etc. How are your reading habits? How is your library coming?

Metaphorically, every serious
believer needs to be in the weight
room, downing protein shakes and
watching his carb intake.

Having stated that, all passages of Scripture contain milk and meat and are capable of ministering to the needs of all who are intent on listening to the Word, no matter their level of spiritual *maturity*. It is incumbent on both the teacher and the pupil to ascertain what God wants each one to learn from the passage under study. What is tragic, however, is for the pupils to demand that the teacher offer only milk and/or for the teacher

never to go so deep as to challenge the students in areas where they are immature and sinning. For instance, as a teacher of God's Word, I must say the following: those believers who sponsored the National Prayer Breakfast should be canceling it instead. Why would believers sponsor an event historically characterized by religious syncretism that hurts rather than helps the propagation of singular saving faith in Christ alone? Such syncretism invokes God's wrath on our nation, not His blessing.

The above is illustrative of the job of a Bible teacher per Paul's admonition of his understudy, Timothy, in 2 Timothy 3:16–17. The spiritual leader/Bible teacher will undergo a stricter judgment (James 3:1) and cannot shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27)—no matter how folks within the sound of his heralding may choose to respond to him. (Remember, America's greatest theological mind, the uncompromising Jonathan Edwards, was thrown out of his church because he wouldn't marry an elder's *child* to a non-believer.)

Generally speaking, the above present-day, relevant admonition illustrates my point:

Do you intently desire to listen
to and obey the Word, or are you
occupied with your own thinking
and way of doing things?

Remember:

For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant (Hebrews 5:13).

Babes in Christ tend to avoid strong doses of the Word because they know the Word will convict them of their wrongdoing and because their conscience will prod them to change. Although they may publicly and verbally accede to *sola Scriptura*, *infants* reject the authority of God's Book when it trumps personal desires because, like a baby trying to digest a steak dinner, they are *not accustomed* (*apeiros*) to bowing to its right-way-ness. Believers who shrink from studying the Word telegraph their spiritual

immaturity. *Infants* may even attempt to discredit the Word in their desires to rationalize and justify self-serving actions.

B. INFANTS REBEL

Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly (1 Corinthians 3:2–3).

The Corinthian believers had heard and received the Gospel at a much earlier time, yet they still walked as though they weren't saved by God through Christ. This disregard is grossly abnormal for any Christian. They were passive and/or rebellious regarding their new life and position in Him. They were rebelling against God's command, for all believers are to *walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh* (Galatians 5:16).

What are the desires of the flesh? They are evident in 1 John 2:16: *the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life*. Elsewhere Paul states, similarly, *Do not quench the [Holy] Spirit* (1 Thessalonians 5:19). The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer secures the victory over (respective to 1 John 2:16) sexual lust, covetousness, and self-centeredness—sins all too present on the Hill. The power of the ministry of the Holy Spirit parallels the degree to which believers allow the Word of God to *richly dwell within* them (cf. Ephesians 5:18 and Colossians 3:16).

It is biblically *infantile* for anyone to name the name of Christ yet continue to display spiritual immaturity and latent insurgency toward God by refusing to adhere to the precepts of His Word. Not only is throwing protein-rich food from the highchair unacceptable, but it is also rank rebellion.

C. INFANTS DISPLAY JEALOUSY AND CAUSE STRIFE

Notice the progression here relative to the first three characteristics.

Immature believers don't listen to good
counsel, they rebel, and thus they
affect others in the body of Christ:

For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? (1 Corinthians 3:3).

Where *jealousy* exists attitudinally, *strife* will result visibly. The former is a sinful, immature emotional feeling, and the latter is a manifestation of selfishness and provocation. Accordingly, immature believers cause division in the body of Christ. Why? Because in their *infancy*, it's still all about them versus God's glory. The babe in Christ has difficulty putting away the old self (cf. Ephesians 4:31), his self-centered ambitions, and his quest for significance. But in truth, as Paul said of himself in Galatians 2:20, *I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live*. Every *mature* believer must live with an attitude of being dead to self.

So why all the quest for personal glory? Our goal as believers is God's glory! Accordingly, when faced with a decision regarding personal interests over those of the body of Christ, we are to choose the latter. *Infants* in Christ, states our passage, *walk like mere men*. Or said another way, they act like non-believers.

III. FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRITUAL ADULTS

A. ADULTS ARE TRAINED AND DISCERNING

But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil (Hebrews 5:14).

This contrasting portion of the second verse of Hebrews 5:13–14 is easy to see and understand. Spiritually *mature* individuals, because of their regular diet of the Word, possess the ability to *discern* truth from error. They are trained to see life through the lens of the Book penned by the Author of life. A parallel passage to this is 1 John 2:12–14:

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Similar to Paul, the Apostle John uses the analogy of physical maturation to depict spiritual growth (although the Greek words to characterize these levels of growth are different). Importantly, what distinguishes the three levels of spiritual *maturity* between the *child*, the *young man*, and the *father* in John's first letter is this: the *young man* and the *father* differ from the *child* in that they *have overcome the evil one*. Much more can be learned from this passage, but in relation to this study and this subpoint, what this similarly illustrates is that the spiritually *mature* believer can and will *discern* spiritual truth from error, whereas the *infant* does not. In other words, babes can get caught in the web of false doctrine or religion. The spiritually *mature*, on the other hand, have come to grips with the truth of 1 Peter 5:8:

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Satan thrives at sidetracking young believers into false religious systems that (to the spiritually less discerning) seem to be like biblical Christianity. But the spiritual *adult* can ascertain true saving faith from false religions and cults as is implied by the third passage in the original listing of passages:

As a result [they] are no longer ... children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming (Ephesians 4:14).

The *child* in the faith tends to go with the flow (the wrong flow), i.e., *tossed here and there by waves*, which may or may not be doctrinal in nature. This verse could refer to following others who cause schisms in the body of Christ. Furthermore, they are doctrinally deceived. Notice Paul says in this regard, *every wind of doctrine*, i.e., they cannot discern correct doctrine as supported by the Word of God. They lack knowledge of the Word. All they know is that "Jesus loves me, and I know my sins are forgiven." It is not uncommon for those at this level of *maturity*, i.e., babes in Christ, to attend a religious institution that teaches salvation is attained in some other fashion than by faith alone in Christ alone. (As I often have said in our Bible studies, a common thread among all false religions is an unbiblical understanding of the person and work of Christ, often combined with extra-biblical revelation of some sort.) As spiritual *infants*, they lack the ability to discern error from truth. They lack training in the Word of God.

At the risk of sounding arrogant or self-righteous, I will say that most believers today in the American Church are spiritual *infants*. Most are grossly under-taught in the Word of God due to the impact of the seeker-sensitive movement in many churches. Accordingly, they are headed for heaven, but in the meantime, their usage by God here on earth is quite limited.

Now think of this unfortunate phenomenon as it relates to public servants who desire higher office: in few circumstances does a president or a king appoint an *infant* to an important task. First, the would-be servant must grow up and come to know the king personally and intimately, earning his trust in *maturity* by living in accordance with his principles. Only then could that one possibly think he or she might be appointed to an important position. In a similar sense, do not expect God to appoint you to a higher level of service prior to *maturing* in your relationship with Him.

B. ADULTS UNIFY THE BODY

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man ... (Ephesians 4:13).

In this Ephesians passage, again contrasting *teleion* with *nepios*, yet another characteristic of a *mature* believer comes to light. *Mature* believers are critically sensitive to the unity of the body of Christ. They hold unity as a high priority because, for one reason, the corporate unity of the body of Christ is the strongest form of evangelism to the secular world. Regarding this point, Jesus said this to God the Father in John 17:21:

“That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

The unity of the body is extremely important to those who are *mature* in Christ, and they will avoid disrupting it. In contrast, the spiritually immature, as previously seen, are characterized by *jealousy*, which leads to *strife*, which leads to disunity.

C. ADULTS DISPLAY CHRISTLIKENESS AND ARE GROWING

To the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

As the believer grows closer to Christ through prayer and obedience to His Word, he becomes more and more like the One Who saved him. This ongoing process is aided by the indwelling Holy Spirit. It should be noted again that perfection in Christlike behavior will never be fully attained in this life; not until we go to be with our Savior (glorification) is perfection achieved. It follows then that we must be gracious and patient with others in *agapé* love—not self-righteously thinking we have a lock on orthopraxy and orthodoxy. Interestingly, Paul uses the word *mature* or *complete* (*teleios*) in Colossians to explain the unending role and goal of the pastor-teacher in this sanctifying process:

We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ (Colossians 1:28).

Continued *maturation* is a sign of *adulthood*; moving toward completeness is normal for the Christian life. Paul said to the Philippians (1:6):

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

It goes without saying that those who are *maturing* are also characterized by humility when they discover that they are out of sorts with Scripture.

D. ADULTS KNOW DOCTRINE AND ARE MATURE THINKERS

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature (1 Corinthians 14:20).

This passage is from the final verse listed in the opening contrasting Scriptures. The context of this passage from Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians has to do with the issue of spiritual gifts, but in a broader sense of application, it relates to this week's subject matter. Specifically, Paul is addressing the Corinthian believers—and by extension, all believers—with the admonition to be *mature* in their thinking.

Mature believers are characterized by *mature* thinking: they possess an ability to understand the principles of Scripture and reason out from them, making sound, principle-based applications of the truths therein, not only in their personal lives but also in their policy formation. All their decisions will accurately reflect the principles and precepts of His revelation via Scripture. *Mature* believers are not disconnected from scriptural truth and application in any area of their lives; that is to say, *mature* believers have integrity with the Word of God.

Mature-in-Christ public
servants are biblically based
thinkers who reason from the
epistemological basis and
everlasting authority of God's Word.

Proverbs 2:6 states this same idea: *For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.* Continuing with Proverbs 7:4, *Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call understanding your intimate friend.* Therefore, unlike in *infants*, a true knowledge and deep understanding about the fundamental, foundational issues of life is characteristic of *mature*, spiritual *adults*. How our nation needs more public servants who are not only trained but also discerning, unifying, growing, *mature* thinkers! They are born from an intense, Holy Spirit-given desire to grow up in Christ.

Spiritual Infants

- Do you react negatively to the admonition of Scripture?
- Are jealousy and personal ambition more important to you than the unity of the body of Christ?
- Are you uncomfortable in Bible-teaching environments?

Spiritual Adults

- Are you trained by the Word and discerning of false doctrine?
 - Do you seek to unify, purify, and protect the body of Christ—even at your own cost?
 - Are you Christlike and habitually growing?
 - Do you know doctrine and reason from it?
-

IV. SUMMARY

Are you a spiritual *child* or *adult*? Which list best characterizes you?

My prayer is that this study will help you in your quest for spiritual *maturity* relative to these respective, definitive passages on the subject. In your examination of these questions, remember the words of Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, to his son:

“Be sober and vigilant. Remember at all times
that while you are seeing the world, the world
will see you. Recollect further that you are
always under the eye of the Supreme Being.”¹

May God bless you as you ponder and measure yourself against this scriptural plumb line.

1. Dorie Lawson, *Posterity: Letters of Great Americans to Their Children* (New York: First Anchor Books, 2004), 268.

The Personal and Cultural Implications of Galatians

The New Testament book of Galatians is one of the two books of the Bible that fueled the Reformation—and is the basis of what today is termed the Protestant Work Ethic—two phenomena that profoundly shaped the development of our nation and culture.

Every public servant should have a working understanding of the connection between Galatian theology and manifest personal and cultural significance. Such knowledge would indeed impact policy decision-making as well.

This small New Testament book not only contains walloping implications for cultural formation, but it also holds critical truths relative to our personal growth in Christ—truths that are unsurpassed in terms of importance! I will pinpoint three of them as we work through an overview of this wonderful epistle.

I. NAME

The Apostle Paul planted many churches on his various missionary journeys throughout Asia Minor (now Turkey). One region was called Galatia (cf. 1:2; 1 Corinthians 16:1). This epistle containing some very important lessons is addressed to more than one church, having been passed on from one church to another. As such Galatians is called an encyclical epistle and ostensibly is still being passed along today to us.

II. AUTHOR AND DATE

The epistle claims to have been written by Paul (1:1; 5:2) and given his style (as revealed here and elsewhere), there is no questioning this. The great apostle was born not too far from Galatia in another region known as Cilicia. There he was raised in strict Jewish orthodoxy as a Pharisee (cf. Acts 23:6) striving to please his peers (Galatians 1:10). His life drastically changed, however, when confronted by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 9). There he was converted and given his marching orders as a missionary by Jesus' surrogate messenger, Ananias (9:15). Of special interest to the public servant is the fact that his calling specifically included reaching for Christ political leaders (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1–4) as well as Jew and Gentile.

Christianity only included a small sect of Jewish converts at the start of his ministry—and by the end of it, the *faith* had become a Roman Empire phenomenon! It is no stretch to say:

Paul was the greatest
missionary in all of history.

Paul's life, in one sense, is a strong testimony to perseverance and the simultaneous empowering of the Holy Spirit. There is no limit to the influence a man can have when He walks with the Lord. Like a Lincoln or a Wilberforce, you too, as a humble persevering public servant, can alter the direction of your town, state, or nation.

The date of his writing the letter to the Church of Galatia is shortly after the meeting of the Jerusalem Council as recorded in Acts 15, around A.D. 49.

III. BACKGROUND

The Galatian region had been a Roman province since 189 B.C., and Paul had worked hard on his first missionary journey to found many churches

in the region, including Antioch, Derbe, Iconium, and Lystra. The main purpose of the book is to put an end to the false teachings of the Judaizers. As such, it is a *polemic* epistle, meaning a strong refutation.

Since the founding of these churches, the Judaizers had infiltrated and gained control of them, corrupting the doctrine of salvation—specifically, justification by *faith* alone—instead preaching “*faith* plus works.” The distillation of Paul’s counter to their teaching is recorded in 2:21: “*if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.*”

IV. EMPHASIS AND THEMES

A. SALVATION BY FAITH ALONE

Previously warned to “stand down” from preaching this heresy by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:23–29, the Judaizers had nonetheless persisted. They taught that Gentiles (and ostensibly people today), in order to be saved, must first become Jewish proselytes and submit to the judicial and ceremonial Mosaic Law of the OT in addition to *faith* in Christ. Paul clearly summarizes in the epistle the proper purpose of the Mosaic Law in 3:24:

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

The Mosaic Law, as always intended by God, was to be an instrument whereby a conscientious individual would measure himself and quickly determine that he or she lacked sufficient righteousness (cf. Deuteronomy 27:26; Matthew 5:20; James 2:10) and was therefore in need of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

The Mosaic Law can be likened to an MRI machine: it does not intend to cure, its purpose is to diagnose.

In this analogy, Jesus is the pharmacist who freely provides and fulfills the prescription to an ailing patient who is hungering for spiritual healing.

If it weren't for the strong polemic, or refutation, of error as stated in this epistle, Christianity could have become a subset of Judaism. Lest we today think this thought farfetched, Galatians 1:6–9 informs us that the whole church was already duped! In this line of thought, Paul adds in 4:11, *I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain*. Interestingly, this is the only epistle that Paul wrote that does not begin with, or in some way include, a positive beginning note to its readers; this absence underscores the serious tone relative to the dire consequences to the primitive Christian Church as a whole—if there was to be no immediate course correction.

B. SANCTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

In addition to correcting the doctrine of salvation, Paul carries the economy of “by *faith* alone” forward and incorporates it into the doctrine of sanctification. Sanctification in the life of the believer is also achieved by *faith* alone! In 5:25 he summarily states in this regard, *If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit*. This instruction is also an important aspect of the book. If the Holy Spirit does indeed dwell in the life of the believer (after being saved cf. Romans 8:9), then it stands to reason that He will mature the believer by His internal guidance and conviction of sin in His own way and timing. Galatians 3:3 in this regard adds, *Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*

Related to both salvation and sanctification by the economy of *faith* alone, the OT states that *Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness* (Galatians 3:6; cf. Genesis 15:6). God's economies of salvation and sanctification have always been by belief versus works. Paul reasons here that even in the OT, belief has always been the means of salvation and sanctification versus keeping the Law. And in the epistle to the Galatians, he adds yet another very convincing argument in this regard: we need keep in mind that the dispensation of the Law does not occur until 430 years after the Abrahamic Covenant/The Promise (cf. Galatians 3:17). Accordingly, if keeping the Mosaic Law was God's intended way of salvation, then what about all those who lived before the Mosaic Law was given?

A Glance at Galatians

- What goes through your head when you think about why you should or should not go to heaven?
 - What goes through your head when you think of achieving personal growth and self-improvement?
 - Should this Bible book shape your thinking?
-

V. UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGING PASSAGES

The contents of Galatians should be mastered by every public servant who is serious about using his office to influence others and the nation for Christ. Why? Because you will find that some of your colleagues will think like the Galatians did prior to Paul's penning this timeless epistle. Herein is a course correction for those who are misled into believing that faith alone is not God's formula for salvation. In addition to correcting extremely aberrant and heretical thoughts on salvation and sanctification, at least three passages in this letter are used by others to propagate confusing theological viewpoints. You need to have a clear understanding of them, and I will attempt to provide you with a proper contextualized explanation of each.

A. IS REGENERATION VIA WATER BAPTISM (3:27)?

For all of you who were baptized into Christ.

The fact that immersion does not save is indicated clearly in 1 Peter 3:20–21; in no way does this passage in Galatians contradict that one. First Peter therefore guides us into understanding what Paul is communicating here in this Galatian passage via the use of a metaphor. This passage is not a reference to a physical water baptism in that Paul is using the phrase *baptized* (*baptizo* meaning “to place, immerse”) *into Christ* to communicate that the believer has been closely placed in the sense of being united with Christ. In a similar sense, Paul is incorporating this literary genre, or device, in Galatians 2:20, wherein he states he has been “*crucified with Christ.*”

We therefore reason he is speaking metaphorically in this passage; Paul wasn't literally dead when he wrote those words. If salvation is by *faith* alone (a truth replete throughout Scripture), then baptismal regeneration (if that were the way to interpret this passage) would negate the oft-repeated-elsewhere idea of salvation by *faith* alone. Such a form of salvation would be equivalent to works (contr. Ephesians 2:8–9). Paul is not teaching baptismal regeneration neither here nor elsewhere.

The concluding phrase of Galatians 3:27 could also be easy to misunderstand but instead serves to buoy the aforementioned interpretive approach: Paul says, [You] *have clothed yourselves with Christ*. What does he mean? You should understand this second stanza as a parallel thought, an additional beautiful metaphorical facet associated with the same diamond of truth: the believer, upon placing his *faith* in Christ, is *clothed ... with Christ*. Again, this language is not intended by the author to be interpreted with wooden literalism. (Our Lord doesn't expect us to wear certain underwear!)

The picturesque prose of this Pauline
passage is intended to vividly
illustrate the believer's positional
and practical unity with his Lord.

B. ARE ROLES THE SAME FOR MEN AND WOMEN (3:28)?

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The Evangelical feminist movement has based much of its egalitarian theology on and from this one passage. But properly understood, Paul is stating that all believers are *one in Christ*, be they *Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female*. The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

God's Word is replete with the fact that there is impartiality in Christ. But simultaneously God's Word clearly, repeatedly, and distinctively

teaches that by God's design, there are differing roles in life. This uniqueness in roles includes governing authorities versus the citizenry (Romans 13:1–8); elders versus congregants (Hebrews 13:17); bosses versus employees (1 Peter 2:18); parents versus children (Ephesians 6:1); and husbands versus wives (1 Peter 3:1). A whole cadre of passages replete throughout Scripture, attests to role differentiations. Although positions vary, Galatians 3:28 serves to make it abundantly clear that no one is more significant or important than another in God's eyes—nor should that be the case in our viewing of others!

Paul further elaborates on impartiality in 1 Corinthians 12:13–26, and James 2:1–9. In harmony then with the whole of Scripture, Galatians 3:28 fits with the principle of those passages: equality of value simultaneously exists with diversity in function.

C. IS THERE NO ETERNAL SECURITY (5:4)?

You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

Does this Galatians passage indicate that a person can lose his salvation? No. In the corpus of this epistle, the reader throughout is ensconced in a front-row seat, witnessing the cataclysmic clash between a salvation by *faith* alone versus a supposed salvation by *faith* plus works (aka, keeping the Mosaic Law in addition to subscribing to God's grace) economy of salvation. In that repeated context, Paul is saying in this particular passage that those *who are seeking to be justified by the law* are *severing* themselves from an economy of salvation by *faith* alone. The Greek word for *sever* (*katargeo*) means "to be estranged."

Accordingly, the message being communicated here is: those who side with the Judaizers estrange themselves from God in rejecting what Paul had preached earlier, so clearly and vehemently (cf. Galatians 1:6–9). Taken in the context of the whole of Scripture, this passage does not tamper with or contradict the myriad of passages that teach the eternal security of the believer (cf. Romans 8:31–39). In this way of understanding the passage, it follows that, for you to estrange yourself from what Paul had previously taught signifies that *you have fallen from* a grace-alone understanding of the economy of salvation.

Salvation by *faith* alone via the
grace of God is a critically
important tenet of Biblical
Christianity and the Galatian Epistle.

This particular passage in no way negates all the other clear and strong NT passages regarding the eternal security of the believer.

In summary of this portion of a survey of Galatians, these problematic passages are easily understood to harmonize with the remainder of Scripture.

VI. APPLICATION TO GOVERNING AUTHORITIES

A. TO THE PERSON

What follows are three takeaway points from Galatians that should forever shape the public servant's life, making this NT book an important one to master.

1. Possess the Zealous Commitment of Paul

In Galatians 1:10 the great apostle states,

For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still striving to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

Prior to his conversion, Paul had murdered Christians in his attempt to please the most ardent Pharisees. After coming to Christ, his singular ambition was to please Christ. How about you? If "Jesus paid it all," does not "all to Him I owe" follow?¹

In 2:20, Paul underscores the theological reality that breeds such zealous devotion of a man to his Lord. He writes:

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

Paul saw his old nature as dead. He himself, with his selfish ambitions, was now no longer a priority; in fact, he reckoned them dead—rather, Christ lived in him! Such single minded devotion to our Lord can only stem from our adoption of a similar biblical understanding as spelled out here in Galatians. Meditate on this passage. What idols in your heart eclipse this singular focus that we need possess in serving the One to whom we owe our very life?

2. Prevent a Legalistic Spirit

Legalists are self-righteous people who possess pharisaical attitudes. Such a perspective always stems from a works-based theology of salvation. If you want to be in the “A” club, you will adhere to the legalist’s extrabiblical standards. But legalists are hard to be around, and they evidence little joy. They convey attitudes of spiritual superiority and are often condescending. But if you are saved by the grace of God, it follows that you will extend grace and mercy to others. Remember 5:1:

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Christ came to set believers *free* from an economy of works-based salvation and sanctification (per the culture of the Pharisees and the Judaizers). Christ came to set you *free* from a performance-based economy—one where you never know if you’re good enough. Paul confronts such ensuing condescending attitudes in 6:3:

For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

Don’t be a holier-than-thou public servant. Be characterized as someone who grants to others what they may not deserve. Don’t believe, think, or come off as though you are spiritually or morally superior! In fact, some church congregations and elder boards come off this way; they need to study this book!

Avoid thinking of others as oxygen-deficient climbers from your summit perch.

Be gracious and merciful toward others in the same way that God has been abundantly patient, gracious and merciful to you!

3. Progress by Walking in the Spirit

We may inquire, in an economy of grace, “How then do I mature in Christ?” If we remain sensitive to God’s indwelling Holy Spirit by confessing sin whenever He convicts (1 John 1:9) and remain short-roped to His Word (Colossians 3:16), then we are *walking by the Spirit* per 5:16:

Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

If you *walk by the Spirit*, you will grow, and *you will not carry out the desire* of your sinful nature.

Notice the following two passages related to this same question: in 1 Corinthians 4:3–4, Paul states, ***I do not even examine [anakrino] myself ... but the one who examines [anakrino] me is the Lord.*** But later in the same letter, he says that when a believer comes to the communion table, he needs to *examine (dokimazo) himself* (1 Corinthians 11:28). These two passages seem to be contradictory in the English translation of the NT, but they are not. Importantly, it is to say this: relative to the first passage above, there is a need to *walk in the Spirit* (versus *quenching* the Spirit, cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:19), to enable the Spirit to *examine [anakrino] me* per the first passage listed. This first passage indicates that, as a result, I don’t have to be here *examining myself* all the time. When I *walk in the Spirit*, I can depend on Him to prompt my heart—to judge me—relative to specific areas of needed growth.

But to the second passage listed, even though God the Holy Spirit is prompting, piquing, and stimulating my heart to grow in certain areas (and He uses the Word as well as others to achieve this intention), I nonetheless need to continually *examine (dokimazo)*, “analyze and approve” of my actions in the sense of “Am I being personally responsive to what the Holy Spirit is prompting me to repent of and change in my life?”

This seeming conundrum serves to illustrate the less exacting nature of the English language in comparison to the Greek language. *Examined* in its usage in 1 Corinthians 4 relates to God’s judging your heart, whereas the usage of a different Greek word in 1 Corinthians 11 relates to my analysis and approval in the sense of taking responsibility for my actions relative to

what the Holy Spirit has convicted me about! The passages are not saying the opposite.

All three passages then inure to the personal, guiding power of the Holy Spirit versus a rigid set of extrabiblical outward standards that supposedly connote that I am godly to others. Trust the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide and convict moment by moment! Therein is the achievement of intimacy with God! In the sense of personal growth, Christianity is an intimate relationship with God more so than a bunch of rules and regulations to perform outwardly. In this same construct of thought, Paul concludes this in 6:4:

But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another.

In summary, Galatians provides the means by which the public servant can become increasingly intimate with God and, therefore, effective in public service.

B. TO THE POSITION

As stated in the introduction, the theological truths of this book fueled the Reformation, giving birth to what is commonly referred to as the Protestant Work Ethic (cf. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* by Max Weber, Eng. trans. 1930). How exactly are they connected? Follow me on this: when we are empowered and ***walk by the Spirit*** (5:16), we increasingly manifest the ***fruit of the Spirit*** as listed in Galatians 5:22 and 23:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

As a result, we become increasingly self-governed. The promise and the munificent implications of the manifest ***fruit of the Spirit*** to any given society are enormously large! As you can imagine, a culture of indwelt-by-the-Holy-Spirit individuals will shape its DNA in a myriad of positive and profound ways!

Exactly how does this empowering manifest itself? The resident Holy Spirit when reigning in the heart—in contrast to being continually grieved or quenched—controls and dominates the actions of the individual (Galatians 5:18), enabling him to overcome the proclivities of an otherwise overriding sin nature. This sin nature, among many other manifestations,

includes slothfulness (cf. Proverbs 12:27) in contrast to a work ethic: thus, the connection to the idea of Galatians being the book of the Bible that fostered the Protestant work ethic.

Several of the additional manifestations and benefits of an individual and ensuing culture being indwelt by the Holy Spirit are as follows: (1) being led into all truth (John 16:13); (2) a sensitized and empowered conscience (Romans 2:15; contr. 1 Corinthians 8:7); and (3) an active, victorious, overcoming nature (John 16:33). These three are but a few. The point is that huge societal benefits are achieved from the manifestation and practice of these character qualities! What great things happen in a nation when citizens and governmental leaders are characterized by the magnanimous *fruit of the Spirit!*

It follows that Spirit-indwelt leaders rise above the effects of surrounding, otherwise self-dominating oppressive sin, to influence, shape, and aid their fellow man and country! *How astoundingly significant this Galatian truth is to the prosperity of a nation!*

What results from the Galatian teaching of God's design for a self-governing individual (and citizenry) equates to a negligible need for a dictator and/or police state to alternatively quell the inherent sin nature of man by outward force. Galatians then, in one sense, is about how to govern a nation most effectively! Summarily, the cultural implications of Galatians are this:

When believers are indwelt
by the Holy Spirit, they will
be governed from within.

The comparative cultural results stemming from the individual's ability to victoriously govern self are both munificent and magnificent: more societal liberties! More freedom! More prosperity! And more opportunity for everyone to reach his full potential as a human being! Conversely, there is less need for outward forms of restraint, i.e., governmental controls.

This cultural application is reflected in Paul's summary words found in the concluding portions of Galatians (6:9–10):

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people.

VII. SUMMARY

These profound personal applications and professional implications detail how the book of Galatians relates to a governing authority. These truths and blessings flow from the study and manifestation of this profound six-chapter NT book.

As a believer appointed by God to public office, make sure to live according to the truths heralded in Galatians! Remember the personal applications of the book: to *possess* the zealousness of Paul, to *prevent* developing a legalistic spirit, and to *progress* by *walking in the Spirit*!

Lastly and professionally, what follows from the profundity of the Galatian truths is the necessity to uphold the constitutional tenet of freedom of religion if for no other reason than to further the churches' capability and calling to create indwelt-by-the-Holy-Spirit citizens both now and in the future. These powerful God-indwelt individuals will affect a nation for good via their personal and multiple manifestations that stem from *walking by the Spirit*, i.e., *the fruit of the Spirit*.

Read this epistle through several times this week. You may not realize it, but the America we all know and love was greatly shaped by Paul's letter to the church at Galatia! It follows that you should know its message forward and backward—and live and legislate accordingly to its profound precepts!

Understanding the Separation of Church and State

When Jesus said, “*render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s*” (Matthew 22:21), He was proclaiming a huge new distinction—something quite different for the coming Church Age, relative to the past with Old Testament (OT) Israel. This passage, among other New Testament (NT) passages, represents the biblical basis of *institutional* separation of civil government from God’s ordained institution of the Church. (Lest you misunderstand what I am saying, I must be careful to add at this point that *institutional* separation does not imply influential separation, as is posited by many secularists today.)

Unlike the preceding biblical epoch of OT Israel, where God’s people and the State were one—a theocracy or sacerdotal (“priestly or ecclesiastical”) system of governance—in our present age, Jesus expects the two institutions to be differentiated in structure, purpose, and leadership.

It follows, therefore, that America’s greatest resources are leaders in both institutions who are men and women of character.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Bible clearly teaches that today there is to be an *institutional* separation of Church and State. To think otherwise is to believe in a theocratic or sacerdotal form of government. What the Bible does not teach—and what the secularist would like to say the U.S. Constitution supports—is an *influential* separation of Church and State. Clearly, however, such thinking is not supported in the Constitution nor the Scriptures.

“Render unto Caesar” represents one of the biblical passages that supports the idea of *institutional* separation. Let us examine this thinking more closely from a historical perspective.

As primitive Christianity began, as recorded in the book of Acts, the separation of the Church from the State of Rome clearly existed. Not until the fourth century A.D. when Constantine co-opted Christianity as the State religion (in his attempt to unify the vast and diverse Roman Empire) did the previously existing, clear separation between the two institutions disappear. Tragically, this lack of separation occurs even during the Post-Reformation period! Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin practiced a sacerdotal societal structure versus a *composite* one per the clear teaching of the NT (cf. Matthew 20:17–22; Romans 13:1–8; 1 Peter 2:13–14). In that much of the Reformers’ emphasis on doctrinal correction of heresy related to soteriology (the doctrine of salvation), no surgical excising was performed relative to the aberrant earlier suturing of Church and State.

Important to this study is the thought that in the NT era—save the first three centuries of it—a theocratic, sacerdotal system has existed in most countries of the world. Historically, not until the American experiment in government did our Founding Fathers react to sacerdotal England (wherein the Church of England and the State of England still remain one and the same) and seek a pragmatic solution to separate themselves from a forced religious belief system incumbent on being born in England.

If, biblically speaking, the Church and State are to be separate institutions, does that suggest, as the secularist would postulate, a total disenfranchisement of the Church from the State, i.e., an *influential* separation as well? Is that the extrapolation Christ would desire from the Matthew 22:21 text? No!

As we will see in this chapter, the institution of the State is quite dependent on the existence of a strong and healthy institution of the Church (which it does not control) to build men and women in *righteousness* for service in government.

Without a strong Church that makes
disciples, the State soon goes wayward
due to the sinfulness of its leaders.

Since this is such a vital need and concern of the State itself, as well as of the State's leadership, what more so and specifically does the book of Proverbs state about the absolute need for *righteous* governmental leaders? Let us turn our attention in pursuit of the answer to that question.

II. UNDERSTANDING THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Every statesman needs to take a lesson from Proverbs 14:34. In this important Proverb is a nationalistic (versus personal) bestowal of truth that is a sound political maxim:

*Righteousness exalts a nation,
But sin is a disgrace to any people.*

Righteousness in the lives of individuals—both in a country's citizens and leaders—is the superior virtue over all others. This quality is a *nation's* number-one national resource! The writer of Proverbs is stating that this one ingredient assures the *exaltation* of a *nation*.

Neither the international trade nor the gross domestic product nor the presence of natural resources is most fundamental to the *exaltation* of a *nation*. Rather, the *righteousness* of a *nation's* individuals is its greatest resource—and the greatest commodity that a *nation* needs to manufacture!

The same principles that build individuals in *righteousness* (as expounded by the Word of God) are the same principles, multiplied by and through individuals, that build a *nation*. When a *nation* is impregnated with highly principled individuals, it gains well-being.

Given this cut-to-the-chase analysis of our greatest need, the question then quickly becomes one of how *righteousness* is formed in the lives of individuals. Having come to this conclusion, therein exists, in terms of serving the institution of the State, the absolutely critical preeminent duty of the Church in an institutionally separated society: to convert the soul and disciple, i.e., to Christianize the leaders of the State and its citizenry.

Conversion is even preeminent to education. Without a moral foundation, *knowledge makes arrogant* (1 Corinthians 8:1) and is of little value in terms of *nation* building. Therefore, in our composite country, the State is highly dependent on an institution it does not control for its own health and sustainability—the Church. Conversely, for the Church to spend her energy in the Capitol community attempting to affect policy

with little manifest concern for the souls of the State's leaders is to practice, biblically speaking, a misinformed and misguided sort of involvement. It is to attempt to do what others—strong-in-Christ public servants—can do much better! It is to be less than efficient. It is to misunderstand the primacy of her God-ordained role in a composite society.

The Church can best influence the State by building and sending *righteous* public servants to serve in government. Keep in mind, the State is not in the business of manufacturing *righteous* individuals. Rather, God has designed it to punish unrighteous individuals (cf. Romans 13:4; 1 Peter 2:13–14). Proverbs 29:2 serves to summarize this point:

*When the righteous increase, the people rejoice,
But when a wicked man rules, people groan.*

States Proverbs 11:10–11 in this regard:

*When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices,
And when the wicked perish, there is joyful shouting.
By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted,
But by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down.*

Adds Proverbs 28:12:

*When the righteous triumph, there is great glory,
But when the wicked rise, men hide themselves.*

As you can see, Proverbs has much to say about the necessity of *righteous* governmental leaders! Scripture shouts about this matter! The Church must be in the business of manufacturing them via evangelism and discipleship at all levels of their career paths.

III. THE GERMINATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The necessity of evangelism by the people of God to birth *righteous* individuals and achieve an ongoing healthy State is proclaimed by Proverbs 11:30:

*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,
And he who is wise wins souls.*

The fruit of the righteous generally includes our influence, productivity, instruction, and example. But notice what specifically is added to the definition of this fruit: evangelism or the *winning* of souls! When Jesus

visited the woman at the well in John chapter four, He was undoubtedly very thirsty and in need of water. He, however, set aside His personal needs to *win* the woman to salvation! He forgot about His own desires in want of achieving a higher priority: the joy of her salvation—the beginning of a *righteous* life.

Righteousness means
“right-way-ness.”

The soul of the woman at the well was the most important matter on Jesus’ mind. If only more Christian individuals whom God has placed in the Capitol would practice this priority of another’s soul over and above a self-centered preoccupation with career.

States Charles Bridges regarding the absence of soul *winning*:

The Christian who neglects his brother’s salvation fearfully hazards his own. He is gone back to his native selfishness, if he does not exhibit that love and kindness of God that has appeared unto men.¹

He goes on to add:

How poor is the mitre [head dressing] or the crown; how debasing the wisdom of the philosopher, the scholar, or the statesman, compared with this wisdom!²

The most important and wisest use of time in the Capitol is evangelizing the lost and creating, by God’s grace and imputation of the Holy Spirit, men and women who will hunger and thirst for *righteousness* the rest of their lives! Several years ago, the CapMin ministry leader in the New York State Capitol won 13 legislators to Christ in his first 18 months of serving there!

How misinformed, simplistic, and overlooked is the wisdom of our *nation's* leaders when the formation of *righteous* individuals through aggressive evangelism is never even mentioned—let alone emphasized! We need Franklin Graham to hold a crusade in the Capitol! What could be more important to the *righteousness* of our *nation*? Such ignorance in our priorities bespeaks the famine of biblical literacy in our Capitol! Make no mistake here: *righteousness exalts a nation*! Therefore, the priority of evangelism is the key to a great *nation* more than anything else! We need to get this through our heads, my friend! Evangelism is the germination of *righteousness*! We need today to convert public servants who are lost without Christ!

IV. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF RIGHTEOUS LEADERSHIP FROM THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Given the need for *righteous*, aka, biblically based leadership in the *nation*, what are some of the qualities *that* Proverbs states need to be present in statesmen? Notice the following specific instructions from Proverbs that define what *righteousness* should look like in a public servant. The *righteous* need to be

A. SELFLESS IN SERVICE

Proverbs 16:12 personifies the need for *righteousness* in the leadership of government:

*It is an abomination for kings to commit wicked acts,
For a throne is established on righteousness.*

A *righteous* leader will have no interests of his own apart from the public good. In his or her heart will be a consideration of others as more important than self (cf. Philippians 2). God requires that leaders whom He appoints (cf. Romans 13:1) be a blessing to the people and benefactors to their country. Ecclesiastes 8:9 states: *a man has exercised authority over another man to his hurt.*

How often I catch wind about the motives of our leaders and their selfish desires in seeking reelection. Only from the knowledge, understanding, and submission to the realization that God has appointed a person to office can selfish motives be eradicated and replaced by the *righteous* motives of

selfless service. **Righteous** public servants, states Ecclesiastes, serve others to the point that they **hurt** themselves in doing good! Can the same be said of you? Are you selfless in service?

B. JUST IN JUDGMENT

A major God-ordained responsibility of government is the punishment of evildoers (1 Peter 2:13–14). Within that vein is the awesome responsibility of just treatment through due process. A major portion of the job description of every elected official is to make sure the **nation** has an excellent judiciary system, especially God-fearing **righteous** judges (ones who, I might add, support the laws of the land—not make them up!). I have purposefully reversed the order of the following Scriptures in order to display the causal and reflective aspects of just leadership as it pertains to the longevity of a **nation's** vitality:

A king who sits on the throne of justice

Disperses all evil with his eyes (Proverbs 20:8).

A righteous man who walks in his integrity—

How blessed are his sons after him (Proverbs 20:7).

In ancient times kings would decree **justice** from their thrones. They were to rule in fear of God. So should be our lawmaking, police enforcement, and judicial appointments today. States Proverbs 24:23–25:

To show partiality in judgment is not good.

He who says to the wicked, “You are righteous,”

Peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him;

But to those who rebuke the wicked will be delight,

And a good blessing will come upon them.

If Solomon were here to visit our **nation's** Supreme Court, he would urge the justices to concentrate on conveying **righteousness** on the unrighteous. Recent decisions by our land's highest court have been more in keeping with that position, especially the June 24, 2022, Dobbs decision in which a majority held that the U.S. Constitution does not confer a right to abortion and returned the matter to the states. That decision reflected the wisdom in Proverbs 31:8–9:

*Open your mouth for the mute,
For the rights of all the unfortunate.
Open your mouth, judge righteously,
And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy.*

Rather than make up rights for the unrighteous, judges should defend the rights of the less fortunate—for example, the voiceless, yet-to-be born human beings! Only through *righteous* lawmakers and law enforcers can a society have any semblance of *justice*. *Justice* stems from *righteous*, God-fearing individuals who are grown into such by the discipleship priorities of the Church in a composite *nation* of co-abiding institutions of Church and State.

C. KNOW-HOW IN HIRING

If *righteousness exalts a nation*, then it follows that the open acknowledgment of *righteousness* and the discernment to elect people of integrity are the sure path to national prosperity. It follows that when and if the *righteous* have been elected to office, they should, in turn, hire *righteous* employees to dispatch their values. Too often, however, I have seen *righteous* elected officials hire the wrong kind of people. The wise statesman hires others who represent his character! Hiring wrong, corrupt, and wicked individuals will ruin a statesman's office. Contrary to *establishing* the office, they will misrepresent and corrupt! States Proverbs 25:5:

*Take away the wicked before the king,
And his throne will be established in righteousness.*

D. COMMITTED IN CONVICTIONS

For a Christian public servant to flounder in his principles—to compromise biblical absolutes in his policies or interactions with others—grievously tarnishes his testimony and, I might add, the corporate testimony of the body of Christ on the Hill. To be truly *righteous*, believers must hold fast to biblical convictions when the pressure is on! To do so requires not only biblical knowledge of those convictions, but also fellowship in the Capitol with other like-minded believers on a regular basis. When the fiery trial of our convictions arrives, will we stand firm and remain *righteous*, or will we fold? States Proverbs 25:26:

*Like a trampled spring and a polluted well
Is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.*

E. BARRING BRIBERY

To what avail are the best laws if people do not uphold them? The reason capitalism is slow to root in Russia and former CIS countries is due in large part to a lack of *righteousness* among its leaders and citizens; personal *bribery* overthrows the best of legal constructs. Samuel's sons took *bribes*, and their perfidy ruined Israel. Consistency must pervade every grade of official responsibility lest *bribery* corrupt a culture from the top down. People of God, people of *righteous* convictions, must pervade the leadership of all systems of governance for them to survive. States Proverbs 29:4 in this regard:

*The king gives stability to the land by justice,
But a man who takes bribes overthrows it.*

F. POTENT IN PRAYER

What every country or state most needs is *righteous* men and women beseeching God's presence in their personal and State affairs. Do not be deceived by syncretistic "prayer breakfasts." God only hears the prayers of leaders and citizens who are upright and who live *righteously* through faith in Jesus Christ. States Proverbs 15:29 in this regard:

*The LORD is far from the wicked,
But He hears the prayer of the righteous.*

Proverbs 15:8–9 states further:

*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
But the prayer of the upright is His delight.
The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD;
But He loves one who pursues righteousness.*

Scripture is clear: the prayers of those who are at enmity with Him, who passively or actively reject the Son of God, are worthless and go unheard. And the State suffers for want of God's blessing. The *righteous* leader is a man of potent prayer.

V. CONCLUSION

All would agree that characteristics of *righteousness* are necessary to the dispatch of good government, but the only way to produce these virtues in leaders is through the discipleship efforts of the Church in the lives of individuals. As the Church goes then, so goes the State. Said another way:

The State is reflective of the
righteousness of its people rather
than the causal agent of it.

Put still another way, the preacher is much more important than the politician to the future of the country. At the end of the day, in God's design, the latter reflects the aptness of the former.

Given this premiere truth regarding society, far be it from the Church to expend all its efforts in activism, seeking to cajole those who hold office (who oftentimes reject Christ) to vote biblically. It won't happen. Instead, the call and emphasis of Proverbs regarding the germinating health of a *nation* clearly unveils an emphasis on *righteous* leadership. Accordingly, the Church must emphasize this task: developing statesmen in Christ! They are the ones who are the greatest resource of the government of the United States of America.

1. Charles Bridges, *An Exposition of the Book of Proverbs* (New York: Robert Carter, Publisher, 1847), 114.
2. Ibid.

Do You Grieve or Quench the Holy Spirit?

Often in ministry, pastors in counseling situations end up dealing with the felt needs of individuals. But underlying those felt needs are the actual needs. The real needs are usually related to incorrect actions that stem from aberrant thinking, i.e., biblical ignorance or poor theology. *For as he thinks in his heart, so is he*, states Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV).

Accordingly, and to shape proper thinking, a person must be guided by God's Word. But to manifest right actions, God's Word must be overwhelmingly powerful and convincing in the conscience of the individual—in his or her thinking. Our conscience is no better than what we are conscientious about.

This is where studying the great doctrines of the faith comes into play. When a person grasps and understands all that Scripture has to say about a particular subject, it will often be persuasive to the conscience—and guide the person into right actions.

With that introduction in view, I would like to study the great Bible doctrine of the Holy Spirit with you. May the profound truths about the Third Person of the Trinity help to further mature you in the faith and strengthen your thinking, conscience, and ensuing actions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Jesus said to the disciples and ostensibly to believers today, *"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever"* (John 14:16). Jesus' ministry with His disciples was limited by

time as He would soon ascend into heaven. That God has empowered all believers with the Third Person of the Trinity is comforting news, known only through studying and applying the truth of the Scripture!

Known also as the **Helper** in Scripture, the Holy Spirit is God; the Bible identifies Him as one of three Persons existing as one God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. As the third member of the Godhead, He is tasked with the ministries of **helping** and empowering. Via His enabling, every public servant who is a follower of Christ can do what is right in his personal and vocational life. In the study that follows, “*Do You Grieve or Quench the Holy Spirit?*” we will learn more about who the Holy Spirit is, His presence and ministry, and His enabling, **helping** abilities in the believer’s life. It follows that, given His multifaceted positive functions, we would not want to ***grieve*** or ***quench*** Him.

II. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PERSON

A. RECOGNIZED AS A PERSON

Personal pronouns like “He” or “Him” are used to refer to the Holy Spirit rather than “it.” Note that “He” or “Him” is used four times in John 14:17 to refer to the Holy Spirit:

“That is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.”

B. ATTRIBUTES OF PERSONALITY

Personality is defined by the presence of intellect, emotion, and volition. Notice each of these capacities is a part of the Holy Spirit as revealed in the following respective passages.

1. Intellect

Romans 8:26 and 27 reveal that the Holy Spirit has intellectual capacity. He possesses the ability to know and understand reality:

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with

groanings too deep for words; ... He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

What a comforting passage! As we often fumble around in our prayers, the Holy Spirit has the intellectual capacity to cut to the chase and read the desire of our hearts—effectuating our prayers to God the Father! He *helps* us to pray. (This passage has led me to conclude that quantity is more important than quality when it comes to praying.)

Furthermore, relative to intellect, in 1 Corinthians 2:10–11 notice that the Holy Spirit has the ability to *search* and comprehend:

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit aids in our understanding of both God and self. All of the above to say, the Holy Spirit is not some kind of ghost, nor is He esoteric in terms of our understanding of Him; He is a person as revealed by His intellectual capacity. Accordingly,

He who dwells in the believer is both
personal and intelligent. It follows that
we should strive to have a personal,
intellectual relationship with Him!

2. Emotion

The Holy Spirit possesses the ability to experience emotion. One passage, Ephesians 4:29–30, reveals that He *grieves* when we use the temple in which He dwells (our physical body, cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16) in ways uncharacteristic of Him. As an ambassador of Christ, you regularly and in multifarious ways mischaracterize the very nature of Him whom you actually carry around inside of you:

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

3. Volition

The Holy Spirit possesses the ability to determine and act decisively. This capability also reveals His personal nature as evidenced in 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11. Herein the Apostle Paul reveals that the Holy Spirit oversees determining and distributing spiritual gifts to believers:

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ... But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

The following two Scriptures also serve to reveal the volitional aspect of the Holy Spirit:

While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2).

"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials" (Acts 15:28).

In summary of this first insight regarding the nature of the Holy Spirit, throughout Scripture God the Holy Spirit illustratively possesses intellect, emotion, and volition, which, when examined together, underscore that He is not a thing or a ghost, but rather can be likened to a person. This theological knowledge manifests in the practice of a very personal way of living with Him! As a believer, you can know Him Who lives in your heart! In fact, God the Holy Spirit desires to have an ever-increasing personal relationship! So, learn to talk to Him through prayer; consult with Him, and enjoy His ever-present company! He is there to help you, encourage you, guide you, and correct you! Memorize and meditate often on the opening passage of this study, John 14:16, in regard to the purpose and role of the Third Member of the Trinity. Again, Jesus states regarding His eventual departure from His disciples:

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever.”

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD

A. ATTRIBUTES

The Scripture expressly declares that the Holy Spirit has the same attributes as God does. Note these common characteristics in the following chart:

Holy Spirit	Attributes of Deity
Omniscient	All-Knowing (Isaiah 40:13–14)
Omnipresent	Present Everywhere (Psalm 139:7)
Eternal	No Beginning or End (Hebrews 9:14)
Truth	Veracity; Integrity (1 John 5:6; John 16:13)

Scripture, which also expressly states that the Holy Spirit is obviously a different personage, harmonizes with the classic, tightest definition of the Trinity: three different personages of the same numerical essence. If the Holy Spirit is omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, and *infallible* (“incapable of being untruthful”), it stands to reason that He, too, is God. Note the following in this regard:

Pseudo-Christian cults all have something in common—a faulty definition of the Trinity, erring at some biblically explicit point of definition.

B. STATEMENTS OF DEITY

To support further the fact that the Holy Spirit is God, in 2 Corinthians 3:17 the Apostle Paul states explicitly the deity of the Holy Spirit:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

In Acts 5:3–4, Peter references an aforementioned point in this study, the personal nature of the Holy Spirit as illustrated by the fact that Ananias lied to Him. But notice further that Peter associates lying to the Holy Spirit as synonymous with lying to God:

But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”

These passages and many others underscore the historic scriptural underpinnings for the doctrine of the Trinity and specifically herein, that the Holy Spirit is a member of it.

IV. THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

As a personal member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit has certain responsibilities, and what follows is an assortment of those. For instance, according to Psalm 104:30, the Holy Spirit is active in creation and its continual renewal:

***You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;
And You renew the face of the ground.***

In a world cursed with sin, one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to sustain and maintain our fallen earth and its ecosystem prior to the coming of ***a new heaven and new earth*** as described in Revelation 21:1 and 22:1–3.¹

Last, in terms of a quick survey, note yet another important responsibility of the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit Bears Witness of Christ

Attests that Jesus is the Christ	John 15:26
Will disclose or reveal Christ	John 16:14
Will not speak of Himself	John 16:13

V. THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SALVATION

One of the most important areas of the Spirit's work is regarding God's plan of salvation. Yet another connotation of the Holy Spirit's being our *Helper* is related to an individual's salvation. Jesus states in this regard (John 16:7–8):

“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”

By the Holy Spirit, sinners are convicted of their sin and born into God's kingdom, John 3:5–8:

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

As it specifically relates to the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation, note what He does in this regard per Titus 3:5–7:

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Lastly, in terms of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in salvation, according to Ephesians 1:13–14, the Holy Spirit *seals* and guarantees the believer's salvation:

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

An explanation about the *sealing with the Holy Spirit* is in order. A *seal* was usually a signet ring or a cylinder engraved with the owner's name or a particular design. This ancient emblem was used to *seal* goods, to demonstrate ownership, to attest to a document's authenticity, or to physically impress upon something an early form of a trademark. To the point, the idea of an ancient *seal* indicated ownership and security. Here in Ephesians, Paul picks up on this cultural understanding to represent and communicate the believer's guarantee of future blessings.

God states that the personal
presence of the Holy Spirit in the
life of the believer is the promise
of our inheritance in the future!

What a wonderful assurance of salvation! When saved by the Holy Spirit, a believer is simultaneously *sealed* by the Holy Spirit for all eternity per this magnificent passage (and many others)!

VI. THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BELIEVER'S LIFE

A. HE INDWELLS EVERY BELIEVER

The setting of the book of Romans records the Apostle Paul's speaking to saved individuals; it is one of the primary books of the New Testament

regarding the doctrine of salvation. In chapter 8, verse 9, notice how the Holy Spirit relates to those who are redeemed:

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

This passage unequivocally indicates that it is impossible to be a Christian and not be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. There should be no question in your mind that if you have come to faith in Christ, you are also indwelt by the Spirit of God.

B. HE GUIDED THE AUTHORSHIP OF SCRIPTURE

Another ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer can be identified in 1 Corinthians 2:12–13 (the “we” that follows is a reference to Paul and the other apostles):

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

In other words, the Holy Spirit inspired the authors of Scripture—what they wrote came from Him; He guided the penning of Scripture that so blesses every believer to this day!

Second Peter 1:21 serves to further underscore this inspiration.

For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

C. THE BELIEVER HAS RESPONSIBILITIES IN RELATION TO HIM

Again, given the significant and profound benefits that inure to the life of the believer, no follower of Christ in his right mind would ever want to short-circuit the Holy Spirit’s empowerment in any way. Yet the Bible says that condition is possible—so beware!

1. Do Not Grieve Him

As mentioned earlier in the study, in Ephesians 4:30 Paul instructs the believers at the Church in Ephesus not to ***grieve*** the personally indwelling Holy Spirit. This is worth stating again: God is ***grieved*** when believers fail to live in accordance with their new life in Christ. You have been bought with a price, and you carry around inside of you the Holy Spirit. Represent Him well! Don't make His inhabitation a difficult daily chore—one to which He does not look forward!

2. Do Not Quench Him

In 1 Thessalonians 5:19 Paul states imperatively,

Do not quench the Spirit.

If it is normative for the Holy Spirit who dwells in you to continually create a fire in your bosom to live righteously, then sinning carries the idea of dousing or ***quenching*** that fire. Do not douse all His power that would otherwise consistently and continually dwell within you!

3. Be Continually Filled with Him

Continuing along the lines of His personal empowerment to enable you to live righteously, take careful note of Ephesians 5:18:

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.

Herein Paul is not so much contrasting two different kinds of lifestyles as he is comparing two lives that are controlled by outer forces. This passage indicates that for the indwelled believer to be totally controlled by an outer force is normative and desirable—in this case, not ***wine*** but the power of the Holy Spirit. He should permeate every area of your being, which, in the case of a public servant, should include policymaking! There must be no compartmentalization as to what portion of a believer's life is ***filled*** or controlled by the Holy Spirit. To oppose His ***filling*** in any area is in essence to ***quench*** Him.

In a cursory study of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, the following point should also be well understood:

We are baptized in the Holy Spirit when we are saved, but there are many subsequent fillings of the Holy Spirit.²

Whereas the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer occurs in a positional sense at the time of salvation, in a practical, ongoing sense, there are many *fillings* of the Holy Spirit. These *fillings* occur whenever the believer exhales sin (confesses and repents) and then inhales, so to speak, i.e., asks God to reappropriate the fullness and control of the Holy Spirit in and over the throne of his life. To illustrate and underscore this important truth regarding the Holy Spirit, note that in the book of Acts, only one time are believers baptized by the Holy Spirit—at the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. However, this historical narrative tells of numerous times when the believers are *filled* with the Holy Spirit. Importantly, deal with sin in your life to remain *filled* and empowered by the Holy Spirit on a daily basis.

4. A Further, Critical Understanding Relative to Being Filled

Colossians 3:16 provides a keen insight regarding further understanding of this vitally important truth:

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

The same attributes listed at the end of Ephesians 5:18 appear in Colossians 3:16 also—only the cause is different in each passage. ***Letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly*** and ***being filled with the Spirit*** in a deductive sense are the same, i.e., ***being filled with the Spirit*** is commensurate with the degree to which the ***Word of Christ dwells in you!*** This is a huge insight. The Word is your charging station that allows your vehicle to remain energized and operate effectively for His glory and purpose: no Word = no power.

5. Keep from Sin

Galatians 5:16 states:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

Building further on this concept, the key to living a victorious Christian life is the lifelong fundamental habit of Bible study, which will keep you ***filled with the Spirit***; this is synonymous with ***walking in the Spirit***, which is the deterrent to ***carrying out the desires of the flesh***.

The degree to which you are ***filled***
with the Word is the degree to which
you will become powerful in the Spirit
and resist the temptation to be fleshly.

D. EVIDENCE OF THE BELIEVER'S BEING FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

When a believer is ***filled with the Holy Spirit***, he will exhibit the ***fruit of the Spirit***. Examine Galatians 5:22–25 with this in mind:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

The nine characteristics of ***being filled with the Holy Spirit*** in this passage are not characteristics you are supposed to conjure up and discipline yourself to do as much as they are evidence or indicators of the believer who is ***filled with the Holy Spirit***: He comes out of your pores when you let Him! Do these attributes of His indwelling, ***filling***, and empowering presence characterize you? Are you exhibiting these qualities in your own life? What unconfessed sin(s) is/are preventing Him from permeating and exuding from your life?

Of note here and in any study on the Holy Spirit, *being filled with the Spirit* is both critical and progressive. That a believer must *be filled with the Spirit* versus *walking* in the flesh is of critical importance. But *being filled with the Spirit* is also progressive: a believer who has *walked in the Spirit* for many years will evidence more of the *fruit of the Spirit* than a believer who has *walked in the Spirit* for only several months.

VII. APPLICATION

Observe carefully and meditate on 1 Corinthians 6:19–20:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

This passage must have major significance in every believer's life!

God has bought you out of this world at a tremendous cost to Himself! At the same time that He purchased you with the blood of Christ, He bought you, my friend! And He indwelt you with His Holy Spirit.

Now He expects you to serve Him and glorify Him as you live out the remainder of your earthly existence! These theological truths regarding the Holy Spirit need to recreate and shape your identity, i.e., how you see yourself in this life! They need to inform every area of your service to Him: through personal devotion of oneself, personal commitment to family, and personal commitment as a public servant to your nation. Do not *grieve* or *quench* Him in any area of your life!

1. Worth noting here is that Psalm 104:30 and other related passages serve to counter the idea that man by himself can destroy his earthly habitat. To think that man can annihilate the earth stems from an ultra-hubristic, secular worldview of the supreme importance of man. In contrast, the Bible states that God remains omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent in the current affairs of mankind and that He reigns supreme over the environment He created in the first place. It follows that the believer can wholly rely on God's promises pertaining to His sustainment of the earth's ecosystem, even with man's Fall in view.

In the book of Genesis, God promises never to flood the earth again (Genesis 9:11), and in the Sermon on the Mount, God promises always to send rain, which specifically includes mention of its falling on the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45). God's common grace and biological sustainment are ongoing promises in a fallen world (cf. Matthew 6:25–32) and contradict such fad theories as global warming.

2. A historical portion of Evangelicalism believes in what is commonly known and referred to as the "Second Baptism." Advocates believe that one receives the indwelling Holy Spirit at a future point after receiving Christ. Personally, I adhere to the theological position that the Holy Spirit indwells every believer at the point in time when he or she repents from sin and comes to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, i.e., the believer is indwelt at salvation (cf. Romans 8:9; Acts 11:17). Advocates of the Second Baptism position usually cite the book of Acts. Those who oppose this position believe that Acts is a historical narrative account of the beginning of the Church and is not necessarily normative/exemplary for Christian practice today. In arguing their viewpoint, they cite the doctrinal books of the NT (such as Romans), which inarguably provide normative guidelines for the orthopraxy of the believer today.

Embracing the Second Baptism position can lead to an overly subjective and mystical personal faith, in that much emphasis is placed on His internal, personal guidance versus the objective revelation of Scripture that is outside of oneself. But having said that and stating that I hold to that position, the orthopraxy of many non-Second Baptism believers reveals little place for the *Helper* to impress or guide in their Christian experience; rather, theirs is an overreliance on the objective, outside source of Scripture only for guidance. These Evangelicals are too often characterized by a rigidity and legalistic approach to Scripture with a less-than-personal (or in my humble opinion, attractive) manifestation of Christianity. All this explanation is to illustrate that theology matters today! It is extremely important because one's orthodoxy (theological understandings) leads to one's orthopraxy (the outworking practice of one's faith).

Dealing with Pride: In Life and in D.C.

Some view *pride* as a virtue, but Scripture is clear that the believer is to detest it. Charles Bridges states in his excellent commentary on Proverbs, “On no point is the mind of God more fully declared than against pride.”¹ Unfortunately, in our increasingly backward culture, *pride* is often valued as a prized commodity.

The apostle Paul heralds in stark contrast to self-importance, “*I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live*” (Galatians 2:20). The biblical orientation of one’s thought life more than suggests that we get our minds off of ourselves and focus instead on the One who saved us! Biblical thinking at this point—this mental exercise of exchange—is the only way to mortify personal *pride* truly and completely.

I. INTRODUCTION

The acceptance of *pride* in our culture is so prevalent that some will argue with what I’ve said. Allow me to illustrate its prevalence.

Frank Sinatra sang, “I did it my way” and Whitney Houston popularized “the greatest love of all ... is learning to love yourself.” Both made millions from the sale of such albums. “Taking *pride* in one’s work” is a commonly held axiom, and who hasn’t witnessed the myriad of “proud parent” bumper stickers or monotonous, arrogant “I did this” political speeches? Even some Christian ministries believe that engendering *pride* (often under the guise of infusing “self-esteem”) in a child is a good thing.

But, no matter what you believe about the need for “self-esteem” or “the adult quest for meaning,” all hold in common a subtle or not-so-subtle focus on one’s self. Oh, and did I mention the “selfie” craze—look at me, here I am! These are the seedbeds of an increasingly self-absorbed culture where in conversational skills (among many other things) the subject always revolves back to me.

In relation to a fixation on self, the Bible teaches precisely here in stark contrast, the opposite. The apostle Paul illustrates the sin of boasting about his own life when he says in Philippians 3:4–9:

If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.

The great apostle had more to boast about than you or I, but he exchanged what could have justifiably been a self-centered orientation for God-centered glorification.

In essence, **pride** is the rebel that does battle against God’s dominion.

In 1 Corinthians 1:31 Paul quotes Jeremiah 9:24, stating, *so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”* Jeremiah and Paul’s God-inspired thinking and attitude about the stench of **pride** is further revealed in 1 Corinthians 2:2: *For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.* The public servant is

just that: a servant! But more than a servant of the people, the Christian public servant is first and foremost a servant of his Lord Jesus Christ—and honoring Him is what motivates his desire to serve with excellence his constituency.

What About Instilling Self-Esteem in Your Children?

As Christian parents, or influencers of others, we are not motivated by the same things as worldly friends, we are not on a narcissistic quest for personal meaning; I avoided instructing my children in ways others use to obtain self-esteem. Conversely, a much stronger curriculum and motive for others to attain excellence in all areas of life is to instruct them to seek after God's glory—to pursue a lifelong quest to reflect His excellence and greatness in the world! Paul states precisely this attitude in 1 Corinthians 10:31: ***Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*** Instilling God esteem in your child will lead to a much more secure and humble adult than instilling and praising his ***pride*** as a child. It's all about God's greatness not mine!

Christian author, C.J. Mahaney puts it this way, "Paul lived a cross-centered life."² He was not absorbed with self-greatness, but something far, far more important: instead, he was all about heralding the wonderful work of God in paying for his sin. After all, ***What do you have that you did not receive?*** (1 Corinthians 4:7). Given the reality of every human's dependence on God for his or her very next breath, ***"may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"*** (Galatians 6:14). James adds, ***"But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil"*** (4:16).

Solomon had much to say about this subject in his God-inspired book of Proverbs. Study along with me further about the necessity of mortifying

pride and adjusting our motives, and as you do, ask God to reveal areas of *pride* that not only need immediate attention perhaps at our offices, but areas in our personal lives where we need to emulate Christ's goodness, versus self. In summary of this introduction note Proverbs 8:13:

*The fear of the Lord is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverted mouth, I hate.*

In an attempt to define *pride* and better understand its manifest forms in our lives let us first examine its characteristic traits.

II. SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF PRIDEFUL PEOPLE

A. PRIDEFUL PEOPLE ARE SCOFFERS

Prideful people will often display attitudes and actions of scorn (open dislike and disrespect); derision (the use of ridicule); and mockery (a counterfeit appearance) to manifest contempt. Scoffers are quick to pass judgment on others. The Psalmist warns us not to go near them: Do not *sit in the seat of the scoffer*, he says, lest you learn his ways (Psalm 1:1). In addition, Solomon identifies proud people as indexed by manifest scoffing in Proverbs 1:22:

*"How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded?
And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing
And fools hate knowledge?"*

What compels one to scoff? The soul of the scoffer contains an underlying predilection toward self-greatness; he fancies himself, leaving little room for the presence or thankfulness for his chief sponsor. Scoffing is nothing more than an unconscious or else clever form of self-adulation via the systematic discount and elimination of others. In Proverbs 9:7–8 Solomon states the risk others run in associating too closely with individuals steeped in self absorption:

*He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself,
And he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself.
Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you,
Reprove a wise man And he will love you.*

Rather than add to the nobility and culture of the Capitol, scoffers detract from it. States Proverbs 24:9:

*The devising of folly is sin,
And the scoffer is an abomination to men.*

In Proverbs 3:34 Scripture says that God *scoffs at the scoffers*. Unlike fallen mankind, God has every right to do this because He is perfect!

The first characteristic then,
of proud persons is that they elevate
themselves by putting others down.

To the contrary, humble people center their thoughts and speech on *whatever is true, honorable, whatever is right* (Philippians 4:8). They view others as more important than self (Philippians 2:3). They *have been crucified with Christ*; they live for Him (Galatians 2:20). Some great sound bite advice I received years ago in this regard is to learn to preoccupy my mind with ideas and the future rather than people and the past. That exercise has served me well.

B. PRIDEFUL PEOPLE ARE BOASTERS

Scripture says that to talk about our future with confidence is a form of boasting. Note Proverbs 27:1 in this regard:

*Do not boast about tomorrow,
For you do not know what a day may bring forth.*

No matter how well minded our intentions, or confident we may be, James says that, *Instead, you ought to say, "if the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that"* (4:15). To talk confidently about your future is presumptuous; it presupposes that you are in control of it when you are not. It is always best to keep every thought about your future in your mind and confined to your prayer closet. Typically, inherent also in individuals who

expound on the greatness of their future is a twin attitude of exaggeration. They overdo the reality of their present situation in ways personally beneficial. States Proverbs 25:14:

Like clouds and wind without rain

Is a man who boasts of his gifts falsely.

Refrain from **boasting** not only about the future, but learn to never speak of your past accomplishments; that too is a form of **boasting**. States Proverbs 27:2:

Let another praise you and not your own mouth;

A stranger and not your own lips.

Don't fool yourself into thinking "if I don't tell them about my accomplishments they will never know!" They can ask someone else about you or look you up on the Internet just as quickly and easily as you telling them about yourself. Coach Wooden used to always say, "Work on your character, not your reputation."

C. PRIDEFUL PEOPLE ARE ARROGANT

A third sister characteristic of a proud person, in addition to **scoffing** and **boasting**, is **arrogance**. Interestingly, Proverbs 14:16 equates **arrogance** with **foolishness**:

A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil,

But a fool is arrogant and careless.

Arrogance is defined as "an attitude of superiority manifested in an overbearing manner or in presumptuous claims or assumptions." Why do you suppose that it is **foolish** to be **arrogant**? For one, it makes exactly the wrong impression than the one the **prideful** person desires! Resist exaggerating your own sense of importance or worth; seek to be understated, not overbearing. For instance, in times of verbal communication, learn to ask questions of others versus holding the ball in what should otherwise be a tennis match filled with long back and forth ground strokes. No volleying at the net either. It's no fun interacting with overly aggressive and dominant people who hold onto the ball! As a public servant you can get away with dominating conversations and nobody will usually say anything, but folks go away with the wrong impression, and rightfully so. Don't be **careless** in

this regard. Take to heart Proverbs 12:9 and notice how it is tied to *boasting*, the previous characteristic of *pride*:

*Better is he who is lightly esteemed and has a servant
Than he who honors himself and lacks bread.*

Both figuratively and mentally
sit at the feet of everyone you meet.

Attempt to learn from others versus impressing others. Be characterized as someone who asks sincere questions; refrain from looking for opportunities to interject related stories. Instead be thinking how you can learn more by asking a question relative to something another just said versus not listening while you think about what you'll say as soon as he inhales.

D. PRIDEFUL PEOPLE DECLINE CORRECTION

A fourth characteristic of *pride* is to think you're always right. Proverbs 13:1 and 15:12 speak to the sin of over confidence:

*A wise son accepts his father's discipline,
But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.*

*A scoffer does not love one who reproves him,
He will not go to the wise.*

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon generally and repeatedly organizes people into three categories: those who do not yet know wisdom, *simpletons*; those who reject wisdom, *scoffers*; and those who are accepting of wisdom, the *wise*. Notice below the existence and characteristic attitudes of each of these three individuals in each of these two Proverbs, 19:25 and 21:11 respectively:

*Strike a scoffer and the naive may become shrewd,
But reprove one who has understanding and he will gain knowledge.*

*When the scoffer is punished, the naive becomes wise;
But when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge.*

When a *simpleton* (termed a *naive* one above) observes the defiance of a *scoffer*, he may become wise as a result of watching the *scoffer's* reaction (which is characteristically to reject reproof). Furthermore, note in each of the two Proverbs that the *simpleton* is observing and comparing the contrasting responses to the rebuke of both the *scoffer* and the *wise* person—the *wise* take reproof and instruction and grow from it; we have already seen that the *scoffer* rejects it. All that to say, a *prideful* person is not teachable; he is in a rut, not growing as a person.

E. PRIDEFUL PEOPLE DEFY AUTHORITY

Insolence is a level of *pride* wherein an individual is puffed up to the degree he exhibits boldness and or effrontery. Such a heightened level of *pride*, states Proverbs 13:10 can be disastrous if left unchecked:

*Through insolence comes nothing but strife,
But wisdom is with those who receive counsel.*

Such haughty and contemptuous people, if not brutal in their behavior or language, become increasingly overbearing and *arrogantly* critical. If their *pride* goes unchecked—especially in the life of an employee under your supervision in your office—someone who lacks proper respect for rank or position, and in whom exists presumptuous disrespect for equals and superiors, in the end the *insolent* will end up hurting you, their boss. Learn to develop an eye for *insolent* staff and do not tolerate it; nip it in the bud before it blooms and sets back your office, your mission. In distinct contrast, albeit phrased in a Roman economy of employment, 1 Peter 2:18 states the kind of principled attitude God expects subordinates to possess toward their superiors:

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

Even if you as their boss have deficiencies (and what person doesn't?) it remains the responsibility of your staff to nonetheless be *submissive* to your leadership (as long as your authority is not demanding an employee to sin in some way, e.g., via both sins of omission or commission).

F. PRIDEFUL PEOPLE HAVE HAUGHTY EYES

Solomon uses the figurative picture of a *lamp* in his writings to convey the common idea of projection. With that in mind, notice what he says proud people project per Proverbs 21:4:

*Haughty eyes and a proud heart,
The lamp of the wicked, is sin.*

Learn to ascertain the existence of proud *eyes*; study, read, receive an impression of another as you interact with them. It is wise to pick up on one's spirit; the *eyes* give you a view into his soul. States Proverbs 6:16–17:

*There are six things which the Lord hates,
Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:
Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
And hands that shed innocent blood, ...*

G. A SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF PRIDEFUL PEOPLE

Proverbs 21:24 is an apt summary of Proverbs on *pride*; it packages up many of the previously mentioned definitive aspects of this subject.

*“Proud,” “Haughty,” “Scoffer,” are his names,
Who acts with insolent pride.*

States commentator Bridges,

The proud man is proud of his *pride*,
proud of his high spirit; counting
a Christian cowardly, who in the
true spirit of the gospel, yields up
his right to a stronger hand.³

Here then are the six characteristics of manifest *pride* as explicated in and from the book of Proverbs. Let us now turn our attention to the

ensuing results that inevitably occur when one fails to punt on *pride* and calibrate on Christ.

III. THE FOUR RESULTS OF PRIDEFUL PEOPLE

A. DISHONOR

Pride was the principle ingredient of the fall, and is therefore the native foundation of today's human condition. Per Proverbs 11:2, when Adam and Eve fell, shame followed:

*When pride comes, then comes dishonor,
But with the humble is wisdom.*

Be sure of this: if you fail to check *pride* it will lead to your eventual dishonor and downfall. A part of the fall, *pride* can be likened to cancer, growing worse over time. Mortify it! Surgically remove it from your life! Go cold turkey!

B. DESTRUCTION

In Luke's Gospel (18:14) Jesus states a promise: "*Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.*" This one New Testament (NT) passage is a great summary of Old Testament (OT) Solomonic, proverbial wisdom on this matter. In fact, it is sad to witness the violation of this single truth repeatedly play itself out on the Hill. Notice the myriad of Proverbs (15:25; 16:18; 18:12; and 29:23 respectively) that underscore Jesus' counter-intuitive statement:

*The LORD will tear down the house of the proud,
But He will establish the boundary of the widow.*

*Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before stumbling.*

*Before destruction the heart of man is haughty,
But humility goes before honor.*

*A man's pride will bring him low,
But a humble spirit will obtain honor.*

C. STRIFE

One of my sage seminary professors and a former member of the board of Capitol Ministries, a man who has experienced (like all of us, I suppose) staff disruptions over the course of his career, advises his students to leave the employ of another *quietly*. Be it a ministry organization or a congressional office, it is a sign of maturity to not create *strife* when you disagree with your boss.

The fruit of arrogance is strife.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *strife* as “bitter sometimes violent conflict or dissension.” It is a sign of personal immaturity to take advantage of the closeness and personal insights one gains with his employer and then turn around and exploit him or her on the way out. Solomon says in Proverbs 28:25 that such is one of the fruits of *pride* and *arrogance*. Every employee should always remember that if it wasn’t for the boss who created his job, he would never have had a job in the first place!

*An arrogant man stirs up strife,
But he who trusts in the Lord will prosper.*

Pride not only results in dishonor, destruction, and strife; it results in punishment.

D. PUNISHMENT

The high-minded who in essence are contending for supremacy with the Almighty will not go unpunished by Him. This is the reminder and declaration of Proverbs 16:5:

*Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord;
Assuredly, he will not be unpunished.*

Pride can stem from different things: “Some are proud of their beauty, their talents, their rank or their comparative goodness.”⁴ Whatever the basis for personal *pride*, God contends with all proud people. Why? He gave it to them and He will not share His glory with anyone. Note God’s

jealousy regarding His glory as it plays out in the OT relative to the city of Tyre in Ezekiel 28:1–8:

“Say to the leader of Tyre, ‘Thus says the Lord God, because your heart is lifted up and you have said, ‘I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods in the heart of the seas’; yet you are a man and not God, although you make your heart like the heart of God—behold, you are wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that is a match for you. By your wisdom and understanding you have acquired riches for yourself and have acquired gold and silver for your treasuries. By your great wisdom, by your trade you have increased your riches and your heart is lifted up because of your riches—therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Because you have made your heart like the heart of God, therefore, behold, I will bring strangers upon you, the most ruthless of the nations. And they will draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendor. They will bring you down to the pit, and you will die the death of those who are slain in the heart of the seas.’”

Is it any wonder why God reacts so vehemently against man’s *pride*?

Man’s *pride* displaces God’s supremacy. Therefore, God sets Himself in battle array, as against the usurper of His prerogative, the rebel against His dominion.⁵

God’s punishment of *prideful* people is echoed by Solomon in Proverbs 19:29:

*Judgments are prepared for scoffers,
And blows for the back of fools.*

The *arrogant* culture of OT Tyre also serves to illustrate the mind of God as meted out by Paul’s words to the *pride*-filled believers at Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 4:7 Paul reasons why we have no basis to be *prideful*: *What do you have that you did not receive?* It follows that *prideful* individuals,

be they believers or not, have forgotten that all they might find *pride* in is ultimately a gift from God. It follows that He is ultimately deserving of all praise for beauty, talent, rank or wealth!

Now let's conclude by pondering some solutions to *pride*. How does one exchange *pride* for a Christ-oriented life?

IV. THREE WAYS TO OVERCOME PRIDE

For the unbeliever, frying one's *pride* means you must first repent and exchange the lordship of your life for Christ's—apart from this first step there is no logical reason why you should not exalt yourself; the secular pretense of humility can be and is nothing more than an outward act for anyone who in essence believes that he or she is God! Given that prerequisite for any possibility for true humility, here is how Solomon says we can begin to slay visceral, internal *pride*:

A. DON'T SELF-PROMOTE

This is a difficult concept for someone who has to be elected to maintain his or her career. My best advice is that you allow others to speak of your strengths unscripted. Keep in mind the principle Proverbs 25:27:

*It is not good to eat much honey,
Nor is it glory to search out one's own glory.*

Further note how you can publicly manifest humility in a practical sense per Proverbs 25:6–7:

*Do not claim honor in the presence of the king,
And do not stand in the place of great men;
For it is better that it be said to you, "Come up here,"
Than for you to be placed lower in the presence of the prince,
Whom your eyes have seen.*

Discipline yourself; do not self-promote. Again, heed the words of Proverbs 27:2:

*Let another praise you, and not your own mouth;
A stranger, and not your own lips.*

Self-promotion is a bad habit; mortify this temptation and tendency. Spend your days praising others and diminishing yourself.

B. SEE OTHERS AS MORE IMPORTANT

In Philippians 2:3—and Proverbs 16:19 respectively:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.

*It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly
Than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

C. REALIZE WHAT IS GOOD IS FROM GOD

Isaiah 64:6 is a sobering passage for anyone who thinks he is self made:

Righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.

V. SUMMARY

Similar to what Jesus said in the Gospel of Luke (18:14), James 4:10 exclaims a great takeaway promise worthy of memorization: *Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.* Be careful to always deflect praise to His glory, and remember: God will not share His glory with anyone, so be careful not to compete!

1. Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, (Banner of Truth 1998), 41.
2. C.J. Mahaney with Kevin Meath, *The Cross-Centered Life* (Colorado Springs, Multnomah Books, 2002), 11.
3. Bridges, 368.
4. *Ibid.*, 229.
5. *Ibid.*, 42.

Anger and Office

This week we will examine all that the Bible book of Proverbs has to say about *anger*. If you struggle with this sin, and who doesn't, or you hang with those who do, then this chapter is for you.

I. INTRODUCTION

I have chosen to outline the study by first looking at the five roots of *anger*. Most of the time our *anger* stems from some sort of selfish sin, save righteous indignation. We'll look at different kinds of tempers to see what Proverbs says about how to tick someone off (in case you are deficient in this skill) and also how to avoid that. The remaining instruction from Proverbs teaches about how to live opposite of *anger*—in peace.

II. HEBREW WORDS DEFINING ANGER

The Old Testament (OT) Hebrew root words that appear in the following numerous Proverbs are all translated into the English word *anger*:

1. *Aph*: literally, “a nostril, nose, face” referring to the facial expressions of someone who is *angry*.
2. *Abar*: “to be arrogant, to become *angry*.”
3. *Chemah*: “heat, rage.”
4. *Ebrah*: “overflow, arrogance, fury.”
5. *Kaas*: “vexation.”

One can easily see the connection, the similarity of authorial intent in the use of each of these different words.

III. GREEK WORDS DEFINING ANGER

In the New Testament (NT), the following Greek words are translated into the English word *anger*:

1. *Orgizo*: this Greek word is the most commonly used word in the NT for *anger* and it means “to make angry.” It appears in Galatians 5:20 in relation to the fruits of the flesh—those characteristics of the unregenerate that are at enmity with Christ—*idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions*, etc. One famous commentary defines *orgizo* as, “jealousies, which, when smoldering in the heart, break out in wrath.”
2. Ephesians 4:31 uses the same root, *orge*, when it commands those who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ for salvation to, *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.*
3. Colossians 3:8 uses the same word when it states, *But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.* As you can see by these passages, *anger* is not a tool available to believers in the Capitol (or anywhere else for that matter) for any reason or purposes save righteous indignation, as we will see later.
4. James 1:19 states the same word when it commands, *This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.* Why? *For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God* (1:20). All citations here in Roman numeral III refer to the same Greek word, *orge*.
5. Ephesians 6:4 contains a heightened form of the same root: *parorgizo*, when it commands, *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* The Greek word here is negated, meaning “not to provoke to *anger*.” This is a contrasting statement: by *disciplining* your child, you are not provoking him to *anger*. More about that here is in order:

A Word about Spanking Children

Spanking is sometimes necessary to properly parent a child. In Proverbs 29:15, Solomon instructs Rehoboam not to prohibit God's institution of the family from carrying out this responsibly lest he end up governing a police state. Proverbs 29:15 reads, ***The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.*** In other words, a child who is not disciplined when he rebels and displays willful disobedience will learn that he can get away with what he knows in his heart to be wrong; he will become spoiled. In Proverbs 23:13 and 14, King Solomon also says to the future king, ***Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you strike him with the rod, he will not die. You shall strike him with the rod and rescue his soul from Sheol.*** The Adamic curse is present in every child and the sin-laden nature is present in all mankind. A child who does not know his boundaries quickly and assuredly becomes unhappy and ***angry***. Ephesians states that the parent who fails to discipline his child is, in essence, ***provoking your [his] children to anger***. The child rebels in search of the security of those boundaries. Accordingly, a failure to spank creates a child who grows up to depict much of what follows in this study.

6. *Thumos* relates to being quick-tempered and indicates a more agitated condition, an outburst of wrath from inward indignation. While *orge* suggests a more settled or abiding condition geared toward taking revenge, it is less sudden in its rise and more lasting in its nature.

Understand the root cause before
you deal with an **anger** problem.

Having briefly overviewed five OT and four NT words related to **anger**, what follows are the five roots of **anger** from Proverbs.

IV. EXAMINING THE FIVE ROOTS OF ANGER

A. FROM JEALOUSY AND ENVY

The Hebrew word *qinah*, meaning “ardor, envy, rivalry, zeal,” is translated as **jealousy**. Some commentators define **jealousy** and envy as different, but twin sisters: **jealousy** being the attempt to guard what you are fearful another person might take and envy being the desire to have what another person possesses. Those are fine distinctions of the same genre of sin, but it is not as clear a distinction relative to the Hebrew words used in the book of Proverbs. **Jealousy** stems from a zeal to want what another person has which turns into **anger** when the expectations go unfulfilled.

For jealousy enrages a man,

And he will not spare in the day of vengeance (Proverbs 6:34).

Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood,

but who can stand before jealousy? (Proverbs 27:4)

On the book of Proverbs, commentator Charles Bridges writes, “envy is an implacable passion with native principle. ... [I]t has a fearful train of evils. ... Reason [becomes] the oil to fan the flame [of this sin] rather than the water to quench it. ... Enmity invadeth their spirits and settleth itself.” Summarily, **jealousy** becomes a most uncontrollable sin, be it motivated by a fear of loss or a desire to have. It is often the underlying motive for angry behavior.

B. FROM HATRED

Hatred stirs up strife,

But love covers all transgressions (Proverbs 10:12).

The Hebrew word for *hatred* is *sinah*, meaning “malicious and unjustifiable feelings toward others.” *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines *hatred* as, “prejudiced hostility.” Jealousy and envy stem from the fear of loss and the desire of wantonness, whereas *hatred* stems from a selfish-based belief that you are better than someone else. The sin is based in a Darwinian ideology that some are more fit than others. In essence then, rank pride is the seedbed of *hatred*. This epistemology is trumped by Scripture, however, which states that all human beings (and only human beings) are created in God’s image. Our theology then will ultimately determine the existence or else expungement of feelings of *hatred*. And hatred is a root of *anger*.

C. FROM INSOLENCIE

*Through insolence comes nothing but strife,
But wisdom is with those who receive counsel* (Proverbs 13:10).

The Hebrew word for *insolence* is *zadon*, meaning “presumptuousness, arrogance, and pride.” *Merriam-Webster* defines insolent as “haughty and contemptuous or brutal in behavior or language: OVERBEARING.” I like *Merriam-Webster*’s second listed definition as it applies to the Capitol community, “lacking usual or proper respect for rank or position: presumptuously disrespectful or familiar toward equals or superiors.” Show me a climber in the Capitol, and I will show you an *insolent* person who is easily *angered* when his path to the top is in any way thwarted. People who are overly ambitious for advancement set themselves up for strife and *anger*. Oh, how I have personally seen this play out in too many short careers here on the Hill.

D. FROM ARROGANCE

*An arrogant man stirs up strife,
But he who trusts in the LORD will prosper* (Proverbs 28:25).

In this Proverb the second stanza informs the meaning of the first. Akin to C, the arrogant “climber” will go to any length to immediately prosper—not really believing that advancement comes from the Lord.

Do not fuel your career with
arrogance, selfishness, or ambition;
most often they lead to an explosion.

Psalms 145:14 states, *The LORD ... raises up all who are bowed down.*

E. FROM FOOLISHNESS

*When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man,
The foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest*
(Proverbs 29:9).

No agreement can be made with a *fool*. *Fools* start their reasoning with their own mind—thinking it is the final and highest authority.

*A fool always loses his temper,
But a wise man holds it back* (Proverbs 29:11).

When you disagree with a *fool*—one who thinks his or her mind is infallible—you can expect that it will produce *anger*. This is because you are challenging a pride-filled core, and we have seen, pride is the seedbed of *anger*.

In summary, these are the five roots of outward *anger*. Rather than take a Band-Aid approach, we must perform surgery on the root cause(s) of our *anger* in order to cure it. Only then will healing and victory occur.

V. EXAMINING THREE KINDS OF TEMPERS

A. QUICK TEMPERS

*A quick-tempered man acts foolishly,
And a man of evil devices is hated* (Proverbs 14:17).

*Like a city that is broken into and without walls
Is a man who has no control over his spirit*” (Proverbs 25:28).

Whatever is in the air will affect and invade this person’s mind and emotions. He is thin-skinned, reactive versus prudent, and defensive versus discerning, and he allows others to affect his emotions. Especially in the

world of political debate, he identifies and objectifies rather than react to ad hominem attacks.

B. HOT TEMPERS

*A hot-tempered man stirs up strife,
But the slow to anger calms a dispute* (Proverbs 15:18).

*A man of great anger will bear the penalty,
For if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again*
(Proverbs 19:19).

*An angry man stirs up strife,
And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression*
(Proverbs 29:22).

C. SLOW TEMPERS

*He who is slow to anger has great understanding,
But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly* (Proverbs 14:29).

BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger
(Ephesians 4:26).

Parorgismos is the Greek word for **anger** in the second verse meaning, “irritation.” This is the only time **anger** is legitimate in the believer’s life and it relates to righteous indignation. A leading NT commentator explains:

In this statement he [Paul] may be legitimizing righteous indignation, anger at evil which is done against the person of the Lord and His will and purpose. It is the anger of the Lord’s people who hate evil. It is that anger that abhors injustice, immorality, and ungodliness of every sort.¹

Jesus was always **angered** when the Father was maligned or when others were mistreated, but He was never selfishly **angry** at what was done against Him. Our **anger** that is sin is defensive and self-serving and resentful of what is done against ourselves. It is the **anger** that leads to murder and to God’s judgment.

Anger that is selfish, undisciplined, and vindictive is sinful and has no place even temporarily in the Christian life. But *anger* that is unselfish and is based on love for God and concern for others not only is permissible, but commanded.

Righteous *anger* and being slow to *anger* are evidenced in the following Proverbs:

*The king's favor is toward a servant who acts wisely,
But his anger is toward him who acts shamefully* (Proverbs 14:35).

*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city*
(Proverbs 16:32).

Being slow to *anger* is akin to using *anger* in a righteous response to evil. It has its place and is a mark of true wisdom.

VI. HOW TO SOLICIT ANGER IN OTHERS

Just in case you are unskilled in how to *anger* others, here are some tips:

A. SPEAK HARSHLY TO OTHERS

*A gentle answer turns away wrath,
But a harsh word stirs up anger* (Proverbs 15:1).

*A fool's lips bring strife,
And his mouth calls for blows* (Proverbs 18:6).

*Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire,
So is a contentious man to kindle strife* (Proverbs 26:21).

*A stone is heavy and the sand weighty,
But the provocation of a fool is heavier than both of them*
(Proverbs 27:3).

The truths of these Proverbs are self-evident and need no comment.

B. SLANDER AND SCORN OTHERS

*A perverse man spreads strife,
And a slanderer separates intimate friends* (Proverbs 16:28).

The Hebrew word for *slander* is *ragan*, meaning “to murmur, whisper, criticize, and grumble.” *Merriam-Webster* fitly defines *slander* as, “utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage reputation.”

*A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city,
And contentions are like the bars of a citadel* (Proverbs 18:19).

The *brother* spoken of here is a blood relative in this colorfully depicted Proverb. No feud is as difficult to resolve as one with a family member and, therefore, extra care should be taken to avoid such conflicts.

*The north wind brings forth rain,
And a backbiting tongue, an angry countenance* (Proverbs 25:23).

This describes cause and effect. As surely as it will *rain* with clouds from the north (Solomon wrote living in the Northern Hemisphere) *backbiting* will cause *anger* in others.

*Scorners set a city aflame,
But wise men turn away anger* (Proverbs 29:8).

Scorn is an emotion involving *anger* and disgust, passionate contempt, and disdain. Avoid being *scornful* in your personal and professional life. Realize that everyone in a fallen world has his faults—that should not surprise or disgust you if you are a Bible-believing Christian. If you are a Humanist, however, you have every right to be *scornful*, given your misguided beliefs in the upward evolution of man. You should be rightfully disgusted with everyone who is not as perfect as you believe yourself to be.

Prolonged *anger* yields increasingly worsening results. Notice the following Proverb with that in mind.

*For the churning of milk produces butter,
And pressing the nose brings forth blood;
So the churning of anger produces strife* (Proverbs 30:33).

Churning, *pressing*, and *churning* are all the same Hebrew verbs colorfully portraying the fruit of *anger*: *strife*.

C. STEP ON OTHERS

*He who loves transgression loves strife;
He who raises his door seeks destruction* (Proverbs 17:19).

In a parallel Proverb, each stanza helps to interpret the meaning of the other. In this one, the second portion is an idiom that denotes pride. *Merriam-Webster* defines idiom as “an expression established in the usage of a language that is peculiar to itself either in grammatical construction or in having a meaning that cannot be derived as a whole from the conjoined meanings of its elements.” This image is of a proud man who flaunts his wealth—a man with a huge house and front door. Jeremiah 22:13–17 qualifies the meaning of this idiom in its time of use, further stating, “*Woe to him who builds his house without righteousness, ... who uses his neighbor’s service without pay. ... But your eyes and your heart are intent only upon your own dishonest gain.*” Such outward selfish behavior infuriates others; such could be likened today by drug lords living in mansions while their business—selling drugs—causes lives to be ruined. Such is portrayed in the following Proverb:

*He who sows iniquity will reap vanity,
And the rod of his fury will perish* (Proverbs 22:8).

Scripture often speaks in terms of *sowing* and *reaping*, i.e., the end result of an earlier action, cause and effect. Such is the case here. Stepping on others will make them angry.

D. BRIBE OTHERS

*A gift in secret subdues anger,
And a bribe in the bosom, strong wrath* (Proverbs 21:14).

In this contrasting Proverb, the second stanza implies a perversion resulting in a *wrathful* reaction by the recipient. It is one thing to give a gift to quell *anger* in another (to offset a wrong action as a means of making up); it is quite another thing to *bribe* someone with your wealth.

VII. HOW TO AVOID ANGERING OTHERS

A. COVER SIN

*The fury of a king is like messengers of death,
But a wise man will appease it* (Proverbs 16:14).

The Hebrew word for *appease* is *kaphar*, meaning “to cover over, pacify, and make propitiation.” Solomon states that it is a desired skill when working with those in political power to propitiate for their weaknesses—don’t make everything that is wrong about a person an issue! Many are those who live by the letter of the law, awaiting and exploiting the sins of others. Scripture, however, has much to say about grace. Grace is unmerited favor (*for by grace you have been saved through faith* [in Christ]) and is a principle of wise living. Notice the following passages that serve to buoy this concept:

Hatred stirs up strife,

But love covers all transgressions (Proverbs 10:12).

A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger,

And it is his glory to overlook a transgression (Proverbs 19:11).

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

This advice isn’t related to murder, rape, robbery, or the like. Rather and in addition, generally speaking, it is better to address someone’s minor sins once you’ve built a relationship with him—and to do it in private. Covering, versus exploiting, another’s weaknesses will lead to peace versus *anger*.

B. ABANDON QUARRELS

The beginning of strife is like letting out water,

So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out (Proverbs 17:14).

The Hebrew word for *strife* is *rib*, carrying a broad generality of “disputes, adversaries, complaining, contending, controversies, indictments, lawsuits, or quarreling.”

Hone your skill of sensing when
divisive situations might occur and
intercede prior to their maturation.

***Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man,
But any fool will quarrel*** (Proverbs 20:3).

At this particular juncture in the outline, another very special skill at living life is contained in Proverbs 26:17. It pertains to the foolishness of entangling yourself in another's transgression. It is wise not to get involved in quarrels between others that have nothing to do with you.

***Like one who takes a dog by the ears
Is he who passes by and meddles with strife not belonging to him***
(Proverbs 26:17).

C. RESTRAIN YOUR WORDS

***He who restrains his words has knowledge,
And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding***
(Proverbs 17:27).

The Hebrew word for *restrains* is *chasak* and means "to withhold, keep back."

D. KEEP YOUR DISTANCE FROM SCOFFERS

***Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out,
Even strife and dishonor will cease*** (Proverbs 22:10).

For those in positions of leadership and power, this is good advice. If you do not possess the authority to root such from your midst (for instance, a family member), at least register a strong protest to his actions. To do less is to live with his fruits.

***Do not associate with a man given to anger;
Or go with a hot-tempered man,
Or you will learn his ways
And find a snare for yourself*** (Proverbs 22:24–25).

Be careful whom you *associate* with: "***Bad company corrupts good morals***" says Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:33. Definitive of bad company is this:

***For their minds devise violence,
And their lips talk of trouble*** (Proverbs 24:2).

Don't be around this kind of person unless you are evangelizing them.

VIII. THE BENEFITS OF PEACE VS. ANGER

*Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it
Than a house full of feasting with strife* (Proverbs 17:1).

A parallel Proverb is 15:17: *Better is a dish of vegetables where love is than a fattened ox served with hatred*. It is wise to be in the presence of those who are poor and loving rather than rich who *hate*. We live in a society consumed by gaining social status—hanging out with the rich and famous—celebrity is one of America's idolatrous gods. See that for what it is.

*The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion,
But his favor is like dew on the grass* (Proverbs 19:12).

This Proverb is akin to Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2: all are called to submit to governmental authority. In both of these NT passages there is resulting favor (cf. 13:3; 2:14), a peace that results. Proverbs 20:2 portrays a parallel emphasis:

*The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion;
He who provokes him to anger forfeits his own life* (Proverbs 20:2).

To live in non-rebellion with governing authorities, even though you might not agree with their many decisions, is to live peacefully.

IX. CONCLUSION

If you suffer from frequent outbursts,
my prayer is that this study will
help you to find the root cause.

Whereas you can cover up and create a façade, your level and frequency of *anger* should act as a barometer to indicate how sinful and self-absorbed you really are—and subsequently your need for Christ as Lord and Savior.

Righteous indignation, on the other hand, is a measure of your love for Christ. Are you *angered* over the things that *anger* God? Therein is an indication of spiritual maturity. God bless you for standing firm where Scripture is firm. Amen.

1. John MacArthur, "Can Believers Be Angry Without Sinning," Grace to You, 12/27/2023: <https://www.gty.org/library/bibleqnas-library/QA0135/can-believers-be-angry-without-sinning>

The Profound Theological Importance of Husband-Wife Marriage

If you debate marriage based upon personal happiness, you will lose the argument. If you debate it from theology, you will not.

Certainly, **God** intends marriage to be a source of great personal satisfaction. We live in a fallen world full of disappointments and heartaches, and it is such a blessing to have a soul mate who is dedicated and loyal to you. I praise **God** for my *wife* Danielle in this regard.

But there is much more to marriage than personal happiness. When America in any way denigrates **God's** ordained institution of *husband-wife* marriage, our nation loses one of His primary means of heralding His nature to our country! Such loss has serious long-term repercussions both in terms of national cultural patterning and moral direction. Why? Because **God** designed marriage between a man and a woman to be an emulation of His very nature! To lose the *husband-wife* model of marriage is to lose an archetype of His otherwise invisible attributes, His eternal power, and His divine glory.

My friend don't argue marriage as if it's all about personal happiness! There's a whole lot more to it than that!

I. INTRODUCTION

Ephesians 5:22–33 contains a large embodiment of the divinely inspired Apostle Paul's teaching relative to the relationship of *husbands* to *wives*.

The context of this passage in the epistle is within the section where Paul is expressing the behavioral aspects of the called-out ones (cf. 1:4, 5; 2:10).

The overall organization of the book of Ephesians is simple to understand: Paul has expressed the doctrinal truths and the calling of believers in chapters 1 to 3. He then segues to express the various practical aspects of the conduct of believers in chapters 4 through 6:9 (all based on the prior doctrinal truths he has previously stated). Within this latter delineation on the behavioral elements of believers, he specifically addresses the *husband-wife* relationship. More pointedly, Paul addresses the walk¹ or practices of the believer in this section, calling him or her to walk² in unity (4:1–16), in holiness (4:17–32), in *love* (5:1–6), in light (5:7–14), and in wisdom (5:15–6:9). The passage, 5:22–33, follows:

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

Given the fact that the passage under investigation appears below the wisdom banner when outlining the book of Ephesians means that for the believer to walk in wisdom, he or she must understand the *God*-ordained relationship between *husband* and *wife* the way *God* intends it to be. Of course, too, the presumption is that *God* expects you and me to obey what He says here. In addition, *God* expects lawmakers to take His wisdom on

marriage into consideration when constructing (or reconstructing if need be) marriage legislation for a nation.

More so, by living in accordance with the guidelines of Ephesians 5:22–33 and enjoying the wonderful benefits of blessing that stem from following such guidance,

The believer's allegiance to **God's**
manuscript on marriage serves
to manifest His glory to the world.

Exactly what do I mean by this assertion? In Romans 1:20 Paul states, *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made.* Clearly, in addition to **God's** wonderful manufacture of organic and inorganic substances within the first days of creation, He fashioned marriage soon thereafter (cf. Genesis 2:24, 25). Therefore in proportion to a believer and societies' obedience to **God** and His ordained guidelines concerning marriage, His attributes, power, and nature are on display in and to a man-centered, **God**-rebellious, lost and fallen world.

Herein is perhaps a whole new motive for a couple to work and strive for a **godly** marriage—a reason and a motive that should eclipse each one's quest for self-satisfaction only. When people steadfastly obey Scriptures' specific blueprint for marriage, they mightily testify of **God's** existence and greatness. *Your* marriage can and should be a powerful manifestation of **God's invisible attributes, eternal power and divine nature.** Your marriage should and most definitely can preach **God's** glory to a lost, watching world!

In addition to motivating every true believer to be extra-sensitive and careful as to how he treats his spouse, this truth also explains the reason why the forces and agents of evil continually labor to expunge **God's** model of marriage from the face of the earth. To do so results in the fact that **God's** existence is less apparent. Marriage, as we shall examine, provides all of us with a magnificent glimpse of what **God** is like! Should it be any wonder, therefore, why such a powerful force is afoot to redefine marriage?

To do so is to extract a testimony of and by **God**, as well as to erode one of the five foundational pillars that He intends to manifest His reign in the world prior to His Second Coming.

How then does the biblical pattern of marriage illumine the reality of **God**? That question is answered in this passage. Specifically, the relationship of **husbands** to **wives** helps to illustrate and reveal the following three major aspects dealing with **God's** attributes, power, and nature.

II. THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF THE TRINITY

God has ordained marriage to reveal intensively, but not extensively, His nature as it exists within the triune **Godhead**. The following four **godly** characteristics are revealed on earth through His ordination of the **husband-to-wife** relationship.

A. FELLOWSHIP

A seminary definition of the Trinity is this: **God** exists in three personages of the same numerical essence. The close study and comparison of various scriptural passages remarkably and unmistakably reveals this truth. Accordingly, **God's** essential nature is characterized by fellowship and communication within the **Godhead**. And these two attributes, fellowship, and communication, are beautifully portrayed by and in **God's** construction of marriage.

Interestingly, the Hebrew word for one (*echad*), as used in Deuteronomy 6:4 to describe the oneness nature of **God**, denotes a pluralistic unity. The same word is used in Genesis 2:24 and quoted by Paul in Ephesians 5:31 to describe the **husband** and **wife** as one flesh, i.e., they are one, but remain two separate personages: a pluralistic unity. Therefore, a good marriage where the **husband** and **wife** freely communicate and enjoy fellowshiping with one another vividly displays **God's** divine nature. So then,

To the degree that you, as **husband** and **wife**, are communicative and enjoy one another's company is the degree to which you give glory to **God** in your marriage.

I *love* talking to my *wife*, Danielle, and greatly enjoy her company! We continually discuss everything going on in our lives. The point is this: to abstain from regular communication and fellowship is sinful because, in part, the believing couple is failing to manifest *God's* character.

B. AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION

The second characteristic of *God* that is on display through His ordination of marriage is the way in which He interrelates within Himself and with His creative order. Throughout all of the *Godhead* and creation, there exist authority-submission³ relationships. In the Trinity, the Son (as depicted by His name) is subject to the Father. Matthew 28:18 and John 5:26–27 bear out the fact that the Father gave *Christ* His authority. Marriage is likened to every other *God*-ordained institution whereby there exists an authority/submission relationship, *husband* to *wife* respectively (Ephesians 5:22–23). The character of *God* is thereby revealed.

To further illustrate the authority-submission construct nature of *God*, note that in the institution of the family, the children are to be subject to the parents' authority (Ephesians 6:1); in the *Church*, the believer is to be subject to the elders (1 Peter 5:5); in commerce, the employee is to be subject to the employer (1 Timothy 6:1); and in the state, the citizen is to be subject to the governing authorities (Romans 13:1).

Specifically, the *wife's* submission to her *husband*, among other things, is a powerful picture of *Christ's* submission to the Father when He went to the cross. "*My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will*" (Matthew 26:39). Or of the *Holy Spirit*, who is called the *Helper* by *Jesus Christ* in John 14:26, "*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.*"

C. LOVE

The third characteristic of *God* revealed by marriage is His *love*. First John 4:16 states, *God is love*. Accordingly, Ephesians 5:25 commands *husbands* to *love* their *wives*. Paul reiterates the essential importance of this mandate no less than two additional times in the same passage: *So husbands ought also to love their own wives* (v. 28), and *Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself* (v. 33). This selfless

*agapé love*⁴ displayed by the spiritually mature *husband* portrays the very character of *God* to an onlooking, *God*-scrutinizing world. Not only does the *husband* love his *wife* because in his obedience he will be blessed, but he *loves* his *wife* because his *love* reflects the very essence of *God* to the world.⁵

D. RESPECT

The *respect* of the *wife* for her *husband* (Ephesians 5:33) is the fourth characteristic of *God's* emulation in the similitude of marriage. *Wives* are commanded to *respect* their *husbands* which reveals the *respect* that *Christ* has for the Father. Such *respect* is implied in Philippians 2:6–7 where Paul says of *Christ*: *who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself. Christ* willingly took a different position during His incarnation, even though in His essence He was equal with *God* as the second member of the Trinity (cf. John 5:18). Out of *respect* for fulfilling the ultimate plan of *God*, and with redemption of the elect in view, He was willingly subservient to the One to Whom He was equal. The *respect* of the submissive *wife* to her *husband* then becomes a tremendous physical picture of the interrelationships existing among the members of the Trinity, i.e., the Son's *respect* for the Father's authority. This human modeling is essential to the warp and woof of successful cultures.

Marriage, as depicted by Paul in this Ephesian passage, attests in these four aforementioned tangential ways to the very nature of *God*. Accordingly, the believing *husband* and *wife* need be obedient to these biblical precepts if the couple is to “*Let your [their] light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 5:16). Herein then—illustrated theologically—is revealed why *God* is for marriage between a *husband* and a *wife*: it serves to reveal His nature and attributes.

III. THE UNITY WITHIN THE TRINITY

The second main category of understanding that is depicted by *God's* observable model of marriage is His unity within diversity within the Trinity.⁶ In this Ephesian passage, combined with Paul's teaching in Galatians 3:28, there exists a tension in marriage that also exists in the

Godhead, that being the equality of the members in the midst of their dissimilarities regarding role and function. Accordingly,

For marriage to reflect *God's*
essence, there must be practiced
a distinction of role and function
in the midst of equality
between *husband* and *wife*.

A. EQUALITY

Galatians 3:28 reads, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*. According to the latter portion of this passage, there is no spiritual distinction between the genders. One leading commentator on Ephesians puts it this way: “In the dimension of spiritual possessions and privilege, there is absolutely no difference.”⁷ Both are *heirs according to the promise* (Galatians 3:29). This is the conclusion of the extensive exegetical work done by S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., in *Role Distinctions in the Church: Galatians 3:28*. He states the following:

The richness of the oneness, without any denial at all of role distinctions, is the preeminent thrust of the section we have been considering. Justified by faith in Christ, both male and female are “sons of God” (v. 26), both are “in Christ Jesus” (v. 26), united in Him in eternal union through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (v. 27), both have clothed themselves with Christ and are one in Him (v. 28).

Accordingly, *God* has designed both *male* and *female*, heretofore, *husband* and *wife* to be equal before Him in position. This construction exactly parallels that of the unity within the Trinity: each member possesses homogeneity and essential similarity.

B. DIVERSITY

The egalitarian equality of the genders as explicated by Paul in Galatians 3:28 in no way erodes or contradicts the diversity of them stated elsewhere, especially in Ephesians 5:22–33. Here their roles are distinctly differentiated. In addition to this passage, elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments is communicated under divine inspiration the delineation of *husband*-and-*wife* responsibilities.

Paul's teaching stems from that given in the book of Genesis where, in summary, *God* describes the role of the *husband* as one of *headship*, and the *wife* in terms of a *helper* (see Genesis 2:18–25). Ray Ortlund, Jr., has provided the leading exegetical work on this along with Dr. Wayne Grudem.⁸ The Scriptures not only describe their differences in these general terms, but more specifically in terms of unambiguous responsibilities.

The following are some of their scripturally definitive differences:

Some Primary Functions of Women

- Homemaking Responsibilities (Proverbs 31)
- Home Management Responsibilities (Titus 2:5)
- Mothering Responsibilities (Titus 2:3-5)
- Teaching Younger Women (1 Timothy 3:11)
- Displaying Hospitality (1 Timothy 5:10)
- Differentiating in Dress (1 Timothy 2:9)

Some Primary Functions of Men

- Providing for the Household (1 Timothy 5:8)
 - Leading in the Church (1 Timothy 3:1–7)
 - Leading in the Home (Ephesians 5:24)
 - Sacrificing for His *Wife* (Ephesians 5:25)
 - Sanctifying His *Wife* (Ephesians 5:26)
 - Fathering Children into Adults (Proverbs 22:6)
-

These differing role functions of the *husband* and *wife* are not intended to suggest a superior/inferior relationship in the marriage any more than the role of *Christ* in salvation, which differs from that of the Father and the Holy Spirit.⁹ Similar to *God's* expression of salvation being a team effort whereby varying *God*-assigned responsibilities are assumed and accepted by each member of the Trinity, so are roles in marriage. Each gender possesses *God*-designed and imbued proclivities.

This concept of role specificity should not prove new, difficult or alarming to the believer. Paul forthrightly presents this same principle of role differentiation in the context of the unity of the *Church* and its diversity of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:12–18:

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

The *body* of *Christ* is composed of varying gifts and, therefore, varying responsibilities and roles per *God's* eternal design—all with the same value and worth. Accordingly, the relationship of *husbands* and *wives*, in their essential unity and specified role diversity, give witness to *God's* triune nature.¹⁰

IV. CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

Lastly, the relationship of *husbands* and *wives* serves to illustrate the relationship of *Christ* and His *Church*. Ephesians 5:27 states, *that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless*. Colossians 1:22 is a parallel passage in statement and meaning. In summary, *God* is preparing a bride, which is the *Church*, for *Christ*. Whereas in the Old Testament Israel is pictured as the *wife* of the Lord (cf. Isaiah 54:5; and

Hosea 2:19–20), in the New Testament the **Church** is seen as the bride of **Christ**, with **Christ** as the bridegroom (cf. Mark 2:20). Furthermore, in His Second Coming, **Christ** will be united with His bride and appear with her in His glorious, triumphant return. Such splendor is revealed in the following passages of the book of Revelation:

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7).

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2).

And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Revelation 21:9).

Herein is an astounding metaphor of the *husband-wife* relationship:

If it is theologically evident that
Christ died for His Church to
save her and is in the process of
sanctifying her and will someday
glorify her, then those same
elements seemingly would
appear in the metaphor of
human marriage, and they do.

Accordingly, the *husband's* responsibility in *marriage* is to present his *wife sanctified, having cleansed her by the washing of the water with the word* (Ephesians 5:26). Men, here is another reason you should be in Bible study—because you need to be teaching **God's** Word to your *wife* in order to fulfill your responsibility before **God** as a *husband*! What follows

are three theologically-basic responsibilities you have in relationship to your *wife*:

A. SALVATION

In Ephesians 5:25, Paul states:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

Herein is a direct parallel contained in one passage connecting the metaphor of marriage to the redemptive work of *Christ* for His *Church*. In that a physical *husband* cannot spiritually save his physical *wife*, he is commanded nonetheless to display the same sacrificial *love* to the point of death so as to depict the ultimate love of *Christ* for His called-out ones.

The *husband* is to display his love by his actions; to her, his vocabulary is a much less impressive conduit than his volitional sacrifices for her best interests.

To the degree that he sacrifices his own desires for those of his *wife* is the degree that she senses his true *love*.

B. SANCTIFICATION

In Ephesians 5:26 the passage continues to indicate the cleansing metaphor of the *husband* to the *wife* in parallel to *Christ* and His *Church*. It reads, *so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.*

In marriage the *husband* is to know how to deal with his *wife's* sin. In Stuart Scott's book, *The Exemplary Husband*, he includes a chapter titled "A Husband's Resolve: Helping His Wife Deal with Her Sin."¹¹ Scott's thoughts are motivated from the gravity of the aforementioned passage, i.e., it is the *husband's* responsibility to grow his *wife* spiritually. Why?

It models *sanctification*: *Christ's* building, cleansing and washing His *Church*.

This *husbanding* skill requires the abilities of being gracious, patient, loving and correcting (think of that in terms of 10-10-10-01 in respective proportions I might add!). In addition, it requires the ability to discern true repentance and practice biblical forgiveness. Each ingredient is representative of the process our Lord uses with His *Church* to *sanctify* her. Again, in terms of a *husband's* sanctifying his *wife*, we see the wondrous illustration that marriage emits relative to *God's* nature, character and purposes in the world.

C. GLORIFICATION

Lastly, if marriage parallels *Christ* and His *Church*, wouldn't that model also parallel in some way the eventual marriage of believers to the Lamb of *God, Jesus Christ* in His Second Coming? Indeed, that is exactly what the marriage ceremony of *husband* and *wife* depicts! It is a coming together, the long-awaited consummation of the courtship that in a small way symbolically embodies the marriage of the Lamb of *God* to His *Church*. (See the previously indicated passages listed from the book of Revelation.) Although somewhat anachronistic in the physical realm (in human marriage, the glorification stage comes before the *sanctification*), the marriage ceremony nonetheless captures the excitement and anticipation that the followers of *Christ* sense as they await the consummation of the *Church* Age and the Second Coming of the Lord: at last *Christ* is united with all of His called-out ones and reigns triumphant!

V. SUMMARY

These are the many ways that the relationship of *husbands* and *wives* models and describes the spiritual realities of the living *God* of the universe who has revealed Himself in the Scriptures. The mere fact that the physical reality of marriage over the centuries has outwardly portrayed and paralleled the profound symbolism attested to in Scripture evidences the authorship of *God* not only on marriage, but His penmanship of the Bible. Their respective proclamations have matched up with one another for centuries! And

As the institution of marriage goes,
so goes a nation's culture.

Lastly and most importantly, in that *God* has so identified Himself to His creation *through* His construct of the institution of marriage, true believers should be extremely motivated to pay special, close attention to their marriage. They are to give it the priority and energy it deserves and requires in order to best proclaim *God's* invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature to an unbelieving world. This should be especially true with lawmakers who publicly profess *Christ*.

The health of your marriage
is a fundamental signature
to your long-term, overall
effectiveness and influence.

Beloved, I hope this study will provide you with a different and even more powerful motive for working attentively, diligently and forthrightly on your marriage! There is so much more to the divine institution than your personal satisfaction (as important as that is in a fallen, disappointing world).

In a cultural sense even more is at stake: when America in any way denigrates *God's* ordained institution of *husband* and *wife* marriage, our nation loses one of *God's* primary means of heralding His nature to our country! This loss has serious long-term repercussions in terms of cultural patterning and moral direction. In this sense, I hope you clearly see why:

There is a whole lot more to
marriage than personal happiness!

There is much more to marriage, and much more rides on defining marriage **God's** way—than on a person's personal pleasures. As a lawmaker, it is critically important for you to understand this truth.

1. The word “walk” is used by Paul metaphorically throughout the epistle to capsule the believers' process of sanctification or becoming Christlike.
2. Cf. Genesis 1:26 and Deuteronomy 6:4.
3. The one exception to submission to authority relates to those in authority asking another to violate **God's** clear commands.
4. In the Greek NT, *agapao* signifies unconditional love and is based on a person's character, in contrast to a responsive love that is determined relative to how one is treated.
5. There is a gradient ease or difficulty in the submission of the **wife** relative to the love—or lack of it by the **husband**, and vice-versa. Note that these indispensable ingredients of submission and love in marriage are exemplarily and simultaneously modeled in the Trinity.
6. Theologically, this is the tension of synthesizing the Economic Trinity with the Ontological Trinity. Both are taught in Scripture. The Economic Trinity refers to how the persons of the Trinity relate to each other, and the Ontological Trinity depicts **God's** overall being and existence.
7. John MacArthur, *Divine Design: God's Complementary Roles for Men and Women* (Unite Kingdom: David C. Cook, 2010), 42.
8. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 160.
9. Raymond C. Ortland, Jr., *Male-Female Equality and Male Headship; Genesis 1–3*, quoted in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 95.
10. Failure by one to accept his God-given role is first illustrated by Satan. He rebelled against his God-created position of being an angelic being (cf. Ezekiel 28:11–19; Isaiah 14:12–15; Genesis 3:1–13). In essence, rebellion is the sin of rejecting your God-given role; it is wanting to be someone other than the person and position God created you to be and fulfill. *Rebellion* develops when a person thinks he knows better than God, which is a statement that he wants to be God. It is the sin of pride. Lastly, rebellion is listed as a characteristic of an apostate in Jude (vv. 8–11).
11. Scott, Stuart. *The Exemplary Husband* (Bemidji, Minnesota: Focus Publishing, 2000), 205.

Sexual Sin and the Aphrodisiac of Power

Given the nature of the Capitol, many people live away from their home environments for regular, extended periods of time. The temptation for sexual sin is ever-present, and I have seen too many legislators, staff, and lobbyists fall prey to it. Accordingly, the following Bible study contains some key biblical insights related to staying sexually pure in a surreal environment like the U.S. Capitol.

I. INTRODUCTION

Power is an aphrodisiac that makes those elected to high office much more susceptible to sexual sin than those who are not in power. This Bible study is, therefore, important for someone in the public eye. The following are some biblical insights that relate to avoiding sexual temptation and sin in this area.

II. OBEY GOD REGARDING SEXUAL PURITY

No pragmatic means of avoiding sexual sin will ever supplant this first and primary necessity. One must first come to faith in Christ and experience the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to bring his sexual passions under control. Even then, maintaining control is difficult in a sex-laden culture like America. Galatians 5:16, however, does provide a *promise* that the believer can have victory and control over sinful sexual desire:

Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

Salvation is the first necessity for walking in sexual purity. Without the indwelling Holy Spirit, God's power cannot be enabled in us and implemented by us to give us victory over our fallen, fleshly nature.

Secondly, we must memorize and meditate on Proverbs chapters 5, 6, and 7 giving special attention to the passages that relate to the end results of *fornication* and *adultery*. We must possess a sober understanding of the real results of sexual sins to help quell the irresponsible, selfish urge to be sexual outside of wedlock. The results are manifold and deadly.

III. PROTECT AND NURTURE THE SEXUAL ASPECT OF MARRIAGE

Since most everyone possesses sexual desire, get married! Marriage is God's intended means to satisfy and fulfill the God-given desire for sexual relations. If one does not have the gift of celibacy (and very few do!), then he should be seeking to get married. Marriage is God's delightful design for most people. Genesis 2:24 states in this regard:

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Becoming *one flesh* is a natural, wonderful propensity that God has placed in His creation. He created sex to be practiced within the confines and commitment of a husband and a wife (a male and a female) in the bonds of matrimony. States Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:9 in regard to this desire and its fulfillment:

But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

It's not as if the One who created men and women with a passionate desire for sex doesn't realize it or comment about it! But until marriage, God's revealed will is complete abstinence. The fulfillment of sexual desires then should be an impetus to prepare in every way for attracting and marrying the right, godly person. God does not want those to whom He gave a sexual drive to be continually frustrated by a lack of fulfillment. Get married and then nurture the sexual aspect of marriage!

Surveys indicate that married people have much more regular sexual fulfillment than people who are unmarried. Within the confines of a marriage commitment a husband and wife can nurture trust and fulfillment

over many years of communication and practice. Such is simply not the case outside of a marriage commitment.

IV. VIEW SEX WITHIN MARRIAGE AS GOOD

It follows that, for the aforementioned to be true, a couple must view sex within marriage as a good thing that God desires for each of them as a couple. God intends for their sexual desires to be creative, enjoyable, and fulfilling with their spouse as is evidenced in Hebrews 13:4:

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

God says the *marriage bed* (a polite euphemism for sexual intercourse) is not sinful in contrast to sex outside of marriage. ***Fornication*** is the sin of sex while unmarried, and ***adultery*** is the sin of sex with another person while married. God wants sex to be a huge blessing in your life within the confines of marriage.

The preceding two points, viewing sex as a good thing within marriage, are huge pillars in the quest to avoid sexual sin.

V. BE SEXUALLY UNSELFISH WITH YOUR SPOUSE

Once married, a person's body becomes the property of his or her spouse. 1 Corinthians 7:1–5 says:

Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

God intends for spouses to be unselfish when it comes to meeting the physical needs of their mates. And due to the general lack of sexual self-control, explicit in this passage, one's mate is to be sensitive to the

other's needs—to remove the temptation of sexual fulfillment outside of wedlock.

These three previous points can be summarized by the cliché, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Championing these biblical means for sexual fulfillment will lead to blessing and much less temptation resulting from a lack of fulfillment.

What follows are some other preventative insights aimed at the prohibition of sexual passion resulting in sin.

VI. DO NOT ALLOW THE PLANETS OF PRIVACY, PROMOTION, AND PASSION TO BECOME ALIGNED

When the privacy of a hotel room is combined with the promotion of the Internet or pay-per-view television and the passions of unfulfilled desire yearn (stemming from not putting into place the previous three points), the temptation to sin is greatly increased with even the most mature, Spirit-filled followers of Christ. Therefore, one must adhere to the sage advice and wisdom of the writer of Hebrews (12:13) who said:

Make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

In other words, if one is serious about avoiding sexual temptation, he should plan out his life so as to avoid it! Travel with your spouse; stay with friends or business associates while on the road.

Do whatever it takes to avoid
situations that have proven to
be destructive in the past.

Since the advent of the Internet, the porn business is now four times larger than the combined total of the Hollywood movie industry largely due to the various new forms of private delivery and promotion of their product. Therefore, we must be wise and think ahead, creating habitual disciplines in our lives so that these planets do not align themselves—and the

curses of the aforementioned Proverbs come to bear. Meditate on Proverbs 9:13–18 the next time you are tempted by pornography or *adultery*:

*The woman of folly is boisterous,
She is naive and knows nothing.
She sits at the doorway of her house,
On a seat by the high places of the city,
Calling to those who pass by,
Who are making their paths straight:
“Whoever is naive, let him turn in here,”
And to him who lacks understanding she says,
“Stolen water is sweet;
And bread eaten in secret is pleasant.”
But he does not know that the dead are there,
That her guests are in the depths of Sheol.*

Lest there be any doubt about sex outside of marriage being sinful in the New Testament (NT), Paul’s letter to the church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 4:3–7) addresses sexual purity. He states,

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.

Beloved, in the Capitol sexual sin can destroy your life, and it *will* destroy your life if you let it get hold of you.

Do not pander to your fallen sin
nature, rather mortify the flesh.

The good news is that it doesn’t have to be that way; sex is not bad! God intends for you to enjoy sex within marriage. Notice what Solomon tells Rehoboam in this regard (Proverbs 5:15–20):

*Drink water from your own cistern
And fresh water from your own well.
Should your springs be dispersed abroad,
Streams of water in the streets?
Let them be yours alone
And not for strangers with you.
Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice in the wife of your youth.
As a loving hind and a graceful doe,
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;
Be exhilarated always with her love.
For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress
And embrace the bosom of a foreigner?*

Commit to the aforementioned disciplines so as to enjoy a fruitful and sexually fulfilling marriage!

If you want an excellent career, you must discipline yourself to learning. If you want excellent financial stability, you must discipline your spending. If you want a strong spiritual walk with Christ, you must discipline yourself to memorize His Word. If you want great kids, you must discipline yourself to discipline them. If you want a car that lasts a long time, you must discipline yourself to maintain that vehicle. If you want a healthy body, you must discipline yourself in what you eat and how you exercise.

The same is true with sex; you must discipline yourself to achieve a sexually fulfilling life. As in all things, you must discipline yourself to do it God's way. That is my prayer for you.

Alcohol and Office

As you know I regularly frequent the book of Proverbs. Of the 66 books of the Bible, this one is perhaps the most applicable for those choosing to live their lives under scrutiny in the Capitol. Solomon, king of Israel, is instructing his son, Rehoboam, on how to live skillfully in governmental leadership. Much can be gained from the topical study of this book. Alcohol and Office is one of those subjects that needs special consideration

I. INTRODUCTION

Long ago, with the help of one of my seminary professors, I began outlining and developing theologically the 31 chapters of the book of Proverbs. This Old Testament (OT) book contains 915 Proverbs which my professor had already divided into six main divisions for exhaustive study:

1. Spiritual Wisdom
2. Personal Wisdom
3. Family Wisdom
4. Intellectual Wisdom
5. Marketplace Wisdom
6. Societal Wisdom

I then developed 87 subcategories and exhaustive outlines under these six main divisions. What came out of this three-year exercise are studies for public servants that will afford you an opportunity to grow in personal wisdom in many pertinent, practical areas. This study, under the category of personal wisdom, tackles *Alcohol and Office*.

What follows is all that Proverbs has to say about alcohol. As much as this beverage is available in the Capitol community—especially during free receptions and dinners—it can become your greatest enemy because it can lead to ruin. A special word is in order here: partaking of everything that is “free” is not in your best interest. Do not be like the kid in the candy store without self-control. The surrealism of the Capitol environment coupled with being away from home can corrupt you faster than you think.

Remember the words of the Apostle Paul who said, ***I discipline my body and make it my slave*** (1 Corinthians 9:27). I have noticed that those who are without personal discipline do not function well here—especially when it comes to booze and food. The following is what Solomon had to say regarding alcohol to his son who would someday lead the nation.

II. THE PRESENT FRUITS OF FERMENTATION

***Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler,
And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise*** (20:1).

Biblical history records that since the days of Noah (Genesis 9:21), the love of wine and strong drink have deceived and shamed many. ***Mocker*** has the idea of “scoffing,” and ***brawler*** carries the meaning of “being violent, loud and uncontrollable.” What’s doubly sad is that these fruits of the fermented grape, so to speak, overcome a drinking individual before he is aware of it, all the while failing to deliver the pleasure he is seeking.

Noah is an example of one who drank excessively from his own vineyard. He soon lost respect and dignity in the sight of his inner family. Notice the extrapolation of this fact in Proverbs 23:29–35:

***Who has woe? Who has sorrow?
Who has contentions? Who has complaining?
Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?
Those who linger long over wine,
Those who go to taste mixed wine.
Do not look on the wine when it is red,
When it sparkles in the cup,
When it goes down smoothly;
At the last it bites like a serpent
And stings like a viper.***

*Your eyes will see strange things
 And your mind will utter perverse things.
 And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea,
 Or like one who lies down on the top of a mast.
 “They struck me, but I did not become ill;
 They beat me, but I did not know it.
 When shall I awake?
 I will seek another drink.”*

A person's governing reason is lost when alcohol is used wrongly. In place of reason are lust, appetite, and passion. As a result, the heart *utters perverse things*. It's not surprising that in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul commands, *And do not get drunk with wine* (Ephesians 5:18).

III. THE FUTURE FRUITS OF FERMENTATION

The effects on the overall direction a person charts for his or her life is a secondary result of indulging:

*Listen, my son, and be wise,
 And direct your heart in the way.
 Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine,
 Or with gluttonous eaters of meat;
 For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty,
 And drowsiness will clothe one with rags* (23:19–21).

So much of Proverbs talks about how those with whom you choose to fellowship will affect your life. Proverbs 4:14–17 states:

*Do not enter the path of the wicked
 And do not proceed in the way of evil men.
 Avoid it, do not pass by it;
 Turn away from it and pass on.
 For they cannot sleep unless they do evil;
 And they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble.
 For they eat the bread of wickedness
 And drink the wine of violence.*

Hanging out with wicked people quickly loosens a person's attachment to instruction. Cultivating such relationships quickly forsakes the way of God. The results over the long term are a lack of personal productivity,

poverty, and *clothing oneself with rags*. Skid row serves to illustrate this truth; a majority of those on our nation's streets suffer from alcoholism. The following Proverb underscores this actuality:

*He who loves pleasure will become a poor man;
He who loves wine and oil will not become rich* (21:17).

Herein is a biblical insight that should guide policy formation on the same.

The root solution to poverty has
more to do with the formation of
Christ's character in individuals than
in meeting their personal needs.

Woefully inadequate are policies to overcome poverty that fail to consider the aforementioned Solomonic truths. This insight also underscores why the institution of the church is so much better equipped to handle the plight of poverty than is the institution of the state. The church is designed by God to address the issues of the heart, where, in a majority of cases, the real problem lies.

IV. FERMENTATION AND LEADERS

*It is not for kings to drink wine,
Or for rulers to desire strong drink,
For they will drink and forget what is decreed,
And pervert the rights of all the afflicted* (31:4–5).

In the book of Esther, King Xerxes was drunk and ordered his wife to come before his eunuchs *to display her beauty to the people and the princes* (1:11). When King Herod asked for the head of John the Baptist, his request took place in the middle of a feast (Mark 6:21). Both serve to illustrate the truth of this Proverb in terms of state leadership. The drunkenness of Elah, king of Israel, and Ben-hadad, king of Syria (cf. 1 Kings 16:8–9; 20:16; Hosea 7:5) serve to illustrate the same behavior.

When rulers—both kings and priests— desire strong drink, they *forget what was decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted*. It follows that one of the qualifications for spiritual leadership in the church is leaders *not addicted to wine* (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7). No leader in any of God's ordained institutions can afford to have a mind clouded by substance. The point of this principle is that such behavior in a leader negatively impacts others. The leader must have a higher standard.

Often throughout Scripture, drunkenness and adultery, or other sexual sins appear side by side, indicating the quick downward spiral for both secular and sacerdotal leaders who practice substance abuse that inevitably leads to shameful activities. Intemperance is unseemly as it turns a leader into a beast. And to lose respect in leadership is to lose leadership. Guard it! Keep your integrity at all times! You were elected to serve others—not indulge yourself!

Notice that the following Proverb directly proceeds from the previous one given in verses 4 and 5:

*Give strong drink to him who is perishing,
and wine to him whose life is bitter.
Let him drink and forget his poverty
And remember his trouble no more* (31:6–7).

Whereas drink is not for kings, it does have its use. Psalm 104:15 states *wine which makes a man's heart glad*. Such is illustrated by the Samaritan who gave drink to the wounded traveler in Luke 10:34. Paul prescribed it to his ailing understudy, Timothy, stating *No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments* (1 Timothy 5:23).

Conclusively, to drink wine was not a sin in the OT (cf. Deuteronomy 14:26) but drunkenness was (cf. Isaiah 28:7). So it is in New Testament times. This teaching of Proverbs regarding wine is illustrative of *selflessness*. Rather than personally indulging, alcohol can be prudently prescribed for medicinal and other conservative purposes when necessary. Here then is the principle of self-denial and service of others.

V. CONCLUSION

The Scriptures do not state hard and fast that any consumption of alcohol is sinful, but it does repeatedly warn against the sin of drunkenness

and its results. The stakes are much higher as this principle relates to leaders. Nothing should be practiced that impairs a person's ability to reason and judge with biblical precepts. Therefore, the leader's standard should be higher—not only because he deals in intellectual property, but for reasons of example. Consider 1 Corinthians 10:31, Whether, then, you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

May God give you self-control and great wisdom when it comes to alcohol.

The Importance of Parenting and the Course of the Nation

When the institution of the family flounders in its primary responsibility to *train up a child in the way he should go* (Proverbs 22:6) the state is eventually overwhelmed with insurmountable problems.

The state has a much easier job of maintaining civility in society when parents lovingly discipline their children at a young age. One might say that parents oversee the manufacturing plant of a good society. They are God's first remedy in a fallen world, His intended means of curtailng evil in a nation. The book of Proverbs has much to say to parents about how to raise up a child.

I. INTRODUCTION

A great country and a good culture are created first and foremost through good parenting.

To this point, Proverbs 28:4 states, *Those who forsake the law praise the wicked*. This passage relates to God's moral law in the Torah, but the principle being expressed here by Solomon could be applied in a broader sense to one's obedience to a nation's laws (cf. Romans 1:32).

It follows that those in the institution of government should not only prioritize their own parenting responsibilities, but in a professional sense,

seek to strengthen policies that help the nuclear family to *train up a child*. What follows is a study almost exclusively from the book of Proverbs related to helping you, as a public servant, become a better parent both personally and professionally; it is doubly powerful when the leaders of a society not only model great parenting, but write laws that help to facilitate this with others.

II. THE PURPOSES OF PARENTS

As a public servant you have to fight your scheduler in order to be a good parent because good parenting takes time; you are in a constant battle over your priorities. This means you must be especially knowledgeable and skilled at parenting simply because you will most likely have less time to achieve this than will your next door neighbor. Accordingly, give special attention to this study and the principles expounded upon herein. The purposes of biblical parenting follow:

A. TO INSTRUCT YOUR CHILDREN

Hear, my son, your father's instruction

And do not forsake your mother's teaching (Proverbs 1:8).

My son, observe the commandment of your father

And do not forsake the teaching of your mother (6:20).

This first purpose is perhaps the most important. If you get this right and not so much the other Scriptures to follow, you will probably still end up with good kids. Here's the big principle that is so often forsaken in today's American households: your child needs to clearly *observe the commandment(s)* of his or her parents and not be allowed to *forsake* them.

Obedience is not an
option that the parent
should afford the child.

Rather, obedience is to be demanded—with immediacy—always. The above passages imply that the child or children must learn to revere authority. To allow your children to show disrespect for your authority is akin to teaching them not to fear God. A healthy fear of God is the basis for your child to one day bow the knee to the Lordship of Christ (hopefully at a young age) which is the ultimate objective and purpose for parenting. There is no need to submit to God later if there is no need to submit to parents now. Such reverence for authority is created in a child at an early age through good parenting.

*To receive instruction in wise behavior,
Righteousness, justice and equity (1:3).*

With the parent's authority established and not in question, this passage contains some of the lofty goals that good parenting can achieve in the child: to *instruct* a child in *wise behavior* means that the parents have as their objective to inculcate in the child the ability to eventually govern him- or herself by choice. To train in *righteousness* means the child will eventually self-apply God's standards when dealing with himself, others, and God. When trained in *justice*, the child will conform to the will and standard of God. And lastly, *equity* has the idea of living life in a fair and pleasing way. Such children, borne from excellent parenting, not only eventually end up loving the Lord, but make for wonderful citizens!

*My son, if you will receive my words
And treasure my commandments within you ... (2:1).*

Notice how this passage relates back to 1:8 and the primary point I first made in this study. If you read through chapter two of Proverbs, you will learn of all the things this *if* leads to. It culminates in verse 5, wherein is the *then*: *Then you will discern the fear of the LORD. Fearing the LORD* is wrought via demanding that the child *receive my [your] words and treasure my [your] commandments*.

*For the LORD will be your confidence
And will keep your foot from being caught (3:26).*

As a result of this proper *fear of the LORD* and the child's *treasuring* His *commandments* (and yours) there results in the child a *confidence* and peace of mind. The child looks to his parents and eventually to God for guidance—and this Proverb indicates that God looks out for, and over him! What a tremendous principle and motivation this is to be a good,

instructive parent! Think of the summation of these aforementioned passages in this way:

Good parenting results in
God's helping your child!

God will keep your child's *foot from being caught* if you teach your child to *receive your instruction* at a young age! Unfortunately for the parent, child and society, too many parents simply do not *instruct* their children. In essence they live with them under the same roof, with the children finding their own way. Leniency is in vogue—as if it is a higher virtue than *instruction*. It is not! It is bad parenting. Generally, there is too little proactive *instruction* in today's American families which result in so many wayward kids and social ills. The following Proverbs underscore this:

*Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father,
And give attention that you may gain understanding,*

*For I give you sound teaching;
Do not abandon my instruction* (4:1–2).

*Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise,
And apply your mind to my knowledge* (22:17).

These passages serve to further illustrate the need of the parents to be proactive—requiring their children to *apply* [their] *mind to the knowledge* of their parents.

Don't be a wimpy parent who allows
his kids to call the shots. Children
eventually disrespect wimpy parents.

B. TO EXHORT YOUR CHILDREN

Exhorting is what the passages that I will list in this section all have in common. Some good synonyms for exhort are: “urge strongly, advise, and warn.” The parent’s responsibilities go beyond instruction (my first point in the purpose of parenting section of the outline). Beyond just instructing, the parent is to press God’s truths into not just the mind, but also the heart of the child by repetition, urgency, and reason. One must shepherd the heart of his child. The following Proverbs bear witness to a parent’s urgency in this regard. Notice the demanding, exhortative nature of the passages:

*My son, do not forget my teaching,
But let your heart keep my commandments* (3:1).

*My son, let them not vanish from your sight;
Keep sound wisdom and discretion”* (3:21).

*Now therefore O sons, listen to me,
For blessed are they who keep my ways* (8:32).

*My son, keep my words
And treasure my commandments within you* (7:1).

C. TO CORRECT YOUR CHILDREN

Not only does the biblically driven parent instruct and exhort, he also corrects.

*For whom the Lord loves He reproves,
Even as a father corrects a son in whom he delights* (3:12).

Hebrews 12:9–10 is the New Testament corollary passage to this Proverb:

Furthermore we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good so that we may share His holiness.

Notice the continuing association between the child’s obedience to an earthly father and his or her later submissive response to God. At the risk of “guilting you out” here,

Many people are rebellious
toward God today because
of bad parenting earlier.

The child never learned the value and fruit of correction at a young age. No one ever broke his self-will and as a result he carries around a rebellious spirit today. This idea is evidenced in the following Proverb:

***“Forsake your folly and live,
And proceed in the way of understanding”*** (Proverbs 9:6).

This is a passage that should be memorized and utilized by every parent when shepherding the heart of a child. Learn to say, “That’s wrong in accordance with God’s Word.” Such language best sets the stage for the child to have a sensitivity and desire to please God tomorrow.

Of course, if one is a humanist, believing that man is basically good, not fallen, then there is no reason for correction. Quite to the contrary, the Christian worldview holds that man is fallen, including one’s cute little boy or girl, and is, therefore, in dire need of parental instruction, exhortation, and correction. Lastly, your children are in need of direction in their path through life.

D. TO DIRECT YOUR CHILDREN

Notice the following set of Proverbs that speak to this purpose in parenting:

***My son, if sinners entice you,
Do not consent*** (1:10).

***My son, do not walk in the way with them.
Keep your feet from their path*** (1:15).

***So you will walk in the way of good men
And keep to the paths of the righteous*** (2:20).

***Do not let them depart from your sight;
Keep them in the midst of your heart*** (4:21).

The picture of a *path* is a wonderful metaphor related to the direction one walks in life (i.e., the straight and narrow *path*). Parents should not

be remiss in correcting the direction their child is going as he or she ages. These mid-course corrections are ultra-critical decisions wherein the parent must not prove passive. If one has taught a child submission to authority at a young age, it will not be as difficult for the child to obey at an older age (while still under one's roof). In Danielle's and my parenting, we chose our children's friends when necessary.

E. KEEP THEM FROM SEXUAL SIN

A specific area of parenting spoken of repeatedly is that of keeping your child from sexual sin.

Keep your way far from her

And do not go near the door of her house (5:8).

To keep you from the evil woman,

From the smooth tongue of the adulteress (6:24).

That they may keep you from an adulteress,

From the foreigner who flatters with her words (7:5).

A responsible parent will always know who his child is with and where he is—especially at night. Be passionate about making your child accountable in these areas at all times. Teach your child to not pander to his fallen nature, but rather to mortify the flesh, to *discipline* [his] *body and make it* [his] *slave* (1 Corinthians 9:27). Teach your sons and daughters that sexual desire is to be fulfilled in marriage only. Conversely, sexual involvement before marriage leads to absolutely nothing good for your children, their friends, your family, and our nation! As a governmental leader you know how much sexual sin ends up costing our nation in terms of the welfare roles, medical costs, law enforcement, etc. Such are reduced by good parenting in this one particular area.

III. THE RESPONSE OF THE CHILD

Children are called to obey their parents in Ephesians 6:1. Proverbs echoes the same truth per the following. This is important to know when your child resists your authority:

*Then he taught me and said to me,
 “Let your heart hold fast my words;
 Keep my commandments and live* (Proverbs 4:4).

*When I saw, I reflected upon it;
 I looked, and received instruction* (24:32).

A parent must establish authority early on. This allows the child to gain a sense of conditioning as to the normative nature of parental authority in his life. It sets the stage for the future in the home. It follows that at a young age, parents must curtail a child’s natural tendency to rebel; a parent must lovingly prove and enforce his authority at the earliest stages of a child’s life. This is done through spanking. Notice the following Proverb in this regard:

*He who withholds his rod hates his son,
 But he who loves him disciplines him diligently* (13:24).

*Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child;
 But the rod of discipline will remove it far from him* (22:15).

Corporal punishment for wrong doing is replete throughout Scripture; it is one of the realities and necessities of living in a fallen world. But keep in mind always that spanking must be done in love and not anger.

IV. THE BENEFITS OF GOOD PARENTING

There are tremendous benefits from taking the time and possessing and practicing the biblical skills necessary to raising your children. The following benefits listed in Proverbs last for a lifetime! That’s to say that investing in your good parenting skills today will come back to you a hundred-fold tomorrow! It is akin to creating an investment portfolio with geometric returns!

A. A LONG LIFE

*Hear, my son, and accept my sayings
 And the years of your life will be many* (4:10).

Ephesians 6:3 quotes this promise also, as recorded first in Deuteronomy 5:16, “*that your days may be prolonged*” on the earth. Wherein a child must first be obedient, to accept *my sayings* for this principle to take effect,

it implies (as we have seen) the discipline and commitment of a parent to be instructive and exhortative. Think about this: your child's length of *life* is related to your parenting skills.

B. A LIVELY AND PLEASANT HOME

How blessed it is to thoroughly look forward to each and every family gathering! There is little in this life to compare to the joys of family, but how many are those, who, for a lack of wisdom in parenting, miss out on these later blessings. Be passionate about your parenting now, and it will accrue to a present and future lively and pleasant home for the rest of your life.

Keep my commandments and live,

And my teaching as the apple of your eye (Proverbs 7:2).

For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you,

That they may be ready on your lips (22:18).

Child-centered families are
abundant today, but God's Word
calls us to parent-centered families.

C. A BETTER SOCIETY

If a child doesn't learn obedience in the home, he will most likely be a cost to society, both literally and figuratively. Conversely, those who learn to respect authority in the home will be on the side of helping society by curtailing crime, as this Proverb bears out (and was used in the prologue):

Those who forsake the law praise the wicked,

But those who keep the law strive with them (28:4).

Parenting today relates and is connected to a good society tomorrow; the two are intrinsically intertwined in Scripture. It follows that public servants not only give attention to their own parenting skills but to lawmaking that helps parents achieve their God-given responsibility.

V. THE RESULTS OF BAD PARENTING

Proverbs lists the deleterious things that happen to a child when the parent allows rebellion—both passive and aggressive—in the home. What follows should serve as an additional motivation to prioritize your parenting while in office. It is by far more important to displease your scheduler and staff than it is to shirk from your God-given responsibilities at home. Be clear on this:

You must prioritize serving the
institution of the family over and above
serving the institution of the state.

Don't confuse these primacies lest, long after serving in office, you have to live with the following the rest of your life. Herein is what Solomon states to his son in this regard, who, by the way, and in the context of the book of Proverbs, will someday be in charge of running the state:

A. A CHILD CHARACTERIZED BY RUIN

*The wise of heart will receive commands,
But a babbling fool will be ruined (10:8).*

B. A CHILD CHARACTERIZED BY STRIFE

*Through insolence comes nothing but strife,
But wisdom is with those who receive counsel (13:10).*

C. A CHILD CHARACTERIZED BY DEATH

*He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul,
But he who is careless of conduct will die (19:16).*

D. A CHILD CHARACTERIZED BY GLUTTONY

*He who keeps the law is a discerning son,
But he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father (28:7).*

E. A CHILD WHO IS UNREPENTANT

*He who turns away his ear from listening to the law,
Even his prayer is an abomination (28:9).*

F. A CHILD WHO IS UNRESTRAINED

*Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained,
But happy is he who keeps the law (29:18).*

Too many bad things can happen to a child whose parents are negligent, whose passion for the privilege of parenting is eclipsed by the limelight of public service. It is too high a price to pay—to neglect your child and abandon your higher calling.

VI. CONCLUSION

As fallen human beings, we will all stumble at times in our parenting. That is to be expected, but thank God He gives us around 18 or so years to *train up a child in the way he should go*. Pray that God will help you in this area and read biblically based books on this subject with your spouse. Continue to hone your skills in this area.

This study would contain less than *the whole counsel of God* (ESV) on this matter without including mention of 1 Timothy 2:15. This passage speaks about the primary role the woman has in raising children. Hers is a high calling of influence, love, and discipline in raising the next generation. Equally standing before God in their worth, God has assigned the role of leading this generation primarily to the man, who is the breadwinner, whereas He has assigned the role of influencing the next generation to the woman. *This is a much higher and much more difficult calling*. May both husband and wife commit afresh and anew to this God-given responsibility that benefits not only the child, family, and society in the present and the future, but also the Kingdom of God. Parents are to raise their children in *the discipline and instruction of the Lord* (Ephesians 6:4). This is not a suggestion; it is a God-ordained responsibility, a privilege to be extremely passionate about.

Need I Forgive Someone Who Is Unrepentant?

F*orgiveness* can be a difficult discipline to practice but is an indispensable character quality that must be continually cultivated over a lifetime. To be unforgiving is to pander to the old nature which the Scripture tells the believer he should lay aside. To be unforgiving is to feed the desires of the flesh. Staff workers, friends, and family find gracious, *forgiving* people attractive, so cultivating this quality will actually help you.

In today's out-of-control competitive, combative environment of public elections, it is almost guaranteed that many false things will be said about you—and ending up carrying baggage as a result is all too easy. I also struggle with false things that have been said about me in the past. We all desire to be liked, and we all desire to protect our reputation, yet we live in a fallen world where jealousy and envy exist. And now with the advent of the Internet, another person can actually buy your name and turn it into a website and post whatever they want about you! How do you handle such things?

One public servant actually preached the opposite of *forgiveness*: “Don’t get mad; get even.” But failing to *forgive* is like storing rotten garbage; it begins to stink up your whole house! Not only is it difficult for others to hang out with someone who continually reeks of vitriol but fostering and cultivating a desire for revenge will cloud one’s relationship with God.

Accordingly, let’s examine what the Scriptures teach about this essential biblical quality—and especially whether we need to *forgive* someone who is unrepentant.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sorting through the following scriptural passages that speak to *forgiveness* will be confusing without first understanding and clarifying the difference between a position-in-Christ passage and a practice-in-Christ passage. Context indicates which of these two a particular Bible writer has in mind. What I mean by a *positional* truth in the context of this study is this: believers are forever *positionally* justified before God when by faith they place their trust in Christ and His finished work on the Cross on their behalf. The permanency of Christ's *forgiveness* is always assured. The believer is said to be "sealed" in Him, and nothing *will be able to separate us from the love of God* (cf. Ephesians 1:13 and Romans 8:38–39). Accordingly, positionally before God is the person who has placed his trust in Christ.

But in addition to *positional* truth, the Author of Scripture, God Himself, speaks of *practice* truths. For example, in the book of Ephesians, the first three chapters address *positional* truths such as the one already mentioned. Then, at the beginning of chapter 4, the Apostle Paul segues into speaking about *practice* truths, and what the implications are in the life of the believer given the *positional* truths previously examined.

To the subject of this Bible study, the point is this: should not those who are positionally *forgiven* and sealed in Christ practice *forgiveness* with others? Bottom line, to *forgive* others is to be Christlike! To do otherwise reveals a disconnect between a person's beliefs and his actions. If I have been *positionally forgiven* by God, should I not *practice forgiving* others? This is a simple but profound point to make at the front end of such a study. In summary of the Introduction, the word *forgiveness* is used in both a *positional* and a *practical* sense throughout the Bible. This distinction will greatly aid our understanding of what follows.

II. THE MANDATE TO FORGIVE

A. THE EXAMPLE OF THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

The crucifixion of Christ on the cross was an unmatched illustration of ultimate injustice. The world will never see a greater contradiction between the life Jesus lived and the gruesome penalty He received. Accordingly, Jesus set a profound example for us relative to His gracious response to

His own flagrant mistreatment. Notice in this regard what is recorded in Luke 23:34:

But Jesus was saying, “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Jesus uttered these words in the midst of being laughed at and mocked! Such a response shows not only His divine grace and enablement but His boundless compassion and characteristic ***forgiveness***. The point is this:

Christ is our role model for a
forgiving spirit—no matter what
injustice we may have suffered.

To be Christlike is to respond to injustice with personal concern toward the perpetrator. It is to ***“love your enemies”*** (Matthew 5:44). It is to ***regard one another as more important than yourselves*** (Philippians 2:3). Only the indwelling Holy Spirit can enable and achieve such uncharacteristic, counterintuitive personal responses! Each of us is still in possession of a sin nature that desires to feed on revenge. Herein is the ultimate, divine, and powerfully profound example of what it means to be ultimately ***forgiving***.

B. FURTHER ELABORATION FROM THE LIFE OF JESUS

In Mark 11:25 Jesus elaborates on the mandate to ***forgive***. The truth of this passage is easy to see. Failing to possess a ***forgiving*** spirit toward others will adversely affect a believer’s relationship with God.

“Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.”

This passage is not suggesting that the believer’s position in Christ is in jeopardy for failing to ***forgive*** another person. Rather, what this passage is teaching is this:

In your day-to-day life,
clinging to contention will cloud
your communion with Christ.

Jesus is saying that the benefit of *forgiving* someone is not only a restored relationship with that person but also a continued closeness to God. In a similar passage related to practice (versus position) 1 John 1:9 states, *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. This passage, in its context, is also related to the day-to-day living of the believer. The verse is not suggesting that a person's failure to confess his sins after being saved will lead to his loss of salvation; rather, the Apostle John is teaching us that such a failure affects our communion with Christ.

Both Mark 11:25 and 1 John 1:9 are expressing the same realities related to the ongoing daily walk or practice of the believer. Both *forgiving* others and confessing our sins after being saved will affect our relationship both with God and our fellow man. Such is an important elaboration regarding God's mandate to be a *forgiving* individual. (If either of these aforementioned passages were to be interpreted to mean that a believer could lose his salvation, it would contradict the clear pronouncements of Ephesians 1:13 and Romans 8:38–39.)

C. YOUR ABILITY AND POWER TO FORGIVE

Rather than continuing to harbor resentment and seeking “a pound of flesh” or personal revenge, notice the intent of Jesus' interaction with Peter in Matthew 18:21–22:

Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”

It's easy to see what Peter was angling for here; he wanted to know at what point he could retaliate! Jesus responds by revealing the nature and an attribute of God Himself, underscoring the godly principle and indispensable character quality of ongoing, attitudinal personal *forgiveness*.

Believers, via the indwelling and empowering Holy Spirit, you are already in possession of an unending spirit of graciousness and the ability to personally *forgive* others! When you came to Christ, the gracious Holy Spirit took up residency in your heart; and He is called *the Helper* (cf. John 14:16; 16:7). Are you living in accordance with your position in Christ? When you retaliate, are you not quenching the Holy Spirit's very nature that He wants to exude through you as His ambassador? Therefore, for any believer to posture "I am not a very *forgiving* person," is theologically incongruous! Oh, yes, you are! Quite simply, you are *not* choosing to live according to your new nature in Christ! Instead, you are choosing to pander to your old fleshly nature that wants to be fed in and by your disobedience to God's truths.

III. THE MECHANISMS TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE

The first point in this study makes it clear that believers should model Christ's attribute of *forgiveness*. The believer is mandated, i.e., commanded to personally *forgive* others.

However, the question many believers wrestle with is this: do I need to *forgive* someone who is not repentant? That too is the question Peter was getting at in the above passage. Certainly, Jesus' answer mandated unending personal *forgiveness*, but therein He does not address a person's liberty to seek institutional justice (if need be) as is revealed elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Romans 13:4). While Scripture leaves no room for personal retaliation, it does give license to and for seeking institutional justice. What follows will help clarify this distinction.

A. BY THE USE OF GOVERNMENT

In considering the answer to the question "Need I *Forgive* Someone Who is Unrepentant?" we must turn our attention to better understanding God's purposes and reasons for why He instituted civil government. But note first Romans 12:18 and 19:

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.

The first sentence of this Pauline passage underscores the same idea developed in the first point, i.e., believers are to be characteristically *forgiving in a personal sense*. But notice the second portion of this passage. Likened to Jesus in Matthew 18:21–22 (mentioned in the first part of this Bible study), here in Romans 12, Paul does not eliminate the possibility of *vengeance* (i.e., “justification relative to a wrong committed”). In fact, he specifies how it is to be accomplished:

God is to do the avenging—
not the individual who was violated.

How does God achieve His vengeance? Notice Romans 13:4 several verses later in the context of this passage, keeping in mind that the chapter divisions in the Bible are not inspired. They were added by man years later, and therefore, do not necessarily indicate a different subject or thought. Paul states here that the institution of government is God’s *avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil* (Romans 13:4). Something huge is being added here relative to our understanding of *forgiveness*.

Yes, the believer is mandated to be forever characteristically *forgiving* and not to seek after his or her own personal vindication of any wrong suffered. Such, rather, is the duty of civil government. In this stream of thought God says, “**I WILL REPAY.**” How does God Himself repay? Via His use of His ordained personal surrogate: civil government. People can count on God’s promise to do that—that is, if the offended party is willing to put the matter into His hands and be patient. Here then is a balancing principle relative to personal *forgiveness*:

God intends for individuals to
forgive injustices, but if need be,
to adjudicate them via civil government.

As a public servant, you are well aware of your responsibility to maintain one of the major God-mandated responsibilities of government: to be about providing “justice for all” in a fallen world (as the American Pledge of Allegiance aptly states). Civil government is to be manifestly representational of God’s attribute of justice. In that God is both characteristically *forgiving* and characteristically just at the same time, He therefore expects the same from His institution and those who manage it! Herein then, the book of Romans not only provides great doctrine, but beautiful, practical theology, instructing an injured individual how to achieve both personal *forgiveness* and institutional justice—all within several verses of one another (12:18 to 13:4)!

To teach that believers should *forgive* and forget and not to seek justice is to teach a half-truth from Scripture. And such serves to discount God’s purpose for civil government, which is to manifest His attribute of justice (cf. 1 Peter 2:13–14; Romans 13:1–5).

B. BY THE ATTITUDE OF AN INDIVIDUAL

This God-given blueprint for dealing with someone who has in some way harmed another is further elaborated on in Romans 12:20:

BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.

Paul is most likely referring to an ancient Egyptian custom wherein those who desired to display their contrition in public would carry a pan of burning coals atop their head, outwardly representing the pain of their guilt and shame. Studying this passage reveals a second form of recompense for wrong. In addition to a harmed party’s appeal to civil governing authorities in order to obtain justice, this passage teaches that one’s enactment of personal *forgiveness* not only benefits the *forgiver* but additionally serves to shame the offender.

In the above passage of Romans 12:20, Paul is quoting this idea of heaping shame and guilt on someone via enacting public *forgiveness* from Proverbs 25:21–22. There in the book of Proverbs, King Solomon explicitly states similarly the same principle to his son Rehoboam as Paul is expressing to the believers in the Church at Rome. But in that passage the

King states something outwardly that in Romans Paul only implies: *And the LORD will reward you* (Proverbs 25:22).

This verse underscores God's means of achieving repentance and reconciliation in and with another via the use of shaming in public. Solomon says that *the LORD will reward* those who invoke shame on an offender in this way. But keep in mind that the way a person shames another and obtains God's favor is via his personal choice to *forgive* the offender! Here then are two great incentives to mentally incorporate as you battle against your old sin nature that so wants to harbor hurt and revel in retaliation.

C. COMBINING BOTH MECHANISMS

In Matthew 18:23–33 Jesus tells a parable (known as “The Parable of the King”) that serves to illustrate the tension between using the tools of personal *forgiveness* and the subsequent, if necessary, deployment of institutional authority in order to achieve justice with an unrepentant party. In this parable a king *forgives* a servant who had wronged him and owed him much; however, the *forgiven* servant did not similarly *forgive* a fellow servant who had wronged him and owed him much. A pertinent portion of the parable follows:

“But that [forgiven] slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ ... Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do that same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart” (vv. 28, 32–35).

The overarching idea of this parable is that if God has *forgiven* you (positional truth), you should be willing to *forgive* others (practicing truth). But it also serves to better understand the other point under study: the king possessed both a *forgiving* attitude (in the first part of the parable) and (in the latter part of the parable) a willingness to utilize institutional authority, if necessary, in order to achieve justice.

The king's *forgiving* spirit is underscored by verse 32: *I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me*. The inference is that the king

initially perceived (incorrectly) the slave to be contrite over his sin and seeking reconciliation, so he forgave him. But in reality, the slave turned out to be everything but! At the outset had the king known the slave's heart to be hard and recalcitrant relative to the wrongs he had committed (he was of such poor character that he was actually choking the fellow slave), he would have probably done sooner what he ended-up doing later. In reality, the slave proved to be a deceitful and brutal individual.

Once the slave's devious, manipulative and hurtful ways were established, the king employed institutional means to bring about justice (cf. v. 34). The *forgiving* king did not shirk from employing legal means to achieve reconciliation. The same wisdom and acumen should characterize every mature believer—and serve to inform him regarding how to properly deal with unrepentant individuals. Among other lessons, Jesus is teaching via this parable that

There is a tension between
being personally *forgiving*
and yet legally employing.

The Parable of the King is both descriptive and illustrative of these tandem-and-in-tension truths taught in Scripture. On the one hand is the instruction of Ephesians 4:32 and, on the other hand, Romans 13:4:

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32).

But if you do what is evil be afraid; for it [civil government] does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil (Romans 13:4).

Every believer is to be characterized by *kindness* and *tenderheartedness*; these attitudes are synonymous with a *forgiving* spirit (cf. Colossians 3:12–13). But at the same time the believer understands that “Government does not bear the sword for no reason” (my paraphrase). God ordained civil

government for a reason: to manifest God's justice (albeit not perfectly) in a fallen world. Unfortunately, some "spiritualize" away this God-given purpose for civil government, believing that God would have them only *forgive* and try to forget—versus using His ordained means, i.e., institutional authority, in order to also achieve justice. Don't settle for less than what God has provided in terms of remedying a wrong.

Passivity is not to be equated with a higher level of spirituality no more so than should *forgiveness* eclipse justice.

Sometimes passivity and *forgiveness* are spiritualized concealments for the lack of courage to fight for justice.

D. BY THE USE OF A GODLY ARBITRATOR

In 1 Corinthians 6:1–8 Paul identifies another additional means to seek justice, specifically as it relates to believers who disagree over smaller matters of a civil (versus criminal) nature, i.e., believers should always attempt to solve their minor differences (cf. v. 2) without civil government/secular courts.

E. SUMMARY REGARDING THE MECHANISMS TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE

Does God expect you to *forgive* someone who is unrepentant? Yes. A person should not hold internal grudges—even if the offending party has not attempted to apologize or make things right. Internally, we must let things go—no matter what the attitude or response of an offender is. As stated in the first point, the believer is to be characterized by unending personal *forgiveness*; he or she is mandated to *forgive*. But on the other hand, a person's *forgiveness* does not propitiate for another's injustice. And for that matter, God has provided and empowered a mechanism He has called into

existence in a fallen world. He calls this mechanism civil government, and He intends for it to adjudicate and recompense wrongful actions.

There need always be requisite
satisfaction of violated justice.

On the cross Christ forgave and simultaneously satisfied our violation of His standards, justifying the believer's standing, his vertical relationship with God. But in the horizontal world of personal relationships, well, that often takes two steps to accomplish: personal *forgiveness* and then payment later. Accordingly, the wronged one needs to personally *forgive* while wisely seeking measured remedies for injustice. Likened to Christ's work on the cross, the achievement in a horizontal sense of personal *forgiveness* and justification both serve to manifest God's character and attributes in our world. While some offending parties need not the voice of institutional authority in order to gain the sensitivity of righting a wrong, others do. In fact, Jesus spoke to this in Matthew 5:25–26:

“Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.”

The mere threat of a person's use of institutional authority in order to seek justice often serves to bring about reconciliation apart from civil government involvement. God desires that wrongdoers fear the authority of civil government (so as a public servant, make sure that they do!) and what it can do to them if they practice or refuse to reconcile a wrongdoing. It goes without saying that a strong judicial system enacted and maintained by civil governing authorities is an irreplaceable component to achieving both justice and orderly conduct in a fallen world.

IV. THE MEANS OF FORGIVENESS

One of God's attributes is that He loves even His enemies. This universal love is displayed in His indiscriminate blessing bestowed on all of mankind. Theologically, this love is referred to as *common grace*. It then follows that for believers to reflect more and more the attributes of God in a fallen world, we must also love our enemies. Notice this discipline evident by the command in Matthew 5:44:

"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Joseph undoubtedly displayed this discipline as recorded in Genesis 45:5–11 wherein he welcomes back his betraying brothers. Both Matthew and Genesis illustrate the need for huge spiritual maturity and the need for the believer to continue to grow in *forgiveness*, which is a rigorous discipline he must choose in order to become more Christlike in a fallen world.

V. CONCLUSION

What motivates and enables believers' growth in *forgiveness* is this: we possess an internal sense of having been blessed by God (cf. Proverbs 25:21–22) if for no reason other than knowing we have been called by God and set apart by Him to achieve His holy purposes in a fallen world.

Let the security and profundity of this calling endow you with the internal fortitude to respond in Christlikeness in the face of injustice. Your position in Christ provides you with the means to *forgive* and seek reconciliation with even your worst enemies. Who might the Holy Spirit desire for you to *forgive* and seek justice with?

The Personal and Cultural Benefits of Truthfulness

Im sure you have lived long enough, as have I, to experience the fact that time and *truth* run hand in hand. *Truth* wins out in the end.

Accordingly, the importance of *truth* in the Capitol cannot be overstated. In this chapter, the following proverbs depict the various benefits of being a man or a woman of *truth*. Understanding the benefits of being *truthful* versus the detriments of lying or bearing false witness proves motivational to say the least.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Scriptures speak repeatedly of the importance of developing a “*truth* habit.” That is, working to become a man or woman who always thinks about and responds *truthfully* in every situation—even when an answer is not beneficial. Why? The maintenance and sustenance of *truthfulness*, exclaiming *truth* as a principle of life and a part of the moral fabric of our national culture, is far more important than any one individual. Notice the following proverb highlighting the extreme importance of *truth* as a principle.

*Do not let kindness and truth leave you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart* (Proverbs 3:3).

Exodus 34:7 states that the Hebrew word for *kindness* (*hesed*) is a fundamental characteristic of God: *who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin*. Using the same Hebrew word in Proverbs 3:3, this Exodus passage underscores the fact that God is literally *abounding in kindness*, or as similarly translated in other English Bibles, *steadfast love*.

To the point of this week's study, Proverbs 3:3 states that we are to be characterized by *truth* as well—and it is to be associated with being kind. The Hebrew word for *truth* is *emet*. In John 14:6, Jesus states that *truth* is also an inherent characteristic of God Himself:

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

God expects the same qualities that characterize Him to be manifest in us; such is commensurate with being created in His image. Furthermore, the metaphoric language and picture of Proverbs 3:3 in speaking about the *heart* of an individual depicts the visceral and habitual need for the ongoing, simultaneous exhibition of both *kindness* and *truth*.

An introduction to a Bible study on *truth* necessitates the preceding introduction—the importance and necessity of love and *kindness* as well. To have *truth* without love is to be a *noisy gong or a clanging cymbal* per 1 Corinthians 13:1:

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

Mature in Christ is the believer who possesses both virtues, and poor is the witness of the believer who states biblical *truth* without incumbent sensitivities. God is *abounding in kindness* as well as *truthfulness*.

II. TRUTHFULNESS: WHAT WILL IT DEMAND OF US?

Having established the foundational need for both *kindness* and *truth* to coexist in the soul of man, notice in addition the further proverbial admonition:

Put away from you a deceitful mouth

And put devious speech far from you (Proverbs 4:24).

In that *deceit* and *deviousness* are far from God's nature, so must deceitful and devious actions be far from ours as well! The idea of *devious speech*,

i.e., speech opposite of *kind* and *truthful* speech, includes speaking gossip, slander, or harm toward others, which encompasses the idea of the Ninth Commandment stated in Exodus 20:16: “*You shall not bear false witness.*” Solomon further impresses this idea on his son, Rehoboam, the future public servant of Israel, who will one day be tasked with the leadership of a nation, stating:

Buy truth, and do not sell it,

Get wisdom and instruction and understanding (Proverbs 23:23).

All too often people do not *buy* into *truth* but instead *sell it* out in the Capitol for reasons of political expediency. How sad it is to see the oft selling out of *truth* in the extremely competitive atmosphere of elections. The following proverb helps us not to succumb to such pressures:

Better is the poor who walks in his integrity

Than he who is crooked though he be rich (Proverbs 28:6).

The desire to be rich relates to more than monetary wealth; often in our culture it relates to power and upward mobility in a career, including being elected to office. Do not sacrifice *truth* and personal integrity on the altar of political expediency, my beloved friend. Such haste in the moment of battle is unbeneficial in the long run because time and *truth* do run hand in hand.

We should deem *truth*
to be more valuable than
ourselves or our careers.

I am afraid this idea is largely lost in America today. Is your highest good in your career winning the next election? Is *truth* subservient to that goal? May it not be so! God will honor your being principled versus expedient. Commit yourself to being a man or a woman of *truth* today. Think of it this way in the specific terms of an election: being *truthful* today may cost me an election, but in so doing, *truthfulness* may set me up for what God has next in store for me. *Truth* demands this stance of me.

III. TRUTHFULNESS: WHAT WILL IT DO FOR US?

Sometimes being *truthful* will cost us dearly, but God will honor our *truthfulness*. What follows are some of those benefits.

A. GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

*By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for,
And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil*
(Proverbs 16:6).

The Hebrew word for *atone* (*kaphar*) can be translated as “covered,” or “to make propitiation for.” Contextually, the word is being used in a horizontal sense of man’s relationships with one another. Think of this context like the man-to-man context of Proverbs 10:12, *Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions*. We avoid undue calamity in personal relationships by characteristic and simultaneous speech and actions of the same words used in Proverbs 3:3: *lovingkindness* and *truthfulness*. Via a proper *fear of the LORD*, we are motivated to avoid behaving sinfully—being harsh or lying—in interpersonal relationships.

Behaving sinfully leads
to relational disaster!¹

On the other hand, proportional to our habitual *love* and *truthfulness* will be our interpersonal relationship success.

B. INTIMACY WITH GOD

*Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD,
But those who deal faithfully are His delight* (Proverbs 12:22).

The Hebrew word for *faithfully* (*emunah*) means “firmness and steadfastness.” In other words, to learn to speak the *truth* firmly and consistently is to find *delight* with God. No doubt, being straightforward demands courage. How firm are we in speaking the *truth*? Do we speak with

kindness? What a tension and balance this is! Personally, I wish I were much better at this. Conversely:

For the devious are an abomination to the LORD;

But He is intimate with the upright (Proverbs 3:32).

The English word for *devious* is from the root “to deviate,” meaning “to deviate from a right, accepted, or common course: astray.”² This apt English translation for the Hebrew word (*luz*) could also be translated as “twisted.” God finds people who turn aside the *truth*, i.e., twist *truth*, to be *abominable*. That’s not a good thing. Notice that Proverbs 12:22 and 3:32 connect *lying lips* and *deviousness* respectively to not having *delight* and *intimacy* with God. If we want to have and sense *delight* and *intimacy* with God, we must be *truthful*!

People in the Capitol should
be ardent searchers for *truth*,
strongly condemning any and all
forms of deviation, if for no other
reason than as a result of their
sense of closeness to God!

The ultimate source of *truth* is the Bible. Historically, the Word of God has always been the reliable final arbitrator as to what is *truthful*. Again, Jesus not only underscores the treasure of *truth*, but personifies it in John 14:6 when He states, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life....*” We must therefore become Bible students to develop in *truthfulness* in order to be increasingly pleasing to God. Remember, a judgment day is coming for both the believer and the unbeliever wherein everyone will answer for every *deviation* from *truth*.

He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD,

But he who is devious in his ways despises Him (Proverbs 14:2).

Not only does keeping the *truth* benefit our personal relationships and our intimacy with God, but it builds our sense of personal integrity.

C. PERSONAL INTEGRITY

Solomon personifies wisdom in chapter 8 of the book of Proverbs. As he defines her in verses 7 and 8, he states further characteristics of wise people:

*“For my mouth will utter truth;
And wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness;
There is nothing crooked or perverted in them”* (Proverbs 8:7–8).

Those who are wise will not only speak *truth*, but they will also mentally ponder what is *righteous*. This is the sign of mature believers: a disciplined thinking pattern that has trained their cerebral faculties through continual and repeated arrest of sinful thoughts and motives. The biblical theology of mature believers serves to inform them of the existence of their fallen nature within. Therefore, mature believers form mental disciplines not to pander to, but rather to mortify their fallen nature, knowing they still possess the fallen nature even though Jesus Christ is in the process of sanctifying them.

Do we take the care often
necessary to mentally arrest
our sinful nature and its
propensity for evil thinking?

The following proverb depicts the need to form this critical habit:

*He who has a crooked mind finds no good,
And he who is perverted in his language falls into evil*
(Proverbs 17:20).

Personal integrity is impossible to achieve in a *crooked mind*—the seed-bed of *perverted language*—and both are watershed precursors to *falling into evil*. Nipping our thinking in the bud will help in maintaining a sense of personal integrity; don’t let the horse get out of the barn. Again, we cannot pander to our fallen nature; we must starve it instead.

D. KINDNESS AND TRUTH

What the fourth attribute, *truthfulness*, will do for us is as follows: we will receive *kindness* and *truth*! By keeping those virtues, we will receive those virtues. After all, what goes around comes around!

For certain, attitudinal premeditation is a determinative aspect of relational success or failure. Deciding beforehand to do another good or evil is the thought in the following proverb:

Will they not go astray who devise evil?

But kindness and truth will be to those who devise good

(Proverbs 14:22).

When we premeditate on ways to *devise good* to another, *kindness* and *truth* will accrue! “*Give, and it will be given to you,*” states Luke 6:38. We *reap* what we *sow* states Galatians 6:7.

E. LONGEVITY AND PERSEVERANCE

The fifth benefit of what *truth* will do for us can be gleaned from Proverbs 12:19. Being *truthful* develops perseverance and extends longevity.

Truthful lips will be established forever,

But a lying tongue is only for a moment (Proverbs 12:19).

To my point in the opening preamble of this Bible study, time and *truth* run hand in hand; *lies* are eventually exposed. *Truth*, however, endures. “Truthfulness carries not only the idea of veracity and accuracy, but also of durability, permanence and reliability,”³ states a leading commentator on Proverbs.

Looking for longevity
and perseverance in office?
Then become a habitual *truth* teller!

The ploy of trying to shade things to benefit ourselves will be disclosed, especially in elections where opposition researchers abound.

F. ADMIRABLE BEHAVIOR

The way of a guilty man is crooked,

But as for the pure, his conduct is upright (Proverbs 21:8).

Conduct refers to the way and work of an individual, addressing his or her personal integrity or lack thereof. **Crooked** behavior evidences someone who is **guilty** of something, whereas **upright** behavior points to a clear conscience. The former has something to hide, the latter does not. How much easier it is to live without hiding things! A wonderful benefit of forming habitual **truthfulness** is the commensurate admirable behavior that results. Legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden had another way of saying this: “Work on your character, not your reputation.” I think he took that statement from Proverbs 28:6.

G. ACCURATE COMMUNICATIONS

The following proverb is from a series known as “the sayings of the wise.” Proverbs 22:21 speaks to our ability to become an accurate conveyor of **truth** to another.

To make you know the certainty of the words of truth

That you may correctly answer him who sent you (Proverbs 22:21).

In a day largely void of writing materials, the verbal conveyance of **truth** was critically important. Trust in a messenger is addressed four times in Proverbs (10:26, 13:17, 25:13 and 26:6). The conveyor must continually avoid exaggeration and dwell on certainty. Such a discipline is within the corpus of being a **truthful** person. A **truth** teller both then and now needs to accurately convey what is told to him by another. Being committed to **truth** will make us men or women who are increasingly committed to and manifesting of accuracy and precision.

These seven virtues—seven triumphal treasures of **truthfulness**—will inure to our benefit if we determine to be men or women of veracity.

IV. TRUTHFULNESS: HOW WILL IT DEFEND US?

Longman, in his great commentary on the book of Proverbs, states in regard to Proverbs 20:28, “It is through ... constant faithfulness between

all parties involved that productive governance can take place and the king himself can avoid usurpation.”⁴ Here is what he is commenting on:

Loyalty and truth preserve the king,

And he upholds his throne by righteousness (Proverbs 20:28).

This is what *truthfulness* can do for those who hold office—and the overall health of the culture.

The stability of the government
rests primarily upon the loyalty
and veracity of those who govern.

“What the king demands of the citizens (cf. 20:8 & 26) he must demand of himself as well, for God certainly does.”⁵ States Kitchen in his similarly great commentary on Proverbs:

It is both by strict adherence to the *truth* and by passionate and compassionate commitment to God and His people that the king wins their loyalty. In so seeking these qualities in his relations with his subjects, he imitates God’s own rule.⁶

This excerpt is precisely what Solomon is conveying to Rehoboam—and us—in this proverb. Obviously, America is not a land of *kings*, but the principle still applies to those elected to office.

How will *truth* defend us? Psalm 89:14 states regarding God’s reign: *Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; loving-kindness and truth go before You*. Such is the standard to which all in governance should aspire. Such passion for *truth preserves* the officeholder! Notice the same principle of longevity resulting from *truth*-telling in the following proverb:

A false witness will perish,

But the man who listens to the truth will speak forever

(Proverbs 21:28).

Various other proverbs contain principles that promote the upholding, establishment, and longevity of those desirous of remaining in public office. And one of those proverbs pertains to always being *truthful*.

Digressing from the virtue of *truthfulness* as a preservative to holding office, the following are four other preserving virtues that Solomon mentions to his son who would be the next king. Notice the repetition of the idea of *establishment* (*kun*), meaning “to be firm,” that runs throughout the following proverbs. In fact, the word for *established* is used 25 times in the Old Testament regarding the *establishment* of a dynasty.⁷

According to the book of Proverbs,
what are four additional keys to
being established in office?

A. BE JUST WITH THE POWERLESS

How a leader treats people who cannot pad his pocket, gain his attention, or jeopardize his agenda speaks volumes about his or her character. When God finds a person who is *just* and *truthful* with the powerless, He promises him security.

*If a king judges the poor with truth,
His throne will be established forever* (Proverbs 29:14).

Not only does being just with the powerless promote personal security, but it stabilizes the land. Proverbs 29:4 states, *The king gives stability to the land by justice, but a man who takes bribes overthrows it.*

B. DETEST WICKEDNESS

If God sets rulers in their place, and He does per Romans 13:1, then an additional insight into how a leader maintains His pleasure in His appointment is as follows:

*It is an abomination for kings to commit wicked acts,
For a throne is established on righteousness* (Proverbs 16:12).

In principle, to choose the way
of righteousness is to choose
the way of landing in office.

We do not need to look far in American history to recount the response of God (via His orchestration of voters) to remove wicked people from office.

C. REMOVE WICKED COUNSELORS

In addition to being *truthful* to establish ourselves in office, the third biblical insight, achieving God's favor while in office, is revealed in this Proverb:

*Take away the wicked before the king,
And his throne will be established in righteousness* (Proverbs 25:5).

Rehoboam, to whom Solomon wrote this proverb, is the classic example of its violation! He refused in his reign to listen to the right advisors. Choosing his “high-school buddies” over his dad’s proven, seasoned professionals led to his devastating failure. How important it is to prune the unrighteous and disloyal from the leader’s midst! To do so is to gain longevity in leadership. Don’t underestimate the deleterious effect that bad staff can have on achieving your purpose(s) in life.

D. STOP OPPRESSION AND UNJUST GAIN

No one needs to be convinced that graft is corrupting. Yet, these practices determine the course of many leaders and governments today!

*A leader who is a great oppressor lacks understanding,
But he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days*
(Proverbs 28:16).

If the principle of this proverb is accurate, those who are dishonest will be removed from power. Time and *truth* run hand in hand. The *prolonging* of a *leader* is related to his integrity regarding bribes—whether direct or indirect.

These four keen biblical insights, in addition to being *truthful*, relate to how we please God and maintain His blessing relative to His appointment to serve in government. In addition to being *truthful*, be just with the powerless, detest wickedness, remove wicked counselors, and stop oppression and unjust gains. God will honor and *establish* those officeholders who keep these additional four virtues in view!

V. CONCLUSION

Truthfulness is part of God's very nature. Jesus will manifest a perfectly *truthful* governance when He returns to rule the world. And even though we presently live in a fallen world, all leaders should be motivated by the fear of God and the benefits listed in this study to discipline themselves to *truthful* thinking, speech, and behavior. The following closing proverb is fitting.

Two things I asked of You,

Do not refuse me before I die:

Keep deception and lies far from me,

Give me neither poverty nor riches;

Feed me with the food that is my portion (Proverbs 30:7–8).

All of us can easily be *deceived*. We often think we're smarter than we are; we can be unaware of the craft or trickery of others. Herein Solomon prays that God would protect him from himself: that he would not be void of the *truth*. May such be the case and the prayer of both you and me and may the virtue of *truth* remain a vital aspect in American culture!

1. John A. Kitchen, *Proverbs: A Mentor Commentary* (Dublin: Christian Focus Publications, 2006), 354.
2. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. "devious," accessed April 5, 2022, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/devious>.
3. R.N. Whybray, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 197.
4. Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 385.
5. Kitchen, 458.
6. *Ibid.*
7. John N. Oswalt, "kun," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 1:433–34.

Learning to Better Discipline Your Mind

Characteristic of the most effective public servants is an intensely disciplined mind. They are able to stay on point because they have learned to think (usually very quickly) before they speak. But even more fundamental than that is their habit of thinking about the *right* kind of things in the first place: they have learned to *dwell* on certain things and not allow their minds to *dwell* on the wrong things.

With that in mind, this week I would like to take a closer look at Philippians 4:8. This is a passage I have been meditating on for several years now, and it has greatly helped me. I think it will help you too.

It unlocks guidelines as to how we ought to discipline, manage, and care for our minds. How do godly people think? What should be going on in our minds? What habits should be forming in the maintenance of our minds? That organ inside our skulls is an incredible asset given to us by our Maker; it stands to reason that we should be good stewards of it. How we ought to care for and manage our minds is the subject of this passage and this chapter.

I. INTRODUCTION

Philippians 4:8 appears near the end of Paul's epistle to the Church at Philippi, which is the first church he planted in Europe, more specifically Macedonia (now northern Greece). This is a letter characterized by joy. The letter is very practical and as well; it provides one of the most profound

passages on the humanity and humility of Christ (chapter 2) as well as insights into false teachers (chapter 3). Overall, it is a love letter of praise and thanksgiving to one of Paul's favorite churches. Repeatedly throughout my walk with the Savior I read this small epistle and find myself refreshed and encouraged as a result. I trust the same is true for you.

Let us now turn our attention to 4:8:

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

In closer context, this passage follows and contrasts Paul's command to ***Be anxious for nothing*** (4:6). In place of ***anxiety*** (*merimnao*) (this Greek word is best understood as "unconscious blasphemy") the Apostle in this previous passage delineates the manifestations of his and other's spirituality: joy, prayer, thanksgiving, and peace. These four elements appear in chapter four just prior to the verse of study. For an individual in the Capitol to possess a strong spiritual maturity, a peace of mind, a Christ-empowered confidence, these elements must be present on a continual basis. How is that achieved? It's achieved primarily and *positionally* by making and possessing peace with God through personal faith in Christ and being richly filled with the Holy Spirit. But secondarily and *practically* it is achieved through the constant, repetitive training and disciplining of the mind. In the study of Satanology (all that the Bible has to say about Satan) the informed, mature believer realizes he is in a spiritual battle. More importantly, it is critical that he understand where the battleground lies: the believer is in a constant battle for the mind! States 1 Peter 5:8 in this regard:

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Ephesians 6:12 states stereophonically, ***For our struggle is not against flesh and blood.*** In Mark 8:33 Satan's battle for the mind is illustrated by what Jesus states relative to Peter's misguided thinking: ***But turning around and seeing His disciples, He [Jesus] rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."***

It follows from this analysis that the victorious Christian need possess a mind that is not only Spirit-controlled by God, but highly disciplined

by self. What follows in 4:8 are eight of these qualities that the believer need *dwell* on—be highly mentally disciplined regarding. The main verb (an imperative verb meaning this is a command from God), i.e., the action required by God of the believer in this passage is specifically to *dwell* (*logizomai*) meaning, “to recon, consider, take into account, calculate” in an ongoing sense the eight virtues preceding the command.

But before examining each of the characteristics in detail, notice the succeeding context in 4:9; in fulfillment of 4:8 Paul immediately pleads for the Philippian believers to imitate him!

The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Verses 4:8 and 4:9 are not disjointed comments. Mental disciplines—the virtues of godly, mature thinkers as listed in 4:8—are more caught than taught. Who in your life emulates the eight characteristics that flow from 4:8? I dare say that personal example is more of an impetus to your spiritual maturity than memorizing and meditating on the list that follows (as important as that is). Whereas Scripture didactically communicates, another’s personal life persuades and influences; a godly example is often more powerful in terms of another’s bringing about change versus what is read. That is why you should attend Bible studies and build close relationships with other mature believers. Choose today to build friendships with godly individuals because their virtues will rub off on you! (Proverbs 27:17; contr. 1 Corinthians 15:33) You become like the friends you choose. I might add that if you are a parent, you must choose your children’s friends for them.

In his commentary on Philippians, Lightfoot provides aiding insights into the order and relationship of this seemingly random shopping list of eight virtues. He states:

Speaking roughly, the words may be said to be arranged in a descending scale. The first four describe the character of the actions themselves, the two former being absolute, the two latter relative; the fifth and sixth point to the moral approbation which they conciliate; while the seventh and eighth in which the form of expression is changed are thrown in as an afterthought, that no motive may be omitted.¹

Take time to digest what Lightfoot is saying by going back over the passage. Make those relationships of the aforementioned in your mind not only now, preliminarily, but as you now study each of the eight that follow.

A. WHATEVER IS TRUE

Paul's circumscription (def: "the property of having limitation in space as opposed to omnipresence or infiniteness") and understanding of *truth* is that which is confined to God's revelation in Holy Writ (cf. Romans 1:18). As a public servant you can rely on a poll or consensus for ascertaining public opinion. You can rely on science or psychological data, but be sure of this: sources of *truth* apart from the Scriptures possess varying levels of certitude: Keep in mind that polls change daily. Science once believed the world was flat. Shock treatments were once routinely administered. Bloodletting was thought to cure disease. Doctors used to perform frontal lobotomies. But the Bible is immutable and veracious because it is breathed by God Himself (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Wise is the leader who *dwells* on
Scripture—who possesses a lifelong
hunger for its mighty fortress of
always-reliable, always-certain *truth*.

The prophet Jeremiah bespeaks of his understanding of this, his manifest personal discipline, where in 15:16 of the book named for him he states, *Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Your name, O LORD GOD of hosts*. Have you been called by God to public office? Are His *truths* foremost in your mind and in your votes? John 17:17 is an apt summary of this mental orientation, this absolute presupposition relative to intellectual well-being and proper functionality. Jesus says in John 17:17, *"Sanctify them in truth; Your word is truth."* What a tragic disconnect—a tragic testimony too I might add—when someone names the name of

Christ in the Capitol, but His *truths* are not characteristic of his or her thinking or the way he or she acts or votes.

In the wisdom of Proverbs, in a largely verbal culture, *truth* had to do with true speech as opposed to a lie or deceptive speech (cf. Proverbs 22:21). This insight makes for another practical application point: go to great lengths to discipline your speech in terms of *truthfulness*. Do not exaggerate, speculate, provide false impressions or mislead. Do not be disingenuous or opportunistic in your speech. Remember the definition of disingenuous: “lacking in candor;” also, “giving a false appearance of simple frankness.” In addition, do not talk too much (cf. James 1:19; 3:5). Conversely, *GIRD YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH* (Ephesians 6:14). The only way I know of doing this is to develop a voracious appetite for God’s Word!

B. WHATEVER IS HONORABLE

This Greek word here for *honorable* is *semnos* and is found elsewhere only in the Pastoral Epistles where it is a descriptor essential to leaders. The idea of this virtue is for one to possess mental “seriousness, sublimity, and dignity.” It is the sister idea of worthiness. In context, one cannot allow his mind to *dwell* on things that are unworthy of his time and attention, or baser things beneath them. Avoid the profane and *dwell* on the sacred. Choose only high-protein items from the menu of a fallen world. Consume only dignified content versus junk-food weight-gainers like soap operas, gossip sessions, pornography, or sounds that are something other than music. Those things serve to rot our mind, not buoy it. Per the Lightfoot quote, these first two virtues are absolutes, the non-negotiable foundational aspects of sound mental discipline. In that 2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV) promises believers a *sound mind* from God, *truth* and *honor* serve as absolutes to keep it that way! Choose this moment to upload into your computer only *truthful* and *honorable* content!

C. WHATEVER IS RIGHT

Given the bedrock mental commitments to scriptural *truth*, and being a person of seriousness, sublimity, and dignity, what is the *right* or just thing that you should choose to *dwell* on? *Dikaïos* carries the idea of thinking only on what is just and proper. Is your mind disciplined to think about and conclude to do the *right* thing when there is no one else watching, or

to whom you are accountable? To illustrate, do you choose to vote pro-life because the Scripture says that is *right*? Or do you do what is wrong according to the *truths* of Scripture? This is a remarkable character quality of the treasurer of the board of the ministry I serve; I have known him for nearly 50 years, since my college days, and he consistently thinks and determines to do what is *right* based on the *truths* of Scripture. If one lacks the personal conviction to do what is *right* apart from accountability, then when in private he will sin. Do you possess a strong discipline to *dwell* on and do what is scripturally *right* no matter what the consequences? Therein is a virtue of a godly mind and a godly person. God always blesses that!

D. WHATEVER IS PURE

Pure (*hagnos*) means “holy, chaste.” In the Book of Proverbs (15:26) the equivalent Hebrew word (per the LXX [Greek Septuagint]) is *tabor*. The word stands in contrast to the thoughts of the wicked. Notice this here: *Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD, but pleasant words are pure*. Thus, the idea of *dwelling* on *whatever is pure* has the connotation of focusing one’s mind on things that are not besmirched or tainted or in some way evil. Cease such mind wandering ventures beloved public servant friends! Don’t go there; nip it in the bud!

In the Philippian epistle, *pure* stands in contrast to those whose motives and plans were impure so as to cause distress to the Apostle Paul (1:17). This is the habit of not *dwelling* on or devising evil toward another in one’s mind. Disciplined godly minds *dwell* on their presenting circumstances with a determination to do what is *right* and *pure* per scriptural principles.

Rather than think about the hurts of
people from the past, choose to *dwell* on
ideas about the future and what could be!

Very helpful to this, earlier on in the epistle, Paul gives us a powerful insight into his way of thinking: *forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead* (3:13). The disciplined mind occupies itself with

big ideas in the future, versus small people in the past. It is sober to the reality that the past is finite, and the future is infinite! Such thinking leads to much success and accomplishment relative to the hand one has been dealt in a fallen, often disappointing world. For sure people will fail and betray you, but how you respond is everything. The best way to get over past hurts is not to keep bringing them up in your mind; think about something else that is *pure*.

E. WHATEVER IS LOVELY

The Geneva Bible captures the sense of meaning very well when it translates the above as *whatsoever things are worthy of love*. Many commentators recognize that this is a broad, open statement, a big tent, versus addressing biblical morality only. Accordingly, one's mind should *dwell* on the things that are admirable by the world at large such as the works of Beethoven or Mother Teresa, a scientific invention or a medicinal breakthrough, be they accomplished or authored by believers or not. Such are lovely and admirable things and worthy of praise. Let your mind *dwell* also on these things! How many Christians do you know who are critical of everything, coming across as morally superior and condescending, offering little praise of others? Do you see the good in others, or in your mind is everyone else below your standards? Are you the only lovely thing in the world? Such a mentality is contrary to what this clause teaches. Believers should give praise where praise is due and celebrate the virtuous image and greatness of God as manifest in and through mankind, both regenerate and not. The excellence, achievements, and merits of all of mankind are praiseworthy because they illumine a responsible omniscient Creator who has left His imprimatur on all of mankind. Enjoying *whatever is lovely* is a biblically conciliatory approbation, an apt illustration of the breadth of mental outlook in an otherwise fallen world, said to be suitable by the Apostle.

At least two other passages reinforce this idea of positive attitudinal breadth: Romans 12:15 states in general, *Rejoice with those who rejoice*. Galatians 6:10 states, *So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith*. Are you given to mental and outward praise when you see something that is lovely? Don't be one of those Evangelicals who is always angry.

F. WHATEVER IS OF GOOD REPUTE

This relates “to the kind of conduct that is worth considering because it is well spoken of by people in general.”² Akin to the broadness of *whatever is lovely* these are virtues generally respected in the virtuosities of God’s Creation, such as respect for others, manners, kindness, consideration, listening, etc. The mature believer need *dwell* on Paul’s imperative to *regard one another as more important than yourselves* (Philippians 2:3). Is your mental outlook, speech and conduct symphonically pleasing in its overall demeanor?

G. IF THERE IS ANY EXCELLENCE

Excellence (*arête*) “moral goodness” is a seldom used word by Paul imported by him from secular Greek moralizing culture. As used by him, this is the basis for mental disciplines expressing themselves in noble actions. O’Brien suggests that the better translation is therefore “moral excellence”³ providing a more codified meaning. The contextual meaning relates to keeping with God’s overall goodness in your thinking. Goodness is an attribute of God and a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Extending outwardly from the foundation of *truth* and *honor*, herein we find ourselves plumbing Paul’s multifaceted descriptors of the believer’s intended and ensuing radiant demeanor.

H. AND IF ANYTHING WORTHY OF PRAISE

This word relates to the mental discipline of praising others in one’s mind and with one’s mouth. This is the kind of conduct that wins the respect of others; such a mentality is becoming of God and others—and it spells influence for the believing public servant. Those who name the name of Christ are to *have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 2:5).

II. CONCLUSION

In both Ephesians 5:2 and Philippians 4:18 believers with the aforementioned virtues are termed *a fragrant aroma*. This is a beautiful summary terminology of the passage under study. Unfortunately for the cause of

Christ and the advance of the kingdom, too many non-believers accurately refer to too many believers with the exact opposite phraseology. The virtues of a godly mind as described here are not only imbuing the attributes of God but depict an overall proper attitude toward life. Herein described is not a critical, condescending, stuffy self-righteousness that proves to be such a stench to unbelievers. Keep in mind *the kindness of God leads you to repentance* (Romans 2:4).

Philippians 1:10 adds regarding the believer's mental outlook, *so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ*. The Greek word for *sincere* (*eilikrines*) means "judged by sunlight, unalloyed, pure." More literally it can be translated as "without wax." The word was used of a potter whose pot cracks were not waxed over. Others could see the blemishes because they were unpainted. Paul is stating that believers who are *a fragrant aroma* are unpretentious and in possession of a breadth of mind that non-believers find genuine and attractive.

Do you have praise for things virtuous in believers and non-believers alike? The disciplined, godly mind of Philippians 4:8 depicts an attractive, real person who possesses a Christ-like spirit. May God grow us in this way.

1. Lightfoot, J.B. *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Hendrickson publishers: October 1999), 161.
2. Fee, Gordon D. *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 418.
3. O'Brien, Peter T. *The Epistle to the Philippians, A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Carlisle: Eerdmans, 1991), 506.

PART IV

***BUILDING BIBLICALLY BASED
CONVICTIONS ABOUT
TODAY'S SOCIAL ISSUES***

Ministry Versus Political Activism

Since the mid-1970s Evangelicals have sought to re-enter the political arena in response to a morally declining America. Their sincere desires were to stop the erosion of our Christian heritage and return the nation to our former values. In this quest, perhaps inadvertently, well-meaning Evangelical leaders attempted to co-opt the Church into an organization of political activism.

This subtle attempt to change the primary, God-ordained purpose of the Church from a soul-winning, disciple-making organism into a nation-saving, vote-making organization met with mixed results.

When Capitol Ministries was born in 1996, one of our primary objectives was, and remains, to provide biblical clarity to this matter. Our ministry has always believed that it is much more efficient and effective, for the sake of both the Church and the nation, for the Church to remain intent on its God-ordained soul-winning and disciple-making objectives. Our purpose has been to manufacture present and future political leaders—sending mature-in-Christ public servants into office and into government leadership! It follows that a mature-in-Christ public servant (an insider) can effect much more biblically based change than can a member of the Church, inexperienced in the ways of the State (an outsider), who lobbies the State for change. In stating this intention, these objectives in no way imply any theocratic objective:

In the new covenant, the Bible is clear regarding God's desire that an *institutional* separation of Church from the State exist, but *institutional* separation does not imply *influential* separation.

Grown by the discipleship efforts of the Church, public servants are to serve the institution of the State with no eye for co-optation. (I should add a personal note here for the sake of secularists who tend to assume that Christian public servants have a desire to make America into a theocracy. In over 20 years of working with Christians in office, I have yet to meet one who harbors this motive.)

I. INTRODUCTION

The Bible clearly teaches that today there is to be an *institutional* separation of Church and State. To think otherwise is to believe in a theocratic or sacerdotal form of government. What the Bible does not teach—and what the secularist would like to say the Constitution supports—is an *influential* separation of Church and State. Clearly, however, such thinking is not supported in the Constitution or the Scriptures.

The State is dependent on godly leaders, but the State is not in the business of manufacturing them; that is the role of the Church.

When the Church concentrates its efforts on evangelizing and discipling officeholders, those officeholders who possess a Christian worldview are positioned to effect much change!

It follows then that the emphasis of the historic Religious Right movement—attempting to redefine God's mandate for the Church—is fundamentally flawed and, therefore, will always remain largely ineffective. We cannot expect the Church to be an effective, well-oiled political machine, but we can expect the Church to be an effective, well-oiled disciple-maker of those who serve the State.

II. A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Evangelicals reentered the political arena incorrectly in the mid-1970s. But how is it that they ever left it in the first place—especially since their

forefathers, the Puritans, were the very instruments and foundation upon which the State was conceived and implemented?

The Evangelical pullout occurred in the 1920s and 30s in response to the critical attack on the authority of God's Word, the Bible. How are these matters related?

In the late nineteenth century, America's conservative Protestant seminaries experienced the incursion of theological higher criticism propagated by a seminary in Tübingen, Germany. Theologically speaking, German Higher Criticism seriously questioned the infallibility, inerrancy, and inspiration of the ancient manuscript evidences that comprise the basis of all Bible translations. Theirs was a criticism of the source documents that compose the ancient manuscript evidences used to translate the Bible into modern-day existing languages. Before Tübingen, throughout all of Church history, the matter of the integrity of the source documents of the Scriptures had never been on the table for debate.

In fact, during the Reformation in their great debate with the Council of Trent—as to whether salvation was by faith alone in Christ alone via God's grace alone—both Luther and Calvin deemed the Scriptures as accurate, reliable, and authoritative for all matters of faith and practice.

In 1930s America, that all changed.

Theologically speaking, German Higher Criticism entered the American Church, and many of the mainline Protestant denomination seminaries fell prey to the rationalistic thinking of the movement. In essence, the purveyors of what would later become known as Theological Liberalism held to a belief that God inspired not all of Scripture. Additionally, reinterpreted from the literal text of Scripture were man's understanding of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. No longer was the kernel of the Gospel that man was sinful and in need of a Savior, but in its place, Jesus had been reduced to being a good, humble role model—Someone Who portrayed a good lifestyle. Jesus was no longer salvific in their way of thinking, merely One we should emulate, but nothing more. An accurate depiction, the retail name of Theological Liberalism was the Social Gospel movement that gutted the revealed Gospel of Scripture, which says, ***But God demonstrates His***

own love toward us in, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

The Gospel of the Scripture prior to the incursion of Theological Liberalism is intensely personal, driving the sinner toward repentance and the recognition of his desperate need of a Savior and Lord. Conversely, the Social Gospel became political, searching for sweeping answers for the betterment of mankind, *often through politically based means*. In theological circles, this chasm, which became known as the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy, would divide the Protestant Church in America and eventually throughout the world.

III. THE MANIFESTATION IN THE POLITICAL ARENA

The Fundamentalists, later known more so as Evangelicals, took great offense to the Modernist, Social Gospel movement because then as now, it redefines the biblically explicit person and work of Jesus Christ. A good way to discern the difference today is this: Fundamentalists have at their heart the primary task of defending the faith, whereas Evangelicals, to proclaim the good news of Christ. Fundamentalists are certainly Gospel-focused and evangelistic, but tend to historically be those who adamantly fight against heresy more than do Evangelicals.

Responding to the defection of many mainline denominations, the Fundamentalists separated their fellowship from Theological Liberals. They left liberal churches, seminaries, colleges, and publishing houses. Later they would build new ones to recreate the vast infrastructure that conservative American Protestantism had enjoyed, the very engine that to this point had driven American culture.

In the meantime, the Social Gospel movement, in carrying out its unbiblical interpretation of Christ's mission, became out of necessity increasingly political. The movement became heavily involved in the political process to achieve what they considered the betterment of mankind. Accordingly, as we could imagine and to the point under discussion in this Bible study,

As Fundamentalists parted company
with Theological Liberalism, they
parted company with American politics.

This tragic result ended the historic, foundational involvement of Bible-teaching pastors' often being the very men who held public office in the formative years of American history. The godly influence in American government soon evaporated and was replaced by a Social Gospel narrative.

IV. COMPARING THE METHODOLOGY OF THE SOCIAL GOSPEL MOVEMENT TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

Fast-forward 40 years. Theologically speaking, the decade of 1970 would be titled the Evangelical Resurgence. Rather than cite examples of this revitalization, more important to the point is to juxtapose the huge, numeric groundswell in the Evangelical camp with the rapid moral decline in the nation. These parallel contrasting factors provide an acute realization as to why (what would later be titled) the Religious Right movement arose and moved posthaste back into the American political arena.

In the 1920s and 30s, out of sincere motives for separating for the sake of the purity of the Gospel message, Fundamentalists and Evangelicals had abandoned the arena of political involvement and civil influence. They were not about to commingle with a new, ill-informed "Christianity" that had invaded their space. The Social Gospellers invaded the political arena for reasons of missional necessity. As Theological Liberals gained ground, Theological Conservatives lost ground.

Then 40 years later, Fundamentalists and Evangelicals were fighting mad that the America they knew was in moral decline and dominated by Theological and Political Liberalism. The Evangelical Resurgence was now underway, and they hoped that reengaging and affecting the political arena "for Christ" would preserve a nation from its rapid moral disintegration.

As Evangelicals moved back into the political arena, they did so with a right understanding of biblical doctrine, especially concerning Christ and personal salvation. Their doctrine was biblical in comparison to the encroachment of Theological Liberalism some 50 years earlier. The unadulterated Gospel, encapsulated in the book of Romans, was at the heart of the Evangelical Resurgence: we are *dead in our transgressions*, [but God] *made us alive together with Christ ...* (Ephesians 2:5). The purveyors of the Social Gospel had long ago abandoned this message.

Outstanding, however, in the zeal of the reentry of the Religious Right (which, one might say, was the political arm of the Evangelical Resurgence) was the absence of a major biblical ingredient to any ministry endeavor that

is desirous of God's blessing. Whereas Fundamentalists and Evangelicals have long held to the Gospel as defined and revealed by the Scriptures, their methodology for ministry—especially as it relates to their methodology in the political arena—was not informed by the Bible. In truth, the Bible is instructive regarding both.

The Religious Right's message was right,
but their methodology was wrong.

One example of this right message among many is found in Philippians chapter 1, where Paul is writing near the end of his ministry. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul gives the reader wonderful insights into biblically revealed ministry methodology. As Paul writes, he is physically chained to the Praetorian Guard, Caesar's most elite protectors. This means if he was not in Caesar's household, he was surely next door to it. Notice in verse 18 what Paul says,

"I have finally arrived at the doorstep of the world's political leaders. Now I will tell them what needs to change in the empire!"

Paul does not say that. What he does say is:

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.

The context of Paul's remarks pertains to another subject, but the insight into his and our priority of ministry is refreshingly clear:

Winning and building people in Christ—
not changing nations—must be the first order
in the church and in the life of every believer.

That was Paul's clear priority, and it should be ours too:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19–20).

This passage is the Great Commission! Like Paul, the Church now is mandated to be about *making disciples*!

“Seek first His kingdom” states Jesus in Matthew 6:33. After all, *if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come* (2 Corinthians 5:17). If it is true that people’s lives change for the better when they come to Christ, then should not that transformation be the first priority of the institution of the Church and the individuals in the Church? Such was not the priority of the Church during the Evangelical Resurgence/Religious Right movement of the 1970s. Rather, the priority and methodology of Evangelicals was to attempt to transform the Church into a political activist organization and change the laws of America. But God calls His Church and His followers to change hearts—knowing that “good laws come from good hearts” (a loose translation of a quotation from William Penn).

V. THE CLARIFYING POINT

By employing worldly methodologies for political influence, the Church reduced itself to nothing more than a political pressure group—whereas, biblically ordained by God, the Church is to proclaim freedom from trespasses and sin and proclaim new life in Christ! Bad politicians, political corruption, and ill-based laws all change when people come to know the living Christ. Therein lies the primary methodology of God’s people. This biblically based priority then leads to evangelizing and discipling State leaders.

Send a mature believer into the public arena, and as an insider he or she will effect change to a much greater degree than will an outsider.

Unfortunately, because of a faulty methodology since the 1970s, the Church has been less than effective in its attempts to change the direction of America. It has spent its seed on the sidewalk. It should be no wonder that in its ill-fated attempt to morph its purpose, the Church has increasingly missed its calling and mission. And in becoming a political action group, the Church has vastly discounted its credibility in the process.

VI. SUMMARY

The Church needs to be biblical in both its message and methodology. To muddle one is tragic (the Religious Right); to muddle both is catastrophic (historic Theological Liberalism). Christians involved in the wrong message and/or methodology on earth render themselves useless and ineffective in God's eyes.

First Timothy 2:1–4 is an apt summary of this study. When believers prioritize praying evangelistically for and evangelizing kings and all who are in authority, God promises the following: *so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity* (v. 2).

Wise is the believing officeholder who commits himself to these biblically revealed purposes and priorities.

Maturing public servants in Christ is
the most efficient way for the Church to
change the direction of a nation.

The Church is at its best when it equips the insiders to do the changing. Mature believers in office are in a more powerful position to effect change than are believers on the outside. Disciple public servants today! God blesses men and women who act on clear, biblically based priorities.

Liberal Theology's Struggle with Modern Archaeology

Theological liberals tend to stereotype conservative Christians as simpletons—ignorant and lacking in intellectual support—people who cling to their beliefs in blind faith. This study, however, suggests quite the opposite is true. Theological Liberalism was constructed with and based upon the piecemeal-at-best biblical archaeology of its day. Over the hundred years that have since passed, numerous discoveries have occurred.

When liberal theology was birthed, the number of archaeological discoveries that existed were not nearly what we have today. Indeed, we now find that the “historic” foundation of Theological Liberalism is eaten through with termites—and on the verge of collapse.

Learn the testimony of modern biblical archaeology: the evidence for the veracity and trustworthiness of the Bible is compelling and overwhelming! The time has come for theological liberals to reboot their thinking. My friend, the following evidence presented in encapsulated form defeats their suppositions.

I. INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth century at the height of deism (the belief in a supreme being who does not intervene in the universe) and Darwinism, a theory was floated regarding the origins of the first five books of the Old

Testament (OT). Attributed to Moses, these books known to the Hebrews as the Torah and referred to by the Greeks as the Pentateuch are the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This new theory attempted to discount their Mosaic authorship and instead postulate that they were written much later; supposedly, they were derived from other sources.

This theory flies in the face of the Torah itself, and its self-attestation, wherein the books themselves state that they were written by Moses. Other OT books state the same fact: their authors attest that the Torah was written by Moses. Similarly, Jesus Christ Himself attests in the NT that Moses was the Torah's author.¹ Therefore:

Embracing a theologically liberal position
regarding the origin of the Old Testament
is tantamount to calling Jesus a liar.

Furthermore, if the first five books of the Bible are inherently untrustworthy, at what point can we begin to trust in the Scriptures? The predominant liberal theory regarding the origin of the Torah is known as the Wellhausen theory or, better, the J.E.D.P. theory (which stands for Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomists, Priestly). This hypothesis proposes that “the Pentateuch was a compilation of selections from several different written documents composed at different places and times over a period of five centuries, long after Moses.”² Unfortunately, and for want of a better theory, most non-conservative seminaries in America persist even today in teaching this viewpoint—as if nothing has changed in OT scholarship, especially the archaeological portion of it, since 1880 when the J.E.D.P. theory of Torah origination was first popularized! What is doubly sad is that since its inception, theologically liberal scholarship in Europe “has time and again administered fatal blows to nearly all [Wellhausen] foundations.”³ Triply sad, the liberal professors have no bench strength, no substitute players for their admittedly weak superstar who has been so hammered out there on the court. Even though, to their embarrassment, he has been so drastically outplayed during the second half, they’ve left him in the game!

What follows for you in this study is how J.E.D.P. came into existence. But before going there, keep in mind why a study on the integrity of the first five books of the Bible is so important: most, if not all of conservative Christian theology is founded in and by the Torah! When I teach on theology—the major doctrines of the Bible and the attributes of God—those lessons begin with and are rooted in the first five books of God's Word and especially Genesis! To allow for the subtle or overt dismemberment of these first five books is to damage the foundation, construct, and confidence we have in our understanding of the Christian worldview. It all begins here! Furthermore, to be conversant with the faultiness of J.E.D.P. presuppositions will enable and equip us to argue effectively with those who reject the Christian worldview based upon their adherence to this undermining theory. So, read on, my friend!

A. STAGE ONE OF LIBERAL OT THEOLOGY

The J.E.D.P. theory's foothold can be attributed to Jean Astruc, a French physician who in the mid-eighteenth century conducted a literary analysis of the book of Genesis and discovered that sometimes God is referred to in Hebrew as *Elohim* and at other times as *Yahweh*.⁴ From that discovery, he formed the supposition that Moses relied on and used two different sources in writing Genesis (versus the simple explanation of providing two names for God). His notion received little attention, but what is most significant is that he set the stage for a criterion of "source division."

B. STAGE TWO OF LIBERAL OT THEOLOGY

The second stage of development is evidenced in the work of Johann Gottfried Eichhorn in his 1783 publication, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Eng: *Introduction to the Old Testament*). His work dissects the book of Genesis and the first two chapters of Exodus, attributing them to two sources: the Jahwist (*Yahweh*) and the Elohist (*Elohim*), representing the J and E in J.E.D.P. theory.

At first, Eichhorn believed that Moses was the editor who combined these materials. In later editions of his thinking and theorizing, he would yield to the consensus of the movement he helped create and state that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses at all; rather, it was written at a much later date.

C. STAGE THREE OF LIBERAL OT THEOLOGY

The third stage of development of the J.E.D.P. theory can be attributed primarily to Wilhelm Martin Lebrecht de Wette in his *Dissertation Critico-Exegetica* published in 1805. His main attribution to the basis of the growing conjectural hypothesis was that none of the Torah came from a time earlier than King David's reign. And more specifically, he introduced the idea that the essence, or source, of the Deuteronomy literature was extracted from a book of law that was found in the Jerusalem temple, originating around the time of the biblical account of King Josiah's reform, i.e., 621 BC. Herein is the birth of source "D," as it came to be called.⁵ The "D" stands for the Deuteronomic source.

A paragraph (or two) needs to be added here about the motivation for the broad acceptance of a later date of authorship of the Torah. Why did these skeptics do all this work of debunking the Torah in the first place? Such is primarily motivated by the *prophetic* passages within the Torah: specifically, Leviticus 26:27–45 and Deuteronomy 28:58–63. These passages *prophecy* the Babylonian captivity of Israel and their later restoration from exile—undisputed events in history. Generally speaking, fulfilled prophecy sets the Bible apart from all other books in both ancient and modern time, both religious and secular, and lends vast credibility to divine inspiration. No less is that fact true—the effect of fulfilled prophecy—in and of the books of the Torah!

Accordingly, the way liberal theologians have chosen to address and *explain away* fulfilled prophecy is to invent a later date for the origin of the book that foretells the event. Postulating that biblical books containing prophecies of future events were written after the predicted event is quite convenient, especially when history records that these events occurred. Of course, this critical repositioning is akin to double jeopardy: either the credibility of the book's author or the credibility of the critic himself is destroyed, casting one or the other into the darkest light of dishonesty and a lack of reliability. The following phrase encapsulates this common practice among liberal theologians:

Vaticinium ex eventu, prophecies invented
after they have already been fulfilled.

This saying, *vaticinium ex eventu*, is commonly and regularly espoused to explain away fulfilled prophecy in Scripture. And again, it is a convenient way of *explaining away* the fulfilled prophecies of the Torah, specifically in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Those who are strong in Christ, those who are *always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you [them] to give an account for the hope that is in you [them] ...* (1 Peter 3:15) will be conversant concerning such scheming.

D. STAGE FOUR OF LIBERAL OT THEOLOGY

Although many other individuals would contribute to this theory, the next major contribution would come in 1853 from Hermann Hupfeld's *Die Quellen der Genesis* (Eng: *The Sources of Genesis*) and its refinement by the Dutch scholar, Abraham Kuenen. He believed that the Priestly or Holiness Code found in the Pentateuch (Leviticus, chapters 17 to 26) stemmed from a source existing after Israel's exile. This code has to do with Israel's rituals, forms of sacrifice, genealogical lists, and their origin as a people. "P" then (as in "Priestly") stands for this supposed source and the supposed derivation of the existence of the Torah's contents pertaining to the above.

J.E.D.P., then, supposedly represents a combined confluence of documents that inform the Pentateuch. Granted, this explanation is quite complicated to understand, but this much is undeniable: it is all conjecture! *The documents and authors for each of the supposed sources, J, E, D, and P are either unrelated, or the sources for these speculative theories do not exist!* The amount of faith required to buy into this concocted explanation of Scripture's origin only serves to illustrate the bias of its authors! In this way, J.E.D.P. is similar in spirit to the theory of evolution: nothing times nobody equals everything! All is conjecture. It is not a thinking man's position! In parallel thought:

Darwin admitted at the end of his life that
any theory, no matter how far-fetched,
was better than the alternative: bowing in
submission and obedience to a holy Creator.

Such is the rationale of the fallen mind: to expunge any and all accountability to the only true God Who has revealed Himself in Scripture.

II. MOSES: THE ACTUAL AUTHOR OF THE TORAH

Moses, on the other hand, had every qualification to write the Pentateuch. He had the education, background, and experience necessary. Keep in mind that by God's sovereign arrangement, Moses was brought up and tutored in an Egyptian society whose culture then far surpassed that of the remaining ancient world. Additionally, as the patriarchal leader of Israel, he had the motivation to compile the Torah. And lastly, he (similar to but much more than the Apostle Paul in prison) had the time: having spent 40 years in the wilderness, he could have written something even longer. As will be seen by what follows, writing was prevalent in his day, and his early Egyptian upbringing in Pharaoh's court most certainly accommodated the honing of his literary skills. For sure he was a buff, rugged man, but that certainly doesn't mean he was a dumb jock.

III. THE REFUTATION OF THE WELLHAUSEN THEORY

Before examining some illustrations of the testimony of subsequent archaeological discoveries, making mention that the Wellhausen theory was discounted early on by such men as Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg, a leader in conservative biblical scholarship in Germany during this time, is important to this study. His work, *The Genuineness of the Pentateuch* (1847) represented a profound conservative position in refutation of Wellhausenian thought. In America, Princeton Theological Seminary scholars Joseph Addison Alexander and William Henry Green also eruditely upheld Mosaic authorship. These men, long before the discovery of the archaeology that will follow, dealt strong blows to Wellhausen and his works.⁶ In turn, liberal theologians have never successfully rebutted their critics, the scholastic discounters of Wellhausen theory. The subsequently published archaeological excavations/findings have only served to reinforce the position of both Alexander and Green.

IV. ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE ANTIQUITY OF THE TORAH

The Wellhausen hypothesis formulated its judgment on the historicity of the OT based upon, in some part, the then-available archaeological

evidence that scantily existed in the nineteenth century. That data was meager at best. As mentioned, even more unfortunate is the bias that existed among the theory's proponents; they did not give the benefit of the doubt to the documents they critiqued—a hard and fast rule and discipline in the science of hermeneutics. They found it easy to discount the statements of Scripture because nowhere did there exist archaeological confirmation for the same. They failed to believe the archaeological axiom that:

The absence of evidence is not
necessarily evidence of absence.

For example, at the time of Wellhausen, archaeological evidence for the biblically explicit people groups of the Hittites (Genesis 15:20) and the Horites (Genesis 36:20), the historicity of King Sargon II (Isaiah 20:1), or the existence of King Belshazzar (Daniel 5:1) were unconfirmed by archaeological discovery. Wellhausians condemned these people as mere fiction on the part of the late authors of the Torah. And in their arrogance, the liberals railed on the incredulity of these biblical accounts, refuting the biblical record with their supposed erudite intellectual superiority. But be sure of this: their sins of arrogance will find them out. States Gleason:

It has come about that in case after case after case after case where alleged historical inaccuracy was pointed to as proof of late and spurious authorship of the biblical documents, the Hebrew record has been vindicated by the results of recent excavation, and the condemnatory judgments of the Documentarian Theorists have been proved [to be] without foundation.⁷

States England's William F. Albright, the man esteemed as the world's leading archaeologist of his generation, who formerly held to the Wellhausen theory:

Archaeological and inscriptional data have established the historicity of innumerable passages and statements of the Old Testament.... Wellhausen still ranks in our eyes as the greatest Biblical scholar of the nineteenth century. But his standpoint is antiquated and his picture of the early evolution of Israel is sadly distorted.⁸

John Elder states:

It is not too much to say that it was the rise of the science of archaeology that broke the deadlock between historians and the orthodox Christian. Little by little, one city after another, one civilization after another, one culture after another, whose memories were enshrined only in the Bible, were restored to their proper places in ancient history by the studies of archaeologists.⁹

States J. A. Thompson before the year 2000:

Finally, it is perfectly true to say that biblical archaeology has done a great deal to correct the impression that was abroad at the close of the last century and in the early part of this century, that Biblical history was of doubtful trustworthiness in many places. If one impression stands out more clearly than another today, it is that on all hands the over-all historicity of the Old Testament tradition is admitted.¹⁰

With those overall statements in mind regarding the verification of archaeology relative to an early date for the Torah, it will prove beneficial to examine some scientific discoveries that substantiate Mosaic authorship and further discount the J.E.D.P. documentary hypothesis theory:

V. A SAMPLING OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES

What follows are some Wellhausian premises of the nineteenth century that are refuted by specific archaeological discoveries in the twentieth century.

A. THE RAS SHAMRA TABLETS

These tablets were discovered by Schaeffer in 1929 and are composed in a 30-letter Semitic alphabet that closely parallels the Hebrew dialect and symbol usage more so than any other language of ancient origins. The tablets date to around 1400 BC and reveal a depraved polytheistic Canaanite culture existing (very importantly) at the time of the Israelite conquest of the Promised Land.

In addition, the dialogue existing on the tablets reveals cliches that are characteristic of the poetic forms found in the Pentateuch and in the Psalms. The tablets, for example, refer to Baal's home as being located "on the mountain of his inheritance." This closely parallels Exodus 15:17 which states, "*The mountain of Your inheritance.*" Space will not allow me to explore the numerous other examples; suffice to say, other forms like Hebrew poetry are in evidence: tricolonic forms of prose and elevated writing skills.

This discovery, along with those dating to 1500 BC from the turquoise mines of Serabit el-Khadim (discovered by Petrie in 1904) and the Gezar Calendar (found by Macalister in the 1900s), displays beyond any shadow of doubt an ability to write in the Mosaic period.

Why is this discovery so significant?

The J.E.D.P. liberals had earlier postulated that the art of writing was virtually unknown in Israel prior to the Davidic Kingdom; therefore, there could not have been any written records during Moses' time.

B. THE NUZI TABLETS

These discoveries were found by Chiera and Speiser in the Nuzi area (near Kirkuk) on the Tigris River in 1925. They date from the fifteenth century BC. Revealed from the study of these thousands of tablets are the customs of the time. They display Abraham's culture prior to his sojourn to Egypt, such as the acceptable practice of selling one's birthright. An illustration of this within the tablets is the story of a brother's being recompensed

for selling his primogeniture to his younger brother in exchange for three sheep. This illustration parallels Genesis 25:33, wherein Esau sold his birthright to Jacob. Another instance is the binding character of a deathbed will, which is characterized biblically between Isaac and Jacob in the book of Genesis.

Another discovery in a similar support role of negating Wellhausenism is provided by the Mari Tablets. Discovered by an archaeologist named Parrot near the city of Tel Hariri on the Euphrates River in 1933, they contain direct evidence that during the eighteenth-century BC a people group referred to as the Hibiru existed. As it turns out, the Hibiru is an ancient Akkadian reference to Abraham's people found in the book of Genesis. The philological understanding of the word relates to a Canaanite meaning of "wanderers" or "people from the other side."

Why is this finding so significant?

Those who would have us believe that the OT is nothing more than a man-made collection of myths claim that the Genesis account of Abraham and his descendants was and is unhistorical and fictional. One prominent proponent of the theory went so far as to deny the existence of Abraham.

Furthermore, the **Ebla Tablets** nail the liberals' coffin shut as it pertains to Abraham. This 1964 archaeological discovery of a whole ancient library (subsequently unearthed in 1974) testifies to the veracity of the secular kings, *as recorded in Genesis 14*, who existed during the time of Abraham

C. THE BABYLONIAN CODE OF HAMMURABI

This 1901 discovery by Scheil serves to indicate the numerous similarities between the societal laws indicated in the biblical books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers and Babylonian culture. This account of the law code of ancient Babylon displays forms of punishment for crimes or breaches in contracts. There is an "if...then" structure to the writings. For sure, some laws and forms of punishment differ due to societal ideologies, but that disparity is not the issue. Rather, the archaeological discovery serves to illustrate the existence of a penal code at the time of Moses.

Why is this code so significant?

The liberals had earlier theorized that the Pentateuch was fallacious based on their belief that the legislation of the Priestly Code in these biblical books represented a later, post-exilic stage of development in the Hebrew culture. They boasted that laws of this level of sophistication could not have been developed until the fifth century BC. States Millar Burrows of Yale:

Scholars have sometimes supposed that the social and moral level of the laws attributed to Moses was too high for such an early age. [These discoveries] have effectively refuted this assumption.¹¹

Such verifications from the world of archaeology serve to substantiate Moses' rightful place—staring down on the Speaker's podium—in our U.S. House of Representatives wherein our laws are birthed.

D. THE TELL EL-AMARNA TABLETS

Carrying the name of the city in which they were discovered in 1887, these tablets date to 1370 BC and are comprised of correspondence by and between Palestinian and Syrian princelings. In part they reveal fierce invaders to the south and request Egyptian troops. Those invading are the Hibiru. The cities that have already fallen are listed as Gezer, Ashkelon, and Lachish. Accordingly, this secular archaeological find parallels Numbers 21:1–3, a record of the Hebrew conquest of Canaan. Interestingly, this account is from the vantage point of those being conquered.

Why is this discovery so significant?

Wellhausen proponents propagated their belief that the account of the conquest of Palestine and the Transjordan as recorded in the biblical books of Numbers and Joshua was grossly unhistorical. But subsequent archaeological excavations indicate that the conquest was historical. Interesting to note is exactly who turned out to be “grossly unhistorical.”

VI. SUMMARY

Numerous other archaeological finds could be recounted to make the point of this Bible study, but suffice to say that archaeology has played a major role in supporting the veracity of the Old Testament.

It would be foolish to propagate
the J.E.D.P. theory today in light of
all the discoveries that refute it.

In fact, if theologians proffered the same theories today, they would be laughed at. States Albright (my favorite archaeologist):

New discoveries continue to confirm the historical accuracy or the literary antiquity of detail after detail in it.... It is, accordingly, sheer hyper-criticism to deny the substantially Mosaic character of the Pentateuchal tradition.¹²

The following are some applicable thoughts to take away from this faith-building study:

A. BE DISCERNING OF FALSE TEACHERS

Much can be learned from the arrogant scholarship of Wellhausenism. What follows are keys to identifying liberal theologians. The NT has many warnings about false religious leaders who lead people astray, leaving them shipwrecked regarding the faith. They will also shipwreck nations if

allowed to: *liberal theology is too often the seedbed, the basis of liberal political theory* (a subject I have addressed in much greater detail in other studies).

Remember, one of the most significant biblical indicators of spiritual maturity is spiritual discernment, i.e., the ability to distinguish truth from error. This intellectual acumen is only gained through in-depth Bible study. Conversely, as I minister to people in the Capitol and travel around the country and the world, I often hear of spiritual maturity being defined otherwise: as if it only means loving others! But what do you do when liberal theologians attempt to win political/ideological debates based upon their unscriptural premises? Do you respond with nothing but “love”? No. ***Love ... does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth*** (1 Corinthians 13:6). Consider the words of Philippians 1:9, which says, ***And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.*** What follows are identifying characteristics of liberal theologians. Learn to discern their characteristics:

Keys to Identifying Liberal Theologians¹³

1. They are predisposed to devaluing textual evidence from Scripture.
 2. They assume that the scriptural authors had lower literary standards than their own.
 3. They assume the religion of the Bible is of purely human origin.
 4. They artificially concoct “discrepancies” to substantiate supposed biblical errors.
 5. They assume a superior knowledge of ancient history over and above the original authors who lived thousands of years closer to the events, which they recorded.
-

B. HOLD TO A HIGH VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

In the Capitol, do not be caught up in old myths (which never seem to die) regarding the supposed lack of integrity of God’s authoritative Word, the

Holy Scriptures. His Word is just as true when it speaks in the historical narrative as when it commands our obedience or provides us with principles for wise living. The Scriptures claim to be the Word of God not once or twice, but thousands of times. And indeed, they are. Foolish is the man or woman who suppresses that truth—to the opposite, they know it to be the case when they are honest with themselves (cf. Romans 1).

C. REALIZE WHO IT IS THAT POSSESSES BLIND FAITH

The simpleton is not the conservative Christian with a high view of the inspiration of Scripture; rather, simpletons cling to their beliefs with blind faith, ignorance, and a lack intellectual, scientific, and historical support, espousing a liberal “understanding” of God’s Word. Modern-day archaeology has served to undermine the postulations of liberal theologians. Romans 1:22 is an apt, direct summary: *Professing to be wise, they became fools*. Do not be counted among them.

1. Cf. Exodus 17:14; Joshua 1:8; John 5:46–47, respectively. In the NT passage herein, Jesus states, “*For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?*” In John 7:19 Jesus states further, “*Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law?*” These passages evidence Jesus’ testimony that Moses wrote the books of the OT law. How can we claim Christ and reject scriptural inspiration?
2. Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 89.
3. *Ibid.*, 97.
4. Jean Astruc’s writing, published in 1753, was titled, *Conjectures Concerning the Original Memoranda Which It Appears Moses Used to Compose the Book of Genesis*.
5. At the start, it must be said that De Witte was not a part of the Documentary Hypothesis School. Rather, he was a fragmentary theorist. Fragmentary theorists believed the Pentateuch was composed from separate fragments, some of which were as old as Moses, and were fitted into a historical context.
6. When something goes *wonky*, it is said to be “awry, or wrong.”
7. Archer, 174.
8. As quoted by Gleason Archer in *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 174.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. Millar Burrows, *What Mean These Stones? The Significance of Archeology for Biblical Studies* (Alexandria, Vir.: ASOR, 1941), 56.
12. William F. Albright, *The Archeology of Palestine*, rev. ed (Harmondsworth, Middlesex. UK: Pelican, 1960), 224.
13. Excerpted in part from Gleason, 112.

Theological Liberalism: How Bad Theology Leads to Bad Policy

In the Capitol, the “compassion” and “mercy” of Liberal Theology¹ has been used to foist a myriad of unbiblical concepts that have led to bad policy, one of the most egregious examples being entitlement programs. Here in the Capitol we are all acutely aware that the charts that project runaway national debt and national economic insolvency are not only accurate but disturbingly and frighteningly alarming, to say the least. And we all know that the major contributor to the crisis is the sacred cow of entitlement programs. It represents over 80% of the budget! It is no secret to those in D.C. that it is the major driver of our nation’s increasing national indebtedness. Even when we cut the fat in the other 20 percent as well in and from this 80 percent driver, we are still faced with a runaway freight train that continues to gain momentum. The mental picture of a buffalo stampede is more appropriate. America’s entitlement program policies are now hugely coming to roost on the doorsteps of the U.S. Treasury—all birthed from bad theological premises enacted decades ago!

Given this crisis, what wisdom can we glean from God’s Word that could aid us in solving the problem? May God use this Bible study in that regard.

I. INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly the motives for building a national social safety net some decades ago were both sincere and well-meaning. The astute, wise law-maker, however, must first ask himself if such pragmatism can be justified biblically. Is there a biblical basis for the institution of government to create such large entitlement programs? What does God's Word say in regard to the extent of governmental responsibility for the welfare of its citizens?

In 1 Timothy 5 and elsewhere in the New Testament (NT) (cf. Acts 6:1–6; Romans 15:25–26; Galatians 2:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–12; James 1:27; 1 John 3:17) the Bible is explicitly clear about whose responsibility it is to form a safety net for members of society: there is a pecking order, or hierarchy of responsibility, revealed in Scripture.

The responsibility for taking care of society's poor and bereft first lies with the institution of marriage. God's design is for the husband to provide for his own household (cf. 1 Timothy 5:8). If for whatever reason he is unable, the responsibility for provision, secondarily, falls to the children and/or grandchildren within the institution of the family. This is clear also from a close read of 1 Timothy 5. The third tier of responsibility for caring for the poor and bereft lies with the institution of the church, which is also clear from 1 Timothy 5.

Interestingly, and importantly, nowhere in Scripture is the institution of the State in view as it pertains to societal responsibility for the needs of the less fortunate. Nowhere to be found in the NT is an explicit command for the institution of the State to assume such a function. States one of America's leading conservative systematic theologians, Wayne Grudem, in his survey of all biblical passages pertinent to this subject: "I am surprised to discover that few people seem to realize that these verses say nothing about civil government overcoming individual citizens' poverty!"² Summarily, herein then is God's biblically revealed pattern for the most effective, efficient, and sustainable safety net for society. I should quickly, and in all objectivity, add that Scripture does not prohibit government from directly aiding the poor, but to the degree to which of God's five ordained institutions wanders from its scripturally explicit responsibilities is the degree to which the institution will become inefficient and increasingly unable to fulfill its God-explicit responsibilities.

At the conclusion of this study, I will list five biblically based ways civil government (apart from direct entitlement programs) should aggressively aid its people (albeit indirectly) to overcome poverty.

We hope, in light of the fact that
America is in the midst of a tsunami
of national debt, to find ourselves
teachable. What does the Bible say
about entitlement programs?

Make no mistake. Do not be theologically naïve! America's bankrupting entitlement policies stem from previous, pervasive bad theology: the bad theology of Theological Liberalism. Few people today, it seems, tend to make the connection between political thought and its underlying historical, theological influence! How one views God tends to determine one's worldview. Accordingly, the ideological war within American culture today cannot be completely understood without first comprehending the theology underlying it.

As it pertains to the entitlement mindset today of many liberal political leaders, the foundational theological influence is that of the Social Gospel. The Social Gospel or Liberal Christianity or Theological Liberalism became rooted in American culture more than a century ago as an outcome of the Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy, an epic theological battle in the American Protestant church (of which more will be said later). American liberal political ideology is rooted in this Modernist theology mindset more than it is borrowed from another similar political ideology, i.e., socialism or communism. Political liberalism was homegrown in our own Sunday school classrooms more than imported from abroad.

What happened back then
theologically continues to have a
tremendous effect on today politically.

There is a definite, ongoing connection between the two! This one-hundred-year-old theological battle forever shaped the differences between the two major camps of American political thought. At the risk of sounding partisan, let me say this: on the Hill today, the vast majority of political conservatives who name the name of Christ are not affected by Social Gospel theology, whereas the vast majority of political liberals who name the name of Christ are influenced by liberal Protestant theology, aka the Social Gospel movement. Among the 535 members of Congress and the Senate, I can count the exceptions to this axiom on one hand. The Social Gospel and what it has historically stood for is the seedbed of the liberal political agenda today—and the basis of entitlement programs historically fostered by and in American government. This theological reality is at the root of why D.C. is so divided today. In essence, a theological war is going on: two opposing worldviews that continually butt heads as those differences manifest in contrasting policy formation. Herein are dueling worldviews.

Since this is such an important ongoing influence, it stands to reason that it is critically important for public servants to possess a working knowledge of the Social Gospel and understand why it is such *bad* theology. By using the word *bad*, I mean it is a perversion or a corruption of what the Bible actually teaches. The Social Gospel is in no way biblically based, nor justifiable.

The Social Gospel movement, which infiltrated and captured many mainline Protestant denomination seminaries and subsequently their pulpits, resulted from the confluence of five aberrant theologies. “Cashing in” on this convergence were four notable individuals. But first,

It is important to underscore that
when put to the test of Scripture, the
Social Gospel is not biblical Christianity.

Social Gospellers are the ones who have departed from the pervasive theology that stemmed from the Reformation. And it was historical Protestant Reformation theology that was foundational to American cultural formation.

Before moving on in this study, it is important to identify terms and how they were used in the theological history of America. Prior to the invasion and onslaught of liberal Protestantism, American Protestantism was commonly and synonymously referred to as American Fundamentalism. That was the only brand, the singular brand of Protestantism; there was no competing form of Protestantism. With that in mind, notice the following quote from leading liberal theologian Kirsopp Lake during the time of the introduction of his brand. It is quite revealing and damaging to his theological revisionist cause:

It is a mistake, often made by educated persons who happen to have but little knowledge of historical theology, to suppose that Fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the kind; it is the ... survival of a theology which was once universally held by all Christians. ... The Fundamentalist may be wrong; I think that he is. But it is we who have departed from the tradition, not he, and I am sorry for the fate of anyone who tries to argue with a Fundamentalist on the basis of authority. The Bible and the *corpus theologicum* of the Church is on the Fundamentalist side.³

If Lake is right in his analysis, and I believe that he is, then it follows that if liberal political ideology does indeed stem from liberal Protestant theology, then liberal political ideology too (specifically entitlement programs) is lacking in a basis—i.e., any basis of biblical authority.

II. THE FORMATIVE CONFLUENCES OF SOCIAL GOSPEL THEOLOGY

What follows are sound bites (for the sake of the brevity—this study is already lengthy) explaining what laid the groundwork for the Social Gospel movement. Keep in mind that it was acceding politicians to Social Gospel thinking who birthed the national entitlement programs. Again, the Modernism movement (a synonym for Theological Liberalism) captured many fundamentalist seminaries, denominations and churches, congregants and politicians. And it was the Modernist politicians who

enacted the entitlement programs that now threaten our nation's future financial solvency.

Even though liberal theology is alive and well here on the Hill—it is dying in the local community. Why? In that its theology deems evangelism unnecessary, few are the new adherents in the pews. Many liberal churches are merging, selling off properties to survive as congregations shrink to extinction. There are very few up-and-coming young liberal Protestants in America today.

In summary, as it relates to Treasury-crippling entitlement programs, really bad theology has shaped this really bad policy.

The following five heretical influences drastically weakened the bark of the American Church, and the Social Gospel bore its way in and hatched lethal eggs, which today have infected and threaten to destroy a once towering giant.

A. REASON AND RATIONALISM

Harvard Divinity School was once a bastion of conservative, reformed theology. When Henry Ware was elected its president in 1805, he soon thereafter denied the biblical doctrine of the Trinity and became a Unitarian. Around the same time, a pastor of national influence, William Ellery Channing, who ministered at Federal Street Church in Boston, also abandoned the Puritan Trinitarian orthodox understanding of the atonement, opting for Unitarianism. (Unitarians not only reject the Trinity but stand for broad freedom and tolerance in religious beliefs.)

Interestingly, these theological departures within fundamental Evangelicalism generally paralleled the growth of transcendentalism (the belief that knowledge of reality is derived from intuitive sources rather than from objective propositional truth) in the secular world. Transcendentalism was fueled in part by the beliefs of Ralph Waldo Emerson. By the 1830s what was resulting was a palpably heightened view of the preeminence of man's reasoning (over and above the objective source of truth being garnered from God's Word) in both the church and the secular world. In both arenas, man's reason was now trumping God's revelation. (Dr. "Well-I-Think" over and above *Thus saith the Lord*.) The takeaway point here is this: human reason, rather than Scripture, was becoming the authority for all of faith and practice, including political thought.

B. UNIVERSALISM

“If it is God’s will for all to be saved, then all will be saved” summarizes this belief system. Such a faulty presupposition, in opposition to Scripture, has tremendous implications. Originating in London around 1779, the Universalists in America held their first convention in Philadelphia in 1790. This helped pave the way for Nathaniel Taylor’s New Haven Theology, which denied the imputation of Adamic sin with a governmental view of the atonement (the belief that God could simply forgive everyone’s sin because He is omnipotent). In short, Universalism’s “gospel” denied any need for repentance from sin and instead emphasized that “personal redemption for mankind” is achieved via the reformation of man’s environment.

The confluence of Universalism was being birthed in American thought. Such represented a drastic pendulum swing away from the Gospel of Scripture, which repeatedly emphasized (and emphasizes) the necessity of personal repentance from sin and belief by faith in Christ and His redemptive work on the cross. In a nutshell, Universalism teaches that man is basically good. The tremendous implication is this: if one’s theology dictates that man is inherently good, then his failings are to be explained by his surrounding environment and social injustices. Therein is what needs fixing. Obviously this resulting worldview permeates much political ideology today. Historically speaking, here is where such thinking is derived from.

C. PROGRESSIVE ORTHODOXY

Horace Bushnell went a step further than New Haven and Universalism Theology. He believed in the moral influence theory of atonement (an incomplete understanding of Christ’s atonement). Bushnell defined atonement this way: Christ’s death was not propitiatory (the satisfaction of each individual’s violation of God’s standard and attribute of perfection), only exemplary, i.e., God indicating to mankind how much He loves us and, therefore, how much we should love others. In this “christianity,” Jesus is no longer salvific. He is what theological liberals today call “the historical Jesus,” i.e., exclusively a good-behavior role model. The takeaway point is this: herein is the human formation of “another Jesus,” which Paul sternly warned against in Galatians 1:8–9.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

The Social Gospel, then, is another religion!

D. NEOORTHODOXY

Kant and Schleiermacher add yet another aberrant confluence of sweeping theological error: neoorthodoxy. This “new” orthodoxy in essence represents full-blown subjectivism—truth is “what it means to me.” Gone was the propositional authority of the revealed truth of Scripture. Neoorthodoxy promoted (and today promotes) pietistic awe: true religion is based on one’s inner, subjective experience. Perhaps a good illustration of the prevalence of present-day neoorthodoxy is this: “Bible studies” where individuals state, “This is what this passage means to me” in the place of an objective study of authorial intent. Accordingly, the Bible gets its authority from my faith, versus the other way around. The applicable takeaway point? Truth is derived from how I feel about things: my feelings are my authority, not God’s Word.

E. HIGHER CRITICISM

The last major aberrant theological wave to encroach upon the American church prior to the Social Gospellers coming on the scene was a theologically intellectual movement that cast doubt on the authenticity of the source documents that comprise the Scriptures themselves. Baur, Strauss, and Wellhausen were the major proponents of this assault. Baur, in his intellectual pride, asserted that neither Paul, Peter, nor John wrote the NT books attributed to their names. Strauss proposed that the Gospel accounts were a myth. Wellhausen chose to discount the miracles of the Bible. All three popularized a critical approach to Scripture, casting doubt in the minds of believers. The result—man became the overt judge of Scripture, versus Scripture being the judge of man.

The summation of these four confluences gave rise to the formation and distillation of Social Gospel ideology. What follows are sound-bite

descriptors of the men who significantly contributed to the codification of the Social Gospel movement in American culture:

III. FOUR PURVEYORS OF THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

Simultaneous to these widening cracks in historic reformed theology, which was the pervasive theology of our Founding Fathers and the germinating basis of American culture, was the Industrial Revolution and the stratification of societal classes. The capitalist system itself was soon viewed by the following influential individuals and others as the embodiment of sin. As a result, there needed to be social, versus individual, application of “Christianity” to American life. By contrast, what propels reformed, fundamental, evangelical Christianity, both then and now, is the atonement of sin in the life of the individual.

Note the different target here:
it is the sin of the system that
effectuates and propels the
Social Gospel movement.

In Social Gospel thinking, it then follows that the primary mission of the Church should be the deliverance of the poor: all those individuals who were being oppressed by the free market. Accordingly, this is where the name “Social Gospel” stems from: it is an attempt to refocus Christianity on the economic deliverance and equality of the individual, versus the conversion of his or her soul. This is no less than a theological and missional redirect—a rewriting—of historic Christianity. It is, therefore, not Christianity whatsoever; it is another religion. The leaders of the Social Gospel movement in American Christianity were as follows:

A. RITSCHL

The kingdom of God from the perspective of this European influence meant an ethical kingdom. Ritschl said Christianity was all about ethics and morals. With a low view of the effects of sin on the judicial standing

of man before his Creator, he viewed Christ in a way less than the Christ revealed in the Gospels, a good person who provided a role model for all to follow in loving one another with tolerance. This is in place of a redemptive Christ who saves man from his sin (again, cf. Galatians 1:8–9).

B. GLADDEN

Historically, Gladden is considered the founder of the Social Gospel movement. “The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man” is a term stemming from his pen and codifying his beliefs and actions. Gladden, too, rejected the judicial aspects of salvation in Christ. In his adaptation of Christianity to a social/ethical emphasis, he viewed capitalism as unchristian when penning his books, *Working People and Their Employees* and *Social Salvation*. He emphasized the sin of society, believing in shared ownership versus the sin of the individual soul.

C. SHELDON

Coining the phrase “What Would Jesus Do?” meant something quite different than its modern-day counterpart (Promise Keepers: What Would Jesus Do Now?). Conversely, Jesus was only a role model to emulate. Sheldon marketed the Social Gospel into a national movement of social reform throughout America. He was influential in popularizing its message.

D. RAUSCHENBUSCH

A liberal pastor of a poor church, he became horrified by the living conditions of the socially oppressed. His book titles reflect this: *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, *Christianizing the Social Order*, and *A Theology of the Social Gospel*. All these influences and influencers reveal a radical change underway in the meaning of historic reformation Christianity in America. The summary point: government could, should, and would aid in the manifestation of this new religion’s way of thinking.

IV. TWO COMPETING THEOLOGIES AND TWO POLITICAL PHILOSOPHIES

As the true-to-its-history Christian church fought back against the Social Gospellers in the early 1900s, efforts for the most part proved inalterable.

The bug had penetrated the bark. Now into the meat of the tree, rapid reproduction was occurring in all strata of society.

Many denominations, seminaries, mission agencies, and publishers had been devastatingly impacted. Denominations like the Northern Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Lutherans had been infected and forever affected. (Granted, today there are non-Social Gospel aspects of each which survived or were reformed under respective banners.) As the battle for theological purity waged on, the competition became fierce: the Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy was a huge theological war. And as the Modernists repeatedly won out, taking control of much of the aforementioned, the Fundamentalists looked to rebirth and rebuild institutions that embodied a biblically accurate, personally salvific faith characteristic of historic reformation Christianity.

In the world of political parties, the theological liberals were both causal and reflected in political liberalism, and the theological conservatives were both causal and reflected in political conservatism. To this day, both of the contrasting theologies dominantly shape the policies of their respective parties. So to a large degree, the liberal versus conservative theological competition of the past continues to this day through the out workings and manifestations of respective political parties. The war rages on—no longer so much in the seminary (as those battles have long been decided), but in the Capitol.

V. THE ONE RESULT: POSSIBLE CONFUSION IN THE CAPITOL

Both theological adherents continue to hold the title “Christian,” which is confusing because Modernism has a different understanding of Jesus which, therefore, classifies it as a different religion. But in a theologically ignorant Capitol, most people lack the discernment to ascertain the difference.

Seminary professor J. Gresham Machen is helpful on this point. Princeton Theological Seminary was an outstanding Presbyterian seminary possessing a high view of Scripture until the denomination went liberal. It was only a matter of time until the great orthodox professors of the institution would be forced to depart, Machen being one. They founded Westminster Seminary in response. In reflection of the competition, Machen would state that *these were two altogether different religions* and that the clash was as profound and as grim as, comparatively speaking, “Christianity and Confucianism.” The liberal *Christian Century* magazine

editor Charles Clayton Morrison would say, “Two worlds have clashed ... the world of Tradition and the world of Modernism. One is scholastic, static, authoritarian, individualistic; the other is vital, dynamic, free and social.” This is a pretty good sound-bite encapsulation of the competing theologies.

I believe the biggest deception on the Hill
today is this: the religion of the Social
Gospel proffers itself as being “Christian”
when it isn’t even close to being biblical.

According to the Bible, we must trust in the salvific Lord Jesus Christ to be saved and call ourselves true Christians. If we believe Jesus is only an exemplary figure, then we are not a genuine believers. When someone states, “My pastor taught me the Social Gospel,” what should that tell you? Don’t be confused or theologically ignorant!

VI. THREE CONCLUSIVE DETERMINATIONS

A. SOCIAL GOSPEL THEOLOGY IS AT THE HEART OF OUR NATION’S FINANCIAL WOES

The King James Bible says, *For as he thinks within himself, so is he* (Proverbs 23:7). It follows that the way a legislator understands God via his or her theology, or lack thereof, will determine his ideology in both personal and policy formation. To reason this another way, “Right actions begin with right thinking, and right thinking begins with thinking right about God” (Radmacher).

If the Social Gospel is unfounded in Scripture, such thinking and ideology should be soundly rejected. Why? Whenever an individual or society veers from the owner’s handbook, the way therein always proves detrimental. Proverbs 16:25 says, *There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*. The fiscal tsunami that is about to hit and topple the Treasury can be aptly understood in this way.

Again, this is not to suggest that government not care for or help the poor, but it is to suggest how government best cares for and helps the poor. God's Word is clear on how a nation and its political leaders should construct a social safety net for society.

B. HOW GOVERNMENT BEST HELPS THE POOR

1. Individuals

Biblically speaking, the institution of government needs to provide individual, accessible private property rights to all citizens (Genesis 1:26; cf. Exodus 20:15, 17). The compelling studies of Hernando de Soto Polar relative to overcoming poverty in Peru serve to profoundly underscore this truth. For one to possess accessible rights to own personal property is a determinative factor in breaking the poverty cycle of individuals and nations. America should not change its rich heritage in this area of policy. Property rights curb poverty.

2. The Institution of Marriage

In 1978 Diana Pearce published *The Feminization of Poverty* in which she postulated that "female-headed households in particular formed a larger and larger percentage of the poor in America." Insightfully, this trend is attributable to and parallels the sweeping changes that occurred nationwide relative to family law, specifically no-fault divorce. No-fault divorce laws, unlike business or criminal law, possess no penalty for the one responsible for the failure of the marriage contract. What results are mothers with children dependent on entitlement programs. Why? Our divorce laws are not based in the biblical precepts of justice (cf. 1 Peter 2:13–14), rather on pragmatism. The government should incentivize marriage by offering tax breaks and making divorce more difficult. Such changes will curb poverty.

3. The Institution of the Family

Akin to foster care programs, government could incentivize and reward families who open their doors to the poor. Some families in our church have done this with no governmental incentives. Such will curb poverty.

4. The Institution of Commerce

Government needs to incentivize the institution of commerce in order to create jobs. When businesses are growing and prospering, they demand, train, and hire employees. It is only the institution of commerce in a free market society that can economize a culture, and it is up to the government to stimulate enterprise in all ways possible. Such will curb poverty.

5. The Institution of the Church

Government needs to continue to provide religious freedom so churches can flourish and multiply, thereby creating church members who become the salt and light of society (Matthew 5:13–15), citizens who live in obedience to 1 Timothy 5 (see the introduction), men and women who take the initiative to provide for the poor both by themselves and through their initiation of not-for-profit ministries such as the Union Rescue Mission. It is the institution of the church that best cares for and rehabilitates people because of the compassion and power of the transforming Gospel of the truly salvific Jesus. Many people are poor because they have not been liberated from various besetting sins and addictions, something the power of the cross of Christ can accomplish. Such will curb poverty.

These are the five indirect means
by which government is to play
its main role relative to helping
the poor. Sustain and enact
these biblically based policies,
and poverty will decrease.

C. HOW GOVERNMENT LEAST HELPS THE POOR

Again, nowhere in Scripture does God assign specific responsibility to government to provide entitlements for its citizenry, whereas Scripture does assign specific entitlement responsibilities to various individuals and other

institutions (as previously seen in this study). Again, one could argue that since Scripture does not prohibit government from directly aiding the poor, that such is biblically permissible. But to the degree any institution engages in responsibilities outside its biblically explicit God-ordained role(s) it will be to the same degree inefficient and wasteful. First Peter 2:14 states the specific role of government is *for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right*.

The misunderstandings about and supposed scriptural justifications for enormous government-based entitlement programs stem not from Christianity but from another misguided religion that markets itself using the same name. Outside the explicit ordinances of the Scriptures, it follows that direct governmental provisions of entitlements lead not to self-sufficiency but rather the ruin of both the individual recipient and the nation's Treasury. Government entitlement programs have no basis in Scripture.

May God grant you, our nation's leaders, great wisdom to transition our policies to biblically informed positions relative to best helping the poor and bereft—people you and I love and people God loves.

VII. FINAL THOUGHT

Unfortunately, there is another deleterious result that continues to this day in America in regard to the incursive Social Gospel movement that took root over one hundred years ago. In order for the Social Gospel movement to effectuate change in American culture, it was mandatory for it to infiltrate government leadership and influence policy. This study attributes the germination of government entitlement programs as evidence of this very thing: the Social Gospel was and remains the seedbed of political liberalism. They remain intrinsically intertwined today.

Rather than remaining in the political arena like they had been since the country's foundation, where they could fight against Theological Liberalism and for the hearts and souls of political leaders through Gospelling and discipling, unfortunately Fundamentalists and Evangelicals retreated from the political arena for fear they would be perceived as theological liberals themselves. Nothing could have been more deleterious to the future of America.

Rather than stand their ground and continue to win and disciple public servants for Christ, imparting to them a Christian worldview on such things as God's means of creating a social safety net, they abandoned this critically

important sphere of influence—this vitally important missional affinity group! As a result, theological and political liberalism blossomed. It follows that the biblical remedy, the best way to change America’s downward spiral, is for evangelicals to make disciples once again in the political arena.

1. The Right Rev. Mariann Budde, a liberal theologian presided over an interfaith service called “A Service of Prayer for the Nation” on Jan. 21, 2025, at The Washington National Cathedral. It was the last official event of President Donald Trump’s inauguration ceremonies for his second term. Rev. Budde used part of her sermon to lecture President Trump on social issues. In a story about the event, reporter Chris Enloe asked, “Should God be used as a mere prop to justify the liberal agenda?” He wrote, “That message sounded more like a progressive activist’s rant than a biblical sermon. There was no quoting of scripture, only weaponizing of Christian values — ‘compassion’ and ‘mercy’ — for the apparent justification of a liberal vision on immigration policy and the LGBTQ agenda.” Chris Enloe, “Woke bishop tries to lecture Trump about LGBT agenda, immigration — but the Bible fires back” January 21, 2025, Blazemedia, <https://www.theblaze.com/abide/mariann-budde-donald-trump-lgbtq-immigration>

This serves as a most recent illustration of the ongoing manifestation attempts of theological liberalism in the political arena: when political leaders fail to interpret the Bible correctly and then use their misinterpretations as justifications for various policy enactments, a nation is led into ruin in one way or another. Entitlement program enactments decades ago are egregious examples of how bad theology has led to bad policy—and why in-depth, serious, Bible study in the capitol of the world is so important to the health and well-being of any nation!

2. Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 283.
3. Kirsopp Lake, *The Religion of Yesterday and Tomorrow*, (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 61–62.

Coming to Grips with the Religion of Environmentalism

In our lifetime, the shift in aggregate, national religious belief has been radical. In essence, and unfortunately, America has been in the process of changing horses: from the religion of Christianity to one of Radical Environmentalism. The American people are in the process of exchanging the worship of the Creator for the worship of His creation. This huge and dire error, with extreme consequences, presages disaster.

The timeless truths of Genesis 1:26–31 have informed, guided, and dominated American thinking in the past. Make no mistake; our historic moorings, cultural understanding, and obedience to what God says in this passage are the basis of America’s greatness.

My prayer is that this Bible study will help provide you with a clear, perspicuous understanding—the ability to cogently identify the differences between these two dueling worldviews.

I. INTRODUCTION

For years, global warming advocates have proffered that the California drought is a precursor of things to come. But they abandon that alarm and leap to the other side as soon as California experiences an extremely wet year. In 2017 heavy rainfall and runoff filled all reservoirs, which caused

water to be dumped into the Pacific Ocean at such a voracious rate that the spillway of Oroville Dam was seriously damaged. A San Francisco newspaper's headline, which attested to that shift in thinking, read, "Is California Overdue for Biblical, Catastrophic Flooding? History Says It Could Be."

I find such sudden, radical swings in climate theory to be both destructive to credibility and astonishingly amusing!

What seems to go largely unnoticed is that the 180-degree turnaround of the radical doomsday climate-change folks contradicts what God's Word states in this regard. In terms of worldwide drought, God says, ***He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous*** (Matthew 5:45). Notice that God's common grace promises rain even to the unrighteous! And in Genesis 9:11 God says to the flood theorists, ***"I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth."*** In the Sermon on the Mount, God promises to always send us rain, and after the flood of Noah, God promised He would never flood the Earth again.

Other related passages of Scripture serve to contradict the idea that man, by himself, can destroy his earthly habitat. For example, Psalm 104:30 states, ***You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the ground.*** God says He will continually renew the face of the Earth until He forms a new heaven and a new Earth in the end times (Revelation 21:1).

In the thousands of years of climate history since these words were recorded, the veracity of God's promises have proven to be reliable. So whom then should we trust?

To think that man can alter the
Earth's ecosystem—when God remains
omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent
in the current affairs of mankind—
is to more than subtly espouse an
ultra-hubristic secular worldview relative
to the supremacy and importance of man.

We can all rest assured and wholly rely on God's aforementioned promises pertaining to His ability and willingness to sustain our world's ecosystem!

What glorious truths God has given us! They run smack in the face of the secular fad theorists who try to scare us with global warming or now, suddenly, with flooding!

What has set America apart from other nations of the world has been the strong presupposition of its innovators, i.e., to steward the natural resources of the country in ways that add value to them and thereby benefit others. This premise is based on a mindset that assumes both the utility of natural resources and the value they possess to help others—the very things that God saluted when He created the world in which we live.

Notice these two aspects from Genesis 1:26–31, our passage of study:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so. God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

The Psalmist in chapter eight reinforces the idea that God has given man dominion over His creation:

*What is man that You take thought of him,
And the son of man that You care for him?
Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And You crown him with glory and majesty!
You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,*

*All sheep and oxen,
And also the beasts of the field,
The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas”* (vv. 4–8).

The Psalmist reinforces the idea that man has been created in the image of God and has been given dominion over all of the Earth, and if not specifically stated in these passages, elsewhere in Scripture is the idea of man’s living to help others (cf. Philippians 2).

Whereas Scripture clearly teaches
that man is the apex of God’s purposes
and creation, the primary purpose
and belief of Radical Environmentalism
is the preservation of the Earth.

Inevitably, these worldviews clash. Certainly inherent in the Christian view of the world’s resources is the understanding of good stewardship, but that perception is not good enough for radical environmentalists who in essence idolize and worship the Earth; theirs is the demand to limit the progress and expansion of mankind. The Earth is the highest good in their way of thinking—not man; and to them, God is a myth, harmless at best, but potentially dangerous. Make no mistake; the difference between secular preservationists and Christian conservationists is big.

One illustration of this clashing worldview is California water. (Please allow me, because I am from California, to take the liberty of using my state to illustrate this study since I am intimately familiar with this situation. I also have a degree in Ecosystems from UCLA). In an average year of California rainfall, God blesses the state with 200-million-acre feet of fresh water. On average, that water is enough to supply the annual needs of 400 million households—or about 1.2 billion people—enough water to supply all the needs of India or China.

Of that huge supply, only 20-million-acre feet is presently utilized; the remainder is lost—if not absorbed in the soil, allowed to flow back into the Pacific Ocean because environmentalists refuse to allow additional storage lakes to be built. And of the 20-million-acre feet that is captured, 15 million goes for agriculture and only 5 million is allotted to residential use!¹ **In other words, only 2.5 percent of California's fresh water supply is directly used by households—and yet there is an outcry to limit household usage!**

In fact, in order to secure tunneling under the Delta (as a substitute for the long overdue peripheral canal project) so as to deliver more northern California water to the Bay Area and Southern California (75 percent of the population lives in the south, and 75 percent of the water is in the north), the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California had to agree not to expand its water usage—as if California water was somehow in short supply!

The water situation in California is an apt illustration of Radical Environmentalism's attempt to limit the growth of mankind in the state by curtailing the supply of water— even though there is more than enough to go around. At the core of the decades-old, heated water battle in California are dueling worldviews: one says that people are most important, the other says that the environment is.

In fact, Governor Pat Brown, who was the state governor from 1959 to 1967, pioneered the California Aqueduct many decades ago. Before the religion of Radical Environmentalism prevailed, the state engineers designed the aqueduct to carry three times more water to Southern California than it ever has. That is to say, the state's religious understanding changed between the time of his leadership and his son's. In all fairness, his son, Governor Jerry Brown (who served from 1975 to 1983 and 2011 to 2019) championed the Delta tunnel project in lieu of the peripheral canal, which his father had envisioned from the get-go. But having given Governor Jerry credit, his tunnel project has much less capacity than his dad's original peripheral canal plan.

Accordingly, a person's worldview inevitably determines how public servants and the nation as a whole utilize (or fail to utilize) their natural resources for the betterment of others. Therefore, what informs your worldview becomes most important. In light of this, notice what God says from the first chapter of His Book.

II. THE HIERARCHY OF GOD'S CREATIONAL ORDERING OF THE WORLD

Genesis 1:26–31 yields significant insights into the uniqueness of man that God has specified. Here God distinguishes mankind from the remainder of His creation. After creating the heavens, light, land, atmosphere, and the sea, God creates the fish, birds, and animals (Genesis 1:1–25). Subsequent to all that, He creates man. But notice an exclusive difference: God creates man unlike any other previously created creature: *in Our image, according to Our likeness...* states Genesis 1:26.²

This critically important exclusive difference places man in a distinctly different position from the remainder of the created order. Both of the Hebrew words, *image* (*tselem*) and *likeness* (*demuth*), carry the idea of man's being a reflection or a similitude of God's communicable attributes and characteristics—in the sense of intellect, emotion, will, and morality. No other created life has all of these distinctions. Therefore, man is unique: *You have put all things under his feet* states the Psalmist in 8:6.

The Hierarchy of God's Created Order



God has placed man in a superior position over the remainder of creation. This is fundamentally important because it forecasts God's intention: that the remainder of creation is to serve man. Notice the line of demarcation relative to the biblical order of creation.

Compare this understanding of creational hierarchy to other belief systems. For instance, in India, pantheism³ lies at the root of national beliefs. Accordingly, there is no line of demarcation in the created order, which means the rat has as much right to the corn in the cupboard as does the child. In California, where the religion of Radical Environmentalism reigns supreme, it means the fish has just as much right to the stream as does the dam builder. The pumping of water for people is curtailed if the delta smelt fish could be sucked into a turbine.

In God's eyes, man is the highest good; man reigns preeminent over all of creation—and yes, in reigning he does so with respect to the Creator of creation, to whom he must answer. Yes, he values the life of the smelt, but at the end of the day, the smelt doesn't rule his life; rather, he rules the smelt's life. The late Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer is right when he stated, "So the Bible tells me who I am. It tells me how I am differentiated from all other things. I do not need to be confused, therefore, between myself and animal life."⁴

The biblically informed public servant must
therefore order his thinking in light of
God's revealed hierarchy in creation.

In creating the world, God expects man to reign and steward His creation in ways that are pleasing unto Him. Lest there be any doubt about man's being the height of God's created order, the one in charge, the Psalmist adds in 115:16:

*The heavens are the heavens of the LORD,
but the earth He has given to the sons of men.*

III. THE HOUSEKEEPERS OF GOD'S CREATIONAL ORDERING OF THE WORLD

In God's hierarchy of creation, man is atop and is to rule over all of creation and subdue it (Genesis 1:26, 28). Notice these words: *rule* and *subdue*. They define how man is to operate in his preeminent role within creation.

Not only is he given the unique identity of being created in God's *image*, but he is also tasked with the charge to *rule* and *subdue*.

The Creator has appointed man
as the warden of His possession.

Man is to *fill the earth* (v. 28) and oversee its operation as a stewardship responsibility. Note that the word *subdue* does not carry with it a bulldozer mentality. When commenting on Genesis, Ian McHarg, one of the world's foremost landscape architects, said in summary of his thinking, "If ever there was justification for a bulldozer mentality, this verse is it." But what McHarg failed to see is the biblical context of the passage: mankind has inherent stewardship responsibilities before his Creator, as is borne by the very fact that this right of dominion is given before the Fall, which does not occur until Genesis chapter 3. Post-Fall, yes, man can and does sinfully alter his steward responsibilities if left unchecked (which is why evangelizing the lost is the most important discipline for achieving the ultimate stewardship of the planet). Unfortunately, McHarg elected to abandon the ideas of biblical *rule* and *subdue*, substituting and believing another religion, pantheism, was the best religion for planet stewardship.⁵

Inherent in making His pronouncement in Genesis 1:21 and 31 that all He created is *good*, God expected and continues to expect that mankind will not reconfigure or destroy that which He put him in charge of. Rather, states one leading Evangelical commentator regarding these passages, these words "speak of a productive ordering of the Earth and its inhabitants to yield its riches and accomplish God's purposes."

This foundational, biblically based way of thinking has accelerated America's quick and relatively sudden vault into world leadership. Rockefeller's innovation of the use of gasoline (a byproduct from the production of lamp oil), Carnegie's innovation of steel alloy from iron, Morgan's investment in the creation of electricity, the harnessing of water by Hoover Dam and its transportation by the Metropolitan Water District, and Mulholland's importation of the same from the Sierra Nevada: all gave birth to American innovation and the industrial revolution!

Here's the point: such ruling or subordination of natural resources was largely done by Christian men whose minds and actions were informed by Genesis 1! Such fundamental subjugation of natural resources then gave rise to efficient modern agriculture, energy production, transportation, architecture, and their likes. The current trend now, to move away from this biblical understanding, drastically challenges the American way of life, our world leadership in innovation, and our very quality of life.⁶

This is perhaps best illustrated by a classic interview with William Gould, the retired CEO of Southern California Edison and the father of the western power grid. Gould remarked about a 1984 summit meeting with environmental leaders in Salt Lake City and how the meeting went sideways. Bottom line, the environmentalist exclaimed that they had enough laws on the books to hinder the development of any new power plants. Gould went on to say how the development of the San Onofre Nuclear Power Plant was a nightmare due to continual public lawsuits. He remarked that SCE would never attempt another due to huge cost overruns coupled with the insecurity of ever being able to come on line. Subsequently, other power developers left the state for greener pastures. Therein was the seed-bed for the California electrical crisis—a shortage threat that still persists on hot summer days. Now years later, the radical environmentalists have succeeded in shutting down the world's most efficient way to produce electricity— and with technological advances, now one of the safest.

It's very plain to see that countries such as India, which possess similar natural resources but hold to dissimilar beliefs, experience incessant intractability. But such is the exact same road on which America finds herself due to her disregard and rejection of what God so clearly exclaims in Genesis!

To allow fish to govern the construction
of dams, endangered species to govern
power plants, flies to govern hospitals,
or kangaroo rats, homes is to miss the
clear proclamation of God in Genesis.

God calls all public servants and citizens to walk in the confidence of His hierarchy of creation with an understanding of our housekeeping responsibilities. For Americans to discount Genesis is for America to walk backward.

When the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California had the foresight to increase water storage to assure delivery during drought years, they spent over \$3 billion constructing the Diamond Valley Reservoir, which holds an additional 800-million-acre feet of water. As wise as stewardship responsibility was to insure water for 17 million people who live in Southern California, \$1 billion ended up having to be paid to fight and assuage the lawsuits of the radical environmentalists who managed to delay the project for ten years.⁷ In contrast, during more recent California drought years, the non-subduing radical environmentalists of Marin County have had to jerry-rig water pipes across the Richmond Bridge in order to keep their citizens from dying of thirst. That's what happens when endangered species *rule* over people.

The false religion of Radical
Environmentalism leads to human
poverty and cultural insolvency.

Beloved, this religion of environmentalism is not a very good religion on which to base a country! America's problems are not so much rooted in a lack of creativity, markets, or conveyance as much as they are in religious beliefs. Unlike the religion of environmentalism—the Christian religion's organizational chart relative to creation is not aberrant.

IV. THE HARVEST OF GOD'S CREATIONAL ORDERING OF THE WORLD

Continuing in the first chapter of Genesis, verses 29 and 30 specifically reveal that God's purpose in creating the world was for man's betterment

and enjoyment. More specifically, the plants, animals, birds, and every moving thing were created by God to be man's food. Without the aid of Scripture, a person might suppose that this is a greedy, self-centered way for man to view other living inhabitants sharing the planet. Certainly that would be the conclusion of those who reject the inspiration and authority of God's Word; it is easy to see how people could arrive at such conclusions apart from God's Word!

But God reassures man in verse 31 not only that His creation and hierarchy were very good but also that they were and are to serve as mankind's multivariate forms of food.

Man need not feel guilty because
his basis for bountiful living is
not arrogance; it is revelation!

Opposite the effacing anthropology of the radical environmentalist, Scripture unabashedly proclaims man's superiority over all else in the world. Again, Psalm 115:16 states, *But the earth He has given to the sons of men.* Further to the point, 1 Timothy 4:1–4 castigates those (and their religion) who fail to understand God's will on this matter and powerfully states:

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will...advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected....

V. SUMMARY

God is pleased when organic and inorganic substances, the lesser of creation, are utilized to benefit those uniquely created in His *image*. Conversely, He is greatly displeased when humans inappropriately exalt His creation and worship it at His expense. Romans 1:21–25 underscores this displeasure:

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God... Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures...For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator....

In a culminating crescendo of recurring biblical teaching, herein the worship of God's creation instead of God Himself is deemed as *foolishness*. God has harsh words for those who *profess to be wise* with biblically unenlightened ideology. My friend, don't be counted among these people. If you are, my friend, you need to come to Christ!

I see three conclusions very applicable to the life of a public servant as a result of this study:

A. GOD IS PRO-MANKIND

The God of the Bible is pro-mankind. Because He loves us and wants to bless us, He gave us a planet full of abundant natural resources! It is true that the Fall has made those natural resources more difficult to realize for our good, but nonetheless, He didn't remove them from us. The religion of Radical Environmentalism, on the other hand, is anti-mankind. All that the proponents have left in their twisted way of thinking, which is devoid of acknowledging, serving, and worshipping God, is the physical world around them in which they find themselves. As if to think they are on the moral high ground, their religion is bent on keeping man from that which God has intended for his betterment.

B. THERE IS GREAT POLITICAL VALUE IN HOLDING ONTO THE GENESIS UNDERSTANDING

There is much political value in holding to the Genesis order of creation. It is important to communicate through your actions and voting record that people are of greater importance and worth than anything else in your district—both animate and inanimate objects—because at the end of the day, only human beings are eligible to vote. (At least at this point in American history, fish can't vote). Stand for the betterment of common people versus

members of the “enlightened class” who deprive people of making a living and forging a better life.

C. DIRE DEMOGRAPHIC AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES ARE IN STORE FOR RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALISTS

Well worth noting are the demographic consequences of Radical Environmentalism. Those advocating this position tend to have had only one child, if that, in the last two decades. Accordingly:

What radical environmentalists have
committed is akin to ethnic suicide;
let's call it ideological suicide.

Those believing in the biblical truth of multiplying and filling the Earth have continued to have large families. Since the advent of Radical Environmentalism in America in the last two decades, it is estimated that the latter ideological affinity group has outperformed the former by six million children. Those six million children are just now reaching voting status. Said another way, young Americans raised with a Christian worldview will soon outnumber the children of radical environmentalists by at least six million voters in coming elections. Indeed, the scriptural truth that ***your sins will find you out*** will soon be realized across the country. Hopefully, the religion of Radical Environmentalism will soon be relegated to fringe minority status in American society. Amen.

1. Per statistics from the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.
2. The words “Us” and “Our” in this passage are indicative of the Trinitarian nature of God (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4).
3. Meaning God is in everything.
4. Schaeffer, Francis, *Genesis in Space and Time* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1972), 51.
5. McHarg, Ian L., *Design with Nature* (Garden City: New York, Doubleday/Natural History Press, 1971), 68.
6. *Insight Magazine*; Spring 2001.
7. When given the opportunity to store California Bay Area drinking water in a new proposed reservoir near Lake Shasta in the northern part of the state, so as to facilitate the deconstruction of the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir Dam in the Sierra Nevada, I find it interesting that radical environmentalists refuse the proposition because HHR water and power presently cost the Bay Area nothing! That observation is to say that when restoring the environment comes at a personal cost, they seem quick to jettison their ideology.

Is God Judging Nations Today?

Some leading Evangelicals believe and teach that America is now experiencing God's *judgment*. As a public servant who is sacrificing so much in your attempt to turn our *nation* around, it would stand to reason—if those Evangelical leaders are correct—you are wasting your time. Are you laboring against a foregone conclusion? I think not. But let me qualify that position: I do not believe America is experiencing the *forsaking wrath* of God, but yes, America is experiencing the *consequential wrath* of God.

In this study, I will explain what I mean by these italicized theological terms with which you should have a working familiarity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Before examining pertinent passages in answer to the question *Is God Judging America Today?* it is important to first understand God's attribute of *judgment* and the biblical forms wherein it manifests itself. The question can then be asked as to which forms of *judgment* apply to America.

II. UNDERSTANDING GOD'S JUDGMENT

Scripture is replete with the proclamation that God is characterized by holiness (Psalm 93:5), righteousness (Psalm 7:17), and perfection (Psalm 19:7) to list His specifically related attributes to the topic of this study. It follows that any violation of those qualities demands adjudication in a way similar to the summons of a human courtroom. The satisfaction of God's violated

justice is said to be His *judgment* or a manifestation of His wrath (cf. Deuteronomy 9:7). Predicated by the Fall, *God is angry with the wicked every day*, states Psalm 7:11 (KJV). Ephesians 5:6 states, *for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience*.

However, God's *judgment* is balanced—often placated—by His attribute of mercy. States Romans 9:15, (an Old Testament [OT] quote in this regard), *"I [God] WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."* Here's the point: in a chronological sense, when God's eternal justice is no longer eclipsed by His eternal mercy—that is to say, His attribute of mercy is expended—His *judgment* or wrath is necessarily manifest.

Since God is just and sin must and will be paid for, wrath—the righteousness of God revealed against sin—is an inevitable consequence.

Keep in mind that the study of God's attributes, the understanding of His forms of *judgment*, and the application of *judgment* to a *nation* or *nations* are complex theological issues that, to obtain a better understanding, require greater space and text, so I will be required to abbreviate much of what could be said.

God's *judgment* can be summarily categorized into five areas:

III. THE FIVE FORMS OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

The five forms of God's *judgment* repeatedly mentioned in the Bible are as follows:

1. Eternal Wrath: *Hell*
2. Eschatological Wrath: *The Day of the Lord*
3. Cataclysmic Wrath: *The Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah*
4. Forsaking Wrath: *Removing Restraint*
5. Consequential Wrath: *Sowing and Reaping*

In this study we will examine the last two forms of God's wrath to answer the posed question, "Is God Judging America Today?" My goal is to carefully evaluate each of these two specific forms of God's wrath in terms of a more thorough biblical understanding. In contrast to the need for an increased biblical understanding of the above two is cataclysmic wrath; it is not in need of biblical analysis to ascertain whether it is readily apparent in the world today.¹

IV. THE FIVE IDENTIFIERS OF NO. 4: FORSAKING WRATH

This fourth wrath is also referred to by theologians as “the wrath of abandonment.” In Romans 1:18–32, notice the following five identifying characteristics that surface when God pulls back and allows a person or a group of people to exercise the unrestrained fallen nature of man.

A vivid portrayal of *forsaking wrath*, of God’s giving someone over, is furnished in Hosea 4:17, *Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone*. Ephraim was the largest tribe of the ten northern tribes of Israel. You would think the prophet Hosea, in speaking for God, would have called them to repentance. He did not. Herein God was forsaking—which He does when sinners are determined to pursue *what was* [is] *right in* [their] *own eyes* (Judges 17:6). Another OT illustration is Psalm 81:11–12, wherein God speaks through the Psalmist:

*“But My people did not listen to My voice,
And Israel did not obey Me.
So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart,
To walk in their own devices.”*

A third illustration (now from the New Testament [NT]) in addition to Romans chapter 1², which follows, takes place when God the Father placed the sins of the world on the shoulders of His Son, so as to be a substitute for sinners. In remaining separated from sin, God the Father, in essence, abandoned His Son on the cross. Jesus replied accordingly, *“Why have You forsaken Me?”* (Mark 15:34; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Given those three similar subject illustrations, Romans 1:18 begins, *“For the wrath of God is revealed.”* This verse depicts the main subject of the passage that follows. Notice more specifically the thrice-repeated phrase through the end of the chapter: *God gave them over* (vv. 24, 26, 28). The phrase provides the skeletal structure for the outline that follows, serving to identify, evidence, and illustrate when *forsaking wrath*—the wrath of abandonment—is present. What follows then are biblical descriptors that serve to help us recognize when this kind of wrath is present.

A. A SUPPRESSING IN SELF (vv. 18–22)

This first identifying characteristic that the Apostle Paul lists is not preceded by the phrase *God gave them over* but is nonetheless part of the profile.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.

The first evidence of the presence of God's *forsaking wrath* is that people *suppress* (*katecho*), meaning "to hold back," that which they know is the *truth*. I am always amazed when people say, "I don't believe in God" or "I don't believe in the Bible." In a personal, loving refrain I am thinking, *Aren't they lying per this passage?* It is not that the unregenerate don't know there is a God and His Word—it is that they *suppress* these *truths* (cf. Romans 2:15). There is a big difference! In the OT, David declared, *The fool has said [lied] in his heart, "There is no God"* (Psalm 14:1). The simple reason for this suppression is summarized by Jesus in the NT: "*men loved the darkness rather than the Light*" (John 3:19).

Further down in this section (v. 21) of the Romans 1 passage, suppressors *became futile in their speculations* (*dialogismo*). *Speculations* is perhaps better translated into the English understanding of "argumentation or reasoning."³ The Greek sentence structure here carries the idea of the vanity that results from godless reasoning. Accordingly, *professing to be wise they became fools* (*moraino*). Figuring out the meaning of *moraino* is not difficult given its English transliteration: *moron*). In summary, *forsaking wrath* is evidenced when a person or people *suppress the truth*, which means their subsequent engagement ends in *futile* dialogue and reasoning. Such communications are moronic or roughly equivalent to an intellectual level of a 7- to a 12-year-old.⁴ A current illustration of *moraino* would be members who admit they have never viewed the videos that exposed the atrocities of Planned Parenthood but then exclaim in another interview that all the videos were fabricated. Such is futile logic. Herein illustrated is the *suppression of truth* within an individual.

The next recognizable characteristic of God's *forsaking wrath* is as follows:

B. A SWAPPING FOR ENVIRONMENTALISM (vv. 23-25)

And exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Man is created in the image of God, whereas the remainder of the created order is not (Genesis 1:26). Therefore, mankind is separate, special, and superior as it relates to all God has made. It explicitly follows from Genesis 1:26 that mankind is not equal or subservient to all that God has created; conversely, *man* has preeminence over creation and the environment. Properly understood, God has appointed *man* to be His steward over the earth.

Clearly indicative of God's *forsaking wrath* is the instance where the abandoned *serve the creature rather than the Creator*. See my previous studies on the religion of environmentalism at capmin.org/biblestudies that detail this aberration. Notice the next indicator:

C. A SENSATION TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY (vv. 26-27)

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

Indicative of *forsaking wrath* is a proclivity toward lesbianism and homosexuality.

D. A SECURING OF DEPRAVITY (vv. 28-31)

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God,

insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful.

In this next portion of the passage, Scripture indicates the direct result—that which is secured—is a *depraved mind*. When restraint is absent, this is what *God gives people over to*. Notice what this passage teaches: the things that are *not proper* stem from and are a result of *depraved minds* (*adokimos*), which means, “not standing the test.” *Adokimos* was a term referring to metals that did not stand the test due to impurities. Under close examination, these metals lacked internal fortitude or integrity. Since these metals were rejected, *adokimos* came to mean “that which is worthless and useless.”

It’s not as if *depraved minds* do not know what’s right to do. Later, in chapter two of Romans, the Holy Spirit reiterates the principles of this lesson’s first point: *they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them* (2:15). Men and women inherently know what is right or wrong. A good understanding of the flow of this passage and what depravity means is summarized by this thought: the mind that finds God worthless becomes worthless itself.

That worthless mind is debauched, deceived, and deserving only of God’s wrath. Lastly, in regard to evidences of God’s abandonment in the life of a person, is this:

E. A SANCTIONING IN OTHERS (v. 32)

And although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Here is the last of the five characteristics. When God is pulling back His restraint, those who practice the aforementioned degradation approve of others who do likewise, i.e., *but also give hearty approval to those who practice them*.

These five characteristics provide the mature-in-Christ Christian public servant with enormous insights and discernment in order to wisely identify the presence of *forsaking wrath* in those around him.

V. IDENTIFYING WRATH NO. 5: CONSEQUENTIAL WRATH

Consequential wrath is best understood through the parallel idea we commonly refer to as sowing and reaping. Galatians 6:7 states, ***Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.*** To illustrate in one of many possible ways, if a person or a *nation* sows debt, that person or *nation* will reap in due time the results of financial crisis. Whenever an individual or corporate group of individuals violate the inviolate precepts of God's Word, he, she, they or the institution will suffer the respective consequences. Most assuredly, America is facing this form of God's *judgment*.

Let us backtrack now and answer the question whether America is experiencing the *forsaking wrath* of God. Unlike the ease of answering the question of the existence of *consequential wrath*, ascertaining the possible existence of *forsaking wrath* requires a much more complex biblical analysis.

What follows are six reasons why I personally do not believe America *as a national entity* is presently subject to the *forsaking wrath* of God.

VI. SIX BIBLICAL REASONS WHY AMERICA IS NOT EXPERIENCING GOD'S FORSAKING WRATH

A. ROMANS CHAPTER ONE DOES NOT ADDRESS NATIONS

As previously seen, Paul warns of God's *judgment* (Romans 1:18–32), and he declares that those who persist in sin will be given over to its tyranny and that God will forsake and remove restraining grace if they fail to repent. *But notice that no mention of nations is made in the passage.* Some leading Evangelicals have suggested that this chapter refers to *nations* and the *judgment* they will receive in this age. Such, however, must be read into the passage.

Romans 1 addresses the topic of divine abandonment but says nothing about God's forsaking *nations*. Paul warned only of the ensuing *judgment* that individual unbelievers ("they, themselves" are plural pronouns referring to multiple individuals and not to a group) would incur during their life on earth. Twenty-one plural pronouns are used in these verses, and all of them refer to individuals. Romans 1:18 specifically says that God's wrath is being directed *against men*; it does not say national entities. Paul speaks of the *futile* minds and *foolish* hearts of men in verse 21, descriptions only

applicable, contextually, to individuals. Chapter 2 continues by addressing individuals as well (2:5, 6, 9).

Summarily, it is evident that God does judge unbelievers via the form of *forsaking wrath* during the Church Age. However, Romans 1 should not be entreated to suggest God judges wayward *nations* via this form of wrath. This passage provides no biblical support to warrant that position.

B. GOD'S PRIORITY IS TO JUDGE THE CHURCH, NOT THE STATE

Peter declares in 1 Peter 4:17 that during the Church Age, God's *judgment* is primarily purposed for the maturation of believers.

For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

God's present manifestation of *judgment* will *begin with us first* or before it is dealt to *those who do not obey the gospel*. *Begin* (*archastai*) could be translated as "commence." It is chronological in nature though also implying a sense of importance and priority.⁵ Thus, Peter is teaching that in this *time* or age, God's *judgment* will focus upon *the household of God*, i.e., His Church.⁶ God's intentions are to purify His called-out ones and present them to His Son before He judges individuals (cf. Revelation 20:11–15: i.e., the Great White Throne Judgment) in a future *time* after the Church Age. Again, no mention is made of God's intention to judge *nations*. The insight of 1 Peter 4:17 and many other passages indicates God has eternal plans for His Church; the longevity, destiny, and importance of the State wanes in comparison.

No passages state that *nations* are being judged by God during this period of *time* in which we live. God has judged *nations* in the past (the old covenant) and will do so again in the future (during the future tribulation period spoken of in the book of Revelation).

C. THE SANCTIFICATION OF HIS CHURCH IS HIS FOCUS

Closely related to the previous point, God is preparing the Church to be the bride of Christ for all eternity. The State, however, has little to do with God's eternal kingdom and will be done away with in the future (cf.

Acts 17:26). Importantly, God designed *nations* and their governments to be instruments of His restraining grace in a fallen world (cf. Genesis 11:6; 1 Peter 2:14). When Christ returns and reigns, the *time* will have come when they will no longer be necessary. Properly understood and borne from Scripture is the understanding that the Church is eternal and the State is temporal. Consider 2 Corinthians 11:2 and notice the emphasis:

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.

Paul desired to see the Corinthian believers grow unto maturity, using the similitude of a marriage to illustrate. He longed to see them become a pure bride presentable to Christ. The same desire for the Church can be seen in Ephesians 5:27; here it is a reference to God's desire for His Church.

That He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

Colossians 1:28 provides insight on Paul's reason for teaching and is fitting with the aforementioned passages: ***So that we may present every man complete in Christ.*** Further, Ephesians 1:4 explains God's big vision for choosing believers: so they would be ***holy and blameless before Him.***

These passages emphasize God's big purpose: the sanctification of His Church. Again, the reason is to purify a bride for Christ. The book of Revelation foreshadows the day when this purification will be complete. In Revelation 19:7, a multitude of voices erupt with praise:

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

These select passages (a few of many) unfold the splendor and majesty of God's overarching focus and purpose during the Church Age. Notice the following contrast:

In the New Testament era,
the institution of the State is not
associated with God's *forsaking wrath*.

Acts 17:26 is one of the few NT passages on the subject. It states that God *made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.*

This passage does not mention *forsaking wrath*. *Nations* and governments are temporal entities serving God's eternal purposes, under His sovereign eye and as He deems fit. Often in history, God's purpose for *nations* has been to judge and thereby mature the Church via the conduit of persecution. Thus, we learn, if by no other method than the sheer weight of passages in the NT, that *nations* are peripheral and the Church is central during the present age.

D. EXHAUSTIVE NT WORD STUDIES DO NOT SUPPORT GOD'S JUDGING NATIONS TODAY

Again, God judged *nations* under the old covenant and will do so again at His Second Coming, but there is no NT indication that He judges *nations* presently during the Church Age.⁷ Furthermore, OT references to future national *judgments* refer still to the future, not this age, in part because the Church was a mystery in the OT (cf. Ephesians 3:5, 6). This means future *judgments* mentioned in the OT could not have applied to the present Church Age. Illustratively, the OT prophecies of Joel 3:2 along with Zechariah 12:1–9 are prophecies about national *judgments* that will take place during Armageddon in the future (cf. Revelation 16:16, 19:11–12, 15). Revelation 19:15 says that after the Second Coming, Jesus will *strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron*. Consider the following exhaustive lexical support from the New Testament:

1. The Greek word for judge

Judge (*krino*) or a derivative is used 182 times in the New Testament. In no instance do these words refer to judging *nations* in the Church Age.⁸

2. The Greek word for nations

Nations (*ethnos*) is never used in the New Testament in the context of *judgment*. With 168 occurrences, this background is particularly interesting and insightful.

3. The Greek word for repentance

Repentance (*metanoia*) is never used to speak of *nations*. In other words, no *nation* during the Church Age is ever called to repent—whereas individuals are.⁹

E. THE NEW TESTAMENT DOES NOT THREATEN JUDGMENT AS A CONSEQUENCE FOR NATIONAL SINS

If God judges *nations* during the Church Age, why did the NT writers fail to mention it? Specifically and illustratively, would it not have been appropriate for Christ to caution Pilate or Paul to warn Caesar of impending national *judgment*? If neither Christ nor Paul warned these political leaders, it is odd that nothing of the sort has been recorded by the Holy Spirit Who inspired the writers of Scripture.

Furthermore, Paul used very little if any ink on the end of his quill to discuss the morality of the Roman Empire. If God judges *nations* today, surely Paul would have implored the Empire to reverse directions if indeed divine *judgment* was around the corner. His accounts during his imprisonment in Caesar's household (cf. Philippians) are void of "Caesarian moralisms" but rich in terms of evangelization (cf. 4:22). Even when writing to Philemon (in the book by that name), a slave owner, Paul never said anything regarding the evils of national slavery; he provides no hints that it would provoke the *judgment* of God upon Rome. Would not a warning have been in order? The NT is devoid of threatening political leaders with the hammer of God's national *judgment* by Christ or the apostles. They did not model a ministry of national damnation nor suggest such for other believers after them.

Poignantly, John the Baptist rebuked the person of Herod, not the *nation* of Rome (cf. Mark 6:17–18). This insight should prove sobering, informative, and instructive for Christian public servants.

F. REVELATION CHAPTERS TWO AND THREE RELATE TO THE CHURCH AND NOT THE STATE¹⁰

The book of Revelation demonstrates God's concern for the Church. Seven churches are mentioned in chapters two and three. To those lacking

God's approval, Christ threatened to remove their lampstand unless they repented. Once again, the focus is on purifying the Church.

Interestingly enough, these chapters are void of mentioning the sins of any particular city or state. If God is set on judging *nations* during the Church Age, we would expect warnings to repent, like God's warning to Sodom and Gomorrah. No warning is given to the cities of the seven churches.

This additional evidence serves to reveal that God is more concerned about preparing a spotless eternal bride than He is with judging temporal *nations*.

VII. CONCLUSION

America is not like Sodom and Gomorrah in the sense that not any faithful were to be found (cf. Genesis 18:22–33). In fact, to the contrary, America today is populated by tens of millions of faithful followers of Christ!

Many are those who have glibly postured, "If God does not *judge* America, then He owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology!" But such thinking fails to consider what went on between Abraham and God in Genesis 18:22–33 before He judged Sodom and Gomorrah! To the contrary, I believe the following is a more biblically accurate summary:

Abraham, if he were to plead with God for America, would have a much stronger case than he did pleading with God for Sodom and Gomorrah.

In fact, by and large, today's America is not characterized by people who are unfaithful to God's precepts. Conversely, only a small minority of individuals are grossly disobedient to God—individuals to whom the five indicators of Romans 1 apply. Unfortunately, for the vast majority of faithful individuals in America, too many of the unfaithful have been allowed by the faithful to gain high positions of influence in our culture: in our government, our educational system, our media, and our entertainment industry. This condition is tragic, unfortunate, and costly.

Those individuals who are rebuked by God's forsaking wrath are largely responsible for God's consequential wrath on our *nation*.

Beloved, that condition needs to change—and it is something we can change with God's help! What is a great encouragement to me, ministering here in our *nation's* Capitol, is witnessing the groundswell of faithful individuals who have been voted into office. If my calculations are correct, and I believe they are, more believers are in Congress and the executive branch

now than at any other time in modern American history! And they are beginning to reach a tipping point!

I think great days lie ahead for our country as more and more Evangelicals rise in their influence—you godly public servants who are working so hard to deliver us from the consequential wrath we are undergoing as a *nation*, due in large part to the misdirection of those who are rebuked by God's forsaking wrath. Proverbs 29:2 is an apt summary:

When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when a wicked man rules, people groan.

This study is by no means an exhaustive biblical argument on this subject. To believe that God is judging America via consequential wrath is reasonable, but for the aforesaid reasons, a biblical basis does not exist to conclude that any *nation* today, including America, is experiencing forsaking wrath. Still the five identifiers of Romans 1 seem to describe our present culture and some of the individuals therein.

This conclusion should greatly encourage those who serve and lead in America. There is hope! It's not as if in your attempts to rebuild America you are going against the will of God—in the sense that you are hanging in, and He isn't.

Beloved, the ball is still in our court; let us not lose heart in doing well! States 2 Corinthians 4:16, ***Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.*** May we work industriously at our own spiritual maturation, convert the lost who presently hold office, and continue to elect new, mature believers to sow godly policies that will manifest God's consequential blessing for all for years to come!

1. If God is sovereign over the affairs of mankind today, which the Scriptures state He is, and a cataclysmic event occurs somewhere in or over all the earth at any time in biblical history, we could and should attribute that cataclysmic event to the wrath of God in some form and to some degree. Accordingly, the coronavirus could be a form of God's cataclysmic wrath. But having said that, I don't think we should label the coronavirus as a form of God's cataclysmic wrath, such as the form of wrath He manifests in the OT with the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, or the "unparting" of the Red Sea, because that form of God's wrath is void of a human curative, and I think we'll soon see a human cure for the coronavirus.
2. I am not discounting the measurability of historical patterning of a nation's catastrophes as an indicator of wrath; simply that such is outside the scope of this Bible study.
3. *Bibleworks* 5.0.
4. *Merriam-Webster*, in defining what a *moron* is, states that one has the mental equivalency of a 7- to 12-year-old.
5. Lothar Coenen, Erick Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, eds., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, trans. and ed. by Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 165.
6. Literally, in the Greek, "of the house of God" is a common synonym used throughout the New Testament for the Church (cf. Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:6).
7. Some will disagree at this point, arguing that if the Church today is the Israel of yesterday, then what God said and did through Israel in the OT is applicable and transferable to the Church today. I do not believe, however, that the Church today is the same biblical entity as Israel in the OT. I find this position extremely difficult to hold, not only exegetically but pragmatically. I cannot imagine trying to defend all of what was true of Israel (including the fact that it was a theocracy; the stoning of homosexuals, etc.) in the Capitol of America today. This view also opens the door to Dominion Theology/Theonomy in terms of a Postmillennial eschatology: i.e., I don't think believers are called to make America into a Christianized theocracy.
8. Stephen's statement in Acts 7:7 regarding the judgment of nations is a quotation from the Old Testament. He was reciting Israel's history. In several instances Jesus speaks of judging cities like Chorazin or Bethsaida (cf. Matthew 11:21–24; Luke 10:13–14). The main subject, however, in each passage is illustrating the Great White Throne Judgment. Each foreshadows the future Great White Throne Judgment (cf. Revelation 20:11–15), which is explicitly directed toward individuals not nations. This judgment will take place after the Church Age.
9. When Jesus called the disciples to proclaim repentance to the nations in Luke 24:47, it is clear from the parallel passage and context of Matthew 28:18–20 that nations refer to all the individuals within a nation.
10. Note the analogy of Scripture here: Revelation chapter two and three are illustrative of 1 Peter 4:17.

Does Real Change Begin with the Left or the Right?

Real change does not begin with the left. Real change does not begin with the right. Real change does not begin from the top down. Real change does not begin from the bottom up. Real change begins from the inside out.

Real change in society is a result of real change in individuals, and real change in individuals occurs when they repent from sin and cry out for the Lord Jesus Christ. That being the case, I invite you to refresh your understanding and conviction about how a person can most effectively change a nation. Falling into the trap of thinking that politics is the source of ultimate cultural change is all too easy. As important as elections are, the believer should not forget what the Scriptures say about this subject.

What follows are the three most important priorities—per the Bible—for you to practice in order to effectively change a nation.

I. INTRODUCTION

If believers are God's agents of cultural change, then what must characterize believers—and especially believers holding public office—for God to use them powerfully and demonstrably to transform a nation?

Scripture reveals at least three specific criteria that must be evident in God's people for them to effectuate real, positive change. I think you will be intrigued, and you yourself might be changed by what follows in this study.

II. A NATION IS CHANGED IN PROPORTION TO THE BELIEVER'S FUNCTIONALITY

The Scriptures repeatedly make a connection between the functionality (behavior) of the believer and the conversion of the sinner.

A. ILLUSTRATED BY THE APOSTLE PETER

Notice this connection in 1 Peter 2:9–12:

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD'S OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are the PEOPLE OF GOD; YOU HAD NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

In this passage, there is a direct connection between the behavior of the believer and the conversion of the *Gentiles*. If the believer's lifestyle is *excellent*, i.e., commensurate with godliness, the unregenerate will take note and be influenced positively for Christ. This correlation is evidenced by Peter's use of the term *day of visitation*, which is a reference or synonym to redemption in the New Testament (NT) (cf. Luke 1:68; 7:16; 19:44). Contextually, what Peter is stating in this passage is that when the grace of God stirs the heart of an unbeliever, he will respond to God's saving faith and *glorify God in the day of visitation* in proportion to the credibility of the testimonies he has observed. Believers need to function like Christ to influence unbelievers. If our actions are truly good, they will foster credibility, having created a platform, basis, and *ethos* for changing the world from the inside out.

The words *good deeds* codify Peter's emphasis regarding the critically important aspect of obtaining and maintaining the credibility of one's testimony in ancient days. Followers of Christ were often slandered. States one commentator in this regard:

The early Christians were falsely accused of rebellion against the government with such false accusations as terrorism (burning Rome), atheism (no idols or emperor worship), cannibalism (rumors about the Lord's Supper), immorality (because of their love for one another), damaging trade and social progress, and leading slaves into insurrection.¹

Today is not very different. The routine maligning of believers by the secular media, tares in the Church, and other negative situations have been my personal experience. I know deprecation has happened to many of you who are part of the Members Bible Study as well. So what is Peter's solution per his epistle? What is the biblical remedy to offset routine defamation?

Your genuine **good deeds** are
the overriding measuring factor
whereby others ascertain your
trustworthiness and credibility.

B. ILLUSTRATED BY JESUS

The relationship between **good deeds** and credibility runs the length of Scripture. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:13–16), Jesus Himself makes this clear association:

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (vv. 14–16).

What Peter labeled **good deeds**, Jesus labels **good works** in relation to achieving and maintaining personal credibility. In this passage, Jesus states the idea of others' ensuing conversion via the synonym for **good works**, **glorify[ing] your Father who is in heaven**. Again, the relationship between the believer's **good deeds** or **good works** and the sinner's conversion is on display.

Functioning in holiness either buoys or breaks believability.

As a person who desires real change on the Hill and in the nation, the function of *good works* in your life is critically important and necessary to achieve and maintain effective outreach in the tightly knit U.S. Capitol. What are you doing in this regard? What follows are some additional illustrations of the correlation between *good works* and credibility.

C. ILLUSTRATED BY THE APOSTLE PAUL

Instructing Timothy (1 Timothy 5:14) in what he should teach widows in the Church, Paul says, *Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach.* Here again is this same correlation. Later in the same letter (6:1), he informs Timothy as to how he should instruct those who were converted slaves in Roman culture.

All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against.

In Titus 2:5 the theme surfaces regarding how Titus should pastor women. Paul tells Titus to instruct older women to set good examples in their behavior so they in turn can urge younger women *to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.* How believers function in various settings determines the credibility of their witness.

D. ILLUSTRATED BY THE APOSTLE JAMES

James underscores this same correlation and adds a vital additional element to the discussion: that *good deeds* or accompanying *good works* are always normative of true saving faith. He states in James 2:17 that faith, without accompanying *good works*, is illegitimate faith (my paraphrase).

If a believer habitually exhibits a lack of *good deeds* or lacks a desire to do good to his fellow man, then he should question if he is truly saved. The

genuinely saved individual will desire to do *good works* or *good deeds*—the standard operating procedure of those who are genuinely saved.

E. THE OPPOSITE ILLUSTRATED

In the Old Testament (OT), the converse of this principle is illustrated in real-life examples.

1. David

The prophet Nathan rebuked King David in 2 Samuel 12:14 concerning his sin of adultery (behavior). *“However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.”* King David’s bad deeds were cause for blasphemous behavior in unbelievers. *Blasphemy* (*blasphemia*) means “railing.” In the Scriptures, the word is confined to speech defamatory of the Divine Majesty, i.e., evil speaking, calumniating, and contumelious rhetoric toward God. *Blasphemy* is characterized by contempt for God or of sacred things.

2. The Nation Israel

In Ezekiel 20:39, 41, the prophet declares in abandoning tones, *“As for you, O house of Israel,” thus says the Lord God, “Go, serve everyone his idols; but later you will surely listen to Me, and My holy name you will profane no longer with your gifts and with your idols ... and I will prove Myself holy among you in the sight of the nations.”*

Israel’s idolatry had made the nation a poor witness. But in the eschatological future sense of this passage, God will regather Israel in the end times, and she will be an effective holy witness of Him and for Him to the remainder of the world. Whereas *good deeds* lead to conversion, bad deeds lead to *blasphemy*.

Does your behavior evoke belief or
blasphemy in the heart of the unbeliever?

F. SUMMARY

The degree to which the believer concerns himself with the determinate program of God as revealed in the Scriptures, the person of Jesus Christ, and the indwelling Holy Spirit is the degree to which God will use that believer for His purposes. Changing a nation has less to do with political involvement than it does with living a life in day-to-day functional obedience to Christ. Whereas politics reflects a culture, obedience to Jesus revolutionizes a nation. The bedrock of real change is the transformation of hearts from the inside out.

III. A NATION IS CHANGED IN PROPORTION TO THE BELIEVER'S FAITHFULNESS

Matthew 25:14–30 records Jesus' Parable of the Talents. In this analogy, a master gives each of his three servants a sum of money (talents) to invest. To the two who were faithful and made a return on their master's investment, the master exclaimed in verse 21:

"Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things."

This parable provides a keen insight into how we can expand our influence or, better, what criteria God uses in deciding whether to expand our influence.

Note that the two servants who were diligent to make the most out of their opportunities were deemed faithful in comparison to the one who did nothing with the gifts God had given him. The principle of the parable is that all who are faithful with what God assigns to them—even the smallest of things—will be rewarded with greater, increasingly influential opportunities and assignments.

If you are faithful with what God initially gives you to accomplish, He will add responsibilities to your job description, just like a good boss does in the business world. If you want to change a nation, begin by being faithful to your present calling. Remember this biblical principle: "If you are faithful with a few things, He will put you in charge of many." In contrast, many are those who are looking for the once-in-a-lifetime home run at the expense of doing things God's way—hitting singles every day. Work daily on your discipline of personal diligence.

To change a nation, you must
be faithful to do your part.

Be diligent to accomplish
with excellence what God
has assigned you to do.

As a result, He promises to expand your horizons over *time* and eternally change lives via yours. If every believer prioritized being faithful with the small things, their increased influence would begin to change the culture in short order.

A nation is changed in proportion to the behavior and faithfulness of believers. One more aspect of the biblical formula for real change is as follows:

IV. A NATION IS CHANGED IN PROPORTION TO THE BELIEVER'S FOCUS

Believers who manifest actions commensurate with their testimony in Christ, who are also faithful and blessed with increasing influence as a result, need to be intently focused on God's specific purpose(s) for their specific life in order to effectuate real change. Ephesians 5:15–17 states:

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

The will of the Lord for our lives is already revealed in Scripture. For instance, Scripture tells us that God wants everyone to repent and trust in Christ for salvation. God's will is that everyone follow His precepts. God's revealed will is that everyone glorify Him. Living and not understanding *the will of the Lord* is foolish.

In addition, knowing God's specific, personalized will for your life is in view here. *Foolishness* is also identified in this passage with the misuse of your *time* because of not knowing specifically what God wants you to accomplish. I can only *make the most of* [my] *time* by understanding what

the personal *will of the Lord is* for my life. What then is God's specific purpose or calling for your life as a public servant?

You had best figure it out!

Common congressional wisdom suggests that every member who ends up making a mark on America has focused specifically on one or two areas of policy related to his or her personal passions. What is the passion of your heart as you walk in close proximity to Christ? While in office, what is He specifically calling you to focus on?

Starting with seemingly nothing,
a magnifying glass can light a
fire! But effecting such a purpose
requires a steady hand.

What is the specific area of policy, concern, discipline, or task that God wants you to nurture and conform to His ways in the days and years ahead? How long did it take William Wilberforce to overturn slavery in the British Empire? How steady is your hand?

V. SUMMARY

The believer who would really change the world must be **functional** in good deeds, **faithful** with the small things, and **focused** on the use of his or her *time* with a view toward God's purposes and priorities. Can that be said of you?

1. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (NASB): Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time, 2nd Ed. (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2020), 1681.

God's View on Babies— Inside and Outside the Womb

Over the course of just a few years, the public abortion debate has gone from arguments over when life begins to lawmakers proposing legislation that allows a baby to be killed after birth.

A great public outcry resulted after it became known that Virginia Delegate Kathy Tran proposed a bill on January 9, 2019, that would allow a woman to receive an abortion at full-term and even while in labor.¹

In explaining to a reporter how Del. Tran's new liberal abortion law would function, then-Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, a former pediatric neurologist, disclosed in a recorded and broadcast interview: "If a mother is in labor, I can tell you exactly what would happen. The infant would be delivered, the infant would be kept comfortable, the infant would be resuscitated, if that is what the mother and the family desired, and then a discussion would ensue between the physicians and the mother."²

In other words, infanticide.

Stunningly, the day Del. Tran proposed a bill that would allow a live baby to be killed or left to die, she offered a bill to protect the lives of moths.³

Tran's abortion bill died in committee, but many states have passed or are considering legislation that essentially removes all penalties and restrictions and allows abortions through the end of the third trimester up to birth.

The most glaring example occurred on the forty-sixth anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion. On

January 22, 2019, the New York legislature passed a bill that allows abortions into the third trimester and even during labor. When the bill was passed into law, legislators stood up and cheered, and to celebrate, then-New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo lit up the One World Trade Center and other landmarks in pink, which, until then, had been a symbol of the celebration of life, i.e., a woman's beating breast cancer.⁴

Yet another illustration is New Mexico's new law that allows abortions through all nine months of pregnancy. The law also removes conscience protections for pro-life medical workers who do not want to participate in abortions and eliminates criminal penalties for anyone who kills a woman while providing an abortion. A clinic in Albuquerque is one of only a few independent facilities in the country that perform abortions close to the third trimester without conditions.⁵

"New Mexico is one of seven states that do not have a gestational limit for abortion, though partial-birth abortions are illegal in the state. As a result, Albuquerque, the state's largest city, is often referred to as the 'late-term abortion capital of the world.'"⁶

In Massachusetts, 16-year-old girls cannot legally vote or buy an alcoholic drink, but a new law passed in 2020 allows them to have abortions upon demand without the consent of their parents. "With this law, Massachusetts becomes the first state ever to legislatively remove a parental consent requirement as unnecessary," an article in *Ms.* magazine gushed.⁷ "Similar efforts to repeal parental consent laws are underway in Illinois, Virginia, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The law also makes it easier for women to obtain an abortion after 24 weeks of pregnancy to 'preserve' their physical or mental health."⁸

Pro-life advocates call Vermont's new statute the most radical abortion law in the world with no limitations.⁹ The Vermont law even stipulates that a "fertilized egg, embryo, or fetus" has no independent rights. Experts warn that legislation opens the door to gruesome fetal experimentation.¹⁰ Wanting to further protect access to abortions, the Vermont General Assembly introduced Proposal 5, an amendment to the state's constitution that would ensure abortion on demand remains legal in Vermont throughout all nine months of pregnancy should *Roe v. Wade* be overturned (as it indeed was in June of 2022). The amendment passed the Senate and was approved by the House in early 2022. Vermonters adopted the amendment with over 75% of voters approving it in the November 2022 election.¹¹

And on the national scene, protections for our most vulnerable citizens took a heavy blow on February 25, 2019, when pro-abortion U.S. senators blocked the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act. The bill would have forced doctors to provide medical care to a baby born alive in a failed abortion.¹²

Some clarity is in order. Legislators and judges alike need to understand when life begins from a biblical perspective—a truth that is written on the heart of every human being (cf. Romans 2:15).

Here, then, is the case from the Scriptures relative to life's beginning at conception and the surrounding case for governmental enforcement of that clear and consistent propositional truth in the Word of God.

I. INTRODUCTION

Every public servant needs to know and ponder in his or her conscience the scriptural case for the Pro-Life position.

But before going there, it is important to clarify that I intend a compassionate, pastoral tone. Many who read these studies do not attend the in-person Bible studies I teach to national political leaders in Washington, D.C., nearly every week and are unfamiliar with my teaching style, so I am concerned that my tone may be misunderstood. I realize the abortion issue is a volatile subject in our culture today; it is an emotive matter, to say the least. And, in fact, in our sexually permissive society, millions of men have gotten women pregnant out of wedlock, and abortion has been the most convenient solution.

Abortion has personally affected the lives of millions, but as I write this Bible study, another whole side to this subject is not readily apparent in the following exegetical treatise: the God Who is Pro-Life offers abundant grace and forgiveness at the foot of the cross to those who have personally been involved in this matter. God the Father is loving and all-knowing, and He offers a restart—a cleansing for those who come to Him in contriteness of heart and seek His redemption. God loves you, He is gentle, and He is willing to help you put the past behind. As the hymn writer put it, “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” Again, I believe these biblical truths are just as important to contemplate before we study what follows.

Another preliminary comment is in order before diving in. This week's study is meant to be a resource for use not only in our personal lives and the

formation of biblically based personal understanding and convictions, but also as reference material when the opportunity arises to speak publicly to this very important matter. In this latter sense, I am reminded of what the Apostle Paul said to his understudy Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2: *The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*

Many theological liberals—Scripture twisters—would like you to believe that the Word of God is ambiguous and unclear about the subject of when life begins, but such is not the case at all. What follows is a logical outline as to why every citizen, public servant, and civil government needs to form and underscore personal convictions, lobby for, pass, and enforce laws that are consistent with life's beginning at conception. Therein is the singular, repetitious proposition of the Word of God and of this study. I trust and pray that the following simple outline will aid in the biblical and rational understanding of this premise. Summarily, the following is the proposition of this study:

To the contrary of what abortion
advocates proffer, God's Word
is unambiguous, immutable, and
perspicuous when it comes to His view
on babies—inside and outside the womb.

II. MAN IS MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

The Pro-Life argument begins with *Imago Dei* (lit. “Image of God”), which is the theological doctrine asserting the inherent value of all mankind being created in the image of God: inherent value, independent of utility or function. The Pro-Life position is rooted in this concept. Why? If life has no intrinsic value, then why is it worth protecting? Is man's value equal to that of a dairy cow, which is primarily sustained to serve an economic, utilitarian function to others in society?

In the whole of God's creation, man is differentiated and stands pre-eminent; only man was made in His image and is able to embody His

communicable attributes. All other animate and inanimate objects are of a lesser created order as seen in Genesis 1:26:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Unlike the remainder of creation, man possesses the ability to reason; he has intellect, emotion, and will. He possesses morality; prior to the Fall, he was always good and sinless. Note also from this passage that man is appointed to be God's representative over all else. He is to be the custodian, the steward of God's creation (cf. Genesis 9:1–2). Man is, therefore, definitively created to be above the remainder of creation, possessing unique and wonderful value from and for God Himself. This same biblical truth informed Thomas Jefferson's penning of "inalienable rights" in the Declaration of Independence—the idea that certain God-given rights cannot and must not be revoked by any outside force. Jefferson put it this way: all men are "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights" including "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Mankind, in turn, is commanded to reciprocate by loving God and his fellow man. Mark 12:31 states the second of the two great commands:

The second is this, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." There is no other commandment greater than these.

It follows that those created by a loving God in His image will love and protect others created in His image, be they believers or not. All men, no matter their race or age, are our *neighbors*, and we are to *love them as ourselves*. We are to do this based on the revealed will of God in His Word, the Bible; we are to do this on the basis of creation. We are to love even those who are in a state of rebellion toward God, for all men regardless of redemption have value because they are made in the image of God. Therefore, all are to be loved—even at great cost. This is, of course, the whole point of Jesus' story of the Samaritan: because a man is a man, he is to be loved at all costs¹³ (cf. Luke 10:25–37).

All human beings possess inalienable worthiness imbued by their Creator, implying that no one can stand between a human being and his Maker in the sense of annihilation. Only God gives mankind life, and only God can take it away. To understand this premise differently in any way is

to make man the final determiner of human life; to understand this premise differently in any way is to open the door, not only to abortion, but to infanticide and euthanasia.

In summary, *Imago Dei* is a biblically rooted theological doctrine that asserts the inherent value of mankind—the sanctity of human life—independent of and preeminent to utility or function. *Imago Dei* is therefore the fundamental and irreplaceable premise to building a case to protect human life.¹⁴

III. LIFE BEGINS AT CONCEPTION

A number of common-sense arguments for life beginning at conception include, “There is no other time for life to begin except at conception,”¹⁵ and “The benefit of the doubt as to when life begins should always inure to the side of life,”¹⁶ and the vast, ever-increasing scientific compendium of evidence¹⁷ (which is beyond the scope of this Bible study per se). In addition to those reasons, a strong, consistent, incontrovertible exegetical argument from the Word of God exists, which follows.

A. PSALM 139:13

*For You formed my inward parts;
You wove me in my mother’s womb.*

David ascribes personhood to himself while in his *mother’s womb*. The Hebrew word for *inward parts*, *kilyah*, refers to the “innermost parts” of a person and is used elsewhere in the Old Testament (OT) to describe a person’s mind and thoughts in the following passages:

*I will bless the Lord who has counseled me;
Indeed, my mind [kilyah] instructs me in the night* (Psalm 16:7).

*Examine me, O Lord, and try me;
Test my mind [kilyah] and my heart* (Psalm 26:2).

*When my heart [kilyah] was embittered
And I was pierced within* (Psalm 73:21).

*I, the Lord, search the heart,
I test the mind [kilyah],*

*Even to give to each man according to his ways,
According to the results of his deeds* (Jeremiah 17:10).

These supplemental passages testify to the meaning revealed in Psalm 139:13—that God formed David's thinking and emotions (the supposition here of emotions is further illustrated in the following point) while in the womb. This provides evidence of the biblical presupposition of life—the existence of intellect, emotion, and will—prior to birth.

B. LUKE 1:41-42

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

In this New Testament (NT) passage, Jesus is in the womb of Mary, and Mary is visiting Elizabeth who is pregnant with John the Baptist. Notice first:

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit,
Luke calls the preborn **child** a "baby."

Baby (*brephos*) is the same Greek word used throughout the NT to describe an infant. Illustratively, note the following three usages:

1. Luke 2:16—Jesus Himself is called a baby (*brephos*) lying in a manger.
2. Luke 18:15—Scripture states regarding Jesus, *And they were bringing even their babies [brephos] to Him so that He would touch them.*
3. Second Timothy 3:15—Yet another illustration of the Greek word *brephos* is used in this passage wherein the Apostle Paul is speaking of his understudy Timothy: *And that from childhood*

[brepbos] you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Lastly, in regard to Elizabeth's baby in this passage, also recorded by Dr. Luke, is that *the baby leaped in her womb*, thereby exhibiting all of the very signs of life—intellect, emotion, and will, in accord with the aforementioned point that a baby can think in the womb. Scripture reveals that

While in the womb, John the Baptist
responded intellectually, emotionally,
and willfully to Mary's voice in his
preborn state of personhood.

C. PSALM 51:5

*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.*

A quick read of this verse might seem to indicate that Scripture is teaching us that David's mother sinned in *conceiving* him, but that interpretation is not what is in view here.

Psalm 51:5 is one of many biblical references to the curse of sin (cf. Genesis 3:16; Job 14:4; Psalm 58:3; and implied in Isaiah 43:27 and Hosea 6:7). Sin is endemic and infectious to all of mankind as a result of the Fall; this is what is known theologically as *congenital sin*. Accordingly, Psalm 51:5 is primarily a hamartiological passage (*hamartiology* is the study of the doctrine of sin). The Bible repeatedly teaches that all are brought forth into the world as fallen human beings due to the curse of *congenital* sin and, therefore, in need of a Savior. The New Jerusalem Bible translation perhaps better captures the contextual idea than does the previous NASB translation: *Remember, I was born guilty, a sinner from the moment of*

conception. The relevance of this passage (in addition to all that it teaches about sin) to the Pro-Life position is obvious:

David, under the inspiration of
the Holy Spirit, uses the word *me*
in the same sentence and context
as he uses the word *conceived*.

The use of *me* underscores personhood, i.e., personhood at **conception**. The word for **conceived** is the Hebrew word *harah*, which means “to become pregnant, to procreate, to beget” (cf. Genesis 4:1; et al: *harah* is used 21 other times in Genesis). *According to David, he became a person the very moment his mother became pregnant*—when she procreated! States Schaefer in this regard, “He [David] is saying that from the moment of conception—as a person—he had a sinful nature. What is so significant about this passage is that David thought of himself as a distinct human being, a distinct person, at the moment of conception.”¹⁸

Being able to exist independently,
what is commonly referred to as
fetus viability, is not the biblical
determinant or definition of
when life begins. Conception is.

D. JEREMIAH 1:5

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
And before you were born I consecrated you;
I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.*

Likened to David's understanding above (point C) and Isaiah's understanding as follows (point E), Jeremiah also believed that he was a person in the womb of his mother.

E. ISAIAH 49:1, 5 (NIV)

*Before I was born the Lord called me;
from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.*

*And now the Lord says—
he who formed me in the womb to be his servant.*

In these passages, the prophet Isaiah also evidences God as having named him *before I was born*. The Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that God views a person's life as having begun prior to his passage through the birth canal.

F. GENESIS 25:22-23

But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, why then am I this way?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger."

This passage is talking about Isaac's wife, Rebekah, who was pregnant with twins, whose names would be Jacob and Esau. Notice the writer of Genesis (Moses) refers to the preborn as *children* (*ben*), which is used 4,900 times in the OT to refer to a son (when used in singular form) or *children* (when used in a plural form). In that they are struggling, a literary prefigurement of personhood (intellect, emotion, and will) is being attributed.

G. EXODUS 21:22-25

This passage is perhaps the most insightful and informative passage in the entire Bible relative to today's abortion controversy. We need to observe it carefully with its surrounding context. It also provides a segue into the next biblical matters of consideration on this topic.

If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide. But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

Under the Mosaic Law, if two men were fighting and one or both accidentally struck a **woman with child** (again, note the use of the word **child** as a descriptor for what is in the womb of the **woman**), two possibilities resulted: either there is no harm to the **child** and a minor penalty is in order relative to the mother's being injured to some degree, or there is harm to the **child** (or both). In the second scenario, the penalty is much more severe, and "just recompense" (what is known in jurisprudence as *lex talionis*) is in view. Interesting, under the Mosaic Law, if someone caused the *accidental* death of another adult, the "eye-for-eye" criterion was *not* applicable (cf. Numbers 35:9–15; 22–29). However, the "just-recompense" standard exists here in Exodus 21! *To protect the life of the unborn, a higher legal standard was in place!*

If the accidental killing of a preborn **child** in ancient Israel is a serious matter in the eyes of God way back then—and this passage indicates that it was—is not the intentional killing of a defenseless person in the womb egregious to Him now?

In Moses' day the unborn **child** received governmental protection, and an adult was punished for harming him even if the harm was unintentional. But in America today, the **child** receives no governmental protection, and the adult who ends a baby's life receives no punishment! On this matter, existing American law is uninformed by Mosaic Law. America has this backward, and the law needs to change if this nation expects to receive God's blessing. Summarily, each of these previous seven biblical passages indicate the following:

God views a preborn **child**
as a precious person—
a human being—in the womb.

IV. MURDER IS EVIL

We have just noted that Exodus 21 evidences that the killing of a preborn *child* is sinful in the eyes of God. Other passages speak of the evil of murder in general:

A. EXODUS 20:13 (NIV)

You shall not murder.

In the Torah, unintentional killing (manslaughter) required the guilty party to be banished to a city of refuge. But premeditated murder, *ratsach*, in the Hebrew Old Testament, and *phoneuo* in the Greek New Testament, meaning “to slay or put to death,” indicates intention and mandated the civil death penalty (see next point in the outline).

Punishment for both unintentional and intentional killing or murder reveals the serious, serious mind of God relative to the taking of another human life. Why? Again, man is uniquely created in the image of God, *Imago Dei*. Other passages on the sin of murder include Exodus 21:12; Numbers 35:17–21; and Romans 13:9. Taking a life is a very severe matter in God’s eyes.

In fact, Exodus 20:13 defeats the pro-abortion argument that “A woman has a right to control her own body.” Abortion is not a decision that affects only her; in aborting her baby, the woman is making a decision for another person’s body and is ending the life of a separate and distinct human being.

Determining whether a baby lives or dies is not a “choice” that a woman has a moral right to make; in choosing abortion, she is ending the life of someone else—a precious and unique soul created and loved by God.

V. THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE STATE IS TO PUNISH EVIL

So far, this study has revealed that Scripture is sure-footed and redundant on the sanctity of human life, which begins at *conception*. What follows is the biblical teaching for God's intended medium of retribution for those who violate His divine standards.

A. GENESIS 9:6

Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.

Genesis 9 contains the first mention of capital punishment. Because mankind alone is created in the image of God, God empowers man to *shed* the *blood* of a murderer. Further underscoring the premise of the sanctity of life, which is replete throughout Scripture, God invokes capital punishment not only on every man who murders another man, but even on animals that kill a human being (cf. Genesis 9:5; Exodus 21:28). That's consistent. The concept of the State's meting out God's retribution for murder is seen in these passages:

B. ROMANS 13:4

For it [the institution of government] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

Stemming from Genesis 9:6, *by man his blood shall be shed*, as well as the way in which ancient Israel was to practice and manifest the principle *lex talionis* as previously cited in Exodus 21:22–25, the NT contains the same judicial concept. Civil government *is a minister of God ... to bear the sword* in terms of civil jurisprudence for wrongdoing: *an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil*.

This NT passage reveals God's requirement of the State to be His mediator of His justice in a fallen world—to mete out punishment relative to wrongdoers. Important to a person's understanding is a more theological way of saying this: the punishment brought by civil authorities is the

mediatorial wrath of God. Civil government is God's means in a fallen world to restrain evil. Wherein individuals are instructed not to seek personal vengeance (Romans 12:19), God insists on the State's enacting corporate, corporeal punishment on His behalf and is the primary reason why He created the institution of the State in a fallen world.

C. 1 PETER 2:13-14

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

Again, this is another underscoring twin passage: God expects civil government to punish evildoers.

D. MATTHEW 26:52

Then Jesus said to him [Peter], "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword."

In this NT passage, Jesus is restating (another way of illustrating it) the same truths contained in the two previously cited ones: for the sake of Peter's life, Jesus (Who, as the second member of the Trinity, created the institution of the State) stopped Peter, knowing that if he were to slay those those who wanted to crucify Jesus, that he, Peter himself, would be put to death by the State. Implied in Matthew 26 is that the State, both then and today, possesses this kind of authority: Jesus is authenticating capital punishment, the State's authority, in essence, to *perish* those who murder other human beings.

VI. CONCLUSION: THE STATE MUST PROTECT BABIES

What the Bible teaches is that life does not begin at fetus viability, nor heartbeat, nor pain recognition capability: **THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT LIFE BEGINS AT CONCEPTION!**

Human beings are created in the image of God at the moment of conception, and the State is accountable in God's eyes to shoulder the responsibility of protecting all human life. It follows that every individual and State must protect the life of unborn babies from the point of

conception forward lest the individual and State be chastened by God not only for shirking one of their primary, God-assigned roles, but also for allowing the murder of its most vulnerable family members and citizens.

Herein is where the worldviews of secular humanism and biblical Christianity stand in sharp contrast:

The State's responsibility is to
protect its citizens, especially those
who cannot protect themselves.

A study on God's love of babies would not be complete without once again including the grace and forgiveness of God as it relates to those who have not been obedient to one or more of the aforementioned biblical truths pertaining to this subject. No one should conclude that this study is advocating the death penalty—or any punishment—for women who have had an abortion. Rather, it is this: there is forgiveness at the foot of the cross; God is a gracious, loving Father Who, upon repentance of the individual, is forgiving. Come to Christ today for salvation and experience His love and gentle hand as you ask for forgiveness, receive His pardon, and clear your conscience. Ephesians 1:7 states, ***In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.***

1. Virginia's Legislative Information System, *A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 16.1–77, 18.2–73, 18.2–74, 18.2–76, and 32.1–127 of the Code of Virginia, relating to abortions; eliminate certain requirements, 2019 Session, 19103112D*.
2. Jessica Chasmar, "Ralph Northam, Virginia governor, defends bill allowing abortion during labor," *Washington Times*, January 30, 2019, www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/jan/30/ralph-northam-virginia-governor-defends-bill-allow/.
3. Virginia's Legislative Information System, VA House Bill No. 2495 to amend and reenact § 15.2-2403 of the Code of Virginia and to amend the Code of Virginia by adding in Article 1 of Chapter 9 of Title 15.2 a section numbered 15.2-926.4, relating to cankerworms; eradication; prohibition on spraying during certain months, 2019 Session, 19104098D.
4. Caleb Parke, "New York 'celebrates' legalizing abortion until birth as Catholic bishops question Cuomo's faith," *Fox News*, January 23, 2019, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/new-york-celebrates-legalizing-abortion-until-birth-as-catholic-bishops-question-cuomos-faith>.
5. Associated Press, "New Mexico Governor Signs Bill to Preserve Abortion Rights," *U.S. News and World Report*, February 26, 2021, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/new-mexico/articles/2021-02-26/new-mexico-governor-signs-bill-to-preserve-abortion-rights>.
6. Daniel Porter, "Analysis: How House bill 51 was defeated in the New Mexico Senate," Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, April 12, 2019, <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/analysis-how-house-bill-51-was-defeated-in-the-new-mexico-senate/>.
7. Carrie N. Baker, "Groundbreaking Massachusetts Abortion Law Repeals Parental Consent for Older Teens," *Ms. Magazine*, December 29, 2020, <https://msmagazine.com/2020/12/29/massachusetts-abortion-law-roe-act/>.
8. *Ibid.*
9. "Vermont governor signs extreme bill for 'unlimited, unregulated abortion,'" *LiveAction News*, June 20, 2019, <https://www.liveaction.org/news/vermont-extreme-abortion-bill/>.
10. Dale Hurd, "As Another State Pushes for Killing Babies at Birth, Pence Blasts Democrats as Party of 'Infanticide,'" *CBN News*, February 1, 2019, <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2019/february/culture-of-death-another-state-pushes-for-killing-babies-at-birth-pence-blasts-democrats-as-the-party-of-infanticide>.
11. Nancy Flanders, "Vermont Senate approves pro-abortion constitutional amendment," *LiveAction News*, April 14, 2021, <https://www.liveaction.org/news/vermont-senate-pro-abortion-constitutional-amendment/>.
12. Kate Smith, "Senate rejects 'born-alive' bill as anti-abortion advocates reignite 'late-term' abortion debate," *CBS News*, February 27, 2019, www.cbsnews.com/news/born-alive-act-senate-rejects-born-alive-bill-anti-abortion-advocates-reignite-late-term-abortion-debate-2019-02-27/.
13. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian* (London: Norfolk Press, 1970), 9.
14. In a stark clash of worldviews, the humanist/evolutionary outlook on life does not possess this foundational basis for protecting it.
15. Francis A. Schaeffer, (sermon, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, 1982).
16. Ronald Reagan, *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984) (author's paraphrased summary).
17. Excellent books on this subject are available; contact me.
18. Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 158.

The Biblical Case for Defending Israel (Part 1)

Can you immediately and cogently reason from Scripture why America should be committed to Israel? By way of introduction, I believe that in a reaping and sowing sense America has wonderfully prospered because our cultural foundation stems from all that Israel has historically provided us relative to pertinent scriptural truth. There is no doubt the biblical truths borrowed from historic Israel have provided the cultural moorings for historic America. One might summarily call this our philosophical union with Israel. If for no other reason, we owe Israel our loyalty relative to our debt of gratitude. But there are many more biblically based reasons that I will proffer in this Bible study.

I. INTRODUCTION

God's Word contains a clear and absolute, timeless promise relative to the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12:3, "*And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse.*" History vividly punctuates this truth. America is among nations that have shown longstanding support for Israel. President Harry Truman acknowledged the sovereign state of Israel within 11 minutes of the signing of the Israeli Declaration of Independence on May 14, 1948. Whether you are *blessed* for supporting Israel as has been our nation or *cursed* for attempting to demolish her like ancient Babylon, Hitler's Germany, or the present-day Arab nations, one thing is certain: this people and country are extra special, set apart by God from all others. No other country compares. This is because in the Old Covenant, God chose Israel to be His people as a light unto all the other Gentile nations of

the world (cf. Isaiah 60 and 62); they were a people set apart for His own possession (Exodus 19:5–6). Accordingly, the Jewish people hold a very special place in the heart of God.

Given ongoing attention to Israel and Gaza, I thought this would be a good time to provide a biblical primer as to why you and our nation should remain staunch allies of Israel. Again, can you immediately and cogently reason from Scripture why this should be?

There are at least three pragmatic reasons our nation should support Israel.

II. PRAGMATIC REASONS FOR SUPPORTING ISRAEL

A. ISRAEL IS LEGITIMATE

In 1948 when Israel became a nation, 160 other countries acknowledged it as a non-racist democracy. In fact, Arabs hold public office in the Knesset and high positions in its military. It is a nation that believes people are made in the image of God and endowed with inalienable rights.

B. ISRAEL IS RELIABLE

In an increasingly tumultuous Middle East we need an ally to protect ourselves. America needs a reliable ally in this area of the world due to the nuclear threat of Iran (caused by the nearly available enriched uranium) which has repeatedly declared its hatred for America.

C. ISRAEL IS SMART

Much scientific and technological advancement has been achieved by Israel. Financial management¹ and information processing make her a world leader. Now void of earlier socialistic economic tendencies, her free-market, roaring entrepreneurial spirit makes her a world leader and an awesome trade partner. George Gilder's book *The Israel Test* documents the historically disproportionate contributions of the Jewish race to the betterment of mankind.² This book is a must-read and helps to explain why other nations are so jealous of her.

More important than these excellent pragmatic reasons as to why America should support Israel is the biblical one. What follows is the

exegetical case; the three major biblical chapters when studied together exclaim why every legislator, government leader, citizen, and human being should befriend Israel:³ those three chapters are Genesis 12, Romans 11, and Revelation 7. We need to have these passages at our fingertips and to have intellectual dexterity when it comes to this pertinent issue.

III. GENESIS 12

In Genesis 12:1–2 God makes a covenant with Abram, who is the patriarch of the nation Israel. But before examining that in some detail, it is important to understand the whole of Genesis. There are two main divisions in the book, each possessing four sub-points. The first portion (1–11) relates to beginnings: the Creation, the Fall, the Flood and Dispersion. The second portion (12–50) pertains to the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. In this study, we are picking the book up at the start of the second portion, where God chooses a man from whom He will generate a family, a tribe, and then a whole nation. Again, the nation of Israel is a distinctive nation as described by God Himself in Exodus 19:5–6 and Deuteronomy 7:6–8 respectively:

“Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

“The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

In addition, God makes three unilateral promises with Abram: a *land*, a seed, and a *blessing* as evidenced from this passage (Genesis 12:1–2).

*“Now the LORD said to Abram,
“Go forth from your country,*

*And from your relatives
 And from your father's house,
 To the land which I will show you;
 And I will make you a great nation,
 And I will bless you,
 And make your name great;
 And so you shall be a blessing;"*

The aforementioned passages of Scripture are where the case for being pro-Israel begins. Noteworthy here is God's promise in Genesis 12 that *includes a land*, which is elsewhere referred to as the *land* of Canaan (cf. Genesis 17:8).⁴ Again, the promise of *the land* is critical to the study that follows because in Genesis 12:3, previously cited in the prologue, God states the consequences of not being an ally of His people Israel in their *land*:

*"And I will bless those who bless you,
 And the one who curses you I will curse.
 And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

At first glance, the passage above seems quite straightforward except for this: do the promises God made to Israel "evaporate" *forever* due to her later rejection of the Messiah, Jesus Christ? Many Evangelicals today would answer in the affirmative. They reason that, due to Israel's rejection of Jesus, God has *replaced* her with the Church. This is called Replacement Theology (RT), and it comes in many versions. RT reasons that the covenants made to Abraham and ensuing to Old Testament (OT) Israel are null and void and spiritually accrue to the Church in the New Covenant of the New Testament (NT) and are now *fulfilled* in a spiritual sense of understanding more than a physical one.

The problem with this view, as we shall see in this study and the one that follows, is that many passages throughout the Bible indicate that God is not *forever* finished with Israel. Notice for starters the following passages in Genesis that use words like *descendants*, *forever*, and *everlasting* in an unlimited sense to describe the nature of *the land* promise. Note more carefully Genesis 12:7 in this regard:

The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.

There is no qualifier or limitation relative to the understanding of God's meaning of *descendants* in the above passage. The same holds true in 13:15. Notice the word *forever*:

“For all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever.”

In 17:7, direct your eyes to *everlasting covenant*:

“I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.”

Israel's right to hold onto *the land* due to God's *everlasting* covenant with her is called an *everlasting possession* in 17:8:

“I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

Summarily, there is no limitation or qualification to God's unending promises relative to *the land* God will give His people, Israel. No passage of Scripture anywhere in the Bible states something to the effect of, “All bets are off *forever* if My people reject My coming Messiah—because if you do I will ‘spiritualize’ these promises thereafter and give them to the Church.” What I am hinting at is this:

The case for supporting Israel
today turns on the immutability
of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Said the opposite way, if the Abrahamic promises are now nullified, then we are correct to reason that there is no biblical basis for America to support Israel. If Israel's rejection of Jesus voids the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12, then it stands to reason that Israel has no future in God's economy. If God is done with Israel, then why shouldn't others be also? The truth is, God has not replaced Israel *forever* with the Church, and He has a huge future plan ahead for the Jews, even if for now they are on the

“sidetrack” as God grafts in the Gentiles during the age in which we live, the Church Age of biblical history. His promises to Israel are not nullified as will be seen in the following redundantly plentiful NT passages.⁵

IV. ROMANS 11

This is a tremendously informative passage in light of the subject matter. In the context of Paul’s epistle to the Gentile Church at Rome, he inserts what is commonly referred to as the parenthetical chapters of 9 through 11 in his long letter.⁶ These three chapters reveal God’s big plan for Israel—a plan that validates the veracity of the words God chose to use through His mouthpiece, Moses, as He penned the book of Genesis: Specifically, the words *forever* and *everlasting*. All of Romans 9–11 needs to be read as a whole to capture the total impact but having stated that, I have copied some of the pertinent portions to underscore the point of this portion of our Bible study: God has a bright future for Israel! Note Romans 11:1, 2, and 11:

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. ... I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be!

In God’s big plan, He has temporarily *sidetracked* His chosen people. He did this right after they did not recognize (to say it politely) their Messiah (cf. Matthew 27:51). This passage makes it clear that being *sidetracked* or having badly *stumbled* is to be distinguished from having been *rejected* or *fallen* in the sense of finality.

During this period, God is grafting in the Gentiles (cf. Ephesians 2:12–13). Notice this same idea as it is expressed in Romans 11:11–12:

But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!

God will greatly *bless* Israel *in the future*—when He *fulfills* His Abrahamic Covenant promises to her! That is the plain meaning of these texts! One must either ignore the plain meaning of what Paul is writing here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Romans 11:9–11 or cavalierly change hermeneutical principles from a grammatical-historical-normative

exegetical approach to the text, to one of an allegorical, figurative or symbolic hermeneutical understanding of this text in order to rationalize what is being said by God herein.

Paul continues in his reasoning to the Gentiles at Rome. The language now being used, obviously intended to be metaphoric language, makes the point of this study: Paul is calling the Gentiles a wild olive branch that is being grafted in to the root. Note in this regard:

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree (Romans 11:17).

This is a great word picture. Speaking further about the hardened hearts of Israel, a people having previously **rejected** Jesus, there remains much hope. Note Romans 11:23–24:

And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

To paraphrase Dr. Charles Ryrie, a leading professor at Dallas Theological Seminary (a theologian with a consistent hermeneutic, see endnote 7), Israel has been sidetracked while God gathers in the Gentiles. In the end times, however, God will bring Israel back on track, joining up with the now much larger heavenly-bound train. During this period of biblical history, the time in which we live, Israel's heart is, for the most part, hardened toward their Messiah. States Paul in Romans 11:25–29 in this regard:

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery ... that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written. ... From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Yes, presently Israel is a Gospel-rejecter, but **for the sake of the fathers** (the great OT saints, like Abraham) God will honor Israel at a future time when they too will come to Christ *en masse* (fr. "all together"). God is immutable in His attributes, one being His veracity; He is incapable of

lying and is therefore ever-mindful of His *irrevocable* promises! Immutable means He is incapable of change.⁷

At a future time God will change Israel's hearts toward Jesus; this is evident in the clear and powerful passage of Ezekiel 36:24–36. Notice that verse 24 has already been *fulfilled* in this OT prophesy:

“For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

Stemming from this passage there should be no doubt: God is not finished with Israel! Prior to examining the *fulfillment* of these promises in the prophetic book of Revelation, it is important to emphasize that Replacement Theology cannot overcome the aforementioned theological construct without changing its hermeneutical approach to these many straightforward passages.⁸ RT is herein discounted by Romans 11 and Ezekiel 36; in these passages God Himself declares He will be faithful to His own unilateral covenant of Genesis 12!

Therefore, it stands to reason that His “if-then” covenant of Genesis 12:3 also remains immutable and intact today. That is to say, the promise of *blessing* or else *cursing* those who *bless* or else *curse* Israel applies for individuals, terrorist groups, and nations today. This biblical fact more than insinuates and informs—it screams loudly—as to why American foreign policy should be extremely positive toward Israel! Such policies *bless* America. Plain stupid is an executive branch or Congress that doesn't get this!

V. REVELATION 7

This passage of Scripture reveals that there will be 144,000 Jewish evangelists who will herald the Second Coming of Messiah throughout the world. I dare say that the zeal of Gentile evangelists of the past will pale in comparison to these Jewish evangelists heralding the Second Coming of Messiah! What a massively huge turnaround will occur in Israel between now and then! At that point in time, the hardened hearts descriptive of Israel in Romans 11 and Ezekiel 36 are obviously absent. Revelation 7:4 states:

And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.

Numerous other passages speak of the rebirth of Israel and her inheritance of Jerusalem in conjunction with the Second Coming of the Messiah. These important passages include Zechariah 12:10; Psalm 132:13–14; 2 Chronicles 12:13; 33:4 & 7; 1 Chronicles 23:25; 1 Kings 11:36 and 2 Kings 21:7. The plain meaning of these texts indicates that Israel will not only re-inherit the *land*, again, a prophetic event that has already been *fulfilled*, but that her heart will subsequently be changed, and the coming Messiah will *bless* the whole earth as He reigns in perfect majesty from Jerusalem as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

A flurry of people will put their faith in the Messiah during these end times (cf. Matthew 24:14).

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands (Revelation 7:9).

Salvation is the main theme due to the effectiveness of the 144,000 worldwide Jewish evangelists:

And they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 7:10–12).

What a glorious scene! What follows is the 1000-year Jewish-cultured Millennial Kingdom where Jesus will reign over all the earth from Jerusalem—wherein in the Abrahamic Covenant will be literally and ultimately *fulfilled*!

VI. CONCLUSION

Since God is not through with Israel, and since God has a huge future plan for Israel, it stands to reason—based on the healthy fear all should possess

relative to Genesis 12:3—that all individuals and all nations should be sure to stand on the side of Israel. Amen!

1. Romans 11:12 speaks specifically to this.
2. George Gilder, *The Israel Test* (Minneapolis: Richard Vigilante Books, 2009).
3. Obviously this statement should not be taken too far so as to mean a blanket endorsement of everything the nation might engage in or do that is ethically or morally unsubstantiated.
4. Later in Israel's history, Joshua will lead Israel into the Promised *Land*. In Joshua 3:16 Scripture records that they crossed the Jordan River at a location east of Jericho, which means they crossed just north of the Dead Sea. I mention all that to make a simple point: if Israel were now to revert to her territory prior to the Six Day War, she would in essence be forfeiting this area originally promised to them by God as an “*everlasting* possession” (cf. Genesis 17:8).
5. There will be two unique people of God relative to future things, both Israel and the Church. The latter does not eclipse the former, as many NT and OT passages evidence, nor will the former enter the Kingdom of God apart from salvation in Christ per John 14:6 and Acts 4:12. In a real sense, the spiritual *blessings* of the Abrahamic Covenant accrue to the Church for a time (until God grafts Israel back in) due to the present apostasy of Israel, having executed the Messiah.
6. Paul's first-century letter to the Gentile church of Rome pertains to God's sweeping program for Gentile followers of Christ. It is his *summum bonum* (lat. “supreme good”) his *magnum opus* (lat. “greatest work”) pertaining to God's plan for salvation. He therefore begins his thesis by painting the world in sin (1:1–3:21); in chapters 3:21–5, he presents God's plan of salvation from sin. In chapters 5–8 he progresses into how the believer ought to live in this world, a discussion he continues in chapters 12–16 after the herein-mentioned parenthetical discussion of God's plan for Israel. In the contextual thesis of the whole, it makes perfect sense that Paul (himself a Jew) would include an overview of God's *summum bonum* and *magnum opus* for the Jews too! This insight into the greater context of the passages under study adds much weight as to the authorial intent for their inclusion, lending much weight to a literal understanding of their meaning. One should therefore not take liberty to “spiritualize” the parenthetical chapters, as if Paul's language were now suddenly and conversely symbolic, figurative, allegorical or poetic—and then suddenly change back to a literal understanding in chapters 12–16! To support such is to support a cavalier hermeneutic. Context does not permit such interpretive license.
7. It is important to underscore the truths of John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 as they relate to Israel. No one will enter the Kingdom of God apart from faith in Christ. In the End Times a person will not go to heaven just because they are Jewish, it is not as if there is a second pathway to heaven that circumvents the way of the cross (cf. Luke 3:8–9).
8. Replacement Theologians often change their hermeneutic when dealing with prophetic passages so as to avoid the plain meaning, the authorial intent, or literality of passages like these so as to fit a predetermined theological disposition. That is to say, they do not consistently apply a grammatical, historical, normative interpretive approach to such passages (like they do the remainder of Scripture wherein they reason, for instance, their convictions relative to their salvation). I believe that to change one's interpretive rules relative to Bible passages is incongruent; such is to engage in cavalier or hopscotch hermeneutics. It stands to reason that if we maintain a consistent grammatical-historical-literal hermeneutic throughout our interpretation of the whole of the Bible, including prophetic passages, we cannot substantiate a belief in Replacement Theology.

The Biblical Case for Defending Israel (Part 2)

In Part 1 of this series, we looked at some “Israel 101” biblical passages regarding why every person, group, and nation should be supportive of Israel. This week we will dig deeper—call this study “Israel 401.” Keep in mind, given what’s happening in Israel, I think it is timely to provide this two-part series on Israel—from a Bible teacher’s perspective.

Nearly every public servant who has his or her ear to the ground knows that the Bible enjoins individuals and nations to *ble*ss Israel. In Genesis 12:3 God states in His promise to Abraham (Israel’s patriarch), *“I will ble*ss *those who ble*ss you, and the one who curses you I will curse.”

Not all, however, who follow Christ are pro-Israel. Within Evangelicalism there is a camp who hold to what I explained and defined in Part 1 as “Replacement Theology.” The other more sophisticated theological name is “Supersessionism.”

These adherents believe the Church supersedes Israel; they embrace what then amounts to a contextually descriptive title, “Replacement Theology.” In this study, I will use these terms interchangeably.

By way of review, the Replacement Theology crowd believes God is done with Israel, having replaced her with His Church. The Church then is the new Israel; therefore, the conditional promise (cf. Genesis 12:3) stated above in the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Genesis 15:18) now applies to the Church.

What does the Bible say about all this? What do you believe? How an American lawmaker reasons this issue from Scripture has huge implications in American foreign policy and as, many conclude, whether God will continue to *ble*ss America.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study should prove quite intellectually challenging to most who read it. Do not let that deter you from persevering through so you may understand what follows as this is a critically important subject for anyone holding office. As usual, I have attempted to explicate in a way that makes the study bite-sizeable and digestible to aid your comprehension. Stay with me.

II. CHALLENGES FACING SUPERSESSIONISM

If the conditional promise (cf. Genesis 12:3) of the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Genesis 15:18) remains intact, then God's *blessing* on individuals and nations is in part predicated on how they treat Israel as a nation. That being the case, a person's theology for not supporting or *blessing* national Israel need be airtight. The biblical position and exegetical support for Supersessionism must be painstakingly explicit, universally convincing, and beyond a shadow of a doubt given the stated deleterious results that are promised in Genesis 12:3! The difference in this case between God either *blessing* or cursing demands one's best exegetical abilities. Again,

To erroneously adhere to Replacement
Theology could jeopardize an individual's,
a group's, or a nation's future.

Supersessionists have a tall order to fill if they embrace and confidently promote "God is finished with national Israel" because on them is the scriptural burden of proof. At a minimum, they must convincingly argue from God's Word the following:

A. THE PROMISES GOD HAS MADE TO ISRAEL ARE NO LONGER APPLICABLE TO ISRAEL

Does Scripture clearly enunciate that the obvious promises God made to Israel no longer inure to Israel but instead to His Church? How can God make numerous unconditional promises to Israel as a nation in the Old and

New Testament (both in Genesis 12 and Romans 11) and then not fulfill them? Where does God in His Word specifically negate the promises He made in those passages?

B. THE CHURCH IS THE NEW ISRAEL

Replacement Theologists must demonstrate that Scripture clearly teaches that the Church supersedes and eclipses Israel. Is the Church specifically referred to as the replacement of national Israel? Or is the thesis of Replacement Theology based on one or two passages taken out of context as we will examine later in this study?

C. THE CHURCH INHERITS ISRAEL'S COVENANTS AND BLESSINGS

Does Scripture clearly teach that in *blessing* His Church, God will no longer *bless* ethnic Israel as a nation? The Supersessionists have the responsibility to convincingly prove from biblical passages that Israel as a nation no longer has a place in God's future. Again, on them is the burden of proof.

They must provide sound exegetical support for each of these three propositions in order to make their point. Anything less is to play with fire per Genesis 12.

III. CLARIFYING SUPERSESSIONISM

Before testing more closely each of the three premises questioned previously in association with specific pivotal biblical texts, several further insights need first be mentioned to gain a broader understanding of this still-prevalent theological viewpoint. These insights are as follows:

A. THEY DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN SPIRITUAL ISRAEL AND NATIONAL ISRAEL

In order to construct and defend their position, Supersessionists will often suggest that what the respective Bible writers had in mind when mentioning Israel (relative to passages that are problematic to their position) is this: "Israel" is a reference to Jews who came to Christ, versus the ethnic nation of Israel. That convenient distinction will become increasingly evident as this study progresses.

B. THEY UNABASHEDLY AND MUNIFICENTLY CHANGE THEIR HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH TO INTERPRETATION

This cavalier—what amounts to a hopscotch—approach to interpreting the biblical text is what really bothers me! When confronted with straightforward, plain passages that promise Israel's national return, they quickly suggest the Scriptures have a nonliteral meaning. This misrepresenting is somewhat similar to a referee changing the way he calls the game in the final two minutes. If Replacement Theologians applied this same privilege with the numerous passages dealing with their redemption, they would have no assurance of their salvation.

C. THEY ARE SOMETIMES MOTIVATED BY ANTI-SEMITISM

To do justice to the topic, I need to mention that anti-Semitism is sometimes the real driving force behind those who hold to a God-has-rejected-the-Jews viewpoint.

Jewish racism amongst those who name the
name of Christ is nothing new—as despicable,
ungodly, and un-Christlike as it is.

Whereas the former two caveats can be argued with objectivity, this last point is a matter of one's heart, and Scripture warns us not to judge another's heart. What is discernible, however, is an individual's intractable deafness to cogent reasoning from multiple prevalent biblical texts and an underlying bitterness toward a group of people; sometimes such stubbornness is due to anti-Semitism. This possibility should not be overlooked when dealing with those who adamantly and unlovingly profess, "God is done with the Jews!"

IV. CONDENSING SUPERSESSIONISM

Lastly by way of introduction, what follows is not a study on Eschatology per se nor a critique of Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, or Amillennialism, even though, granted, a strong correlation exists among these camps.

One either holds to non-Supersessionism or Supersessionism. To undertake a broadened discussion correlation (or not) of these eschatological viewpoints would overwhelm the title, the focus, and the intent of this study. Suffice it to state the following:

V. COUNTERACTANTS TO SUPERSESSIONISM

American Evangelicalism in terms of its best-known national seminaries, radio preachers, parachurch ministries, and popular authors have unreservedly promoted a pro-Israel theology for many decades. The Dispensational seminaries, such as Dallas, Western, Denver, and Moody; the national radio and TV preachers, such as the late DeHaan, Falwell, McGee, Wiersbe, Rogers, and Stanley—as well as Swindoll, Jeremiah, and MacArthur; the parachurch ministries such as CRU (formerly Campus Crusade), Navigators, Youth For Christ, and Capitol Ministries; the writing ministries of Hal Lindsey in *The Late Great Planet Earth* and Tim LaHaye in his Left Behind series have all combined to inauspiciously affect the Supersessionists' viewpoint in our day, “to the point of [its] vanishing altogether”.¹

Nevertheless, regardless of marketplace momentum in one direction or another, the policymaker should root his convictions for or against Replacement Theology based on his personal exegesis of the Word of God. This study is an attempt to aid that decision.

VI. COMPREHENDING SUPERSESSIONISM'S HERMENEUTICS

More about prior point III.B is in order. Supersessionists rely on several principles of interpretation in order to arrive at their conclusions. These principles are worth further mention so as to broaden understanding, background, and insight into Replacement Theologists' way of thinking when they examine the pivotal passages that constitute the debate. A brief explanation of each of their differing principles is as follows.

A. THE NT HAS AN INTERPRETIVE PRIORITY OVER THE OT

Most conservative expositors believe that Scripture is progressive in its revelation, i.e., what is mentioned skeletally for example in Genesis is analogous to, but in full-color, greater detail in the New Testament (NT). But

Supersessionists believe that rather than providing additional and greater insight, the NT is not only an interpreter of the meaning of Old Testament (OT) texts, but it can reinterpret them! More specifically in this regard, physical promises made to Israel by OT prophets, they believe, are often reinterpreted by NT writers to have a spiritual fulfillment in the Church. Accordingly, actual OT predictions pertaining to Israel's future physical restoration are, I believe, wrongly discounted.

In suggesting that God in this way is now offering something greater—something that transcends the authorial intent of the OT writer—is to rewrite and/or reinterpret what the OT author meant to the audience he communicated to at that time. But here's the major problem with that:

Practicing this hermeneutic brings into
question the integrity, infallibility, and
immutability of Scripture as a whole.

Bottom line—they are proffering that the biblical author really didn't mean what he said at the time he said it! This interpretation presents a real problem and is an affront to the basics of the biblical doctrine of Bibliology—that the Bible is infallible and inerrant and plenary inspired, which is a watershed issue, viewing the Bible and its authority in an overall sense.

B. OT TEXTS HAVE SPIRITUAL VERSUS LITERAL FULFILLMENTS

In addition to Genesis 12 and Romans 11, a forthright reading of Bible texts such as Amos 9:11–15, Zechariah 14:16, and Joel 3:17–18 indicates that God has a plan to restore national Israel. Israel will once again someday possess the land! And that prophecy has already begun to be fulfilled! The intended meaning of these texts is difficult to miss. Again, the Supersessionists argue that God fulfilled these promises in “nonliteral ways”² but the problem with this position is that other OT prophesies already fulfilled were fulfilled both physically and literally!³

C. NATIONAL ISRAEL IS A TYPE OF THE NT CHURCH

Both Supersessionists and non-Supersessionists believe in OT types (or typologies). A type in Scripture is a person or thing in the Old Testament that foreshadows a person or thing in the New Testament; a type is a prefigurement. For instance OT animal sacrifices that atoned for the sins of Israelites foreshadow Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the Cross for the sins of mankind. The latter example is termed a superior antitype. In this way Supersessionists reason that Israel is a type, and the Church is the superior antitype.

However, one cannot read into the Bible the existence of a type when the Bible does not specifically identify something as a type; to do so is to travel down the slippery slope of subjective interpretation of Scripture—reading types into everything imaginable. This is a form of eisegesis, which is defined by *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as “the interpretation of a text (as of the Bible) by reading into it one's own ideas.” In the hermeneutical school of typological interpretation, the interpreter becomes the power and force of a passage versus the way it's supposed to be—the definition is provided by the passage itself. Such is to superimpose a meaning that was unintended by the author(s). No biblical evidence is found anywhere in the Bible to indicate that Israel was intended by God in the OT to be a type relative to the Church. To do so is to read into the text something that is not there in order to support one's predeterminations. This is eisegesis, not exegesis.

These are three differing-from-the-norm interpretive principles that Supersessionists regularly employ to support their viewpoint that “God is finished with Israel today.”

VII. CONTESTED PASSAGES OF SUPERSESSIONISM

What follows are their most common arguments from Scripture that are used to justify their belief that God is finished with Israel and, among other matters, perhaps imply that Israel is not worthy of America's special care.

A. NATIONAL ISRAEL'S SUPPOSED PERMANENT REJECTION: MATTHEW 21:43

“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.”

This passage, wherein Jesus is addressing the Jewish leaders of His day, is widely used to support this position. Replacement Theology reasons that Israel permanently forfeited its *blessing* because of her rejection of Jesus. States Gerstner, “They have been tried and found wanting” (quoted by Ironside, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*).⁴

Notice however that the word “you” is not clearly indicative of the nation Israel, Jesus could simply be addressing the present rejecting leaders. In fact, just two verses later in Matthew 21:45, the Jewish leaders indicate that Jesus was specifically addressing them! (This is the conclusion of Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community*.)⁵ The nation of Israel is nowhere mentioned in this passage.

Secondly, no reference is made to the Church’s being the replacement. The words Jesus uses here are *given to a people*. This could be a reference to individuals who are responsive to Jesus—or to a better Israel in the future versus the self-righteous pharisaical leaders. He is addressing those who suppressed the multitudes they were supposed to be pastoring. This is the position of Vlach, *Has The Church Replaced Israel?*⁶ and Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*,⁷ and McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*.⁸

Even if *given to a people* were a reference to the Church, the passage does not rule out a future restoration of the nation Israel. Accordingly, this passage should not be used to roundly and conclusively suggest that God is finished with Israel—especially when at least 13 other books of the Bible state otherwise.⁹

B. ISRAEL LANGUAGE SUPPOSEDLY APPLIED TO THE CHURCH

Supersessionists believe that language depicting Israel is applied to the Church in the NT; they conclude that the NT therefore identifies the Church as Israel. Let us take a careful look at a sampling of some of those passages in order to gain a better understanding of this assumptive error.

1. Galatians 6:16

And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

This is the primary text cited by Replacement Theologians that supposedly indicates the Church is called Israel in the NT. The reasoning again is

that if you can say that the Church is Israel in the NT, then you can conclude that God is done with Israel; Israel has been replaced by the Church. The problem with this conclusion, however, is the overall context and main thesis of the epistle. The Galatian epistle is written to refute the Judaizers, those Jews in the Galatian Church who were teaching that salvation is not by faith alone in Christ alone, but by also keeping the OT law—a wrong view of true salvation. Contextually and properly understood, near the end of this strong polemic Paul throws a “bouquet” to those Jews in this particular church who had not been corrupted by the Judaizers. He appropriately calls those who were trusting in Christ alone for their salvation the [true] ***Israel of God***. Paul is making a distinction between the true believers of Jewish descent and the Judaizers whom he had already anathematized for their salvation-doctrine heresy (cf. Galatians 1:6–9). They were the ***Israel*** not ***of God*** so to speak (in the sense of God’s way of salvation always having been by faith alone, per Genesis 15:6). Contextually, Paul is closing his letter on an upbeat, in part, commending genuine Jewish Christians who possessed a proper understanding and belief in what he and the other Apostles taught about what it actually means to be saved. Commentator George (*Galatians*) aptly further states in this regard:

It is strange that if Paul intended simply to equate the Gentile believers with the people of Israel that he would make this crucial identification here at the end of the letter as opposed to including it in the main body where he developed at length the argument for justification by faith.¹⁰

In fact, the Scriptures always mention Israel in the context of national Israel—not in a confusing sense as the Church (and in violation of the principle of the perspicuity of Scripture).

There are no passages in the whole
of the New Testament that say the
Church is Israel or that the Church
is a Replacement of Israel.

2. 1 Peter 2:9–10

But you are a CHOSEN RACE, a royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD'S OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

The small capital letters in the Lockman Foundation's New American Standard Bible (1995) (used above) are intended by the translation team to serve to indicate OT passages (in this case Deuteronomy 7:6–8) that are being repeated and quoted by the NT author. This feature of this particular Bible translation is very helpful. In this sense, in 1 Peter 2:9–10, Peter is using OT terms spoken by Moses to identify Israel and to describe those who have trusted in Christ for salvation—folks who in the NT are a part of the Church.

If both Israel and the Church are God's people relative to God's Old Covenant with Israel and His New Covenant with the Church, does it not follow that the same descriptors could apply to each? Such is this case, but here's the point:

Simply because "Israel terms" are applicable as well to the Church does not mean that the Church is Israel.

Importantly to this study, the passage makes no claim that the Church has replaced Israel.

3. Romans 11:16–24

We now arrive at the crux passage in the debate. (Rather than quote this lengthy passage herein relative to space considerations, just make sure you take the time to read it.) This passage speaks about the Gentiles being grafted in with a literary device—a metaphor of an olive tree. Gentiles are

depicted as the “wild olive branch” being grafted into “the rich root of the olive tree,” i.e., Israel. This beautiful language depicts an easy-to-understand parallel that seems to underscore the proposition of Replacement Theology.

The later portion of the passage, however, works against their position. Paul goes on to reason that the Gentiles should not feel superior to the “natural branches,” i.e., the Jews, because *God has the power to graft them in again* (11:23, ESV). And such will be the case per Romans 11:26.

C. SUPERSESSIONISTS MUST SOMEHOW OVERCOME THE CLEAR NEW TESTAMENT PRONUNCIATION OF ROMANS 11:26: THEY MUST DISCOUNT ALL ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED

In the context of the earlier portions of this passage (11:23), the meaning is quite evident—God has the power to someday graft back in national Israel. This understanding is underscored by the beginning of Romans 11, where in verse 1, Paul states, *I ask, then, has God rejected His people? By no means!* (ESV) The straightforward meaning of this passage, with a due, normal reading is not hard to comprehend.

Supersessionists believe, however, that *all Israel* means believing Jews and Gentiles, i.e., that the *all Israel* Paul is speaking about is the Church. Context, however, does not support such an exaggerated understanding, especially in light of the verse that immediately follows 11:26—verse 11:27—which states, *“THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.”* Since the Church is made of those who have had their sins taken, then *all Israel* could not be a reference to the Church! So it follows that Paul does not have believers in mind when he says, *all Israel!* Rather, this passage serves to underscore that God has not forgotten, nor will He forget in the end times, the promises He made to Israel in Genesis 12! That is the simple understanding of the passage.

Accordingly, it is difficult to understand why Supersessionists view Romans 11 as favorable to their position as it is not in the least bit! Rather, it serves to negate their position.

D. THE SILENCE OF THE NT

By reinterpreting the normal meaning of Romans 9–11, Supersessionists believe—incorrectly—that the NT does not speak to Israel’s restoration, but that God is done with them. The non-Supersessionists take just the

opposite view: Romans 9–11 does speak to their restoration, as do other passages, including Acts 1:6 and Matthew 19:28. All three passages evidence Israel's restoration, and the last two by no one other than Jesus Himself! Note Acts 1:6:

So when they had come together, they asked Him “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

They were asking when *the kingdom of Israel* would be restored. In what follows after Acts 1:6, Jesus would not provide the direct answer to their question—but neither did He correct their assumption! Note Matthew 19:28:

Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

In the eschatological future when Jesus returns and reigns, this passage more than suggests Israel will be there also! These two passages were utilized by commentator Peters in response to the Supersessionists claim that the NT was silent about the future of Israel. So overwhelming was his exegetical argument that many of his opponents conceded the debate (cf. *The Theocratic Kingdom of our Lord Jesus, the Christ as Covenanted in the Old Testament*).¹¹

Similar to the OT Prophets, Jesus
and the NT are not silent about the
restoration of national Israel.

Again, at least 13 books of the Bible speak plainly and clearly about God's intent in the End Times to restore national Israel!

VIII. THE CULMINATION OF SUPERSESSIONISM'S THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTATION

Romans chapters 9–11 categorically teach that there is a future for national Israel! For no other reason (and I have listed many) the arguments of the

Supersessionists in their attempts to discount Israel's future fail in light of this strong, powerful, and straightforward passage. Waving the flag for the Supersessionist position is unsubstantiated, especially in light of the conditions and ensuing jeopardy that are stated in the Abrahamic Promise of Genesis 12. One must be very contemplative relative to how he treats national Israel. God has big plans for and is protective of her!

IX. SUMMARY

Both the OT and NT teach that Israel will be restored as a nation; Israel has a promised perpetuity that is nowhere discounted in or by Scripture. Furthermore, there is a perpetual, recurring biblical clarification and separateness between Israel and the Church. These sober facts render the Supersessionist position suspect. Accordingly,

The advocates of Replacement Theology
are out of bounds when they herald
with peril, "God is finished with Israel!"

To the discerning, their arguments are specious and lacking in exegetical substance. Every policymaker needs to deeply ponder the implications of Supersessionism with utmost reflection, seriousness, and prayer. No biblical reasons exist to believe that God is finished with Israel—and there are no godly reasons to justify being anti-Israel.¹² Our nation must stand with Israel because He commands it and because the God-given consequences to do otherwise are fearful.

1. Craig Blaising, "The Future of Israel as a Theological Question," *Journal of Evangelical Society* 44 (2001). I agree with Craig Blaising's observation, but many Evangelical leaders disagree with me on this point. They believe Supersessionism is the majority opinion amongst Evangelicals today.
2. Anthony Hoekema. "Amillennialism" in R. G. Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1977), 172.
3. Passages that proclaim God's future plans for Israel beyond the Church Age as referenced in this study are many. It is difficult for me to conclude, as must those who hold to Replacement Theology, that passages in the books of Acts, Amos, Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, Genesis, Isaiah, Joel, Matthew, Psalms, Revelation, Romans, 2 Samuel, and Zechariah—that's 13 books of the Bible—do not actually mean what they appear to mean!
4. H.A. Ironside, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1938), 190–191.
5. Anthony J. Saldrini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 59.
6. Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel: A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 143.
7. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries Publications, 1994), 40.
8. Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2018), 296–297.
9. One of the main rules of hermeneutics is that the homogenous meaning of a majority of clearly-stated passages relative to a matter needs to interpret the vague and less precise passages since Scripture's self-proclamation is that it is infallible and inerrant.
10. Timothy George, *Christian Standard Commentary: Galatians* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2020), 440.
11. George Nathaniel Henry Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ, as Covenanted in the Old Testament and Presented in the New Testament* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 2:50.
12. For further study on this issue, refer to the excellent, comprehensive book, *Forsaking Israel*, Larry D. Pettegrew, Kress Biblical Resources; The Woodlands, Texas. 2021.

What the Bible Says About Our Illegal Immigration Problem

With the terrorist killings around the world, and the further threat of terrorist incursion in America due to a naïve or misinformed understanding of what the Bible actually teaches about immigration, I am offering the following Bible explanation in order to provide you with a better understanding and a sound, systematic theology pertaining to this subject. My prayer is that God will use His Word to be of help as you solidify your thinking about this ongoing problem. The situation is increasingly critical, so I hope and pray that I can help you in this way. May God guide your actions as you study what He says about nations and immigration.

I. INTRODUCTION

An opinion piece written by Merrill Matthews and published by *The Hill* serves as an apt introduction to this study:

“The number of illegal immigrants in the country has roughly doubled under President Biden. The United States had some 10.2 million illegal immigrants in 2020, and another 10 million have entered during Biden’s presidency. If the 20 million illegal immigrants were all in one state, it would be tied with New York for the fourth most populated state. If some 10 million

immigrants have crossed the border in the three years since Biden became president on Jan. 20, 2021, we could be looking at 15 million to 20 million more by the time he leaves office on Jan. 20, 2029.”¹

The consequences are heightened by Kevin D. Roberts in a piece he wrote for *The Federalist*:

“While everyone who has entered the country unlawfully has committed a crime, the scale of the Biden-Harris border crisis is so great that ICE has been forced to release more than 600,000 illegal aliens with criminal records into the American heartland, including 13,000 illegal aliens who have already been convicted of homicide. By focusing on these cases first, we can make it clear to the American people that our goal is restoring law and order.”²

A report by the Republican Homeland Security Committee adds to these threats:

“Not only are more suspected terrorists illegally crossing our borders, but apprehensions of Chinese nationals illegally crossing the border have also increased over 1,000 percent under the Biden-Harris administration, compared to FY2017-FY2020. These encounters have included individuals with ties to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the People’s Liberation Army, according to information obtained by Chairman Green. The potential national security implications of this unprecedented influx are concerning, especially as the Committee released a report detailing the growth in CCP-related espionage and acts of transnational repression in the United States under this administration. Unfortunately, reports from last year revealed Secretary Mayorkas’ DHS had instructed Border Patrol agents to drastically reduce the number of vetting questions for Chinese nationals in order to more quickly process these aliens into the interior.”³

The above serves to illustrate biblically uninformed thinking. What the Bible has to say about this should lead the public servant to vastly different conclusions and actions, especially in light of terrorist attacks.

Before we begin the journey into Scripture on this subject, it must first be said that when it comes to presenting Bible studies on policy issues, it is the responsibility of the careful Bible expositor to discover the analogous, repeated voice of God's Word on a matter (or if not specifically spoken of in Scripture, to discover and apply related and proper biblical principles). Conversely, it is not the job of the expositor to necessarily offer detailed policy positions or solutions. That's your job as a Christian legislator, and it is, I might add, a more difficult one. A Bible expositor in the Capitol should be pre-political or, in other words, offer a biblical basis for policy formation. And in order for you to do your job effectively and in a way that pleases God, you must first have accurate biblical information. Without this pre-political guidance, it is much more difficult to arrive at policies that are both pleasing to God and beneficial to the advancement of the nation.

It's difficult to arrive at the proper
destination without accurate directions.

The book of Judges illustrates and serves to underscore deficient, ill-principled reasoning in contrast to obeying God when it twice says, *every man did what was right in his own eyes* (17:6; 21:25). This should be our concern regarding immigration policy because biblically uninformed policy inevitably makes for bad policy.

This is perhaps best illustrated by the No Fault Divorce legislation that Ronald Reagan signed into law as the Governor of California in 1969. He would later state that this was his "greatest regret."⁴ The policy backfired, having a deleterious effect on marriage and our country because it is based in pragmatic expedience versus biblical exposition. More specifically, No Fault Divorce laws undermine the biblical teaching of Genesis regarding God's intended construct of His ordained institution: to *cleave* (*dabaq*) meaning "to be joined together" and as a result *become one* (*echad*) *flesh* (cf. Genesis 2:24). *Echad* carries the idea of "pluralistic oneness." All that

to say, No Fault Divorce serves to illustrate pragmatic-based policy devoid of God's guidance. It can accurately be said then, that:

Public servants are too often
pro-GMO when it comes to marriage
and other policy decisions.

(GMO is an agricultural abbreviation for Genetically Modified Organisms and is a huge concern as man alters the DNA of what God designed.) All that to say, may immigration reform be not driven by expedience and convenience! May "everyone be quick to do what is right in God's eyes!" As tempting as quick-fix pragmatic solutions might be, they lack God's wisdom and therefore end up hurting more than helping the country. Keep this in mind as you weigh immigration reform policy.

(The intent of my occasional Bible and Policy Series is to provide you with bedrock biblical principles for your framing of God-honoring policies. Hopefully, what follows is a balanced, nutritious meal ready for the diner's consumption, brought forth from God's kitchen, without any waiter alterations.)

II. GOD'S DESIGN: INDEPENDENT NATIONS

Our understanding and construction of a systematic theology on immigration must begin (like most theology) in the book of Genesis. After the flood in Genesis, chapters 7 and 8, God repeats His command (cf. Genesis 9:1 & 7) to mankind—the one that was first given in Genesis 1:28—to ... *"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."* Think, then, of Genesis 9 as a makeover.

A. THE TOWER OF BABEL

What's happened here is this: after the Fall of man (Genesis 3), God's creation begins to show an ongoing, increasing proclivity to disobey Him—even His simplest commands. It is this overt, ongoing, and accelerating

rebellion that necessitates the flood, the makeover. But inundation did not put an end to insubordination: soon thereafter creation's defiance of God surfaces again in yet another way. Rather than *scatter* from the region of Ararat after the flood in concert with His earlier commands to *fill the earth*, the descendants of Noah willed to do just the opposite! They desired to stay put and build a monument! But this monument was not to honor how great Thou art—rather for how great we are! That monument is known as the Tower of Babel. Note how God reacts to fallen man's one-nation plans in Genesis 11:6–8:

The LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.

Not good! The descendants of Noah were the first "empire builders," bent on amassing their personal power. Here then is the underlying biblical reason why God wants there to be a diversity of nations—this is fundamental to understanding the mind of God as it relates to this week's study.

The sin nature in man
necessitates the separation of
man into independent nations.

This is God's way of counteracting man's fallen nature. The axiom, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely"⁵ is underscored by the dispersion of man in Genesis 11. As a matter of fact, it is this same principle of Scripture that informed our Founding Fathers relative to the separation of powers within our one Government. The *Tower of Babel* illustrates the same idea: that one of the results of man's fallen nature is his tendency to accumulate and then misuse power. *Babel* illustrates an all-out quest for a one-nation-in-the-world form of existence and governance, wherein man worships his own greatness rather than God's. *Babel* serves

to illustrate man's open defiance of God. Its modern-day equivalent is the philosophy of Humanism.

B. THE COMING ANTICHRIST

Further evidence of God's opposition to a one-nation-world is the future establishment of such a world by the coming Antichrist. Note Revelation 13:7 in this regard:

It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.

At this point in time, God will grant Satan and his pawn, the Antichrist, temporary control over civil government as the Antichrist rules over a one-nation-world.⁶ Thus, both Genesis 11 and Revelation 13, in different ways, serve to underscore this biblical truth and rudimentary principle in the formation of a theology on immigration:

God desires the world to be inhabited
by numerous independent nations.

This foundational premise is where our study of immigration must begin because many things flow out of it: for instance, some people think that God today is for a borderless world. He is not! It follows from Genesis 11 that nations, by God's design, are to have different languages, cultures, and boundaries. Out of necessity and remedy for the Fall and the power-hungry presence of sin, it is easy to understand why this is God's blueprint for today. In this way God is more apt to receive glory from His creation than if, like the prideful, world-conquering empires of history—Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, the dream of Hitler, or that of the coming Antichrist—mankind becomes caught up in self-worship and uses his unchecked amassing of power to abuse others whom God has created in His own image and likeness. The witness of history, however, is this: the diversification-of-nations principle has been violated by many would-be world

conquerors. Accordingly, and importantly, *so the Lord scattered* is a passage one must count as fundamental to the immigration debate. Summarily, this is the reason and the basis for multiple, independent nations, the existence of which is so fundamental to a proper Christian worldview and understanding.⁷

III. GOD'S DESIGN: BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES

It follows that, if God's design is for independent nations, then there must be national borders and boundaries for those independent nations. And it follows that there must be enforcement of borders and boundaries by governments in order to maintain a nation's independence. All of this logically flows from *so the Lord scattered*.

Now add Romans 13:1 from the NT to our theological construction. This passage expressly states and reinforces the proposition: God is the author of independent nations:

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Notice the last part of this passage: *those which exist are established by God*. Scripture teaches not only that *the Lord scattered* people, but in addition, specifically that He *established governments* and nations. These are key constructive, essential principles relative to immigration. In addition, note that this is all part of what theologians term *the mediatorial reign of Christ*, i.e., how God in His sovereignty manifests His reign during His physical absence prior to His Second Coming wherein He will personally reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

That the will of God is for the existence of independent nations with national borders and boundaries is further evidenced by God's descriptive words relative to the classification of people in the OT nation of Israel:

IV. GOD'S DESIGN: COUNTRYMEN AND SOJOURNERS

In numerous OT passages, the student of Scripture learns that the God of Israel distinguished among three types of people in the land; those are summarized in the following sidebar.

Distinguishing People in Ancient Israel

Designation	Known As	Hebrew Word
Citizen	Countryman	<i>Ach</i>
Legal Immigrant	Sojourner	<i>Ger/Toshab</i>
Foreigner	Illegal	<i>Nokri/Zar</i>

The above are important biblical monikers of distinction that God makes relative to people in a given country. An Israelite **citizen** is referred to as a **countryman** (*ach*) in Scripture, whereas a legal immigrant is referred to as a **sojourner** (*ger*) or *toshab*, and a **foreigner** is called an illegal (*nokri*) or *zar*. Important to this study, and evident from the OT, is that an illegal did not possess the same benefits or privileges as a **sojourner** or **countryman**. This fact can be illustrated from many passages. Notice, for instance, the words of Ruth the Moabite and her response to Boaz the Israelite in Ruth 2:10:

Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?”

Not only was Ruth a **foreigner** (*nokri*), an illegal immigrant, she was a Moabite illegal, who according to Deuteronomy 23:3 was forbidden to migrate into Israel altogether! For **citizen** Boaz to entertain Ruth at all was remarkably generous and gracious, and possibly even against the law of the land. (Perhaps Boaz already had in mind legitimizing her status by marriage.) The point is that Ruth’s self-declaration serves to underscore the classification of people in and by ancient Israel.

Furthermore, a **citizen/countryman** was expressly forbidden to take advantage of or mistreat a legal immigrant, known as a **sojourner**, per Exodus 22:21 and Deuteronomy 10:19 respectively:

“You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt (ESV).”

“Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt” (ESV).

Informing an immigration theology, a *sojourner* could be likened to a legal immigrant, and a *foreigner* could be likened to an illegal immigrant today. Note Hoffmeier, a biblical expert on this subject:⁸

A sojourner (sometimes translated as stranger) was a person who entered Israel and followed legal procedures to obtain recognized standing as a resident alien.

Hoffmeier goes on to say that, on the other hand, Israel treated illegal immigrants differently:

Illegal immigrants should not expect these same privileges from the State whose laws they disregard by virtue of their undocumented status.

These standard categories of one’s standing in a given nation and the differentiation between *citizens*, immigrants, and *foreigners* are representative of the will of God. In fact, these categorizations have been the distinctions in the mind of God ever since He *scattered* the people into different nations in Genesis 11. Further, the classification of people today in most every nation is based on Israel’s OT example. Summarily it follows:

The God of independent nations
differentiates between the
peoples of nations.

Therefore, governmental leaders today in every nation—to be biblically accurate—should invoke and staunchly maintain legal distinctions of status between their resident peoples:

Citizens, immigrants, and *foreigners*: to remain biblical, these distinctions should never be obliterated. No reformed immigration policy should attempt to eradicate these distinctions; to do so is to posture oneself as more knowledgeable and insightful than God.

V. GOD'S DESIGN: UNDERSTANDING IMPARTIALITY AND HIS IMAGE

Why have I spent so much time on matters that seem so basic? As obvious as the aforementioned points may seem, there are those who believe that because God calls us to be impartial and because God created all mankind in His image (Lat: *Imago Dei*), believers should be the leading proponents of a borderless world—one with no classifications or categorizations of people within a given country! Such a perspective, however, misunderstands what biblical impartiality and *Imago Dei* mean and do not mean. For instance, Leviticus 19:15 defines and properly contextualizes the concept of biblical impartiality:

“You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.”

In discussing impartiality, God does not scrub the aforementioned distinctions of various people in Israel; impartiality nowhere in Scripture negates the aforementioned precepts of one's legal status in a given nation. This passage points to the fact that to treat one illegal immigrant who possessed wealth differently from one without money is what is partial. To say that God created everyone in His image does not negate the biblical concepts of, in this case, legal status in the land: to clarify the point, a bank robber, a murderer, and an illegal immigrant are all created in God's image, but that fact does not place them above the law of the land! Often, attempts are made to foist impartiality or *Imago Dei* onto the discussion about immigration policy. Such attempts, however, serve to reveal the proponents' ignorance or else deliberate twisting of Scripture.

VI. GOD'S DESIGN: PROTECTING THE CITIZENRY

It is critically important for public servants to understand and apply the aforementioned biblical precepts relative to the formation of immigration laws because Romans 13:1–7 and 1 Peter 2:13–14 imply that in God's mind, in His economy for creating nations and governments, He intends for the leaders of a nation to protect the *citizens* of the nation. Note in this regard Romans 13:4:

... for [Government] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for

it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

In this passage, Paul, a *citizen* of the Roman Empire, is addressing believers who are *citizens* of the Roman Empire living in the capital city of Rome. Not only does he state here the need for *citizens* to abide by the rule of law, which includes immigration law, but in addition, he implies what the motive should be behind the legislators' (*ministers* [*diakonia*], meaning "servants") lawmaking: to look out for the welfare of *citizens*, i.e., such laws are intended to *you for good*.

It is not overreaching to reason from this passage that immigration laws, like all of a nation's laws, should stem from a desire to protect the nation and its *citizenry*.⁹ That protection should deter a myriad of intrusions by illegals: weapons of destruction, disease, property and job theft, the importation of illegal drugs, and the like, which could result from illegals who have never pledged their allegiance to the nation and its laws but rather have broken the laws of the land by entering the country illegally.

In that God intends for *citizens* to obey their governing authorities and in that those authorities have deemed positive and negative migratory policies (again, assuming their laws have been informed by Scripture), it follows that:

The immigration laws of every nation
should be biblically based and strictly
enforced—all with the utmost confidence
and assurance that God approves such
actions by the nation's leaders!

Similar to a parent who incorrectly feels guilty for spanking a rebellious child because the parent's conscience is not sufficiently informed by Scripture, the conscience of the lawmaker, too, should be informed by God's Word on this subject. And God's Word says He frowns on illegal immigrants—just like He says He frowns on children ruling the roost!

VII. GOD'S DESIGN: RESTRICTIONIST NOT RACIST

It needs to be especially underscored that an advocate of immigration restriction is not necessarily a racist. Policies preventing illegal immigration should stem from biblical motives of ensuring the general welfare of the nation versus denying a would-be immigrant the potential for a better way of life. To procedurally exclude *foreign* individuals who might be criminals, traitors, or terrorists, or who possess communicable diseases is not racist in the least! It is good stewardship to protect the *citizens* of a nation who have unmistakably pledged their allegiance to that nation and their fellow *citizens*! Holding to a biblical theology on immigration in no way implies that one is necessarily a racist!

VIII. GOD'S DESIGN: BOUNDARIES EQUATE TO COMPASSION

One additional misnomer that is common to current debates on immigration is the charge that those who are tough on immigration are patently compassionless. Just the opposite is true! This can be illustrated in a myriad of ways. One is an economic argument:

In a world of limited resources and GDP,
for a nation not to enforce boundaries or
defenses relative to alien incursion is,
in the end, compassionless.

Such leniencies, as evidenced by current American immigration policies and the facts quoted in the introduction to this study, eventually bankrupt the treasury. This happens when non-*citizens* are the recipients of endless entitlement grants, health benefits, employment insurance, education scholarships, etc.—all given to those who have never pledged allegiance to the flag that they willingly take from! A nation with overly lenient immigration policies will always end up insolvent. It's difficult to manifest compassion when you are bankrupt yourself.

IX. GOD'S DESIGN: ADDITIONAL PRINCIPLES

The standard of Scripture on immigration is obvious, consistent, and not difficult to understand.

The question as to how a nation that
has so wildly strayed from God's
standard and returns to God's standard
is a complex and difficult one.

Stemming from the biblical precepts examined, there are at least six NT biblical principles that add additional insights on this matter:

A. GOVERNMENTS MUST PROTECT THEIR PEOPLE

As gleaned from Romans 13:4, Paul states under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, *for it* [government] *does not bear the sword for nothing*. Governments are to seek the welfare of their people by *punishing evildoers* (1 Peter 2:13–14). People who are illegals are a threat to the welfare of those who are *citizens*. It is out of an inherent desire imbued by their Designer, that governments want to protect their *citizens* as a mother does her child—and if they don't, they should. In terms of immigration, for a government to be pleasing to God and receive His blessing, it has no option but to protect its *citizenry* from illegal immigration per Romans 13:4 and 1 Peter 2:13–14. It must always protect its borders and punish those who enter illegally. Any governmental response that is less than this violates God's clearly revealed intention for government and invites chaos (as we now are seeing on our southern borders).

B. PERSONAL INDUSTRIOUSNESS, NOT GOVERNMENT, IS GOD'S MEANS OF PROVISION FOR INDIVIDUALS

Part of the curse of the Fall of man in Genesis 3:17–19 was the economic necessity that man would now have to work in order to obtain necessary

provisions. Paul restates this same idea when he reminds the Thessalonians that Jesus did not come to abolish the need for personal industry:

For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

The institution of government is not God's intended means for providing for people; rather government's role is limited to *the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right* (1 Peter 2:13–14).

God intends for people to support
their government, not for their
government to support them.

Fundamental to immigration reform is the need to remove the magnet of alluring governmental entitlements that serve to entice illegal entry. Such forms of provision are not pleasing to God and only work to destroy personal honor, character, and productivity in the recipient. Government entitlement programs are not biblical for anyone, let alone illegal immigrants. Nowhere in Scripture does God state that He created His institution of civil government to meet the needs of the people. (In other Bible studies, I explain in much greater detail that God ordained the institutions of marriage, family, and Church to meet the needs of the distraught, among other purposes—but not the institution of civil government!) Said again for emphasis, God intends for people to first meet their own needs; but if for some legitimate reason that is impossible, their needs are to be met by other individuals in their family or else the Church, but not the State. In the genius of God, the real needs of the individual can be met much more effectively and efficiently through those closest to him or her than by the impersonal institution of the State.

C. GOVERNMENTS MUST FURTHER THEIR COUNTRIES

Akin to the previous point, also based upon Romans 13:4 is the inherent responsibility of a government to advance the country, meaning its

leaders will want to enact immigration policies that only allow people into the country who can advance it, not detract from it. It also means that its schools should prioritize the enrollment of its *citizens* over immigrants and exclude illegal immigrants.

D. GOVERNMENTS ARE ENTITLED TO COLLECT TAXES

In that every country is competing with others in the world market, the less the tax the more competitive the nation. Having stated that, God grants every government the right to collect all forms of tax from every citizen. Note Romans 13:6–7:

For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due ...

Especially interesting to this topic, the Greek word for *taxes* (*phoros*) specifically relates to the *taxes* a person would need to pay to those who conquered their nation. The double emphasis being this: even if one is in subjugation to a foreign leader (which is the case with an illegal immigrant), he is nevertheless biblically obligated to pay *taxes*. Further, the word for *render* (*apodidomi*) has the connotation of “paying something that is owed.”

If concessions are granted to allow illegal entrants to obtain *citizenship* status over a period of years while remaining in the country as a part of comprehensive immigration reform, then this biblical insight needs to be taken into consideration in a God-glorifying workout plan. Illegal entrants should have to pay, at the least, their fair share of taxes (if not more as a fine for past lawless actions).

E. GOVERNMENTS MUST PUNISH EVILDOERS

Again, in Romans 13:4 God intends for governments to *bear the sword* relative to enacting justice. They are to be an *avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil*. This means government is sanctioned, bound, and responsible to punish those who break the law. There must be an extraction of due recompense for crimes committed, including illegal immigration, in order for a government to be characteristically just with and to all of its *citizens*. Appropriate and just fines need to be levied, both if illegal entrants choose to stay and work toward *citizenship* or choose to leave.

God's attribute of righteousness and justice means there is always to be a payment to balance an offense (versus simply letting an illegal go back to his or her country with no fines). This principle suggests that immigration reform must demand a cost for those who have entered America illegally. In light of this principle,

Immigration amnesty creates an
injustice toward those who have instead
worked through the legal process to
become ***citizens*** of the United States.

F. GOVERNMENTS CANNOT SHOW PARTIALITY AND BE JUST

When you think about it, whereas God, individuals, families, churches, and corporations can manifest grace and mercy, the institution of government must be just. Whenever government favors one group over another, it manifests corporate injustice. Therefore, fundamental to immigration reform is the need to demand that illegal entrants meet the same requirements as others who have legally obtained ***citizenship*** status.

X. APPLICATIONS OF THEOLOGY

What follows from these expositied biblical principles are at least six applications relative to immigration. These need to be manifest in comprehensive immigration reform in order to create laws that are in line with and pleasing to God.

1. ***Foreigners*** should not be allowed unregulated entry into a country. Borders and oceans should be impenetrable so as to discourage illegals' entrance.
2. ***Foreigners*** should not be able to partake of any governmental entitlements. (Governments should not be in that business to begin with.)

Nor should they be allowed to have any licenses, legal identification, or enrollment in any institutions.

3. *Foreigners* who can help advance (not detract) should be afforded *sojourner*/immigration consideration. It follows then that *foreigners* who are already in the country seeking *citizenship* should have citizen-sponsors who can testify to their past value, productivity, present character, and loyalty.
4. *Foreigners* should be required to *pay taxes* similar to those paid by *citizens*, both present and past due.
5. Illegal *entrants*, whether headed toward *citizenship* or expulsion, should be justly punished.
6. Not all of the responsibility of illegal immigration should be placed on the shoulders of each illegal immigrant because of the simple fact that the institution itself, the government of the United States, has continually violated the biblical principles associated with immigration. The repeated, long-term violations of the institution itself in specific regard to having fostered and prolonged illegal immigration need to be taken into consideration in working out the problem.

At the risk of crossing the line from the expositor's discipline of being pre-political only, governmental inaction coupled with entitlement magnetism has led to an inordinate number of people who now live here illegally. It follows that in the quest for God-honoring justice, governmental exceptions need to be made to achieve a successful workout plan for a stated period of time; it is not as if the institution has clean hands in this matter. In this vein of thought, ensuing actions of immigration reform and restitution should not be construed as an unjust display to those who have gained their *citizenship* legally, as much as it is the manifest, public repentance of our government for having prolonged, having knowingly and repeatedly broken God's principles relative to the aforementioned.

May God grant you, our lawmakers, wisdom in crafting this last point into a policy that is pleasing to God. I pray for you in this regard.

1. Merrill Matthews, “Illegal immigrants double under Biden—and that’s just the start,” *The Hill*, January 23, 2024, thehill.com/opinion/4423296-matthews-illegal-immigrants-double-under-biden-and-thats-just-the-start/
2. Kevin D. Roberts, *The Federalist*, December 4, 2024, thefederalist.com/2024/12/04/the-case-for-mass-deportation/
3. Homeland Security Committee, Republican, “STARTLING STATS FACTSHEET: Fiscal Year 2024 Ends With Nearly 3 Million Inadmissible Encounters, 10.8 Million Total Encounters Since FY2021, October 24, 2024,” <https://homeland.house.gov/2024/10/24/startling-stats-factsheet-fiscal-year-2024-ends-with-nearly-3-million-inadmissible-encounters-10-8-million-total-encounters-since-fy2021/>
4. Judy Parejko, author of *Stolen Vows: The Illusion of No-Fault Divorce and the Rise of the American Divorce Industry* (InstantPublisher, 2nd Edition, 2012), states CA Assemblyman Hayes “was responsible for doggedly pursuing [the no-fault divorce] bill because he was facing a divorce, and he didn’t like the rules at the time. Nowadays, his actions would be called a conflict of interest.”
5. John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton, first Baron Acton (1834–1902) is credited as the author of this quote.
6. In a study of the doctrine of sin, specifically corporate sin, it should be noted that Satan is *not* presently in control of civil government (a theological gaffe shared by many Evangelicals who thereby reason that all governments are evil and logically justify their separation from any involvement in it thenceforth). Even though Satan acts like he controls the world when he tempts Christ in Luke 4, we know elsewhere from Scripture that he does not (in the Luke 4 temptation, Satan is lying to Jesus).
7. This is the biblical basis and reasoning as well for why a country should not use its military might to conquer others, eclipsing whatever other pragmatic reasons might be proffered. Fortunately and rightfully, this has not been a historic temptation of our superpower nation.
8. James K. Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2009) 52.
9. Such proper attitudes are reflected by the lawmakers who wrote the US Constitution. It states that the laws of America are motivated by and meant to “ensure domestic tranquility” and to “provide for the common defense.” Such are noble, biblical desires that need to continue to be incorporated in the attitude and spirit of necessary immigration reform policies.

Scripture's Clear and Convincing Case Crushes the Same-Sex Marriage Debate

SCOTUS's ruling that overturned *Roe v. Wade* has paved the way for the high court to question the legitimacy of its similarly overreaching decisions. D.C. insiders know that one of those past rulings ripe for being overturned is same-sex marriage.

In response to the vulnerability of the Supreme Court's same-sex marriage decision, the House of Representatives rushed through legislation to make same-sex marriage the law of the land. News stories reported that secular archaeologists even helped with the cause, suggesting that ancient human fossil evidence supports transgenderism! On December 13, 2022, President Joe Biden signed the misnamed "Respect for Marriage Act," which allowed homosexual marriage in every state in the nation.

But what does the highest authority in the universe have to say about this matter—that authority being God Almighty as revealed in His Word?

Before examining several pertinent biblical passages that provide the irrefutable and convincing clarity negating same-sex marriage, the issue of who, according to the Bible, is qualified to speak authoritatively about the

Bible should be addressed. The Scriptures are clear: God sets the standard for those who are approved to teach His Word. Those God-appointed teachers, called overseers, are identifiable by specific characteristics. The existence of these qualities is intended by God to indicate those whom He has appointed as His mouthpieces—men who are set apart by Him to teach, herald, and preach His Word. The Bible is nonambiguous: no one else is qualified to speak for Him.

Shouldn't we refer to God's Word to determine who He says is credible to speak for Him?

Too often on the Hill (or in various state capitols across America) non-believing public servants arrange for illegitimate "Bible spokespersons" to proffer testimonies (which amount to their personal opinions) in subcommittees. The same is true on talk shows and various other mediums.

But according to God's Word, such people do not speak for Him. One of the pertinent passages that contains the authentications of a legitimate spokesman of God is 1 Timothy 3:2. Therein the Apostle Paul instructs his understudy, Timothy, who has just entered his pastorate, how to choose leaders in the Church who possess God's stamp of approval. Paul states, *An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.*

A legitimate spokesman for God, an overseer (*episkopos* or pastor-teacher, cf. Ephesians 4:11–12) will be one who, among other qualifiers, is the *husband of one wife*, (literally, "a male who is a one-woman man"). A legitimate spokesperson for God must believe in male/female marriage to begin with! Put plainly, a supposed member of the clergy who does not believe in male-female marriage is not qualified to speak on marriage! First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 serve to filter out illegitimate spokesmen for God and His Word, so don't listen to what these counterfeit representatives might espouse! Pseudo Christian pastors are not qualified in God's eyes to speak on the subject! If you know the Word, you will quickly ascertain that their arguments are specious.

I wrote a Bible study on "Nine Characteristics of Tares" (cf. Titus 1:11, 3 John 9–11) that elaborates more extensively on the existence of Satan's pawns—false teachers—whose singular intent, per the insight of Scripture, is to mislead believers. The Scriptures shout about false teachers—and there are many—who attempt to legitimize same-sex marriage. I am cautioning you to carefully consider the lifestyle characteristics of those who claim to be God's representatives on homosexuality and gay marriage.

Naïve is the person who listens to the divergent views of false teachers. The Bible is clear and convincing and does not contradict itself on the matter; it provides one viewpoint throughout all its 66 books!

It stands to reason that the biggest threat to a clear and convincing understanding that the Scriptures negate same-sex marriage is not secular dissension. It is clerical duplicity. Don't be fooled. This in-depth Bible study expositis the main passages in the Bible that proponents of homosexuality contort and twist to support same-sex marriage.

One need not look very far into Scripture to learn of God's singular definition of marriage and His subsequent sweeping disapproval of same-sex marriage. To the point, in no way is God's Word pro-LGBTQ. Only a Scripture twister could reason otherwise. Years ago, a legislator challenged me on my understanding of the exclusivity of Scripture regarding this subject. He suggested at a Bible study I was leading in the California Capitol that the Scriptures propounded something different from what he thought was my biased, personal viewpoint. He asked if he could present a Bible study the following week to represent God's supposed approval of same-sex marriage and homosexuality. No such study ever materialized. The fact is, he couldn't produce one.

This Bible study on this issue indicates why.

In my scriptural work-up on same-sex marriage, I provide the LGBTQ community's positions on the various pertinent passages (I think that is only fair). But so doing serves to further uncover their specious arguments.

By way of introducing the perspicuous distinctiveness of God's mind, notice the following: in addition to the narrative of Adam and Eve, who are specifically identified as husband and wife in Genesis 2:24 (cf. 1:27), Proverbs 12:4a underscores God's testimony regarding His design and definition of marriage. *An excellent wife is the crown of her husband....* As in English, the Hebrew words used in these ancient manuscripts are unmistakably clear: wife (*ishshah*) means "female," and the word for husband (*baal*) means "male." In one sense, I need not argue further. But Scripture is replete and unswerving in this regard, and this Bible study goes deep.

Don't be fooled; know your Bible on this matter! All societies that digress from male-female marriage do so at their own peril. Same-sex marriage is not God's design. Rather, it is human folly, and it leads to an overall dysfunctional society like we are now experiencing.

I. OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES

A. GENESIS 19:4–13

In this passage, what was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah?

Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; and they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them." But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, and said, "Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof." But they said, "Stand aside." Furthermore, they said, "This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them." So they pressed hard against Lot and came near to break the door. But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. They struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves trying to find the doorway. Then the two men said to Lot, "Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring them out of the place; for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the Lord that the Lord has sent us to destroy it."

The homosexual "christian community" interpretation expounds that the sin in evidence is *not* sodomy, but rather inhospitality. Proponents claim that the Hebrew word for *have relations* or *know* (*yada*¹) has "an unknown or ambiguous meaning." Secondly, sexual activity, they claim, is not indicated in the passage; this is supposedly supported via their referencing of Ezekiel 16:49–50, which will be examined next.

To the interpretive contrary, the word *yada* appears 943 times in the Old Testament and is not ambiguous in meaning: "to gain knowledge or become better acquainted with someone or something" is its meaning. However, keep the following in mind:

Context strongly indicates that
yada is used in Genesis as a polite
euphemism for sexual intercourse.

Yada is used euphemistically in Genesis 4:17 wherein Scripture states ***Cain knew (yada) his wife and she conceived ...*** (KJV). To think of this word usage any differently leads to interpretive problems in both chapters 4 and 19. To illustrate, why did Lot plead with them not to act ***wickedly*** (v. 19:7)? Why did Lot panic, offering sexual substitutes (v. 8)? Is it not somewhat contradictory to attempt to break down another's ***door*** (v. 9) in reaction to their ***inhospitality***? It is apparent from context that Lot understood well that their advances were not friendly in nature.

Furthermore, the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah brought the following response from God: ***And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave"*** (18:20). In verse 19:13, God's angels stated, ***"For we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the LORD that the LORD has sent us to destroy it."*** All these references argue against the sin of Sodom being one of inhospitality.

B. EZEKIEL 16:49–50

The homosexual community nonetheless cites this passage in support of inhospitality being the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. But as will be seen, the following passage hinders, not helps, their argument:

"Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it."

Arrogance, slothfulness, and blindness toward the needs of others are certainly evidence of self-centered, sinful behavior worthy of admonishment in any culture. But an additional listed iniquity in this passage is the word ***abomination*** (*toebah*), which is translated elsewhere from Hebrew to English as "detestable acts." For this to mean homosexual acts is in clear

view considering Leviticus 18:22, which uses the same word synonymously with homosexual activity:

C. LEVITICUS 18:22

“You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.”

The word ***abomination*** is the same Hebrew word used in Ezekiel 16:50, *toebah*, wherein homosexual activity is clearly described. *Toebah* is characterized by males lying together. Leviticus 18 and Ezekiel 16 further serve to link, identify, and illuminate the specific sin of Sodom and Gomorrah as being one of homosexuality.

D. LEVITICUS 20:13

“If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.”

Notice the phrase ***detestable act*** is the same Hebrew word as ***abomination*** (*toebah*).

But what about putting homosexuals to death?

The Old Testament (OT) book of Leviticus is God’s manual for Israel—His chosen, set apart people in His old covenant—whom He intended to be His distinguished-from-all-others representative people. He gave them special ceremonies, laws, rituals, dietary restrictions, a personal holiness code, and enforceability to achieve their exclusivity from the practices of the surrounding Canaanites and Egyptians. These surrounding pagans subscribed to all kinds of sexual deviancies, among other immoral actions. Accordingly, Leviticus 18 and 20 have to do with the impermissibility of various forms of sexual immorality—from incestuous relations to bestiality. All sexual degradations are roundly prohibited and punishable to retain cultural purity and witness. Keep in mind that God had said,

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (Deuteronomy 7:6).

In the New Testament (NT) Church Age, under the new covenant, God *abrogates* (“to abolish by authoritative, official, or formal action”) Israel’s ceremonial laws, dietary regulations, Levitical priesthood, etc., as evidenced in various respective passages such as Acts 10:1–16, Colossians 2:16–17, and 1 Peter 2:9, etc. These elements, like the stoning of homosexuals, are no longer to be practiced, in that God has instituted a new covenant for His people in the age of the Church, per Matthew 26:28, 2 Corinthians 3:6–18, and Hebrews chapters 7 to 10.

What should be focused on today is the divine character behind the rituals and penalties spoken of in Leviticus. The spiritual principles upon which ancient Israel’s rituals were rooted are timeless because they are manifestations of the very nature and essence of the purity and holiness of God.

Leviticus and Arguing about Homosexuality

Advocates for same-sex marriage have attempted to put words in the mouths of Christian legislators, often insinuating that Christians believe stoning homosexuals is proper because Leviticus 20:13 says, **“they shall surely be put to death.”** The response to such conjecturing is quite simple, as follows.

Ask the following question in response: “Do you believe a civil command found in Leviticus is applicable outside of the context of ancient Israel?” If the person answers, “Yes,” then say, “I don’t.” If they answer “No,” then say, “I agree.” Either way the argument is over.

You might want to add or clarify, “Is everything in the Bible that was stated in God’s old covenant about ancient Israel repeated in the new covenant about the Church? Certainly not!”

Furthermore, “Putting to death a man who lies with a male” is not a tenet found recurring in the new covenant of the Church Age. However, the NT most certainly does reiterate and uphold the prohibition of homosexuality, but not the corporeal punishment of it.

It is naïve, if not disingenuous, to falsely insinuate that Christian legislators hold to a belief that governments today should stone homosexuals. On the other end of the spectrum of biblical ignorance are those who suggest that homosexuality is no longer prohibited because Israel's holiness code is now obsolete. Both suppositions stem from a biblical illiteracy pertaining to a chronological misunderstanding of ancient Israel and the Church today. Such a lack of knowledge is unfortunately too common among journalists and lawmakers. (Challenge them to begin attending a good Bible study that may lead to their salvation.) First Corinthians 2:14 states in this regard, *But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.*

E. JUDGES 19:22-23

This parallel passage to Genesis 19 provides further insight into the meaning of God's narrative.

While they were celebrating, behold, the men of the city, certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the door; and they spoke to the owner of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations with him." Then the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my fellows, please do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not commit this act of folly."

The words *wickedly* (*rawah*) and *act of folly* (*nebalah*) roundly mean "profane actions of immorality; senselessness and disgrace." These words exhibit the wrongfulness of what *have relations* (*yada*) means.

II. NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES

The gay community claims that Jesus Himself never condemned homosexuality. Note, however, the following passage:

A. MATTHEW 10:14-15

"Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. Truly I say to you, it will

be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.”

In this passage Jesus specifically mentions Sodom and Gomorrah as He teaches His disciples. His main point is that people who reject God’s messengers—whom He is sending out to be His witnesses—will undergo a stricter judgment than, comparatively speaking, did Sodom and Gomorrah. Jesus is therefore acknowledging the appropriateness of the condemnation of these cities for the reason previously established.

B. ROMANS 1:26–27

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

Paul’s reasoning in Romans is based upon congruity with creation. God distinguishably created male and female (Genesis 1:27), and as mentioned in the introduction, Genesis 2:24 states that marriage is between a man and a woman: *For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.* Literally, *ish* shall be joined to *ishshah*.

Romans could not be any clearer.

This passage pronounces that lesbianism and homosexuality are sin. The literal Greek for the English translation *their women exchanged the natural function* is “changed the natural use for the use beside.” The homosexual interpretive idea that *natural function* relates to the natural homosexual desire a person already possesses is unfounded here and in the corpus of Scripture. To travel that road is to fight the increasing weight of context and cross references. Nowhere in Scripture is this gay community idea validated; it is *eisegesis*, meaning interpreting Scripture based on one’s

own presuppositions, agendas, and biases. It is a mishandling of the text by people who only want to make a point at the expense of the true meaning. *Exegesis*, on the other hand, means discovering the true meaning of the passage based on grammar, syntax, setting, and the original Greek or Hebrew words used by the book's author.

Further and importantly, note Paul's choice of the Greek words for *women* and *men*. He does not use *gune* and *anthropos*, which describe the dignity of *women* and *men*. Rather, he uses *theleia* and *arsen*, which are descriptive of sexual gender only. Paul's refusal to ascribe even an implied dignity to those who degenerate into homosexuality is a powerful insight into the mind of God on the subject.

Additionally, Paul uses the Greek word *aschemosune* in this passage, which translated into English is *indecent acts*. He uses the same word in 1 Corinthians 13:5 in opposition to true love when he states, *love does not act (aschemosune) unbecomingly*. This phrase literally means "True love does not seek after its own lust and want."

In a broader context, this section of Romans relates to evidences *indicative* of a point at which God no longer restrains sin—when He withdraws His common grace. Homosexuality, in this passage, is evidence of "God's giving over" people to their own fallen, base ways. When God removes His restraint, a person is said to be *reprobate*. Homosexuality then is a sign of reprobation. A sentence summary of Romans chapter one is this: when people forsake the Author of creation, they inevitably forsake the order of creation.

C. 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

The Greek word here for *homosexuals* (*arsenokoitas*) is a compound noun; *arsen* (*male*) and *koitas* (*sexual intercourse*) (English: "coitus"). The word is unmistakable in its meaning. These two words are individually used repeatedly throughout the NT with their respective meanings. The classic

and highly respected work *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* states, “*arsenokoitas*: ‘a male who practices homosexuality’ was the use of the word in extra-biblical literature of the time.”²

Therefore, for the homosexual “church” to state that the original meaning of this compound Greek noun “has been lost ... and that it would appear to have no relationship to consensual homosexual activity” is quite dishonest. Additionally, they mislead, reasoning that the English word “homosexual” does not appear in the original manuscripts of the Bible. Such a statement is true but naïve, as the Greek word *arsenokoitas* does appear, being a much more precise, descriptive, and definitive word of the sin in question than its English counterpart.

D. 1 TIMOTHY 1:9–10

Realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.

In this passage, Paul’s point is that the *law* of God is intended to reveal a person’s need for Christ to lead that person to trust in Him. For any evangelist, be it Timothy or any pastor today, to fail to state what sin actually is, is to be unclear to sinners about the Word of God. What is it a person needs to be saved from? Here listed as a sin is the same compound Greek noun *arsenokoitas*—a male who practices homosexuality. This passage and 1 Corinthians 6:11 illustrate the following:

One needs to be saved from the sin of
homosexuality as were some Corinthians.

E. 2 PETER 2:6–10

And if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who

would live ungodly lives thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority.

Peter incorporates these OT cities as a historical example to illustrate his point. The pertinent words in this passage, as well as the whole passage, are often overlooked by pro-homosexual interpreters. The late Peter J. Gomes, the former pro-homosexual chaplain of Harvard University, is one such man. For Gomes to have mentioned these passages would have destroyed the thesis of his book.³

Condemned (*katarkrino*) means, “To pass sentence on because of a crime.” In the construct of the passage, such condemnation is directly related to the **sensual conduct** (*aselgeia*), “wantonness and licentiousness,” of the men of **Sodom and Gomorrah**.⁴ The ancient use of *aselgeia* was a description of “whatever was disgraceful... that which is characterized by moral impurity or filth.” Lastly **corrupt desires** (*miasmos epithumia*) further define the reasons for God’s condemnation. This Greek phrase means, “A strong desire to defile.”

This is yet another passage (as if it were necessary) that helps to interpret the meaning of the sin of Genesis chapter 19. Considering the specific and descriptive words used here in 2 Peter, to interpret *yada* to mean “to get acquainted and build a friendship” is intellectually impossible.

F. JUDE 7

Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

Jude underscores more of the same. The homosexual community generally states that the translators of the original Greek New Testament were unclear as to the meaning of these passages and therefore selected their favorite sin(s) to attack. However, the word for **gross immorality** (*ekporneuo*) is a heightened sense of *porneuo*, which means “fornication,” accordingly “excessive fornication.” **Strange flesh** (*heteras*) means “another man.” Lastly, the context of this passage pertains to apostasy—those who

seem to be followers of Christ but in actuality are imposters. Jude's point is comparable to that of Romans: homosexuality is an indication of reprobation, and Sodom and Gomorrah are used repeatedly to illustrate God's attitude toward reprobation.

III. SUMMARY

Homosexuality and same-sex ceremonies are illegitimate in God's eyes. His Word is repetitive, perspicuous, and staid on the subject. For the individual to engage in these acts or for society to endorse them is to practice sin.

Not only is homosexuality and same-sex marriage voided by God in His Word, but biology as well condemns homosexuality and same-sex marriage: one cannot be a homosexual evolutionist.

IV. CONCLUSION

There is hope for all caught in such a pernicious addiction. Jesus Christ came to liberate sinners! *Such were some of you; but you were washed...* states Paul regarding homosexuals in 1 Corinthians 6:11. Therein is the heart of the minister and the believer toward those who are addicted to whatever sin—to love the sinner, while inalterable on sin. Contextually, some of the Corinthian church members were formerly homosexuals, but by God's grace they found new life in Christ! We need to repent and believe on the Savior today to receive the gift of eternal life, as well as freedom from and power over the bondage of sin. Lastly, note the following:

It is not the place of the State nor its
populace to redefine what God has
created. Such is arrogance of the highest
order. Man should not define God's ways;
God's ways should define man's.

This matter is serious in the eyes of God in that it puts a society in danger of suffering God's consequential wrath of sowing and reaping.⁵ When a

culture becomes permissive by embracing homosexuality and other types of sexual sin, it degrades that nation's foundational building blocks: biblical marriage between a man and a woman, child bearing, and child rearing. If a nation loses what progenerates a healthy society, eventually that society is lost. Sowing by permitting sexual sins reaps a crumbling culture.

1. *Yada* is used twelve times in the Old Testament with this euphemistic understanding. *Euphemism*: the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive word or expression for one that is harsh, indelicate, or otherwise unpleasant or taboo (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*).
2. Walter Bauer and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. by William F. Arndt (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 109.
3. Peter J. Gomes, *The Good Book* (New York, William and Morrow Company, 1996). In his supposedly comprehensive biblical treatment of the subject, he ignores even mentioning some of the pertinent passages recorded in the Bible and dealt with herein.
4. Helpful to understanding what Jude means is the fact that the angels who came to visit Lot in Genesis 19 came in physical form (ref. 19:3, wherein they ate bread). We can conclude that the angels had angelic beauty in physical form. In this sense then, the Sodomites went after "strange flesh."
5. God's wrath of reaping and sowing is in view here, abandonment wrath is not. Some leading Evangelicals often cite this passage to support their thesis that America is under God's wrath of abandonment. They quip, "If God doesn't judge America He owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology!" But note that if there had been only a few believers in Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Genesis 18:22–33) God would have spared those cities. Therefore what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah is not analogous to America: millions of faithful believers reside in America! (See my study on "Is God Judging America Today?" for a thorough exposition on God's wrath of abandonment.)

The Bible on When War Is Justifiable

If Jesus calls His followers to be “peacemakers,” then how could a Christian cabinet member or congressman support the idea of going to war?

The short answer is this: “***Blessed are the peacemakers***” is one of Jesus’ beatitudes relative to how believers should conduct their *personal* lives (Matthew 5:9). But there is a distinction to be made between Jesus’ instruction regarding *personal* behavior and the responsibilities He sets forth relative to His ordination of the *institution* of government (Romans 13:1–8 and 1 Peter 2:13–14) that Christian Members are called to serve.

In an Old Testament (OT) parallel, in the sixth commandment, the Hebrew word for *murder* is *ratsakh* in “***You shall not murder***” (Exodus 20:13), but note this word is different than the ones God uses in Scripture in relation to His people’s having to kill someone in war.

Let us investigate more fully what the Scriptures have to say about war.

I. INTRODUCTION

When Jesus returns, He will ***wage war*** against the nations led by the Antichrist (cf. Revelation 19:11). In Deuteronomy 20, God Himself sends Israel to war. Therefore, this study is not so much about whether or not God condones war; He does. God’s acceptance and use of war in a fallen world is not difficult to understand when viewed in the sense that often and ultimately, He is manifesting His attributes of ***justice*** and ***righteousness*** through its use. Therefore, this study is not about whether God is for or against war—the answer to that question is obvious from Scripture. This

study is more about the kind of war that is acceptable versus unacceptable in His eyes.

To gain a biblical understanding about God's view of war, we need to elaborate first on what the Bible says is the role of God's institution of government. This role must be clearly distinguished, contextualized, and separated from passages that speak to individual responsibilities as noted in the preamble. Failure to make this distinction that Scripture itself makes leads to confusion, as if the Bible contradicts itself, which it does not.

Secondly, gaining an understanding of what kind of wars are just requires examining whether the basis for the internationally accepted *just war theory* is biblical. Are each of the eight principles that comprise this theory supported by Scripture? If so, what passages from God's Word underlie each precept? Said another way, is each of the eight precepts *cap-tive to Christ* (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:5) so to speak?

Lastly, a study on war would not be complete without examining the two leading camps in opposition to the *just war theory*: the *Christian pacifist* and the *noninterventionist* (this latter camp is peopled by Christians and non-Christians alike). How do advocates of these beliefs attempt to support their viewpoints, and are these viewpoints biblically based? As a result,

This study should prove most helpful for
thinking clearly about the present crisis.

Examining these subjects in this order will hopefully aid the public servant in his or her formation of strong, biblically based convictions regarding the proper use of war.

II. THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

The Fall of man in Genesis chapter three warrants God's ongoing need to restrain the ensuing evil in and from man. One of the primary means God has ordained to achieve restraint, stemming from His holy attribute of perfect *justice*, is the principle of just recompense. This principle was first illustrated in Genesis following the Fall. The pain of childbearing for

the woman and the necessity of labor for mankind's survival (3:16–17) illustrate the just cost of man's disobedience, i.e., a cost to be borne by mankind into his distant, physical future. Further, in Genesis 9:6 God institutionalizes capital *punishment*: "**Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed.**" That is to say, God will use corporate man as His surrogate to mete out His just recompense, in this case for murder. The due recompense for the premeditated murder of another man will be the murderer's death: corporeal *punishment* by corporate mankind. The concept presented is more fully explicated in Romans 13:1–4. Scripture says in this regard:

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

Notice first of all that *governing authorities* are *established by God* (v. 1) for the purpose of, among others reasons, bearing *the sword...an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil* (v. 4). This same idea is echoed by 1 Peter 2:13–14:

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

Human institutions (ἄνθρωπινῃ κτίσει, *anthropine ktisei*—"that which is created for humans [by God]") exist *for the punishment of evildoers*. This basic truth is foundational to a proper understanding of the role of government in general and in specific as it relates to the subject of war. God's design, the purpose of government in large measure, is to curtail the evil deeds of men and to deter the further wrongdoing of man against the weak and defenseless; it is a form of God's restraining grace in a fallen world.

This fundamental purpose of government can be expanded to include not only the need to protect its citizenry from evil from within but to

protect its citizenry from evil from outside. In this sense, government is *a minister of God to you for good*.

III. GOVERNMENTS GOING TO WAR

If this is the purpose of government, then
it follows that God would expect a nation to
protect itself from forces of evil outside its
borders or outside forces that would attempt
to harm innocent people in some way.

Many times in the OT, Israel had to defend itself from the plundering onslaught of the Philistines, Assyrians, and Babylonians. (Depending on Israel's obedience or disobedience to God, He would allow Israel either to be victorious or defeated respectively.) In fact, as mentioned in the introduction, God commanded Israel to go to war in Deuteronomy 20:1:

When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you.

Additional evidence of God's condoning a nation's self-interest through the use of war are the following NT illustrations:

John the Baptist does not condemn a Roman soldier for going to war; rather, he says, "*be content with your wages*" (Luke 3:14).

When Cornelius the centurion was won to Christ, the apostles did not condemn his vocation (Acts 10:1; 44–48; cf. Luke 14:31). Their response is unlike Jesus' in John 8:11, wherein He tells the woman adulterer, "*Go. From now on sin no more.*"

These and other passages serve to illustrate the idea that God is not averse to governments engaging in war; that is part of the reason He created them—to benefit mankind in this way. Again, the more difficult question is this:

When is going to war
justifiable in God's eyes?

Certainly, the ancient practice of conquest and plundering another nation for the sake of gaining their wealth and new slaves is not a justifiable cause for war. So then what is? What are the specific earmarks to help us to ascertain the justifiable and unjustifiable use of war in the eyes of God?

IV. THE EIGHT PRINCIPLES OF JUSTIFIABLE WAR

Throughout centuries of discussions relative to the ethics of war usage among both Christians and non-Christians alike, a broadly, internationally accepted *just war theory* has been developed. Historically in the Church, the primary believers to tackle the issue of war from a philosophical standpoint were Augustine of Hippo and then some 900 years later, Thomas Aquinas. Augustine addresses war in his classic book, *The City of God*:

They who have waged war in obedience to the divine command, or in conformity with His laws, have represented in their persons the public justice or the wisdom of government, and in this capacity have put to death wicked men; such persons have by no means violated the commandment, "Thou shalt not [murder]."¹

Centuries later Thomas Aquinas began to codify Augustine's thoughts on war into a punch list of indicators as to whether or not a war is ethically justifiable. The modern-day summary of that moral pursuit follows. Given the fact that some of the best ancient Christian scholars originated the skeletal aspects of the *just war theory*, it should come as no surprise to today's believers that each is undergirded with biblical truth!

In summary, the Latin phrase for wars being morally right or justifiable is *jus ad bellum*, meaning "the right to go to war," but only when embarking on it meets the following eight criteria:

A. JUST CAUSE

Is the reason for engaging in war, such as defending a nation from an evil aggressor, morally right? As noted in the introduction, God furiously wages war against the Antichrist in Revelation 19:11.

Notice His principle for engagement:

And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

This is a glorious passage of the awesome spectacle of the triumphal Second Coming of Christ. Herein observe that God *wages war* only when it is for a *righteous cause*. Those nations considering waging war should do likewise: only consider engagement when the cause is justifiably *righteous*.

Conquering other nations is usually a wrong objective of war because God is for a diversification of nations per Genesis 11. To in any way invade, usurp, or colonize another nation is the wrong objective for the use of war. God intentionally *scattered* the nations (11:8), and His intent is that they be kept *scattered*. (Thank God that this Genesis 11:8 idea is deeply, unwaveringly embedded in our nation's fabric! Our nation possesses the mightiest war power in world history—a might that could be used alternatively to conquer the world if it were not for our deep convictions stemming from Genesis 11:8! Considering our military muscle, may our continual awareness, understanding of, and convictions stemming from Genesis 11:8 never depart from our corporate culture, our thinking as a nation.)

The war criteria of “just cause”
means that, in some overt
way, a nation’s sovereignty
is directly threatened.

“Just cause” is the first principle for a nation to consider when pondering the use of war. A direct threat to a nation need be imminent to warrant the use of war.

B. COMPETENT AUTHORITY

This next principle asks this question: has the aggression to which a nation is responding been declared and/or proliferated by the actual authority within the nation? Stated differently, is a nation's consideration of going to war in response to a renegade or third-party covert action within the

nation? This distinction helps to guard against and discern the existence of parties other than those in actual authority who may desire to *unrighteously* and unjustifiably accelerate a war using deception and agitation. For our nation to declare war on another nation that is not responsible for the evil actions being propagated within its own geographical boundaries is not just. This principle is rooted as well in 1 Peter 2:13–14.

C. COMPARATIVE JUSTIFICATION

This third principle means this: by way of stark comparison, it should be apparent that the enemy's actions are morally wrong and the actions of the nation bringing war are morally correct. Notice Romans 13:3 in this regard:

For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same.

This simple point could be easily overlooked: if a nation's actions are morally right, another nation has no justification to go to war with them. Relatively speaking, when compared, there must be a stark difference between the justifications for one nation to engage in the action of war against another:

The injustices suffered by a nation
enacting war must significantly
outweigh those suffered by the nation
upon which war has been declared.

For instance, during World War II, the added agony that America's invasion brought on the French people was justifiable in comparison to the atrocities they were suffering under Hitler. In this instance, the promise of national liberation—freeing France from Nazi occupation—provided a glaring moral contrast to Germany's unjustified invasion.

D. RIGHT INTENTION

Is the purpose of the war to achieve *justice* and *righteousness* or one of conquest, pillage, and destruction—or are the motives perhaps vengeful? Proverbs 21:2 speaks to what underlies the need to discern right intentions:

*Every man's way is right in his own eyes,
But the Lord weighs the hearts.*

Many passages speak of man's ability to be self-deceived due to the Fall (cf. Proverbs 16:2, 24:12; 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Corinthians 4:4). The noetic effect of sin, if unchecked by the counsel of God's Word and the advice of other godly people, can lead to the manifestation of bad intentions. Relative to the sinful proclivities of man, the OT book of Judges states, *every man did what was right in his own eyes* (17:6), but in so doing they did wrong. Man, in realization of his sinfulness needs to always obtain the godly counsel of others (cf. Proverbs 13:10). Proverbs 24:6 summarily states how one ought to wage a war that God approves of relative to this principle of right intentions:

*For by wise guidance you will wage war,
And in abundance of counselors there is victory.*

Carefully discerning whether the motives and intentions for going to war are just is critically important. This discernment can only be accomplished through the counsel of many. It follows then that a nation should not unilaterally *wage war* at the sole judgment of its executive; rather, seeking congressional approval would be supported by Scripture. Such approval is a check and balance that is necessary in response to the realization that man is often lacking in the best judgment or ability to discern whether motives and intentions are proper and God-honoring. Summarily, establishing right intentions is a sure-footed scriptural principle.

E. LAST RESORT

Have all the other reasonable means of resolving the conflict been seriously tried and exhausted? Romans 12:18 underscore this idea:

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

God is most pleased when parties can resolve their problems, thereby eliminating any need for war. At the same time, this principle is often

misused by the wrongful party: is the perpetrating nation using drawn-out negotiations as a stall tactic while they prepare to do evil? The rightful party should not be naive to this stratagem; a time comes when it is obvious that the grace of one party is being taken advantage of by the other to unjustly delay what in the end will be necessary: the just use of force. War should always be the last resort.

F. PROBABILITY OF SUCCESS

Entering a war is foolish unless there is a high probability of success. Luke 14:31 buoys the biblical basis of this principle:

Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand?

When answering the question of the probability of success upon entering a war, the obvious considerations of counting the cost must be considered. Determining what a successful effort to go to war will cost is difficult, and each incident is different with its own set of circumstances. The point of this study is not to delve into those weeds but to point out that weighing the probability of success and the cost of biblically based considerations are vital before determining to enter into a war.

G. PROPORTIONALITY OF RESULTS

Will the good results stemming from the success of the war objectives be greater than the losses that will inevitably occur from pursuing the war? Luke 14:28 speaks to this principle:

For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?

Even though God states that governments are to *bear the sword ... an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil*, it doesn't always follow that the good achieved by avenging the evil is outweighed by the additional harm that could result to innocent bystanders. Perhaps the proportionality of results will increase with patience or further creativity manifest in the timing or type of war utilized. Such considerations going into war are certainly undergirded by Scripture to correctly ascertain God's

will in the decision. Using Russia as an example, if cutting off their supply lines and imposing sanctions that have severe consequences have greater proportional results, is it wiser to do that than it is to attempt to fight an embedded enemy? A nation's leaders need calculate and weigh the costs and benefits of their war strategy before waging it.

H. RIGHT SPIRIT

All war must be undertaken with great reluctance, sobriety, and counsel. Those who engage the force of war must do so with great sorrow. Psalm 68:30 speaks about those who delight in war:

He has scattered the peoples who delight in war.

Given the pain of *punishment*, the inevitability of harming innocent people, and the overall further setbacks that will occur to the nation and its citizens, for any individual or nation to gleefully participate in combat is woefully displeasing to God. This last criterion of the *just war theory*, likened to all that precede it, is a principle substantiated by Scripture.

V. A SUMMARY OF THE JUST WAR THEORY

When the criteria are carefully and corporately reasoned and going to war is *just* and *righteous*, then a nation must engage with its full force, intense focus, and all-out power in a quest for immediate and decisive victory. In response to fulfillment of all the elements of the *just war theory* when going to war is *just* and *righteous*, what results can in no way be a half-hearted response! A nation cannot respond flaccidly with less-than-clear objectives!

Winston Churchill, when faced with the inevitability of engaging Nazi Germany, worked through and fulfilled all the above criteria with Parliament. Upon entering the war, he personally emulated this ensuing right spirit and resolve—what necessarily must follow when justifiably and *righteously* a nation enters a war. In his address to Parliament in 1940 he declared the following:

Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, "This was their finest hour."² You ask, what is our aim?...Victory, victory at all costs,

victory in spite of all terror; victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival.³

Churchill serves as an executive model for properly leading a nation into war. When war is *justified* and *righteous*, a country's leadership should never enter into it with "low testosterone." It is an all or nothing commitment of the totality of the nation in its decisive quest for all-out victory as quickly as possible!

1. Saint Augustine, trans. by Marcus Dods, *The City of God* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009).
2. Winston Churchill, "1940: The Finest Hour," 2021, *International Churchill Society*, <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1940-the-finest-hour>.
3. Winston Churchill, "Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat, 1940," May 13, 1940, *American's National Churchill Museum*, <https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/blood-toil-tears-and-sweat.html>.

The Remedy for Racism

Every culture and government throughout history has faced the issue of racism and unjust resentment toward others who are different. Racism is characteristic and evident of the sinful nature of man. Fallen mankind has always built barriers and ostracized others. This exclusion stems from pride: a fallen man's predilection to believe he or she is superior to another in some way. In this regard, racism parades around with his ugly brother who goes by the name arrogance. At its core, racism is a heart issue—a dilemma with no solution apart from Christ's regenerative work in a person's heart.

In fact, the Bible's test for the veracity of genuine faith is the absence of racism. John 13:35 says, "*By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*" Jesus' command here stems beyond loving those who are not exactly like us.

In this chapter let us examine some biblical insights regarding racism.

I. INTRODUCTION

"Racism" is defined as "a feeling of superiority based on race." The *Oxford Dictionary* defines "racism" in this way: "The belief that all members of each race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races."

In the first chapters of the book of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul addresses what is known in seminary circles as the biblical doctrine of soteriology, i.e., what the Bible has to say about salvation. When the reader arrives at the second chapter of Ephesians, most specifically verses 11 through 13, Paul is

in the middle of a discussion about one of the fruits of soteriology. Notice what that fruit is:

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Notice the first word, *therefore*. What Paul is about to say relates to and is based upon what he just said. And what he has just said is that salvation is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Prior to verse 11, Paul is conveying the idea that in no way is salvation based upon man’s merit. What he is saying in this passage under study is based on that previously stated idea: if salvation is a gift from God, then no one can say he or she has earned it and, therefore, believe and act as though superior to one who has not earned it! The attitude that the Jews were God’s chosen people, coupled with the fact that the Gentiles were not, is the precise reason why the Jews possessed a superiority complex—a racist attitude—relative to the Gentiles. Since salvation is not based on personal or ethnic merit and is available to all of mankind, for a saved person to believe he is superior to another is incongruous.

More specific to the passage, here’s what’s going on: the Ephesian believers to whom this epistle and this specific passage are addressed were Gentiles. Historically speaking, they had been greatly diminished and segregated—racially—from the kingdom of God by the Jews.

Even though that discrimination was the Jewish sentiment, God never intended for the Jews to view themselves as having a corner on the market—to think they were God’s chosen people and no one else was! Rather, God had set the Jews apart to be His representatives to all the nations. They were not to hoard God’s blessing but to share it with the other nations! The Jews, it seems, wanted the divine blessing of God’s decree (cf. Amos 3:2) but not the divine mission of God’s decree. In fact, Israel was supposed to be proselytizing all the other Gentile nations—not hoarding their special status. This is evidenced by the following Old Testament passages:

In Genesis 12:3 God pronounces His fundamental edict upon Abraham, the Jewish patriarch, saying, “*And in you all the families of the earth will*

be blessed.” The meaning and breadth of the word *all* for sure encompasses more than just the Abrahamic offspring to follow.

In Isaiah 42:6 we learn more about God’s plan for a special, representative-of-Him people:

“I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, and I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations.”

Isaiah 49:3 echoes, *“You are My Servant, Israel, in Whom I will show My glory.”* Furthermore, in verse 6 of the same chapter we read, *“I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”*

In Isaiah 60:3, God’s plan goes on to say, *“Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.”*

God’s plan for Israel culminates in chapter 62:1–2 of Isaiah, *Until [Israel’s] righteousness goes forth like brightness, and her salvation like a torch that is burning. The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory.*

Even though Israel was largely disobedient to God’s missional calling, these passages serve to illustrate the point that Israel had no basis for feeling culturally superior because in this perspective she was called to *serve*—not *condemn*—the Gentiles.

II. RACISM ILLUSTRATED: ANCIENT ISRAEL

Instead of spreading God’s blessing and message of salvation by faith through the coming Messiah, God’s chosen Messenger, the nation and ethnic group known as Israel, ended up being condescending toward the Gentiles; they had developed an attitude of superiority. Scripture evidences this attitude in many ways. In the book of Jonah, Jonah was called to preach repentance to Nineveh. He knew that God would bless them if they repented, but since he personally hated them, he fled from his God-given assignment to preach to them. Take note of this in Jonah 4:2:

“I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.”

As a Hebrew, Jonah would rather have seen the Gentiles judged than forgiven, so he tried to jump ship on his assignment—but even that didn’t work!

In the New Testament (NT) book of Acts (10:28; 34–35), we witness the same attitude in the young Apostle Peter. Peter was a Jew who carried an ample amount of Jewish baggage concerning the Gentiles until God got hold of him and began to work in his heart:

“You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.... I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.”

God had set apart the Israelites, and to make them distinctive, He gave them special and strict dietary, clothing, and marriage laws. They, however, perverted and devolved these distinguishing characteristics into a source of pride, self-glory, and religious isolationism. In terms of others knowing God, their evangelistic sermon sounded something more like what you might expect to hear on a kids’ playground: “Tick-tock, the game is locked, and nobody else can play.” So deeply rooted had Israel’s haughtiness grown that if a Jewish man or woman married a Gentile, the family would conduct a funeral!

The nation of Israel had debauched her calling—and the nation’s debauchery would cost her dearly! After much patience, God pronounced His judgment on her through the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah 5:1–7 God says to His chosen people:

“Why when I expected [you] to produce good grapes did [you] produce worthless ones? So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground” (vv. 4–5).

This specific prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in Jesus’ parable of the *landowner* (note that God is the *landowner* in the parable) as recorded in Matthew 21:33–43:

“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner WHO PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINEPRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the

vine-growers to receive his produce. The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. But afterward he sent his son to them, saying 'They will respect my son.' But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers? ... Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you."

The *vineyard* is a common symbol for the Jewish nation throughout Scripture. Herein God, the *landowner*, develops a *vineyard* and leases it to the vinedressers, who are the Jewish leaders. The killings refer to the OT prophets, and the killing of the son relates to Jesus' death at the hands of the Jews. Consequently, God takes His missional assignment away from Israel and gives His kingdom work to the Church—which is primarily composed of Gentiles.

Now why have I explained all that? Ethnic Israel had no reason to believe she was superior to other ethnicities!

The courtyard on the Temple grounds affords one remaining illustration of Israel's gross contortion of her calling. God had placed a courtyard in the design of the Temple for the specific purpose of winning Gentile converts. God's intended purpose was to provide a place where the Jews could proselytize the Gentiles to Judaism. Israel's magnificent glory was to be a magnet that would allure the Gentiles to come and see for themselves. So bad, however, was the debauchery of her mission that by NT times, the Jewish leaders were using the courtyard as a place to hold a swap meet to make money! An understanding of this debauchery explains why Jesus was so angry with them, driving them out and overturning tables! He said to them, ***"Is it not written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS?' BUT YOU HAVE MADE IT A ROBBERS' DEN"*** (Mark 11:17).

No doubt the Jewish leaders over the centuries had developed strong racist attitudes toward the Gentiles. And as we are about to see, only through the cross of Christ is the division healed between any racially divided group. The regenerative work of Christ in the heart of fallen man can heal more than just the racial divide between Jew and Gentile. God's power can heal any ethnic division. States Ephesians 2:14–16 in this regard:

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one ... that in Himself He might make the two into one new man ... and might reconcile them both.

When every believer understands this theological perspective of Scripture, he or she must realize that any present ethnic label should be subservient to being one new man whose identity is first and foremost in Christ!

III. RACISM DEFINED: THE SIN OF PARTIALITY

The student of the Bible should note that the word *racism* does not appear in Scripture. Rather, the Word of God refers repeatedly to it as the sin of *partiality* (*diakrino*). *Dia* means “under”; *krino* means “to judge,” literally “to judge under.” By judging another as inferior or underneath, a person is exalting himself as being superior or elevated above another human being. Again, one of the aspects of the Fall is pride, and pride often manifests in subtle or not-so-subtle attitudes of superiority. Whenever we gossip, we are in essence championing our superiority to the listener. The more specific meaning and usage of *diakrino* came to refer to the superficial elevation of one person over another for external reasons, i.e., it was common then as it is now to show favoritism based upon wealth, race, appearance, success, position, or social status.

IV. BETTER UNDERSTANDING THE SIN OF PARTIALITY

Our study now need shift to James 2:1–7 (NKJV), which has as its subject the sin of *partiality*. Take careful note of this passage:

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you

and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

James admonishes believers for favoring one person or socio-economic group of people, in this case the upper class, over and above the poor. Without going into too much detail (the passage is a week's study in its own right), it is important to note that the Church was manifesting favoritism to those who actually blasphemed Jesus' name!

Secular hypocrisy relative to racism is understandable: kids grow up in public schools learning the theory of evolution as fact. But evolution is more than a biological presupposition: it is a poisonous ideology that says "only the fittest survive," meaning some things in the world have more value than others. What is so hypocritical is that once a child is catechized in this ideology, he is told not to be a racist as an adult. Well, why not if evolution is true? Cannot the popularity of *partiality* today be explained by and large from yesterday's presupposition of evolution? In fact, evolutionary theory is a seedbed of racism; it is a great conundrum in American secularism.

James is saying that this same kind of hypocrisy should not exist among believers. Why idolize or display *partiality* in the Church, especially when it involves elevating the wealthy—if indeed they are the ones who primarily persecute you?

In contrast to secular evolution, the Bible speaks of God's creating man in His image. Accordingly, all of His creation—regardless of wealth, race, sex, handicap, age, position, status or celebrity quotient—inherently possesses a singular, similar value. In fact, the Almighty is impartial. Throughout His Word, He condemns *partiality*; He specifically warns in John 7:24, "*Do not judge according to appearance....*"

May it never be that we give away
that which is biblically correct to gain
that which is politically correct.

May it always be the other way around: the way of biblical impartiality. The parallel in the Capitol might be to hold a gathering, inviting the most

prominent people to sit at the head table and read from the Scriptures, pray, and give speeches without regard for the fact that they blaspheme Christ by their lifestyles, voting records, words, and actions before and after the event. In these annual Capitol gatherings, all spiritual qualifications are conveniently overlooked for the sake of the event's success.

Note the following passages in regard to the seriousness of the sin of *partiality*:

A. LEVITICUS 19:15

"You shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great"

Leviticus was a book of instruction for the Levites, the priests of the newly set-apart holy nation of Israel. Within the book of Leviticus is God's specific instruction to the Levites as to how they were to lead the effective, God-honoring worship of the nation Israel. Within this context God sets forth the above authoritative instruction on *partiality*.

B. JOB 34:19 (NKJV)

"Yet He is not partial to princes, nor does He regard the rich more than the poor, for they are all the work of His hands."

This section represents Elihu's best wisdom as he tries to decipher Job's mysterious plight. In so doing, Elihu fails in his prescriptive counsel, but nonetheless accurately reflects upon the character of God. God is not *partial* to position—be it a prince or a ruler. The fact that He does not favor social stature is especially underscored by the following passage:

C. 1 SAMUEL 16:7

"For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

D. DEUTERONOMY 10:17-18

"For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing."

Throughout Scripture, we see the compassionate, impartial love that God has for all of His creation. Later, in Deuteronomy 15:7–8 (NKJV), God says:

“You shall not harden your heart, nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.”

God has always held the poor special.

V. GOD IS PARTIAL TOWARD THE HUMBLE

Our passage from James also reveals that while man is sinfully *partial* toward wealth, celebrity, and prestige, God is not sinful in His favor toward the poor and humble. In 1 Corinthians 1:26–28 this idea is easily ascertainable:

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are.

As much as we might think of the historical Paul as a strong, powerful leader of the first-century Church, it is interesting to review his perception of himself as expressed in 1 Corinthians 2:1–4 (NKJV):

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech, or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. ... I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom ... but in the power of God.

Such a self-view is indicative of a man who will not have a racist, *partial* heart toward anyone of any other ilk.

VI. JESUS' LESSON ON RACISM

Paul's rejection of racism can only be attributed to God's work in his heart when considering the society into which he was born. As this study has

already pointed out, the Jews were not known for loving their neighbors. In particular, the Jews hated the Samaritan people with a long-standing passion. The Jews regarded this mixed race as inferior and considered them less than human.

Jesus addresses this prejudice in Luke 10:29–37 when He is asked by a lawyer how he may gain eternal life. Jesus asks the lawyer what is written in the law.

And he answered, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF” (v. 27).

In this passage Jesus tells the lawyer he is correct and says, ***“DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE”*** (v. 28).

The lawyer further challenges Jesus, asking, ***“And who is my neighbor?”*** (v. 29).

In this context herein, Jesus tells the lawyer the story of the Good Samaritan: a man was attacked, stripped, beaten, and left for dead by robbers on a treacherous road from Jerusalem to Jericho. A priest and a Levite, people who were highly regarded among the Jews, both walked across the road to avoid the dying man, who was a Jew, by the way. However, a passing Samaritan, considered by the Jews to be lower in societal hierarchy than tax collectors and outcasts, ran toward the man—not away from him. The Samaritan bandaged the man’s wounds and took him to an inn where he paid the innkeeper to care for him.

Jesus asks the lawyer who was the good neighbor. The lawyer replies, ***“The one who showed mercy.” ... Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do the same”*** (v. 37).

In telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus accomplished many objectives. Jesus broadened the concept of *neighbor* for the Jews, He challenged the lawyer’s personal prejudice, and He illustrated the need for a Savior in that relying on his own merits, the lawyer could never live according to God’s law.

The importance of the love-your-neighbor concept—a neighbor being someone who is perhaps not of your particular race—is further defined and understood in and by Matthew 22:36–40 when Jesus is asked, “What is the greatest commandment of all?”

And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

All that to say,

We should strive to love people
of other races to the same
degree we love ourselves.

The OT Jews refused to associate with the Samaritans: people they deemed to be of an inferior race. Jesus rebukes such inner attitudes. Are there any people with whom you refuse to associate today?

VII. RACISM: ITS NEGATIVE RESULTS

When believers act out in ways racist or *partial*, the following deleterious results occur relative to the overall witness of the body of Christ:

A. PARTIALITY POLITICIZES THE BELIEVER

Partiality sucks away the very lifeblood of spirituality. No longer is spirituality the most important consideration: status is. But remember, who you are in American life is far less important than who you are in Christ.

B. PARTIALITY POLLUTES THE BELIEVER

Being a spiritually hungry believer is much better than being a “who’s-who” believer. Too many Churches have become ineffective “Christian” country clubs. Lost in their *partiality* is their mandate for missions and their fervor to win souls for Christ! Christianity becomes a comfort zone where I only

hang out with my friends of a similar social-economic status—and such is of far greater importance to me than the possible discomfort of cross-cultural missions.

C. PARTIALITY PREEMPTS THE BELIEVER

James 4:6 states that ***“GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.”*** As said previously, *partiality* stems from attitudes of superiority, and superiority is based in pride. Don’t miss the severity of this passage, which indicates that God is actually working against those who have hearts of superiority. He only works through those who are dead to self and alive in Christ (cf. Galatians 2:20).

VIII. SUMMARY

May God grant us an increased discernment relative to the devastating, socially dividing, mission-stopping sin of *partiality*! The nation of Israel totally corrupted her purpose for existence via self-exaltation and Gentile condescension. *Partiality* totally corrupted her! Proverbs 24:23 (NKJV) states, ***It is not good to show partiality in judgment.*** Three takeaway applications follow:

1. First, the remedy for racism starts with me and a biblically based theology relative to the sin of *partiality*. As a believer, do I have this aforementioned understanding and theology in my heart? Do I view other races as equal to mine? There is no worse witness than someone who names the name of Christ but is demeaning to any race of people. Such an attitude reeks with hypocrisy when you understand the underlying theology.
2. Secondly, the remedy for racism has more to do with evangelism than public policy. Racism is a form of *partiality* that stems from man’s fallen nature. Only through the power of the cross can the nature of a person be changed from the inside out. Certainly laws pertaining to discrimination have their place and are necessary, but they will never eradicate the problem from society—so don’t think the answer is in more legislation. It is not. The wise public servant will therefore always work toward religious freedom and

incentivization of the Church—so that it can best facilitate evangelism and change hearts.

3. Thirdly, we cannot expect the secular humanists, those who are steeped in an ideology of evolution, to get this right or to model anything different than what their evolutionary theory has taught them. Conversely, it is incumbent on believers to model cross-cultural acceptance and impartiality. For instance, I work hard at incorporating other ethnicities into Capitol Ministries versus having an all-white ministry. *Partiality* and racism have not been a major temptation or stumbling block for me because I grew up playing basketball and lived and competed with many great African American guys who are still friends. Putting off *partiality* and racism might not come as easily for you if you grew up not being exposed to people of different races. I understand that, but nonetheless, being impartial is a matter of obedience to God. So then, what are you doing that is deliberately cross-cultural?

May God grant you and me great wisdom in this area—and a heartfelt love for others of different races. Amen.

What Does the Bible Teach Regarding Capital Punishment?

Many people believe the Bible is unclear on the issue of capital punishment—as if they could substantiate either viewpoint, believing either position could be justified. Is such the case?

Fear of the State and its power to execute equal and proportional justice is a necessary force in a fallen world.

In contrast, for those who believe that man is basically good and not fallen, an overly forceful State seems inhumane. Secular humanism teaches and concludes that mankind is inherently good and given enough time and the proper environment, he will see the error of his ways and reform. Their position is that the human being simply lacks education.

What follows is a short primer on the Christian worldview of capital punishment.

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT (OT) BASIS OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The Bible repeatedly provides the basis and substantiation for capital punishment. It is not as if there are two competing views on this subject in Scripture when applying normal rules of interpretation to the text of Scripture (known historically as the grammatical-historical-normative

science of interpretation). With this interpretation in view, notice the plain meaning of the following OT passages:

A. GENESIS 9:6

“Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.”

B. EXODUS 21:24

“Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

C. LEVITICUS 24:20

“Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him.”

D. DEUTERONOMY 19:21

“Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

These passages and others indicate that the Mosaic law was based on the heavenly attribute of equal and proportional justice and that such is not to be eclipsed by God’s attribute of mercy. As we will see, God’s compassion in situations of justice is to be supplied by the institution of the Church and members of His body—not by the State. It follows that by way of practical application, the convicted murderer’s later appeals for a stay should find no judicial sympathy with the State. Think about it:

When the State begins to show mercy
toward certain individuals and not
others, it becomes unequal and
proportionately unjust in the dispatch
of its God-ordained responsibility.

Sympathy and mercy are the roles of individuals and of the institution of the Church.

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT (NT) BASIS OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Jesus Himself validates capital punishment in the NT era when He states in Matthew 5:38,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.’ ”

By quoting this OT truth, known as *lex talionis*, “the law of retaliation,” Jesus is saying by the surrounding context of this passage that in no way is *lex talionis* outdated in its application during this age. Importantly, nowhere in the NT does Jesus reject the OT concept of capital punishment. And while He instructs us to be merciful in our personal lives, He does not suggest mercy as an alternative for the State. Note this distinction in the following two Scriptures. The first is a command by God to the individual, and Romans 13:4 is a command by God to the State:

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord (Romans 12:19).

For [the State] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil (Romans 13:4).

These NT passages, plus many others, serve to underscore the relevance of capital punishment for today. Nothing in the NT negates bringing forward the OT concept of the death penalty.

III. GOD’S REASON FOR CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

When a person intentionally puts to death another human being who is made in the image of God, that intention represents high treason against God Himself because He is the Creator of all human beings. He is the One—and the One and only—Who gives life and Who can take it away. In response, God has in part designed and given authority to the institution

of the State for the purpose of manifesting His justice and retaliation for murder. Understood biblically, the State is His surrogate to achieve this purpose.

IV. THE STATE IN CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The State has the God-given responsibility to take the life of a murderer, whereas an individual does not. One of the two main purposes of the State's being created by God is for the punishment of evildoers. Note 1 Peter 2:13–14 in this regard:

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

God's purpose for the State is to *punish evildoers*. Romans 13:1 in the NT adds:

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Lex talionis remains a just act in the New Testament era in which we live—given the reality of a fallen world where man is corrupt. Genesis 6:11 states the following in this regard:

Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence.

It stands to reason that to be anti-capital punishment is miscalculated philanthropy or a misplaced humanitarianism that is unbiblical. Why? Because God is merciful, yes, but He is also just; and His mercy never compromises His justice. Herein then, by man, is a mislaid pity.

Further in support of capital punishment is Proverbs 28:17, which states:

*A man who is laden with the guilt of human blood
Will be a fugitive until death; let no one support him.*

The State then, properly understood through the lens of Scripture, is God's long arm of justice.

V. THE CHURCH AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The necessity of capital punishment following conviction of a capital crime must not however eclipse the individual's or the church's compassionate visit to the cell of the condemned. The mercy and forgiveness of the Gospel, which affords spiritual birth and life, are a whole other matter that needs to be presented to those whom the State has rightfully and biblically condemned to physical death.

Capital conviction and church
compassion represent a biblical
partnership of two ordained institutions.

Their respective roles relative to the convicted should never be compromised. For together, God's justice and mercy are at once on display, which is how God would have it.

VI. SUMMARY

One seemingly difficult question sometimes arises relative to this study and should be clarified as follows:

If we accept verbatim the OT prescription of the death penalty for murder, while rejecting the equally strongly worded OT prescriptions of the death penalty for adultery, childhood rebelliousness, and bestiality, among other sins (not to mention the OT directive to gouge out an eye or knock out a tooth of a person who commits mayhem), how do we escape the criticism that we are just picking and choosing our crimes?

Those specific punishments for crimes are not repeated in the dispensation of the new covenant that God makes in the New Testament with His Church. That is why including Jesus' words regarding capital punishment (Point III) is so important in this study. Those other forms of punishment were intended by God to set apart Israel as a holy and righteous priestly nation. Such is not the case today as God has grafted in the Church as His

primary representative people in the world today. Those penalties are not prescribed in the NT, whereas capital punishment is.

May God grant you His instruction and convictions regarding the necessity of capital punishment in a fallen world—as is the case today in America. Studies indicate that when capital punishment is not practiced by the State, murder increases due to a lack of fear of equal and proportional retribution. Therefore, as a lawmaker, it is incumbent on you to stand for the death penalty relative to the good of the citizens of the country.

PART V

***BUILDING BIBLICALLY BASED
CONVICTIONS ABOUT
TODAY'S ECONOMIC ISSUES***

Capitalism versus Communism

Since the difference between capitalism and communism is clear—one is based on scriptural truth, and the other is not—can you articulate a pro-property rights/capitalism position from Scripture? It follows that you should be able to give a basis for capitalism via God’s Word. This study is designed to aid you in that regard and also to help you form personal and political convictions based on God’s guidance as explicated in His revelation.

I. INTRODUCTION

As I write this study, I am reminded of a powerful and emotive scene from the movie *Far and Away*, when Tom Cruise is riding a wild horse, racing westward on the morning of the great and historic Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889. To underscore the subject of this study, remember that at that time in history, the American government granted to its citizens unassigned land that was open to settlement. All that to say, America has historically believed in private property rights, which is the single greatest reason why this nation has grown to become the world’s largest economy in a relatively short period of time.

The Bible is pro-private property. Many passages support this view. Therefore, all governments should be pro-private property. Further, according to Scripture, personal private property ownership is fundamental to every person’s ability to express being created in God’s image. (I will

develop that idea later in this study.) In addition, private property rights are fundamental to personal and national fruitfulness. (Examples of this view will be included in what follows.)

Biblically based private property ownership is the basis of capitalism. Capitalism stands in absolute and distinct contradiction to the ideology of communism. As Karl Marx said in his *Communist Manifesto*:

“The theory of the Communists may
be summed up in a single sentence:
the abolition of private property.”

Before building a scriptural case for private property and capitalism, let us first begin by investigating the precedent that God is the ultimate Owner of everything.

II. PASSAGES ON GOD’S ULTIMATE OWNERSHIP OF ALL PROPERTY

Scripture teaches that God—not governments, be they communist or otherwise—is the ultimate Owner of the earth and all that is therein and that He desires individuals to be His stewards of what He possesses. Note this first point in the following Scriptures:

*The earth is the LORD’s, and all it contains,
the world, and those who dwell in it* (Psalm 24:1).

*“Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens,
the earth and all that is in it”* (Deuteronomy 10:14).

In granting stewardship, He entrusts the responsibilities of management to the top of His creative order: man, whom He created in His image, unlike any other segments of His creation. This fundamental idea is conveyed in Genesis 1:26–28:

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the

sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

To clarify man’s incumbent stewardship role over all of creation, God uses the descriptive verb **subdue** (*kabash*) to encompass what He specifically intends for man to do. This Hebrew word *kabash* specifically means “to bring into servitude.” In Numbers 32:22, 32:29, and Joshua 18:1, this same word is used in the sense of a parallel contextual meaning, i.e., Israel was to **subdue** the land of Canaan so the land would serve Israel. Importantly, the contextual usage of *kabash* in Genesis 1 pertains to God’s urging those in His creation who are made in His image to discover, understand, develop, utilize, and enjoy all the earth’s overabundant resources. Implied in God’s command to man is this: man is to carry out his God-appointed stewardship responsibility with respect and thanksgiving to God. Having first established this principle of God’s ultimate ownership, the following point now needs to be made:

In God’s ultimate ownership, Scripture repeatedly communicates that He intends for individuals—not His institution of civil government—to steward His property.

In the aforementioned quoted Genesis passage, emphasis needs to be placed on the word **them**, which refers to individuals. Civil government is not in view in this Scripture. From this first book of the Bible all the way through to the book of Revelation, Scripture makes it clear that God conveys property ownership to individuals—not to totalitarian regimes, democratic civil governments, or any other kind of nation as a whole.

III. PASSAGES ON PERSONAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

Reinforcing the aforementioned, a myriad of passages evidence God's expectation of personal ownership of His property— versus implications of governmental or societal ownership of His property. The following are some of those evidences:

A. THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15).

This verse presumes that people own something that can be stolen. For instance, I am not to take my neighbor's cart because it *belongs to* my neighbor. If a person doesn't own anything in the first place, ***stealing*** something from him is impossible. Or, as a modern example, you cannot search through my email files and give them to whomever you choose without my knowing; to do so is to ***steal*** intellectual property. Rightfully so, capitalism necessitates title deeds, copyrights, trademarks, and patents in order to keep others from ***stealing*** what belongs to you.

B. THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exodus 20:17)

This passage addresses the heart. Covet (*chamad*) in this Hebrew passage and *epithumeo* in Greek (cf. Romans 7:7) means “a strong desire; wantonness.” As used in this context, coveting is the desire to take from another what rightfully belongs to him. Note specifically that the passage does not say those things ***belong*** to the community or the government. Three times the passage uses the word ***neighbor*** (*rea*), meaning “a person, a friend, or a fellow.”

C. IRRESPONSIBLE OWNERSHIP

“If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death” (Exodus 21:29)

This Scripture uses the word *owner* (*baal*) in relation to, in this case, being an irresponsible steward of what Moses (the author of Exodus and the first five books of the Bible known as the Torah) implies is already possessed. To *own* something means you are legally connected to it, to the extent that you can be found personally liable for damages. Such laws today, stemming from the Torah and its assumption of personal property rights, prove motivational to a person's being a good manager! Moving beyond pride of ownership, such laws in turn breed personal asset management skills. The upside of such skills includes the creation of responsible value-added products and a biblical, economic virtue unknown in biblically ignorant or biblically defiant communist nations.

D. MOVING A LANDMARK

"You shall not move your neighbor's boundary mark, which the ancestors have set..." (Deuteronomy 19:14).

This verse speaks in regard to the sin of moving the boundaries of land *owned* by another person. The following Scripture adds in this regard:

***"Do not move the ancient boundary
Or go into the fields of the fatherless"*** (Proverbs 23:10).

Each of the two stanzas of this proverb serve to give insight into the meaning of the other. Private ownership is the object here: *stealing* another person's property simply because he is unable to defend what is rightfully his is wrong.

E. THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

"You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family" (Leviticus 25:10).

Our subject of study becomes increasingly interesting. I am afraid that as proud Americans, we are often guilty of thinking that capitalism is a perfect system of governance, but no economic system is perfect in a fallen world! Churchill once quipped, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others!" Only when Christ returns and sets up His

rule as the King of kings will there be a perfect government and a perfect, totally just economic system on the earth.

The Old Testament (OT) book of Leviticus informs us that every 50 years, Israel's people were to hit the restart button on their personal property/capitalism-based economy. Akin to playing the game *Monopoly* today, wherein one or two players in time will monopolize all the properties, some people in our fallen world inevitably become economic juggernauts, while others who are less gifted, far less farsighted, or less competitive can and will fall to the wayside. Some are not as strong or able as others and cannot compete or gain wealth, even though they live in a personal-property-based culture. This is one of those realities of living in a fallen world.

It is not that capitalism is perfect;
it is just that it is the best
alternative in a fallen world.

Personal property ownership is not a perfect cure-all, and no capitalist should try to make that argument as evidenced from Leviticus 25:10. But the point to be underscored relative to this study from this Scripture is: ***“each of you shall return to his own property....”*** As in the other aforementioned passages, God's endorsement of an economy with ***“his own property”*** (even with its faults) is in view here.

F. SUMMARY OF PASSAGES ON PERSONAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

The Bible speaks repeatedly regarding the economic creation and well-being of a nation and how that best occurs in what will always be, until Christ returns, an unfair, disproportionately talented, fallen world. The best system, says God's Word, is via a government based upon and one that respects personal private property rights. With the inclusion of the Year of Jubilee (an occasional adjustment mechanism in a private property economic structure), we can safely say that God is a capitalist, not a communist.¹

Given that summary, we can also extrapolate the following from the aforementioned five passages:

One of God's fundamental principles is for civil government to respect and facilitate the private ownership rights of its citizens.

The economic principle that stems from the Torah is this: necessary for achieving a properly functioning, fruitful, and prosperous nation in a material sense is personal property ownership. (The Bible does not deem material things as evil; such thinking is a faulty dualism and the subject of other studies.) To violate God's principle of private ownership and enact some form or level of communism in a state is patently unbiblical and will ultimately lead to the demise of a nation's motivation, economic engine, growth, and the overall material well-being of its people.

IV. THE NATURAL TENDENCY OF GOVERNMENT TO OVERREACH

In a greater-than-just-material-concerns sense, God has ordained four other separate institutions that He intends to function simultaneously and independently of government in order to best achieve His purposes and herald the riches of His grace (cf. Ephesians 2:7) in a fallen world prior to His Second Coming. Government is only one of five coequal institutions. And within that five-institution spectrum of God-given responsibilities, government does what it does better than the other institutions: suppress evil. But keep in mind, the other four institutions—marriage, family, commerce, and the Church—do what they do better than government! Government cannot accomplish for a nation what the other four can and do achieve much more expeditiously and efficiently: marriage *promulgates*; the family *cultivates*; commerce *invigorates*; and the Church *translates*. Those theological pillars of institutional understanding are fundamental to a biblical

worldview and serve to qualify the role of government. Given this contextualization and the focus of this study, what is also in view is as follows:

The institution of government is
always on the prowl to invade the
sandbox of every other institution.

But the government causes chaos whenever it does! Left to its predilection to roam, it soon wanders outside its God-designed purpose: perverting marriage, stymieing the family, encroaching on the Church, and, left to its self-centered ways, overstepping commerce by eroding or attacking private property rights! Government seemingly finds the physique of Jabba the Hutt to be attractive! Left unchecked, government will eclipse God's separate institution of commerce, which must function with personal property rights to flourish institutionally in order to invigorate a nation materially.

The dominating tendencies of government in a fallen world are nothing new. The prophet Samuel spoke to Israel about the increasingly pervasive nature of civil administrations when Israel first mentioned to him that they wanted their own king. Notice his sage response to the nation Israel in 1 Samuel 8:10–18:

So Samuel spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king. He said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants. He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys and use them for his work. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. Then you will cry out in that day because of your

king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”

Unchecked government begins to *take* from the people, confiscating more and more for itself. The word *take* appears *six times* in this passage! Be on guard: runaway government is normative in a fallen world! Therefore, as exegetically substantiated in the previous point:

God's blueprint is for a nation's
people to possess the bulk of
property and wealth of the nation—
versus the government.

It follows that government, according to the Bible, must be kept in check lest it begin to think it can achieve for its people tasks that are better suited for fulfillment by God's other ordained institutions.

The role of government is limited to and most efficient when, according to 1 Peter 2:14 (ESV), it is about [praising] *those who do good* (i.e., in part, those who provide jobs for others due to their giftedness should be rewarded and not penalized so as to encourage them to create more jobs and wealth for the nation) and *punish*[ing] *those who do evil* (provide a strong judicial system internally and a strong military force externally) (cf. Romans 13:1–8). Any government that begins to step outside its biblically specific purposes becomes ghastly and monstrosly inefficient, resulting in the eventual if not immediate eclipse of its citizens and their liberties, thereby lessening their motivation, personal abilities, and resourcefulness to reflect the attributes of God to others.

V. PERU, PRIVATE PROPERTY, AND POVERTY

Peru is a good example of how the violation of private property principles entraps a nation in poverty. The denial of private property rights does not always rest on the shoulders of communist ideology; sometimes it takes

place in supposed capitalist countries such as Peru (what I call CINO countries: “Capitalist In Name Only”).

The brilliant work of Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto serves to substantiate the aforementioned biblical principle of private property and its absence being the root cause of poverty. When governments deny private property rights by making their attainment next to impossible, they stymie the creation of wealth among their own people. Such policies are extremely shortsighted. The root cause of poverty is this: with no ability to gain working capital due to a lack of collateral from property ownership, entrepreneurs do not have the means to enter the capital market and create a product or service. De Soto’s team attempted to build a house in Peru. Here is what they went through:

To obtain legal authorization to build a house on state-owned land took 6 years and 11 months requiring 207 administrative steps in 52 government offices.... To obtain a legal title for that piece of land took 728 [additional] steps.²

States Dr. Wayne Grudem regarding de Soto’s similar attempt to obtain a permit to build a small garment workshop on the outskirts of Lima:

They worked at the registration process 6 hours a day, and it took them 289 days! The cost was the equivalent of \$1,231 U.S. dollars, or 31 times the monthly minimum wage equivalent (approximately 3 years’ salary for the ordinary person living in Peru).³

In addition, our Capitol Ministries ministry leader in Peru informs me that all too often, due to a lack of integrity and corruption in the title industry, property titles are found to be illegitimate.

De Soto has documented similar roadblocks in the countries of Egypt, Philippines, and Haiti. Property ownership is next to impossible in many developing nations, which traps its citizenry in poverty! It is as if these country’s citizens are living in a communist country. *This is not God’s design for a nation!* Such backward, biblically negligent, manifest governmental ideology serves to illustrate the wisdom of God’s ways. Likened to the American government’s 1889 land grant, as the individuals prosper

from private property rights, so does the whole of the nation and its administration.

Unfortunately, however, as America jettisons its trust in the Torah, it follows that there would be, and are, increasing threats and erosion of private property ownership.

VI. AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTALISM, PRIVATE PROPERTY, AND POVERTY

After taking ten years to develop and after only twenty-five years of operation, the much-needed San Onofre Nuclear Power Plant in San Clemente, California, is now closed. Blaming incessant lawsuits and subsequent delays caused by environmental groups, the executive of Southern California Edison, which championed the project, said the utility would never again create another nuclear power plant. As a result, the utility has not attempted to build another power plant on its own private property.

Environmentalists and their choking, imbalanced regulations descended on the logging industry in the Northwest, claiming the spotted owl was an endangered species (an owl that is identical to the California spotted owl, which is in abundant supply), and nearly destroyed the industry. Fifty thousand lost jobs later, owners can no longer harvest lumber at will from their private property.

Government and Secular Environmentalism

Having majored in Ecosystems at UCLA and climbed extensively in the High Sierra since my childhood, it is evident to the objective student of this subject that sometimes biblically uninformed policies lead to species endangerment. To illustrate, the bighorn sheep of the Eastern Sierra are rightfully classified as an endangered species. But the reason is that three national parks eclipse a large portion of their natural habitat. The National Park Service (NPS) is governed by a preservationist philosophy (whereas the U.S. Forest Service operates under a conservationist philosophy, a tension that stems from the historic debates between

Mather and Pinchot during the formation of the NPS). The outworking dictations of a preservationist philosophy in our national parks means no wildlife can be hunted. (And, boy, do the animals know it!) In the case of the bighorn sheep, that means man cannot glean its predator, the mountain lion. The uninhibited growth of the mountain lion population is the reason the sheep are endangered. Make no mistake, the secular environmental policies of the government—uninformed about Genesis 1:26–27—represent the real threat to the bighorn sheep in the Sierra.

In Santa Cruz, California, environmental policies make it impossible to trim the trees on a homeowners' own private property, even when the overgrowth is a serious fire threat or quite often causes power outages during rainy, windy weather after their heavy limbs fall on power lines.

**These three vignettes serve to illustrate
the encroachment of government on
commerce and private property.**

In California, where our family has resided for four generations, there has been a huge stagnation in development (especially compared to Texas) since the adoption and requirement of environmental impact reports. The bottom line is that even though private property exists, the economic benefits God intends for private property ownership have been greatly diminished. Viewed through the lens of developable land, now the government, in essence, owns the land! What a huge philosophical about-face from the days of the great Oklahoma Land Rush! The present overly regulatory policies of our nation's government, biblically speaking, pave the way for the road to poverty.

Additional erosion of private property rights occurred under President Bill Clinton, who issued executive order 13061, which seized ten additional rivers per year, making them federal property even if they flow through

private land. Both Presidents Clinton and Obama enacted orders that confiscated millions of acres of private land that will be effectively removed from private use forever. Fortunately, President Donald Trump enacted orders to reverse this trend. In summary of this point:

**The private ownership of land best serves
the continuing prosperity of any nation!**

We only need to study or visit regressive Russia or inalterable India. Both are lands of plentiful natural resources, yet the people are stuck in the plight of poverty due to the fact that their cultures are not informed by what the Torah teaches concerning private property rights! Israel, on the other hand, a much younger nation informed by the Torah, has experienced huge economic development in a relatively short period of time. Therein lies the difference between nations of similar resources. No wonder Thomas Jefferson said the United States would be different, stating, “The true foundation of republican government is the equal right of every citizen in his person and property, and in their management.”⁴

It is hard to imagine that our nation would ever even contemplate changing horses after having ridden an OT stallion for so long—and having experienced the absolutely incomparable thrill of riding it for so many years!

VII. BIG GOVERNMENT, PERSONAL LIBERTY, AND REFLECTING THE IMAGE OF GOD

As government grows, it eclipses personal liberty. As personal liberty diminishes, so does the individual’s ability to reflect the glory of God to others. What do I mean by this? One example is personal wealth.

When an individual prospers, he has more to share with others: he has the opportunity to reflect, in this case, the grace of God by giving to others in need. Often such expressions of love lead to the Gospel and salvation. This giving is in juxtaposition to government’s taxing the wealth of individuals, thereby denuding them of their personal resourcefulness with the belief that government can meet the needs of others more effectively. But

in truth, God did not ordain government to play this role, and the institution is woefully wasteful and inefficient when it attempts to meet the needs of citizens—especially their real spiritual needs for regeneration in Christ.

When government sticks to its God-ordained job description, *for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right* (1 Peter 2:14), it achieves what other institutions cannot and simultaneously empowers its citizens with individual liberty to reflect the glory of God to other people. The purpose, role, and limitations of civil government and its leaders must be informed by the Scriptures—not by self nor secularism. It is to serve its citizens so they can best serve their fellow citizens.

VIII. SUMMARY

The right to personal property, also known as free enterprise or capitalism, is the governmental economic system supported by Scripture. Scripture does not support communism. We need look no further than what has happened in Venezuela in only a few short years—once a prosperous, thriving capitalist country, millions of its citizens have now been forced into exile to escape the resultant poverty of a communist takeover. Whereas the former leads to a prosperous nation, the latter leads to a poverty-stricken nation. Historic America serves as a wonderful illustration of this biblical axiom. Accordingly, as lawmakers and public servants, do not even consider making an ideological shift at this point in our history. Do not jettison our prosperous past that has been so beautifully informed and made possible by adherence to the Mosaic law contained in the Torah regarding personal property rights!

1. Historically and presently, Congress, in essence, enacts the principle of the Year of Jubilee every time it acts to bust up or curtail the formation of a monopoly.
2. Dr. Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).
3. Ibid.
4. Merrill D. Peterson, *Jefferson: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1398. [Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval (July 12, 1816)]

God's Institutions and Their Roles on Earth

The Scriptures teach that God designed five institutions to establish order on the earth—institutions that have precise and unique roles, responsibilities, and objectives.

Each institution is to fulfill the purposes it was assigned by God to achieve. It follows that each institution is woefully inefficient and ineffective when it tries to achieve the purposes of another. Recent events bear this out as we experience the calamitous effects of the institution of commerce trying to moralize a culture! Businesses have been using their products and services not to fulfill consumer wants or needs as they should, but rather, as platforms to force unpopular and radical anti-biblical agendas upon the public. But it's not gone well for them.

One such company is CNN, which in 2022 rolled out CNN+. This streaming service was a repackaging of their ultra-radical and biased newscasts and anti-biblical shows such as "Parental Guidance with Anderson Cooper," that features an openly gay man whose two sons were born out of wedlock. The rollout cost CNN \$500 million, but CNN+ was canceled within the first month due to lack of consumer interest.

Netflix is another example. Offering families what some critics are describing as "rampant child porn-styled shows, the racially charged anti-white programs, and the rampant push for openly encouraging transgendered and homosexuality as the norm,"¹ Netflix lost customers in droves and became the "worst performing stock of 2022 in the S&P 500."²

Twitter banned conservative voices and dispatched armies of "fact checkers" whose job was to promote radical policies. They boosted certain stories and hid others, such as the well-documented Hunter Biden laptop

political kickback scandal. One ultra-wealthy American had enough. Elon Musk, the world's richest man, bought Twitter for \$44 billion and vowed to make it a platform for free speech.

In recent years, Disney has pushed an anti-biblical agenda in exposing children to aberrant sexual lifestyles and presenting them as normal in their cartoon movies.³ Disney executives now vow to make 50 percent of Disney cartoon characters LGBTQ or racial minorities by the end of 2022.⁴ Doubling down, Disney executives vowed to fight a Florida law that would prohibit teachers from instructing kindergarten through third grade students on "sexual orientation" or "gender identification." In response, the Florida Legislature passed a bill to dissolve Disney's authority to self-govern, which obliterated decades-old tax breaks. Investors responded to the news that Disney would now pay much more in Florida taxes. Disney stock, which had been at an all-time high in March 2021, tanked. In January of 2023, business reporters disclosed that Walt Disney (NYSE: DIS) stock fell 43.9% in 2022.

The recent huge phenomena in American business serves to illustrate how things go sideways really fast when an offending institution attempts to usurp another institution's area of calling and expertise.

This week we look at the five institutions that were created by God and revealed in the Bible, and especially the role that God meant for government. This study will provide tremendous insight. It will provide you with great and immediate discernment and a keen perspective that will inform your judgment on most policy issues.

I. INTRODUCTION

This is a basic and necessary Bible study for every officeholder. As a matter of fact, it is such an important Bible study that my objective is to teach you how to teach this to others. You should be able to preach this in a church or teach what follows in a small group. My prayer is that God will use this not only to equip you, but to serve others with great wisdom.

Since God is sovereign and omnipotent, how does He reign in the world today between the first and second advents of His Son, Jesus Christ? The Scriptures provide the answer; He mediates His reign through His ordination of five institutions during this present period of biblical history: the Church Age. Another way of stating this concept is to refer to it as the administration of God as referred to in 1 Timothy 1:4:

Nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.

In a personal illustration of this concept, the Apostle Paul informs his understudy Timothy not to be diverted from furthering the administration of God (in this case via the particular institution of the Church). In Luke 16:2, the underlying Greek root *oikonomia* (translated as “administration” in the above passage) is translated as “management” and “manager,” respectively.

And he called him and said to him, “What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.”

Further, in 1 Corinthians 4:1, this same root word is translated as *stewards*:

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Oikos is the Greek word for “house,” and *nomos* the word for “manager.” “Economist” is the closest English derivative—notice that phonetically it is nearly a transliteration. This word is a historic reference to one who manages the affairs of a household. As we will see, this word is used in other biblical passages to indicate how God manages His relationship to the world at a given time. In Ephesians 3:2 (here in the context of the institution of the Church), notice what the Apostle Paul says about himself:

If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you.

Paul viewed himself as a *steward* (*oikonomia*) of God’s grace, which was given to him by God for us. As a public servant, albeit you are assigned to a different God-ordained institution, His institution of the State:

You must view yourself in the same light.
As a good administrator of government,
you must be a good manager, a good
steward of this particular institution.

Still another English equivalent (as used in the New American Standard Bible translation) is the noun *dispensation*, best understood through its English verbal equivalent as “to dispense.” How then does the sovereign, omnipotent God of the universe—as declared in and by Scripture—administrate, manage, steward, or dispense His reign in a fallen world today, one fractured by sin, in His physical absence? The answer is via His ordained institutions, the Church and State being just two of five.

Now, and very importantly, let’s go a step further in unfolding this big concept. The Apostle Peter is instructing early Christians regarding the institution of the State in 1 Peter 2:13–15. The context of the passage that follows pertains to believers having a good witness with the leaders of the State. He says, therefore, that the following must be present:

Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him For such is the will of God.

The main verb or action of this God-given command is to *submit* or subjugate (in Greek, *hupotasso*), meaning “to place oneself under” the institution of the State in this case. But more broadly, notice Peter includes the word *every*, meaning every other [God-ordained] institution. It follows then that whenever and wherever the Greek word *hupotasso* exists in the New Testament (NT), it is often in reference to identifying the existence of a God-ordained institution. But what exactly is an institution in terms of the underlying Greek words translated into English here as “institution”? Could it be that the underlying Greek words have a more exact meaning than the broad English term *institution*? Indeed, that is the case.

The Greek words behind the English word *institution* are *anthropine ktisei*, meaning in a literal sense (of the adjective-noun word combination) “for mankind what is created.” *Ktisei* is the Greek noun for “creation.” It literally means “what has been created by God for mankind.” (the root word *anthropos* means “man.”) This is a classic example of the Greek language having a more exact meaning than the English derivative. The broad-meaning English word *institution* fails to convey all that the Greek word combination carries with it.

However, when you consider the English verb equivalent of the noun, *to institute* means “to establish in a particular position” (*Merriam-Webster*). Therein lies a better hint of the substantive meaning of *anthropine ktisei*.

Submitting to every God-ordained particular authority, as this passage indicates, is in keeping with the will of God.⁵

The implication and larger context of Peter's inspired instruction, believers *submitting to every "for man created by God" institution*, per the whole of this passage, is equated with *submission* to God Himself.⁶ While that may be hard to understand here, it is borne out by the many passages depicting these authority-submission relationships inherent in each of the following ordained institutions.⁷ What might be difficult to extrapolate from this aforementioned passage of Scripture alone will be simple to realize and grasp in and from the following passages.

Again, if the identifier of the existence of a God-ordained institution is the command to *submit*, then there are five—not three—institutions evidenced in Scripture. What follows are explanations of those five explicit authority-submission relationships with supporting scriptural passages.

After presenting each of the five institutions with at least three different identifying passages that depict the existence of an authority-submission relationship, I will then provide passages for each that relate to the institution's God-ordained purpose. Rather than comment on each (in a study that is already lengthy), I will leave it up to you to ascertain the related point being made from each passage. Finally, I will conclude by illustrating the corruptions that follow the commingling of institutions, i.e., when the secularists promote the institution of government as preeminent versus all five being equal in God's mind. Note the five institutions that follow are in no particular order of importance.

II. THE STATE: AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION PASSAGES

A. ROMANS 13:1-3

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same.

B. 1 PETER 2:13-14

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him

C. TITUS 3:1-2

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

The State:
its purpose is to moralize.

D. ROMANS 13:4-7

For it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

E. 1 PETER 2:14-17

...for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

Probably the most important aspect of these passages (in terms of present applicability) relates to God's explicit intentions for the State: *the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right*. To say it with gentleness, it is therefore wise for governing officials to avoid over-involvement with other institutions—public servants should allow latitude versus interfering with the other institutions God has ordained and thus allow them to do what they are designed by God to achieve. Each institution is more efficient than any other institution in achieving what God designed it to do.

It is biblically fallacious to think government is God's only vehicle to achieve His will in the world.

God explicitly limits the State's purposes in the passages just cited. The State's purpose is not expanded anywhere else in Scripture. Again, government will not accomplish as effectively or as efficiently what God has ordained as the responsibility and purposes of other institutions. In summary, the God-ordained purpose of the State is to quell evil in a fallen world through corporeal punishment. The outward force of exacting retribution for sin can be deemed "to moralize society."

III. COMMERCE: AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION PASSAGES

The commercial economy of the Roman Empire, at the time of the writing of the (NT), was that of a master-slave compensation relationship. Without delving into it, although the names in the relationship are similar to American slavery, it is believed by most commentators that the manifestation of employment was quite different. (This is not to suggest it was less than evil in and of itself.) Notwithstanding, the NT writers concentrate on what is preeminent to the many social ills of the Roman Empire: inward change through the Gospel versus any emphasis on changing this particular cultural evil (cf. the NT book of Philemon). The point related to this study is to utilize these passages to illustrate the authority-submission relationship that exists in the institution of commerce both then and now (not to debate the issue of slavery and the Bible).

A. 1 PETER 2:18–21

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For

this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.

B. EPHESIANS 6:5

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ.

C. COLOSSIANS 3:22

Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

Commerce:
its purpose is to commercialize.

A part of the curse on mankind as a result of the Fall in Genesis 3 is man's toil in labor. Genesis 3:17–19 states:

“In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.... By the sweat of your face you will eat bread.”

Labor in and of itself is part of the creation and is not to be thought of as a curse. God intends for man to achieve dignity through work. But labor after the Fall will now always be difficult in some way.

Nevertheless, the institution of commerce serves to create sustenance and temporal provisions, if not prosperity, for man's needs. This is the purpose of this institution as bestowed by the Creator. The State, in contrast,

was not and is not intended or designed by the Creator to efficiently commercialize a culture (as previously seen, it is to moralize a culture).

These first two described institutions' roles, properly understood, aid the public servant to reason through otherwise difficult and complex policy issues. (For instance, this construct can be applied to the present healthcare debate.) But in addition to these two institutions, a legislator or cabinet member must be knowledgeable concerning the three remaining institutions that God has created for mankind as revealed in the Bible. They follow.

IV. MARRIAGE: AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION PASSAGES

A. 1 PETER 3:1-5

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.

B. EPHESIANS 5:22-23, 28-33

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love

his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

C. 1 CORINTHIANS 11:3

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

Marriage:
its purpose is to materialize (among others).

D. PROVIDE PROCREATION: GENESIS 1:27-28

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Procreation, materializing the next generation, is one of the primary reasons God created the institution of marriage. Further purposes for the institution (in addition to materializing the next generation) follow:

E. TO PROVIDE PERSONIFICATION OF CHRIST'S
LOVE FOR THE CHURCH: EPHESIANS 5:24-27

But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

F. TO PROVIDE PARTNERSHIP: GENESIS 2:18

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

G. TO PROVIDE PLEASURE: PROVERBS 5:18-19

*Let your fountain be blessed,
and rejoice in the wife of your youth.
As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all
times; be exhilarated always with her love.*

Notice these four manifold purposes for God's construct of marriage. They are all wonderful! God intends for marriage to be fulfilling as long as it is conducted in His ways (between one man and one woman). Make sure you prioritize your marriage and continue to build equity into your relationship, especially given the difficult lifestyle you lead as a public servant, which often causes you to be separated from your spouse. Safeguard and protect your sacred marriage.

It is God who defines marriage.
For the State to redefine marriage is
hubristic and serves to illustrate an
overreach in institutional purpose.

V. THE FAMILY: AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION PASSAGES

A. EPHESIANS 6:1-4

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

B. COLOSSIANS 3:20

Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

C. HEBREWS 12:5-11

And you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

The family:
its purpose is to catechize.

D. TO RAISE A GODLY HERITAGE: EPHESIANS 6:4;
PROVERBS 22:6; DEUTERONOMY 4:9

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from

your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons.

E. TO BE A BLESSING: PROVERBS 17:6; PROVERBS 31:28

Grandchildren are the crown of old men, and the glory of sons is their fathers.

Her children rise up and bless her.

The primary purpose of the institution of family is to raise godly children for the growth of the Church and Christ's kingdom and its ensuing, resulting positive impact on culture. The fruit of strong families—the first line in disciple-making—inures to the overall benefit of every other institution.

It is a serious error when the State interferes with parents raising their children in a biblical manner. For example, Scripture teaches that parents are to discipline their children at a young age in order to curb their sin nature. If government curtails that institutional responsibility and inalienable right, then government and society will inherit citizens who lack discipline, most likely necessitating a police state in the next generation.

Again, it is hubristic for government to think it knows best how parents should raise their kids! Scripture is God's intended informant for child-rearing, not government.

VI. THE CHURCH: AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION PASSAGES

A. HEBREWS 13:17

Obey your [church] leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

B. 1 THESSALONIANS 5:12–13

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you

instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

C. ACTS 20:28

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

D. 1 PETER 5:1-5

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.

The Church:
its purpose is to evangelize.

God's primary purpose for His Church is to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). He achieves this by giving evangelists and pastor-teachers to this institution (Ephesians 4:11-12; Romans 10:15). In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul states a unique characteristic of the Church, which in one sense separates it from every other God-ordained institution. Notice this when the Apostle Paul describes the institution of the Church in the following way:

But in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

The Church, or the *household of God* as referred to here, is the *support* (*hedraïoma*) *of the truth*. The word means “under girder,” “foundation,” or “bulwark.” No other God-ordained institution previously examined possesses such a moniker of distinction! The implications are huge. In essence, this means that all other institutions ordained by God in the Church Age are dependent on the health of the Church, which is synonymous with its effectiveness to make disciples who become the preservers and illuminators (cf. Matthew 5:13–14) *of the truth* in and for all the others. Granted, the Church’s primary focus is on building another kingdom, Christ’s kingdom that is *not of this world* (John 18:36), but tangentially, it produces (at least should produce) men and women of Christian character who are model, mature-in-Christ’s-character individuals for the other God-ordained establishments. Disciple-making has an effect on the here and now, not just on God’s spiritual, eternal kingdom. No other institution can accomplish this task. The Church has unique value, and whether they realize it or not, all the other institutions are dependent on the health of the Church and its disciple-making abilities!⁸

VII. THE FOCUS OF INSTITUTIONS

As indicated, each of the five institutions has uniquely ordained purposes from on high. Each needs to be allowed to do what it does best.

One cannot expect the Church to
arrest thieves on the street any
more than one can expect the State
to make disciples in the Church.

One cannot expect commerce to produce
good children any more than one can
expect families to produce automobiles.

Each institution is uniquely gifted and endowed by God. The wise legislator will heed God’s way of mediating His reign between His first and

Second Coming and His means to presently manifest His will in a fallen world by respecting His design and purpose for each institution.

VIII. THE FAULT OF INSTITUTIONS

Here are some of the problems that occur when the State (to choose one institution) confuses its role with others or begins acting beyond its purposes (of “rewarding those who do good and punishing those who do evil”). When government plays in the sandbox (so to speak) of another God-ordained establishment, notice some possible outcomes:

Confusing the State with Other Institutions

State eclipsing marriage.....	REDEFINITION
State eclipsing family.....	NANNY STATE
State eclipsing commerce	SOCIALISM
State eclipsing the Church.....	THEOCRACY

All of the above represent aberrations from God’s revealed will. They lead to inefficient, sometimes disastrous consequences. We have the owner’s manual; we should not deviate from its directions. To do so is to in part introduce a theologically incorrect government-and-economics outcome in a given country.

IX. CONCLUSION

This study, which is in essence a study in Christian worldview, serves to provide the Christian officeholder with a biblically based perspective for governing. If one does not know what he believes, or why he believes what he believes, then this study is especially pertinent. Here is a construct, taken from Holy Writ, that is attuned with the Creator’s blueprint. Remember the purposes of each institution. Here is a takeaway summary:

Institutions and Their Purpose

STATE	to moralize
COMMERCE	to commercialize
MARRIAGE	to materialize
FAMILY	to catechize
CHURCH	to evangelize

Furthermore, from a theological perspective:

State exists to manifest God's restraining grace. God didn't have to restrain sin after the Fall.

Commerce exists to manifest common grace. God didn't have to provide a means of and for producing value-added products and services after the Fall.

Marriage exists to manifest creational grace. God didn't have to prolong putting up with the agony of dealing with wretched individuals after the Fall.

Family exists to manifest formational grace. God didn't have to provide a means of growing character in people after the Fall.

Church exists to manifest saving grace. God isn't obligated to save anybody who is in rebellion toward Him after the Fall.

God is so good to us to manifest His grace and reign through these created-for-man institutions. Without them, our fallen world would be much more chaotic; to the degree we live informed by them and enact laws in accordance with them, is the degree to which the world is less chaotic. These institutions are manifestations of His wonderful love and care for those He created and deeply loves!

Again, He has been gracious to provide us with each of these institutions! He didn't have to because in our fallenness we are undeserving! He is a God of order, and this plan represents divinely thought-out order! Lastly, keep in mind, each institution is more efficient than all other institutions when it is doing what it does best—what God designed it to do.

Herein is the way Christ intends to manifest His reign in the world today. These institutions represent His ongoing mediated authority in a fallen world, in His physical absence, prior to His Second Coming.

The better news, the great news, is that one day He *is* coming—what a glorious day that will be! Christ will someday reign from Jerusalem over the whole world! His physical, personal, non-mediated reign and His manifestation of authority will be perfect, without the stain of sin. What a wonderful day that will be! Are you ready for His return? Have you bowed your knee to His Lordship in every area of your life—including how you should legislate and form policy according to *His will*? Confess Him today as your Lord and Savior and legislate according to *His institutional construct*. He blesses those who are obedient to Him!

1. LeftRightIQ, April 25, 2022, “Netflix flood of liberal-agenda programming has cost them 35% in less than one week,” <https://letrightiq.com/2022/04/25/netflix-flood-of-liberal-agenda-programming-has-cost-them-35-in-less-than-one-week/>
2. Jessica Bursztynsky, Sarah Alessandrini, CNBC News, April, 20, 2022, “Netflix closes down 35% wiping more than \$50 billion off market cap,” <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/04/20/netflix-plunges-trading-subscriber-loss.html>
3. Chris Enloe, March 30, 2022, “Leaked videos show Disney employees boasting about forcing LGBT agenda into content,” <https://www.theblaze.com/news/leaked-videos-show-disney-employees-boasting-about-forcing-lgbt-agenda-into-content>
4. Joshua Rhett Miller, March 30, 2022, “Disney Exec vows more gay characters amid huge inclusivity push,” <https://nypost.com/2022/03/30/disney-executive-wants-more-lgbtqia-minority-character/>
5. The Greek words translated “human institution,” *anthropine ktisei ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει*, are somewhat difficult to translate. The first Greek word is an adjective modifying the second, a noun, both in the dative case of the sentence (an indirect object). The Greek words literally and respectively mean: “characteristic of mankind” (in contrast to heavenly) and “what is created.” When used together they come to mean, “For mankind, what is created.” It is not the idea that the human created the institution, rather a creation by God for mankind, to mediate His reign in Christ’s physical absence. Further, one could argue that authority and submission relationships were necessitated by the Fall (sin in the world) and that no need existed for authority and submission prior to the Fall. This is commonly referred to in theology as the egalitarian viewpoint. Such however is negated by Paul’s rooting of husband and wife authority and submission in creation, not the Fall (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:3–16; 1 Timothy 2:11–14). Institutional authority and submission, then, have to do with the mediatory reign of God in the world versus a remedy for sin, post Fall.
6. A caveat to submission is the principle of Acts 4:19. The passage illustrates one in institutional authority demanding that one in submission to authority disobey a scriptural truth. Whenever a decree by one in authority in any of the five institutions is unequivocally in contradiction to one’s ability to obey God’s Word, then God’s Word must take precedent over the demands of the one in authority.
7. Historical evangelicalism has typically identified only three institutions ordained by God in the Church Age. If, however, an institution is characterized by the existence of an authority-submission relationship, which seems to be the composite instruction of 1 Peter 2:13–15, then there are five institutions revealed in the NT. This would then be the difference between what I have deemed a “trititutional” versus a “pentetitutional” understanding of the mediatory reign of Christ in the Church Age. I am, as herein depicted, a “pentetitutionalist” (my words).
8. The critical importance of the Church to accomplish its God-ordained task of making disciples necessitates that its work needs to go unhindered by the State. History proves that when the Church is not under the control of the State, it is most effective.

Resource Development

Why is it that America has in very short order economically outpaced all the other countries of the world? Countries where Buddhism is the predominant religion, for example, have been around for 2600 years, and Islam-based nations have existed for over 1000 years. America, which has only been around for a few hundred years, is by far the most prosperous nation in history! The reason for this momentous growth is Christianity.

Unlike other religions, Christianity combines rational thinking and human dignity. Hinduism teaches its adherents to empty their minds of rational thought. Islam, on the other hand, rejects God's incarnation through Christ, depriving its adherents of a role model of God's characteristic humaneness and, in particular, graciousness.

The economic greatness of America is grounded in Christianity's theological basis of both rational thinking and human dignity and has shaped the way we think.¹ These two underpinning presuppositions are, in essence, what catapulted America into world leadership in very, very short order. In this chapter, I would like to examine the role of government in maintaining that greatness.

I. INTRODUCTION

The preamble to this chapter is intended to provide a sound-bite summary as to why Christianity both allows and enables America's economic prosperity. It follows, however, that as our nation increasingly jettisons its biblical bases, the manifest aspects of rational thinking and human dignity will also diminish over time.² To the degree that these virtues are lost in our culture, to the same degree the sustainability of our country's moral fabric will be disabled, which is directly connected to and undergirds our

country's economic greatness. Said another way, our economic engine is based on rational thinking as to what is empirically right and wrong, as well as a characteristic respect for others, such as not stealing another's property, not stealing ideas, and not damaging another's personal dignity.

As illustrated by the Kavanaugh nomination to the Supreme Court hearings, as the cultural jettisoning of Christianity increases, the discerning eye can ascertain the rise of *perniciousness*, which implies irreparable harm done through evil or insidious corrupting or undermining, according to *Merriam-Webster*.³ What is intended to be and was at one time a Senate procedure governed by an overriding pursuit for truth was instead eclipsed by ulterior and lesser motives.

Allan Bloom's classic book *The Closing of the American Mind* is an excellent work chronicling the demise of rational thinking in America, especially on our university campuses. As a Christian intellectual from India evaluating America's greatness from abroad in his book, *The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization*, Vishal Mangalwadi also chronicles irrationality via the fatalist mentality of Hinduism. The result of this mentality is that Hindu countries have been stymied in historic poverty. No one needs to read a book to understand the lack of human dignity rooted in the culture of Islam. As a result, Muslim economies are largely built or not built singularly on Western-developed oil exportation. All of these cameos serve to illustrate the following:

Religion and a nation's economic prosperity are intrinsically intertwined.

Will Christianity, which has been the DNA of Western civilization, continue to be in the future? A nation's adherence to (or in America's case, increasing disconnection from) a religious belief system greatly determines its destiny. As much as the secularist attempts to discount this presupposition; nonetheless, it is resolutely true.

Given this backdrop, this chapter is intended to provide every reader with a cogent biblical basis as to why and how government should most efficiently go about promoting economic prosperity. The best means of

promoting economic development are based on biblical revelation—biblical teaching and biblically revealed principles regarding what the Bible says is the role of God’s ordained institution of civil government. Importantly though, as stated in the preface and this introduction and the reason why I began this study where I did is that the ultimate success of *governmental* promotion of economic development is largely predetermined by the existence or nonexistence—the cultural embedding or lack thereof—of rational thinking and a respect for human dignity in its populace. Any attempt at national economic development void of these cultural underpinnings is virtually impossible. And further, only Christianity—not the government—can provide these underpinnings. Again, this critical distinction must be made up front prior to embarking on this study; this presupposition must be underscored and not overlooked.

II. RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IS GOOD

Scripture does not support the idea that material prosperity is evil. For leaders to reason that government should restrain material prosperity because material prosperity is evil is contrary to Scripture as attested by the following verses. As a matter of fact, in the Pastoral Epistles, the Apostle Paul labels such teaching as overtly heretical.

To support the idea that the material world is not inherently evil, first notice, when God blessed His creation of man in the garden, what He distinctly said in Genesis 1:28:

And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

This passage implies that God expects mankind to discover, develop, and produce goods and services from the earth for his own betterment. Also determined is whether or not mankind is predisposed to better understanding the universe in which he lives through gaining knowledge about it. As man has been created by God and accountable to Him, this passage decrees his standard operating procedure. Such a presupposition, or lack of it, determines whether or not a populace is intent on developing its natural and human resources. Herein is the theological impetus, i.e., the motivation for the pursuit of goods and services.

Granted, sinful temptations can accompany the discovery, creation, and manufacture of goods and services. Wayne Grudem in *Politics According to the Bible* notes this fact and lists some of them in saying the following:

Pride, envy, selfishness, lack of love for one's neighbor, and laziness from having excessive possessions. The greatest temptation is setting our hearts on material things rather than the God who gives them: "You cannot serve God and money" (Matthew 6:24). But these temptations to sin must not cause us to think that material goods are evil in themselves, and surely it is not evil but good for a nation to continually increase its production of goods and services, for that is what God intended human beings to do on the earth.⁴

The following passages further indicate that resource development is *good* and that adding value to raw goods is a great pursuit! Keep in mind that this fact must first be established before considering the outline point that will follow: government should encourage individuals to develop privately owned resources.⁵ (After all, why should a government do that if material is not viewed as *good*, rather as evil?)

A. BLESSING EQUALS PROSPERITY

In Ephesians 1:3, the Apostle Paul states that God has granted believers *every spiritual blessing*. This passage serves to indicate that *blessings* from God are more than material. But God's *blessings* are not void of being material either. In fact, God repeatedly gives promises of material *blessing* in response to those who trust in Him and are obedient to Him. Again, there is much more to Scripture than material prosperity (per the mantra of prosperity preachers.) It stands to reason that if the material world were evil, God would not grant material things as gifts to His people. Note this in Deuteronomy 8:7–10, which states in regard to God's *blessing* the descendants of Abraham:

For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of

whose hills you can dig copper. When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.

This beautiful, wonderful passage adroitly fits with Genesis 1:28!

Believing that the spiritual world is **good**
and the material world is evil is a false
dualism that is not supported by Scripture.

What Scripture does teach is a distinction between **good** and evil—not material riches versus material poverty. Obedience to God’s revelation is **good**, whereas disobedience to it is evil. Further discounting the former idea is Genesis 1:31. Note that the context of this passage is right after God had created the material world:

God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good....

If God says the material world He created is **good** and not evil, who are we to make pronouncements to the contrary? Accordingly, it follows that it is not outside of the biblical realm to think God will and does bless those He created in His image with material possessions. Is this thinking not underscored by the book of Job?

B. THE BOOK OF JOB

Job, arguably one of the most righteous yet persecuted men of the Old Testament (OT), remained faithful to God even while Satan was allowed to take his livestock, his servants, his family, and his health. Nonetheless, Job 42:10–17 says one of the ways the Lord rewarded Job for his faithfulness was to double his material wealth.

The LORD restored the fortunes of Job ... the LORD increased all that Job had twofold.... The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning ... And Job died, an old man and full of days.

C. FUTURE PROSPERITY

In the future, right after what Scripture repeatedly calls *the day of the Lord*, in which God avenges the sin of man and blesses the faithfulness of the saints in the end times, the material productivity of the world will greatly increase. Abundant material output will be associated with the Second Coming of Christ. Note this fact in Joel 3:18:

And in that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah will flow with water; and a spring will go out from the house of the LORD to water the valley of Shittim.

If God thinks material prosperity is evil, then why does He bless the faithful with so much of it in the future?

D. THE POOR AND PROSPERITY

Throughout Scripture, poverty is not seen as positive but something that needs to change for the better. This idea in itself reveals that God sees material possessions as *good*. Notice 1 John 3:17 in this regard:

But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

This passage indirectly serves to underscore the point being made. God's love is communicated in part by the dissemination of *the world's goods* to those who are lacking in material possessions. God desires all people to live with adequate material possessions—and certainly abundant natural resources are in this planet He has created and given us stewardship over to abundantly meet the needs of everyone. God is *good*. In fact, one of the OT descriptors for God is Jehovah-jireh, meaning “God our provider.”

E. JESUS THE CARPENTER

Mark 6:3 contains a reminder that Jesus added value to raw goods and resources: wood.

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” And they took offense at Him.

F. PAUL THE TENTMAKER

Acts 18:3 reminds us that Paul added value to raw goods and resources: fabric.

And because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:7–8, Paul states that others need to add value to the resources of the earth in some way:

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

In all these passages, **laboring** to achieve value-added material possessions is implied as a normative way of life in God's eyes. As already stated earlier in this book on government and economics, even prior to the Fall **labor** has always been God's means for man to gain the benefit of the earth's natural resources (cf. Genesis 2:15).⁶ God could have simply given man value-added products from His creation, but He made man with a desire to be industrious and to **labor** in order to gain material benefit. For a person to be lazy or to lack diligence is to violate God's standard operating procedure. And as God would have it, the way He designed man with his sense of dignity and worth is largely determined by his **labor**.

G. GOD'S PRONOUNCEMENT

As previously mentioned, characteristic of false teachers in the New Testament (NT) is their asceticism.

Asceticism is the belief that self-denial is the mark of true spirituality.

Again, pitting the material world against the spiritual world is a false dichotomy for ascertaining spiritual maturity. In 1 Timothy 4:4, Paul was

negating this heretical teaching. He states summarily that resource development is *good*:

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude.

Someone who lives on less is not necessarily more spiritual than another who lives with more material possessions. The question of spiritual maturity does not hinge on possessions or lack thereof, but rather with the intent of a person's heart for the use of material things he possesses. Do you idolize them, or do you use them for God's stated purposes? Are you a hoarder or a steward? Is your orientation all about you or others? The answer to those questions will determine how you use what God has given you. In this same line of thinking, note 1 Timothy 6:10:

For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

No better recent illustration of this is the NBA home office and various players kowtowing to China's totalitarian, autocratic, despotic rule over its citizenry in many forms. Making a buck was more important to the NBA home office than were the God-given human rights of individuals.

Note that God does not disdain money: He disdains *the love* of it. In summary of this point, as determined by the aforementioned passages, for individuals to *labor* to develop natural resources into value-added products and services is *good* and not necessarily greedy in God's eyes. God desires industrious individuals, His stewards, to *labor* and then use those resources He has given us for His purposes. Having substantively in omnibus fashion established that biblical premise, it follows that God would desire His institution of government to foster and encourage all citizens in such a quest. And He does.

III. GOVERNMENT SHOULD ENCOURAGE INDIVIDUALS TO DEVELOP PRIVATELY OWNED RESOURCES

Governments should not only foster and encourage but also incentivize citizens to create economic growth for themselves. Nothing is inherently evil about resource development! To do so is to enrich, diversify, and stabilize a

nation *and* its civil administration. Romans 13:4 is the crux passage in the NT that supports these premises:

For it [government] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

On its face value, this passage does not take much explaining to be properly understood: government exists in part *for* [your] *good*. That is to say, *it is to serve its citizenry*—to do *good* for them. This scriptural idea is appropriately woven into the contract of the United States Constitution, wherein our exegetically sensitive Christian forefathers wrote that our government exists to “promote the general welfare” of the nation. The historic way in which our government has *served* its people *for good* is through identifying the worth and incentivizing the unique contribution of each of the other four God-ordained institutions, i.e., commerce, family, marriage, and church. Each provide a unique contribution to the nation that the others cannot.

Notice one illustration of a specialized contribution in each of the following four other institutions.⁷

A. THE INSTITUTION OF COMMERCE

Government has historically provided tax write-offs to businesses that reinvest their wealth to build their businesses larger, thereby creating more goods and services and jobs for others. The expense of building a business is tax deductible in the sense of depreciation—what a wonderful incentive to grow a business!

B. THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

Government has historically provided tax incentives for married couples to have more children. Our daughter gave birth to our fifth (of seven) grandchild just in time to pick up the federal child tax deduction and the California state tax credit! With all the open land and abundant natural resources our nation has, why not up the incentives and double the size of the nation? That will certainly stimulate the economy, and it will keep us competitive with other countries who are outgrowing us in terms of

population. The dictatorship of Belarus, for example, will provide a family with a free home if they have at least seven children. Contrary to population/economic development, if for no other reason than an economic argument (and there are better, morally based arguments), pro-abortion laws serve to hurt the economy. America, in fact, should have fifty million more *laborers* and consumers than it presently does contributing to the GDP, as well as, by way of taxation, enabling a larger military budget to combat other counties who represent evil desires and possess growing militaries.

C. THE INSTITUTION OF FAMILY

Legislation originated in Arizona and now spreading to other states, created by former Congressman Trent Franks when he was a state representative, gives tax deductions to those who pay to educate their children in private schools. This choice ends up actually saving the government money through reduced enrollment in expensive, noncompetitive bureaucratic-laden public schools. This tax deduction is brilliant thinking in that it not only provides more choices to the parents for a child's best education but also saves the State money. Education vouchers should be passed into law to further create competition in education, and competition always creates better everything!

D. THE INSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH

That government has historically provided tax incentives for people who give to religious institutions is great thinking and policy because, like the other institutions, government cannot achieve nearly as efficiently that which each of the other institutions does best and is specifically designed by God to accomplish. In this case, the Church builds character in the citizenry, whereas the government is not in the character-building business per se; rather, it exists to punish evil. For government to incentivize religion is for government to create character in its own present and future leaders.

E. SUMMARY OF POINT

Fortunately, in America our government has acknowledged the value that each of these institutions provides to the nation and has profoundly and

wonderfully *served* them by way of incentivizing each to do what it does best. Is it any wonder America has been so prosperous a nation! That prosperity is due to nothing short of a genius application of biblical principles. Why would we ever change this?

What has resulted is a huge cultural synergy of **good** and rapid resource development that has achieved national advancement unparalleled in world history.

The aforementioned conclusion serves as an insightful, biblically informed analysis as to why, and I say this again for emphasis, America became such a great nation in a relatively short period of time. If you are ever asked that question or asked to speak on it, the above reference to following biblical principles should be included in your outline!

For lawmakers and policy makers, these are examples of great laws that align with the teaching of Romans 13:4. They must be preserved! They wonderfully manifest the biblical teaching that government ***is a minister of God to you for good***. Notice importantly that Scripture does not say, “You are to be a servant of government for its ***good***.” (Obviously regimes don’t get what this passage is teaching!) Herein illustrated by our own country is the biblical idea that government should incentivize the overall development of a nation and, even more specifically, its resource development—in contrast to socialist/communist countries that believe civil government can do it all by owning it all. Is it any wonder why socialist countries like Venezuela always fail? There is a reason for such failures:

Socialist countries are not
built on biblical premises.

You and I can praise God that we live in a country that is, at least in this area and for now, biblically spot-on! May the institutional incentives *from* government only increase in the years ahead! Herein is the biblically based theological understanding as to how civil government can and does best grow a nation's resources and its economy!

IV. PRIVATELY OWNED RESOURCES ENABLE INDIVIDUALS TO MEET THEIR OWN NEEDS

When a country's leadership understands the profundity of what Romans 13:4 teaches concerning how government should operate to best serve its citizenry, it ends up working to empower citizens to meet their own needs versus encouraging them to rely on their government to do that for them. President John F. Kennedy best capsulized this guiding biblical principle when he penned:

Ask not what your country can do for you—
ask what you can do for your country.

When government postures and disciplines itself to serve its citizens so they can create private wealth, it creates a culture of self-reliant individuals versus those who are dependent on government handouts. I have traveled into many former communist-controlled countries and seen firsthand what communism has done to the hearts of people. Once it is gone, reigniting a can-do entrepreneurial spirit that so characterizes the citizenry of historic capitalistic cultures is very difficult. God knows nothing of the model of a large government wherein people increasingly end up looking to it rather than to Him for their needs. *It is important to note that this principle of individual self-reliance stems from the teachings of Romans 13:4! It [government] is a minister of God to you for good.* This is an informative and inviolate biblical principle concerning a government's proper understanding of economics; herein is how God wants government to view its job! It follows, too, that when people have an abundance of personal resources, they are in

a better position to help the needs of the less fortunate—versus a government’s trying to meet all those individual needs with little personalization, no spiritual solutions, and a huge inefficiency.

V. PRIVATELY OWNED RESOURCES ENABLE INDIVIDUALS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE POOR

The result of the aforementioned belief, as it relates to meeting the needs of the less fortunate, i.e., those who have been badly impaired by a fallen world—and this does occur through a myriad of ways—is that there is a more effective, personal, and successful way of meeting the needs of and fostering self-reliance in the poor. This biblical model, again stemming from the profound theology and implications of Romans 13:4, is that individuals, not governments, become the primary resource for satisfactorily and abundantly helping to create a societal safety net. Via God’s instruction to government in Romans 13:4, government plays a more efficient and effective role when it *smartly and shrewdly* empowers and incentivizes the other God-ordained (and coequal if not more important!) institutions to meet the needs of the less fortunate versus attempting to bear the burden itself.

VI. SUMMARY

Herein is the Christian worldview and the passages supporting that, that pertain to a civil government’s understanding of economics. Herein are God’s answers and God’s ways for government to best develop abundant resources for the whole of a culture! Herein is God’s blueprint for private property and creating an ensuing, effective societal safety net. Herein is how best a government fosters resource development through scripturally based incentivization.

1. It should be noted that Judaism contains both of these theological aspects as well. Even though a much younger nation than even America, Israel's economic prosperity can be attributed to these same religious moorings: both rational thinking and human dignity.
2. Witness in October 2018 the reaction to the Justice Brett Kavanaugh confirmation wherein both rational thinking and human dignity were greatly lacking.
3. *Merriam-Webster*, 1828, s.v. perniciousness <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pernicious>.
4. Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, (Zondervan, 2010).
5. The biblical premise of private ownership in a capitalistic economy is the thesis of the CapMin "Capitalism vs. Communism" Bible study (Chapter 41).
6. After the Fall, labor became difficult.
7. Stating what follows is not to imply that our government does everything correctly; in fact, some existing policies and regulations serve as disincentives to each of the God-ordained institutions.

Free Markets and Regulation

In order to best explain what Scripture teaches about free markets and regulation, I would like to draw a theological parallel, which should prove instructive.

The healthiest Christians are what I call biblicists. That is to say, they rely on the Bible as their standard for all of faith and practice. To the right of a biblicist is a libertinist who takes liberty with scriptural commands, reasoning that Jesus died for all our sins anyway, so then why not take liberties with biblical guidelines? You'll be forgiven in the end, so why not live the way you want? To the left of the biblicist is the legalist. This person adds to the standards of Scripture and enforces them on others as the supposed true litmus test for spirituality.

In a parallel sense and thus related to this book on economics and government, the healthiest economies are characterized by free market enterprise. In an economic sense, we should all strive to be free marketers. Similar to the theological continuum above, to their right are economic libertarians and to their left are communists.

I think this analogy is *good* for best understanding the role of government pertaining to societal economics. In this chapter, allow me to further unpack what the Bible says about free markets.

I. INTRODUCTION

“Biblical libertinism” is descriptive of a believer who is characterized by a disregard of God’s ordinances in Scripture, such as the Ten Commandments.

These believers deem their human freedom of choice as their ultimate authority, not God's commands. The Apostle Paul, however, foresaw such faulty behavioral conclusions from so free a salvation when he penned Romans 6:1–2:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

Paul trumps such thinking with another theological truth: the believer is dead to sin once he has accepted Jesus into his heart. Biblical libertinism then is a meritless concept.

In a parallel sense, the error of economic libertarianism is similar in nature; it is best summarized, I think, by Dr. Wayne Grudem:

Therefore, I differ with "Libertarian" views of government that make human freedom of choice their ultimate standard of good rather than obedience to God's moral principles of the Bible and fail to adequately recognize that governments should do "good" for people [Romans 13:4], not merely protect their freedom.¹

Do you see the parallel in such thinking? Biblical libertinism and economic libertarianism share in common the higher authority of man over and above biblical revelation. Both share a common belief that their personal liberty is the highest concern.

On the other side of the continuum in my analogy are the spiritual legalists and the economic communists who both superimpose their extra-biblical ideas on others. Both live on Mount Superior, and getting through their gate at the bottom of the hill is difficult. Theirs is a standard for individual and corporate behavior that not only robs the joy of living, but doesn't work! A person needs only to visit a legalistic church or a communist country to know what I mean.² Void of such extremes are the spiritual biblicists and the economic free marketers. Both view God's principles as revealed in the Bible as the highest concern and final adjudicator.

All that to say, neither economic libertarianism nor economic communism are governmental systems that are substantiated by Scripture.

What follows is a theological construct underscoring the fact that Scripture upholds the idea of free market enterprise.

II. EXAMINING LIBERTARIANISM

Economic libertarianism stands on the premise that personal liberties are the highest objective that government should strive to achieve and protect. In this worldview (or better stated, this way of thinking), gaining and maintaining personal freedom is deemed a more important purpose and objective for civil government than is maintaining biblical principles in a country. It is what government should be all about trying to create and maintain.

The free marketer believes that civil government should be about pursuing more than just personal freedom. Most every society today agrees that some governmental regulations are needed to protect citizens and create a thriving economy. For instance, courts punish fraud and injustice among businesses. Certain agencies need to create and enforce health and safety standards. Government needs to make sure weights and measures are accurate. These governmental responsibilities go above and beyond protecting and maintaining personal freedom. Societies today see a need for government to maintain roads and provide services such as fire and police departments and city planners. And if governments do not provide a trustworthy currency, economic trade becomes much more difficult.

It is hard to imagine a culture's thriving without some level of government, and in fact, God did ordain the institution of civil government as is evidenced in 1 Samuel 12 and Romans 13! Economic libertarians must keep that in mind as they reason out their political and economic ideology: does God know best, or do the libertarians? Is total freedom and the autonomy of man the highest *good*, or is obedience to God and exalting His glory? In the previous examples, civil government is performing what God designed it to accomplish in a fallen world: to be *a minister of God to you for good* (Romans 13:4) and for the *punishment of evildoers* (1 Peter 2:14).

III. EXAMINING COMMUNISM

As seen in previous chapters, government ownership of property is not its primary God-intended purpose. I have already built a strong exegetical case to prove that statement.

Furthermore, the use of the government for the personal enrichment of the government itself or a leader in government or his family runs contrary

to what Scripture teaches regarding God's revealed purposes for this institution of His. In 1 Samuel 12:3–4, Israel's leader, Samuel, said to the nation of Israel at the end of his service:

“Here I am; bear witness against me before the LORD and His anointed. Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? I will restore it to you.” They said, “You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man’s hand.”

This passage serves to foreshadow what the New Testament (NT) shouts: the institution is to *serve* the *good* of the people versus a judge, a king, an emperor, or a president. Again, Romans 13:4 definitively states of government:

For it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

Chapter 43, “Resource Development,” showed that government exists primarily to *serve* the people, quell evil, and create justice. Communist forms of government are patently unbiblical because they go far beyond this biblical definition and limitations. Given that premise, let us now underscore from Scripture the abnormality of government owning property.

IV. GOVERNMENTS SHOULD ENCOURAGE INDIVIDUALS TO DEVELOP PRIVATELY OWNED RESOURCES

Governments should not only foster and encourage but also incentivize citizenry to create economic growth for themselves. To do so is to enrich, diversify, and stabilize a nation *and* its civil administration! The more prosperous individuals there are in a nation, the greater the economic basis (through taxation) for the government.

On its face, Romans 13:4 does not take a lot of explaining to be understood properly. It says government exists, in part, *for* [your] *good*. That is to say, *it is to serve its citizenry*—to do *good* for them. (I always think of this passage when a witness, who is being inordinately badgered in a house or senate committee by a member, reminds the member that they work for the taxpayers! Government leaders are in office to *serve the citizenry*—not rule

over them.) This scriptural idea is appropriately woven into the contract of our Constitution, wherein our exegetically sensitive, biblically informed Christian forefathers wrote that our government exists to “promote the general welfare” of the nation. The historic way in which our government has *served* its people *for good* is through identifying the worth of and incentivizing the unique contribution of each of the other four God-ordained institutions, addressed at length in chapter 42. Each provides a unique contribution to the nation that the others, in terms of efficiency and yield, cannot.

In that economic communism has no biblical basis, this practice does not yield pragmatic success. Those visiting both East and West Germany when the wall was in place experienced the stark difference in each nation’s economic outcome. The same people at the same time with the same natural resources—one controlled by a free-market ideology and the other by communist principles—were vastly different. Another example in economic ideological contrast—a present-day example, in fact—is provided by North and South Korea. The same people, the same environment and resources, the same starting point, but one nation has possessed a free-market economy, and the other has not. The result? One is dark, and the other is light in ways more so than simply comparing a nighttime satellite photo. The point of this chapter is well made by these illustrations: government, if only for motives to better itself, should encourage individuals to develop privately owned resources!

V. PROHIBITIONS OF GOVERNMENTAL SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT

By way of review:

The fundamental purpose of government is
to *serve* the people—not profit from them.

That America has been on a wonderful mission for many years to promote democratic governance and free market capitalism to the nations of the world needs to be stated often. This biblically based mission has brought prosperity to millions. Why? Scripture is replete with warnings

about political leaders' misusing their governmental position both in an institutional and individual sense.

Scripture throughout the Old Testament continually warns about the propensity for governmental authorities to abuse their positions of power. One of many ways the Bible speaks specifically to this exploitation is via the denunciation of *bribery*. The many passages on *bribery* that follow serve to illustrate the deplorability of those who take advantage of their position—in contrast to serving the citizenry. Genocide, or murdering one's citizenry in order to maintain power, would be another reprehensibility. The reason I single out the sin of *bribery* among political leaders (often simply called corruption) is that for this very reason too often free-market capitalism fails in some countries.

Bribery (*shochad*) is possible with people who have some sort of power and authority that they can wield over others. Scriptures on *bribery* are always related to someone who is being tempted to misuse his authority. Notice the many passages that condemn this misuse of power.

A. 1 SAMUEL 8:11-17

He said, "This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and of fifties, and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants. He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys and use them for his work. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants."

In the first related passage cited in this study, Samuel wanted to make sure he did not personally abuse his institutional authority. This passage records Samuel's speaking further to Israel by way of contrast. In this Scripture, he warns Israel that (unlike him), the tendency of institutional leaders will be to abuse their authority.

The natural proclivity of government is to expand itself beyond what God has called it to achieve and to misuse its power. This predilection is an aspect of man's fallen nature and why a representational form of government "by the people and for the people" is the best form of government. (Even so, no governmental system is perfect in a fallen world, as is illustrated by America's woeful inability to slash its deficit spending with a representational form of government.) It is also why in the sense of Church institutions, I like denominations and congregational rule: both serve to check the pastor who could very well attain too much power and run with it (cf. 1 Peter 5:1–5 in this regard).

The point is that, in a fallen world, there always need to be checks in every God-ordained institution on what otherwise amounts to runaway autonomous power. The following are several passages relative to *bribery* that speak to one of the means by which political leaders use autonomous power. This specific case is how *bribery* leads to the destruction of free markets:

B. DEUTERONOMY 16:19

You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous.

C. PSALM 26:10

*In whose hands is a wicked scheme,
And whose right hand is full of bribes.*

D. PROVERBS 15:27

*He who profits illicitly troubles his own house,
But he who hates bribes will live.*

E. EZEKIEL 22:12

"In you they have taken bribes to shed blood; you have taken interest and profits, and you have injured your neighbors for gain by oppression, and you have forgotten Me," declares the LORD God.

F. HABAKKUK 1:2-4

How long, O LORD, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, "Violence!" Yet You do not save. Why do You make me see iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; strife exists and contention arises. Therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore justice comes out perverted.

All these aforementioned passages underscore the misuse of government for personal advancement rather than the service of the people. May this sin never be counted against you because the sin of **bribery** is hugely damaging to free market economics! Russia and Ukraine have served as **good** examples. Their efforts to replace communism with free-market capitalism have been greatly stymied by a carryover culture that tolerates **bribery**.

VI. TWO EXAMPLES OF GOVERNMENTAL SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT

To underscore the point being made that governments should promote free markets, versus government existing to serve the leader(s), is Omar Bongo.

A. OMAR BONGO, GABON

Here is the first example of an aberrant use of government. Bongo ruled the country of Gabon in Africa for forty-one years. In his obituary published June 9, 2009, *The Telegraph* of London reported that Bongo "considered everything inside [Gabon] to be his personal property... shamelessly looting the country's oil wealth... and elevated corruption to a method of government." *The Telegraph* additionally reported:

"[He] owned 33 properties in Paris and Nice...these discoveries were probably only the tip of the iceberg; Bongo's fortune certainly ran into the hundreds of millions of dollars and may have reached the billions."³

Bongo serves as a colorful antonym to government's purpose for existence:

God does not intend for government to
be the vehicle for a leader's gain; rather,
it is to house the people's free market!

As we have seen already, Scripture is clear that leaders are to *serve* the people and that a leader who uses his position for personal gain is corrupt. Underscoring this concept is Proverbs 16:12:

It is an abomination for kings to commit wicked acts, for a throne is established on righteousness.

B. JOE BIDEN, U.S.A.

A second illustration of what appears to be self-aggrandizement, using one's office for personal gain, took place in the U.S., involving President Joe Biden when he was vice president. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are among many news sources that reported the story. The following is an excerpt from an investigative piece written by award-winning investigative reporter John Solomon, published on April 2, 2019, by *The Hill*:

“Two years after leaving office, Joe Biden couldn't resist the temptation last year to brag to an audience of foreign policy specialists about the time as vice president that he strong-armed Ukraine into firing its top prosecutor. In his own words, with video cameras rolling, Biden described how he threatened Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko in March 2016 that the Obama administration would pull \$1 billion in U.S. loan guarantees, sending the former Soviet republic toward insolvency, if it didn't immediately fire Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin”.⁴

The story quoted Biden, whose remarks had been previously video recorded at a meeting of U.S. foreign policy specialists. The story said Biden told Poroshenko:

“You're not getting the billion. I'm going to be leaving here in, I think it was about six hours...I looked at them and said, “If the prosecutor is not fired, you're not getting the money”...Well, son of a ----, he got fired. And they put in place someone who was solid at the time,” Biden told the

Council on Foreign Relations event, insisting that President Obama was in on the threat.”⁵

Solomon reported that the prosecutor who was fired was “leading a wide-ranging corruption probe into the natural gas firm Burisma Holdings that employed Biden’s younger son, Hunter, as a board member,”⁶ and that “U.S. banking records show Hunter Biden’s American-based firm, Rosemont Seneca Partners LLC, received regular transfers into one of its accounts—usually more than \$166,000 a month—from Burisma from spring 2014 through fall 2015, during a period when Vice President Biden was the main U.S. official dealing with Ukraine and its tense relations with Russia.”⁷

Solomon reported: “Before he was fired as general prosecutor, [Shokin] had made ‘specific plans’ for the investigation that ‘included interrogations and other crime-investigation procedures into all members of the executive board, including Hunter Biden.’”⁸

The Bible warns that government leaders will be tempted to use their power for their own *good* rather than viewing their appointment by God as one to *serve* others. They fall to the temptations often afforded them, to use their position and power for self-aggrandizement.

VII. SUMMARY

Free market capitalism is God’s blueprint for growing a nation’s economy. Both libertarianism and communism are riddled with pragmatic problems caused by their theological and ideological contradictions. These systems do not come close to achieving for a society what biblical free market enterprise does! This is why ventures such as Solyndra, The Affordable Health Care Act, or the U.S. Postal Service will never be able to provide goods and services that are competitive with those provided by free-market capitalism. The failures of men in office that are represented by these illustrations are predictable given what Scripture says are God’s intended purposes and limitations to His institution of government.

Closely parallel to being a spiritual biblicist and not a libertinist nor a legalist, there exists an economic tension between the extremes of libertarianism and communism that a nation must maintain in order to best facilitate economic prosperity. Living in the balance between those two extremes is biblically based free-market capitalism. What we have gleaned from the Word in this study reveals that God desires governments in a fallen world to enact, support, and maintain free-market capitalism.

1. Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A comprehensive resource for understanding modern political issues in light of Scripture*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2010.
2. Note that modern-day China is an economic hybrid of a communist dictatorship that allows free market enterprise among its citizenry. This is an attempt by a totalitarian regime, a rigid ruling class, to create prosperity for those over whom they maintain the ultimate control. It is nothing more than a communistic government attempting to placate their citizens by offering them a carrot. At the end of the day, China remains a communist nation, in an economic sense if not totally.
3. "Omar Bongo Obituary," *The Telegraph*, June 8, 2009, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/politics-obituaries/5478816/Omar-Bongo.html>.
4. John Solomon, "Joe Biden's 2020 Ukrainian nightmare: A closed probe is revived," *The Hill* April 1, 2019, <https://thehill.com/opinion/white-house/436816-joe-bidens-2020-ukrainian-nightmare-a-closed-probe-is-revived>.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

Debt, Money, and Inflation

The brilliant economist Milton Friedman once said, “Inflation is just like alcoholism. In both cases, when you start drinking or when you start printing too much money, the good effects come first; the bad effects only come later.”¹

I like Friedman’s metaphor. The deleterious results of all delectable undisciplined habits generally do not come to roost immediately. But as with every sinful addiction, most assuredly the eventual decline that comes is what Scripture means when it says, *and be sure your sin will find you out* (Numbers 32:23). God’s law of sowing and reaping applies not only to individuals but also to nations (Hosea 8:7). To live uprightly in a fallen world that is full of temptations takes great character and discipline—something that is difficult for individuals to achieve apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Such understanding bespeaks the need for believers in office who possess great character and discipline, whose hands keep a tight rein on the government’s purse strings.

In this chapter on debt, money, and inflation, I want to examine what Scripture says about the spiritual root cause of fiscal irresponsibility in an individual or a nation. Read on, beloved.

I. INTRODUCTION

Back in the late ’70s, I had the honor of being a member of America’s basketball World Cup team. As a preliminary to the actual World Cup in the Philippines, we competed in the Christopher Columbus Cup tournament in Buenos Aires. The tournament was about two weeks long, and during that short period of time, Argentina’s currency inflated 31 percent! Being

from America, I'd never seen anything like that—nor do I ever hope to again!

One glaring historical example occurred after World War I in Germany, where wives commonly met their husbands at the factory gate during lunchtime in order to get and spend the paycheck before evening, when it was worth less because of the hyperinflation.

Governments cause inflation when they increase the money supply at a much greater rate than the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP). Increasing the money supply is like alcoholism; all gluttonous activity seems pleasurable in the beginning—but then reality sets in—and few are those who possess the willpower to quit cold turkey. As important as this subject is, public servants must understand biblical precepts related to debt, money supply, and inflation.

One of God's intended responsibilities for His ordained institution of government is for it not to go into debt, but to maintain an effective money supply, and to avoid inflation. This responsibility is in keeping with His revealed overarching purpose for government as declared in Romans 13:4: ***It is a minister of God to you for good.*** Government does not *serve* its populace when it lacks fiscal discipline, plunges into debt, and then, in an attempt to remedy its lack of willpower, turns on the money printing press as a shortcut solution. Presently, this very malfeasance can be witnessed in Venezuela, and the "cure" is as immoral as the cause. Both are derelict abuses of power and far from what God expects of His ordained institution and its leaders.

It doesn't take a Milton Friedman to figure out that increasing the money supply beyond the rate of GDP will lead to inflation. But here's the shocker to think about: in a representative form of government, any resulting runaway national debt is nothing more than a reflection of a financially obese populace! There is no way of getting around that fact.

If you follow Friedman's metaphor completely, the trajectory of our soaring national debt will not be altered until a majority of the populace gets past the initial euphoria of government program addiction and experiences sobriety from its debt service payments. In fiscal year (FY) 2020, forecasts showed that America would fork out \$479 billion in debt service payments—over 10 percent of its budget!² The eventual pain of having to go cold turkey should overwhelmingly serve for responsible citizens to elect a majority of representatives who are resolute on correcting the problem—assuming we don't first die from fiscal cirrhosis.

Our nation is in an increasing stupor as we mainline “entitlement” and its newly emerging rhapsodic twin, “healthcare.”

But after “the party,” we will soon hear the jarring knock of Mr. N. Flation. Throughout history this guy has always had a nose for sniffing out those who are strung out on entitlement. You can bet he will take us all to his famous clinic, and no, my friend, it’s not in Malibu; it’s in the outskirts of the Mojave. It’s not a posh coastal mansion overlooking the Pacific. In fact, it’s in shambles, and emblazoned over the front door, written in a font called “mockingbird bold,” is a blinking neon sign that reads: *The Trillionaire Club!* There we’ll all attempt to dry out and awaken to reality.

II. RECAPPING THE BIBLICAL PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT

In the Bible study “God’s Institutions and their Roles on Earth” (Chapter 42), I attempted to exegetically establish the point that government exists to help the other God-ordained institutions of marriage, family, commerce, and church to do what they do best, while at the same time doing what it does best. It is *sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right* (1 Peter 2:14). As stated in the introduction, Romans 13:4 says it is *a minister of God to you for good* (Romans 13:4). Clearly, the biblically explicit, God-purposed role of government is both to *punish evildoers* and *serve* the populace. Government’s role is not to become the end-all *provider* for the people! Remember, providing our needs is God’s role for heaven’s sake! Such an incorrect understanding of the role of government will lead to the ills that this Bible study addresses.

“Government the *provider*” is a title and role assigned to it by biblically naïve or intentionally biblically disobedient political leaders.

Posing as the *provider* is also a cheap way to garner votes in a democratic form of government (more on that in a moment). To define government in a secular, provisional way is to head down a path of greater and greater debt accrual and eventual insolvency. To think that government exists to *provide* for the people is to think in ways that are ultimately unsustainable, injurious, and uncompassionate to everyone.

With this overarching biblical understanding of government in focus, let us examine some scriptural principles that relate to the three terrible children to which parents of nonbiblical government ideology always give birth: the children's names, and in the order of their birth, are Debt, Money Supply, and Inflation.

III. DEBT

Just as a personal credit card makes it relatively easy to go into debt by spending money not yet earned, the printing press at the treasury of civil government offers the same temptation.

Out-punting their coverage,
government falls into the trap
of pleasing the citizenry in ways
unaffordable to the treasury.

This trap is especially tempting in a representative form of government where congressmen are motivated to “bring home the bacon” in order to please their constituents—the very ones they are dependent upon to elect them. They often *provide* a short-term immediate gain for their districts without considering how those actions will impact the nation's long-term future. For a nation's citizenry to desire and the government to capitulate to a “*provider*” model represents biblically illiterate, uninformed, and undisciplined choices that lead to national indebtedness. What follows are three biblical aspects of debt.

A. DEBT IS ROOTED IN A LOVE FOR MONEY

Providing entitlements a nation cannot afford is ultimately rooted in what the NT calls the *love of money* (1 Timothy 6:10). First notice the context of verse 9, which is addressing ministers of the Church, but the principles revealed can be applied to governmental leaders as well. Verses 9 and 10 follow:

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction (1 Timothy 6:9).

For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Timothy 6:10).

In terms of a political leader, the desire to *get rich* could reflect the aspiration to get reelected throughout life, i.e., “But those who *want* to get votes fall into temptation.” In this case, *getting rich* equates to the *temptation* to gain notoriety and power. What results from these unchecked *desires*, Scripture declares, are *ruin and destruction*, and in this case, the *ruin* of the government.

States William Kelly in his commentary on this passage in the Pastoral Epistles, “One’s overall moral sense will become blurred as a result of this overmastering passion [*love of money*].”³ According to the context, this verse is being written to pastors; however, public servants fit into the applicable sense of this Bible study. Venezuela is a fitting, recent example of what happens when public servants stoop to self-concern over concern for the public. They start down a road of irrational and pernicious behavior—characteristics that are very evident in too many career politicians on the Hill.

The Greek word for *plunge* (*buthizein*) can also be translated as “submerge” and carries the idea of “drowning in the sea.” In a macro sense of application, what follows self-concerned politicians who *want* above all else to gain reelection or personal notoriety, power, and/or fortune is a nation drowning in a sea of debt.

The following passage (6:10) speaks to the motive of such *want* and desire: *For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil....* In a similar cause-and-effect sentence structure to 6:9, Paul describes what results: *pierc[ing] themselves* [and the country’s citizenry and treasury] *with*

many griefs (6:10). Kelley states, “[Here is] a graphic metaphor describing the thorns of remorse and disillusionment which now lacerate them.”⁴

In a representative form of government, the temptation always exists for elected officials to please the voters who also possess a *love of money*, i.e., greed and self-centeredness. In an attempt to secure votes in the next election, the public servant must never give in to this base personal motive, one that both the public servant and those they represent harbor in their sin-laden, fallen nature. Acting on this motive can lead to what Wall Street calls “insider trading” or Vegas named “prostitution.” For a public servant to stoop to a transactional relationship with their constituency is, in the long run, to *pierce* the nation with the *grief* of national debt. The unchecked manifestation of a *love for* votes and a *love for money* respectively will ruin any nation!

Such self-serving character and ensuing debt are trends commensurate with increasing secularization.

President John Adams was correct when
he assessed the Achilles heel of our radically
new form of representative government:
“Our Constitution was made only for a moral
and religious people. It is wholly inadequate
to the government of any other.”⁵

Only religious people who are first capable of governing themselves—disciplining their own sinful, gluttonous predilections—can sustain a representative form of governance. (I should add here that this is why serious participation by public servants in in-depth Bible study at all levels of government is essential and critically important for our nation!) As America slides away from a love for God and His biblical precepts that define government’s role from a heavenly perspective, an unchecked lust for the *love for money* and the ensuing *want* for a provisional state rushes into that vacuum. Secularization means an increasing number of Americans believe that government should *provide* for their needs. In fact, a recent poll indicates four out of ten young Americans prefer socialism to capitalism!

This poll serves to make the point. But this unintended-by-God secular philosophy of government as *provider* always leads to eventual insolvency.

B. DEBT IS ILLUSTRATIVE OF A LACK OF CONTENTMENT

In contrast to those *who want to get rich*, Paul's personal faith in Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit was the reason he could testify to the Philippian believers the following:

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am (Philippians 4:11).

When a believer's *contentment* is in Christ, personal ambition—*want*—for material *riches* or unduly gained votes grows strangely dim. When *The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want* (Psalm 23:1) and when a person is *content* and at peace with God in his inner man, the wanton temptation to go into debt is greatly diminished. As the hymnist wrote, "The things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."⁶ Someone once said, "The secret of *contentment* is not to add to a man's possessions but to diminish his desires." Only peace with God through Jesus Christ and personally knowing He *has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ* (Ephesians 1:3) provides man the fulfillment of these otherwise base inner longings. The degree to which you are filled with Christ, know your position in Christ, and are mastering His Word is the degree to which you will live with an inner *contentment*. Be sure of this:

Nothing else will, nor can,
ultimately satisfy and fill the vacuum
of *want* in the heart of fallen man.

C. DEBT LEADS TO ENSLAVEMENT

Alienation from God carries with it discontentment—a void in the inner man that seeks fulfillment of some sort. Rather than choosing Christ, many attempt to fill their vacuous soul with material things. And if a person goes

into debt to satisfy these *wants*, additional deleterious entrapments will arise. Proverbs 22:7 warns:

The borrower becomes the lender's slave.

America's burgeoning debt makes our nation uncharacteristically dependent on its many lenders and future lenders who serve to buoy our addiction, be they based at home or abroad. Likened to a junkie in a dark alley in need of a "fix," we still need their injections into our arms (even though we might find fault with those who source our "habit")! We become slaves of sorts with an embarrassing and hypocritical dependency. One example of this sourcing of a "habit": America should not owe a dime to the government of China. How utterly embarrassing it is to owe even a dime to a genocidal, totalitarian regime!

Debt throttling an individual's or a family's ability to do well to others has the same effect on a nation. To illustrate, a family might desire to help with the hunger and medical needs of every person in their community, but such sincere desires are limited proportionately by their indebtedness. In that the borrower becomes a slave to the lender, the lender's demands must be met prior to the needs of others.

In addition and apart from any indebtedness, to continue the metaphor, God does not call parents to bankrupt their family through overly compassionate gestures to the poor. Doing so only leads to an additional poor family in the community! The first-century Church in Jerusalem made this mistake. They depleted their personal resources in their zealous attempt to meet the needs of the poor (cf. Acts 2:42–45). This "benevolence" led to their dependence thereafter on the gifts of others (1 Corinthians 16:1–3). They killed the goose that laid the golden eggs!

This same principle applies to nations. For a nation to overspend and be obligated to prioritize the repayment of its debtors is to proportionately possess less capacity to incentivize the institutions of marriage, family, commerce, and church, which are God's intended first responders for meeting the needs of those who, for whatever legitimate reason, cannot satisfy their own needs. Fiscal enslavement offsets a government's liberty to incentivize the other institutions that carry the biblical burden and priority to help those who cannot legitimately help themselves. Debt proportionally diminishes God's intended plan for a societal safety net. (This subject will be examined more fully in Chapter 49: "God's Design for a Societal Safety Net.")

D. DEBT AND JOSEPH'S CIVIL LEADERSHIP

Genesis 41:47–48 describes the civil management of Egypt by Pharaoh's CEO, Joseph. Herein illustrated by this Old Testament (OT) narrative passage is the biblical antonym for accruing huge national debt! Notice what this savvy, God-fearing leader did for his boss's nation with their abundant resources:

During the seven years of plenty the land brought forth abundantly. So he gathered all the food of these seven years which occurred in the land of Egypt and placed the food in the cities; he placed in every city the food from its own surrounding fields.

Joseph was a good manager of the country's GDP. Because of this public servant's foresight, character, discipline, and fiscal stewardship, when the seven years of famine arrived, the nation of Egypt was in the position of being a lender—not a borrower! As a result:

**Biblical Egypt became
rich in the recession.**

One present-day example similar to Joseph's Ancient Egypt is modern-day Chile. This country has an in-place balanced budget law and subsequent surpluses in excess of 2 percent of the GDP. (Their GDP was only \$280 billion in FY 2018.) Chile, nonetheless, represents much better financial management than America, with its vast wealth and productivity—way more than Chile! According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, we possess only 4½ percent of the world's population, yet we produce 20 percent of the world's GDP—over \$20 trillion a year (FY 2018)! Given this remarkable capacity for productivity, America has absolutely no legitimate reason to have any debt whatsoever. This contrast serves to illustrate this nation's profound lack of character and application of biblical principles. It is absolutely *shameful*!

Will someone go to Santiago and bring their Josephs up to America to counsel us? If Joseph or our Chilean counterparts were in charge here, our nation would have a huge savings account! Certainly, with our overwhelmingly abundant resources, if we possessed leaders like Joseph, we could, in relatively short order, reverse our country's debtor status. May God's Word inform us on such matters. Are you a modern-day Joseph, or aren't you?

E. SUMMARY ON DEBT

In Deuteronomy 15:6, God instructs His nation Israel with the following:

For the LORD your God will bless you as He has promised you, and you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow....

God repeats His no-borrowing-from-other-nations ordinance to the nation of Israel in Deuteronomy 28:12 and 44. In setting a people apart for His own possession in the times of the OT, God gave Israel all kinds of dietary, religious, and civil laws; not going into debt was one of them! God intended Israel to be exemplary in this way.

That is all to say this: as it pertains to borrowing from other nations to pay for runaway entitlement programs, Scripture is clear that such policies and actions are outside God's job description for civil governments. For man to reinvent or redefine God's purposes of government is to display not only arrogance, but extreme foolishness.

In contrast to governmental entitlement programs and their related indebtedness, and at the risk of sounding uncompassionate, notice what Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 *is* God's plan for meeting the needs of people:

For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.

Rather than depending on government, God expects people (in this context families, most specifically the husband) to *provide* for themselves. Should some individuals be incapable of providing for themselves for any number of legitimate reasons, Scripture is clear that the provisional responsibility falls to the other God-ordained institutions. Again, our national debt is largely rooted in the aberrant human-informed understanding of government's supposed job description: American government has taken

on a role that God never intended for it and is now in trouble for having done so.

Again, civil government should be the
last line of defense in the formation of a
societal safety net—not the first.

Such unbiblical malfeasance has created huge, unnecessary debt. The perils of governmental debt, as warned of in the foregoing passages, are increasingly threatening the overall sustainability of our nation. Non-collateralized national debt is to be strictly—and I believe legally—prohibited. I agree with what Warren Buffet once suggested: that all those responsible for balancing the nation's budget should automatically be ineligible for reelection upon failing to pass a balanced budget.

IV. MONEY SUPPLY

Money in itself, a nation's currency system, is a good thing. As a measure of value that efficiently facilitates transactions between individuals much more so than bartering, it is right to expect that it will remain stable over time in relation to a nation's GDP. It is the standard and should be the reliable, dependable measure by which business transactions can be and are evaluated.

The institution of commerce is dependent on the institution of government to exercise extreme integrity in this area. When a nation's money supply is increased disproportionately to its GDP, the stability and ensuing confidence in the currency is adversely affected. Milton Friedman's axiom, that "inflation is always and everywhere a monetary phenomenon" should serve to govern the way a nation's central bank regulates its money supply.

The reason money supply is important to this chapter is that after incurring debt and before experiencing inflation, the natural tendency of undisciplined governments is to try to remedy things by printing more

money. But two wrongs don't make a right. Such policies inevitably lead to inflation—the remaining “child” to address.

To increase the nation's money supply disproportionately to the growth of its GDP is to commit a form of theft by the government. Such an increase in the money supply results in inflation: more dollars being used to represent the same amount of goods and services. The net effect is that inflation deflates the value of one's savings and the value of previously agreed-to contracts between parties. The Scripture states a timeless principle in this regard:

Differing weights and differing measures,

Both of them are abominable to the LORD (Proverbs 20:10).

Differing weights are an abomination to the LORD,

And a false scale is not good (Proverbs 20:23).

The money supply should not be unjustifiably tampered with so as to alter a government's obligations. To do so is to clandestinely change the playing field for all the players in the respective countries. The question is usually asked:

With the Feds' increase in the U.S.
money supply, why has our nation not
experienced inflation to a great degree?

The U.S. dollar is the foreign currency “reserve of choice” by a vast majority of other central banks around the world, which creates a huge global market for the U.S. dollar. That unique, historic demand acts to buffer the unwarranted increases by the U.S. Treasury in the supply of money: those excess dollars are bought and absorbed by other countries versus those new dollars only going to represent the existing total amount of goods and services in the country. But if the confidence in the U.S. dollar by foreign central banks should ever change, i.e., those governments sell and change out their dollars for another currency, then the inequity of the U.S. dollar supply to the U.S. GDP will readily manifest itself.

The temptation to increase the money supply to remedy undisciplined debt accumulation must be avoided. Two wrongs do not make a right.

V. INFLATION

Inflation is the third very terrible child who is always born to governments that avoid disciplining their first and second child. Keep in mind, however, the will and rant of the thirdborn cannot be broken: proven pathetic parents are deserving of nothing less. The psalmist describes the character of such parents and their stubborn, loud, self-willed monster in Psalm 37:21:

The wicked borrows and does not pay back....

This kid gets what he *wants* from everybody and never pays them back. That is to say, governments that practice the aforementioned do not pay back their obligations with the same value. This is what eventually happened in Peron's Argentina. Lest you think this could never happen in America, what follows are examples of hyperinflation in other unsuspecting populaces who failed to practice fiscal discipline:

Examples of Hyperinflation

HUNGARY / July 1946	207% daily inflation
YUGOSLAVIA / January 1994	64% daily inflation
GERMANY / October 1923	20% daily inflation
GREECE / October 1944	18% daily inflation
CHINA / May 1949.....	11% daily inflation ⁷

Such realities could occur in America if our government does not cut its undisciplined and unwarranted (according to Scripture) spending habits.

VI. SUMMARY

As seen in this chapter, our nation's fiscal calamity is a spiritual problem. The root cause can only be remedied by an alternative inner satisfaction—greed

and *want* to be replaced by *contentment* in Christ. Such is the product of conversion to Christ and a life of habitual Bible study and devotion. Such manifest behavior reflects living out God's precepts, accompanied with much prayer and repentance. This action must occur to effectively curtail the economic calamity that otherwise awaits America. Pray for national revival. These biblical guidelines need to serve the conscience of the public servant in his or her quest for fiscal reform of our great nation.

To speak prophetically (in a forth-telling, not a foretelling manner) for a moment, make no mistake, our nation is on the brink of disaster. Should we fail to enact legislation that demands a balanced budget, runaway debt will eventually lead to hyperinflation, drastically changing America forever. This downward spiral could occur virtually unannounced if other countries suddenly begin to jettison the U.S. dollar as their reserve of choice. This nation is walking on thin ice.

On a more individual note, only a personal relationship with Jesus Christ can fill the void in the heart of the public servant and his or her constituents. Without Christ, the vacuum in man will seek its lust for votes and its lust for money. When did a congressman last say to his constituents, "We can't afford that right now"? Unchecked by the cross of Christ, these base passions lead to an indebted treasury, an increased money supply, and inevitable inflation. This sequence leads to the loss of a nation.

1. Milton Friedman, *Free to Choose*, PBS video series, January 11, 1980, https://www.freetochoosenetwork.org/programs/free_to_choose/.
2. Kimberly Amadeo, "Interest on the National Debt and How It affects You," *The Balance*, October 15, 2021, <https://www.thebalance.com/interest-on-the-national-debt-4119024>.
3. William Kelly, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to Timothy* (London: F.E. Race, 1913), 137.
4. Ibid.
5. "From John Adams to Massachusetts Militia, 11 October 1798," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-3102>.
6. Helen H. Lemmel, "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus," <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/645>, public domain.
7. Andrew Henderson, "The Five Worst Cases of Hyperinflation in World History," *Nomad Capitalist*, August 24, 2021, <https://nomadcapitalist.com/finance/top-5-worst-cases-hyperinflation-history/>.

Solomon on Debt Solutions

Debt is a problem of such enormity and significance that it is crippling our nation. As of mid-2023, the United States was carrying almost \$35 trillion in national debt.¹ “Tasering” you with the severity of this issue is vital. The Apostle Paul often repeated himself when he was trying to make a point. Allow me to do the same—with an eye toward debt solutions!

The looming, growing national debt is one of the biggest challenges facing you and our country. As I have studied Proverbs over the years, the Holy Spirit has turned my attention to what Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, would have to say regarding this debt issue if he visited the Hill. How would he go about personally encouraging you to solve this foreboding national problem? If you had coffee with Solomon, what would he share with you? If you approach the book of Proverbs with this question, you might be amazed about what Solomon says.

Remember that Proverbs is written by the head of a nation to advise his son who will soon take over his duties. What principles can be gleaned from the king’s advice to his son regarding how to best manage a country’s budget? I believe you will find this study worth the time—a doubling down on this subject of fiscal responsibility.

Here is God’s help and advice on how to tame the beast. Read on, beloved.

I. INTRODUCTION

Scripture speaks of God’s creation and ownership of the world in numerous passages. For instance, God states in Psalm 50:10, *For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.* Psalm 24:1 states, *The earth is the LORD’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.*

God's Word also declares His *sovereignty*, a theological term describing the unlimited power and control of God over nature, history, and the affairs of mankind (cf. Isaiah 45:9–19, Romans 8:18–39). In truth, God ultimately owns and controls everything!

Furthermore, the Bible states that God made you and me to be His stewards to manage His creation for Him (cf. Genesis 1:26–28). What an awesome responsibility! *Stewardship*, as the word is used generally in the Bible, encompasses the idea of managing another person's property, finances, or household affairs.² Mature stewards realize and are very sober to the fact that their time, talent, and treasure must ultimately be used to please the person who entrusted the responsibility to them. A close cousin to the biblical concept of being God's responsible steward is the fact that we are His *ambassadors*, states 2 Corinthians 5:20.

Biblically then, you and I are the stewards of God's creation—of what God owns. For those who have trusted in Christ, an attitude of stewardship is a necessary requirement of obedience. Paul portrays this obedience in 1 Corinthians 9:17, stating, *I have a stewardship entrusted to me*. Earlier in the same epistle, he writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, *In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy* (4:2).

I hope you have come to the nation's Capitol with this motive and understanding. Do you clearly see yourself entrusted by God with a stewardship responsibility—not only in terms of your personal and familial life but in terms of how you manage the State?

All of the aforementioned stands in stark contrast to the personal motives of self-aggrandizement, which is a hyphenated word encompassing the meanings of self-advancement and personal enlargement. Unfortunately, too many have come to our Capitol with these wrong motives. They possess a “What's in it for me?” mentality. Unfortunately for the nation, the self-identifying biblical principles of servanthood, *stewardship*, and ambassadorship are far from their character and motives. Such self-centered attitudes are the root of all fiscal problems.

Solomon would advise the following
eight get-out-of-debt guiding
principles for you to implement.

Having stated these foundational basics, how a public servant handles the money God has entrusted to him—in a personal, familial, and national sense—is critically important. Decisions on the use of money stem from and reflect and serve to manifest an individual's beliefs and character. How then does God want you to handle the money He has entrusted to you?

II. BALANCE THE ANNUAL BUDGET

The first principle Solomon would advise you to incorporate as a public servant is found in Romans 13:8, *Owe nothing to anyone....* Paul is not prohibiting borrowing per se. Notice he didn't say "borrow from no one." This understanding of Romans 13:8 is buoyed by the fact that God *does* make allowance for borrowing in other passages, such as Matthew 5:42 and Luke 6:34. Furthermore, capitalism is scripturally based. And for capitalism to work, there must be good borrowing practices. Paul's prohibition on *owing* does not relate to prohibiting responsible borrowing per se, but to borrow without the ability to fulfill one's financial obligations. Accordingly, being a good steward means being wise and planning well to avoid overextension—be it personal or national.

Another passage to add to Romans 13:8 is Proverbs 22:7. Solomon says, *The borrower becomes the lender's slave.* This passage, which is also often misinterpreted, doesn't mean that borrowing is sinful. In fact, its instruction is aimed at lenders more than at borrowers. Context bears out that this verse is a warning against abusive lending practices. Informed by this passage, America has laws that prohibit lender abuse; borrowers should not (and in America cannot lawfully) be exploited. Solomon is saying to his son Rehoboam that without governmental oversight, lenders will often take unfair advantage of those to whom they lend; they will make careless borrowers their slaves if the borrowers are not careful.

Having presented the biblical caution pertaining to both parties in the act of borrowing per Romans 13:8 and Proverbs 22:7, pointing out the obvious is appropriate. History is replete with people and nations who became overly extended, and when the unforeseen then occurred, they had neither a sufficient buffer nor the means to acquire further credit. Financial ruin resulted. These people and nations were found characterized by what Paul called *owing*. Thomas Cook, Britain's oldest travel agency that filed bankruptcy in September 2019, is an example of being characterized by *owing*.

There are many examples of nations lending to other nations, and then when the debt cannot be repaid, the lending nation becomes usurious in collecting, taking unfair advantage, resulting in various kinds of enslavement.

When a person's desired lifestyle requires more money than his income provides, it is extremely unwise for him, a family, or a nation to borrow to maintain that lifestyle versus immediately cutting expenses to a level below their income. Not to reduce spending is bad *stewardship*, and for an individual, a family or a nation to borrow to cover expenses that far, far exceed income is downright foolishness! Debt reduction is especially necessary for governments, rather than going into debt to pay for costs that God never intended the government to fund like social programs! Those who approve measures to borrow in this way disappoint not only God Who appointed them, but also the voting populace who elected them (that is, if the voters are not the recipient of government handouts).

The first biblical principle then is for public servants to balance the annual budget lest they immediately or eventually end up *owing*—and potentially *enslaved* in some form—to another person or nation. Don't ever allow yourself or your nation to reach the degraded status of being in arrears by your misuse of credit.

Historically, many divorces are
attributable to debt: in terms of
spouse to spouse, borrower to
bank, and constituency to leader.

The first principle Solomon would share over coffee with you for eliminating an almost \$35 trillion debt is to balance the budget! Public servants must first give attention to plugging the accumulating fiscal leakage; they must plug the dam before any of the following biblical remedies can be successfully enacted. The solutions that follow will not do much good if expenditures remain out of control.

III. FURTHER INCENTIVIZE WORKERS AND JOB CREATORS

The next priority Solomon would share to reduce the debt would be to incentivize industry—especially small businesses since they create most of the new jobs in America. Providing this stimulation is of fundamental importance and priority to creating a much larger economy. We all know that for commerce to compete on a worldwide scale, a country must possess adequate raw materials, energy, capital, limited taxation, and reduced regulation, all at extremely low costs and levels, respectively. A nation must have lower costs than other nations to compete successfully. Those are foundational elements to creating value-added products and services in order to increase market share. And most importantly, all of the aforementioned economic qualities can only stem from public servants who possess the prerequisite biblical perspective of God's commanding those He created in His image to *subdue* the earth (Genesis 1:28).

Most essential and fundamental to incentivizing commerce in order to create a vastly larger economy, which serves to make the debt a lower percentage of the overall GDP, is the necessity of incentivizing the personal industriousness of the leaders and workers in and throughout commerce. Note what Solomon says in Proverbs 10:4 in this regard:

***Poor is he who works with a negligent hand,
But the hand of the diligent makes rich.***

Industrious, *diligent* individuals have made our nation rich. Nations whose governments incentivize people to be industrious will have more *wealth* than will communist and socialist nations whose governments get in the way by denying private property rights and impeding progress through ludicrous and burdensome regulation. This is the major reason socialism always fails. Solomon states this necessary principle of personal industriousness also in 13:11:

***Wealth obtained by fraud dwindles,
But the one who gathers by labor increases it.***

Biblically, *wealth* is related to *labor*. The result of *laboring* hard—by the sweat of one's brow (cf. Genesis 3:19 ff.)—is *wealth* creation. Proverbs 28:19 reiterates this principle:

***He who tills his land will have plenty of food,
But he who follows empty pursuits will have poverty in plenty.***

Accordingly, since this is God's formula for *wealth* creation, Solomon would say to you over coffee (since he already has a couple of thousand years ago!) that government leaders must effectively motivate individuals, industries, and small businesses to create a vastly larger economy. This incentivization includes unencumbering them from the excessive burdens of governmental regulations. You can't have one without the other! Solomon states in Proverbs 14:4 that *much revenue comes by the strength of the ox*.

By increasing *labor*, the current \$34-trillion debt would become proportionately reduced and less difficult to pay off. By way of illustration, if the economy were to increase by seven percent a year (a realistic goal if job creators are incentivized and unshackled from governmental regulations and if other nations are no longer allowed to trade with us unfairly), the American economy would become twice as large in only ten years, and the \$34-trillion debt would be proportionately one-half its present size relative to the gross national product (assuming the enactment of principle #1, a balanced budget with no increase in the debt load). In twenty years, the national debt would become relatively one-quarter of its present size—even if it were not reduced by a single penny in that time span! And assuming the tax rates were unchanged for the sake of the discussion, the treasury income would be four times as great as well since the economy would be four times larger! Accordingly, there would be ample money to pay off the debt (and this calculation does not take inflation into consideration).

Summarily, Solomon would say that the first things a public servant must accomplish in order to reduce the national debt are to balance the budget and then secondly, grow the economy.

IV. INCENTIVIZE POPULATION GROWTH

The false religion of “environmentalism” wars against this idea, but radical environmentalists are wrong; God has provided the earth with plentiful

resources until His Second Coming, wherein thereafter He will make *a new heaven and a new earth*. Add to that, only five percent of America's geographical landscape is populated at this time. To the contrary, both King David (Psalm 127:5) and God Himself (Genesis 1:28) stated the following *timeless* principles:

Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.

A *full quiver* was commonly understood to mean five children. Make no mistake here: Scripture is pro-growth and pro-large family! Environmental religionists are dead wrong on this matter—and the demographic realities of their biblically uninformed beliefs will soon come to roost in the voter booth, in that Christians have had many kids and environmentalists, very few.

Now consider this based on that presage: any debt is easier to repay if there is a large number of responsible cosigners. The equation is similar to the previous point: in this case, there is less per capita debt when the population is larger. It follows then that policy makers would be wise to incentivize the marriages of procreation-able couples who have the ability to biologically reproduce! In addition to incentivizing men marrying women and women marrying men, would not Solomon also advocate for much larger child tax credits relative to the same? These are not radical measures; these are biblically based measures! Such incentives are essential, Solomon would say, to getting the country out of its massive debt.

V. INCENTIVIZE GAINING KNOWLEDGE

In Proverbs 24:4, Solomon speaks to the value of education—and how gaining *knowledge* is directly connected to *wealth* creation:

***And by knowledge the rooms are filled
With all precious and pleasant riches.***

America's education system with its world-renowned research universities is a major component of its economic genius; the seedbed of innovation is the laboratory. It follows that wise public servants will even more so incentivize education. Accordingly, laws that enable vouchers and tax credits to fund tuition, to create competition and capitalization for existing and additional schools, make total sense. In the long run, these

kinds of educational choice incentives create a smarter, more competitive, productive, and efficient workforce. It is smart public policy: *knowledge* via education is a huge aspect of creating value-added products—a necessity to the stimulation and functioning of the two previous points as they relate to the objective of national debt reduction.

VI. INCENTIVIZE OBEDIENCE TO GOD

Obviously, the institution of government cannot cause an individual to be obedient to God in his heart, but it can incentivize the institution God has ordained to accomplish that: His Church.

Take note of the following Proverbs and what results from wisdom and obedience to God. In this passage, wisdom is personified by Solomon:

*Riches and honor are with me,
Enduring wealth and righteousness.
My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold,
And my yield better than choicest silver.
I walk in the way of righteousness,
In the midst of the paths of justice,
To endow those who love me with wealth,
That I may fill their treasuries* (8:18–21).

What a strong passage relative to this study! Solomon would look you in the eyes and quote those verses from memory over your second cup of coffee! This principle, which is often overlooked in secular books on *wealth* creation, is an absolutely essential point to ponder in relation to this study! The blessings of God on individuals, as well as their nation's *treasuries*, stem from personal wisdom and godly character. The pursuit of *wealth* does not make a nation great; rather, it is the pursuit of wisdom. *Wealth* then is a by-product, says Solomon. Don't miss this insight.

Much of the Old Testament and especially Psalm 1 and Joshua 1 serve to indicate a definite connection between living in obedience to God's commands and receiving His blessings. In other words, when the individual's first action is to honor God—which includes good *stewardship*—a person is in a position to receive God's blessings. To increase your acumen in *stewardship*, ask yourself these questions when contemplating financial decisions:

Is it wise? Is it unselfish? Is it responsible?

These simple questions will help you make good, prudent financial decisions that will bless and prosper you both personally and in the affairs of the State. Obedience to God, not riches, will be the clear focus of a nation God determines to bless. Notice Proverbs 11:28:

*He who trusts in his riches will fall,
But the righteous will flourish like the green leaf.*

Again, the consequences of *righteousness* produce *wealth*—not the pursuit of *wealth*. This is the same idea proffered by Jesus in the Beatitudes. Notice Matthew 5:6 in this regard:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Satisfaction in life is not gained by the pursuit of satisfaction; it, too, is the result of pursuing *righteousness*. Again, the highest objective of a nation must be *righteousness*, not *wealth*. Add Proverbs 13:13 and 21:

*The one who despises the word will be in debt to it,
But the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded* (v. 13).

*Adversity pursues sinners,
But the righteous will be rewarded with prosperity* (v. 21).

These four Proverbs are akin to the better-known Proverb 14:34 that says, *Righteousness exalts a nation....* America has been blessed because our nation has historically revered God's commandments. It follows that Solomon would advise public servants today to further incentivize religious institutions via tax-deductible giving and by other creative means in order to encourage them to evangelize, reconstitute, build, and maintain citizens of character—for sure, do not remove their tax-deductible status! To do so would damage a basic, historic, necessary engine in American society. Solomon attests in the aforementioned Proverbs that without character in the citizenry, a country will never prosper (or get out of debt). And since the institution of government is not equipped to create the inner character of citizens (the Church is causal, and the government is reflective), government must therefore incentivize all not-for-profits for its own preservation and betterment.

As if the aforementioned passages were not convincing enough, this critical need and perspective to incentivize obedience to God is further dimensioned and illuminated by Solomon in 28:2:

*By the transgression of a land many are its princes,
But by a man of understanding and knowledge, so it endures.*

This further insight is huge! There is a definite cause-and-effect relationship between the overall transgressions or, conversely, *righteousness* of a nation (14:34) and its leader(s) that God chooses to give it. (Keep in mind Psalm 75:7, which states, ***But God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another.*** [cf. Acts 17:26].) This verse is the nationally applied principle of sowing and reaping: Solomon says that when a nation as a whole (i.e., its culture) is set on *transgressing* God's ways, that nation will end up with many divisive voices and a leader with ungodly ideas who is woefully and increasingly lacking in God's *understanding and knowledge!* Such is certainly the case in America today. Another plain and simple way of saying it is that:

A nation and its people
get what they deserve.

God sees to that. It follows then that public servants would be wise to incentivize a nation's citizenry to be obedient to God. Make no mistake: a disobedient nation ends up with disobedient leaders who will make things worse rather than, in this case, solve its debt crisis.

VII. LEGISLATE GOVERNMENT SAVINGS

Proverbs 6:6–8 is clear about the wisdom of preparing for the future—and being a self-starter in that regard:

*Go to the ant, O sluggard,
Observe her ways and be wise,
Which, having no chief,
Officer or ruler,*

Prepares her food in the summer

And gathers her provision in the harvest.

Like a wise individual or family, a responsible government should save resources for the future. My favorite insight into the above verse is that the ants save and invest habitually—without someone having to tell them! Most of us are familiar with the principles of compounding. Those who have the discipline to save and invest benefit from compounding—our money works for us versus having to work for our money. Those who are foolish spend more than they earn, are constantly over budget, and borrow and pay interest to someone else! They are always struggling to make ends meet. As blessed as the United States is in terms of income and *wealth*, we should possess huge savings to draw from on a rainy day rather than running up huge deficits. How utterly foolish we have been as a nation in this regard.

To illustrate the discipline of compounding,
if Congress set aside \$33.3 billion per
month for 40 years, at a 4% interest rate
compounded monthly, the balance would
be \$39.5 trillion! (\$39,500,000,000,000).

It's interesting to note that the amount
of contributions would be \$16 trillion but
interest earned would be \$23.5 trillion!³

Think of what would happen to our national economy if we simply set aside that amount every year for the future! By saving a very small fraction of the Treasury's income every year for twenty years, taxes *would be obsolete in just one or two generations*—all because policymakers took seriously Solomon's advice to *observe the ant*. In such a world, think about how much more disposable income individuals, families, and churches would possess to help the poor!

Which of you will lead our nation into a Great Awakening in government funding?

Setting aside money for the future is something that is practiced in God's other ordained institutions: wise couples, families, businesses, and ministries endow themselves. Why not the government also? Only fools spend every dime and borrow to support lifestyles beyond their means. Wise people *observe ants*.

VIII. INCENTIVIZE GENEROSITY

The following passages reveal God's compassionate heart to meet the needs of the poor—and how He expects us to assist in that regard. Closely examine the context of the passages that follow; they are *not* speaking about the institution of government meeting the needs of the poor. Solomon is not instructing Israel's next leader to care for the needs of the poor. Rather, these passages are addressing the generosity God demands of and from *individuals* and—as that relates to this chapter—how such obedience leads to material blessing. It follows that when a nation is full of individuals, families, and churches whom God is blessing, the whole of the nation is blessed as well.

He who is generous will be blessed,

For he gives some of his food to the poor (Proverbs 22:9).

He who gives to the poor will never want,

But he who shuts his eyes will have many curses (Proverbs 28:27).

How blessed is he who considers the helpless;

The LORD will deliver him in a day of trouble (Psalm 41:1).

But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?
(1 John 3:17).

In fact, nowhere in Scripture does God command that His institution of government meet the needs of the poor. Rather, He tasks individuals, families, and churches with that responsibility.

IX. INCENTIVIZE, PENALIZE, AND MEMORIALIZE BUDGET STEWARDSHIP

Since getting out of debt requires consistent planning and execution over periods of time that are generally longer than election cycles, I think Solomon would say during his third cup of coffee that self-imposed laws that incentivize a balanced budget and the creation of policies—to the heightened degree of memorializing it with a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget—are good things. Such memorialization would transcend terms in office. Notice what Solomon tells the future leader of Israel in Proverbs 21:5 in this regard:

*The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage,
But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.*

I think this passage exegetically supports the point I just made. In fact, since balancing the budget is such an important matter in our nation at this time, the keepers of the budget should tie their remuneration to the achievement of the aforementioned—both in an upside and downside sense. To illustrate: if Congress passed a balanced budget and policies that led to a seven percent increase in GDP, then every legislator should receive a seven percent bonus the following fiscal year. The reverse should be the case as well. Such would lead to better *diligence* in planning, policy enactment of the aforementioned, and subsequent national *advantage*.

X. SUMMARY

All eight of these Solomonic advisements are steeped in and based on Scripture. When Solomon led Israel with this kind of wisdom, these truths were part of the reason Israel was in her glory days.

Perhaps this analysis is best summarized by the words of the Queen of Sheba when she visited Israel during Solomon's reign. Notice 1 Kings 10:6–9 in this regard. (It's not as if you are having coffee with someone who doesn't know what he is talking about or lacks illustrations of what he preaches!)

Then she said to the king, "It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. Nevertheless I did not believe the reports, until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. You exceed in wisdom and prosperity the report which

I heard. How blessed are your men, how blessed are these your servants who stand before you continually and hear your wisdom. Blessed be the LORD your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the LORD loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness.”

Likened to the glory of ancient Israel, America too can become a fiscally stable nation once again—if we will enact biblical wisdom in order to tame our debt. Caring for this responsibility cannot and should not be equated with spiritual renewal; that is another subject. But such fiscal reforms will not inhibit that greater need. Here then, in review are the eight pieces of advice Solomon would afford us if he visited the Hill today. Which ones will you work to enact?

A Summary of Solomon’s Advice on Taming the Debt

1. Balance the annual budget.
 2. Incentivize workers and job creators.
 3. Incentivize population growth.
 4. Incentivize gaining knowledge.
 5. Incentivize obedience to God.
 6. Legislate government savings.
 7. Incentivize generosity.
 8. Incentivize, penalize, and memorialize budget **stewardship**.
-

Each of these eight biblically based principles, if enacted, will garner God’s blessing and help us to tame the beast we have created. May God give us strength for the journey, victory in our endeavors, and personal and corporate blessing as a result. Amen!

1. <https://www.usdebtclock.org>.

2. Review Chapter 42, “God’s Institutions and Their Roles on Earth” for more on stewardship.

3. Tyler Reich, CFO at L’Abri Management.

Five Biblical Principles for Tax Policy

The Bible teaches that businesses established through God's institute of commerce are the economic engine of a free-market society and generate the best products and services with the best value and availability, due in part to personal incentive and competition. As already witnessed in previous studies, the institution of commerce is set in contrast to God's ordained institution of government, which by its nature is a monopoly in every country. The institution of government cannot benefit from competition and, by its very nature and God-given purpose for existence, is not in a position to produce the best products or services. What government does best in a free-market society is to referee the free market in order to create a level playing field in a fallen world because, undoubtedly, some will take unfair advantage if no form of punishment or consequence exists for bad behavior.

Even though God did not design the institution of government to be the economic engine of a country, He did nonetheless give it the right to tax the economic engine (cf. Romans 13:1–7) in order to sustain itself. That too is God's revealed design, but taxation must be done in ways that are just and competitive with other nations of the world. This study addresses what Scripture says to government regarding taxing the free market. More specifically, what are the five guiding scriptural principles that public servants must take into consideration relative to tax policy formation? To do so is either to prosper or damage a nation.

May God enlighten you as you study each of these overarching principles that serve to create a nation's tax policy that He is pleased with—and that works best for everyone in the nation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Scripture is clear that the institution of government has the right to tax the citizenry of any given nation. In the New Testament's (NT) classic passage on the role of government (Romans 13:6–7), the Apostle Paul writes what is specific and straightforward in this regard:

“For because of this [government] you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”

In Matthew 22:17, some of Jesus' adversaries came to Him, and in an attempt to trap Him, they asked, ***“Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?”*** He responded by taking a denarius (a Roman coin) and remarking about Caesar's image on it (cf. vv. 19–20). Jesus answered,

“Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's” (Matthew 22:21).

These two passages (additionally, along with 1 Peter 2:13–15) serve to underscore God's principle of taxation and for you, the public servant, the right to tax. The more pertinent biblical question, however, is not this.

The question is not whether
governments have the right to tax,
but how they should tax.

With that foundation in mind, what follows is a chapter that could alternatively be titled: “Five Biblical Principles for Taxation.” What are the guiding biblical principles you must consider relative to the formation of tax policy? What follows is a timeless, cross-cultural theological

construct—a biblical theology of taxation so to speak—to aid you in this regard. We have already discovered the first principle wrought from Scripture: government has the right to tax. The following are four more principles in no particular order of importance.

II. THE PRINCIPLE OF PRIVATE PROPERTY

This principle has been addressed in detail in the chapter titled “Capitalism versus Communism” but not in the context of taxation. A myriad of passages evidence God’s expectation that man—not government—will own/steward His property. By way of review, the following passages illustrate this truth:

A. THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15).

B. THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exodus 20:17).

C. IRRESPONSIBLE OWNERSHIP

“If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death” (Exodus 21:29).

D. MOVING A LANDMARK

“You shall not move your neighbor’s boundary mark, which the ancestors have set ...” (Deuteronomy 19:14).

Do not move the ancient boundary

Or go into the fields of the fatherless (Proverbs 23:10).

Since these passages support the theological premise that God is for the ownership of private property, it follows that the principle of private-property ownership must underlie the government's tax policy. Since God says people are to have personal ownership and personal possessions, and because such is a tenet of the United States Constitution, the U.S. government must take this into consideration when forming taxation policy. The money government takes from individuals first belongs to those individuals. It does not first belong to the society or the government. Therefore, the government must respect individuals' rights and tax them justly. In other words, "*You shall not steal*" comes into play (versus if the government legally owned the property to begin with). This is the second principle: the premise of private property.

III. THE PRINCIPLE OF PROPORTIONALITY

The next principle of taxation relates to government's just and proportional treatment of all individuals who are taxed. Why? Because in a free-market economy, each person will end up with differing amounts of private property, depending on what he can earn given his personal industriousness, education, God-given abilities and talents, and character, as well as Providence. The fact that people are disproportionate in their monetary decisions does not give government the right to be disproportionate: for government to tax disproportionately is for government to be unjust—the very thing God specifically commands government not to be! If God is just and He created government, then it follows that He expects government to act justly between its respective citizens.

To gain or not gain private property or to earn more or less than another person is a freedom of choice previously acknowledged by the government in a free-market capitalistic system. Given this premise, when one individual earns more than another, *it follows that it is not just for the government to tax that person at a higher percentage*. Again, God's Word reveals that God is a God of justice and proportionality; justice is one of His communicable attributes. He is not unjust or disproportionate, nor is He partial.

The following passages specifically reveal these characteristics as they pertain to taxation. More specifically, note, in keeping with His attribute of justice, the following four subpoints all reveal that God is a proponent of a flat-tax income rate and the Author of such!

A. THE TITHE

In Old Testament theocratic Israel, all the people were required to pay a tithe, which meant they were to give ten percent of their income to the Lord. Notice Deuteronomy 14:22–23 in this regard:

“You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year. You shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.”

God commanded of Israel a flat-rate tax. Everyone, no matter their income, paid the same percentage. Israel’s God-ordained flat tax was not a progressive tax that required the wealthy to pay a higher percentage and the poor a lesser or no amount at all.

Presently in America, the tax rate is not proportional; it is progressive, from 10 percent to 37 percent, depending on income earned. A couple who jointly earns under \$19,000 pays the lowest rate of 10 percent of their adjusted gross income, and on the other end of the progression, the couple who makes an adjusted gross income of over \$612,000 pays the highest rate of 37 percent. But in reality, with standard deductions and exemptions in the current federal income tax code,

**Nearly half of all Americans—48 percent—
pay no income tax at all.**

Note that this is not how God taxed Israel; the just God of Israel demanded that all pay 10 percent off the top with no adjustments allowed—no matter what they earned. What this means in America is this: currently, the 48 percent lower-income-producing Americans only pay two percent of the nation’s total income tax. For the government to rationalize such policies as being compassionate is for the government to, in essence, become unjust to the citizenry it serves. (The manifesting of compassion is a concept applicable to individuals, churches, businesses, and families, but not to governments).

B. THE CENSUS SHEKEL

Israel also paid what economists today call a “head tax,” as it related to taking the census. Everyone who was of a taxable age, regardless of economic standing, paid a flat rate of one-half of a shekel. Note Exodus 30:13–15 in this regard:

“This is what everyone who is numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as a contribution to the LORD. Everyone who is numbered, from twenty years old and over, shall give the contribution to the LORD. The rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than the half shekel, when you give the contribution to the LORD to make atonement for yourselves.”

Notice God says, *“The rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less.”* Again we see the principle of just taxation versus a progressive or disproportionate basis of taxation by God Himself.

C. THE SACRIFICE OF A LAMB

After the birth of a child in ancient Israel, a sacrifice was to be made to God of a lamb. But a provision was made for someone who was poor and couldn’t afford a lamb. Notice Leviticus 12:8 in this regard:

“But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.”

This passage is consistent with the principle of proportionality; i.e., those with less income were to pay less, but nonetheless, they still had to pay. They paid a proportional amount of income.

D. GOVERNMENT IS TO REWARD, NOT PUNISH THOSE WHO DO RIGHT

Another important biblical factor that plays into the principle of proportionality is this: with the aforementioned private-property principle and a definitively free-market economy in mind, note what 1 Peter 2:13–14 states is the responsibility to government:

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

God states of His institution that it is not to punish but to *praise* or reward *those who do right*. Suppose a citizen in a private-ownership and free-market economy achieves greater wealth (lawfully) and provides more jobs and value-added products or services than another because he works harder and/or is smarter and/or took the risk to bring to market an idea or service that happened to be at the right time. It stands to reason from this passage that government should *praise*—not penalize that person's accomplishment! It is important to note that the passage does not conclude with “and the penalization of those who *do right*.”

To tax economically accomplishing
individuals at a higher percentage
is to punish them for doing right.
This is not in keeping with God's
revealed purposes for government.

Those who work harder, who work smarter, who are creative and innovative, who decide to take more risk than the next person should be incentivized by the government. In God's mind, He intends government to be *a minister of God to you for good* (Romans 13:4), and it is *sent by Him for...the praise of those who do right* (1 Peter 2:14).

Accordingly, in addition to all the OT passages that reveal that God is for a flat tax, 1 Peter 2 also makes it clear that it is not a just action for a government to treat its citizens disproportionately in any way. Combined, these passages paint a strong, recurring principle for the formulation of tax policy: government, in order to be true to its calling as purposed by God, must be just and proportionate in what it demands of its citizenry. Does not our American Pledge of Allegiance end with “and justice for all”?

The principle of proportionality is biblical, so one may expect practical benefits to result—since obedience to God’s ways and His wisdom are always the doorway to blessing, should He so choose. The following are at least three of the ways this principle brings blessing to a nation:

E. THE WEALTHY PAY THEIR FAIR SHARE

To tax the rich and the poor at the same rate means the rich person will pay more than the poor person, but in ways that remain just.

F. GOVERNMENT INCOME INCREASES

Economist Arthur Laffer first introduced the now-famous “Laffer Curve,” showing that above a certain tax rate, government revenues actually decrease. He persuaded President Ronald Reagan that cutting tax rates would actually increase governmental income, and he was right. The Heritage Foundation reported:

Reagan was a supply-sider—period. He understood that high tax rates discourage work, investment and growth. He used to tell the story of making only a certain number of movies a year, because once he got pushed into the highest tax rates of 70 percent or more, there was no rational justification for continuing to work. The Reagan tax-rate reductions increased tax revenues from \$500 billion to \$1 trillion by the end of the 1980s.¹

The same was true under the Trump administration tax break revisions, wherein America enjoyed the best economy in the history of our nation! With a progressive tax rate still in place, the top 1 percent of earners pay nearly half of all income tax.

In 2021, the top 1 percent paid 45.8 percent of all federal individual income taxes, an increase from the previous 42.3 percent. The top 50 percent of all taxpayers paid 97.7 percent of all federal individual income taxes, while the bottom 50 percent paid the remaining 2.3 percent. The top 1 percent of taxpayers paid a 25.9 percent average rate, nearly eight times higher than the 3.3 percent average rate paid by the bottom half of taxpayers.²

Such disproportionality greatly diminishes the capital of our nation's most talented and best job creators. How much better would the economy be in America today if there were a flat-tax rate? The institution of government was ordained by God to provide justice in a fallen world; it is to reflect God's attribute of justice. To tax individuals at different rates is disproportionate, inherently unjust, and disincentivizing to the most talented people of the institution of commerce who best possess the proven ability to expand America's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

When the biblical principle of
proportionality is incorporated into the
tax code and a flat-tax rate is adopted,
where everyone of a taxable age is paying
taxes in proportion to their earnings,
the financial health of the nation will
increase even more dramatically!

And as outlined in the previous chapter, America needs dramatic GDP growth in order to marginalize and pay off its present gigantic debt. A flat tax will reduce the tax burden on the job producers, providing them with increased freedom to create more goods and services—and thereby jobs—for the nation, as well as increase their giving to those in need through their foundations and philanthropic work (something they do much more effectively and efficiently than government!). At the end of the day, lower tax rates lead to economic growth, and economic growth leads to a larger GDP and tax base for the government.

G. ALL CITIZENS ARE EQUALLY RESPONSIBLE

Another important aspect of obeying the Word of God in regard to a flat tax is that every citizen will then have skin in the game.

As it presently stands, our government
is engaged in out-of-control
spending, and only some of the
voting block is concerned!

It stands to reason that those who pay no taxes have no sense of responsibility for having to pay it back. They vote to retain fiscally irresponsible representatives or senators. Unfortunately, they are an increasingly powerful voting bloc in our democratic form of governance. With a flat tax, all citizens would be active taxpayers versus half now being passive participants in the American experiment in government.

In summary of the first three points, God's Word says government has the right to tax, while respecting private-property ownership, but must be just and impartial to all its citizens in so doing.

IV. THE PRINCIPLE OF PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY

As stated in previous studies, it is critically important that citizens have jobs and are productively employed. Without personal productivity, government has no income to tax. It follows that the degree to which the work force is employed and expanding is the degree to which government has a financial basis to do what God has called it to do with excellence.

A. MAN'S INNATE DESIRE TO WORK

Genesis 1:28 and 2:15 reveal man's inherent, God-given desire to work:

God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

Man was designed with an intrinsic proclivity to *subdue* and *cultivate* the earth, that is to *say*:

Man is most fulfilled and possesses
the highest sense of dignity when his
labor is both possible and necessary.

In principle, governmental tax policies need to take advantage of this built-in-by-God aspiration! To make the point, if governments tax 100 percent of personal income, they will be guilty of quelling this God-given desire. They would be guilty of creating a disincentive relative to man's innate desire to work. Conversely, the lower the tax rate, the higher the incentive is to work and keep for ourselves the lion's share of our labor.

With less taxation, which equates to more net income, a laborer can do more: he or she can choose to spend more, save more, invest more, or give more. Any of these four choices benefit economic growth; all create a larger economy as a whole and more overall available taxable income!

Importantly, Genesis 1:28 and 2:15 are commands given prior to the Fall in Genesis 3. Yes, labor is part of the curse of the Fall (cf. Genesis 3:17–19), but labor itself is fundamental to God's design; *difficulty in labor is synonymous with the curse—not work itself*. So important is this principle of labor that eating is viewed in the Bible as an impetus to motivate man to work! Note the following Scriptures in this regard:

And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need (1 Thessalonians 4:11–12).

For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

A worker's appetite works for him,

For his hunger urges him on (Proverbs 16:26).

Again, there is a direct relationship between man's inherent proclivity toward personal productivity and the formation of good tax policy: since governments can only collect taxes from those who have jobs, it is essential that those capable of working not receive any form of subsistence. No one should be able to take from the government's treasury who could in some way give to the treasury!

In my many visits to South Korea, for instance, I noticed that capable older people must sweep the streets to obtain income. Unearned handouts destroy a person's sense of dignity.

Fundamental to the taxation policies of a nation are the enactment of regulations and incentives that compel people toward work, rather than reward them for idleness.

Scripture is clear: not only are policies that lead to nonpersonal productivity bad for the financial health of the State, but such policies are detrimental to the wellbeing of the person.

In America, people are on government subsistence programs, such as food stamps and disability payments, who are required to do little if anything in return for what they receive. Being ignored is this biblical principle: the presence of citizens who do not have to work for what they receive inevitably leads to other deleterious attitudes in the citizenry. No one should be able to enjoy the benefits of a country without, in some way and at some level, having to labor and earn them.

Every citizen should have to pay some income tax if for no other reason than to possess a sense of self dignity, belonging, and responsibility to and for the country.

How then should public servants promote the citizens' desire to work?

B. ENCOURAGING MAN'S INNATE DESIRE TO WORK

In Luke 19:17, Jesus incentivizes the faithful in what is known as the parable of the ten minas:

“And he said to him, ‘Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.’”

Similarly, in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30), Jesus illustrates through the use of a story that the incentive of rewards is a legitimate form of motivation: He commends those who made a return on their investment and is critical of the one who did not. In both passages, Jesus is underscoring the use of rewards to motivate personal diligence and to promote personal prosperity! In a similar way, wise public servants will view the use of lower taxes as a means of incentivizing the citizenry to work smarter and harder—to create greater personal and national productivity.

V. THE PRINCIPLE OF THE PRACTICAL

The fifth and last biblical principle that needs to be considered in tax policy is what is commonly referred to in theological circles as the “sound-mind principle.” It stems from 2 Timothy 1:7:

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

The Greek word for *discipline* in this passage is *sophronismos*, meaning *sound mind* or *sound judgment*. This same Greek root, *sophroneo*, is translated as such in 2 Corinthians 5:13:

For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you.

Without taking the space in what is already a long Bible study, the point of this passage is that *sound mindedness* is part of being a born-again individual as both passages are written to believers; individuals (in our case, public servants) who have come to Christ are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. What the Bible is saying is that every believer is given the gift of a *sound mind*, or better, *sound judgment*:

Believers are no longer susceptible to the mental biases that are incumbent with the Fall in Genesis 3: the warping effect of the Fall as it pertains to the mind of man.

Known theologically as the noetic effect of sin, this bias is seen in many unbelieving public servants who cannot think straight even though the truth and the right thing to do regarding a policy matter are easy to ascertain—that is, for the believer who has steeped himself in God’s revealed truth, the Bible. Note the following about the fallen, unregenerate mind of man:

The closer a matter is to the moral
attributes of God’s character, the greater
the sin nature warps the understanding.

Romans 1:22 states, *Professing to be wise, they became fools*. All that to say, these passages indicate that God empowers believers (in our case, public servants) to overcome what we will call the sin warp syndrome and to instead possess unbiased judgment: *sound minds* that earnestly desire to take the right actions for a nation. In this case, tax policies.

How this relates to tax policy is clear: God gives wisdom (cf. James 1:5) to believers who ask for it. This wisdom means they will possess the ability to think ahead and devise, with the help of biblical principles, tax policies that will not only honor God by incorporating His precepts, but also be workable, practical, and successful in their application. An example of this follows. The principle of the practical leads to the following common-sense deduction:

Lowering taxes means more
resources are available for individuals
to meet the true needs of others.

Practically speaking, meeting the needs of others in personal ways is much more effective than overhead-laden, national, bureaucratically controlled programs that attempt to do the same. The individualized giving of resources to the needy is always accompanied by other necessary remedying actions, such as making sure the use of such resources goes toward further

education or job training versus alcohol or drugs. Such tax policies lead to holistic solutions for the needs of others. One possessing a *sound mind/sound judgment* can easily conclude this. But don't be surprised when other public servants, who are either passively or actively rebelling against God, cannot see things that are so obvious; their predominant sin nature blinds them.

Another illustration of the principle of the practical is summarized in the following sidebar. (This is an alternative solution to the principle of proportionality.)

Nonvested Citizens

Please note: I say the following with a deep compassion for genuinely bereft individuals. And what I am about to espouse, like everything else I say, is not necessarily the opinion of the congressional sponsors found on the mast-head of the Members Bible Study.

It is my growing personal conviction, stemming from this biblical principle under discussion, that if there is not a change to a flat tax soon, citizens who are now both on government subsistence programs and paying no income tax should have the privilege of voting curtailed until they become earners and taxpayers. Enjoying the benefits of citizenship while at the same time not having to pay for them violates the precepts of Genesis 1:28; 2:15; 2 Thessalonians 3:7–12; and 1 Timothy 5:8. Accordingly (before the enactment of a flat tax wherein everyone pays a proportional amount of taxes), *non-tax-paying citizens should be temporarily deemed non-vested citizens*. This is not as radical as one might initially think—given the alternative: Since a near majority of voters now pay no income tax, there is nothing to stop them from continually voting in benefits for themselves at the expense of income earners and taxpayers and the solvency of the Treasury. Taxpayers will soon become the minority in the nation. *If non-vested status were enacted, it*

*would radically change the makeup of Congress. Congress would soon reflect the desires of those who are actually responsible for having to pay the nation's bills: the ones who carry the others. This kind of thinking can be evidenced historically in colonial America.*³

Given the above analysis and correction, note the following:

Congress is really not broken in the sense of its present functionality (as so many seem to suggest with an air of flippancy). More accurately analyzed, Congress is misrepresentative in the sense of its present functionality.

As it now stands, the real problem lies in the fact that Congress is equally representative of those who are not responsible with regard to America's financial solvency and those who are responsible! If Congress only represented those citizens who are presently vested in America, its present functionality would be much different!

My reason for bringing this up is that it illustrates how important this Bible study is! Congress has become largely misrepresentative due to a biblically uninformed and aberrant tax policy! Our non-biblically based, biblically uninformed tax policy has come home to roost! God help us! God, help us enact these principles from Your Word!

These are but a few profound illustrations of the critical importance of the principle of the practical—applied theology—as it relates to taxation policy formation.

VI. SUMMARY

Public servants need to incorporate at least five basic biblical principles into viable tax policies in order to ensure that the policies are not only

successful, but even more important, pleasing to God. Our nation desperately needs God's blessing, and obeying His precepts is the way for every citizen to best position himself and his nation to gain that blessing. If any of these five principles is missing, the success of the tax policy will not be as great, comparatively speaking, as if all were employed. Those biblically based principles by way of review and summary follow:

1. Public servants have the right to tax.
2. Public servants must acknowledge and respect the existence of personal-property ownership.
3. The taxes levied by public servants must be just and proportional to every citizen.
4. Public servants must incentivize personal productivity.
5. Public servants must be wise and practical as to how they tax.

My prayer is that God will grant you understanding and the wisdom of His timeless principles and that you will apply them to your policy decisions. Amen.

1. Edwin J. Feulner, Ph.D., "Reagan's tax-cutting legacy," *The Heritage Foundation*, July 14, 2015, <https://www.heritage.org/taxes/commentary/reagans-tax-cutting-legacy>.
2. Erica York, "Summary of the Latest Federal Income Tax Data, 2024 Update," March 13, 2024, Tax Foundation, <https://taxfoundation.org/data/all/federal/latest-federal-income-tax-data-2024/>.
3. Cf. Dennis Montgomery, *Colonial Williamsburg: The Journal of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*, Vol 29, No. 2 (Williamsburg, Vir.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2007) Spring 2007.

The Rich and the Poor

My personal conviction is that to provide effective Bible teaching to governmental leaders, expositors must drill down on what God has to say about all manner of issues, and accordingly, that would include macroeconomic concerns. God's Word has much to say about the matters of government and economics.

In this study I want to explore what Scripture says about the relationship between government and the rich and the poor.

I. INTRODUCTION

What Scripture has to say to public servants regarding the proper treatment of the rich and the poor is an important subject. To make the best sense of this material and create an exegetically complete theologicum (a solely biblically based treatise on the matter), I will outline this study in terms of government and the wealthy, government and the poor, and government and equality. I believe you will find this material most intriguing and helpful to you personally and in terms of policy formation.

II. GOVERNMENT AND THE WEALTHY

One other fruit left hanging on the tree in Eden was a species that has since made its way into every orchard of the world. That fruit called *prejudice* isn't very tasty; in fact, it is always rotten to the core. Nonetheless, many are those who feast on it. Outside of the control and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, prejudging—acting partially, stereotyping, and categorizing others—is one of those default tendencies of the sin nature. Applied to

this study, prejudice is the underlying reason why people too often assume that those who are rich are crooked. As fallen human beings, we have a propensity to feel like we are superior to others, and so to believe others who are wealthier are crooked is a convenient way to immediately fulfill our superiority quotient.

A. INCOME AND JUSTICE

In terms of personal income tax, prejudicial conclusions lead to the government justifying taxing the rich at higher percentages. Those who have greater wealth in America are treated differently than those without. Common statements such as “It is time for wealthy people to start paying their fair share” illustrate this bias. But what is fair and just is for all citizens to pay the same rate—no matter their lot in life and no matter their income amounts. Lady Justice is supposed to sport a blindfold.

A wealthy person should not
have to pay a higher percentage
because he makes more money any
more than a poor person should
have to pay a higher percentage
because he makes less.

Either treatment is partial. What is just and fair is for everyone to pay the same percentage regardless of investment timing, earning power, skill, education, creativity, work ethic, comfort with risk, or other determining factors pertaining to personal income in a definitively free market. Justice in government taxation means government should not be prejudicial regarding such factors. For government to do otherwise is to treat citizens with different standards. Note Romans 13:1 with this in mind:

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

It stands to reason that if the *authority* of government is *established by God*, then in order to reflect the very nature and attributes of their Author and to be pleasing to their Author, governments need too, to be just and fair in their actions with all citizens. Therefore, for governments to tax citizens at different percentages of income is unjust. In fact, 1 Peter 2:13–14 says that God’s institution of government is *sent by him for ... the praise of those who do right*.

Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

We could reason from this passage that governments unjustly penalize those who create jobs and value-added products for the betterment of society. In reality, Scripture tells us that those who create wealth should be *praised* and incentivized by government to do even greater value-added creation—perhaps by incentivizing such people with tax breaks! Such leads to more job creation and employment. Note the passage again:

The concept of penalizing those
who do right is not supported by
Scripture, whereas rewarding
those who do right is.

To excuse disproportional taxing of a resourceful individual with a dismissive comment like “They can afford it” or “It won’t hurt them” is to cast aside the consideration of justice in society. These kinds of comments, in fact, display prejudice and partiality when the State is definitively a free market. Much more often than not, the reason wealthy people are wealthy is that they have been willing to take more risk when they saw an opportunity and/or because they worked harder and/or had more character and perseverance. Such honorable attributes are worthy of *praise* by government—not penalty.

B. POWER AND PARTIALITY

Further on this biblical idea is this: to allow a poor man a lower tax rate is for government to show partiality when it is called by God to be impartial. Notice Exodus 23:3 in this regard:

“Nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.”

In context, this passage relates to a courtroom matter, but the principle is applicable to economic justice as well. The principle is this: it is all too easy to lose our sense of empirical economic justice when there are outwardly noticeable differences between two parties, be it in a courtroom or on a tax return. I have experienced this phenomenon in my own life in other ways. By the time I arrived in Westwood as a college freshman, Coach Wooden had already won eight national championships in the previous nine years. I was fortunate to play on his remaining two national championship teams. During that unparalleled decade of college sports domination, I witnessed firsthand how often the referees would attempt to help the other team. Human nature roots for the underdog, the lesser party, but for a person in authority to engage in such behavior is to display partiality and injustice. It is not right, fair, or just. Be it a basketball court or free-market enterprise, the rules of the game are well known to all going in. No matter the game, it follows that both referees and government officials should treat each the same.

I remember one day remarking to former U.S. Rep. Darrell Issa in front of his staff how pleased I was that he had elevated one particular Congressman (of whom I am very fond) to a high position. Mr. Issa was both careful and immediate to respond that my friend had indeed earned the position over his colleagues. I later reflected to Danielle what a wise response that was. Lest I had implied something other in the presence of his staff, Darrell let it be known he must be (and was) impartial in his use of power. Proverbs 17:26 states conclusively this same principle of Exodus 23:3, albeit in the opposite way:

***It is also not good to fine the righteous,
Nor to strike the noble for their uprightness.***

To unjustly tax a wealthy person who has in no way broken the law is for government to ***fine the righteous***. It is to ***strike*** an innocent person for no biblical reason.

C. SUMMARY OF POINT

Civil government needs to be just and impartial to all citizens. In his insightful book *Politics According to the Bible*, Dr. Wayne Grudem best states how governments should judge rich members of their State:

The question is not whether someone is rich or poor, but whether someone has done good or evil. It is wrong to punish those who have not done evil.¹

It is not the axis of being rich or poor that God calls a State to arbitrate. Rather it is the axis of good versus evil that is its biblical calling and responsibility to uphold. Such biblically aberrant policies negatively affect a country in terms of its economic outcomes.

III. GOVERNMENT AND THE POOR

Lest we prematurely conclude that this is a lopsided Bible study concerned only for the needs of the wealthy, all believers are indeed directed *individually* and as corporate bodies (i.e., families and churches) by numerous passages in Scripture to help the poor. Note this in the three passages that follow—but notice too what is omitted from each of them:

But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25–26).

They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do (Galatians 2:10).

But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 John 3:17).

What is in common with all the biblical passages on helping the poor?

Of all the passages that instruct individual believers, heads of households, families, and churches to help the bereft, none of them ever mention civil government.

Scripture never suggests that civil government is the curing institution for poverty. And closely related, Scripture does not support the idea of governments taking from the rich to meet the needs of the poor. That's right, my friend. The responsibility for providing a societal safety net falls to God's other ordained institutions.

A. GOD'S DESIGN FOR A SOCIETAL SAFETY NET

In 1 Timothy 5:3–16, Paul engages in a lengthy discussion regarding God's perspective on social safety nets as they specifically pertain to meeting the needs of widows. The overarching principles that are contained in this passage reveal, in conjunction with those previously listed herein, a hierarchical order, a theological construct if you will, for the proper institutional dispatch of resources to meet the needs of the poor. The needs of the poor are to be met first by individual believers, then heads of household, and then *and only then* does the responsibility fall to the church (if for some other legitimate reason individual children or grandchildren, or if not them, the heads of households cannot provide for their own). Again, nowhere in Scripture does the responsibility default to the State. (Notice I did not yet mention the place for the institution of commerce in this ordering.) Further, the reason God does not include civil government in the task of meeting the needs of the poor is that He did not intend for it to accomplish this task.

When governments begin to
hand out money in an attempt
to “solve” poverty, they create a
permanent dependent class.

They must then continue to hand out that money as if that solves poverty. The reason it is not the solution is twofold: first, it leads to the state's insolvency, as we are witnessing in America's runaway entitlement programs. Second, it serves to keep the dependent person dependent, as good as guaranteeing that he will remain poor. The only real solution to

poverty is for the out-of-work person to get a job and keep it. *Therefore, all permanent solutions to poverty must have nothing less than that objective in mind.* This is the biblically informed program of the Union Rescue Mission (URM) in Los Angeles, California. A not-for-profit corporation incentivized by government tax write-offs, they provide temporary shelter while evangelizing the desperate heart and training the disconsolate soul of the inner and outer man, respectively. The URM is a voice not only for spiritual renewal but also for vocational training since the two are usually connected to endemic poverty.

Herein represented in action is a strategy for helping the poor in ways that are biblically founded and proven effective. You may have noticed that in the hierarchical order of creating a scripturally based social safety net, the institution of commerce was missing. That is because their job in combating poverty is to be the job provider, which is intended by God to sustain the rehabilitated individual—and everyone else—from reentering or entering poverty.

I frequent a barbershop where those who cut my hair are on parole from prison, learning a vocation on their way back to society. Danielle and I stay at a hotel in D.C. where the same is true of most of the employees. These business establishments are sensitive to what God would have them do since He ordained the institution of commerce in the first place! As noted specifically in earlier studies in this series and herein, the job of civil government is not to provide for the poor directly but to incentivize the institutions of marriage, family, church, and commerce to pick up the slack and create the safety net in ways respective of the strength of their institutional calling by God.

B. THE SOLUTION OF WORK

When God placed Adam in the garden, He told him to work it and keep it (Genesis 2:15). Extremely important to note is that this command to man to work is given *before the fall*. That is to say, the necessity of work is not a result of the curse; rather, it is a vital aspect of man's possessing in his inner self a sense of value and worth. God designed man to work in order to achieve a sense of self-worth and dignity! Extremely, extremely important is this: it follows that civil governments must incorporate this biblical truth into all policy formation pertaining to a sustainable solution to poverty! Any programs by any of the five ordained institutions that do not lead to

an individual's working to provide for himself will only serve to further cripple the individual. Furthermore, entitlement programs, which are *not* informed by Genesis 2:15, only serve to prolong and create an addiction to poverty. Every public servant needs to be sure of this fact:

Entitlements do not provide
for the poor what God says are
their prescriptive needs!

Notice what Paul said in this regard to the believers in the following passages:

And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need (1 Thessalonians 4:11–12).

For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Since labor is the key to self-dignity, these passages, along with Proverbs 16:26, place a high value on work, stating that the need to eat is to be viewed as an incentive to make a living for ourselves.

*A worker's appetite works for him,
For his hunger urges him on.*

C. PERSONAL APPLICATION

On a more personal note of application, as a father or a mother you must teach, train, and demand that your children value and perform hard work. Danielle and I made our boys run their own businesses successfully during their high school years. Such parenting has paid huge dividends in terms of their respective huge career successes today.

D. GOVERNMENTS AND EQUALITY

During a mayor's prayer breakfast in Anchorage, my now good friend Mayor Dan Sullivan thanked the various churches for stepping up and opening shelters for the poor. In doing so, he underscored what I am saying here. It was a beautiful illustration of what believers will do when called on by governmental leaders to be faithful to their responsibilities. What the church can accomplish in aiding the poor is more efficacious than what the government can possibly do! The converse to this wonderful Alaskan illustration is a biblically naive government that believes in economic equality and attempts to achieve it by faulty actions: 1) taking from the rich and giving to the poor, 2) unjustly taxing the rich at a higher percentage of income, and 3) creating "entitlements" for the poor. God, as we have seen, does not sanction such behavior, nor does it work.

Allow me to illustrate: if one thousand people with no money were moved into a new city and the government gave every person \$10,000, it would not be long until some people had more than others because of personal initiative. The only way to maintain this "economic equality" would be for the government to continually tax those with more money and give entitlements to those with less. For the government to continually engage in this approach means it must reward bad habits (overspending, poor use of time, unwise decisions, wastefulness, etc.) and penalize good behavior (industriousness, hard work, frugality, wise decisions, etc.)—*the exact opposite of what God states about the purpose of government in 1 Peter 2:14!* It is to reward those who do evil and punish those who do good! In this hypothetical city, it wouldn't be long until those with the greater capacity for wealth creation moved somewhere else—and then the whole city would spiral into poverty. This exact phenomena is occurring in socialist California, where thousands of successful businesses have left and are leaving the state. Make no mistake here:

"Economic equality" is a myth
that is unsustainable and
always thwarted by its own
unintended consequences.

It is foolhardy for any public servant to try to recreate God's purpose for and means of government to somehow achieve this flawed and impossible objective.

IV. SUMMARY

For government to use its power in the aforementioned socialistic way in an attempt to “solve” poverty and help the poor is to be biblically naive. God's intention is for government to spend its energies on keeping the playing field level, likened to a referee—only the game is called *Free-Market Economy*—wherein evil is penalized and good is rewarded. Governments must stand aside and allow the stronger citizens to help the weaker ones individually and personally via their families and churches and via the jobs they create with their businesses. Lest you believe that the aforementioned will not step up and government must step in, you are dead wrong: They will because they are created by God and bear His image, and part of His image is His compassion for those in need!

I am always brought to tears when, during tragedy, I see this side of man come to the surface—the *imago dei* side of man—which always rises up with the greatest of courage and compassion—in fact, displaying heroic levels of courage and compassion—to help his fellow man in need. What a testament to God's imprimatur on the souls of man! Herein is God's blueprint and solution for helping the poor; for sure the solution lies not in a government-driven redistribution of wealth, i.e., socialism.

1. Wayne Grudem, *Politics—According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

God's Design for a Societal Safety Net

One of the most volatile policy issues of our time relates to a fundamental disagreement regarding how a nation should approach entitlements. Entitlement programs now devour the majority of the U.S. federal government's budget, and as of 2024, the national debt reached \$36 trillion dollars and is growing rapidly at an uncontrollable rate.

What does Scripture have to say about such allocative decisions and policy? In a pre-political sense (informing policy through what the Bible says versus attempting to create policy via lobbying pressure), how can the Bible be used to inform the public servant in this regard? Does God speak to this issue? I believe the answer is a resounding yes!

In fact, there are so many passages that relate to the subject of God's design for a societal safety net that a societal-safety-net theology can be built from them. What follows is my attempt to do that.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the study "The Rich and the Poor," I touched on God's design for a societal safety net as it pertains to how to best help the poor. In so doing, under that point in the outline, I referenced this study and what follows, which is a more biblically in-depth treatment of the subject.

II. SEVEN NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES REGARDING THE CONSTRUCT OF A SOCIETAL SAFETY NET

A caveat is in order before plunging into the following passages that serve to inform us regarding the mind of God on this matter. It is important to approach this discussion only through the lens of the New Testament (NT) because God has clearly separated the institution of civil government from any and all sacerdotal responsibilities in the time in which we live per the clear instruction of Jesus in Matthew 22:21. Such was not the case with Old Testament (OT) Israel. This is a critical distinction to make since many liberal theologians, who are pro-government entitlement programs, use the OT as their proof text.

The apostle Paul in Romans 13:1–8, the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:13–14, and Matthew 22:21 (as used repeatedly throughout the government and economics studies) serve to make this clear OT-versus-NT distinction. We are not living in the times of theocratic Israel wherein civil government and sacerdotal responsibilities were both contained in and conducted by the same institution. Accordingly, to examine OT passages in this theological quest would only muddy the waters and be confusing to any quest for perspicacious conclusions. Accordingly, I will limit—and any theologian worth listening to must limit—this exercise in theological construction of a societal safety net to passages outside of a theocratic context and economy.

A. 2 THESSALONIANS 3:6–12

This passage is fundamental to the beginning of our study. It provides the foundational starting point, revealing who God has assigned to be the primary caretaker for providing life's basic necessities for living. Notice verse 10 in this regard: *If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either*, which Paul states to the believers at the church of Thessalonica. Note the whole of the passage and context:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; not because we do

not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.

This passage was and remains instrumental and informative to what is commonly referred to as the Protestant work ethic. Stemming from the Reformation and the rediscovery of such pertinent and informative passages in Scripture, these ideas of hard work and providing for ourselves have become historic cultural constructs in the American culture and way of life, as they should in any nation. The ethic of personal responsibility is a major pillar in the explanation of America's quick rise to productivity, prosperity, and economic prowess. Further, to underscore this very important beginning point, this passage under study is not making a suggestion. Rather Paul is employing an imperative command for us to be personally disciplined to meet our own needs! This passage serves to inform us of the following:

In God's mind, the first source of provision relative to meeting the various forms of physical needs in a society is ourselves.

Apart from those with genuine needs due to birth defects, war injuries, disease, developmental disabilities, etc., how many live in poverty because they are *not willing to work* or *not willing to work hard enough*? In attempting to diminish the unmet needs of a society, this basic truth must not be overlooked by the public servant in his policy formation. At the risk of sounding unloving, a father in the institution of marriage, a family in the institution of the family, a pastor in the institution of the church, a business owner in the institution of commerce, and a government

in the institution of government should not bear or be led to think they bear the responsibility to meet the needs of the individual who lives in an *undisciplined manner*, who does *no work at all*, who is *not willing to work*, or is *not willing to work hard enough*. Proverbs 10:4 echoes this principle: *Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.*

Furthermore, each *individual* in society should *work hard* enough to have an abundance to give to others who are in genuine need. States Proverbs 22:9 in this regard, *He who is generous will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor.* Paul and Solomon in the preceding passages, respectively, are both preaching that it is better to give than receive (cf. Acts 20:35).

The biblical pattern is for a person to *work hard*. Genesis 2:15 states the concept that in the mind of God, hard work has always been His intent for those whom He created in His image:

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

This verse shares God's original design for man. God wants him to be responsible for *cultivating* and *keeping* or maintaining the earth. As mentioned repeatedly in these studies, such are normative activities for mankind even before the Fall, per Genesis 3:17–19. Post-Fall, part of the curse by God on man for his disobedience includes a heightened scale and necessity relative to *hard work*; the curse means in part that man will now *toil* in labor:

“Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust....”

Given the condition of man (due to the Fall and the *toil* involved with labor, he will have a desire to be lazy and not work) combined with the command of God to work, public servants must be wise and take these biblical realities into mind when crafting policies that will align with and motivate in mankind what God intends for mankind to do for himself. To release a man from his responsibilities to take care of himself and to *work hard* enough to be able to give something to someone else who is truly in

need is to take away to some degree a part of the man's intended work ethic and esteem. It is to diminish him—not help him!

Again, God's design is that the *individual* be the first means of provision for himself as well as for others who have genuine needs.

Wise is the policymaker who understands this inherent design of God—and incentivizes, not replaces, personal responsibility and behavior in this regard. Corrupt is the policymaker who twists God's design and uses entitlement promises as a way to gain votes, appealing to the base instincts of the constituents of his district, state, or nation. Such is a violation of God's intended purpose of government, wherein God states in Romans 13:4 that government is a servant for your good. It does not say government is “a servant for my benefit and reelection.”

B. 1 TIMOTHY 5:3–16

This is the most insightful NT passage that reveals the mind of God and His intended pecking order of institutional responsibility relative to meeting the needs of others who possess genuine needs that they cannot meet by themselves (per the first point in this outline). Even though the context of this passage relates to widows in the church per se, it reveals the mind of God on this matter relative to others who are dependent. The passage serves to be very informative as to how God views the matters this study is discussing. Herein revealed (through the lens of providing for widows in the church) is the order of “catch basins,” if you will, as they relate to who is responsible in God's eyes for meeting the needs of others who are truly needy. These “catch basins” serve to display God's compassionate nature in a fallen world. He does not desire for anyone created in His image to float downstream.

Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach. But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work. But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention. Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach; for some have already turned aside to follow Satan. If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.

Again, as you see, verses 3–16 in its tightest context specifically relates to caring for *believing* widows, but the principles communicated via the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul are transcendent of *believing* widows, not only in terms of a broader application to others (in addition to widows) but in terms of nonbelievers as well, i.e., those outside of the church who are needy (per verse 8, which will be examined more specifically).

Studying these first two passages in our outline together reveals that providing provisions for the genuinely needy is first one's own responsibility. We are as *individuals* to provide for our own family members. Note this command at the beginning of the passage: *But if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents.* Civil government

should not be tasked with taking care of the needs of *individuals* when an *individual* family member or members can step up. *Individuals* and other family members are to take care of their own bloodlines. To refuse to take care of your family members is akin to asking your neighbors to take on your personal responsibility—in essence, others should pool their money so you don't have to spend yours.

In the flow of this passage, if the children or grandchildren for legitimate reasons are in no position to meet their grandmother's needs, then the duty falls to other members of the institution of marriage and/or the institution of the family. This is evidenced by the less particular language stated next in the passage: ***But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.***

Herein implied more generally is that members of the household, in addition to the children and grandchildren now included, must step up. The final catch basin one can glean from this passage is the institution of the church, which is to step up to the plate and take care of the needy if the aforementioned do not. Notice this place of prioritization in the final verse: ***If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.*** Paul is stating that the church is the final catch basin, but only after the dependent person's bloodlines are unable to provide. The institution of the church should not be tapped until other upstream resources are considered and utilized for meeting these kinds of needs.

Exhaustively, since all of the explicit and direct passages in the NT (here in this study) regarding helping the truly needy relate to the responsibility of believers, one could argue that these passages only relate to the church and should not be applied to secular society in general. First Timothy 5:8 is most pivotal in countering this view. Why? This small passage facilitates the assimilation and incorporation of *unbelievers* into the broader understanding and application of this passage. Notice the concluding phrase here states, ***is worse than an unbeliever.*** Why is this glimpse so profoundly important?

For a believer to fail to take care of the needy in his own family makes him or her worse than an *unbeliever* who *inherently knows the right thing to do*! The familial duties for provision are written by God on the consciences of *unbelievers* too. Namely, *unbelievers* understand via their God-wired

conscience (cf. Romans 1:19–20; 2:15) that they have a personal responsibility to care for the needs of their own family—and for that matter, others outside their family. It's intrinsic! All that to say,

First Timothy 5 reveals societal-
safety-net principles that are
innately understood by all.

These principles are written
on everyone's heart!

As such, astute policymakers
should take them into
consideration.

This is God's design not just for the church community's safety net, but for a societal safety net for the whole of a secular country!

Further Scriptural evidence of the applicability of this catch-basin concept to the whole of a country is the additional perspective that Paul states in Galatians 6:10. This particular passage seems to indicate that all believers should care for the poor outside of their own *believing* church community: ***So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith*** (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:13; 1 Timothy 6:18). Believers as *individuals* and as bodies (churches) are tasked with the responsibility of meeting others' needs. This important distinction is worth mentioning at this point because the same charge is nowhere to be found in terms of the institution of the State as being responsible for the same. This is an important point of distinction that will be underscored at the conclusion of this study.

What follows is even more of the mind of God as it relates to how the needs of the poor are to be taken care of in a fallen world.

C. ACTS 6:1-6

This narrative passage from the early church is illustrative of the principles and teaching examined previously in 1 Timothy 5. The *believing* widows (most likely qualified widows per the criteria of 1 Timothy 5) were to be cared for by the institution of the church. This fourth catch basin for caring for the poor is in keeping with the hierarchy of 1 Timothy 5: the first being children and grandchildren, the second being other family members, the third being other resourceful widows, and fourth and lastly being the church.

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

What is said in this passage underscores God's design for the church in meeting the needs of dependent people. Be sure to note that this responsibility of the church's role of taking care of the poor is, exegetically speaking, a very qualified responsibility, given what we have already discovered from other informative doctrinal passages (cf. 1 Timothy 5:5, 9, 11, 14). Furthermore, again, and most important is what is *not* said about the institution of the State: taking care of the poor is nowhere to be found in all three of the passages we have examined thus far.¹

Nowhere in Acts 6, nor elsewhere in the NT,
is the State deemed responsible by God to
meet the needs of the genuinely bereft.

D. ROMANS 15:25–26

But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

In this passage, Paul is taking a gift from several Gentile churches and giving it to the Jewish church of Jerusalem—specifically to the poor therein; this is indicative of and synonymous with his 1 Timothy 5 instruction, in this case, to the church at Ephesus. Further notes Acts 2:44–47 in regard to the corporate church and its role with the needy:

And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Wherein Acts is a historical narrative, not necessarily intended as instructive (like the epistles), the book records events that actually happened—good and bad, right and wrong—in the church. Could it be that the overzealousness (v. 43) of congregants led to some wrong decisions (*and they began selling their property and possessions*) that would later lead to the poverty in the church as evidenced by what Paul is stating he did in our previously examined passage in Romans 15:25–26, i.e., his taking a contribution from two Gentile churches *for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem*? The events of Romans 15 occurred after the events of Acts 2.

All that to say, as an important aside to our study, Acts 2 should not be understood as a theological basis for economic socialism. Combined with the insight provided in Romans 15, this passage serves to illustrate precisely the opposite: the fruits of socialism, the possession of little or no personal property, evidenced both here in this passage with the Jerusalem Church and elsewhere, equates to greater difficulty in meeting one's own present and future needs—as well as the present and future needs of others who find themselves in difficult circumstances.

Conclusively, Romans 15:25–26 and Acts 2:44–47 serve as additional biblical evidence of churches helping the poor in other churches. Combined with Paul's instruction to the church at Galatia, wherein again

he states, *So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith* (Galatians 6:10), these passages serve as illustrations of the fourth tier of a God-intended societal safety net. The institution of the church is commanded by God to take care of the needs of the poor. But again, no overt mention of the institution of the State is in view here.

E. GALATIANS 2:10

Romans 15 is not the only passage that indicates the need of other churches to help the poor in Jerusalem. Galatians 2:10 serves the same purpose:

They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.

Paul is being compelled to *remember the poor* at the church in Jerusalem, albeit a charge he *was eager to do*. This serves as more evidence of a fourth tier of provision intended by God in His fabrication of a societal safety net for a nation.

F. JAMES 1:27

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

To *visit widows and orphans in their distress* is euphemistic language, evidencing again the first-tier responsibility of a societal safety net: for *individual* believers to help all people who possess genuine needs, regardless of religious beliefs or lack thereof (there is no qualifier in this passage that says this applies to believers only). Again, there is no mention of the taking on of this task by the institution of the State.

G. 1 JOHN 3:17

But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

This passage is yet another that strongly admonishes believers to meet the needs of the poor and seems to include first, second, or third tier responses to such needs.

III. CONCLUSION

Is there any wonder that believers have established orphanages, founded downtown rescue missions, and built magnificent hospitals? That is because they understand God's plan to some extent for a societal safety net! There exists a specific design in Holy Writ relative to a biblically informed construct of a societal safety net for those in genuine need in any and all nations. Short of the ability for one to provide for himself, God's order of catch basins is for *individuals* to help others. Closely related to that is helping the poor via the institutions of marriage and family. Lastly, the responsibility falls to the institution of the Church—but only at such a time as the other predicates have fallen short of meeting those needs; only then does the need become the responsibility of the institution of the Church.

Importantly, the institution of the State is explicitly absent: it is outside the purview of God's ordained means of provision for the truly needy.

Inefficient and ineffective results are always the outcome whenever any of God's ordained institutions attempt to hijack the responsibilities of another. The wise public servant always poses the question as to which God-ordained institution is specifically commissioned by Him to achieve a purpose. The wise public servant realizes God has not ordained His institution of government to be the end-all for every need that surfaces. Far from that, He has ordained five separate institutions, civil government being only *one* of them, in order to accomplish His will in a fallen world prior to His Second Coming. Specific in this regard and as mentioned previously in this book and worth repeating, one cannot expect the State to effectively and

efficiently meet the needs of society's bereft any more than one can expect the institution of the family to manufacture well-running automobiles.

God has ordained and provided other more efficient and effective means, catch basins if you will, to meet the genuine needs of others in a fallen world so that, again, ideally no one ends up going downstream in society. In summary, those catch basins in their order of the priority of first response are as follows:

The Hierarchical Order of God's Societal Safety Net

1. The meeting of one's own needs
2. The institution of the family
3. The institution of marriage
4. The institution of the church

May God use this study to shape your thinking in these areas of importance to our nation.

1. Wayne Grudem bolsters this point in his study of pertinent passages relative to our subject. He states, "I am surprised to discover that few people seem to realize that these verses say nothing about civil government overcoming individual citizens' poverty!"

Righteous Leadership Exalts a Nation

Proverbs 14:34 contains a sound political maxim, *the simplicity of which is often overlooked*: personal **righteousness** in the population—both in citizens and leaders—is the *single-most important quality* any country can possess! This virtue, states Solomon, is preeminent to everything else, because

***Righteousness exalts a nation,
But sin is a disgrace to any people.***

The writer of Proverbs, King Solomon, whom Scripture states was the wisest man to ever live, proclaims in this passage that personal **righteousness** is the most important ingredient—and should be the focus—in order to achieve the advancement of any given nation. Solomon does not say that the presence of natural resources **exalts a nation**, nor does he say it is attributable to the excellence of its education system, as important as those are. *Rather, personal righteousness is what is the most important!* All else hinges on the integrity and honesty of a nation's leaders and its citizenry, especially as it pertains to a nation's long-term economic viability. Note the democracies where a lack of **righteousness** exists—instead where corruption exists—and what it does to the nation. This is basic, but again, often overlooked.

I trust you'll find the priority and insight of this study profoundly impactful upon your thinking.

I. INTRODUCTION

Five specific traits of *righteousness* must characterize a nation's leaders in order for that nation to prosper, in this case, per the subject of this study, economically. Accordingly, each of the five will be examined in detail. These qualities—what specifically *exalts a nation*—fulfill the promise Solomon made in the above passage.

The Greek word for *righteousness* (*dikaiosune*) is used 86 times in the New Testament (NT). The simplest and easiest way to remember the definition of this word is “right-way-ness.” A careful observation of Proverbs 14:34 (quoted in the preface) reveals a nationalistic summation of the cause-and-effect relationship between *righteousness* and *exaltation*. Great nations, great leaders, great employees, and great family members are always characterized by the following biblical characteristics of *righteousness*—that's what makes them great! (I have visited many democratically governed nations where *righteousness* does not exist to the degree it should, and seeing how the nation is hindered as a result is decidedly apparent.) It should also be noted at the outset that many nations do practice the following five characteristics of biblical *righteousness*, borrowing from the Heavenly Author of such, yet give no attribution to their source.

In an individual sense, when a leader lives in alignment with God's character, he places himself in a position to be blessed by God. On the other hand, *unrighteous* leaders are never in a place or position wherein God can extend them His divine favor in as gracious a proportion.

Per Proverbs 14:34, it follows that a nation's proportion of blessing is directly related to and tantamount to the sum total of the *righteousness* quotient of its individual leaders. Only when a nation is blessed with high-principled individuals does that nation place itself in a position to gain God's bestowal of blessing, favor, and of overall wellbeing. This blessing specifically includes its economic wellbeing.

The long-term exaltation of a nation
is intrinsically intertwined with the
righteousness of its leaders.

Given this cut-to-the-chase analysis of a nation's greatest need, the question quickly becomes one of how *righteousness* is best formed in the life of leaders. It follows that the critical, preeminent duty of all believers is to witness for Christ and lead others to Him; in essence, souls must be won for Christ in the citizenry, and especially its political leaders! Conversion of the soul, Solomon will postulate, not moral foisting, is the only way to breed lasting *righteousness* in individuals. When a person comes to Christ, he or she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Who empowers a person to live *righteously*.

Therefore, in our composite nation (one composed of both church and state but institutionally separated), the state is dependent on believers to diligently evangelize and disciple the unregenerate citizenry. The degree to which believers are faithful evangelizers and disciplers is directly proportional in the long term to the health and wellbeing of the state. The following passages serve to underscore this critically important axiom. These passages are powerful and informative:

When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices,

And when the wicked perish, there is joyful shouting.

By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted,

But by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down (Proverbs 11:10–11).

When the righteous triumph, there is great glory,

But when the wicked rise, men hide themselves (Proverbs 28:12).

When the righteous increase, the people rejoice,

but when a wicked man rules, people groan (Proverbs 29:2).

As previously evidenced in Proverbs 14:34 and the above passages, the following can summarily be concluded:

The book of Proverbs repeatedly
screams about the relationship
between the existence of *righteous*
governmental leaders and the
overall health of a city or a nation!

Again and again, this simple but profoundly important connection is woefully underemphasized in our increasingly secular culture—as if character doesn’t matter to the course of a nation! Furthermore, the above passages are not about the heavenlies; they relate to the here and now! Given this clear and repeated cause-and-effect relationship between the existence of *righteousness* in leaders and the course a country takes, how are you, as a public servant, doing in terms of your spiritual growth, your maturation in Christ, and your *righteousness* quotient?

II. THE PROGENITOR OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The necessity of evangelism by the people of God, so as to birth and develop *righteous* individuals in order to achieve an ongoing healthy, *exalted nation*, is explicitly articulated in Proverbs 11:30:

*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,
And he who is wise wins souls.*

In beautifully imaging Solomonic prose, the picture of *a tree of life* serves to illustrate the far-reaching effects of *the fruit of the righteous*. This *fruit* generally includes a person’s influence, productivity, instruction, example, and progeny. But notice specifically what is added to the definition of *fruit* in this particular passage: evangelism or the *winning of souls*. Herein is yet another exclamatory underscoring of the integral relationship between the fruit of the *righteous* and the importance of evangelism, which again results in the indwelling Holy Spirit, Who elsewhere in Scripture is deemed *the Helper* (cf. John 14:26), in order to achieve the outward manifestations of *righteousness* in an individual and in culture.

May we “*seek first His kingdom and His righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33) not only in our own life but in the lives of others. To do so is to create an ever-green *tree of life* in any given nation! States Charles Bridges in regard to the absence of soul winning:

The Christian who neglects his brother’s salvation, fearfully hazards [weakens] his own. He is gone back to his native selfishness, if he does not exhibit that “love and kindness of God that has appeared unto men”... How poor is the mitre [head dressing] or the crown; how debasing the wisdom of the

philosopher, the scholar, or the statesman, compared with this wisdom!¹

The most important and wisest use of a believer's time and resources in the Capitol is that of winning the lost: creating by the imputation of the Holy Spirit men and women who will *hunger and thirst for righteousness* their whole life! (cf. Matthew 5:6). Summarily:

The winning of souls fosters
righteousness in a nation.

How misguided and biblically uninformed is the thinking of those who do not prioritize evangelism and discipleship—God's means of creating *righteous* individuals! Rarely is that formula postulated as the solution to America's downward trajectory and her economic woes. Have we not come to grips with the profundity of these passages? Do we simply not believe them? Perhaps this unbelief is attributable to the famine of biblical literacy in the Capitol and the nation? If indeed it is *righteousness that exalts a nation*, is not the priority of evangelism the key to a great country more so than any other pursuit you might spend your time trying to accomplish? What could be a more important use of your time than soul winning?

Stemming from the conversion of the soul and regeneration in Christ, Solomon states that the five following characteristics of *righteous* leadership can take root with long-lasting effects. Said another way, when you unpack the book of Proverbs relative to this subject, Solomon is saying that these definitive aspects of *righteousness* serve to *exalt a nation*:

III. FIVE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

How do you specifically define what *righteousness* looks like? What are characteristic manifestations of its presence in a statesman? What follows are the passages from Proverbs that have to do with *righteousness* and define what *righteous* leadership should look like. In order to *exalt a nation*, a leader must be the following.

**A. TO BE RIGHTEOUS MEANS YOU MUST KNOW
YOU ARE CALLED TO SERVE—NOT BENEFIT**

In Proverbs 16:12, Solomon provides insights to his son, Rehoboam, the next leader of Israel, as to what will establish and secure his reign, i.e., his position of leadership:

*It is an abomination for kings to commit wicked acts,
For a throne is established on righteousness.*

The heart of a public servant must regard others whom he serves as being more important than himself (cf. Philippians 2:3ff). God requires that leaders whom He appoints to govern a country, His ordained institution of the state (cf. Romans 13:1), be a blessing to the people they serve. Ecclesiastes 8:9 specifically speaks to the degree of selflessness a leader must possess in his job: *A man has exercised authority over another man to his hurt*. This verse is a powerful way of putting it: *a leader is to be so selfless that it hurts his own interests!* It is only from this biblical theology, the ensuing knowledge of this biblical theology, his understanding of this biblical theology, and his submission to this biblical theology that a person can possibly possess the realization that God has called him to office to serve in this way and to this degree. His service must cost him something; it must mean personal sacrifice! Only then can selfish motives possibly be eradicated and replaced by the *righteous* motives of selfless service commanded in Scripture!

If a leader is secure and settled in the fact that God is the One Who called him to office, i.e., *He puts down one and exalts another* (Psalm 75:7), then and only then is there no temptation to engineer his destiny. Then and only then is there no temptation to perform the *wicked acts* often associated with self-preservation. Here exists *the theological construct in the inner heart* of the leader who fights off corruption. Be sure of this:

Abominable, wicked acts—corruption—
grows in the soil of self-preservation,
whereas the soil of “God placed me
here to serve” nurtures a totally
different variety of leader.

The DNA of the latter variety is this: “God is the One Who put me here for the betterment of others. I understand and am secure in my calling.” In essence then, believing that “God placed me here” leads to *a throne established on righteousness*! If you want to establish yourself in office, then live securely, according to a proper, theologically based understanding of your calling.

It follows that an officeholder who is self-centered will become less *established* due to his ensuing and inevitable *unrighteousness*. A recent illustration of this is a past American president who promised the nation’s citizens that they could keep their own doctor and coverage under his new nationwide insurance plan. As it turned out, that promise was not the case, and he knew it. As a result of his *unrighteous* behavior, his approval ratings dropped, meaning he became less established in office. The connection is easy to see.

The relationship between *righteousness* and being *established* parallels the previously seen relationship between *righteousness* and *exaltation*: *righteous* character and behavior lead to being *established* and being *exalted*—both individually and in a national sense. In summary, *righteous* behavior stems from a believer’s calling in Christ, knowing He appointed you to office; therefore, it is up to Him to preserve you in office, whereas behaving *wickedly* will stem from a person’s thinking he is self-appointed and therefore must be self-preserving.

B. TO BE RIGHTEOUS MEANS YOU MUST BE JUST

A major responsibility of civil government is *the punishment of evildoers* (1 Peter 2:13–14). Within that realm of responsibility is the dispatch of *just* treatment through due process. A major responsibility of every elected official then is to make sure the city, county, state, or nation has an excellent judicial system, especially God-fearing, *righteous* judges. States Proverbs 20:8 in this regard:

*A king who sits on the throne of justice
Disperses all evil with his eyes.*

From the time of Moses, the leaders of Israel were judges, which also meant they were chief executives (and often prophets). When the kings replaced the judges, Israel’s kings would decree *justice* from their throne. They were

to rule in fear of God. So it should be today in our lawmaking, enforcement, and adjudication. States Proverbs 24:23–25 in this regard:

These also are sayings of the wise.

To show partiality in judgment is not good.

He who says to the wicked, “You are righteous,”

Peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him;

But to those who rebuke the wicked will be delight,

And a good blessing will come upon them.

So great should be the judicial *righteousness* of the aforementioned leaders that they rule with total social and economic impartiality.

Open your mouth for the mute,

for the rights of all the unfortunate.

Open your mouth, judge righteously,

And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy (Proverbs 31:8–9).

Only through *righteous* lawmakers, enforcers, and courts can a state have any semblance of *justice*. *Judging righteously* stems from *righteous* leaders for sure. But how are those *righteous* leaders created, raised, and groomed?

How does the state gain noble leaders?

In God’s design, they are to be manufactured (at the risk of sounding impersonal, I like the connotations of that word) by the institution of the church: God-fearing individuals are created, raised, and groomed by the discipleship priorities of believers in a composite nation wherein exist the co-abiding institutions of church and state. Wise is the state that upholds religious freedom so as to provide the church ease in manufacturing *what it most desperately requires*: the next generation of *righteous* state leaders. Keep in mind the state is not tooled by God to create what it most requires for its very survival: *righteous, just* leaders. In summary, the second of the five characteristics of *righteousness* is *justice*. Are you comfortable being a servant (first), and are you committed to being *just*? Such characteristics *exalts a nation*.

C. TO BE RIGHTEOUS MEANS YOU MUST BE DISCERNING

If *righteousness exalts a nation*, then it follows that good discernment by a public servant—to associate with people of integrity—is a sure path to national prosperity. To do otherwise is to be unduly, continually tempted by evil. “*Bad company corrupts good morals*,” candidly states Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:33. In other words, like begets like.

Too often *righteous* elected officials
associate with or hire people
who do not represent their values.

Don't let that be the case with you. Your staff must represent your values in order to be effective in the long run. I am not saying hire only Christians and fire non-Christians. Such a belief is to endorse theocracy—a church-controlled state—which the New Testament does not support, and neither do I. Sometimes believers, in their spiritual immaturity, exhibit many more character flaws than do some nonbelievers and must be fired. Sometimes nonbelievers live according to God's principles, even though they fail to give attribution to the Author of those principles—and they should be hired. The overarching point is this: be discerning whether or not the team you build adequately represents your values.

In Proverbs 25:5 (here, in the context of training his son), Solomon summarily addresses this very important, timeless principle:

*Take away the wicked before the king,
And his throne will be established in righteousness.*

Of critical importance and a matter of utmost discernment, who you hire will also shape you to some degree!

Further and very importantly, one specific form of *wickedness before the king* is highlighted several chapters later by Solomon: personal bribery. Bribery can undermine the best of legal constructs; there is virtually no way for a nation to manage against bribery apart from previous character development, given the existence of private, non-investigable bank accounts in

countries such as Switzerland, Belize, and Malta. The only way to manage against such private corruption is through the formation of convictions against such matters in the heart of those who are bribed. (Keep in mind, bribery is not a problem with people who have no power but is with those who do.) Samuel's sons accepted bribes, which ruined the nation of Israel. Bribes can ruin the best of democracies: witness the revelations of then Vice President Joe Biden's family taking bribes from the Chinese government and the ensuing blind-eye treatment of the Obama administration to unfair trade practices!² States Solomon in Proverbs 29:4:

*The king gives stability to the land by justice,
But a man who takes bribes overthrows it.*

The wise statesman associates with and hires people who represent his or her godly character. On the other hand, embracing *wicked* people will ruin your office. You are playing with fire! Far from *establishing* you, they will harm you, misrepresent you, and may even corrupt you! And states Numbers 32:23 in this regard, "*And be sure your sin will find you out.*" In summary, the third of the five characteristics of *righteousness* is the person's ability to be discerning and circumspect of the influence of others on him or her. Are you a servant, *just* and discerning? Such attributes *exalt a nation*.

D. TO BE RIGHTEOUS MEANS YOU MUST HAVE CONVICTIONS

Whereas convictions are more than having knowledge of scriptural truths, they are nothing less. Only upon deliberate and courageous implementation can knowledge become a conviction.

Like a trampled spring and a polluted well

Is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked (Proverbs 25:26).

To lack conviction as a believer is
often an indication of biblical illiteracy—
if not an absence of courage.

For an elected official who is a Christian to fall from his principles—to compromise biblical absolutes—in his policies or interactions with others grievously tarnishes his or her testimony and, I might add, the corporate testimony of the body of Christ. A believer forms convictions by constant Bible study, prayer, and meditation. Convictions too are either emboldened or weakened in relationship to fellowship or not with other believers. In summary, the fourth of the five characteristics of *righteousness* is conviction. Are you a man or woman who is a servant, *just*, discerning, and in possession of inalterable convictions based on God's Word? Such *exalts a nation*.

E. TO BE RIGHTEOUS MEANS YOU MUST BE PRAYERFUL

The last of the five characteristics of *righteousness* found in Proverbs is that of being *prayerful*. Note Proverbs 15:8–9 in this regard:

*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
But the prayer of the upright is His delight.
The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
But He loves one who pursues righteousness.*

In these two back-to-back Proverbs of parallelism, *prayer* is equated with *righteousness* (the second stanzas of both passages). What every country most needs are men and women beseeching God's guidance in their personal and state affairs. Furthermore, and very important to understand about this matter of prayer is the following:

The Bible says God only hears the prayers
of leaders and citizens who are upright and
righteous from His perspective, meaning
they have placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

Scripture is clear in this regard. For those who are at odds with God, who passively or actively reject the Son of God, their prayers, beyond the prayer of repentance, go unheard. (Note what follows is what the Bible says; this is not just my personal opinion!)

*The LORD is far from the wicked,
But He hears the prayer of the righteous* (Proverbs 15:29).

*We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing
and does His will, He hears him* (John 9:31).

*If I regard wickedness in my heart,
The Lord will not hear;
But certainly God has heard;
He has given heed to the voice of my prayer.
Blessed be God,
Who has not turned away my prayer
Nor His lovingkindness from me* (Psalm 66:18–20).

*He who turns away his ear from listening to the law,
Even his prayer is an abomination* (Proverbs 28:9).

*But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God,
And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear*
(Isaiah 59:2).

In summary, the fifth of the five characteristics of *righteousness* is prayerfulness. Are you a servant, *just*, discerning, conviction-driven, and *prayerful*? Such *exalts a nation*.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is amazing that way too often personal *righteousness* is overlooked as an essential, preeminent ingredient to the dispatch of good civil government. But how to produce such individuals to lead in the state is more difficult than the simple analysis of the need. The only sure-based means to produce these virtues in leaders is through the evangelism and discipleship efforts of believers in the lives of other individuals. As the discipleship priorities, responsibilities, and manifestations of the church go, so goes the state. Put another way,

The state reflects the collective
righteousness of its people,
much more than it is the cause of it.

This conclusion explains why so many democracies with little or no disciple-making churches suffer. Stated still another way, the heralders of God's truth are critically important to the success of the public servant and the future of the country. The expositor/instructor of God's precepts is the seminal incubator of a country's present and future culture. In Hosea 4:6, God summarily underscores this principle when He says to His Bible teachers of the time:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

Because you have rejected knowledge,

I also will reject you from being My priest.

Since you have forgotten the law of your God,

I also will forget your children.

This OT passage, which explains the responsibility of Israel's priests to the nation's citizens, serves to reveal the God-intended relationship between the church and the state today. For the church to fail to teach God's precepts to the leaders of the state is a sore subject in the eyes of God. It is incumbent on the church to teach God's precepts and manufacture *righteous* leaders and citizens for and in the state. The state itself is dependent on the church to do this for her. It is important to realize that the state is not in the business of creating its own leaders.

The insight and emphasis of Proverbs regarding the health of a state, including its economic viability, clearly reveals the need for the continual development of *righteous* leadership. Definitively, a Solomonic spectral analysis of *righteousness* reveals at least five beautiful colors: service, *justice*, discernment, conviction, and prayerfulness. To what degree do each of these wonderful virtues shine forth in and from your life? Does your life reveal these characteristics? To the degree it does, you are adding to the *exaltation of our nation*.

1. Charles Bridges, *Proverbs: Geneva Commentary Series* (Banner of Truth, 1856).
2. Robert Kraychik, "Exclusive—Steve Hilton: Joe Biden has taken billions of dollars in bribes from the Chinese government," *Breitbart*, May 29, 2019, <https://www.breitbart.com/radio/2019/05/29/steve-hilton-joe-biden-taken-billions-dollars-bribes-chinese-government/>. See too Steve Hilton, "Steve Hilton: Joe Biden should be called 'Joe China'—and never be allowed near the White House again," *Fox News, The Next Revolution*, April 29, 2019, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/steve-hilton-joe-biden-should-be-called-joe-china-and-never-be-allowed-near-the-white-house-again>.

PART VI

***THE PUBLIC SERVANT:
AN EVANGELIST TO
HIS COLLEAGUES***

Vitally Important: Unity Amongst Christian Public Servants! [Ephesians]

The *unity* of the followers of Jesus Christ in the nation's Capitol, state capitols, and civic government matters immeasurably. This study will focus on the importance of that *unity*, as well as what the Bible says about the issue. The believer must be cognizant of specific actions to perform in order to achieve and maintain *unity*.

We will examine Ephesians 4:1–3 in this quest. Our nation desperately needs the believers in political leadership to be in *unity*! What results from a persevering *unity* can and will extremely bless our nation!

I. INTRODUCTION

In Ephesians 4:1–3, the Apostle Paul uses the word *therefore* to make a huge segue, signaling the upcoming implications related to the believer's identity in Christ, described in chapters 1–3. The first three chapters of his letter to the church at Ephesus relate primarily to the believer's position in Christ: his or her orthodoxy. In chapters 4 to 6, Paul begins delineating many outward characteristics in the believer's life that should naturally follow. If you know who you are in Christ, it follows that you should live a certain way, i.e., your orthopraxy. Does what you believe match up with what you do?

Even more important than not living hypocritically is the revealed truth of the ingredients that create *unity* amongst believers from the first portion of Ephesians 4:1–3:

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

A quick dissection of this passage reveals five words that Paul mentions under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that are characteristic, i.e., befitting of someone who has been called by Jesus Christ: *humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and diligence.*

These five ingredients lead to *preserving the unity* in and amongst the body of believers in the Capitol. A subsequent *bond of peace*, not disunity, develops among believers.

Before examining these characteristics, notice first the preamble that describes the way Paul views himself. He calls himself:

A. THE PRISONER OF THE LORD

For sure, Paul had been imprisoned for his faith, but more than that was his conversion on the road to Damascus where it became known to him that Jesus had said of him that he was “*a chosen instrument of Mine*” (Acts 9:15). In essence the Lord divinely imprisoned him or, better, made Paul His slave.

Such is the case with everyone called by Christ to serve Him per Ephesians 1:4: *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.* Accordingly, what Paul is about to say regarding the importance of the believer’s outward manifestations or characteristics is underscored by his personal testimony, indicating a willing obedience to Christ. That obedience stems from knowing our clear *calling* by God in Christ (cf. John 15:16; 1 Corinthians 6:20). One leading commentator puts it this way:

God expects conformity within the church, the Body of Christ. It is not a forced legalistic conformity to external rules and regulations, but a willing inner conformity to the holiness, love, and will of our [H]eavenly Father, who wants His children to

honor Him as their Father ... When we received Christ as Savior we became citizens of His kingdom and members of His family. Along with those blessings and privileges we also received obligations. The Lord expects us to act like the new persons we have become in Jesus Christ. He expects His standards to become our standards, His purposes to become our purposes, His desires our desires, His nature our nature. The Christian life is simply the process of becoming what you are.¹

This clarification elucidates what Paul goes on to say:

B. IMPORE YOU TO WALK IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE CALLING

Notice that Paul is modeling the role of the spiritual leader, which is to *implore* people! The Greek word for *implore* (*deesis*) is used 19 times throughout the NT and means “to urge, entreat, beg, plead or exhort.” A good parallel example of this idea is found in Romans 12:1. Paul states, *Therefore I urge [deesis] you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.* In 2 Timothy 4:2 Paul instructs Timothy, his understudy, *preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.* In actuality, any spiritual leader who is unwilling to *implore* other believers to live according to God’s righteousness is, in essence, indifferent and detached from his *calling*. He isn’t doing his God-given job as an under-shepherd. It is incumbent on all under-shepherds—and any and every follower of Christ—to correct erring believers.

It follows that it is incumbent on me to *implore* those of you who name the name of Christ in the Capitol, who are less than *diligent to preserve the unity*, to change your ways and practice what Paul asserts!

I want to examine some of the specific words in this portion of the passage.

1. Walk

This word readily found throughout the New Testament (NT) refers to the daily conduct of the believer. It connotes day-by-day living and captures

the theme of the remaining three chapters of this tremendous epistle: how a believer *walks* should match up to who he or she is in Christ (chapters 1–3). The next word continues to aid our understanding.

2. Worthy

In the Greek, this interesting word has the idea of balancing the scales. What is on one side of the scale should be equal in weight to what is on the other side. Do you see the connection? In other words, our *walk*, i.e., our orthopraxy (chapters 4–6), should match our theology, our orthodoxy (chapters 1–3). Our daily living should match—be *worthy* of—our high *calling* as a child of God and a fellow heir with Christ. And that leads to the next word worth noting.

3. Calling

This word relates to being saved. No one is a Christian until he repents of his sins and receives Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. An individual's faith and repentance to believe in Christ is the flip side of the same coin: God's *calling* on his life. No one ever comes to God unless he is given the faith by Him to respond in repentance. Such is commensurate with God's *calling*.

Faith and repentance are the necessary components acted upon by the individual relative to the sovereign, effectual *call* of God to salvation. Notice the following parallel passages that shed further light on the marvelous, God-enacted truth regarding the believer's *calling* and how that *calling* must manifest itself in proper outward behavior.

Better Understanding Calling

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable

(Romans 11:29).

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints

(Ephesians 1:18).

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14).

To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power
(2 Thessalonians 1:11).

Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity (2 Timothy 1:9).

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession (Hebrews 3:1).

Summarily to this point, Jesus said, “***No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him***” (John 6:44). Later in the same passage He reiterates the point, “***No one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father***” (v. 65). Paul states elsewhere, ***these whom He predestined, He also called*** (Romans 8:30). Ending Ephesians 4:1, Paul reiterates this effectual call in the past tense, stating

C. WITH WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED

This portion of the verse emphasizes the surety Paul must have possessed relative to the Ephesian believers’ salvation, all of which provide the basis for properly addressing the five behavioral matters that follow. The following characteristics are necessary to maintain ***unity*** amongst believers—of those ***called*** of God:

II. HUMILITY

Paul’s first descriptor in verse 2 that leads to corporate ***unity*** amongst other believers is ***humility***. The passage reads ***with all humility....*** Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ ought to be characterized by ***humility***. For believers to understand and properly manifest biblical ***humility***, they must

grasp the broader theological context of the subject. Wishful thinking says, “Be humble” and expects others to step down several notches from whatever degree of superbity they possess. For believers, *humility* stems from a clear understanding of the fact that they are the *bride of Christ*.

At first glance without any explanation, this thought might seem confusing or disjointed. Allow me to illustrate. Paul will state later in Ephesians that God’s ultimate desire for the corporate body of believers is something much greater than *unity* for the sake of *unity*, i.e., *that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish* (Ephesians 5:27 NKJV).

In Colossians 1:22 Paul further conveys this same thought: *yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach*. In essence then, God is preparing a bride for Christ, which is the Church, whereas in the Old Testament (OT) Israel is pictured as the wife of the Lord (cf. Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 3:14 (NKJV); and Hosea 2:19, 20). In the NT, the Church is seen as the *bride of Christ*, Christ Himself being the bridegroom (cf. Mark 2:20). The significance of this beautiful picture is further portrayed in the book of Revelation regarding the Second Coming of Christ *with* His Church. Note that in the following passages:

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready (Revelation 19:7).

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2).

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Revelation 21:9).

What does this all have to do with *humility*? In one sense, the believers are just along for the ride! Your life is all about God’s grace being on display (cf. Ephesians 2:6, 7)! Our salvation is a pre-orchestrated means by which God will glorify Himself by giving us to His Son!

Coming to grips with that deeper theological insight gives birth to personal *humility*! Our quest for personal significance must be eclipsed by this

profound biblical insight: it is all about God's glory—not ours! That truth should and does prove to be a *humbling* elixir as to how we view ourselves.

Good theology is the essential
ingredient to ever-present humility.

Christian faith has very little to do with you and everything to do with God. It is all about His glory, not yours!

III. GENTLENESS

The second outward characteristic of our *calling* in Christ, i.e., attributes that need accompany our profession of faith in Christ, is *gentleness*. *Gentleness* is a key ingredient to achieving and maintaining *unity*. *Praotes*, the Greek word used in this passage for *gentleness*, is elsewhere translated *meekness*. *Praotes*, which conveys the idea of “power under control,” was used in reference to horses in the ancient world who were tamed, broken and trained. Obviously, they remained strong and were spirited, but they were in subjection to the control of their master.

The idea of self-control is a close cousin; make no mistake, *meekness* is not weakness. The following is a brief overview of the word as used elsewhere in Scripture:

Better Understanding Gentleness

***A gentle answer turns away wrath,
But a harsh word stirs up anger*** (Proverbs 15:1).

***You have also given me the shield of Your salvation,
And Your right hand upholds me;
And Your gentleness makes me great*** (Psalm 18:35).

“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.”

(Matthew 5:5).

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls

(Matthew 11:29).

Gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:23).

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted (Galatians 6:1).

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Colossians 3:12).

But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children (1 Thessalonians 2:7).

Not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money (1 Timothy 3:3).

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom (James 3:13).

But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence (1 Peter 3:15).

Gentleness is to characterize the life of the believer, who is powerful relative to the indwelling Holy Spirit. However, that power is under control, governed by the edicts of the believer's Master Who relegates His power in and through His called-out ambassadors.

Unfortunately, for ***unity*** in the Capitol among believers, too many who name the name of Christ are void of ***gentleness***. Such a deficiency creates

disunity. Many excellent illustrations of *gentle* believers can be found in the Bible. Examining some of them will aid in grasping this concept of *gentleness*.

A. JESUS

Matthew 26:47–56 records the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. In this fascinating passage, the quality of *meekness* can be seen in full display—by Jesus, that is—not Peter, who was ready to slice and dice. But notice Jesus’ response to him in verse 53: ***“Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?”*** Herein illustrated is power under control. Jesus was and is the omnipotent, sovereign King of the universe, but He chose not to use His power on this occasion.

Having first stated that, notice now Matthew 21:12: ***And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves.*** Being a *meek* person does not preclude a person from expressing righteous indignation.

Ephesians 4:26 states this premise in sound-bite fashion: ***BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN.*** Indeed, being characterized by *meekness* and righteous indignation simultaneously is possible. The question is: what kind of anger do you possess? Is it a selfish anger stemming from a lack of getting what you want, or is it a righteous indignation? How do you keep these Christological illustrations in tension? I synthesize these two illustrations from the life of Christ as follows:

Meekness is power in reserve that is
ever sensitive to the will of God.

Proverbs 16:32 vividly illustrates the value of a *gentle*—but not weak—spirit. ***He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.*** Extremely self-controlled, powerful people are the type of people others are drawn to. There’s a confidence in their leadership and in their personhood. They are unifiers.

B. MOSES

The life of Moses reveals additional perspectives of this biblically desired quality of *gentleness*. God says of him in Numbers 12:3, *Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.*

At the same time, note Moses' perception of himself as recorded in Exodus 4:10: *Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."* Having first recognized those self-perceptions Moses had, take note of the following instances from Numbers and Exodus:

1. Confronted Pharaoh in the Lord's name
2. Confronted Israel regarding her idolatry
3. Confronted the Lord to forgive Israel's sin

How do you explain this seeming dichotomy? The answer is this: his confidence was not in himself but rightfully placed in God's attributes, promises, and power! The *meek* person is not concerned about making a name for himself; he is void of selfish ambition. He is not caught up in his self-image; rather,

The meek man has a selfless image!

The *meek* focus on obedience to God and upholding the honor of His name, His attributes, His righteousness, and His objectives. Such is reflected in the lives of the apostles who gave themselves in total for the advancement of the Gospel.

C. THE APOSTLE PAUL

Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20, *I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave*

Himself up for me. Your degree of *meekness* is directly proportionate and related to your degree of selflessness. In contrast to *gentleness* and *meekness* is sinful anger, which always stems from a person's inability to achieve or fulfill his selfish desires. Accordingly, when you find yourself angry, ask yourself, "Whom am I serving?" *Gentle* people can respond *gently* because their concern in life is to serve the Lord. It therefore follows that believers whose primary focus is on themselves end up being agents of division in the body of Christ in the Capitol.

IV. PATIENCE SHOWING TOLERANCE

In this magnificent passage, the third characteristic Paul lists relative to achieving and maintaining *unity* among fellow believers is the quality of *patience*.

When Paul is *imploping* the believer to be *patient*, he is not saying that we are to be *patient* with or *tolerant* of error. As an example, in Galatians 1:9 Paul adamantly states, *As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!*

In the book of Revelation, the Apostle John quotes Jesus as saying to the Ephesian church, *"I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles"* (2:2). Paul is not suggesting that believers have patience with false doctrine.

Many are those who are *patient* and *tolerant* with everything that comes their way. On the other hand, we know of those in the Capitol who, for the sake of truth, display no *patience* with those who are in error. The latter can be likened to a *noisy gong or a clanging cymbal* (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1), i.e., those who are without love. Certainly, Paul confronted error head on, but remember too that he penned 1 Corinthians 13:1!

How Christlike are you in this regard? Do you simultaneously display God's attributes of righteousness and *patience*? Proverbs 3:3 states this tension best: *Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.*

The Greek word for *patience* is *makrothumia* and is also translated as *long-tempered* and *longsuffering* elsewhere in Scripture. Sequentially, *patience* stems from *humility* and *gentleness*.

Patience germinates only in a
soil containing a rich mixture
of humility and gentleness.

Those who are *humble*, *gentle*, and *patient* acknowledge God's superintending grace in their life. Therefore, it follows that they are in a state of mind to manifest those characteristics with others—just as God has with them. Notice how *patience* is manifest in the following biblical examples.

A. NOAH

Noah simply amazes me! He is the first guy I want to talk to when I get to heaven. We can extrapolate from Genesis 6:9 that Noah was obedient to God (6:22, 7:5) *for 120 years* in building the ark! When God assigned Noah the task, oceans or lakes did not exist. Even though no rain had fallen and in obedience to God's Word, Noah faithfully and *patiently* followed God's blueprint for building a massive ship known as the ark. And while laboring daily over its construction, Noah faithfully preached to his neighbors regarding God's coming judgment.

Hebrews 11:7 states in this regard, *By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household* Keep in mind that not until 120 years later did he experience the fruit of his labors! Yet all the while he *patiently* pursued the objective God had given him!

For those senate and house members
who moan about not yet being able to
change D.C. after being here for a time
measured in months or several years, may
I commend to you the life of Noah.

But then again, how can one avoid falling to the temptation of *impatience* if he is not regularly plugged into a Bible study with other members who can encourage him to persevere in *patience*?

B. ABRAHAM

In Genesis 12:2 God promised Abraham that his descendants would be a great nation, yet he was not given Isaac, the son of promise, until after he was 100 years old! Paul states of him during this long period of waiting on God: *Yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God* (Romans 4:20).

Are you growing stronger in your faith as you wait on God to fulfill His *calling* in and on your life? Maybe He cannot yet use you because you're not spiritually mature enough—as measured by your *impatience*. Keep in mind what the writer of Hebrews said of Abraham: *having patiently waited, he obtained the promise* (6:15).

C. MOSES

Moses made the cognitive choice *to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen* (Hebrews 11:25–27). Here is a man who deliberately left the “Ritz-Carlton” for a 40-year hike in the desert! Moses *endured*. He didn't bail out on his *calling*—even though his *calling* proved much more difficult than any *calling* to our nation's capital. In obedience to God, Moses *patiently* trusted Him with the *purpose* and direction of his life!

D. JEREMIAH

In the OT book of Jeremiah, the prophet is instructed by God to be obedient to Him—but to realize when going in, God states to him, that “no one will listen to your message!” God said to him:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations. ... Now,

gird up your loins and arise, and speak to them all which I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, or I will dismay you before them. Now behold, I have made you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests and to the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you,” declares the Lord (Jeremiah 1:5, 17–19).

Jeremiah was not dismayed because
he was cognizant of his **calling**.
Can the same be said about you?

Jeremiah was a **patient** man! As for Isaiah, it was the same way. The nation would not listen to either prophet or turn from its sins. Regarding these men of God, James 5:10 states: *As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord*. As a member of Congress, are you mindful of the prophets’ **patience**? Are Jeremiah and Isaiah examples to you of the **patience** of the prophets of old?

E. JESUS

Jesus is our ultimate example of **patience**. Hebrews 12:2 states that we should be *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*. Herein Jesus illustrated great **patience showing tolerance**, i.e., relegating Himself to God’s ultimate **purposes** for His glory, no matter the personal sacrifice or cost. States one leading commentator in this regard:

The patient saint accepts God’s plan for everything, without questioning or grumbling. He does not complain when his calling seems less glamorous than someone else’s or when the Lord sends him to a place that is dangerous or difficult. He remembers that God the Son left His heavenly home of love,

holiness, and glory to come to earth and be hated, rejected, spat upon, and crucified—without once returning evil for evil or complaining to His Father.²

Beloved members, can the same be said of you? Are you *patient* in regard to Christ's *calling* of you to D.C.? *Patience* is a main ingredient to the achievement and maintenance of *unity*.

V. DILIGENT TO PRESERVE THE UNITY

The last character quality Paul mentions that is tantamount to achieving and maintaining *unity* in the body of Christ is the need to be *diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. *Diligence* is the persevering application of the aforementioned characteristics that have been addressed.

Why should we be *diligent*? Because the sum total of practicing *humility*, *gentleness*, *patience*, *tolerance* and *diligence* is the key to maintaining *unity* in the body of Christ.

The unity of believers on the Hill is critical
to the health and direction of the nation.

Biblically speaking, *unity* among believers is critical for at least three theological reasons. Could it be that the reason Congress has been branded as a “Do Nothing Congress” for so many years is because the believers lack *unity* among themselves? When the following three aspects of *unity* are manifest among believers in political leadership, a chemistry that is good for achieving goals to benefit a nation is facilitated. The theological reasons why *unity* is so important and why God blesses those who are *diligent* about achieving *unity* are as follows:

A. UNITY REFLECTS GOD'S VERY NATURE

In Ephesians 4:4–6, Paul contends the following reasons why *unity* is so important: *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called*

in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. If the body of Christ is to be the representation of Christ in the Capitol between His first and second advent, then God's nature of *oneness* needs to be reflected among other believers and to all onlookers.

Oneness reflects the very nature of God though God Himself is three different personages of the same numerical essence (a classic description of the Trinity). Implying that a disunited body of believers today represents Christ is hugely incongruous! Disunity fails miserably to reflect His divine nature; *unity* reflects His divine nature! Accordingly, in the Capitol the *unity* of those who are trusting in Christ alone for their salvation is a very serious matter. The following passages serve to drive home this idea:

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).

There should be no disunity regarding all believers' ultimate *purpose* and aim: *the faith of the gospel* refers to that compendium of truth relative to the Christian faith (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3,4; cf. Jude 3; Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:7). Followers of Christ who have other priorities that eclipse proffering the Gospel will inevitably bring disunity to the body in the Capitol simply because they view their *purposes* differently than what Scripture says they ought to be. For the believer to have a higher agenda above God's agenda is misdirected and disuniting.

Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose (Philippians 2:2).

This passage also underscores the necessity of the body of believers possessing *unity* in *purpose*, which reflects both God's presence and His divine nature. Jesus states in John 17:22, as He communicates with God the Father, "*The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one.*"

B. UNITY PROCLAIMS CHRIST TO THE UNSAVED

The Gospel writer records the preceding portion of Jesus' high priestly prayer. However, John records what Jesus goes onto say in John 17:23, "*I*

in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.”

The unity of the body testifies of
Christ’s reality to the heart
of the unregenerate person!

Accordingly, the **unity** of the body in the Capitol is extremely important relative to the effectiveness of our overall witness to unbelievers. If we are perfected in **unity**, God promises us that those in the Capitol will know that God sent Christ to be the payment for their sins.

Notice the term **striving together** (*sunathlountes*) in Philippians 1:27. *Sun* is a prefix meaning “together” or “with.” The root, *athlountes*, should be familiar as the word *athlete* is derived from it. The same term is used as such elsewhere by Paul in 2 Timothy 2:5. Paul utilized the gladiatorial spectacle to communicate the ferocious tenacity we need possess in standing together to proclaim the Gospel. **Unity** is extremely important! We desperately need to maintain concord and harmony on the Hill among believers!

C. UNITY FACILITATES SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Ephesians 4:13 states, *until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ*. Herein the issue of **unity** relates to spiritual maturity. Those who would separate themselves from the body of believers do not possess spiritual maturity in their disobedience to Scripture. Hebrews 10:25 states, *not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some*. The **unity** of the body is not only a matter of obedience to Scripture, but it is God’s design for achieving spiritual growth in your life.

In Ephesians 4:14 Paul states (from the context and flow of the passage) that one of the results of **unity** is that *we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of*

doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming. The word for *craftiness* (*panourgia*) carries the idea of “clever manipulation of error made to look like the truth.” Unfortunately, many are *children* today in the body of Christ as illustrated by their independence from the larger body of believers: to be absent is to be disunited. Show me a “believer” who rejects *unity* and forsakes the assembling of believers together, and I will show you someone who is easily swayed by *every wind of doctrine* or who becomes *impatient*.

To the opposite, Ephesians 4:16 reveals that a committed body of believers practice their spiritual gifts with one another and build up each other! This fact is communicated metaphorically by Paul: *From whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.* What a wonderful, God-designed benefit for those who are committed to *unity* among other believers! They can be encouraged over the long haul.

VI. SUMMARY

The *unity* of believers in any Capitol community, be it D.C., a U.S. state capitol, or a federal foreign capitol is an especially important matter relative to the health and preservation of a nation. When believers are *united* in the leadership of a nation, that nation is positioned for God to bless it in ways that are exceedingly abundantly beyond what you might ask or think. Therefore, to discover what Scripture says are the main components of *unity*, as well as its attainment and maintenance, becomes a matter of importance. Ephesians 4:1–3 speaks to that analysis in a powerful way. When those ingredients of *humility*, *gentleness*, *patience*, *tolerance*, and *diligence* are practiced by the believer, they lead to corporate *unity* among the body of Christ in the Capitol or anywhere else. May God help us to develop each of these character qualities.

1. John MacArthur. *The Believer's Walk with Christ* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017), 33.
2. John MacArthur. *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1986), 127.

Understanding All the Biblical Descriptors of Salvation

The primary purpose of the New Testament (NT) book of Romans is to communicate the specifics regarding salvation. These surrounding truths and words Paul uses to describe these specifics—including justification, *propitiation* (Romans 3:25), *atonement* (Leviticus 12:8), and *reconciliation*—are important to grasp and understand. Once digested, they are also profoundly illuminating! The writer of Hebrews put it this way: *so great a salvation!* (2:3). You will see what I have in mind in this study.

Herein are the explicit details related to your assurance that you are at peace with Him. The book of Romans provides a precise, progressive outline of God's plumb line relative as to how a person is saved.

Lastly, this study is nothing less than a lesson in theology; most people today in our dumbed-down society are not reading or studying theology. I challenge you to gain an inquisitive appetite for such systematic study.

I. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the best way to gain the most profound insight into all that Scripture conveys regarding salvation is to use a metaphor. Imagine throughout this study that you are a lawmaker who has been convicted of breaking the very traffic laws that you had authored, and these enacted laws were, so to speak, “written in your heart” (cf. Jeremiah 31:33). This

perspective, relative to man's perilous condition before God, exemplifies what Paul states at the beginning of his epistle to the Romans. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle writes the following in 1:19–20:

That which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them ... so that they are without excuse.

God's laws are written in every person's heart—so in one sense, it's not as if any of us can plead ignorance to what follows. Difficult as it is for any citizen to convince a traffic officer of his innocence via the use of naivete, imagine especially if the officer knew as you converse through your rolled-down window, that *you* wrote the law—the very one that you are now attempting to deny! Acting dumb in such a setting is very difficult! In the much broader sense of denying knowledge of God's revelation, God can always answer back through the window of your mind: ***That which is known about God is evident within them.*** This illustration is a good picture (embryonic, we will see to what follows) to hold in your mind as we study all the following biblical descriptors of salvation. But before unpacking each of these crucial words, we need to first set the stage.

II. MAN'S DESPERATE CONDITION

Because of man's *sinful* nature inherited through Adam at the Fall (see Genesis chapter 3), Paul concludes in Romans 3:23, ***all have sinned*** (present perfect tense) ***and fall short*** (present tense) ***of the glory of God.*** Romans 5:12 elaborates further on man's inherited *sin* nature:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men.

The Old Testament (OT) books of 1 Kings and Ecclesiastes reinforce the idea of the desperate, endemic *sin* nature of man: ***“for there is no man who does not sin,”*** and ***indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins*** (8:46 and 7:20). In fact, man's *sinful* nature is so infective and spiritually debilitating that Paul exclaims in Romans 3:11 the following results:

“THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD.”

Man's condition is so desperately wicked that he cannot reason his way out of *sinfulness* and find God. Scripture teaches that God actually reaches

down, i.e., He does the finding and saves man! In John 15:16 Jesus precisely and unmistakably communicates this truth:

“You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain.”

Echoes Ephesians 1:4–5:

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him ... as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.

Scripture is perspicuous regarding this truth, not only in what it says in the previous passages, but also by the many illustrations of man’s depraved nature. The truth that man is depraved and, from his dead spiritual state cannot find or reason his way to God is replete throughout the Word of God. That’s how dead he is; he is fallen. The Bible teaches repeatedly and clearly that,

From the moment of conception (Psalm 51:5),
man is spiritually dead in his ***sin***
(Ephesians 2:1–3) and as a result, he is
alienated not only from God (Luke 15:18)
but also from others (1 Corinthians 8:12)
and even from himself (Habakkuk 2:10).

Man is spiritually dead and fractured in his ***sin*** and needs salvation from God to be made whole. It follows that it is no surprise that the various New Testament Greek words for ***sin*** mean “falling short of the mark.” ***Sin*** is any personal lack of conformity to the moral character and desire of God. In other words, ***sin*** is rebellion—either passively or actively—regarding what we know from our heart to be right. Most concisely, ***sin***, at its root, is a “deification of self and a dethronement of God.”¹ We ***sin*** because our very nature is an imputed ***sin*** nature, for which the consequences are stated in Romans 6:23: ***For the wages of sin is death.*** All the foregoing information is profoundly important to the biblical doctrine of salvation

and basic to the Christian worldview. Man is spiritually desperate! Only God can save him!

III. THE GOOD NEWS

Even though we all are sinners, Romans 5:8–10 unfolds the tremendous grace and mercy of God to save us sinners from our spiritual death and separation via the work of Jesus Christ, Who paid the penalty for man's *sin*:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

The magnificent, good news of the Gospel is that *while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!* This act of salvation is described by many specific words in Scripture. These profound components of the believer's biblical doctrine of salvation are formally known as the doctrine of *soteriology*. *Soterios* is the Greek verb that means "to save." Trust me, the following study of these related words will bless you in a special way as you learn about all that God has done on the believer's behalf.

Scripture provides mankind with many
strong and vivid words that further
describe *so great a salvation*.

What now follows are these definitions and the biblical descriptors of each of one.

IV. SUBSTITUTION

In both Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45 the Gospel writers state the following:

“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

These passages indicate in classic biblical Greek that the life of Christ was in essence a **substitution**, or, as stated in the NASB text, *a ransom* (*lutron*) meaning, “instead of” or “in the place of.” In other words, Christ gave His life in place of ours to pay the penalty for our *sin*. Herein is the idea of a **substitution** and, as we will see next, for the purpose of *atonement* for us.

But before we unfold the salvific idea of *atonement*, in our illustration of the traffic officer and the lawmaker, the idea of **substitution** is akin to the lawmaker’s later standing before the judge, and after the lawbreaker’s been sentenced with a penalty, the judge removes his robe, steps down from the bench, and pays the bailiff the amount required. Jesus Christ Himself was God’s **substitutionary** payment—the *ransom* if you will—Who stood in our place for our *sin*.

V. ATONEMENT

In Colossians 1:19–20 the Apostle Paul speaks about the way in which the holy God of the universe took the initiative to make peace with *sinful* man:

For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him ... having made peace through the blood of His cross.

The God of the Bible has provided and ordained **blood**, which is the actual essence and depiction of life as the means of *atonement* for *sin*. Jesus’ life, depicted by the **blood**, the essence of life itself, is what *atoned* for man’s *sin*. *Atonement* means, “to cover; to wash away.” Accordingly, Christ, the second person of the Trinity, i.e., *the Father’s fullness dwelling in Him*, is both the sacrificial **substitutionary** victim (per the previous descriptor) and the sacrifice-offering *atonement* Himself! Christ has expiated (“to extinguish the guilt incurred by”) our *sin*! He took His own loving initiative to appease His own righteous anger relative to man’s rebellious, *sinful* nature!

As it relates to our illustration, God, the courtroom Judge, has personally covered the cost and washed away all the penalties associated with the lawmaker’s legal infractions. Christ paid it all on our behalf! The loving Judge Himself covers over the findings of His own courtroom! Think of

the scenario in this way: the Judge has torn up His own writ! Paul says He did this in Colossians 1:22, which says:

In order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.

Summarily to this point in our outline, God has sent His Son as a **substitutionary atonement** for our **sin**.

VI. PROPITIATION

In his classic book, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, Leon Morris states the following regarding **propitiation**, “It is the combination of God’s deep love for the sinner with His uncompromising reaction against **sin** which brings about what the Bible calls **propitiation**.”² **Propitiation** (*hilasmos*) is the “averting of wrath by means of an appropriate transaction or sacrifice.”³ It is the satisfaction of violated justice. Stott adds additional insight:

“It is God Himself Who in Holy wrath needs to be propitiated, God Himself Who in holy love understood to do the **propitiating**, and God Himself Who in the Person of His Son dies for the **propitiation** of our **sins**.”⁴

“God took his own loving initiative to appease his own righteous anger...”⁵ **Propitiation** is God’s responding in mercy when we are due His wrath. Note 1 John 4:10 in this regard:

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The courtroom judge has every right to punish the lawmaker for his wrongdoing, but instead his response is one of mercy, personally satisfying the demand of his own court. It is as if the judge himself is calling off the officer who justifiably is handcuffing the lawmaker. First John 2:2 puts it this way:

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

VII. REDEMPTION

Not only is man born into and manifesting *sin*, but the Scriptures also teach that he is in bondage to *sin*—and in desperate need of being bought out of his bondage! The Greek term used in this verse for *redemption* (*agorazo*) means “to buy in the marketplace; to purchase.” *Redemption*, then, is a beautiful picture of Christ’s buying my freedom from my bondage to *sin*. *Agorazo* is God’s act “to set free by the payment of a price.” Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul chose an analogous word to communicate vividly and powerfully in and from a decadent Roman slave-market world. Additionally and particularly important in terms of application implied using this word, as well as throughout the book of Romans, chapter 6, is this idea:

Divine ownership resulted
when God purchased me out
of the slave market of *sin*.

Yes, the believer is bought with a price and set free from *sin*, but as denoted by Paul’s choice of words, he becomes simultaneously a *slave* to his new owner and master! Morris’s statement is so very apropos:

Believers are not bought by Christ into a liberty of selfish ease. Rather since they have been bought by God at a terrible cost, they have become God’s slaves, to do His will.⁶

This *profound, profound, profound* insight and understanding of my salvation must motivate me to the highest level of obedience and intensity relative to every assignment my Master gives me! It’s all about pleasing my Master—the One Who paid a huge price to *redeem* me from an otherwise horrible existence of bondage to *sin*!

"How can I say thanks
 For the things You have done for me
 Things so undeserved
 Yet You gave to prove Your love for me.
 The voices of a million angels
 Could not express my gratitude.
 All that I am and ever hope to be,
 I owe it all to Thee!"

is the most appropriate response as depicted by the late Andrae Edward Crouch.⁷

Paul states and admonishes believers with this same weighty sense of understanding, identity, being and purpose when he succinctly writes in 1 Corinthians 6:20:

For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

As the lawmaker begins to follow the judge out of the courtroom and senses the reality of his liberation from his bondage to *sin*, he suddenly sobers, realizing his deep sense of gratitude and ensuing obligation. What a debt he owes the loving judge! Romans 6:18 underscores and crystalizes the unavoidable conclusion of all *redeemed* persons:

And having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Most American believers vastly overlook this huge theological insight. In thinking their salvation is a ticket to selfish fulfillments, they miss what *redemption* really means: becoming an indentured *slave* assigned with the task of helping to fulfill the Great Commission. Divine purchase and ownership must greatly impact and govern the direction of your life and mine in terms of what we do with our time, talent, and treasure post-salvation.

VIII. RECONCILIATION

When someone is *redeemed* or bought out of the in bondage-to-*sin* marketplace, he is simultaneously being *reconciled* (*katallasso*), i.e., being brought back and realigned with God (as was mankind's standing prior to the Fall into *sin* per Genesis 3). Throughout Scripture the unsaved man is called an "enemy of God," bespeaking man's latent hostility toward his Creator that both perpetuated and resulted from the Fall. The classic sermon

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God preached by one of the world's foremost Christian thinkers of all times, America's Jonathan Edwards, is an apt summary title of biblical pronouncement. The Bible is clear; enmity exists between God and man, and there is a need for the two to be **reconciled**.

It is interesting to note that in the same verse or near every major reference to **reconciliation** in the NT, God's wrath is mentioned. My point is, when you are **reconciled** to God, you are delivered from the wrath of God and into the peace of God; you pass from one place to the other! **Reconciliation** occurs when God takes the initiative to absolve the alienation, from enmity to amity via His **substitutionary, atoning, propitiatory, redeeming** purchase—Christ's **reconciling** payment on the cross!

This theological realignment is so profound that Paul states in Romans 5:11 and 5:10 (in reverse order to punctuate what I am emphasizing) that such will create an overwhelming response in the heart of the believer:

We also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

You get the idea. What wonderful, profound passages! In view of our ongoing, analogous illustration, the lawmaker, seeing all that the courtroom judge has done for him based on absolutely no merit of his own, recognizes he has been set free from his infractions and resultant bondage. Instead of a justifiable punishment for his recorded infractions, to his sheer amazement he has been made a *friend* of the judge—all by the judge's endearing hand of grace!

The righteous judge is beckoning for the lawmaker to follow him as he once again instructs the peace officer holding the handcuffs to back off. The lawmaker's heartfelt gratitude cannot help but congeal into desires of responsive, appreciative dutifulness as he follows the gracious and merciful judge from the courtroom. Second Corinthians 5:19 encapsulates the **redeemed** and **reconciled** prisoner's spirit:

Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them.

IX. REGENERATION

In Titus 3:5–6 Paul uses this word when describing salvation:

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Regeneration is an act instantly done and completed by God upon the sinner’s willful desire to turn from his *sin* and respond in *faith* to the gift of salvation offered by Christ. Herein God imparts life to the one who believes. NT terms such as *brought forth* (James 1:18); *made alive* (Ephesians 2:5), and a *new creature* (2 Corinthians 5:17) denote what happens in *regeneration*. Jesus told Nicodemus about this new birth in John 3:3, which says, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” In a summary of synonyms, the idea of *regeneration* is referred to as the following throughout the NT:

Biblical Synonyms for Regeneration

Brought Forth.....	James 1:18
Made Alive	Ephesians 2:5
New Creature	2 Corinthians 5:17
Being Born Again	John 3:3
Spiritual Revivification	Ephesians 2:4–6
Re-Creation	Ephesians 2:10
Circumcision of the Heart	Colossians 2:11
Washing from Former Sins	Ephesians 5:26
New Spiritual Birth.....	John 1:13

Regeneration is an all-encompassing “view from the blimp,” if you will, beneficial summation of salvation. This specifically spiritual, distinct work of God aimed at the inner man—the heart, his soul—transforms the

heart. In terms of our analogy, the biblical meaning of **regeneration** can be equated to the judge's providing the lawmaker with a right standing, as well as expunging and forever sealing all misdemeanors and felonies from his record. Second Corinthians 5:17 summarizes this idea:

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

X. ADOPTION

As if the previous terms were not enough of an illustration of *so great a salvation*, let's now examine the meaning of the biblical word **adoption** (*huiiothesia*). In this Roman custom and legal ceremony, the **adopted** was given all the rights of a natural-born member of the family; the word literally means, "placing as a son." It is the giving of place and condition of a son to someone to whom it did not belong. It is the judicial bestowal of a new status. Paul put it this way to the believers at the Church of Ephesus:

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will (Ephesians 1:5).

Not only does the gracious judge give the lawmaker a "hall pass" and remove the old things from his record, but he also decides to go a step further. Unbelievably, he **adopts** him, taking the lawmaker into his home—bestowing upon him all the rights and privileges reserved for natural-born members of his household! This bestowal is precisely what Jesus has done in a spiritual sense to all believers! States Paul to the Church at Rome regarding the **adopted**:

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15).

XI. JUSTIFICATION

Justification is the legal act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous based on the **substitutionary, atoning, propitiatory, redeeming, reconciling, regenerating, adoptive** work of Christ. It is that "act of God whereby He acquits the Gospel believer of the divine verdict of condemnation and declares him to be righteous."⁸ Importantly, justification is more than a pronouncement of innocence; it is a declaration of

righteousness. The believer is now in good standing with God, and God treats him accordingly! States Paul in this regard to the church at Corinth:

Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Relative to our illustration, this verse is best understood as the courtroom judge's going to the public square and proclaiming the lawmaker as his close friend—bequeathing to him the judge's own righteousness, character and credibility! Paul put it this way to the church at Rome:

Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus (3:24).

XII. SUMMARY: MAN'S RESPONSE

All these biblical descriptors of salvation vividly illustrate the tremendous love, grace, and mercy that God bestows in *converting* the dead-as-a-doornail soul of an individual (cf. Ephesians 2:1–10). Indeed, it is a *great salvation* (Hebrews 2:3). These truths raise the question: *what need be our response to God's offer?*

How do we enact God's *regeneration* in our life? What follows are some passages from Scripture that inform us as to what God specifically expects in response.

A. REPENTANCE

In Luke 15:7 Jesus states:

"I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine [seemingly] righteous persons who [mistakenly think they] need no repentance."

Repentance means a person has a change of intellect, emotion and will. As in the parable of the lost son in Luke 15:21, he must come to the end of the deification of self: *“Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy....”* **Repentance**, then, is an attitude fraught with humility and contrition that is impossible to obtain unless God gifts a person with it. Second Timothy 2:25 states this fact very clearly:

If perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.

Repentance, then, is also a gift from God. When God does grant **repentance**, the benefits are unsurpassed in this life. In Peter’s sermon recorded in Acts 3, he states it this way: *“Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord”* (v. 19). Luke (13:3–5) states the same truth in the opposite way, that those who do not **repent** will not be saved:

“I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (v. 3).

B. FAITH

In Hebrews 11:6 the author states,

Without faith it is impossible to please Him.

“As **repentance** is the one side of the coin of **conversion**, turning from one’s **sin**, so **faith** is the other side, laying hold upon the promises and the work of Christ.”⁹ **Faith**, then, is the total commitment of oneself to Christ, the volitional acceptance of God’s gracious offer, the affirmation of the human heart to the work of God previously described herein. **Faith** is the means by which Christ and His work are appropriated.

Faith in and of itself does not save; rather,
it is the channel through which God’s
enactment of His gift of grace saves me.

Follow what I mean by this statement. The above fact is why I do not care for the common label “The **Faith** Community.” In its politeness and

political correctness, the label is too broad and misleading, tending to engender the idea that all people of *faith* are okay with God. Certainly, it is possible to have *faith* in a *wrong* understanding or *no* understanding at all concerning the biblical descriptors of true saving *faith* as illuminated in and by this study. This distinction of *God's grace* being what saves me via my acceding *faith* is made clear by Paul in Ephesians 2:8:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.

We are saved *by the grace of God*. This grace is enacted via the conduit of believing by *faith* alone in the Author of Scripture Who therein has revealed the cogent elements of salvation to us to believe in.

C. CONVERSION

In Acts 26:20 Paul is explaining salvation to King Agrippa, stating the following:

That they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

Conversion means “to turn toward, turn around; to change one’s mind and behavior.” In Acts 26:20, Paul is evidencing that true salvation is always characterized by a person’s turning around. A person who has no desire to turn around relative to *sinful* ways is not really saved. Scripture explains **conversion** both in terms of man’s responsibility to turn, or be **converted**, and God’s turning or **converting** of a man. Relative to the former, Isaiah writes in 55:6–7:

Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him... He will abundantly pardon.

And to the latter point of God’s responsibility to **convert**, Peter preached in Acts 3:26:

“God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.”

Accordingly, **conversion** (Acts: 15:3) is both a work of God and an act of man that has tremendous implications:

Conversion leads to a fundamental change of the whole life. It receives a new outlook and objective. ... [I]t involves a complete transformation of his existence under the influence of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

Conversion is a turning of the intellect, emotion and will toward God. Paul calls **conversion** “turning to God” in 1 Thessalonians 1:9:

And how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.

D. LORDSHIP

Paul states to the church at Rome the need to understand in Whom *specifically* you are placing your **faith** or to Whom you are **converting**. Romans 10:9 states in this regard: *If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*

The Greek word translated **Lord** (*kurios*), which is used 747 times in the New Testament, means “master, king, or boss.”

When a person comes to Jesus for
salvation, he or she must come to the
Jesus described in Scripture in order to be
saved. The Jesus of Scripture is the **Lord**.

A person is not saved unless he or she believes in the **Lord** Jesus Christ. **Repentance**, **faith**, and **conversion** all carry with them the idea that we must relinquish control of our life to Christ’s **lordship**; it is the surrender of our will for that of another. Akin to the earlier understanding of **adoption** in this study, Jesus Christ becomes our new boss, and we gratefully become His **slave**! If we don’t sober to that reality as we contemplate salvation, then we might be settling for “easy believism,” i.e., receiving a Jesus of our own making or to our own liking. The result would be to delude ourselves into thinking we have accepted Jesus—and that we are saved—when in reality we are not. Instead, we have received a Jesus of our own definition

versus the One defined in Scripture and history. Is it our authority that defines who Jesus is or is it Jesus' authority Who defines Who He is? In 2 Corinthians 11:4, Paul was concerned for the Corinthian church relative to this very thing: that they had received another Jesus—one that he had not preached to them.

**A *repentant* heart that gladly desires
a new **Lord** is characteristic of a true,
real **conversion** of the soul.**

The truly *converted* will gladly want to make Christ's agenda their agenda! Those who are believing in *another Jesus* are always characterized by a lack of obedience to Jesus' commands; they cling to their own way of doing things. This disregard then is a telltale sign of true or false *conversion: lordship*. Jesus stated in Mark 8:34–35 this same heartfelt condition as to what connotes true saving *faith*:

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.”

E. COMING TO CHRIST

The Apostle John and the Apostle Paul were noticeably clear in their respective Gospel (John 1:12) and Epistles (Ephesians 1:13) regarding the need for a contrite heart to plead for God's salvation:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.

Notice the caveat to being *sealed* in the Holy Spirit: it is *belief* or receiving the *message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation*. Begging God can

and should be done through prayer, which is speaking to Him. Pray the following prayer today if it represents the desire of your heart:

“**Lord** Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner in need of a new boss. I **repent** of being the god of my own life and plead with You to save me. I welcome You into my life as my **Lord** and Savior. I need the empowering of Your Holy Spirit to **convert** me into the person You want me to be. Thank You for hearing my prayer and coming into my life.”

Having studied these descriptors of salvation and the biblical response, my prayer is this: that if you have not asked Jesus into your heart, your contemplation will prove to be like King Agrippa’s after Paul reasoned with him in Acts 26:28:

Agrippa replied to Paul, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.”

I trust that God will use this study to speak to your heart in a profound way about salvation that is found in Jesus Christ alone. Amen!

1. Charles M. Horne, *The Doctrine of Salvation* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2021), 91.
2. Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 210.
3. Everette Falconer Harrison, G.W. Bromiley, Carl F.H. Henry, *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
4. John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Westmont, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 172.
5. Stott, 172.
6. Morris, 54.
7. Andrae Crouch, “My Tribute,” 1971, track 9 in *Keep on Singin’* (Uppsala, Sweden: Pilot Music AB), Vinyl LP.
8. Floyd H. Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology: Examining the Great Doctrines of the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic and Professional, 2013), 350.
9. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Doctrine* (Ada, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2015), 310.
10. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 1:355.

Is Salvation by Faith Alone?

In this study I would like to dig into one of the most important passages in the entire Bible. It will lend great light on the historic arguments regarding the doctrine of salvation: is justification from our sin accomplished by *faith* alone, or is something needed in addition? This subject has been a controversial one throughout Church history and remains so today. What do you believe regarding how a person is saved and why?

I. INTRODUCTION

As we survey the Scriptures in pursuit of an answer to what they teach regarding our salvation, I will rely on basic hermeneutic principles of interpretation. What do I mean by that? What are hermeneutic principles? Let me draw some parallels. Whereas pilots, doctors, and lawyers follow strict procedures to properly execute the disciplines of their profession, so must the interpreter of a document. Whereas the former disciplines are aeronautics, medicine, and law respectively, the latter is that of interpretive rules or hermeneutics.

One of the most basic, fundamental rules of hermeneutics in the study of the Bible is the principle known as *analogia scriptura*. Lest I quickly lose you, that means the student must assume that a document does not contradict itself, unless it proves itself contradictory. The interpreter must assume the document is innocent until proven guilty of contradiction. God's Word does not contradict itself is the presupposition premise; the Bible is in total

harmony without contradiction or conflict. Another way of stating *analogia scriptura* is that Scripture interprets Scripture. Further understood, the more specific and/or easier-to-understand passages of wide concurrence must inform and interpret the less specific or understood passages. Again, the benefit of the doubt is always on the side of the document's integrity and harmony until proven internally contrary.

Those principles need to guide our analysis in pursuit of the answer to our proposed question: *Is salvation by **faith** alone in Christ alone?* Can the interpreter of Scripture harmonize every passage in the Bible that pertains to this subject? I think you will see that the answer to that question is yes! The few passages that seem to suggest that salvation is by *faith* plus works, in fact, are in harmony with the overwhelming number of passages that state salvation is by *faith* alone in Christ alone. Having prefaced this study with this explanation, let us examine Ephesians 2:8–9, our primary passage for this week.

II. THE SUBJECT

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Without wading into the complex details of the Greek language structure of this passage and losing you before making conclusions, please allow me to paraphrase it at the beginning of this study. What the Apostle Paul is communicating to the believers at the church in Ephesus is this: *For by grace you have been saved through faith* (and even that *faith* is not from yourselves; it, too, is the gift of God); *not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

What Paul states to the Ephesians about the biblically revealed formula of salvation is in prose of classic contrast construction. Salvation is not based on man's efforts, but rather, on God's graciousness. As we shall examine in survey form throughout what follows, this is the singular answer, i.e., the *analogia scriptura* that resonates throughout all the pages of Scripture! Again, we can harmonize the several passages in the Bible that we might think are in seeming contradiction to this overwhelming singular voice of God's Word relative to this particular subject. This we will do under the fourth point of my outline titled "The Suspect."

III. THE SURVEY

The basis of salvation is a major doctrinal issue requiring essential clarity: this study is aimed at helping you to ascertain what you believe about your own salvation and if it squares with God's Word or not. What follows is a biblical survey of pertinent passages, allowing the compendium of analogous Scripture to speak for itself.

I will intentionally overwhelm you with the number of passages that essentially say the same thing. I know of no other way to make my point with as much persuasion.

Note my comments along the way that are intended to help you better understand what the passage is saying.

A. GENESIS 15:6

*Then he [Abraham] **believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.***

Here in the Old Testament (OT) is the formula of salvation. There is no mention of good works. Notwithstanding, years later Abraham was willing to offer Isaac, displaying the genuineness of his *faith* by his obedience to God (by his works). Important to our question of *Is salvation by faith alone in Christ alone?* it must be noted that Abraham's good works were not a part of God's pronouncement that Abraham was declaratively righteous in his standing before Him. Critically important, Abraham was reckoned righteous singularly based on *faith* (cf. James 2:20–23; Hebrews 11:17–19; Romans 4:3).

B. HABAKKUK 2:4

“Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith.”

One of the main emphases of this OT book is that the *proud* trust in themselves, their self-effort or works, whereas the humble live by *faith*, trusting in God. This simple biblical contrast surfaces repeatedly throughout the entire Bible.

C. MATTHEW 1:21

“She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

The name *Jesus* (*Jeshua* in Hebrew) actually means “Savior.” *Christ* (*Christos* in Greek) means “anointed one.” In essence, Jesus’ God-given name (cf. Luke 1:30–31) encompasses His God-anointed mission—to save people from their sins. Fundamentally expressed herein, salvation, then, is through a person, not a system. Jesus’ name itself implies that salvation is achieved by God’s doing versus man’s efforts.

D. MATTHEW 18:3–4

“Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

This Scripture is a beautiful characterization of salvation. Why? How does this relate to the question in the title of this week’s study? Children have no resources, accomplishments, or self-merit to offer God; rather, it is their helpless, dependent humility and trust that Jesus commends, warranting salvation.

E. MARK 1:14–15

Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

The two ingredients necessary for salvation listed by Jesus are *repent* and *believe in the gospel*. Important to note from other passages is this: both *repentance* and *belief* are in and of themselves gifts from God! Acts 11:18 evidences this truth: *When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."* God, then, is the One Who generates *repentance* in the heart of the individual. Note additionally 2 Timothy 2:25, with this idea in mind: *With gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.* Nowhere does Jesus mention human works as being a part of the salvation equation—even the act of *repentance* is born from above in the heart of the individual.

F. LUKE 6:20

And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."

Jesus' concern for the materially *poor* is one of Luke's favorite themes, but here Jesus is speaking about much more than physical poverty; He is speaking about spiritual poverty (cf. Matthew 5:3). An individual's personal bankruptcy—the admission that he is not able to save himself by his own good works—Jesus says, is a necessary precursor for salvation. Much to the contrary, human meritorious works portend an attitude of pride, not personal poverty. The *poor* in spirit are the ones who are saved, not the proud in spirit. Keep in mind our home passage at this point: Ephesians 2:8–9 concludes with *not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

G. LUKE 23:42–43

And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

The thief on the cross next to Jesus realized he had no possibility for eternal life except for and by God's immediate divine grace and intervention. The thief on the cross had no time to perform human works. In fact, it was impossible for him to perform human works, thus revealing the mind

of Jesus on the matter—good works were not required in Jesus’ granting salvation to the thief.

H. JOHN 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

In this all-familiar passage, the operative word for gaining eternal life is *believes*, not personal works.

I. ACTS 2:38

Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”

Herein is the first sermon preached after the ascension of Christ. Most important to gain from this passage is this: again, *repentance* is an essential ingredient relative to salvation. It means, “to turn about-face, or 180 degrees.” And again, per Acts 11:18 and 2 Timothy 2:25, *repentance* itself is a gift from God:

Think of the *faith* necessary for
salvation and the *repentance*
necessary for salvation as two sides of
the same coin: both are gifts from God.

After personal salvation is received by *faith* alone, a public identification with Christ through the waters of baptism results. Again, notice the omission of any prerequisite of personal works. Best understood both contextually and grammatically, this passage means that because of the forgiveness of your sins, you need to be baptized.

J. ROMANS 1:16–17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”

The word *salvation* (*soteria*) means “deliverance, preservation or rescue from danger and apprehension.” When rereading the passage, notice Who initiates and is responsible for this action: *it is the power of God* [not man] *for salvation*. Furthermore, the recipient’s only prerequisite to obtain salvation is belief; nowhere are personal meritorious works in view in this declarative statement pertaining to a person’s salvation. Summarily, *the righteousness of God is revealed*, or given to individuals, based on *faith*. Lastly, note that this passage closes by incorporating Habakkuk 2:4, the passage already examined: expressly displaying that Paul is also making his point by the use of *analogia scriptura*.

K. ROMANS 3:20

Because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

In the book of Romans, Paul is presenting God’s plan for salvation. In this particular portion of his presentation, he is arguing that the OT law was never intended to save someone—as though by keeping it or by performing human *works* a person might be found worthy in God’s eyes. Conversely, and per the passage that follows, he incorporates the OT law to make exactly the opposite point.

L. GALATIANS 3:24

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

Tutors in the time of Christ were strict disciplinarians, oftentimes slaves, who were assigned the responsibility of bringing up their master’s children. Kids longed for freedom from their *tutors*. Similar to the way a *tutor* uses discipline, God is using the law to show us our sin and escort us to Christ.

The intent of the law in both the OT and the NT was never to save; rather, it brightly illuminates our failure to be able to live up to it and, therefore, our need for a Savior.

With the personal realization that I am incapable of keeping it (see Matthew 5), the law points me to Christ for salvation. Clearly then, justification is by *faith*, not by the law or personal works.

M. ROMANS 3:24

Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

The word for *justified* in Greek means “to declare righteous.” The passage expressly states that such a declaration is both a *gift* and the *gift ... in Christ Jesus*. Further, the Greek word for *redemption*, which derives its meaning from the slave market, meant “to pay the necessary ransom in order to assure a slave’s freedom.” This powerful picture informs the biblical doctrine of salvation! Putting the two words together clearly indicates that salvation is a *gift* by and from the *grace* of God to you! Human works are not evident anywhere in this profoundly insightful passage on the subject.

N. ROMANS 5:1

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Greek word for *having been justified* is in the perfect tense, which means something that happened in the past and has an ongoing impact in the present or future. Accordingly, the true believer’s justification by *faith* assures him of ongoing *peace with God*, i.e., the individual is no longer at war or enmity with God. Scripture makes no mention of God’s intending some kind of ongoing insecurity regarding the eternal destination of the believer. At the point of placing our *faith* in Christ, i.e., that point in time when he receives Christ and is *justified*, from there on forward exists

a continuing assurance of salvation per this passage (and many others!). In contrast, if the economy of salvation were at all dependent on human works, and at some point, those human works were less than sufficient—well, it is quite easy to see why the believer’s eternal security would never be assured in his or her mind. Such is not the case in an economy that is totally and completely based on the grace of God.

O. 1 CORINTHIANS 1:21

God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

Without spending space to fully explain the context of this passage, the message of the Gospel is so simple that those who are “worldly wise” reason it to be *foolishness*. That some are too proud to accept the simplicity of the Gospel underscores God’s true, simple husbandry of salvation—that being by *faith* alone: ***God is well-pleased ... to save those who believe.*** Even the worst of sinners in God’s economy can still be saved near the end of their lives (as illustrated previously by the thief on the cross) because salvation is all about God’s doing it, not man’s!

P. 1 CORINTHIANS 2:2

For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

Paul is candidly bearing his soul in this passage and affirming his reliance on God to communicate accurately His unadulterated Gospel through him. Note from Paul’s perspective that there is no big formula for achieving salvation; he ***determined to know nothing else.*** In his preaching and teaching, there is nothing else for him to say but this! There is no long list of things a person must do or check off in order to be saved! Salvation is all about what Christ did on our behalf. It is simple!

Q. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:19

Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Reconciling is the Greek word *katallasso*, which denotes the idea we use when balancing our checkbook: “to change or bring back in line.” Per this passage, **God... in Christ was** (and is!) doing this action of **reconciling**. **Trespases** (*paraptoma*) denotes “a deviation from uprightness and truth, having gone the wrong direction.” In other words, **Christ** alone is the One Who brought us back in line from our wrong direction! Again, note the recipe of salvation: God is the One Who brings us in line and Who forgives all our **trespases**! Such is not achieved by our personal acts of merit!

R. 2 CORINTHIANS 11:3–4

But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached ... or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.

One of Paul’s biggest concerns for the church at Corinth was the later arrival (after he had established the church and departed) of false teachers who then preached a false doctrine of salvation. Even more, he states that he is concerned that the congregation would not discern the soteriological erosion, i.e., that they might bear in their soul such heresy! This passage reveals the primacy and solemnity of getting the Gospel right!

Similarly concerned regarding false teachers of the Gospel, Paul said to the Galatian believers in Galatians 1:6–9,

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

These passages serve to underscore what constitutes the Gospel—that salvation is by **faith alone** in **Christ alone**—and are overwhelmingly important! We must correctly understand the doctrine of salvation in order to be saved!

S. GALATIANS 2:16

“Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.”

Similar to the other Galatians passages previously listed, this one becomes self-explanatory in light of what we have already studied. It plainly underscores the falsity of a works-based soteriology.

T. GALATIANS 3:11, 13

Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, ... Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law.

People either trust in works righteousness, or they are trusting in Christ's righteousness to save themselves. What this passage is declaring is that you are not trusting in Christ at all if in any part, you are trusting in yourself. If that is the case, then Christ's death on the cross was insufficient. Galatians 2:21 puts it this way: *“I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”*

Justification by the law versus justification by **faith** are mutually exclusive currencies. There is no mixing of the two in God's eyes.

U. PHILIPPIANS 3:9

And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.

This passage is a great summary of all that we have been learning. A person can obtain great pride through the performance of good works,

religious activity, rituals, and ceremonies—amassing a self-gained righteousness. Paul contrasts that herein with self-surrendering acceptance of *Christ's* imputed *righteousness*. Whereas the former person may be found in Him or has salvation, the other person, implied by the contrast, does not.

V. COLOSSIANS 1:13–14

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The word *delivered* (*rhuomai*) in the Greek means “to draw to oneself from bondage; to rescue.” In salvation, God draws us out of bondage to Himself. *He delivers, He rescues, and He transfers*—we do not.

W. 1 THESSALONIANS 1:10

That is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

Jesus rescues us from the eternal *wrath to come*, i.e., hell. Like all the other passages we have examined, there is no mention of delivering self.

X. 2 THESSALONIANS 2:13

God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation.

This insight into salvation is similar to that of Ephesians 1:4: *Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.* This foretells who plays what role in salvation. If God foreordained salvation long before (and these passages state that in no unmistakable terms), then you cannot infer that salvation is something you decided to achieve on your own, i.e., self-works based. To infer that a person gains heaven by self-effort is to negate and gut the clarion declaration of these passages.

Y. 1 TIMOTHY 1:15

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Evidently, the early Church had reduced important doctrinal truths into simple statements. Paul affirms this traditional Church summary as an accurate saying, which summarizes the meat of the Gospel. Perhaps even more important to note in this passage is Scripture's preeminent authority over Church traditions (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8). Accordingly:

When conflict exists between Scripture
and tradition—be it in the personal,
familial, or ecclesiastical realm,
soteriological or otherwise—Scripture
must be the final authority and arbitrator.

The fact that *Christ ... saves sinners* must negate and supersede any other traditions to the contrary.

Z. 2 TIMOTHY 1:8–9

But join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.

Again, God's salvation has nothing to do with present personal merit.

AA. TITUS 2:13–14

Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

Christ is the One Who *gave*, Who *redeems*, Who *purifies*, Who *possesses*, and Who, as a result, makes us *zealous* to do good deeds. Why do we do *good deeds*? Not to be saved but because of *so great a salvation*! The

resulting good deeds mentioned at the end are clearly the by-product—not the means of salvation. Hebrews 2:3 calls this *so great a salvation!*

AB. PHILEMON

Philemon is only one chapter long, and the whole of the book illustrates forgiveness. Onesimus was a slave owned by Philemon (v. 16). In that Onesimus had wronged his master (v. 15), Paul writes to Philemon, asking him to charge anything that Onesimus may have done to Philemon to Paul's account (v. 18). In so doing, Paul mentions to Philemon that Philemon himself had come to Christ through Paul—and therefore owes Paul his very life (v. 19)! Herein lies a magnificent similitude illustrating the core of our study: Paul chose to use himself as the payment for Onesimus' trespasses. Paul himself reconciles Onesimus' account with Philemon. The point is this: Onesimus had nothing to do with it! Paul hoped that having paid for the sins of Onesimus, Onesimus would stay on in his newfound liberty and minister the Gospel with him (v. 13). Onesimus' resulting good deeds are motivated from a heart of gratitude and thankfulness. One hymn writer best sums up this epistle's message in this way, "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe."

AC. HEBREWS 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

This chapter in the book of Hebrews is the "*Faith* Hall of Fame," containing men and women who pleased God. How? They pleased Him by humble, dependent *faith*, not arrogant self-righteousness. As illustrated by the many people in this chapter, God's basis of operation with His creation is *faith*, not works.

AD. 1 PETER 1:3–5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance

which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith.

This beautiful, pregnant passage contains many of the salvific actions of God as previously investigated in this study. What a beautiful portrayal of the security of the believer! Again, the security of the believer is not dependent upon human works.

AE. 2 PETER 1:3

Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. Note again the sufficiency of Christ relative to our salvation. Salvation is a result of *His divine power*, which accomplishes *everything*.

AF. 1 JOHN 5:11–13

And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

These are some of my favorite verses in the entire Bible. They are cut and dried. God wants you to know whether or not you have *eternal life* with Him. He does not want you to have to guess about your eternal destiny all through life! Notice that this passage says *so that you may know*. Knowing you have *eternal life* is based solely on whether or not you *have the Son*—not human works.

AG. JUDE 3

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

The term *the faith* refers to the composite of salvation truth contained throughout all of the Scripture (cf. Galatians 1:23; Ephesians 4:5, 13;

Philippians 1:27; 1 Timothy 4:1) as we have thoroughly examined in this study. The verse gives insight into the fact that true believers must be willing to **contend** (*epagonizomai*), i.e., “confront, attack, and battle,” those who would adulterate or dilute this analogous tenet throughout biblical soteriology. That is to more than suggest that the biblical formula for salvation must be adhered to, and theological digression into a works-based soteriology is totally unacceptable to God! Scripture does not suggest that God has much wiggle room on the doctrine of salvation, my friend. Additionally, this verse states that the Gospel, as given in the Scripture, is complete. It is ***once for all delivered to the saints***. Scriptures have no more additions, redefinitions, or differing interpretations coming from some other later, outside extrabiblical source. Delivered or handed down by the apostles and prophets in their respective eras, Scripture is today complete and resolved on soteriology (as on all other Bible doctrines).

AH. REVELATION 17:8

“And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder.”

The redeemed are known by God from the foundation of the world and are written in His Book of Life. Again, this verse illustrates God’s doing versus man’s in salvation.

As you can see by our lengthy yet persuasive survey, the Scriptures are analogous on the fact that ***For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast***. All man must do is respond in ***faith***, which includes ***repenting*** of sin and receiving Jesus Christ’s work on his or her behalf—thereby receiving God’s free gift of salvation (cf. John 1:12; Ephesians 1:13).

To suggest that salvation be otherwise is a very dangerous proposition, one in direct contradiction to the whole counsel of God.

Having only scratched the biblical surface of soteriology, but enough to garner the homogeneity of its teaching, let us now move to examine other passages often used to teach a contrary form of salvation. I will comment on each.

IV. THE SUSPECT

A. JAMES 2:26

Faith without works is dead.

The book of James addresses phony *faith* as does Matthew 7:21, wherein Jesus states “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.*” How is anyone to ascertain true *faith* from phony *faith* according to the Bible? Matthew 7:20 answers, “*You will know them by their fruits.*” James, in his own way of expressing himself, is making the same point: *faith* that has no accompanying outward manifestations is fraudulent. Good works always accompany genuine saving *faith*, says James. In Genesis 22, Abraham was willing to offer Isaac as an expression of his genuine *faith*. This external manifestation of obedience directly related to his internal salvation as recorded in Genesis 15 (one of the first passages we examined). James’ epistle has been greatly misunderstood throughout church history (including the Reformation period), as if to think what it taught contradicted salvation by *faith* alone. Rather, the book emphasizes the fact that outward manifestations—or personal meritorious works—always accompany genuine saving *faith*. Conversely, this passage does not at all mean that *faith* must have works in addition in order to achieve salvation. That would contradict the remainder of Scripture as we have clearly seen. It would violate the hermeneutical principle of *analogia scriptura*. To look at it another way, if God wanted to warn us about phony *faith*, how else could He have said it without our possible misunderstanding of His intent?

B. MATTHEW 25:45–46

“He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these [feeding the hungry, clothing the needy, taking

care of the sick and visiting prisoners], *you did not do it to Me.* *These will go away into everlasting punishment.*"

In this lengthy passage, there is seeming textual evidence for the insecurity of salvation. Supposedly, this text evidences the fact that we must continue to perform good works right up until the end of our life in order to be sure about obtaining everlasting life. The problem with this understanding stems from misinterpreting the earlier part of the passage. If we assume that feeding the hungry, clothing the needy, taking care of the sick, and visiting prisoners are meritorious acts (in verses 35 and 36) which we need to perform for salvation, then the aforesaid conclusion would be fitting. However, if the acts listed are the fruit stemming from God's gift of salvation, then our interpretation of the concluding verses is entirely different. The latter is the case because verse 34 states, "*Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" That is, the deeds listed are not God's basis for our entering eternal life; *rather, they are the fruits being manifest relative to God's bestowal of grace*—those "*blessed of My Father.*" Accordingly, the later non-present fruit only serves to indicate that the person lacked saving *faith* in the first place. Those with no fruit do not possess saving *faith*: "*You will know them by their fruits*" (Matthew 7:16). Moreover, those with no saving *faith* do not possess justification for their sin. Lastly, those with no justification of sin do not possess eternal security, and "*will go away into everlasting punishment.*" This simple understanding of this seemingly problematic passage, although somewhat hard to explain herein, can certainly be understood as analogous with the remainder of Scripture.

C. 1 JOHN 2:9

The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.

Attempts to interpret this passage might indicate that salvation has no assurances. Such an interpretation, however, precludes a working understanding of the Greek language, specifically tenses. Greek language tenses are more definitive and precise than are those of English. Herein the word *hates* is in the present tense, indicative mood, meaning an ongoing, continuous habitual action. Furthermore, like some of the other passages we have examined, the context of this one relates to detecting phonies. Therefore,

the meaning of this passage goes something like this: “The one who says he is in the light and yet continually, habitually *hates* his brother isn’t really saved.” After all, again, “*You will know them by their fruits*” (Matthew 7:20). Again, repeatedly, accompanying true saving *faith* is always obedience to Christ. Lastly, note that a working knowledge of the Greek present tense is important to understanding all of John’s epistles.

D. 1 CORINTHIANS 9:27

But I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Some have used this passage to indicate that Paul was personally unsure about his eternal security. The context pertains not to that, however, but to Paul’s ministering to others. Specifically, earlier in verses 19 and 22, he talks about his desire to win others to Christ. In so doing, he disciplines his physical body and his flesh to avoid *disqualification* after *preaching* and winning others to Christ. More precisely, he could be talking about sexual sins, which would definitely disqualify someone from a preaching ministry (cf. Psalm 101:6; Proverbs 6:33; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). In summary, contextually his comments do not relate to his eternal security but rather his continuing in ministry; preaching, not salvation, is the subject of the passage. To interpret the passage as soteriological creates a huge Pauline contradiction in theology—in light of all else Paul taught in this previous survey.

E. PHILIPPIANS 2:12

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

The tense of the Greek verb *work out* has the idea of “to continue *working* to bring something to fulfillment or completion.” Verse 13 goes on to say, *for it is God who is* [continually] *at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure*. Paul instructs the believers in the church of Philippi to continue to submit their lives to God—as He is working on them—and to do so with a continuing attitude of *fear and trembling*. That means a healthy fear of not ever wanting to offend God, coupled with

awesome respect for the One Who saved you. This passage clearly does not mean working to attain salvation; otherwise, Paul would not mention that God was *working* in them in the same space. The context of this passage relates to the doctrine of sanctification, which is post-salvation, not justification itself.

F. MATTHEW 26:27-28

And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."

This passage raises the additional related question: is communion salvific or symbolic? Does a person have to receive communion or continue to receive communion in order to be saved or maintain being saved? Is communion a human work that must continually be performed in order to obtain salvation? 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 sheds light in answer to this question. Therein Paul interprets communion to be something believers do in remembrance of Him, *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes* (v. 26). Important to observe in and from this passage, neither Paul nor Jesus Christ say anything about communion's being salvific. Christ's actual blood, which He is referring to here, shed on the cross for our sins, is the specific agent of forgiveness. Biblically understood, communion symbolizes salvation and the forgiveness of sin thereafter—in a way similar to the way rings signify marriage thereafter. Communion and rings are responsive, not causal. Critically, Jesus was not saying that the bread and the wine were literally His body and His blood; rather, they are symbols of remembrance. The cup of wine was not Jesus' actual blood any more than Jesus was an actual lamb, a door, or a vine, even though He is figuratively called such in John 1:29, 10:7, and 15:5. All are symbols conveying important spiritual truths. Communion is a matter of obedience for the believer post salvation, not a causal ingredient of it.

V. THE SUMMARY

Does Scripture teach that salvation is by *faith* alone in Christ alone? Yes. In addition, it also teaches that true saving *faith* is always characterized and accompanied by good works.

Good works do not lead to
salvation; rather, they are
the products of salvation.

The doctrine of salvation is very important because it is the essence of the Gospel—that which people rely on relative to their eternal destiny. Put another way, for the spiritual leader to get this wrong means he or she could be leading others to hell. This is why the Word says, *Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment* (James 3:1). Furthermore, Galatians 1:8–9 is worth stating again: if anyone *should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!* The word for *accursed* is *anathema*, meaning “the devotion of someone to destruction in eternal hell” (cf. Romans 9:3; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 16:22). The Bible condemns false teachers to hell.

Later, in the life of the church at Ephesus, Paul would tell Timothy the pastor, *Remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines* (1 Timothy 1:3). Paul was deeply concerned that, *The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths* (2 Timothy 4:3–4). Indeed, that had happened (cf. 1:20) by the time he wrote 1 Timothy. Accordingly, Timothy was to be about *preach[ing] the word* (4:2). He was to *reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction* in this specific regard. Additionally, much of Peter’s second epistle and the second epistle to Corinth relate to the same problem of the false teaching of salvation.

Beloved, in the U.S. Capitol, this was a very serious matter in the past and remains so today! Teaching the Word—especially relative to the doctrine of salvation—is a grave and heavy responsibility. That is why I have gone so long in my notes in this study. We must get this right and not tolerate other “ministries” that err at this point! This is as serious as it gets!

My prayer is that this study will have caused you to contemplate and perhaps rethink your soteriology if need be. Determine who and/or what you are relying on for your salvation—God or yourself. Is your doctrine of

salvation squared away with all these copious Bible passages? Moreover, if you are relying on your own good deeds to get yourself to heaven, in whole or in part, then you need to *repent* of your sin of pride and ask Christ into your life today.

Should You Argue from the Bible in a Secular Capitol?

Over the years I have spent a considerable amount of time studying apologetical systems and evangelistic approaches in relation to political leaders. Should a Christian leader avoid using the Scriptures as his or her authority if others do not view the Word of God as authoritative? More largely, above and beyond evangelism, should the believer argue from the Bible in an increasingly secular Capitol relative to policy matters?

This study encompasses Paul's approach to persuasion when speaking to a secular audience as recorded in the book of Acts. Studying this passage will allow us to focus intently on this subject—and I should add up front that we will learn not one passage is inconsistent with what others teach about this subject throughout the whole of Scripture.

Keep in mind too that Paul's practice pertaining to this question led to at least one political leader's coming to Christ as a result (Acts 17:34).

I. INTRODUCTION

In Acts 17:22–31, Doctor Luke records one of the Apostle Paul's sermons. A study of this sermon proves quite fascinating as Paul reveals how he undertook the task of persuading nonbelievers with biblical truth. More specifically, herein we will witness the heralding of *kerygmatic* (“the act of publicly *proclaiming* the Gospel”) truths to Athenian secular philosophers or, to better clarify, ancient Greek ideologues. This passage of Scripture

is quite informative and therefore profoundly important in providing an exemplar and thesis for developing our own personal, foundational understanding of the biblically proper way to defend (cf. 1 Peter 3:15) and *proclaim* (cf. Colossians 1:28) eternal truths to nonbelievers.

An in-depth study of Acts 17 yields guidelines for communicating truth to the unregenerate.

This sermon reveals that the Apostle Paul's apologetical ("to give a defense") approach was presuppositional in nature. In other words, the sermon's content and results presuppose the absolute and final authority of Scripture in relation to his epistemological ("the philosophical inquiry into the nature, sources, limits and methods of gaining knowledge")¹ basis for argumentation. If Paul used Scripture as his basis in the first-century world to a secular audience, would it not follow that today's believers should use the Scriptures as their starting point and final authority for all reasoning, apologetical and evangelistic endeavors? I think so!

Why do I say Paul's sermon in Acts chapter 17 is presuppositional? Why do I say we should presuppose the authority of God's Word when we speak? Please peruse the following six-point outline to hopefully form similar convictions in your own heart.

II. THE ANALOGY OF SCRIPTURE

The time-honored principle of the analogy of Scripture in the grammatical-historical-normative approach to interpreting Scripture (hermeneutics) necessitates that the Bible (or any ancient book) is not internally contradictory until proven to be internally contradictory. In other words, every book and its author is innocent until proven guilty of contradicting itself. Still another way of saying this is, if God is characteristically *veracious* ("accurate and precise") and *immutable* ("not experiencing change or development"), and if *All Scripture is God-breathed* (*theopneustos*) (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16),

then because of the characteristic nature of God Himself, the Book He authored would not be internally contradictory! All 66 books of the Bible that are *inspired* (or better, *breathed*) by God, per His own testimony, contain an independent and interdependent integrity until proven otherwise. This underlying maxim of this *hermeneutical* (“the discipline of interpreting sacred texts”) principle is known as “the analogy of Scripture.”

At this point you are probably asking yourself, “How does this analogy of Scripture apply to the study?” I will tie these introductory remarks together in a moment. But first, notice what Paul states in Romans 1:18–20:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

The apostle is declaring that men know of God and that He is *evident to them*! However, even though He is *evident to them*, instead of acknowledging Him, they *suppress the truth*. This typical reaction is due to the fall of man and subsequent rebellion against God due to man’s inherent sin nature. Notice what John 3:19 states in this regard: “*The Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.*”

Paul’s recorded sermons in narrative, historical, chronological sections of the Bible (as in Acts 17) would in no way contradict that which he—through the *inspiration* of the Holy Spirit—penned in theological sections, such as in Romans 1:18–20. Important and related to the hermeneutical principle of the analogy of Scripture, narrative sections of the Bible (the book of Acts) should and do illustrate (in action) theological sections of God’s Word. In fact, thinking of Paul’s having any kind of personal integrity or serious believability if what he wrote in Romans 1 was not utilized principally and specifically in his preaching, such as in his Acts 17 sermon, is difficult.

All that to say, the literary critic or the person attempting to understand what the mean of Acts 17 must import the hermeneutical principle of the analogy of Scripture: what Paul means by his use of words in Acts 17 should be *analogous* (“resemblance in some particulars between things

otherwise unlike”)² to his writings elsewhere, e.g., Romans 1:18–20. The author should be deemed innocent of self-contradiction unless demonstrable *evidence* exists to the contrary. A brief illustration of this principle is the alignment of Romans 1:18–19 and Acts 17:22–23. In this Acts passage, Paul states that the Athenians were both *religious* as well as *ignorant*, which is similar to the context and meaning of Romans 1:18–19. Paul states that men *know of God*, i.e., they are *religious*, but they *suppress* this knowledge, i.e., they are culpably *ignorant*.

Furthermore, in passages of parallel meaning, interpretive rules, such as the analogy of Scripture, necessitate that the easier-to-understand passages help to aid in the clarification of the harder-to-understand passages so as not to contradict one another.

Therefore, Paul’s sermon in Acts 17 *must* be interpreted in the context of his teachings elsewhere, not only including Romans chapter 1, but also passages such as 1 Corinthians 1:17–25. The author should be given any benefit of doubt, versus the alternative of effacing his literary and nuclear integrity short of supporting empirical *evidence*. Summarily:

Acts 17 must be prejudged and interpreted by other Pauline passages.

We must assume Paul’s integrity of thought and belief from one book to another until proven otherwise. Said another way and in direct support of the argument I am about to make, Paul doesn’t herald one principle in one place and then another contradictory point somewhere else in his writings at a later date.

Now please allow me to tie all these explanatory notes together: in light of the analogy of Scripture, Paul’s Acts 17 sermon must carry with it the predisposition of presuppositionalism as taught by him in Romans chapter 1. This acknowledgment is critically important to the argument forthcoming in this Bible study (otherwise, I wouldn’t have used so much space making the point). One particular commentator of this sermon, Greg Bahnsen, has aptly and wonderfully summarized all I have said in much

tighter fashion regarding Paul's Acts 17 sermon: "Its doctrine is a reworking of thought in Romans transformed into missionary impulse."³

III. THE IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING CONTEXT OF THE PASSAGE

In the earlier geographic settings of the Acts of the Apostles, specifically chapter 17, Paul was in Thessalonica and Berea respectively. Of note is that in each of these two locations immediately prior to his arrival in Athens, Paul singularly utilized the Scriptures to present the Gospel. Notice Acts 17:2, relative to his proclamation in Thessalonica:

And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.

This passage indicates that *reasoning ... from the Scriptures* was not something Paul merely happened to decide to do in this one instance recorded in our home passage of Acts 17:22–31. Rather, what Paul did when he spoke in Athens was also *according to Paul's custom*. The word Luke uses here for *custom* (*etho*) means "to be accustomed to, or to be a part of." This same word is used elsewhere to describe Jesus' habit of going to the synagogue on the Sabbath to read (Luke 4:16) and His habit of teaching His followers (Mark 10:1). Paul's habit wrought from conviction was always to *reason from the Scriptures*.

Somewhat later in Acts 17:11, Paul is brought to Berea where it is said of the Jews that from Paul:

They received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

Once again, implicitly illustrated, Paul spoke from the *word*, the basis for making his declarations. It was not said of the Bereans that "they received Paul's philosophy" or "they received his thoughts." Rather, *They received the word....*

Upon arrival in Athens from Berea, Paul was on somewhat of a missionary furlough as he waited for Silas and Timothy to come and join him (vv. 15–16). During this time, he was provoked by all the idolatry in the city. His response? He *preached Jesus and the resurrection* (v. 18). Likened to Peter's sermon on the same subject in Acts 2, Paul undoubtedly spoke

not about Christianity's relation to Greek philosophy but about Christ's victory over death and sin (cf. Acts 15:36; 16:17, 31–32).

Nowhere in these passages prior to the Athenian sermon is there a trace of *evidence* suggesting that Paul played to the present positions of his listeners to relate to them philosophically and then subsequently reason apart from the Scriptures from that point forward. This is an important contextual distinction to make prior to interpreting his meaning at the beginning of the Athenian sermon, which at a first reading may seem to contradict the point of this paragraph.

IV. PAUL'S APPEAL TO CONSCIENCE (ACTS 17:22–23)

As the cultural center of the Greek world, Athens was home to the historical purveyors of Greek philosophy, including Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato. Accordingly, this sermon contains and is a confrontation between Christian doctrine and Greek philosophy expressed by one of Christianity's greatest spokesmen. Therefore, in a spiritual sense,

The setting is similar to a
presidential debate or a
championship in the sports world.

This is a clash of philosophical
titans in and of the ancient world.

Paul's sermon should be viewed as nothing less! Relative to this study, it is important to identify whether Paul utilized Greek thought as a launching point of common knowledge or utilized some other bridging devices to segue into a presentation of truth based solely on scriptural revelation. By way of application, how the believer is to approach philosophical paradigm clashes will be modeled for all would-be truth *proclaimers* throughout the coming centuries—and for you and me in the Capitol.

Acts 17:22–23 marks the beginning point of the sermon. After being hauled before the *Areopagus* (those who “controlled” Greek philosophy), Paul launches in. Relative to his earlier observations in the marketplaces, he states: ***“Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.”***

Paul’s opening remarks seemingly indicate his attempt to build common ground with his audience, as in making bridge-building statements and acknowledging the worthiness of some of their customs. But on closer investigation, such was not the case at all! First, the Greek word for ***very religious*** (*deisidaimonia*) can also be interpreted as “somewhat superstitious.” Thus, rather than his attempting to achieve camaraderie, more than likely his open remarks contained the beginning of a mild indictment of their ***suppression*** of that which they inherently knew. This meaning of *deisidaimonia* seems to be the most likely intent of Paul, given the fact that he goes on to say that they worship an ***UNKNOWN GOD ... in ignorance!*** Used prematurely in any conversation, these two word groupings together are hardly endearing. Paul’s earlier use then of *deisidaimonia* was not intended to be a befriending statement of endearment lest he come across as schizophrenic!

Secondly, to further add to this understanding of the passage, Paul is immediately emphasizing that the Greeks attested to some sort of theism as ***evidenced*** by their inscriptions on an altar, ***TO AN UNKNOWN GOD***. Evidencing every man’s internal theistic predilections throughout history is the fact that Paul says they ***worshipped***. Yet Paul says that which they sense a presence of they choose to ***ignore***. This understanding of what Paul meant by his choice and use of the word ***ignorance*** would be in keeping with the same way he uses the word in Ephesians 4:18:

Being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.

The word choice of ***ignorance*** (*agnoia*, also used by Paul in Acts 17:23) does not imply an intellectual deficiency, but rather one of ***culpability*** as Paul summarizes the Gentile mindset. Illustrating this difference is like a patrolman’s pulling a person over on the highway and asking, “Did you know you were speeding?” To honestly not know you were speeding (i.e.,

if your speedometer was broken) would indicate *ignorance* based on *information deficiency*. But to know deep down in your conscience that you were speeding and then communicating supposed *ignorance* is a totally different matter. Definitively the latter is culpable *ignorance*—a *suppression* of truth, lying to yourself and *blameworthy ignorance*.

This illustration reflects Paul's meaning per his word choice. Accordingly, right from the beginning, his Acts 17 vocabulary indicates he was asserting to his audience that they were *guilty of a pretext*, or to incorporate the synonymous meaning of *ignorance* as it is found in Ephesians 4:18, they possessed a *hardened heart*. Said in analogy to Paul's teaching in Romans 1, his opening salvo was heralding the fact that the Athenian philosophers were *suppressing* that which was *evident to them* (Romans 1:19) in their conscience.

Ernest Best, who has conducted intensive word studies on most every Greek word used by Paul in Ephesians states:

Ignorance seems to have a unique place over against knowledge of God ... ignorance, sin and unbelief are closely linked [by the author of Ephesians].

He continues,

[The interpretation of ignorance] expresses the same thought in another way as hardening of the heart.⁴

If Best's explanation is indeed the meaning of *ignorance*, then Paul's speech beginning with "You have a hard heart!" is hardly an appealing style. That method of communication doesn't seem to serve the objective of broad audience receptivity! In fact, Paul's courageously bold communication is empowered by none other than the Holy Spirit! Oh, for men like the Apostle Paul today in the Capitol: both bold and loving! (Cf. Proverbs 3:3.)

Paul's then mention of their *altar inscription*, given these previous insights, now takes on a whole different flavor, i.e., "You may say publicly that God is *unknown*, but deep down you know that isn't true."

The statement conveys Paul's conviction that the Athenian secularists were *suppressing* the truth about God—*truth that they knew inherently in*

their conscience! In a polite manner and without violating 1 Peter 3:15, Paul was communicating that their *ignorance* was *culpable*. Their placard, to the trained seasoned evangelist, proved to be prima-facie *evidence* for the existence of a *hardened heart*. Accordingly, Paul's delineation of thought in Acts 17 *exactly* parallels that which he expresses in Romans 1:19–20: *That which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them ... so that they are without excuse.*

The beginning of this sermon, which is crucial and revelatory, displays no evidentiary apologetical attempts apart from the primacy of the use of Scripture. Immediately modeled and illustrated by Paul, all within the introduction of the sermon, is a quick and aggressive “pulling out the rug” on man-invented Greek philosophy and epistemology. Stunningly, and in contrast to most presentations of truth today, within moments of beginning his address, Paul states (my paraphrase):

Therefore, what you have chosen to falsely worship because of your *suppressing*, hardened hearts, in stark contrast I authoritatively *proclaim* this to you....

Rather than build up slowly from some supposed common foundations between Greek philosophy and Christianity, Paul lovingly launches words that serve to uncover the listener's philosophical and theological impotence. Here then, in print, is an arresting argument (in this case related to the Gospel) supported singularly by and singularly reasoned from Scripture.

Lastly, Paul's stating *This I proclaim to you* relates to the conclusion of the first two verses in his sermon. The Greek word he is invoking, *kataggello*, is translated into the English word *proclaim*. This same Greek word is used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to the solemn authoritative proclamation of the Gospel based on Scripture (e.g., Acts 3:18; 1 Corinthians 9:14; Galatians 1:11–12).

In summary of the first two stanzas of his sermon, Paul has set forth an epistemological antithesis between the *ignorant*, autonomous, and independent bases of Greek philosophy and a God-given authority stemming from a God-given revelation of Himself and His incumbent truth.

How Can We Ever Be So Bold?

Paul knew that ultimately God chooses those who follow Christ. His preaching style and content can only be explained by understanding his resolved convictions relative to the truths of Ephesians 1:4–5.

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.

Paul knew what Jesus had said to the disciples. ***“You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you*** (John 15:16). In other words, Paul knew that ***“the sheep hear His voice, and he calls His own sheep by name and leads them out”*** (John 10:3). Accordingly, what the called-out ones in the audience of the Athenians were listening for (as is every person who wants to come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ today) was the proclamation of the Word of God (cf. John 1:1; Acts 17:34). Our approach to the Word of God, biblical apologetics, and evangelism should be no different today than was Paul’s during his big day in Athens. When the called-out ones hear the Shepherd’s voice via the proclamation of the Word through one of His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20), they respond in ***repentance*** and faith. Since God is the sole determiner of who and how many will come to Him (lest we discount His attribute of sovereignty), Paul did not need to concern himself with winning favor with his Athenian listeners, lest possibly those “receiving Christ” at the end of the sermon be fewer. Nor was Paul motivated by personal popularity and a desire to be liked by everyone, thus toning it down a bit (contr. Galatians 1:10). We must all think through this biblical insight: is popularity my real god, or am I a bondservant of Christ? Only such biblical understandings as these will lead us to personal boldness and courage.

V. PAUL'S APPEAL TO CREATION (ACTS 17:24-28)

Continuing in the same order of argumentation parallel to Romans 1:18–20, Paul now compounds the internal testimony of conscience (as mentioned previously by his use of the Greek word for the translated-into-English word *ignorance* in Acts 17:22–23) with the external testimony of general revelation a.k.a. creation. Acts 17:24–28 states:

“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist.

Paul further substantiates to the Athenians that all of mankind—if they are living in denial of Christ—are *without excuse*. Scripturally speaking, it is not as if people simply don't know of God's existence. Conversely, Paul says in line with Romans 1: *He is not far from each one of us*. Culpable *ignorance* is inexcusable in God's eyes; He has made Himself known to everyone through both conscience and creation. If any person responds to the general revelation that God has granted through conscience and creation, He will be faithful to increase that revelation of Himself to the point of making salvation in Christ always possible. This is appropriately theologically termed “God's responsive, progressive revelation.” Here then is the answer to the often-posed question:

What about the
heathen in Africa?

Both conscience and creation (or general revelation) attest to the fact of God's *knowableness*. Paul's appeal to general revelation here serves his

purposes of further nailing down Greek culpability. God is *not far off* or not impossible to know. This general revelation, if not masked or *suppressed*, creates a desire to *seek God*. Bahnsen summarizes this issue when he states:

[Man] is responsible because he possesses the truth, but he is guilty for what he does to the truth.⁵

God has revealed Himself to mankind internally (conscience) and externally (creation); that means He can be easily found. On the flip side of the same coin, the Gospel of salvation is simple to *proclaim* and understand. Conversely however, the Greeks *suppressed* that which they knew to be true. Instead, as a *diversionary tactic* to the witness of their God-attesting internal conscience, they worshipped their gods in the Parthenon, whom Paul fleshed out in his sermon as those who *dwell in temples made with hands*. From the Areopagus, Paul could have easily motioned with his hand to illustrate that about which he spoke; the Parthenon was in close visual proximity.

In summary of this section of his sermon, Paul has candidly and in straightforward pronouncement refuted the Greeks' manmade gods. He has not utilized them nor built his sermon from some supposed common denominator; rather, he boldly mortifies and rebukes their fabricated ideas about theism.

VI. PAUL'S APPEAL TO CONTRADICTION (ACTS 17:28-30)

Further on into the body of Paul's sermon is a summary quotation, not from the Old Testament, but rather from secular sources per verses 28:

"as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance..."

Why does Paul quote these extra-biblical sources when in fact the Scriptures were Paul's singular basis of authority? Make no mistake what Paul is attempting to accomplish; his is not an endeavor to establish common ground with Greek philosophy! His reason for their inclusion

is that these Greek secular sources serve to contradict their own Greek beliefs! Paul has already cited one such previous notion that supposedly the Greek gods *dwelt in temples made with human hands*! In essence, Paul is arguing, “So which opposing Greek theistic understanding is correct?”

These contradictory quotes are from the Cretan poets, Epimendes and Aratus, from Paul’s hometown. Both serve Paul’s purposes of emblematically illustrating the autonomy of Greek authority or, as stated in Romans, the ineptness of diversionary *suppression*, of seeking after and finding the true God. The poets themselves are people who know about God, but because of a lack of submission to the testimony of conscience and creation, their unrighteousness hindered their quest for Him. Again, John 3:19 states this proclivity of the sinful condition of man’s soul apart from the intervention of the redeeming Holy Spirit: “*Men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.*” Stonehouse adroitly comments on what these poets are in essence attesting to: “the pagan poets in the very act of *suppressing* and perverting the truth presupposed a measure of awareness of it.”⁶

Paul’s importation of this secular thinking is meant to once again, in yet another way, to illustrate that *that which is known about God is evident within them* (Romans 1:19) and that *even though they knew* [about] *God* [through their conscience and general revelation], *they did not honor Him as God...* (Romans 1:21). (The bracketed inclusions are mine for contextual emphasis and to aid in understanding).

Sandwiched in the middle of Paul’s singular thesis regarding the existence of culpable *ignorance* are these two secular guys, twins in thinking, who serve Paul well. These convenient utilitarian quotes illustrate—*evidenced* in and by their own cultural writings—the exact point of Paul’s sermon! Paul skillfully uses their own authoritative source to drive home his point.

Paul is not commending Stoic doctrines or utilizing pagan ideas to round out his sermon with worldly verbosity and “secular digestibility” as those in the Evangelical “seeker-sensitive” movement often postulate. To do so would be internally and theologically contradictory to Pauline clarity as previously cited and found elsewhere in Scripture. It follows that this portion of the sermon cannot be taken as an acquiescence or attempt to identify with a pagan audience.

VII. PAUL'S APPEAL TO CONVERSION (ACTS 17:30-31)

The last section of Paul's address is a call to *repentance* and a warning of coming *judgment*: "*God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.*"

This passage is anything but an attempt to find common ground with the Greek philosophers. Herein is the apex of antithesis to their secular Greek ideas. Herein is a bold call to abandon their unfounded philosophies and turn to Christ!

Paul wanted the philosophers to not simply refine their thinking a bit further and add some missing information to it; but rather to abandon their presuppositions and have a complete change of mind, submitting to the clear and authoritative revelation of God.⁷

Acquiescence to *repentance* meant to live without culpable *ignorance* and noetic conflict. Failure to *repent* would mean a prolongation of epistemological autonomy or, better, clinging to an arrogant, self-centered pride where the person remains the imperial authority and arbitrator in all matters. "That unrepentant person," says the apostle, "will undergo the *judgment* of God." Perhaps this describes you?

Do you "create god in your own image"?

Are you "the final arbitrator of all belief"?

Do you "make god with your human hands"?

Such humanistic hubris! "I am the final authority as to what is true! I need no other source because I am my own god!" Those who cling to these beliefs need to *repent* and come to Christ lest they undergo the *judgment* of God. Your *suppressed* conscience testifies to what I am saying—that what I am saying is true about your present condition.

VIII. SUMMARY

These six facets of Paul's Acts 17 sermon represent parallel truths to his theology of Romans 1:18–20. The fact that this is a vivid portrayal and presentation of presuppositional apologetics is *evidenced* by

1. The Analogy of Scripture
2. The Immediately Preceding Context
3. Paul's Appeal to Conscience
4. Paul's Appeal to Creation
5. Paul's Appeal to Contradiction
6. Paul's Appeal to Conversion

Robert Reymond in his book, *The Justification of Knowledge* summarizes best the communication philosophy of Paul:

Only a cursory reading of Acts will disclose that Peter, Stephen, Philip and Paul, in their missionary sermons to the nations, never urge lost men to do anything other than to repent of sin and bow in faith before God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ for men's salvation. They never imply in their argumentation that their hearers may legitimately question the existence of the Christian God, the truth of Scripture, or the historicity of the death and resurrection of Christ prior to personal commitment. Never do they by their appeal to "evidence"...imply that such "evidence" vindicates their message ... Repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ can be the sinner's only proper response to the whole apostolic witness.⁸

IX. APPLICATION

Should you argue from the Bible in a secular Capitol? Illustrated by the Acts 17 sermon is the model for the Capitol relative to using Scripture as the final authority for truth and or evangelizing and defending the faith. In every Capitol of the world, people already know that Christ is God, that the Bible is true, and that they need to *repent* of their self-appointed authority and autonomy and fall on their knees in submission to God's

authority. They know this truth in their heart of hearts via the witness of their conscience and the surrounding creation of God. Therefore, the believer's job is not so much to convince and persuade with *evidence* and support as it is to aid and lovingly coach the unconverted to quit *suppressing* that which they already know to be true! May the Spirit aid us in such a ministry.

Likened to the example of Paul, the use of the Scriptures and man's ability to *reason* based on scriptural truth need to be a person's final and complete authority. I challenge you to begin arguing from scriptural precepts to make your point relative to policy matters (assuming Scripture or its principles come to bear directly on a matter). When challenged with "Well, I don't view the Bible as authoritative," answer with, "Oh, yes, you do; it is just that you are *suppressing* the Bible's authority." Another one of my favorite responses when arguing about this topic is: "Should I believe what you *proclaim* about the Bible, or should I believe what the Bible *proclaims* about you?"

Hebrews 4:12 is an apt capstone: *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

Unbelievers know Scripture is true. So use it on them even if they say they don't believe it; in reality, they do—even if, like the Athenians on Mars Hill, they try to convince others outwardly that they do not! Lovingly help your modern-day Athenian colleagues to quit *suppressing* what they know to be true! That's the presuppositional premise on which Paul operated his ministry—and so should you!

1. Stanley Greutz, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity Press, 1999), 45.
2. Calvin termed this concept *the analogy of faith* deeming that if the Spirit oversaw the writing of Scripture, then Scripture should interpret Scripture without contradiction.
3. Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready* (Nacogdoches: Covenant Media Press, 2002), 238.
4. Ernest Best, *Ephesians*. International Critical Commentary, Vol. 36 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 420.
5. Bahnsen, 259.
6. Ned Bernard Stonehouse, *Paul Before the Areopagus and Other New Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1957), 30.
7. Bahnsen, 268.
8. Robert Reymond, *The Justification of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1984), 38.

How to Respond to Scripture Rejectors

Over the years, legislators have asked about or made the point that when they use the Scriptures as their basis of authority when arguing a point, their opponents commonly say, “But I don’t believe in the Bible.” Does this mean believers should refrain from using the Word of God as their authority? In this study I will attempt to be biblically informative as to how we should respond to those who reject the veracity of Scripture—lest we refrain from using the ultimate epistemological¹ source made known to mankind by his Creator.

I. INTRODUCTION

Thousands of times over the Bible claims to be the Word of God. For example, in 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul states, *All Scripture is inspired by God....* The Greek word for *inspiration* (*theopnuestos*) means “breathed out of God.”² In 2 Peter 1:20–21, Peter states, *But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*³ Furthermore, the Bible is referred to as *the oracles of God* in Romans 3:2. Accordingly, is Scripture not sufficient or a reliable basis for all matters pertaining to truth and life? Can we not continually depend on the Word of God as our absolute epistemological source to ascertain what is right—both in our personal lives and in the formatting of good legislation? Of course we can.

Therefore, how should we respond to someone who rejects the Bible's authority? Certainly not by jettisoning the use of God's holy, inerrant Word to mankind, which too many a legislator in the past has been intimidated into doing. *To do so is to give one's opponent the home-court advantage.* If we discard the Word of God, we will have to prove our case with similar, inferior epistemological sources. By abandoning Scripture we, in essence, elevate all opposing ideologies to an equal level. The mature believer will avoid forsaking this perfect source. Please allow me the opportunity to develop this idea herein.

II. THE REALITY OF SUPPRESSION

Unregenerate members of Congress know that the Bible is true; they conveniently suppress that knowledge. This biblical fact is revealed in many passages of the Bible. Therefore,

Should we believe the person who
says, "I don't believe what the Bible
says," or should we believe what
the Bible says about that person?

To further understand what is happening in the minds of Bible rejecters, examine Romans 1:18–21. Herein, the Apostle Paul states clearly:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks....

Notice the loud exclamation of this passage, i.e., man *inherently* knows about God and His ways. God's ways are *evident within them*, states the apostle. In other words, man has a conscience that has been given to him by his Creator. The conscience is an instinctive function and ability of the

brain that provides man with the capability to ascertain good from evil. Such a phenomenal ability is part and parcel to being created in the image of God. Herein is the ability to pass judgment on one's own thoughts and actions. In Romans 2:15, Paul brings further light and definition to this wonderful internal moral compass, speaking about mankind:

In that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them....

The Law can best be understood here as God's moral precepts that were first condensed in the Ten Commandments and then later expanded upon in the Mosaic Law of the Pentateuch. Notice that this law is written in individuals' hearts; it is evident within them.

Accordingly, the conscience is to the moral world of man what nerve endings are to a person's physical world. Both are designed by the Creator to protect man from moral and physical danger; both, without a warning device, are capable of harming or even destroying him. Man's conscience, like the physical nervous system, is God's built-in alarm designed to go off loudly when violated.

Jeremiah the prophet underscores this truth from the Old Testament. He records God's words spoken through him to the nation of Israel and ostensibly to all of mankind when he revealed God's statement: ***"I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it ..."*** (Jeremiah 31:33). It follows that since God made man, he would carry His resemblance.

Greg Bahnsen, a student of the great apologist⁴ Cornelius Van Til, summarizes this assertion so well, stating:

**"The human mind is created
by God and therefore in itself
naturally revelational of God."⁵**

Fascinatingly, when speaking to the West Point graduates in June of 2002, President George W. Bush revealed his personal and profound understanding of the conscience of man and the truth that is evident within stating, "Moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time, and

in every place.”⁶ In the context of this quote, the former President evidently held to this truth as a foundational presupposition for the way in which he governed and led. All officeholders should aspire to the same. Educating those who would destroy or break the law written in their hearts is needless and irresponsible. In one sense, there is no need to educate a fellow legislator on a moral issue because, according to Romans 1:19, *that which is known about God is evident within them, for God [has already] made it evident to them*. They already know the right thing to do morally; they simply suppress that knowledge.

III. THE TESTIMONY OF THE CONSCIENCE

Notice from the book of Genesis—prior to Moses’ reception of the Ten Commandments⁷—several passages that serve to illustrate the full and operational mechanism in man known as the *conscience*. It is not that the discernment of right from wrong is learned later in life or that it is shaped by varying cultural considerations or by a person’s environment along the way; rather, that discernment has always been fully developed and present within the human race—and within each member of Congress:

Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9).

In context, Cain had just murdered his brother. Accordingly, he knew very well where his brother’s body was! So Cain lied to God and made up an excuse. His phrase, “*Am I my brother’s keeper?*” was ripe with arrogant sarcasm because Abel was a *keeper* of the sheep (Genesis 4:2). Why did Cain lie unless, of course, he was covering up something and he was fraught with guilt? The chronological point: how else did Cain know that what he had done was wrong apart from his conscience?

“Perhaps my father will feel me, then I will be as a deceiver in his sight, and I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing” (Genesis 27:12).

How did Jacob know that what he and his mother were stewing up was wrong and therefore deceptive when they contrived to fool Isaac into blessing Jacob in Esau’s place (Genesis 27:1–28:7)? Again, this story illuminates the presence of an internal ability to ascertain right from wrong. In Genesis 6:5, Moses states, *Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was*

only evil continually. Scripture again attests that man is internally aware of his wicked ways; he knows!

IV. THE TESTIMONY OF THE CREATION

Not only has this knowledge about God's attributes and divine nature been written on man's conscience or, as we say today, his heart, Romans 1 also states that God's actual character is *clearly seen* by that which surrounds man. In other words, God's very nature is also evident to man as witnessed by God's surrounding creation. In this regard, Psalm 19:1 states, *The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.* As previously stated, Paul said under the *inspiration* of God, that God is *clearly seen, being understood through what has been made* ... (Romans 1:20).

In the book of Acts, Paul further elaborates on God's revelation of Himself through nature when addressing a pagan audience. In Acts 14:17, he writes, *And yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.* According to Scripture then, man has no excuse to deny God's existence. God continually witnesses of Himself to man both *in* him (through conscience) and *around* him (through creation).

V. THE REASON FOR SUPPRESSION

By way of recap, we have seen that it is not that man doesn't know of God's existence or what constitutes sin; rather, he suppresses such knowledge.⁸ Even though man has a God-given ability internally and externally to inherently know what is right and what is wrong, Scripture says that he willfully attempts to suffocate it. Why? John 3:19–20 reads:

This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

Man's corruption of God's morality does not stem from a lack of education. Rather, the educated and calculated willful rebellion of God's precepts characterizes every sinner. While some may display this rebellion in active, outward ways and to a higher degree, others are passive in their

resistance and hostile toward their Maker. As a matter of fact, in Romans 8:7, every unbeliever is said to be at war with God (cf. Colossians 1:21). As seen in John 3, this aggressive suppression of moral truth extends out of the evilness of man's sinning ways. This sinful rebellion is further illuminated by the following passages that highlight his bias in the direction of and toward sin.

Unregenerate people in general, legislators in specific, are not morally naïve, blank slates innocently standing by to be scrolled on by the faithful members of the House. They are not *tabula rasa*.⁹ The aforementioned Scriptures reveal quite the contrary. Unbelievers carry a bias toward sin because of their endemic sinful nature (cf. Genesis 3). They find themselves resisting the truth lest they be confronted by their own evil ways.¹⁰ And when left with the choice between suppressing that which they know and outwardly manifesting hypocrisy, many are those who will opt for the former. That duplicity explains why so many avoid Bible study in the Capitol. They are living in sin, and they know it, and to sit in an environment where the Scriptures are being proclaimed is hugely uncomfortable. They find it better to tell themselves the lie that the Scriptures aren't true.

Psalm 14:1 punctuates this pressure people face to avoid hypocrisy. ***The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."*** Note that the identification tag for being called a fool in Scripture is not so much related to a person's lack of intellectual ability as it is a reference to a diminished moral integrity.¹¹ Accordingly, what the Psalmist means is that the person who lacks moral integrity has gone so far in his heart as to deny God's existence by declaring to himself and those around him that ***"There is no God."*** In an attempt to live with the continual crossing of his *conscience*, comes a need to deny the Creator because creation routinely screams of the presence of God! Akin to the Microsoft monopoly of the past, God has delivered every human being into the world with His programming already installed! The God program always pops up!

Biblically, to declare "There is no God" or "I don't believe in the Bible" is equivalent to the fireman who switches off the alarm in his attempt to gain some needed rest.

So don't buy the excuses of suppressors. Learn to view suppression as someone's crying out for help. The governmental leader who states rebelliously, "I don't believe in the Bible" needs someone to come alongside and help him or her to quit overpowering (by way of self-deception) that which they know to be right. Accurately diagnosed, on display is a strong will in need of deliverance from sin. They need a loving believer to call them to repentance and liberate them from their bondage through reception of the Lord Jesus Christ. Is there any wonder why God mandates every believer to evangelize? The prescription is the central cure to the ailment.

Man's Bias Toward Sin

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9).

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised (1 Corinthians 2:14).

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:3–4).

But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:13).

To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled (Titus 1:15).

VI. SUMMARY

Mankind possesses a strong and continual testimony to the existence of God directly from God—no matter where they live in the world. This is known theologically as *general revelation*, meaning God’s character, attributes, and nature are evident within him (via his conscience) and around him (via creation). However, in his sin, he suppresses that knowledge. Accordingly, his greatest need is to be exposed to special revelation, the proclamation of the Gospel, which upon repentance and submission to it, he is set free and made anew. Paul succinctly stated this truth in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Further regarding special revelation, Cornelius Van Til wrote:

Whenever the unbeliever encounters the gospel in Scripture, he recognizes the voice of God speaking authoritatively in its words; the divine character, convincing testimony, and self-authorizing quality of its message cannot be evaded. Unbelievers immediately discern and understand the evidence about God in their natural experience and recognize the voice of God when they read the Bible.¹²

This is supported by Isaiah 55:11, which amplifies the role of Scripture in converting the soul:

“So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

It stands to reason that Christians in the Capitol need to regularly and consistently proclaim the Scriptures and not shy away from them because someone supposedly “doesn’t believe in them.” For in the proclamation of the authoritative Word of God, whether or not someone is rebellious toward God, is the power to change the Capitol and the culture. In the proclamation of the Word of God, lives and nations are changed!

William Penn, one of the fathers of our country, keenly understood that Capitols and their cultures are the consequences of conversions:

“Governments, like clocks, go from the motion men give them; and as governments are made and moved by men, so by them they are ruined too. Wherefore governments rather depend on men than men upon governments. Let men be good, and the governments cannot be bad; if it be ill, they endeavor to cure it.

But if men be bad, let the government be never so good, they will endeavor to warp and spoil it to their turn.

I know some say let us have good laws and no matter for the men who execute them; but let them consider that though good laws do well, good men do better; for good laws [are in] want [of] good men and [will] be altered or evaded by ill men.”¹³

William Penn was wise to see this truth. Don’t pay any attention to those who say, “The Word of God is out of date; we shouldn’t use it as our authority.” They are those who are ignorant of what this lesson just explained. Only the Scripture changes hearts, which change laws, cultures, and Capitols.

Explain to those who “don’t believe in the Bible” that you are here to help liberate them from their willful suppression of that which they know to be truth.

Accordingly, rather than refrain from using the Scriptures, proclaim boldly to those who are bluffing all around you (cf. 2 Timothy 1:7).

1. *Epistemology* is “the study of the method and grounds of knowledge.” In other words, it indicates what your basis is for knowing something to be true.
2. Grammatically similar Greek constructions (Romans 7:12; 2 Corinthians 10:10; 1 Timothy 1:15; 2:3; 4:4) argue persuasively that the translation *all Scripture is inspired* is accurate. *Inspired by God* literally means, “breathed out by God” or “God-breathed” (MSB).
3. Note in 2 Peter 3:15–16 that Peter testifies that Paul was writing Scripture. First Thessalonians 2:13 testifies to the fact that the apostles knew they were speaking and writing the Word of God.
4. An *apologist* is someone who defends the faith (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).
5. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Reading and Analysis* (Philipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing), 251.
6. “President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point,” June 1, 2002, *The White House*, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html>.
7. The Ten Commandments do not occur until the book of Exodus.
8. The first chapter of Romans goes on to teach that when mankind continually suppresses the truth of God that is shed abroad in his heart, he begins to dull his conscience. This is known as a reprobate mind, where the conscience no longer functions properly. And gone, then, is the ability to internally discern right from wrong. This condition is akin to a man with leprosy who, due to nerve damage, can no longer sense danger and becomes susceptible to many a problem that leads to his ruin.
9. Latin for “a smoothed tablet” or “a blank slate.”
10. Theologically, this is known as the noetic effects of sin. Noetic refers to the mind and intellect.
11. Reference Isaiah 32:6, *For a fool speaks nonsense, and his heart inclines toward wickedness: to practice ungodliness and to speak error against the Lord, to keep the hungry person unsatisfied and to withhold drink from the thirsty.*
12. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 261.
13. Edward Channing, *A History of the United States, Vol. II, A Century of Colonial History, 1660–1760*, (New York, The MacMillan Company, 1908), 118.

Becoming More Like the 12 Amongst the 535

In the Gospel of Mark (3:13–19), Jesus chooses 12 disciples into whom He will pour His life. God uses these men in a super extraordinary way! In fact, the book of Acts states that they were “*these who have turned the world upside down*” (17:6, KJV).

What do you suppose Jesus was looking for when He determined those whom He would choose? In a similar sense, what quality must characterize you for God to determine to use you mightily?

Our country desperately needs public servants who will turn America upside down! So, what is Jesus looking for in you? What character quality does He most desire to be present? Are you the type of person He can use mightily and extraordinarily?

The following study reveals one essential ingredient God demands from those whom He chooses to use in ways unimaginable!

I. INTRODUCTION

The necessity of any governing authorities’ proper understanding of sin cannot be overemphasized. Not only does the teaching of Scripture regarding this subject relate specifically to one’s personal life, but it is also foundational to that person’s professional understanding as a policy maker and law enforcer. Can you clearly think through the biblical answers to the following?

In Mark 3:13–19, Jesus chooses the 12 disciples. These ordinary men have vastly different personalities, temperaments, affiliations, and proclivities. Highlighted are six of them in paired contrasts: Peter was bold and

brash, aggressive, and opinionated. He was an upfront guy who led thousands to Christ through his preaching. Andrew, on the other hand, liked being behind the scenes. Inconspicuous, thoughtful, and reflective, he was all about winning individuals, versus the masses, to Christ. Matthew was a politically traitorous tax collector, an ally of the Romans; Simon, on the other hand, was a political Zealot, a rebel who outwardly opposed the occupying Roman forces! (Imagine those two getting along on the same team!) James was very passionate while Philip was a pessimistic bean counter! Aware of all these differences, Jesus nonetheless recruited each one to be a part of His team because they all possessed something in common that was essential!

Though they had little in common
outwardly, Jesus noted something in
common inwardly among those He chose.

Calling the 12 to His side, He effectively molded these disparate individuals into world-changing leaders in just 18 short months of discipleship and training! A word is in order as to how He could accomplish such a feat. Save for the fact that He was God incarnate, nothing better explains Jesus' success than His example as a peripatetic instructor. According to *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, *peripatetic* means "movements or journeyings hither and thither." Jesus strongly believed in field trips! That is to say (unlike much of the model of Western education), Jesus spent little time teaching and training in a classroom. In fact, to be taught by Jesus meant you were on a perpetual field trip! Such a method creates much more one-on-one interaction, motivation, understanding, and inculcation. As one author puts it, Jesus "graciously encouraged them, lovingly corrected them, and patiently instructed them...." For sure, moral instruction, which is how the best learning always occurs, was a part of His mix. It isn't just cold, hard information that is passed on; it's our lives invested in others! The success of His 18-month cram-session speaks well for the effectiveness of peripatetic instruction. When you think about it, learning while walking about in the world must have been utterly fascinating!

On the God-side of the equation, these men were empowered by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, 40 days after Jesus' ascension. But back to the human side: what overarching characteristic did Jesus deem mandatory in the first place? What did He see or foresee when choosing the 12? Noting Mark 3:13–19, wherein Jesus is choosing them, this characteristic is not readily evident:

And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons. And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, "Sons of Thunder"); and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot; and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.

As is the case in the other three similar selection listings in the New Testament (NT), notice that Simon-Peter is first on the list. He is the most naturally gifted leader of them all. But with that raw talent often comes much pride—pride that the Savior would need to prune. And prune He did in all 12 as He does in you and in me as well. Significantly, by the time Peter later pens his two epistles in the NT, he writes from personal experience, and in the context of effective leadership, **GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE** (1 Peter 5:5). Peter had learned humility the hard way.

II. THE NECESSITY OF HUMILITY

Humility is the essential characteristic
that God requires in people whom He
greatly empowers for use in this world.

These are emptied-of-self,
contrite-of-heart individuals.

Second Chronicles 16:9 serves to incorporate this essential character quality with heavenly usefulness:

“For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.”

Paul, the later arriving apostle of Jesus Christ whom God used mightily, best defines what possessing a heart that is “emptied of self and completely His” means. He stated to the Church of Galatia in Galatians 2:20:

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life, which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

What kind of people does God use the most? He uses those who continually view themselves as God’s vehicle in want of nothing for “me” during this life’s journey. A humble person is a dead-to-self person.

Only people who are empty of self
have room for Christ to become
all, both in and through them.

The word *humility* (*tapeinos* in the Greek), which is found 11 times in the NT, means “low in spirit.” In Jesus’ Beatitudes found at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5), the same Greek word is translated ***poor in spirit***. Matthew 5:3, ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit....”*** Being ***meek*** or ***poor in spirit*** stands in biblical juxtaposition to the idea of self-sufficiency. *Humility* is the realization of one’s utter failure and doom apart from God’s intervention of grace—not only in an eventual, eternal sense but also in the present.

The necessity of humility is even more essential for the public servant when he or she takes into consideration the following biblical truth found in 1 Corinthians 1:26–29:

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the

weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.

This passage underscores the principle that God primarily uses ordinary people—those who are more apt to be humble—to build His kingdom and to change the world. This keen insight explains and illustrates why Jesus chose the common folks, i.e., those more apt to possess the character trait. Very importantly, however, this passage also states that some whom He calls and desires to use are in the world's eyes wise, mighty, and noble—so long as they too are humble (which is less likely). Underscoring this keen insight is verse 26, which states three times *not many* rather than “not any.” (I might add that some believers point to this passage to justify the Christian's supposed non-involvement in government, as if God's economy for changing the world and fulfilling the Great Commission is to use only the foolish, the weak, the base, and the despised. It is important that the Christian public servant be able to point to the fact that the passage reads *not many* rather than “not any” when challenged with this way of thinking.) Paul is a good example of a person who is one of *not many*: he was an outstanding, highly visible leader in his day (cf. Philippians 3).

Similarly, today's elected officials are, in the eyes of the world, wise, mighty, and noble. As a follower of Christ who is elected to high office, you are one of those exceptions spoken of in 1 Corinthians 1:26–29: you are one of the *not many*! It is therefore requisite of your unique status that you be worthy by being especially careful to be humble!

In choosing the 12, Jesus did not select men of stature. Instead, He chose fishermen, a tax collector, a political zealot, and common folks. He chose the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised. Galileans were lower-class, uneducated, rural people, far from the elite of society. Accordingly and as God would have it, He received all the glory from what was accomplished through them. With each disciple, it was plain to see the following:

It was not the man; it was God's
indwelling the man! It was not his
speech; it was God's Word! It was not
his personality; it was God's power!

Can the same be said of you? Compare the above contrasts to someone already possessing worldly stature, rhetorical skills, and salesmanship: the contrast is not as great. God's glory is not the marvel as much as is the man's—unless, of course, that man is characterized by vast humility! This antithesis helps to explain why this character quality is so important to God. It is why Christ-honoring humility needs to be ever so present in the life of someone like you who possesses public stature! If you want God to use you as He did His disciples, then your character must evince heartfelt, genuine, overwhelming humility. This quality is an absolute necessity in order to compensate for your public standing! In your case, God's glory is not as easily seen over the brow of personal presence. Those who have public prominence are much more apt to be overtaken with a sense of personal importance, which God will not empower but rather will *oppose* (1 Peter 5:5).

The lack of humility in America's
political leaders is one of our
nation's greatest problems.

We must all beseech God to give us public servants who are humble. This particular quality leads to effectiveness in office. This particular quality is the one that God is most looking for! This particular quality precedes His empowerment! Public servants must always be striving to grow in humility, and when you think you've got it, you've lost it!

The main reason America has declined is that many of its present leaders (especially compared to past leaders) are not regularly devoted and deeply committed to His Word nor to the study of it, which generates humility. Only by the indwelling Holy Spirit that occurs at conversion and the continuing profound devotion to His Word after conversion can anyone possibly grow in humility while simultaneously being in the lime-light. Make no mistake here, my beloved friend! If you do not attend the Members Bible Studies in the Capitol or go to church when you are home, is it because you don't think it's all that important? By not being faithful to delve into the Word and by not obeying the fourth commandment

(Exodus 20:8), are you telegraphing a sense of self-sufficiency and lack of dependence on God?

Your usefulness to the Master, which is directly proportional to your humility quotient, is further evidenced in Acts 4:13:

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

When you are in front of people, do others see your ego, or do they see the humility of someone possessed by his Savior? Do you give God the glory for His enabling your successes, or are they all because of you? How arrogant! You wouldn't even be alive if it weren't for His hand and continuing enablement! At the end of the day, is it all about your glory or God's glory?

III. THE EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY IN THE SAVIOR

If Jesus demands humility with all His disciples, then it follows He too would model it. Washing the feet of a guest was one of the most menial tasks, reserved for the lowest of servants. With this image in mind, note John 13:3–5:

Jesus ... got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

States one commentator regarding His act and the negative reaction of the disciples:

The reluctance of Jesus' disciples to volunteer for such a task is, to say the least, culturally understandable; their shock at his volunteering is not merely the result of being shamefaced, it is their response to finding their sense of the fitness of things shattered. But here, Jesus reverses normal roles. His act of humility is as unnecessary as it is stunning, and is simultaneously a display of love, a symbol of saving cleansing (vv. 6–9) and a model of Christian conduct (vv. 12–17).¹

Young Peter resisted Jesus' serving him in this way (vv. 6–13). His pride *opposed* Jesus' humble gesture. But again, contrast *proud* Peter with the greatly used, Holy-Spirit-filled, humble Peter. Note in his first epistle what the spiritually mature Peter says to believers:

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time (1 Peter 5:6).

Even further in John 13, Jesus states ostensibly for all believers, *“If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet”* (v. 14).² One cannot overlook this insightful example, a virtue He modeled not only for His disciples, but also for you and me.

To perform the most menial or
difficult task to serve the needs
of others is often the best way to
manifest humility in the moment.

IV. THE NECESSITY OF HUMILITY IN GOVERNMENT LEADERS

Notice Jesus' teachings that follow in Luke 14:8–11, especially the conclusion:

“When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

This storied principle of self-imposed humility parallels somewhat Solomon's teaching to his son Rehoboam in Proverbs 25:6–7:

*Do not claim honor in the presence of the king,
And do not stand in the place of great men;
For it is better that it be said of you, "Come up here,"
Than for you to be placed lower in the presence of the prince,
Whom your eyes have seen.*

In that Rehoboam was being prepared for the civil leadership of Israel, those presently in governmental leadership must give special attention to this principle. Notice what Luke is saying in the primary passage: the elevating of the humble is honorable, whereas the humbling of the *proud* is disgraceful. James 4:10 expands this Solomonic wisdom from the horizontal to the vertical in language previously seen in 1 Peter 5:6:

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

One form of exalting self is the use of the mouth. A mantra around our home when we raised our children was the memorization, meditation, and oft mention of Proverbs 27:2:

*Let another praise you, and not your own mouth;
A stranger, and not your own lips.*

Such catechizing in this and all other aspects of humility leads to a good family culture—and Capitol culture as well. Humble yourself (versus God's having to do that!), and you will be exalted in His time. What a great promise from the Word of God!

V. THE NECESSITY OF HUMILITY IN A NATION

In the Old Testament (OT) books of Zechariah, Haggai, and Nehemiah, Scripture records that the Babylonians had set Israel free from captivity. In this context Zechariah 4:6 was written, a passage that contains an overarching principle related to the effective rebuilding of any country:

"This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts."

Likened to Israel's basic problem of spiritual apathy is America's current state. In resettling their homeland, Israel wanted to rebuild the temple, but most everyone was more interested in building their own homes and pursuing their selfish interests than they were in taking care of and reconstructing the nation! (Keep in mind today the parallel of self-centered

Evangelicals who have been apathetic to reconstruct our nation: 60 million of them have failed to even vote in the last two presidential elections.) Finally, after 16 years of apathy in Israel, the symbolic work of rebuilding the Temple was begun and completed in another four. Zerubbabel, who led the reformation, was the civic leader of Jerusalem who first addressed the spiritual problem of self-centeredness, aka pride, and consequently led the successful rebuilding campaign. States one sage commentator relative to best understanding the meaning of Zechariah 4:6:

Might and power are quite interesting. “Might” is a general [Hebrew] word for human resources such as physical strength, human ability or efficiency or wealth. “Power” also denotes mere human strength—physical, material and includes mental strength. Therefore, let me give you my translation of this verse: “It is not by brawn nor by brain, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” ... The message is simply this: it will not be by your cleverness, your ability, or your physical strength that the temple will be rebuilt, but by the spirit of God.³

This principle is great insight for anyone who is desiring a formula for effective national reformation: more important than man’s physical strength or mental brilliance, which would include political acumen, is his humility—illustrated by and manifested in his utter dependence on God!

The spirit of God-dependence is the
seedbed of a nation’s reformation.

Echoing the idea of this passage and this principle is the metaphoric meaning of the following Scriptures:

*A horse is a false hope for victory;
nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength.
Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him*
(Psalm 33:17–18).

*He does not delight in the strength of the horse;
 He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man.
 The Lord favors those who fear Him....*" (Psalm 147:10–11).

God's admonition to Zerubbabel shouts to us today. Properly analyzed, America's problems are not primarily political; they are first spiritual apathy, which is a synonym for self-dependence or pride! Foremost, Americans need to humble themselves and turn to God; effective political solutions will only follow when that is first the case.

VI. THE NECESSITY OF HUMILITY IN SUMMATION

In James 4:6, Scripture says, "**GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**" Notice the Greek meaning of the words *opposed* and *proud*. *Opposed* (*antitasso*) means "to rage in battle against." God is not neutral against the *proud*; He battles against the *proud* (*huperephanos*), i.e., those "showing one's self above others." Accordingly, don't find yourself in a battle with God over who gets the glory. Rather, be characterized by humility and dependence on the Savior. In so doing, you will be likened by Him to the 12 as He empowers you to minister amongst the 535!

1. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 462–63.
2. Foot washing in itself, without a broken and contrite heart, can be a mere parody of Jesus' intention. Since the act is only mentioned here, careful expositors have been reluctant to place it on par with communion or baptism, i.e., a sacrament, an ordinance, or an ecclesiastical rite.
3. J. Vernon McGee, *Zechariah* (Pasadena: Thru the Bible Books, 1979), 59.

Nine Characteristics of Tares— The Believer's Enemy

In more than 42 years of ministry, my experience has been that most of the time a believer's greatest persecution comes from people who identify themselves as believers.

Why is that?

Remember, even the most faithful believers can be used by Satan if they are not careful. When Jesus told His disciples that He must suffer many things, Peter protested and denied that would happen. Jesus said to him: ***"Get behind Me, Satan!"*** (Matthew 16:21–24). Jesus knew that Peter wasn't Satan, but He made it clear that Peter was being influenced by Satan.

In addition to misguided believers, some people are Satan's outright partners who are determined to cause chaos and turmoil in the believer's life. Jesus refers to them as ***tares***.

An investigation of Scripture reveals that sometimes aggressive, attacking people are not true believers—even though they say they are. In reality, they are agents of Satan who have a goal of robbing you of your joy and sidetracking you in your calling.

You must be aware of this biblically evidenced truth and equipped to respond appropriately. Remember, Ephesians 6:12 states, ***Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but ... against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*** So beware!

Let's investigate the Word of God relative to this subject and study some of the copious New Testament (NT) passages that speak about *tares* and serve to instruct the believer how to astutely identify his enemies.

I. INTRODUCTION

Numerous NT passages identify “christians” (lower case intentional) in the church—even in leadership positions—as being other than who they profess to be. Coming to an objective realization of this fact and an understanding of how to properly respond to them is a mark of spiritual maturity. Jude 1:12 calls these folks (relative to their presence in the church) *hidden reefs in your love feasts*. This is a good mental picture of what I am referring to. As a believer, do you wonder why your knees get skinned up when you swim through the seas of life with certain “christian” people? This study will provide you with insights and added discernment as to why that is the case and, in fact, will always be. *You can learn to eliminate much resultant pain via the application of what follows in this Bible study.*

II. THE INEVITABILITY OF TARES

Every believer needs to be alert to the prevalence of false believers among the truly redeemed of God. In Jesus' parable of the *tares* as recorded only in the Gospel of Matthew (13:24–30; ref. Luke 3:17), the Savior teaches the multitudes that *tares* will be sown in with the *wheat*, a tactic of the enemy containing largely *indivisible* consequences until the day of judgment:

“But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this!’ The slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn”’” (vv. 26–30).

Since Jesus states in this passage that He has no intention of rooting out false believers from genuine ones, an appropriate subtitle to this Bible

study could be: “How to Cohabitate with Tares.” This observation is an important, sobering, stand-alone takeaway in and of itself from this parable.

A *tare* (*zizanian*) was a darnel weed prevalent in the Palestine biome that is largely indistinguishable from *wheat* until it matures and bears *fruit*. Opposite of the taste of *wheat*, in the end the *tares* are choking, bitter, and inedible. Jesus’ use of the word and the picture it evoked in an agrarian-based culture provided a powerful metaphor—as it does today!

Here to follow is a survey of nine NT passages and the respective indicators that lend huge insights into this subject: a theology, so to speak, on *tares*.

In that *tares* are disguised in the beginning (such as were Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5), they begin to overtake, as they mature, the valuable plants that surround them. That word picture illustrates the following:

They blossom into false leaders from originally being incognito; such was the case with Diotrephes in 3 John and the false apostles mentioned in Revelation 2. Even though what follows is presented in parallel order to the NT books, I expect you to take notice of these stages of *tare* maturation in each of the nine points and nine passages that follow. What should result from this study is not only an awareness and intellectual understanding of this phenomenon, but a heartfelt conviction about this ploy of the Devil and how one should deal with the inevitability of *tares* (cf. Matthew 7:15).

III. THE INDICATORS OF TARES

A. THEY ARE DISOBEDIENT (MATTHEW 7:20–23)

“So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

Many struggle to comprehend what Jesus is teaching in this passage, but when indexed through the lens of *tares*, the passage becomes easy to understand. The overarching true test of genuine belief in the Lordship of Christ is unveiled by Jesus Himself in this profoundly insightful passage: indicative of true belief is not what someone *says*; rather, it is the *fruit* of

their actions. “*He who does the will of My Father*” is Jesus’ litmus test of true belief; talk is cheap and can be misleading.

Coach Wooden used to instruct his players
to concentrate on their opponents’ numbers—
not their head—a player’s head often goes in
a different direction from his body.

Notice in Matthew 7 that Jesus contrasts a person who does God’s *will* with someone who does not—yet claims Jesus’ name regardless. *Lawlessness* (*anomia*) means “without law.” The presence of *lawless* behavior (someone who takes license with scriptural precepts and obedience to them) is therefore evidence of the existence of a false “believer”—a possible *tare*. Likened to the skillful moves of basketball players, *tares* in the church know how to fake it.

Furthermore, since the Greek verb *anomia* is in a present participle form (indicating a continuous action), Jesus is stating that disobedient-to-Scripture behavior is a continuous, regular action of people who *talk* like believers but don’t *act* like believers. Lastly, *lawlessness* depicts unrighteous actions in both Old Testament (OT) law and a civil law sense.

Illustrative of *tares* is disrespect for the
law of the land and the laws of God.

Summarily, *tares* will be known not by what they say or profess, but *by their fruits*;¹ one of those will be a continuing spirit of disobedience to outside authority. What follows are eight more passages revealing additional signposts:

B. THEY ARE PRETENDERS (ACTS 5:1–3)

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife’s full

knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?"

The context from Acts 4:32 further evidences that Ananias and Sapphira were members of the church of Jerusalem, but even though members, they were not believers, rather pretenders. To fake their spirituality in front of the true believers, they acted in concert with them. In this case, wanting to appear generous, they were instead hypocrites intent on impressing others through deception. **Tares** are often camouflaged pretenders who lie and cover-up to outwardly come across as spiritual. Make special note of this reality: **tares** are characterized by pretending. Again, *you will know them by their fruits*.

C. THEY ARE ARROGANT (2 CORINTHIANS 11:14–15)

No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

Adding more light to the previous point, notice that Satan **disguises** (*metaschematizo*), i.e., “to change in fashion or appearance,” his **servants** in a cloak so as to appear **righteous** (*dikaiosune*), i.e., “just.” But keep in mind that those who portray themselves as a **servant of righteousness** will appear as clumsy to true believers. Such a demeanor stemming from an unbelieving heart lends itself to a legalistic kind of **righteousness**—an air of superiority often lacking in graciousness toward others.

The principle of this Pauline passage is a near twin to the principle of Jesus' parable of the **tares** in Matthew 13, but what is additionally revealed in our 2 Corinthians passage is this evidence of a self-righteous, arrogant, “holier-than-thou” spirit. Remember, **tares** exist alongside; they are masqueraders, but if you look carefully and long enough, protruding out from underneath that mask is a stinking air of superiority.

D. THEY FALSIFY SALVATION (GALATIANS 1:8–9)

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have

said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

Whereas the former passages describe somewhat incognito *tares*, Galatians is descriptive of fully flowered *tares*. The big problem of the church at Galatia when Paul wrote the Galatian epistle was that false teachers had recently engulfed it. More specifically, the now-in-bloom false teaching was about salvation: the now-in-charge *tares* pridefully taught that salvation was not achieved by faith in Christ alone but, in part, by keeping the OT law (cf. Acts 15:1–9)! Perhaps the *tares* had cloaked themselves for years, making little to do about their doctrinal differences until the time was just right.

Tares do not believe that salvation is by grace alone in Christ alone; deep down they believe in their self-pride that a person can save himself via his self-righteous acts. But here's the problem: when salvation is not based in grace, that person's treatment of others will not be based in grace. Grace is a foreign concept to *tares*. It follows, therefore, that *tares* tend to possess a stunted or non-existent vocabulary and demeanor regarding God's grace and mercy and personally lack humble praise in adoration of the Savior Who, to them, is not the Author of salvation (cf. 1 Timothy 1:3–11). They believe their salvation is based on personal performance versus His sacrifice, and they arrogantly judge others accordingly.

E. THEY BATTLE INCORRECTLY (EPHESIANS 6:12)

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Tares desire believers to be consumed by fights other than spiritual ones. In the above passage, the Apostle Paul dials in as to what is the *ultimate* battle in this world: it is a spiritual battle first and foremost.

The discerning Christian public servant
realizes his or her need to become
spiritually mature so as to be a player
in the outcome of a spiritual battle.

If the ultimate battle is a spiritual one, then the one who is spiritually immature or spiritually unarmed cannot effectively fight in it (cf. Ephesians 6:13–20). Knowing political issues is one thing; being able to persuade, speak, and build personal relationships in order to fight for correct policy is another. But such issues are not the ultimate battle in this life. Spiritual maturity is the transcendent quality necessary for spiritual battle in the ultimate sense of the fight—a fight that lightweights, i.e., babes in Christ, cannot effectively participate in (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1–2). Keep in mind, the spiritual battle is where both the eternal destiny for souls and the cultural wars of today are ultimately won or lost.

Spiritual maturity and a biblical understanding inform the believer that satanic lying, deception, disguise, and false moral superiority are forever in constant play in the nation's Capitol and in the public servant's state and home community. To think otherwise is to say that the profound and insightful truths revealed in Ephesians 6:12 do not exist in the Bible. What is it that you believe in this regard?

Struggle (*pale*) means “hand-to-hand combat.” Only the spiritually discerning can see through all the fallaciousness of the physical world, deal with it effectively, and not be deceived or sidetracked by the Devil. Again, *tares* would have believers be improperly focused and consumed by fights other than the ultimate one—the battle for the souls of men, where the victory is ultimately won or lost. This very cunning tactic of Satan is designed to distract you from what is most important! You must keep in mind and be obedient to this great and informative passage: *our struggle is not against flesh and blood!*

F. THEY ARE SENSUAL (2 PETER 2:1–2)

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned.

The sixth characteristic of *tares* is revealed in this Petrine passage. Aptly here, Peter uses the synonyms of *false prophets* and *false teachers* to illustrate *tares*.

In this passage, Peter underscores many of the truths previously identified in this outline by Jesus, and by human Bible authors, including Luke and Paul, relative to ascertaining the existence and characteristics of *tares*. But here he adds another indication: they *follow their sensuality* (*aselgeia*). These are those, he says, who are *among you*, indicating yet again that *tares* will be a part of your everyday life. This may be a legislator on the floor who claims to be a “Christian”—but is known for his or her sexual license. Beware! Scripture is helping you to see people for who they really are! Don’t be fooled! Not everyone who names the name of Christ is the real deal, my friend.

Furthermore, Peter says in this passage, these are those who *malign the truth*. Think of this descriptor in terms of subcommittee hearings where a “clergyman” or a fellow “christian” colleague testifies to some bill and rips Scripture from context in order to “prove” their point, therein *maligning the way of truth*.

There are *tares* among you in your
home church, and there are *tares*
among you in your committee rooms!

Tares are Satan’s tools to lead you astray and to lead our nation into the pit of hell. Fake clergymen who speak in opposition to clear biblical precepts may deceive your colleagues, but will they deceive you? As a true believer, do you have the spiritual maturity to not only identify but also admonish them? Can you, like Jesus, see through their various forms of deception? One glaring evidence herein is their *sensuality*, and can you say, “*Get behind Me, Satan*”? Can you bring light to darkness? Can you arrest a Scripture twister and set the record straight? Herein are indications of your own spiritual maturity—or lack thereof.

G. THEY ARE NEVER WRONG (1 JOHN 1:8)

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

In addition to point number 3 (*Tares* Are Arrogant), there is a similar but heightened form of hubris that is evidence of false believers: they're never wrong! The heresy being addressed in 1 John by the Apostle John was Gnosticism—a first-century movement whose purveyors believed they had a higher knowledge than Christians. Characteristic of these types of weeds in the Church is a condescending superiority of sinless self-righteousness. Cloaked in Christian garb, some *tares* are so arrogant they don't think they're ever wrong! John provides us with that discerning insight in this nifty passage. If you know someone who names the name of Christ but is never wrong, be warned: watch out! They're probably not the real deal! Indwelt by the Holy Spirit, true believers are always characterized by humility and are willing to be corrected. They'll ask you your opinion and listen.

H. THEY ARE CHURCH LEADERS (3 JOHN 9–11)

I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.

This very powerful passage represents the crux reason this brief letter called 3 John is included by the Holy Spirit in the canon of Scripture. (All else in this short epistle is redundant to other NT teachings, except for this powerful insight.) *Diotrephes* (v. 9) was the head of this church (umm, not Christ!). It is apparent that he unilaterally ran the show. Even though he was the church leader, John labels him as *evil*, someone who *has not seen God*. In other words, *Diotrephes* was a *tare* in full bloom—not a believer. Evidently, he had sneakily worked his way into the leadership of the ministry!

Watch out for controlling legislators, pastors, or board members of Christian organizations who are *accusatory* and always must be right, never wrong (per 1 John 1:8). A trademark of *tares* is that they will attempt to *put them* (you) *out*! Watch out! John wants you to know they're disingenuous, unsaved (even though they pretend to be) and want to oversee everything “spiritual”! Again, per the introduction, do not be surprised

by all this—*false Christian leaders are normative in the Church Age! Many churches—even denominations—are led by tares!* Be spiritually smart, mature, and always on guard!

I. THEY TITLE THEMSELVES (REVELATION 2:2)

“I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false.”

Note that the *tares* at the church at Ephesus (to whom this passage is addressed) had given themselves the title of *apostles*. But Jesus (quoted above in and from the book of Revelation) sets the record straight: *“and they are not....”* The Apostle John, recording herein what Jesus said to him through an angel (cf. Revelation 1:1), is commending the Ephesian church for having had the spiritual discernment and courage to deal with *tares* (cf. 1 Timothy 1:20) who, among the other things we’ve learned about them, give themselves fancy titles (and I might add, oftentimes fancy garb and robes!). This passage is a good concluding aspect to suggest that every mature believer should have the training, spiritual discernment, and courage to do likewise: “You call yourself an apostle? You are not!”

IV. THE INSIGHTS TO INTERNALIZE REGARDING TARES

Parallel to the previous passages, what follows are the respective biblical gauges that in summary fashion unveil the presence of the believer’s enemy.

A. THEY BREAK LAWS

The takeaway principle of Matthew 7 is this: *You will know them by their fruits.*

We only need to taste
the flavor of a *tare* to
realize it is not *wheat*.

If someone professes to be a believer yet habitually takes license with man's and God's laws and is unremorseful and impenitent, every biblical reason exists to doubt the genuineness of his or her profession of faith. Such actions are not commensurate with the indwelling Holy Spirit in the life of a true believer.

B. THEY PRETEND

The takeaway principle of Acts 5 is this: *tares* will mimic the *wheat* as closely as possible before blooming in order to outwardly appear similar and gain a following. Check their story; do your own research if you have doubts. Is there a pattern of lying?

C. THEY POSSESS AN AIR OF MORAL SUPERIORITY

The takeaway principle of 2 Corinthians 11 is this: in their attempts to disguise themselves and come alongside, they have no understanding of the concept of grace. Since they cannot imitate this quality, you should develop a keen discernment for the absence of self-deprecation. *Tares* often project moral superiority and lack basic kindness.

D. THEY ARE LEGALISTS

The takeaway point of Galatians 1 is this: akin to the three previous evidences above, *tares* have a legalistic (versus grace) paradigm of how one goes to heaven. When quizzed, they are found relying on self-effort, i.e., their own good works. They not only possess an aberrant orthopraxy (licentiousness) but an aberrant orthodoxy (legalism).

E. THEY POSSESS AN IMPROPER EMPHASIS

The takeaway principle of Ephesians 6 is this: *tares* fight the wrong battles and possess no real interest in changing the hearts of people through the love of Christ. Theirs is a fascination with outward change with no real understanding (God only can give this) of the concept of or need for inward change. They do not understand the Gospel! Nor are they interested in evangelism and discipleship, rather power.

F. THEY ARE SENSUAL

The takeaway point of 2 Peter 1 is this: know from this passage and the authority of God's Word that *tares* are sexually out of control in their private if not public life. This identifier always comes out with time, if not immediately.

G. THEY CLAIM TO BE SINLESS

The takeaway point of 1 John is this: *tares* are not humble about their personal sin; they deny it. They are never wrong. The heretical Gnostics described in 1 John possessed a holier-than-thou attitude; accordingly, a claim of latent sinlessness acts as an identifying moniker of a *tare*. Are they ever humble in their demeanor? Do they ever admit they make mistakes?

H. THEY ARE CONTROLLING AND ACCUSATORY

The takeaway point of 3 John is this: *tares* tend to seek control and are unrelenting in their false accusations of true believers. In their slander, they bring about divisiveness. Stay away from power-hungry, overly controlling people, *especially if they name the name of Christ*; such qualities are not becoming of true godliness. As they seek and maintain power, *tares* will bite and injure those naïve to their ways and means.

I. THEY WEAR SELF-IMPOSED LABELS

The takeaway from Revelation 2:2 is this: have the courage to call out fake spiritual leaders. Be neither impressed nor intimidated by their self-titling or fancy garb; in your mind, these trappings should only serve to indicate their pride and sense of self-importance. In reality, they are nothing but *tares*!

V. SUMMARY

Any of the above evidences by themselves are not necessarily indicative of the presence of a *tare*, as every believer struggles with sin to some degree and from time to time. However, when they're all continually present, beware! I pray that you, as a believer, can now better ascertain who the *tares* are that Satan has put in the path of your life. Will the *tares*

be successful in their demonic mission of discouraging and derailing you? Can you now better discern their presence and purpose? It follows that you must identify their existence and purpose in order to keep your distance. Again, the believer's battle is a spiritual one, and he needs to see things from the perspective of Ephesians 6:12 (as quoted in and throughout this Bible study). ***Our struggle is not against flesh and blood....***

In Revelation 2:2, the Apostle John records the fact that the Ephesian church identified and put such persons (Hymenaeus and Alexander) out of their midst (1 Timothy 1:20); they were those who called themselves "apostles" but were not! While you and I might not have the luxury of doing something as formal as calling someone out for their pretense, we can be wise by identifying and keeping distance.

Lastly, are you a ***tare***? Are these previous descriptive characteristics indicative of you?

Second Corinthians 13:5 states, ***Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?***

Resist the urge to dismiss my plea to examine your heart on this matter. There are some in office who crow that they are spiritually mature while they attend only ***tare***-led groups and avoid genuine in-depth Bible studies where the Word of God is regularly taught with accuracy. Search your heart and ask the Holy Spirit if this might be you.

Furthermore, God doesn't call genuine believers to the Capitol to refrain from Christian fellowship and to be independent of one another. Such is in direct conflict with Hebrews 10:25 which states, ***Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*** Don't be like some in the Capitol who strut like a peacock and fan their plumage, positioning themselves as mature believers while at the same time avoiding ***assembling together*** with other believers that God has called into office.

In fact, the sin of (what I will term) "believer independence"—not associating with others in the body of Christ—harms Christ's witness in the Capitol per John 17:23: ***I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.*** It is Christ's witness in the Capitol that is most essential and foundational to seeing unsaved Members come to Christ! By forsaking your assembly with other believers, you are hindering the otherwise powerful witness for Christ that we could be having here!

It follows that it is incongruous and disingenuous to insinuate personal “spiritual maturity” back in your state or district, while at the same time, when in the Capitol, you fail to associate in *unity* with other genuine believers via fellowship, prayer, and serious Bible study on a regular basis. Either you are spiritually mature and in fellowship with other genuine believers, or you are spiritually immature because you aren’t. As a genuine Christian Member, you can’t have it both ways! Those whom the Bible designates as having “spiritual maturity” are those who are obedient to Hebrews 10:25 and John 17:23!

1. Galatians 5:19–21 lists characteristics that are in opposition to the fruits of the Spirit. Accordingly, familiarity with this passage greatly aids one in discerning the existence of *tares*, i.e., *immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these... Tares* manifest these things and others while at the same time verbally stating they are “Christians.”

PART VII

***SUSTAINING EFFECTIVENESS
IN OFFICE***

Maintaining Health and Wellness after the Elections

Coming off a major election cycle is a time of special concern and care for any pastor who desires to shepherd those serving our nation. This time is pivotal! Whereas a win can lead to an adrenaline rush absent of rest, personal inventory, and humble reflection, a loss can lead to months, sometimes years, of debilitating depression.

How specifically can the Scriptures help you after the rigors of campaigning and the adjustments you need to make after months of always-on-the-go, necessarily imbalanced living?

Let's turn to Proverbs and contemplate the sobriety of King Solomon and what he has to say about a sense of normal living—a life that garners God's blessing; spiritual, mental, and physical health; and meaningful relationships. Sound good? This study is important for someone who is always on the go; certainly that busyness was the case in the life of the one who penned the following proverbs we will be studying.

I trust this study will help you navigate to a more balanced way of life.

I. INTRODUCTION

The main thesis of the Bible pertains to God's exaltation through man's redemption. Ephesians 2:7 states, *So that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*. God's whole economy of salvation is meant to show His attribute of *grace*. The context of this statement has to do with the redeeming work of Christ—in that the cross displays God's *grace*—that He would save anyone

from personal rebellion toward Him reflects His very nature. By His abundant *grace* alone is anyone saved.

Through these salvific kindnesses, God's goodness and glory redound to all mankind in the past, present, and future. Why the Fall? Why the cross? God's economy of the Fall and the cross (as compared to man's never falling and God's no longer needing to graciously save through His Son) serves to illuminate the *grace* of God. Otherwise, His attribute of *grace* would be inconspicuous to man.

The point is that nothing else in the Bible eclipses this overarching theme. Make no mistake here, the big picture is all about the greatness of God!

A. THE BIG PICTURE

But what does all that introductory material have to do with this Bible study? Many other truths within His Holy Writ, such as one's health, peace of mind, and wellbeing, comport with this theme. They are not the central focus of Scripture, but nonetheless serve to illustrate as well *the surpassing riches of His grace*. The Scriptures for sure instruct us regarding a variety of subjects, such as self-help, relationships, and ancient history. These numerous topics provide a roadmap for a happy family, among many other themes.

In that God was in no way bound to provide us with all these helps, they too serve to a lesser degree to illustrate *the surpassing riches of His grace*. (I use the word "lesser" because the former, in order to provide redemption, cost Him far more.) These somewhat hierarchical truths need to be clear at the introduction of this study for the following reason:

Many "ministries" would have you seek
health, wealth, and prosperity as if they
were primary objectives of the Bible.

Such ministries represent an aberrant man-centered, not God-centered, theology. The Christian life is not about you; it's about Him! And He is the

essential reason why we must begin a topical study on health, wealth, and prosperity with Ephesians 2:7 in view.

B. PROSPERITY AND PERSECUTION

The proverbs that follow are general principles of Scripture, not promises, and importantly, we must synthesize this subject theologically with the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–12), wherein Jesus deems persecution as normative for all believers who live godly lives. Generally speaking, the following proverbs are true—if not externally because of persecution, then internally due to the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This seeming dichotomy is captured in Proverbs 14:13:

*Even in laughter the heart may be in pain,
And the end of joy may be grief.*

C. SUMMARY OF INTRODUCTION

With the big picture of the preeminence of God's glory noted and the tension between prosperity and persecution better understood, Proverbs states, in those contexts, much about health, well-being, and blessings, including how we gain or lose them—both as a recipient and as a giver. What follows in this study is an attempt to unfurl the breadth and depth of this preceding sentence through the following outline. My hope is that this study will minister to your present needs, given your ultra-fast-paced calling in life.

II. PERSONAL BLESSINGS

A. THE PRECURSOR TO GOD'S BLESSING

Everyone wants God's blessing in his or her life. But disobedience to Him and His **Word** often play into Christians' lives. Obedience is the precursor to blessing. People sometimes wonder why they are not being blessed. For example, lazy believers may live with a propensity of obedience to God's **Word** when, in fact, they lack habitual industriousness. There is an obvious disconnect. Perhaps they've developed a skill of "spiritualizing" their way out of hard work (as if Genesis 3:17–19 were not in the Bible). Many wonder why their lives are not characterized by God's blessing and

by wellbeing when, in fact, they are disobedient to His principles that are plainly revealed in Scripture! Being a *hearer* of the *Word* and not a *doer* (James 1:21–27) leads to a jaundiced Christian life. Those people who struggle with the connection between hearing God’s *Word* and doing His will experience difficulties instead of blessings in this life.

Blessings from God are directly
proportional to obedience to
God in each area of our life.

James 1:25 is a wonderful passage that has often and continually sobered me to the gravity of obedience. Memorizing and meditating on this verse has helped me to be serious about applying what I learn from Scripture—versus going through the motions and nonetheless expecting God’s blessing:

But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

This New Testament passage summarizes well what Proverbs states is the key to personal blessing. *Effectual doers* of the *Word* are those who are serious about obedience, who struggle and war against their sin nature, whose lifestyles are characterized by constant repentance, change, and growth. These are the people who make the tough choices to *abide* by God’s precepts. A key word to understand in this passage is *abide* (*parameno*), which means “to remain beside or near.” *Parameno* also translates as *effectual doer*. Other English equivalents are “work” and “making.” It follows that if you fail to continually work at making God’s *Word* beside or near your life, then you are to some degree disobedient to Christ’s Lordship and therefore should not expect His abundance of blessings as listed in the following proverbs. This cause-and-effect relationship should not be underestimated.

Accordingly, in your post-election exhilaration, the degree to which you are obedient to God’s *Word* is the degree to which you will experience the following aspects of His blessings as depicted by these specific proverbs. Don’t be self-deceived into thinking otherwise, my friend.

B. GOD'S BLESSING OF PHYSICAL HEALTH

In Proverbs, the spiritual/mental wellbeing of an individual is often indicated by the blessing of physical health. Again, that is not always absolutely the case, but in principle, it often is. Ask yourself if any of the following health robbers apply to you. Some of the following mental/ spiritual causes of problems diminish physical health and this sense of personal blessing. Again, note the connection between the spiritual/ mental to the physical in each of the subpoints that follow.

1. Arrogance

Do not be wise in your own eyes;

Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

It will be healing to your body

And refreshment to your bones (Proverbs 3:7–8).

The second portion of this proverb provides a remedy for the first portion. After winning a campaign or two, it is easy to fall into the trap of self-importance. Instead, *fear the Lord*. Why? Because He is the One Who appointed you to office—it was not your cleverness. Do not forget Romans 13:1 in this regard:

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

You did not gain office by yourself ! Remember that God *establishes* all *governing authorities*. Such meditations will greatly curtail being *wise in your own eyes*. Whereas arrogance leads to ill health, to *fear the Lord* instead will prove healing and bring *refreshment* to your bones.

2. Disobedience

My son, give attention to my words;

Incline your ear to my sayings.

Do not let them depart from your sight;

Keep them in the midst of your heart.

For they are life to those who find them

And health to all their body (Proverbs 4:20–22).

This proverbial passage parallels and amplifies James 1:25. Notice the verb phrases, *give attention, incline, do not let them depart, keep them*. All such words are cherished in the hearts of *effectual doers*; take them seriously. The result? They are *health to all* [your] *body*.

3. Jealousy

A tranquil heart is life to the body,

But jealousy is rottenness to the bones (Proverbs 14:30 HCSB).

Prolonged attitudes of *jealousy*, such as desiring the office another possesses, Proverbs states, can lead to personal health issues and the lack of blessing. What are you doing conscientiously after the election to guard against this covetousness?

4. Self-pity

A joyful heart is good medicine,

But a broken spirit dries up the bones (Proverbs 17:22).

The spirit of a man can endure his sickness,

But as for a broken spirit who can bear it? (Proverbs 18:14).

Melancholy dispositions, sunken by afflictions such as the loss of an election, are herein referred to as *a broken spirit*. If harbored, self-pity can lead to physical ailments. This mindset must be eradicated and superseded by an immediate, habitual trust in the sovereignty of God. Don't allow the loss of an election to equate to a loss of life! So many other opportunities are available that God expects you to fulfill for His glory! The sooner you get over pitying yourself, the better off you'll be.

Solomon says arrogance, disobedience, jealousy, and self-pity are gangsters who are out to rob you of your physical health.

Arrest these culprits today, and you will experience God's blessings to a greater degree tomorrow!

C. GOD'S BLESSING OF JOY AND HAPPINESS

When followers of Christ walk in obedience, they set in motion a sowing-and-reaping kind of blessing. This is another form of blessing that inures to the *effectual doer*, bringing peace, joy, and happiness. The idea of obedience to God's commandments is personified with a feminine pronoun in chapter three of Proverbs:

For length of days and years of life

And peace they will add to you (Proverbs 3:2).

Her ways are pleasant ways

And all her paths are peace.

She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,

And happy are all who hold her fast (Proverbs 3:17–18).

Several other proverbs that equate obedience with peace and happiness are as follows:

When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD,

He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him (Proverbs 16:7).

All the days of the afflicted are bad,

But a cheerful heart has a continual feast (Proverbs 15:15).

God's blessings yield health, peace, joy, and prosperity.

D. GOD'S BLESSING OF PROSPERITY

Effectual doers are blessed with prosperity. The proverb that follows visually depicts this state of success by the growth of a tree, which naturally expands and gets larger, bearing more fruit. Prosperity and increase should be understood not just in a material sense, but also in the sense of growing God's kingdom, as per the second portion in the context of the first:

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,

And he who is wise wins souls (Proverbs 11:30).

Notice that part of God's blessing is our sense of being used by Him to expand His kingdom. What an inner joy fulfilling that purpose brings every believer! Notice this idea in the first part of the following Proverb:

*Desire realized is sweet to the soul,
But it is an abomination to fools to turn away from evil*
(Proverbs 13:19).

E. GOD'S BLESSING OF LONG LIFE

The Bible is replete with this wonderful promise.

*For length of days and years of life
And peace they will add to you* (Proverbs 3:2).

Again, the “*they*” used in the previous verse is a contextual reference in chapter three of keeping God’s commandments. Ephesians 6:3, which is a quote from Exodus 20:12 in the Old Testament (OT) Torah, promises long life to those who obey their parents: ***SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.***

Summarily, health, joy, happiness, prosperity, and long life are all forms of blessing that Solomon says come to roost in the life of the *effectual doer* of the ***Word*** of God.

Post-election, shift your primary focus back in
the direction of obedience to the ***Word*** of God.

III. CORPORATE BLESSINGS

Proverbs provides the formula for well being, not only for individuals but also for society as a whole. Here are some of the ways you can be a blessing to those who voted you into office.

A. THROUGH RIGHTEOUS LIVING

In the passage that follows, Solomon indicates that the personal ***righteousness*** of individuals engenders health, peace, and well-being to a city or society:

*When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices,
And when the wicked perish, there is joyful shouting* (Proverbs 11:10).

Individuals, whether *righteous* or *wicked*, are the building blocks of culture. A country is no greater than the sum character of its individuals. Much more could be explicated from this proverb, but of special insight is the following: people yearn for *righteousness* in society! That longing attests to the truth revealed in the first chapter of the book of Romans: that God's laws are written on man's heart. Internally, people possess a moral compass, and even though they may suppress that morality in their personal life (John 3:19 states, *And men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil*), they give away the fact that they inherently know right from wrong by the mere fact that they yearn for *righteousness* in their city! While they may suppress their personal conscience, they tend not to suppress their corporate conscience!

B. THROUGH RIGHTEOUS LAWS

Whereas the first way for a public servant to bless others is through his or her personal character and *righteousness*, the second way is through the policies he enacts: laws that are just (which means they reflect the attributes of God).

*The exercise of justice is joy for the righteous,
But is terror to the workers of iniquity* (Proverbs 21:15).

When you, the public servant, live both personally and vocationally in obedience to God's *Word*, God will use your life as His surrogate to give health, peace, and prosperity to others. Are you a person who brings corporate blessings to others?

Notice from the proverbs that follow the many ways in which you are blessed as you bless others: via your counsel of others, the use of your home, the proper raising of your children, and the manifest characteristics of nobility and loyalty. Concentrating on sowing blessings on others will reap personal blessings on you!

Use your position to speak into others' lives; bless others by sharing precepts from God's *Word* with those whose lives you influence. King Solomon speaks to the idea of being a counselor to your colleagues:

*Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil,
But counselors of peace have joy* (Proverbs 12:20).

*Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down,
But a good word makes it glad* (Proverbs 12:25).

*A man has joy in an apt answer,
And how delightful is a timely word* (Proverbs 15:23).

*Pleasant words are a honeycomb,
Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones* (Proverbs 16:24).

*Like cold water to a weary soul,
So is good news from a distant land* (Proverbs 25:25).

*A sated man loathes honey,
But to a famished man any bitter thing is sweet* (Proverbs 27:7).

*Oil and perfume make the heart glad,
So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend* (Proverbs 27:9).

The abundant passages regarding speaking into others' lives indicate what a blessing such actions can be to both you and others!

*Bright eyes gladden the heart;
Good news puts fat on the bones* (Proverbs 15:30).

Being a good counselor and encourager to others is all a part of creating a corporate blessing in culture.

C. THROUGH HOSPITALITY

A home with hospitality can be a wonderful blessing and ministry tool to those with whom you personally interact. The spirit of a home where Christ dwells is far more impacting and comforting than that of a materially opulent home where He is nowhere to be found in the speech or atmosphere. People pick up on the spirit of a home almost immediately.

*Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it
Than a house full of feasting with strife* (Proverbs 17:1).

D. THROUGH CHILD RAISING

Do not sacrifice your children on the altar of your career. If you invest in your kids consistently, they will become a lifetime blessing as the years roll by. Invest in your future by investing in your children today! Notice

the plethora of proverbs that portray the blessing of your offspring. Keep in mind that they will represent the corporate culture of your nation tomorrow.

A wise son makes a father glad,

But a foolish man despises his mother (Proverbs 15:20).

He who sires a fool does so to his sorrow,

And the father of a fool has no joy (Proverbs 17:21).

My son, if your heart is wise,

My own heart also will be glad (Proverbs 23:15).

The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice,

And he who sires a wise son will be glad in him.

Let your father and your mother be glad,

And let her rejoice who gave birth to you (Proverbs 23:24–25).

This next proverb is of particular importance to the credibility of a public servant. What better way to quell the character assassins than to be able to point to the nobility of your children:

Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad,

That I may reply to him who reproaches me (Proverbs 27:11).

A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad,

But he who keeps company with harlots wastes his wealth

(Proverbs 29:3).

E. THROUGH NOBILITY

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,

And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles (Proverbs 24:17).

Those who spike the ball in the end zone lack nobility. One of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. Remember: your personal dignity leads to our culture's dignity...or lack thereof.

F. THROUGH LOYALTY

A wicked messenger falls into adversity,

But a faithful envoy brings healing (Proverbs 13:17).

This proverb speaks to the opposite end of faithfulness in relationships: betrayal. Someone with whom you thought you were close, likened above to a messenger (a word portraying someone with whom you've become vulnerable) suddenly turns on you (contr. 1 Peter 2:18) for no biblical reason. Such actions create *adversity*, i.e., emotions and distance not easily remedied. In contrast, steadfastness in your relationships, genuinely *caring for* others, depicted below by the picture of a laborer meticulously *tending a fig tree*, aka loyalty to colleagues, creates a bountiful harvest in the future and is befitting of personal *honor*:

He who tends the fig tree will eat its fruit,

And he who cares for his master will be honored (Proverbs 27:18).

Loyalty is an inestimable characteristic that not only *heals* and blesses others but *honors* yourself as well.

IV. PERSONAL CURSINGS

The opposite of blessing is cursing. Now notice how King Solomon speaks to the flip side in both a personal and corporate sense of prosperity. The practice of any of the following hinders God's hand of blessing and will serve to thwart your future.

A. NO HEALING

Who with perversity in his heart continually devises evil,

Who spreads strife.

Therefore his calamity will come suddenly;

Instantly he will be broken and there will be no healing

(Proverbs 6:14–15).

Perhaps you just concluded your race against
someone who is characterized by these proverbs?

The underlying Hebrew word for *perversity* (*iqqeshuth*) means “to make crooked, to distort, to twist.” Such a heart manifests itself in *devising*

evil and *spreading strife*. Biblical synonyms for *strife* are “contentions” and “quarrels.” Whereas Scripture says the pure in heart manifest peace (Matthew 5:1–6), the idea here is the opposite: “Cursed are the quarrelsome!” Continual agitation and *healing* are juxtaposed to one another’s interests; we can’t do both at the same time! After all the fighting, mudslinging, and devising of evil during a campaign season, “’tis the season” to switch gears and heal up from it all! Elsewhere in Solomon’s wisdom writings, Ecclesiastes 3:3, he appropriately states:

[There is] *a time to kill and a time to heal;*
A time to tear down and a time to build up.

B. BURNING OUT

God promises refreshment and rekindling to men and women who meditate on His *Word*. Those who are steeped in obedience to it tend more so to live stable lives void of emotional highs and lows. They are invigorated and refreshed by His presence in their inner soul. Again, notice the same proverb that emphasizes this truth:

Do not be wise in your own eyes;
Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

It will be healing to your body
And refreshment to your bones (Proverbs 3:7–8).

During the days of November and December following an election, always plan to drink deeply from His well as you recover from your deleterious marathon. You are most likely depleted. *Fearing the Lord* and imbibing from His *Word* will be *refreshment to your bones* like nothing else.

V. CORPORATE CURSINGS

A. THROUGH RASH AND PERVERSE WORDS

Be especially careful with words:

There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing (Proverbs 12:18).

*A soothing tongue is a tree of life,
but perversion in it crushes the spirit* (Proverbs 15:4).

*Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar on soda,
Is he who sings songs to a troubled heart* (Proverbs 25:20).

This is the season to bring healing and blessing to many with your words. Take to heart James 3:4–5, which says:

Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!

B. THROUGH UNKEPT PROMISES

Failing to keep promises hurts your spouse, child, peer, employee, or constituent.

*Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
But desire fulfilled is a tree of life* (Proverbs 13:12).

*A joyful heart makes a cheerful face,
But when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken* (Proverbs 15:13).

*Folly is joy to him who lacks sense,
But a man of understanding walks straight* (Proverbs 15:21).

*The spirit of a man can endure his sickness,
But as for a broken spirit who can bear it?* (Proverbs 18:14).

As a leader, it is important to follow through so as not to crush the spirit of another.

VI. CONCLUSION

Most everyone wants to experience God's maximum blessings in his life. In order to best understand that desire, we need to not only survey what it is He indeed blesses, but also come to grips with what God indeed despises—what He curses. Be especially diligent to avoid anything that diminishes His blessings in your life and your country.

Weak-Kneed Believers: Surveying 2 Timothy

In his second epistle to Timothy, Paul shares many of his lamentations about *making disciples*. As we will see from our overview of this epistle, real disciple making is never accomplished apart from the trials of *persecution*. Another way of saying this is, we don't know if we are loyal followers of Christ (legitimate, mature believers) until we respond faithfully to *persecution*.

Persecution is a necessary ingredient in *making disciples*, even though few want to acknowledge that affliction is in the mix. But *persecution* is the ultimate test of our mettle. A weak-kneed believer will fail under this test. Only when there is a cost to our faith—when God allows us to be tested—do we learn our true level of spiritual maturity, our level of faithfulness.

I. INTRODUCTION

Peter initially denied Christ when there was a cost to his commitment. But later he responded better to similar trials. The situation was no different for Paul's *disciples*. Fair-weather believers—and their betraying tendencies—were common then and remain so today. I want you to note this and make application of this important principle as we now survey the Epistle of 2 Timothy with this theme in mind.

II. 2 TIMOTHY 1

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy and

peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy (vv. 1–4).

This last epistle Paul wrote (AD 67) before his own martyrdom is filled with intense emotion. The setting is this: Paul is writing this letter to Timothy, his disciple who is now pastoring the church in Ephesus. More closely, the church had been overrun by false teachers (cf. 1 Timothy). Timothy's mettle is being tested through *persecution*, so Paul writes him in ways most appropriate to best help him through the matters he pressingly faces:

For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well. For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you (vv. 5–14).

Timothy was faltering as a pastor because of the troubles created by Hymenaeus and Alexander (cf. 1 Timothy 1:20). These problems (from a human perspective) were born from within the church he was leading; but from a spiritual perspective, Satan himself was propagating the turmoil. This pattern is quite similar today; most believers who are actively

attempting to fulfill the Great Commission find “church” folk to be their greatest problem. That has certainly been my experience and most likely yours too.

Paul’s response is to exhort his disciple to *kindle afresh* his spiritual gifts of teaching, preaching, and evangelism and be like Paul himself. Sometimes past criticisms serve to paralyze future progress; Paul is saying the exact opposite should be true—even though the further manifestation of his spiritual gifts and devout commitment to the Great Commission would likely bring more personal *suffering*! Timothy—and you, my friend—should not be *ashamed* (1:12) about moving forward to achieve your destiny; after all, the continual, industrious fulfillment of your calling best silences your critics.

Paul charges us not to be *timid* (1:7; “weak-kneed”) during trials and *persecution*, using himself as an example. He is acting as a model for Timothy—himself *not* being *ashamed* of the Gospel, even though he *suffers* greatly for proclaiming it. Paul is saying to his understudy and to you and me:

Our audience is one, our doctrine in
the cross is exclusive, and our confidence
in God’s sovereignty must be clear.

If Christ had called him, no man could put him asunder. True in and of Paul’s life and for Timothy’s is the strong inference of this passage. The application for you as a public servant is obvious—especially as folks take you to task prior to elections.

Hymenaeus and Alexander—two heretics who had taken over the leadership of the Ephesian church as already mentioned—had largely caused Timothy’s woes. One might say they were *in* the church, but as unbelievers and not *of* the church. This classification is important to make concerning people who hurt you. As will be seen in the remainder of this study, Paul experienced many other relationships where his friends broke in the wrong direction, *deserting* him or becoming *ashamed* of the Gospel (cf. Romans 1:16). Unlike the two usurpers, these friends were in the church but could be classified differently—weak-kneed “believers” of a different sort.

You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains; but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me—the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day—and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus (vv. 15–18).

Phygelus and *Hermogenes* are Paul's first mention of at least three additional sets of folks in 2 Timothy who had abandoned him in ministry. Like Hymenaeus and Alexander, who are found in 1 Timothy, *Phygelus* and *Hermogenes* also turned out to be fair-weather friends. Nothing more is known about these two promising Christian leaders who were evidently close to Paul but jumped ship when later a personal cost of some sort arose. Acutely aware and having learned from what had happened previously with *Phygelus* and *Hermogenes*, in this passage Paul bespeaks and models a contrasting attitude to Timothy. In the large context, Paul's message to Timothy is this:

In times of trial and **persecution**,
strong **disciples** refuse to equivocate,
vacillate, or compromise on biblically clear
matters, and they will not hesitate to
be confrontational when necessary.

There was no room in Paul's mind for weak-kneed Christianity.

III. 2 TIMOTHY 2

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (vv. 1–2).

In contrast to the weak-kneed, Paul instructs Timothy to **entrust** the Gospel to **faithful men**. Not only Timothy, but every minister and fellow

believer has 2 Timothy 2:2 laid to his or her charge. This passage is another way of expressing the Great Commission found in the Gospels. Notice that every believer needs to be *making disciples*. *Entrusting* the doctrine he or she has been given (from a reputable disciple maker) to another *who will be able to teach* yet *others* is the primary biblical methodology for the expansion of God's kingdom. Four generations of *discipling* are in view in this one passage. Since *mathetes* is the Greek word for *disciple* and means "a learner," it is no wonder that the disciple maker herein and found elsewhere in *Scripture* is referred to as a *teacher* (*didasko*). A Bible *teacher* needs a learner, and a learner needs a Bible *teacher*. As stated earlier, in this same regard Paul said to the Ephesian elders in the book of Acts (those whom he had *discipled* for many years), *For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God* (20:27). This verse reveals what it means to be actively *strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus* (2:1); it is how one strengthens the limb which is lame (Hebrews 12:13), it is how one stands strong in *persecution*. It is the opposite of ending up spiritually weak-kneed.

Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (v. 3).

Believers who do not desire to place themselves in the presence of and learn from Bible *teachers* are biblical enigmas. The person who avoids 2 Timothy 2:2 will not be epitomized by 2 Timothy 2:3. Those who are not being discipled and subsequently do not disciple others are in no position to endure or *suffer hardship* that would be attributed to their faithfulness to the Word of God. Biblically malnourished believers are always weak at the knees. (I should add that this is why placing Bible *teachers* in capitols is the only real means to sustain America. At the end of the day, either we have leaders who are *disciples* and disciplers of and for Christ who have spiritual moxie and can withstand the heat in the kitchen, or we don't).

Paul bids his disciple remain
loyal in the battle for truth.

There is always a cost to doing battle for biblical truth; it will separate *soldiers* of Christ who are willing to *suffer hardship* in the battle

for righteousness from those who are not, whose selfish purposes remain preeminent. The weak-kneed subvert Christ's interests to their own self-interests.

No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned (vv. 4–9).

Why have I chosen to amplify this theme of exhorting weak-kneed Christianity when conducting a general survey of this epistle? Notice the bookend statements (vv. 3, 9) of the aforementioned section of the epistle: a common theme of *suffering hardship* from start to finish. Such is *normative* for the follower of Christ—not optional—in biblically understood Christianity.

The increasing problem in
American Evangelicalism is a
self-centered religiosity sold
from the vast majority of pulpits.

Be it a prosperity gospel, a self-help “seeker-friendly” sermon, or a hyper-charismatic emphasis where the listener is programmed to have self-centered versus transcendent thoughts during worship, all are less than what Paul is saying to Timothy are earmarks of strong-kneed Christianity! Paul consistently talks more about *slaying* self (cf. Romans 6:2–6; Galatians 2:20) than *gratifying* self.

Paul repeatedly states that *suffering hardship, persecution*, and trials is typical of authentic Christianity. Conditioned elsewhere, hordes of “believers” routinely duck out of sight when *persecution* arises. Why? Because *persecution* is not what they originally signed up for! “I thought

Christianity was supposed to prosper me, give me my best life now, and make me feel ‘spiritual’—not cost me! *Suffer* hardship? What’s that? I’m outta here!” is summarily the conclusion of the unfulfilled expectations of the weak-kneed.

Further, let’s peer into the three metaphors Paul uses in 2 Timothy 2 to describe and characterize real Christianity: the *soldier*, the *athlete*, and the *farmer*. In context, Paul is illustrating to full-time ministers such as Timothy, and by way of extension to all *disciple makers*, their need to be *undistracted* (as is characteristic of *soldiers*), in this case by worldly, selfish pursuits. They are to be *obedient* (as is characteristic of *athletes*), in this case to the Word of God as it pertains to all ministry and ministry philosophy. And they are to be *hard-working* (as is characteristic of *farmers*), in this case to the end goal of *making disciples*.

Being undistracted, obedient, and hard-working are all requisites—fundamental disciplines—necessary for anyone who wants to *make disciples* over the course of their lifetime. All are totally the opposite characteristics of weak-kneed “believers.”

Paul now segues into revealing his motives for ministry as is evidenced in and by the following passage. The motive? He perseveres under *persecution* for the sake of the *chosen* and their *salvation*:

For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory. It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself (vv. 10–13).

As ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), Paul, you, and I have a deep-seated reason for living, even when the environment is so hostile as to suggest we should somehow bow out. The *salvation* and maturation of the saints—*making disciples*—compels us to live with an eternally based internal strength.

There is no greater cause, purpose,
or motivation than to clearly understand our
biblical identity and marching orders in Christ.

These internal, theological truths should lead to personal endurance in ministry (orthodoxy leads to orthopraxy). Conversely, the person who is weak-kneed to the point of denying Christ (v. 12) when under *persecution*, in a continual sense, is not saved to begin with, i.e., the trial serves to separate the saints from the “ain’ts.” Trials and *persecution* are sometimes meant by God to identify and separate the tares present among the wheat of the body of Christ (cf. 1 John 2:19).

Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.”

Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will (vv. 14–26).

Paul informs Timothy not to engage in debates with false teachers. Conversely, he is to spend his energies *accurately handling the word of truth* (v. 15). This separation from false teachers, however, does not mean he fails to warn others about them (cf. Galatians 1:16–19; Ephesians 5:6–11; Jude 3). As a matter of fact, many of the New Testament letters are polemics alerting the saved to false teachings and teachers; such is a major

component of biblical ministry. Before departing from this chapter, notice that *Philetus* was yet another person who betrayed Paul in ministry. The list grows.

IV. 2 TIMOTHY 3

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these (vv. 1–5).

The power and focus of Christianity lies in the cross of Christ. The salvific Jesus, Who died on the cross as a substitutionary atonement for sin, affords us justification before a holy and righteous God. Whenever an individual or an organization changes this message, viewing Jesus as a mere sociological change agent (Liberation Theology) or as a mere human role model for one to emulate in character (The Fellowship¹), they have changed the essence of the Gospel. In so doing, they manifest exactly what Paul warns of in this passage: *holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power...* (v. 5).

Jesus is much more than a model
moral code for living. He and He
alone is the way to heaven!

For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith. But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes's and Jambres's folly was also.

Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me!

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (vv. 6–12).

Again, the clear promise from this *Scripture* is *persecution* is normative. I agree with commentators who hold verse 12 to be in contrast to verse 5: those who *hold to a form of godliness* (v. 5) will not be characterized by *persecution* (v. 12).² Why? Because Jesus and Paul repeatedly state the promise and association of genuine godliness and *persecution* in the following passages:

A. JESUS IN MATTHEW 10:22–23

“You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.”

B. JESUS IN LUKE 21:12

“But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name’s sake.”

C. JESUS IN JOHN 15:20

“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you....”

D. PAUL IN ACTS 14:22

Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

E. PAUL IN 1 THESSALONIANS 3:4

For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.

All of these various passages serve to associate genuine *godliness* with *persecution*. Having gone elsewhere to underscore this point, let's turn our attention back to 2 Timothy 3 now.

Paul's contrast to verse 5 (of those who hold to *a form of godliness* but who, he says, have *denied its power*) continues in the passages that follow verse 12 (below). Note what he says in verses 13 through 15: it is the *power* of the *Scriptures* that lead others to *salvation*.

But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (vv. 13–15).

Paul is not talking about some kind of powerless social, exemplary Jesus here, i.e., *a form of godliness*; rather, he is speaking about the salvific Jesus revealed in the sacred writings, the *Scriptures*—wherein is the *power*—the Gospel to transform lives!

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (vv. 16–17).

Scripture repeatedly attests to its own inspiration. To hold any lesser view of it is to be in contradiction to what it says.

V. 2 TIMOTHY 4

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn

aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (vv. 1–5).

Again, standing for truth and refuting error are normative. They beckon hardship, which believers need to endure. Train yourself to expect this result.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come (v. 6).

Paul's personal martyrdom was near. The Greek language he uses is picturesque, likening himself to a ship losing its tether, slipping from the dock.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith (v. 7).

Again, normative to real ministry is the battle for truth and the refuting of error.

In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica... (vv. 8–10).

Paul knew of his coming reward from the Savior he had so faithfully served. **Demas**, on the other hand, is another weak-kneed defector. Why did he defect? The things of the world held a higher priority in his heart. In the book of Philemon (written earlier by Paul), the apostle called **Demas** a "fellow worker." In Colossians 4:12–14 (approximately five years earlier), Paul signifies that he was a close associate. So for Paul to use the word **deserted** (*enkataleipo*) indicates a pendulum swing in **Demas'** heart. The word means "utter abandonment." **Demas** also needs to be added to the list of betrayers in ministry; he was a fair-weather follower. He saw where Paul's life was headed, and he did not want to risk *persecution* and

imprisonment with him. In your heart are you like Paul or *Demas*? Time and *persecution* will tell.

Paul's Betrayers

As seen in this study, Paul encountered many weak-kneed people during his ministry. If we, too, are intent on the Gospel, the Great Commission, and the pursuit of *making disciples*, should we anticipate that all our friendships will turn out great? No, they will not.

1. The Envious Ministers (Philippians 1:15)

In Paul's imprisonment, some believers used the opportunity to discount him. Paul's response was to say that if Christ was proclaimed, no matter the motives of his opponents, he'd rejoice (but nonetheless he balanced his message in Philippians 1:20).

2. Barnabas (Acts 15:39)

Co-workers in the Great Commission, they had a sharp disagreement later in ministry and went separate ways.

3. Alexander and Hymenaeus (1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 4:14)

These two men were heretics who stole the church that Paul spent three years laboring to plant in Ephesus.

4. Phygelus and Hermogenes (2 Timothy 1:15)

Nothing much is known about these two promising Christian leaders who were evidently close to Paul. When a personal cost of some sort later arose, the two men jumped ship (cf. 2 Timothy 1:16).

5. Philetus (2 Timothy 2:17)

Paired with Hymenaeus in this passage (the heretic mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:20), Philetus too had rejected sound doctrine.

6. Demas (2 Timothy 4:10)

In the Philemon epistle (written by Paul earlier), Paul called Demas a “fellow worker.” In Colossians 4:12–14 (approximately five years earlier), Paul signified that he was a close associate. So for Paul to use the word **deserted** (*enkataleipo*) in 2 Timothy 4:10 indicates a pendulum swing in Demas’ heart. The word means “utter abandonment.” Paul said Demas loved the present world more.

The next opponent and persecutor Paul lists was *Alexander the coppersmith*. This most likely is the same Alexander (of *Alexander* and *Hymenaeus* fame) previously mentioned at the start of this study (1 Timothy 1:20). He was never a disciple like *Demas*. *Alexander* could have been similar in trade to Demetrius the silversmith (Acts 19:24) who greatly resented the apostle because of his impact on his business. Whatever the case, Paul’s preaching altered *Alexander’s* career, and as a result, he *harmed* Paul, though the text does not specifically say how:

Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching (vv. 10–15).

Notable is Paul’s response to such a man: he states *the Lord will repay him according to his deeds* (cf. Romans 12:19). As difficult as it is to wait for God to repay evil, vengeance is not a biblically appropriate action for any human in response to *harm*.

Vengeance is God's business alone;
His adjudication is more accurately compensatory.

This is a very real thing that God does—just give Him time and allow Him the space to do it! He protects His under shepherds.

At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them (v. 16).

As if Phygelus, Hermogenes, and Demas were not sufficient personal illustrations of weak-kneed believers in 2 Timothy, Paul summarily states that in a general sense ***no one supported me, but all deserted me***. When Paul was in Roman court, he had no friend to stand with him; they all ***deserted*** him. Had Onesiphorus or Luke been there, they would have surely stood with him, but Paul often went through ***persecution*** with no friends and no encouragement! Stop and think about being in that state—and exactly how remarkable a man Paul was! In these lonely times, intimacy and inner strength in and with Christ are forged in the believer's life. In Philippians, also written from prison, Paul states, ***that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings ...*** (3:10). Spiritual maturity, intimacy with Christ, and becoming a disciple are accomplished in ***persecution*** and abandonment, wherein Christ is the believer's sole hope and resource. And facing those circumstances is a very good thing. Nothing will build your core strength quite like Christ does! So count it all joy (James 1:2)!

Philippians 2:20–21 is another sobering passage along these same lines, wherein Paul states, ***For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests....*** At the culmination of the apostle's great ministry, wouldn't it seem that, by then, he would have had a band of men to achieve any ministry task imaginable! But he did not.

Weak-kneed believers are more common and
more to be anticipated than soul mates whose
love for Christ transcends all forms of self-interest.

But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen (vv. 17–18).

VII. CONCLUSION

Despite his oft-dire physical condition and the too often emotional abandonments of those he'd earlier deemed loyal, such circumstances never affected his spirit! Paul had a pliable heart but very thick skin by the time he wrote 2 Timothy—at the zenith of his life and ministry. He possessed an intimacy with Christ and a resounding faith that totally *transcended, eclipsed, and governed* the emotions of his earthly condition! He ruled his spirit—not the other way around! Noticeably missing from this epistle is any sense of bitterness or resentment. Romans 8:35–39 reveals the deep thinking of this wonderful man and provides an apt capstone to this book survey:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1. The Fellowship's 2005 IRS 990 Statement of Organization's Primary Exempt Purpose, Part III: "... modeling the principles of Jesus ... under the thoughts of Jesus."
2. George W. Knight III, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992), 442.

Mastering the Fascinating Book of Proverbs!

In this study let us attempt to get a better grip and understanding of the Old Testament (OT) book of Proverbs. We will gain an understanding of the various kinds of formal structures that God has incorporated in this book; such insights will greatly aid our comprehension.

God penned this book through His servant Solomon, the wisest man of his day (cf. 1 Kings 3:28) and of all time (1 Kings 3:12).

Most interestingly for those who hold governmental office, a king wrote the book to his son who would be king. Accordingly, it has great, direct application to those God has called to represent Him in the Capitol; it is necessary study for anyone who seeks to lead! What follows will greatly aid you in wise governmental leadership.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most common ancient methods of teaching wisdom was via the medium of *proverbs*, short succinct sayings that communicate truths in a profound way. With brevity of words, vast principles for living are illuminated for and exhibited to the reader. Often this instruction is done by comparing a truth—paralleling it—to a picturesque, commonly known image from everyday life. With that useful insight in mind, the book itself is easier and more enjoyable to study!

Ancient literature records that proverbial forms of communication existed in the East, in Egypt, Edom, and Babylon, but only those written

in the Bible's book of Proverbs bear God's stamp of veracity and trustworthiness. Only these proverbs are sealed with God's authority. (Keep in mind that no less than 3,600 times does the OT claim to be the Word of God.)

The Hebrew word for Proverbs is *Mishlei* and, in a basic sense, means "to be like." In essence, Proverbs conveys *godly wisdom*, which is skill at living life. Therefore, if we desire to increase living our life successfully—especially if we desire to lead in God's various ordained institutions—then the book of Proverbs needs to be a staple of our daily spiritual diet. And, although proverbs are found elsewhere in Scripture,¹ this is the one book amongst the 66 God-inspired books of the Bible that specifically, broadly, and succinctly addresses the subject.

II. THE POTION OF PROVERBS

Five forms of parallelism commonly occur in the 31 chapters of the book of Proverbs that convey timeless principles for living life with great skill for God's glory, i.e., wisely. Summarily, these forms are as follows:

KIND	ILLUSTRATION
Identical/Similar	Proverbs 16:18
Opposite	Proverbs 11:17
Expansive	Proverbs 10:18
Comparative.....	Proverbs 25:25
Formal	Proverbs 16:28

These forms of parallelism used in Proverbs are usually expressed in two poetic lines. The second line facilitates what is captioned previously to create understanding. That is to say, the second line completes the first line in a fashion consistent with one of these five specific forms. Sometimes, however, the captioning is accomplished in four lines (24:3–4), six lines (23:19–21), or eight lines (23:22–25). What follows are examples of each (note that the New American Standard Bible text which I always use in my

studies capitalizes the start of the second stanza to help the reader make this distinction—something the Crabby Microsoft Edit Lady frowns on—but I like it very much!):

A. IDENTICAL PROVERBS

The second stanza provides more insight concerning the subject of the first stanza:

*Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before stumbling* (16:18).

B. OPPOSITE PROVERBS

The second stanza contrasts the first stanza to qualify the specificity of the principle:

*The merciful man does himself good,
But the cruel man does himself harm* (11:17).

C. EXPANSIVE PROVERBS

The second stanza explains more information about the principle first elucidated:

*He who conceals hatred has lying lips,
And he who spreads slander is a fool* (10:18).

D. COMPARATIVE PROVERBS

The second stanza compares the principle of the first stanza to something quite familiar:

*Like cold water to a weary soul,
So is good news from a distant land* (25:25).

E. FORMAL PROVERBS

The second stanza completes the thought expressed in the first stanza:

*A perverse man spreads strife,
And a slanderer separates intimate friends* (16:28).

Learn to look for each of these five forms of parallelism when reading and meditating on the book of Proverbs. Employing such skills will aid your interpretive abilities to understand the authorial intent of the passage and will lead to a proper application in and to your life. I recommend that you embark on a study of Proverbs and conduct the following exercise as you do: read one chapter per day, taking the time to identify and record in the margin which type of parallelism is represented by each. Mark each one with A through E per my identifiers. I think you will find this exercise to be stimulating, fun, and extremely helpful to your mastery of this book!

III. THE PROGENITORS OF PROVERBS

Solomon wrote much of the book of Proverbs and acted as its general editor (as chapter 30 records the words of Agur and chapter 31 the words of Lemuel, both of whom scholars say could be pen names of Solomon due to the close similarity in style). King Solomon ruled Israel from 971–931 BC and, as previously mentioned, was granted great and unique wisdom by God. It is interesting to note that Solomon desired understanding above riches per 1 Kings 3:11–12 (and 2 Chronicles 1:11–12):

God said to him, “Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you.”

God obviously honored Solomon’s heart and priorities as we see by the fascinating study of this book.

What are the inner priorities of your heart?
What is it that God looks for and blesses?

Note 2 Chronicles 16:9:

For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.

Put away *idolatry*, i.e., anything that supersedes God's rightful, preeminent priority in your inner being. Such priority slippage is evidenced in Solomon's heart as in his later years he turned away from God (cf. 1 Kings 11:1–11). His penning of this OT book, however, along with Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, occurred well before that time. Solomon then is yet another biblical illustration of the consequences of sin and the fall of man. Slowly, over the course of Solomon's life, he wandered away from obedience to God. He failed in his old age to live out the truths God had given him and which he had recorded in his writings. Of further interest is Solomon's son Rehoboam, to whom the book is written. Rehoboam completely rejected his father's teaching, and his political leadership was a disaster (cf. 1 Kings 12:6–11). One wonders whether this may have been a result of observing his father's ungodly behavior. May this never be the case with you, my friend.

IV. THE PRINCIPLES OF PROVERBS

The broad conveyance of the book of Proverbs is that wise people—those who live a life of obedience to God—will live longer (9:11), prosper (16:20), experience joy (3:13–18) and the overall goodness of God (12:21) during their life here on earth. Conversely, those who fail to live according to Proverbs (referred to by this book as *fools*) suffer shame (3:35) and death (10:21).

While these truths are generally evident, note that the Bible also teaches that the wicked sometimes prosper temporarily (Psalm 73:3, 12:8) and that sometimes godly people suffer (cf. the book of Job). An important consideration when studying Proverbs therefore is not to do so with an attitude of seeking personal gain and success as though this book contains a sure formula for that. Rather, study the book for purposes of spiritual maturity and wisdom to glorify God and to become more Christlike. Accordingly, Proverbs contains principles, not promises.

V. THE PURPOSE OF PROVERBS

This book answers the question, “How should I live my life?” In answering that question, note that it is not a selfish how-I-can-be-successful book, but rather, one that instructs the believer on how he can know for certain if he has lived a life that is pleasing to God and worthy of reward before the day of judgment. This book deals with personal morality, duty, ethics, values, and virtues that inform and instruct what exactly God’s will is—even in the complex matters of life! To the student of the book, it clarifies what exactly righteousness looks like—and is—in any given situation. Proverbs will inform the believer repeatedly as to what is the right thing to do. States one commentator:

[It] pricks the conscience, penetrates the soul, and probes the deepest recesses of the heart By design Proverbs, being a proactive book, promotes personal holiness at the most practical levels of living.²

Hopefully, everyone in the Capitol will find this study both critical and intriguing. They should.

A lifelong study of the book of Proverbs
will help mold, reinforce, and strengthen
the resolve of every person’s conscience.

Remember, our conscience works from the basis of that of which we are conscientious.

VI. THE PROCEDURE OF PROVERBS

The following ten tips for interpreting Proverbs are paraphrased from *Practicing Proverbs*, by Dr. Richard Mayhue. Each point will greatly aid your study as you examine and work to understand this great book over a lifetime.

Tips for Interpreting Proverbs

TIP 1 Realize that no proverb or section in Proverbs intends to be an exhaustive, final treatment on the subject.

TIP 2 Proverbs must be understood in terms of context, which includes the language of Scripture, the section in Proverbs, the book of Proverbs, Solomon's writings, the wisdom section of OT Scripture, the complete OT, and the entire Bible.

TIP 3 Proverbs demands to be interpreted in the cultural and historical setting of the time in which it was written.

TIP 4 Proverbs are not guaranteed promises but generalizations that can have exceptions.

TIP 5 Poetic features and figures of speech need to be taken into consideration during interpretation versus a wooden, literalistic interpretation.

TIP 6 Proverbs are not a formula for selfish gain but rather a glorification of God via spiritual maturity.

TIP 7 If a proverb is unclear, read it in another translation or use trusted commentaries.

TIP 8 Interpret Proverbs to discover the original authorial intent, discover the timeless principle, and then make application.

TIP 9 Proverbs is not designed for large doses of reading. Study small portions, contemplate, and reflect.

TIP 10 Treat what Proverbs states as divine and requiring obedience versus an optional idea coming from the secular world.³

VII. SUMMARY

May our Lord grant you wonderful understanding and spiritual growth from this magnificent book of the Bible—one that is written primarily to prepare an individual for leadership of a nation! This book has great relevance to a public servant today!

1. Cf. 1 Samuel 10:11–12; Ezekiel 12:22–23; Matthew 9:12; John 4:35; 1 Corinthians 6:13. Oftentimes the NT quotes from the book of Proverbs, e.g., Hebrews 12:5–6; James 4:13. As a matter of fact, no less than 38 times are Proverbs quoted by NT writers.
2. Richard Mayhue, *Practicing Proverbs; Wise Living for Foolish Times* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 33.
3. Ibid.

How to Choose a Good Pastor

You are very careful, deliberate, and wise about whom you hire in your office. The procedures you follow relative to employment help assure that you get what you are looking for.

In a similar way, do you closely examine the *pastor* and church wherein you and your family will obtain a proper spiritual diet?

Many legislative and governing authorities simply go to church where their family has always gone. But as illustrated in the first chapters of the book of Revelation, churches change—and so do *pastors*.

This study—*How to Choose a Good Pastor*—will aid your discernment in choosing a good, biblically based spiritual coach for life.

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, many thoughts abound as to what a *pastor* is or should be like. Some view him as a nice, teddy-bear type who hugs and walks alongside you. Others see him as the Sunday morning event leader who is the good-looking CEO of a slick, market-driven outreach. Others view the minister as someone who can heal the congregants' physical ailments via touching the tube (flat screen). Others can't wait to get pumped-up from this week's prosperity message. And then some view ministers as impersonal and removed, black-robed untouchables, i.e., outsider professionals.

In the midst of these varying perceptions of a *pastor*, what does Scripture indicate he should be like? What are your thoughts on what makes a good *pastor*? The answer to this question is gained by studying

what are called the Pastoral Epistles of the New Testament (NT): the three books of 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Timothy (the chronological order in which they were penned under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit).

II. WHO IS QUALIFIED TO SPEAK FOR GOD?

In seeking a good spiritual leader, our first consideration should be who God's Word says is qualified to speak authoritatively of the Bible. In other words, whom should believers listen to or consider credible?

In 1 Timothy 3:1–7, the Apostle Paul defines a calling into spiritual leadership:

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

The first identifier of a good *pastor* is, *if any man*. The Scriptures are repeatedly clear about the qualification that a *pastor*, the senior leader of a church is male. The Greek word here for man is *tis*, which in fact, is an indefinite pronoun but it is used in parallel to and therefore matches the numerous masculine adjectives that follow in the passage. These masculine adjectives, which translate accurately into the English language as *he*, are numerous and are appropriately supplied no less than 10 times in English translations!

Further to this particular point, in verse 2, Paul said the *overseer* by definition must be *the husband of one wife*. In verse 4, Paul stipulated that, *he must be one who manages his own household well*. In those days, only men were the heads of their households. In woke Evangelicalism today, this clear criteria of Scripture is often compromised, (and the work-arounds—those who distort the Scriptures—are quite amusing I might add) but the conscience of the Christian is bound by the clear teaching of God's Word;

our convictions on this are a matter of obedience to what God explicitly says here.

III. PRELIMINARY PASSAGES

By far the largest number of passages related to the *pastor* has to do with his injunction to teach and preach the Word of God. The sheer volume of those commandments far outweighs any other aspect of his God-given job description. This fact alone serves to indicate that the primacy of *pastoring* is related to teaching and preaching the Word of God. Note this emphasis as illustrated by the Holy Spirit in the following passages:

A. 1 TIMOTHY 5:17

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

B. ACTS 20:27

In Acts, relative to the Ephesian elders with whom Paul had labored in ministry for three years, he states: *For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.*

C. COLOSSIANS 1:25

Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God.

In these three passages, the emphasis of the apostles' ministry was proclaiming the Word. And this same perspective on ministry was handed down from the apostles to the first-century church leaders as evidenced in and by the Pastoral Epistles.

IV. PASSAGES EMPHASIZING TEACHING

One of the main texts underscoring the prominence of the *pastor* being a *teacher* is found in Ephesians 4:11. This verse reveals the kind of leadership

that Jesus Christ has given and intends for the body of Christ in His physical absence (in between His first and second incarnation):

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastor and teachers.

Listed are four different positions of leadership that God advocates to build His body (cf. 4:12). Importantly, in Ephesians and elsewhere in the NT, there is a distinction between spiritual gifts—gifts all believers obtain at the point of salvation—and gifts God bestows to lead His body between the First and Second Coming of Christ. Spiritual gifts are given to each member of the body (Ephesians 4:16). Over and above that fact He gives certain individuals as gifts to the Church to mature His Church: *And He gave some...*

Whereas the leadership positions of apostles and *prophets* primarily relate to the apostolic, formative years of the Church Age, and the authentication of those ushering in the Church Age (as chronicled in the book of Acts), the prevalent ongoing leadership positions given by Christ today are those of *evangelist* and *pastor-teacher*.

V. ADDITIONAL PASSAGES EMPHASIZING TEACHING

The *pastor-teacher* is best understood as one person in Ephesians 4:11. Whereas some English Bibles translate the Greek to mean *pastors* and *teachers*, a careful study of the NT on this subject (in my opinion, as well as others) supports the idea of one person and one office. In other words, Christ gifts His Church with a *pastor* who is a *teacher*, and a *teacher* who is a *pastor*; they go together. In a pragmatic sense, it is difficult to effectively *pastor* without *teaching* the Scriptures, and to effectively teach without pastoring is also difficult. Those who are *teachers* and not *pastors* should not be lead *pastors*; perhaps they would better serve by teaching in a seminary or writing books.

In addition to a pragmatic connection between *pastor-teacher*, many commentators also believe this is the case grammatically. The conjunction “and” (*kai*), which connects the two nouns, often means “that is” or “in particular” in the Greek language. Accordingly, if such is the intended usage in this passage, *teachers* (*didaskalos*) is descriptive of *pastors* (*poimen*), i.e., “*pastors*, in particular *teachers*.” On its own, this interpretation is inconclusive, but consider 1 Peter 5:1 and 2, which state,

Therefore, I exhort the elders [presbuteros] among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd [poimen] the flock of God among you, exercising oversight [episkopeo]....

The three words used distinctively—*elders*, *shepherd*, and *oversight*—yet interchangeably, describe the same person and position. *Elders* and *overseers* are other titles used to describe *pastors* (translated here as *shepherd*). Notice the same usage in Acts chapter 20:

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders [presbuteros] of the church (v. 17).

Later in the chapter he states to these elders, *Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [episkopos], to shepherd [poimen] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (v. 28).*

Once again *elder* and *overseer* are descriptors of the same person as is the *shepherd (pastor)*. Each name is a definitive aspect of the same person and office given by Christ to His Church. States one commentator, “These are different ways of identifying the same person.”¹

Now add the following: in the Pastoral Epistles, specifically 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, which reveal the qualifications for those who are called by Christ as leaders in the body of Christ, the shopping lists of qualifiers begin respectively with *An overseer (episcope)* then ... and appoint elders (*presbuteros*).

Here’s the point: each passage continues to define and describe the *elder-overseer* as a person who is able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:5). Follow the deductive conclusion here: if a *pastor* is another name for *overseer* or *elder* per the conclusion of the former paragraph, then it stands to reason that, per the latter paragraph, a *pastor* is one who is *able to teach*. These various passages, when combined, seem to conclude that every *pastor* is one who is *able to teach* the Word of God, i.e., a *pastor-teacher*.

Why all of this detail about a seemingly small point? Because this small point brings to light a huge insight relative to the subject of choosing a good spiritual mentor/coach (*pastor*) for yourself and your family.

Some *pastors* are not Bible teachers,
and some Bible teachers are not *pastors*.

Choose one who is both! Your spiritual coach needs to love and mentor you as he labors to teach you God's Word! Don't settle for less, my friend. You can see by my studies that I work hard at teaching in our Capitol; I want to work equally as hard at being a good personable *pastor* for you as well!

As seen in the previous passages and many others, the above are the primary interchangeable titles that God uses to identify those whom He has actually given (*and God gave some as ...*) to the body of Christ today. Given this intel, God expects you, as a believer, to cue in on this! Back at home in the district or state, or here in the capitol, don't choose a *pastor* who is not a *teacher*. Equally unsound, don't choose a *teacher* who is not a *pastor*!

VI. PASSAGES REGARDING FALSE TEACHERS

Add to this counsel 1 John 4:1:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

A believer needs to discern if a spiritual leader is really sent from God by first of all asking: does he even teach the Bible? And secondly, if he does, to what degree does he teach it? Acts 17:11 states the following regarding the diligence of the Berean Christians:

For they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.

Jesus said regarding true belief in Matthew 7:20–21:

“So then you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Wisely choose your *pastor*! Make sure he is teaching you the Word of God! Don't settle for anything less—especially given the limited time you have!

VII. APPLICATION

Is it an appropriate and/or a fair question to ask, “How do I rate my *pastor*?” I think so.

Three Descriptives of a Pastor (*Poimen*)

Teacher (*didaskalos*)

emphasizes what the **pastor** does: he **teaches**.

Elder (*prebuteros*)

emphasized what the **pastor** has: he has character.

And ...

Overseer (*episkopos*)

emphasizes how the **pastor** functions: he presides.

Properly rating another (like you do those seeking employment in your office) relates to good judgment. Whereas God condemns those who possess a self-righteous, judgmental spirit akin to the Pharisees (cf. Matthew 7:1), every believer is to possess careful discernment especially concerning spiritual matters. In fact discernment is required in order to properly love. Philippians 1:9 states,

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.

Choose wisely, my friend, you are most loving to yourself and your family when you choose **pastor-teachers** who are biblically-defined at both ends of your geographically split-apart vocation.

Similar to judging safety
from danger is the ability
to judge truth from error.

Every believer needs to be discerning when evaluating good vs. bad **pastors**. Make sure too that you are not following a **pastor** who is simply

flattering you; real shepherds will speak truth into your life at the risk of losing your friendship.

Too often believers incorrectly think, “I’m not to judge” as they follow after ineffectual *pastors* who fail to ever mature their congregants due to their serving-up a low-protein Bible diet. Non-discernment is simply another way of spelling naiveté or imprudence. Proverbs calls such individuals “simpletons.” “I am not to judge” can sometimes be a “spiritual cloak” covering a lack of applied biblical insight or necessary courage.

VIII. SUMMARY

Believers should associate with a *pastor* who will stimulate spiritual growth via *teaching* and *preaching* the Word. At the same time, associate with a *pastor* who will stimulate spiritual growth via *shepherding* your heart through the good times and the bad.

Your selection of a *pastor(s)* will make a huge difference in your growth over future decades! Hebrews 5:14 speaks about how learning the precepts of God develops spiritual maturity:

But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Biblical laxity leads to spiritual naiveté. The ability to *test the spirits* (see again point VI: 1 John 4:1) implies that we are to possess theological acumen. Proverbs 1:22 states, *How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded?*

States Proverbs 14:15: *The naive believes everything, but the sensible man considers his steps.*

Ephesians 5:17 adds some judicious advice: *So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

Be discerning! Ask judiciously, “Does the *pastor* I’m following really *shepherd* me? Does he possess a genuine love for people as well as the skill and commitment to *teach* the Bible?” Those questions are emblematic of the kind of thinking and decisions God expects from every believer.

1. John MacArthur, <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/451016/answering-the-key-questions-about-elders>.

Who Are Your Counselors in the Capitol?

For some years now, my weekly Bible studies have gone out to thousands of people throughout our country. As you know, I am committed to sending these out each and every week of the year. That means I will send them electronically to your email address even when you are in your district office back home (should, of course, you desire this). It is a good stimulus for continued growth and maturity in Christ—and is an additional ministry to our regular Bible studies on the Hill.

In this week's written study, "Who Are Your Counselors in the Capitol?" I would like to exhaust the book of Proverbs regarding what it mentions about choosing *counselors* in your life.

What follows is all that Solomon taught Rehoboam, his son, about this subject in preparation for him to become the next governing leader of Israel. Solomon has much to say about a political leader selecting confidants

I. INTRODUCTION

Successfully living life and forming good public policy depends on many factors: along with the pillars of *wisdom* (*wisdom* being the skill at living life for God's glory), a deep-seated attitude of properly fearing the Lord, the pursuit of His *knowledge*, and the *understanding* of His precepts, there is the additional towering need for a public servant to continually

receive good *counsel*. Every government leader, support staff member, and lobbyist should surround him- or herself with *wise counselors*; everyone needs excellent confidants. A confidant is someone you implicitly trust. A confidant is someone you listen to—a person who cares and protects you at all times. Accordingly, whom you choose as such is a very important matter. Please allow me to attempt to expand your *understanding* of confidants—as other than just several good friends.

Notice first, however, that Proverbs reveals that some individuals, being self-absorbed, don't even possess good friends as *counselors*:

*Through insolence comes nothing but strife,
But wisdom is with those who receive counsel* (13:10).

Insolence (in Hebrew, *zadon*) is a word we do not often use today. It means “arrogance; to exaggerate one's own worth or importance.” It is used here to negatively contrast one who receives *counsel*, i.e., one who possesses trusted confidants. An *insolent* person is characterized by self-centeredness, someone who looks at life through his own limited *knowledge* and perspective. Pride fools this person into thinking outside *counsel* is unnecessary. But notice the fruit of such, states this Proverb, is *strife*. It is not a sign of weakness to ask others about a matter. Quite to the contrary, the Bible says that to seek *counsel* is a sign of personal strength and character. King Solomon, the *wisest* man to ever live (cf. 1 Kings 3:12), believed in seeking *counsel*. He provides acute insight into those who reject *counsel* in the following Proverbs:

*He who separates himself seeks his own desire;
He quarrels against all sound wisdom* (18:1).

*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,
But a wise man is he who listens to counsel* (12:15).

Again, these passages make it clear that selfishness is often the mindset of those who refuse to seek the *counsel* of others. Make note of this simple contrast throughout Proverbs:

Self-centeredness is set in
opposition to seeking counsel.

Always remember that two or three heads are better than one. Furthermore, the larger the decision, the greater should be the *counsel*. Solomon states the following:

In abundance of counselors there is victory (11:14, 24:6).

*Without consultation, plans are frustrated,
But with many counselors they succeed* (15:22).

In summary of the introduction,

*Listen to counsel and accept discipline,
That you may be wise the rest of your days.*

*Many plans are in a man's heart,
But the counsel of the Lord will stand* (19:20–21).

That last stanza implies a key to the matter of *counsel*: Ultimately you must gain *the counsel of the Lord* in order for your decision to *stand* the test of time. It follows that if you must decide on a matter that is not clear cut from Scriptural precepts, how then can you be confident you have obtained *the counsel of the Lord*? May I proffer this in response: by having the right confidants! Beloved, it's all too easy to be naïve as to the sources of *counsel* God avails to you. Do not lack insight or *wisdom* in determining how and from whom you will gain *counsel* for indeed there are many foolish *counselors*. How do you choose good confidants? Who should compose your inner circle? Proverbs speaks to this.

II. SEVEN VERY GOOD CONFIDANTS

There are at least seven ways to receive good *counsel*, sources that should be a regular part of the *wise* person's life. They are

A. THE WORD OF GOD

The *wisdom* of seeking God's ways via His Word, the Bible, is personified in Proverbs, chapter 1. Notice the association of the Word of God (herein personified in Proverbs—a literary device utilized by Solomon) to this week's study on *counsel*:

*"And you neglected all my counsel
And did not want my reproof"* (1:25).

*“They would not accept my counsel,
They spurned all my reproof” (1:30).
“So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way
And be satiated with their own devices” (1:31).*

These passages serve to teach that those who mock and disdain God’s *counsel* become increasingly *satiated with their own devices*. More specifically, these passages relate to unbelievers and indicate that they will grow increasingly hostile toward Christ and will continue to reject His *reproof* the longer they wait. If you are a mocker of God’s *counsel*, His Word, please realize that you might not ever be closer to receiving Christ as your Lord and Savior than you are today. These Proverbs indicate that a person who *neglects* and *will not accept* God’s *counsel* will become increasingly self-centered and more distant from God over time.

To the contrary, gladly, God’s Word is the believer’s preeminent *counselor*, and His Word becomes an even greater *counselor* as spiritual maturity continues. States 6:23 in this regard:

*For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light;
And reproofs for discipline are the way of life.*

God’s Word is intended to *light* your path and show the way! This truth should motivate the believer to become a life-long student of God’s Word; we do not want to be naïve of His precepts when making decisions.

What follows is an amazingly powerful Proverb explaining the supremacy of God’s *counsel* via His Word in comparison to any other form of input. One commentator on Proverbs has appropriately stated of the following passage: the decrees and *counsels* of God are firm and adamant; immovable; notwithstanding all human machinations, [His decrees are] no more to be stayed than the course of the sun.¹

In essence then, all *counsel* that departs from God and His Word at any point or omits the whole *counsel* of God (cf. Acts 20:27) on a matter is foolish to receive. (Beware of the eisegetes [those who interpret the Bible by reading into it their own ideas] who parachute in with scriptural passages ripped from context that can be used to state just the opposite of what God means.) Note this Proverb carefully:

*There is no wisdom and no understanding
And no counsel against the LORD (21:30).*

Singularly preeminent is His *counsel* above all else! No person's opinion, future poll, scientific discovery, or social experiment will ever trump what God's Word now instructs is right! All of the *counsel* you receive from any of the following sources must first square with Scripture to be of value. This is important to distinguish before moving on in this study—lest the preeminence of scriptural authority be undermined.

By siding with God today on an issue, one will never find himself in the embarrassing spot of later needing to change positions.

Positions determined and based in and on the principles of His Holy Writ are everlasting and unwavering! The Word should be your confidant. Having affirmed that priority in seeking *counsel*, Scripture does not suggest that the Word is your singular source of *counsel*; there are others.

B. FRIENDS

A wise man will hear and increase in learning,

And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel (1:5).

A *wise counselor* is a God-fearing man or woman who knows and lives out the Scripture. No other ingredient in the resume of a person you would seek *counsel* from should loom as important! *Counselors* steeped in other things from public surveys to demographics to psychographics must pale in comparison to the *wisdom* you would receive from a godly *counselor* who bases his advice on a thorough *knowledge* and *understanding* of scriptural precepts. Scripture itself attests to Scripture's preeminence in *counseling* in 2 Timothy 3:16–17:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

This passage, along with many others, depicts the sufficiency and supremacy of scriptural authority as the basis for all worthwhile *counseling*. Conversely, it is foolish to receive advice from ungodly individuals who do not depend on His Book. Give pause to your selection in human *counselors*. The following Proverb is reinforcing:

***He who walks with wise men will be wise,
But the companion of fools will suffer harm*** (13:20).

In Proverbs a *fool* is set in contrast to one who has a reverence for and a healthy fear of God (cf. 1:7; 14:1–27). In other words, if you hang with the ungodly and gain their *counsel*, you *will suffer harm*. For instance, if you choose confidants known to break God’s precepts or government’s laws, such attitudes and action will eventually affect their *counsel*. Diplomatically and expediently rid yourself of disloyal, insubordinate, or law-breaking advisors.

The *fool* believes his own mind is the actual source of truth. “I’m sure whatever I’m thinking is correct,” he ponders with pride. In a secular sense, this person worships on the altar of Humanistic Rationalism. In a “spiritual” sense, this person worships at the altar of Neo-Orthodoxy. For the *fool*, truth stems not from objective scriptural exegesis, but from subjective personal conjecture. Be careful from whom you receive *counsel*, even from those who are perceived to be godly. Have an active mind that is trained in relationship to the command of 2 Corinthians 10:5: ***We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*** Consistently sort through the ideological forms of people’s *counsel* and ascertain what is and is not scriptural. Gain and practice spiritual discernment! The world is full of false thoughts, ideas, speculations, reasonings, philosophies, and false religions—all of which run antithetical to God. Do not be *fooled* by bad advice! Your confidants should be godly people who are reliant upon and steeped in God’s Word.

Do not let anyone who cannot
base his counsel in scriptural
truth to influence your mind.

He who walks with wise men will be wise. Whereas “*Bad company corrupts good morals*” (Proverbs 13:20 and 1 Corinthians 15:33 respectively).

C. PARENTS

Generally speaking, one's parents are a wonderful source of *counsel*. In Ephesians 6:2, Paul writes, **HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise)** (cf. Exodus 20:12). There are, however, exceptions to this rule. While this does not suggest listening to all of the *counsel* a parent provides, it does command that one possess an attitude of *honor* toward his parents throughout life, without respect to a parent's behavior. Unconditional *honor* preserves the unity of the family, an institution ordained by God. Solomon, in his fatherly role to Rehoboam regarding parental influence, states:

*When you walk about, they will guide you;
When you sleep, they will watch over you;
And when you awake, they will talk to you* (6:22).

The repetitive mention of *they* in this Proverb relates to the commands of Rehoboam's father and mother (cf. 6:20). Parents know their children best and have the accumulative advantage of knowing their strengths and weaknesses, thereby potentially providing the best perceptions and accordant human *counsel*. In addition, keep in mind that parents have lived life much longer and can often provide excellent perspectives. States dad to son with this biblical truth in mind:

*Listen to your father who begot you,
And do not despise your mother when she is old* (23:22).

*Have I not written to you excellent things
Of counsels and knowledge,
To make you know the certainty of the words of truth
That you may correctly answer him who sent to you?* (22:20–21)

Solomon not only wanted to make sure that he carefully and accurately communicated *truths* to his son, but he wanted to make sure Rehoboam would be accurate in his *counsel* to others. (In Israel the king was also a judge who heard cases.)

In a familial sense, a parent needs to make sure to help his children master biblical *truths* so that they may communicate them to others,

especially one's grandchildren (cf. 2 Timothy 2:2). One's parents should remain as one's confidants (admittedly to a lesser extent, but to some degree) even after the child leaves and cleaves.

D. PRAYER

The epistle of James states, *But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him* (1:5). As you face trials in life and wonder what to do, allow such trials to create a more intimate dependence on God. Seek God in desperation with all your passion and intensity. This passage assures the believer of God's direct guidance: it's there for the asking.

E. HOLY SPIRIT

Old Testament believers did not
have the aid of the indwelling
Holy Spirit as do New Testament
Christians. Accordingly, this form of
counsel is not depicted in Proverbs.

Directly asking God for *counsel* and expecting His direction is a proper activity since the third member of the Trinity actually indwells the repentant and contrite who have placed their trust in the cross of Christ (cf. Romans 8:9).

Apart from some mystical impression or expectation that God will literally speak to you, He will guide you via impressing scriptural *truths* on your mind or leading you to another believer who is mature and can provide insights from Scripture and life experiences.

Keep in mind too that He can also direct you in His providence: God's superintending activity over human actions and human history. He can superintend the matters surrounding that for which you have concerns and make known His will to you. Whatever the case, James promises *counsel*

directly from God upon request! The infinite and personal God of the universe should be your confidant through prayer (cf. Galatians 4:6).

F. CONSCIENCE

Another related means of God's *counsel* is the human conscience. God will often pique your conscience during prayer. Learn to sense His still small voice; become increasingly sensitive to His sometimes-immediate impressions. God's equipping of mankind with this mechanism is for the purpose of contemplating actions and making accurate moral self-evaluations; herein is the innate ability to sense right from wrong. This is not to be equated with or suggest the literal voice of God. Rather, it is that self-possessed faculty that allows one to judge actions and attitudes based on the highest standards perceived. Often it is the Holy Spirit bringing to your mind specific passages from His Word. Likened to a weight trainer or athlete, the conscience is akin to a moral muscle that we program and strengthen (hopefully) over time. In the book of Romans, chapter one, the Apostle Paul speaks to the opposite: a person can sear his conscience, destroying this gift from God for guidance (cf. 1:28).

The conscience can be likened to a moral compass, an inner *counselor* precisely pointing to morality's "magnetic north." If trained properly by the believer, it can become an enormous aid in decision making, a *counselor* of sorts who almost unfailingly can determine the right direction to head. Paul states, *God has not given us [believers] a spirit of fear, but of power and love and of a sound mind* (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJ). Be sure of this, our Maker has granted His followers a sound mind, one that possesses a compass, and it should be one's confidant!

G. PERSONAL WISDOM

One who is *wise*, skilled at living life, is one who understands and employs these first five confidants as a way of life. With a continual healthy reverence of God, he or she becomes a reliable personal *counselor* to self. Good judgment is a character quality that separates the mature from the novice. In Proverbs chapter eight, Solomon again incorporates a literary device in which *wisdom* itself is depicted as a person. With this in mind, notice the following Proverb specifically pertaining to the *counsel* of personal *wisdom*:

*“Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom;
 I am understanding, power is mine.
 By me kings reign,
 And rulers decree justice.
 By me princes rule, and nobles,
 All who judge rightly.
 I love those who love me;
 And those who diligently seek me will find me”* (8:14–17).

Solomon is stating that the governmental leaders of Israel should conduct their work via God’s **wisdom** and justice. Many, however, did not abide by this **counsel**. Sadly, even Rehoboam would reject his **wisdom**. This principle remains true for leaders today. Our wisdom, based on the study and application of God’s Word, should become a guiding force in personal leadership and decision-making. The greater the **knowledge** and incorporation of the Word of God that a leader garners, the better personal **wisdom** he is apt to possess. The converse is true also. How many leaders have fallen from office? To lack God’s **wisdom** is to lack effective self-**counsel**. Be trained by the Word. Start today! This is one reason why the in-depth study of the Bible is necessary and why I labor and strive at teaching the Scriptures in the Capitol. What could possibly be more important or serious? Although one might think otherwise, one lacks wisdom until God’s counsel becomes his basis for judgments.

*The integrity of the upright will guide them,
 But the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them* (11:3).

Your personal **wisdom**, stemming from God’s, should be your continually available, cumulative, strong, always-reliable confidant.

III. ONE VERY BAD CONFIDANT

*The thoughts of the righteous are just,
 But the counsels of the wicked are deceitful* (12:5).

Again, be discerning regarding who you choose as a **counselor**. Are your confidants godly (scriptural), or are they wicked (from the Hebrew word *rasha* meaning “an offender”)? Do not be **deceived** by bad advice and end up paying for it. The Hebrew word for **deceived** (*mirmah*) has the idea of “inculcating of one so that he takes the false as true, the unreal as existent,

the spurious as genuine” (*Merriam-Webster*). The chilling idea conveyed by this word is that one does not realize he is being duped by another, a **deceiver**. Ahithophel gave bad **counsel** to Absalom in 2 Samuel 15:30–31; 17:23, and things ended in terrible ruin. **Do not be deceived**, writes Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:33, “**bad company corrupts good morals**.” In the NT, the Greek word for **deceived** (*planao*) means “to cause to wander.” And again, the implication of the meaning is that one does not realize it’s happening to him. This word is synonymous with the English words “beguile” and “delude.” This form of **wickedness** is akin to a frog in a slowly heating kettle, a supposedly ever “warming” relationship but the end therein is deadly. Be very careful who you cozy up to. Let not **wicked** people be your confidants! Ask yourself, “is what this person saying based in Scripture?”

Diplomatically and expediently rid
yourself of false confidants who
manifest disloyalty or insubordination,
who break God’s or man’s laws.

As a public servant in the public eye, one cannot afford to take such risks. In the end, bad **counsel** will attempt to harm God’s intended purpose for your life; **wicked counselors** are poison!

IV. BEING A GOOD CONFIDANT

Proverbs speaks not only about receiving **counsel**, both good and bad forms, but it also looks at the other side of it—the benefits of being a godly **counselor** to others:

*Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil,
But counselors of peace have joy* (12:20).

In this proverb, the bad **counselor** (previously developed in the aforementioned point) who is characterized by **deception** is counterpoised with

the godly *counselor* who is in personal possession of *joy*; an inner *joy* for being a good *counselor* is his reward.

What a blessing it is to possess an overflowing inner joy!

Godly *counseling* is a major ingredient in disciple making (Matthew 28:19–20). Disciple making is the very reason believers are left in this world after Christ has redeemed them. Those who give themselves to the spiritual maturation of another will find great joy in life (as do I!). States Luke 9:24, *“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.”* The irony of this passage is this: when believers give their lives away serving others for God’s Kingdom, they will possess the greatest life of all! They will possess great *joy* as they *regard one another as more important than* [themselves] (Philippians 2:3). Work to *counsel* others to grow in Christlikeness, to seek biblically sensitive policy, to forsake the darkness of their old ways. What *joy* will result!

V. BENEFITS FROM GOOD CONFIDANTS

There are two additional arguments from Scripture that are persuasive as to why one should be careful to select good *counselors*. The first relates to your *time*, the second to your reward.

A. THE BENEFIT OF TIME

The first argument stems from Ephesians 5:15–16. Paul states a principle that can be related to *counsel*:

Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

This passage equates personal *wisdom* to *time* management. If there is any group that better understands the importance of time management than do public servants, I have yet to meet them. It follows that you carefully select your confidants if only for the sake of *time* limitations. You must have the best *counsel*—not mediocre *counsel*! One lesson I learned in seminary was to build a great theological library with the best commentators and their commentaries as I have not the *time* to read those who are substandard. My point is that you need to get the best from the best.

B. THE BENEFIT OF REWARD

The second argument pertains to the manifest blessings from God for having chosen the proper confidants. Carefully note all the ingredients and progressions found in the following four verses from Proverbs:

By wisdom a house is built

And by understanding it is established;

And by knowledge the rooms are filled

With all precious and pleasant riches.

A wise man is strong,

And a man of knowledge increases power

For by wise guidance you will wage war,

And in abundance of counselors there is victory (24:3–6).

Allow me to attempt to organize the numerous principles, thoughts, and blessings elucidated in this passage (from the original Hebrew poetic form to Western outline form). The wise government leader ***builds*** his personal life, ***house***, and nation via the undergirding of the foundations of always pursuing and gaining godly ***understanding*** and ***knowledge*** (think of these as two of the staples of Proverbs, akin to rebar and concrete). What results is ***wisdom***. From the custody of ***wisdom*** flows the selection and cultivation of seven proper personal ***counselors*** that we have briefly studied herein:

1. The Word of God
2. Trustworthy Friends
3. Parents
4. Prayer
5. Holy Spirit
6. Conscience
7. Personal Wisdom

These are the ***abundance of counselors*** mentioned in this passage. Together—amalgamated—these ***counselors*** greatly aid one's life, reaping many continual ***victories*** over the course of time. Think of these ensuing ***victories*** in the realms of personal, familial, and national interests.

In addition to the foundational relationships and progression of thought previously explicated, *wisdom* leads to the characteristic personal benefits of *strength* and *power* (in the humble, reverential sense of those meanings).

In addition, possessing *wisdom* also manifests in the personal rewards of *precious* and *pleasant riches* (in much more than a physical sense of those meanings). All are unspeakably wonderful blessings from the Lord God Almighty!

VI. SUMMARY

Choose your confidants *wisely*. As a consequence, you will become *strong* and *powerful* and reap the fruit of *precious* and *pleasant riches*. Psalm 1:1 is a fitting capstone: *How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked*. Amen.

1. Charles Bridges, *Exposition of the Book of Proverbs*, (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1847), 331.

Four Common Characteristics in Three Uncommon Leaders

Joseph, Daniel, and Mordecai were three Old Testament Israelites who, at different times, rose to great political power under secular kings. These were foreign kings who did not share the values of these men. They were leaders these men could have easily despised. Save the sovereignty of God, from a human standpoint, how did these men of principle set aside by God and for God attain such positions of influence?

At least four common characteristics and two common results in the lives of these three uncommon men are parallel principles that you need to incorporate into your own life in order to remain effective for God in office. If I could teach an elected official only one Bible study as to how to remain effective for God in office, it would be this one.

I. INTRODUCTION

Some people were not happy when Donald Trump was elected President of the United States in 2016, and they displayed their displeasure by fomenting social unrest and taking part in protests that sometimes became violent. The liberal media hammered President Trump unfairly in attempts to topple him, and some who held public office were very vocal about their difficulty in accepting this change in leadership. Now a different political party is in power in D.C., and many public servants do not agree with their policies.

Always, the question believers should ask themselves is as follows: how would our Lord expect us to behave when leaders are in power with whom we do not agree? No matter who is in power, are violent actions and disrespectful comments pleasing to Him?

Looking to the Bible, the Scriptures include examples of exemplary behavior in three godly, courageous men of the Old Testament (OT) who stood their ground for God, yet maintained respect for those in authority with whom they did not agree.

This study draws parallels from three Old Testament believers who rose to prominent leadership positions in government under different secular kings at different times. Common characteristics in each man advanced their successful rise in governmental leadership.

II. THREE UNCOMMON MEN

What's in common with three uncommon men? Joseph, Daniel, and Mordecai, sojourners in foreign lands, each rose from austerity to political prominence. As a matter of fact, each became his host country's second-in-command under a pagan king! One such feat alone—not to mention three—is reason for this study:

- **Joseph** found himself serving under Pharaoh during Israel's 400 years in Egypt.
- **Daniel** was carted in to serve under Nebuchadnezzar (and Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus) during Israel's Babylonian captivity.
- **Mordecai** ended up in the palace of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) during Israel's confinement in the Persian Empire.

Similar traits, characteristics, and leadership qualities can be gleaned and applied from each man's meteoric rise to power.

These passages are applicable and can provide much guidance related to changes in leadership.

These OT men didn't simply survive; they thrived in very difficult political environments! How about you? Will you thrive under leadership

changes by following the principles seen in these three wise men? I can find at least four common characteristics that account for their prosperity—even though each man serves in a different time and situation.

This study must assume a working knowledge of the context of each man within his respective book of the Bible, i.e., the books of Genesis, Daniel, and Esther, respectively. If you do not already have an agile familiarity with these OT books, I strongly suggest you read them prior to studying what follows so you may gain the maximum impact on your thinking, life, and actions while serving in office.

Building a cogent parallel of these three men will require quite a lengthy study at the very least, which prohibits me from getting into the weeds and duly contextualizing each of the passages that will be addressed.

III. FOUR COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

What are the four common characteristics that are evident in each of these men that can be attributed to their growing and continued influence in a vastly different political environment? Each follows and is supported by respective biblical passages.

A. MANIFEST RESPECT FOR THE KING

1. Joseph

Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh (Genesis 41:14).

2. Daniel

But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself (Daniel 1:8, cf. Daniel 2:49).

3. Mordecai

He went as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth (Esther 4:2).

In each of the three men is an outward respect for the king, strongly suggesting inward respect, at least for the office. In each setting these men were cognizant of God's institution of civil government, and since government is created by God, but not necessarily led by godly men and women, respect for governing authorities is nonetheless required.

Note this principle in the New Testament (NT) from Romans 13:1:

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Joseph, Daniel, and Mordecai each exemplified this principle; and as is evident from these passages, they followed the rules and protocol. Neither did they call their boss names in the media. Believers usually think much differently from governing authorities, and rightfully so, but nevertheless, they must respect the leader's God-ordained position—as these passages so vividly delineate (so long as doing so is not contrary to the commands of Scripture). Do you show respect for people in authority with whom you disagree? States 1 Peter 2:17:

Honor all people; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

B. LOYAL SERVICE TO THE KING

1. Joseph

But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her (Genesis 39:8–10).

2. Daniel

Then Arioch hurriedly brought Daniel into the king's presence and spoke to him as follows: "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can make the interpretation known to the king!" (Daniel 2:25).

3. Mordecai

But the plot became known to Mordecai, and he told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name (Esther 2:22).

Each of these men displayed a manifest unfaltering loyalty to the country's civil leader at times when doing otherwise would have been easy. In each case and in due time, the kings learned of their loyalty.

Do you practice both the presence of God and the presence of the king when engaging in private, personal conversations with others? Note the following:

*The king's favor is toward a servant who acts wisely,
But his anger is toward him who acts shamefully* (Proverbs 14:35).

*Argue your case with your neighbor,
And do not reveal the secret of another,
Or he who hears it will reproach you,
And the evil report about you will not pass away* (Proverbs 25:9–10).

C. INSIGHTFUL WISDOM FOR THE KING

1. Joseph

Then Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?" So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are" (Genesis 41:38–39).

2. Daniel

As for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm (Daniel 1:20).

3. Mordecai

During that night the king could not sleep so he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. It was found written what Mordecai had reported concerning Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who were doorkeepers, that they had sought to lay hands on King Abasuerus. The king said, "What honor or

dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" Then the king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him" (Esther 6:1–3).

Another profound element explaining the dramatic rise of these three men was their value to the king. We may not be able to interpret a king's dreams today, but we can put into words the ageless truths of God's Holy Writ! (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).

When a leader discovers your godly wisdom,
your ability and agility to apply the Word
accurately, specifically, and successfully
in solution of political difficulties, it is then
that you take on tremendous value.

How are you progressing in your discipline and quest for gaining greater biblical understanding and perspicacity?¹ If you have no plans to continually grow and increase in your biblical acumen, you are most definitely limiting your future political value and worth my friend—not only in God's eyes but to the king and the country. Remember, above all else is the power of the Word in your life. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 says:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Do you believe your biblical knowledge and wisdom directly determines your vocational altitude and value? Are you presently *adequate, equipped for every good work* that a superior might need from you? Or are you biblically illiterate and full of your own ideas about various matters? Work to intertwine your personage with the Word of God, and you will possess insightful and profound wisdom for both a Christian or a secular leader. It stands to reason that you should be committed to the Members Bible Study in the Capitol wherein the Word of God is regularly explicated and applied in specific to the life of a public servant. How foolish it is to miss out on studying the Bible; it is to the peril of your country, your King, and yourself!

D. UNSWERVING COURAGE IN THE FACE OF THE KING

1. Joseph

Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer” (Genesis 41:16).

2. Daniel

Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously (Daniel 6:10).

3. Mordecai

Then the king’s servants who were at the king’s gate said to Mordecai, “Why are you transgressing the king’s command?” Now it was when they had spoken daily to him and he would not listen to them, that they told Haman to see whether Mordecai’s reason would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew. When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage (Esther 3:3–5).

These guys had guts! In their prerequisite *manifest respect, loyal service, and insightful wisdom* to the king, they did not compromise what they believed one iota! In addition to the three aforementioned prerequisites, they displayed *unswerving courage*! Notice, however, that the other three attributes must be manifest in concert with courage. Courage alone, without the others, will lead you to disaster in office.

When Joseph is answering Pharaoh in Genesis 41:16 he is, in essence, stating to the follower of a pagan deity that he cannot provide the answer; rather, [it is] **God** [Who] *will give Pharaoh a favorable answer*. Joseph’s reply to Pharaoh was profoundly illustrative of the characteristic of courage because the Hebrew word for **God** that he used is *Elohim*. Joseph was heralding to Pharaoh that the God of the Hebrews would answer his dream!

That response, my friend, takes guts!

Fresh-out-of-prison Joseph was witnessing right in the face of Pharaoh about the one-and-only true God!

Likewise, Daniel doesn't even flinch when Nebuchadnezzar turns up the furnace. I'm paraphrasing the men's response in Daniel 3:16–18, "Turn it up as high as you want! It matters not to us!"

Nor would Mordecai bow to the intimidating power of Haman as is evidenced by Esther 3:3–5. An unswerving total confidence in God is illustrated by each of the three men! And note this: in each case, *each king ends up respecting God's servant for it!* Put simply,

The one who compromises on godly precepts ends
up having to protect himself or herself; whereas
the one who will not compromise on godly precepts
may be the recipient of unearthly protection.

Do you have unbending convictions relative to and grounded in the principles and precepts of God's Book? Will you *speak of Your* [His] *testimonies before kings and shall not be ashamed?* (Psalm 119:46). When God sees this quality and characteristic repeatedly manifest in one of His children, He strongly supports and elevates him.

Notice this principle/promise as summarized by Jesus in Matthew 25:21:

His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."

Undoubtedly, this one characteristic led to the rise of these otherwise common foreigners: God elevated them because each one of them was faithful to represent God without compromise!

Many display *manifest respect, loyal service, and insightful, wisdom but lack the unswerving courage* to speak of God's ways no matter the price. God is looking—America is looking—for leaders of *unswerving courage!* Are you one of them?

Unswerving courage in the manifestation of God's Word is an uncommon characteristic today. Do you possess it? How many of these four characteristics define you? Are you *respectful, loyal, insightful and unswerving?* Again,

don't be the last one without first being the first three! To do so is to be a *noisy gong or a clanging cymbal* (1 Corinthians 13:1). I have noticed over decades of ministry in capitols that such individuals typically do not maintain office as long as they would like simply because they lack the staying power that is requisite for being influential.

IV. TWO COMMON RESULTS

The following passages spotlight at least two recurring results in the lives of these men:

A. PROMOTION BY THE KING

1. Joseph

“You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you” (Genesis 41:40).

2. Daniel

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and did homage to Daniel, and gave orders to present to him an offering and fragrant incense. The king answered Daniel and said, “Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery.” Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. And Daniel made request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego over the administration of the province of Babylon, while Daniel was at the king's court (Daniel 2:46–49).

3. Mordecai

And all the accomplishments of his authority and strength, and the full account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia? For Mordecai the Jew was second only to King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews and in favor with his many kinsmen, one who

sought the good of his people and one who spoke for the welfare of his whole nation (Esther 10:2–3).

In our day and age, there is no biblical promise that if a believer masters these four common characteristics herein that he or she will rise to the number-two position in their government, or in our case will be chosen as the vice president-elect of the United States, a Cabinet post, or a leadership position in the House or Senate. These four common characteristics are principles—not promises.

Having said that, former Vice President Mike Pence served as a wonderful modern-day illustration of a Joseph, a Daniel, or a Mordecai.

For years former Vice President Pence embodied these aforesaid biblical characteristics, and God elevated him to the number-two position in our government. But avoid viewing these principles as a formula to get to the top in your profession. What God does promise His faithful followers is an imperishable crown in heaven! May that prize consume our hearts more so than the perishable, temporary awards and accomplishments of this life. First Peter 5:4 states to believers:

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

And who knows, certainly my prayer is that faithful and mature followers of Christ will lead not only America, but also many nations throughout the world! And such individuals only exist to the degree that others disciple them in the Word.

B. PROTECTION BY A CONCERNED, EVER-WATCHING FATHER

1. Joseph

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive (Genesis 50:20).

2. Daniel

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They replied to the king, "Certainly, O king." He said, "Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!" (Daniel 3:24–25).

3. Mordecai

So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's anger subsided (Esther 7:10).

God has a way of protecting and delivering His children in the long run; He is the expert at reversing evil for good.

These three faithful men all
experienced heartrending and life-
threatening situations, only to see
the hand of God deliver each of them!

When unfolding God's economy of maturing His loved ones, trials cannot be avoided, James 1:2–3:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

Similar to the lives of Joseph, Daniel, and Mordecai, those God is elevating² will face *refining*—humanly impossible fiery ordeals that only God can deliver them from. However, a concerned, ever-watching Father never takes His eyes off of those He loves, elevates, and sustains! He wants only what is best for you as He perfects you!

The fact that God has placed many new, godly men and women in the House, the Senate, the White House and the Cabinet is His doing! Each will face his or her own trials, but may each never lose sight of practicing

the four characteristics that these three men displayed—the formula for pleasing God and maintaining influence for God in public service.

V. APPLICATION

The four characteristics shared by these three men embody the tension every elected official must maintain between loyalty and service to someone they may not have chosen as a leader, while maintaining their allegiance to biblically based principles in order to closely follow God whom they worship. In a very real sense, these three men serve as narrative illustrations of Proverbs 3:3:

*Do not let kindness and truth leave you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart.*

Note the same tension and principle in 1 Corinthians 13:6:

[Love] *does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth.*

God has been gracious to grant America many new, God-fearing governing authorities. In the days ahead, may He grant even more such governing authorities: men and women who possess unbending, omnipresent *respect, loyalty, wisdom, and courage*—those same characteristics found in and attributable to the rise and sustainment of political wisdom and power modeled by Joseph, Daniel, and Mordecai!

God may not advance you to the same level as He did Joseph, Daniel, and Mordecai, but in His own way, economy, and purposes, He will promote and protect you to the degree these qualities depict you! May such traits characterize the men and women in the House and the Senate who name the name of Christ.

This, my friend, is what Joseph, Daniel, and Mordecai have to say today in regard to changes in leadership. We thank God for the message of their lives that still lives on today!

1. *Perspicacity* means “clear-sighted, quick-sighted, sharp-sighted.”

2. Don’t allow yourself to think for a single moment that you won an office in and by your own power.

Are You Praying Effectively for the Elections?

Do you realize that when you get on your knees to pray, you are actually going into battle? Ephesians 6:12 tells us:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Because of this constant struggle, *praying* effectively for the best success is vital. This is especially true during this season of upcoming elections that are critical to the future direction of our country. I don't believe I am overstating it when I say that these elections will, among other crucial issues, affect whether America will remain strong in sending missionaries across the globe in obedience to God's Great Commission. Given that biblical command, it is imperative that committed Christians be *praying* for an outcome that glorifies our Lord and that more believers will win office.

The importance of these elections cannot be overstated.

To be effective, we need to examine how we can be our best at *prayer* and in *prayer*, not only for the outcome of the elections, but also for the outcomes of our lives. But what does it mean to *pray* effectively? The Bible provides the answer.

In this study, let's take a close look at how we can elevate our *prayer* life to a greater level!

I. INTRODUCTION

Let us closely examine the closing section of Paul's address to the church at Ephesus to learn how to increase our effectiveness in *prayer*. The passage is found in Ephesians 6:18:

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.

In this closing section of Paul's letter to the believers in Ephesus, he reveals the purpose for believers to remain in the world after they have been saved. In that specific regard, 2 Timothy 2:4 adds and makes it extremely clear that all believers have been called by Him to be His *soldiers* in the theater of spiritual battle post-salvation in Christ, prior to going home to be with Him. Paul states to Timothy in this regard:

No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

After being saved by God and His grace, we are to *soldier* on in this world for Him. In the book of Philippians, Paul reserves the term *soldier* as the highest moniker of distinction which he uses to describe another believer. In the ascensive progression of Philippians 2:25, Paul states regarding his beloved friend Epaphroditus: *my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier*. This climactic title in Paul's way of thinking is to call him a *fellow soldier* for the sake of the Gospel. There are *brothers* and *fellow workers* in ministry, but he deems few as a *fellow soldier*.

In this study's home passage of Ephesians 6, Paul codifies the battle that all believers will face after being saved yet remaining in the world. The title of *fellow soldier* is therefore a befitting metaphor of personal distinctiveness relative to the faithfulness of the believer post-salvation.

With all of that explanation in mind, note how this section of Ephesians 6 begins:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the full armor of God... (vv. 10–13).

Herein Paul identifies the main aspects of the believer's battle armament in the spiritual war that he has been enlisted to fight in by God as *fellow soldier*. Distilled from this familiar passage (verses 11 to 17 that I have not listed due to length) are the following specifics of the *fellow soldier's* spiritual armament for this battle:

- A. **TRUTH:** The effective spiritual warrior will be grounded, living, and characterized by truth (without personal hypocrisy) stemming from...
- B. **RIGHTEOUSNESS**, i.e., personal holiness, *righteous* living, and uncompromising in biblical convictions, the spiritual warrior possesses an internal...
- C. **PEACE**, which comes from having a reliance in the One Who enlisted him as a *soldier* in the first place, which means he lives his whole life by...
- D. **FAITH**, not by his own sight or way of doing things. Scripture is his guide, not selfish ambition; he lives to achieve God's desires, not his own. Accordingly, he is empowered mightily by the *Holy Spirit* because of his...
- E. **SALVATION**, which means he is in intimate contact with his General. It follows that He has trained him and imputed certain specialty skills to each spiritual warrior via the...
- F. **WORD OF GOD**, which is the only offensive weapon mentioned and his continual source of knowledge for his specific assignment in battle.

All are marks of an effective *fellow soldier*. Elsewhere such men and women of God are referred to with different metaphoric, picturesque, and communicative language. Note such in 2 Corinthians 5:20:

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us....

God determines *fellow soldiers* to remain in the world after saving them to make *an appeal* through them to the world as His *ambassadors*!

One more basic ingredient is found in the context of Ephesians 6 that every mature believer must possess for effective spiritual warfare: a profound, biblically informed understanding of and commitment to *prayer*! Your skills in this discipline are so important to your overall value as a *fellow soldier*!

Don't misinterpret the elections: they
are first and foremost a spiritual battle
requiring mature spiritual weaponry.

The believer should be wiser than those who do not know Christ or His Scriptures. Many are those who view the elections through a political lens only.

When I say “many,” I am including many believers who are naïve to what this study teaches. In contrast, the believer should concentrate on being the most effective *prayer* warrior in the upcoming elections! May I whisper the point I am making? Being a valuable *ambassador for Christ* is far more important than possessing political campaign skills (as important as those are). To say it bluntly, I know too many Christian spiritual hacks who know nothing, and seemingly don't care to know anything, about the spiritual dimension of an election! Don't be one of them!

If the elections are first and foremost—definitively—a spiritual battle per Ephesians 6:10, then it follows that your best way to run your own campaign and help others in their campaigns is to be a victorious spiritual warrior in an election! Spiritual combat is most triumphant to the degree that one meets and is characterized by the aforementioned! Again, think of the criteria of Ephesians 6 as prerequisites for being the most effective person in regard to the elections. Do you really believe *our struggle is not against flesh and blood*?

Accordingly, consider the following biblical insights on how we can best spend our *time* and hone our skills as they specifically relate to our personal *prayer* life.

II. OUR PRAYERS MUST BE ENDORSED

With all prayer...

The Greek word *proseuche* that means **prayer** is used 85 times in the New Testament (NT). Across the board, *proseuche* is the most comprehensive word to communicate the concept of **prayer**. Importantly, gleaned from all its usages, efficacious human **prayer**—**prayers** that are heard and acted upon by God—are only achieved through His Son Jesus Christ and in the power of the *Holy Spirit*. Because of man's fallen nature, he is not in a position to expect God to hear his **prayers**. Accordingly, how then can God hear the sinner's **prayers**? A sinner's **prayers** are certainly not based on his personal merit. Save the **prayer** of repentance from sin, the **prayers** of unregenerate people are ineffective. Note specifically Isaiah 59:2, one of many biblical passages that serve to make this point:

But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.

It follows that we need the imputed **righteousness** of Jesus Christ for our **prayers** to be heard by God. James 5:16 states this truth in the positive:

The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

James is talking about *imputed*, not *personal* **righteousness**; no one is **righteous** based on his or her personal merit. Therefore, the **prayers** we are aiming at God, the **prayers** we are hoping He will answer, will not be heard by God, apart from Christ's endorsement or enablement. We must have an Advocate with the Father (cf. 1 John 2:1) for our **prayers** to be heard. In keeping with the outline, Christ must advocate, i.e., endorse everyone's **prayers** to God! This foundation must first be laid in regard to any biblically sound study on **prayer**. Otherwise, we are **praying** *ineffectively* for the elections.

III. OUR PRAYERS MUST BE DETAILED

and petition...

The Greek word for **petition** (*enteuxis*) means "to fall in with someone." The idea behind **petition** is that believers are to get involved in terms of understanding the sinner's plight. We do not **pray** for the lost with a cold, detached, mechanical attitude, but with love and concern regarding their

future destiny. More specific than the first word examined for *prayer* (*pro-seuche*), *petition* (*enteuxis*) denotes specific requests made to God by the believer. Requesting is therefore appropriate in *prayer*! Biblical *prayer* is more than adoration and worship (as important as that is)! Paul expects believers to include supplication, i.e., *petitioning* in their *prayer* life! Jesus underscores this in John 14:13–14:

“Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”

By asking for specific requests (in line with scriptural priorities, which is the idea behind *praying in My name*), the answers ultimately glorify Him! Why? His power is evidenced in the world via answered *prayer*. To illustrate this idea, Paul *petitioned* for Timothy *night and day* (2 Timothy 1:3), and as a result, Timothy was successful in changing the direction of the Ephesian Church from its heretical takeover (cf. 1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 1:1–2). Indeed, that turnaround in response to Pauline *petitioning* brought glory to God in the world. The fact that Paul *petitioned* with specific, detailed *prayers night and day* informs us of one element as to how we ought to be *praying*.

The explicit command to
“petition in your prayers”
 communicates the idea of
 being detailed in your *prayers*.

By way of personal illustration, for years I have kept a running “yellow sheet” on my computer wherein I record requests and answers. May I suggest that you list your *detailed petitions* (that are biblically based with biblical values) on your smartphone. I have my old way of doing things, but I feel sure some good *petition* apps are available. The point is, God delights in answering *detailed*, quantifiable *petitions* versus nebulous, immeasurable, flighty thoughts. This explanation leads to the third point Paul makes in the passage:

IV. OUR PRAYERS MUST BE DELIBERATE

pray at all times in the Spirit...

The Greek word used for **time** (*kairos*) denotes “a season of **time**” when it is found in Scripture coupled with this particular use of the Greek word **all** (*panti*). Better understood in this portion of Ephesians 6:18 under study, there exists the literal idea of “every critical season.” An upcoming election certainly denotes a **critical time** both in the life of a public servant and in the course of a nation! The applied general idea for elected officials, or any citizen for that matter, is the following:

We should be **praying** more
when the pressure is the greatest!

Isn't that how it usually goes with us anyway? But take solace here in the fact that Paul is commanding it: in light of the larger context of the passage, when the believer wields the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and Satan reacts through his minions, **critical times** or **seasons** for necessary **petitioning** will come—that is, if we are **soldiers** for Christ! Our **prayers** must be deliberate and specified, especially during these **times**! This is the best way to understand what **all times** means in this passage, versus thinking that if we are not **praying** every second of the day—all the **time**—we are disobedient and living in sin.

The closely following phrase **in the Spirit** needs to next be understood. Herein is the power source of the believer's **prayers**. It could be an additional point in the outline, “Our **Prayers** Must Be Driven.” Indeed, that is the case! We glean additional insight in this regard from Romans 8:26–27, which declares that the **Holy Spirit** is the One Who **intercedes for the saints**.

When it comes to **prayer**, think
of the Third Member of the
Trinity as likened to the
power-steering pump in our car.

We initiate (based on His prompting), and He takes over and empowers the task! He energizes our sometimes-mumbling gibberish and *intercedes*, presenting our requests in a form acceptable to God the Father! Wow! Accordingly, we cannot feel like our efforts in *prayer* are somehow lacking in prose and/or adequacy—*the Spirit* will edit and empower them on our behalf! We might say that one of the ministries of the *Holy Spirit* is to spruce us up! He indeed delights in doing exactly that! What great news for someone like me! Note the following from Romans 8:26–27 that amplifies this thought:

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Combined with the aforementioned points, it is the believer's standing with courage on God's Word and its principles that riles satanic forces. His or her use of *prayer in the Spirit* during those *critical seasons of time* mightily aid in the victory; the believer is to cry out to God on the various occasions of the assaults of darkness. An election is such a critical *time*.

In an illustration of contrast, when persecution arose because of his earlier identification with Christ, the Apostle Peter fled from associating with Him (cf. Matthew 26:69–70) versus going away to *pray*! What is our response when persecution arises—especially when our opponent conjures up falsehoods against us in an election? Is our first response to *pray*? Do we believe that God can turn the tide if we react with this kind of spiritual maturity? Our *prayers* must be *deliberate* in these *crucial times*.

V. OUR PRAYERS MUST BE DETERMINED

and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition

The conjunction *and* (*kai*) connects what follows to that which has just been stated, *and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance*. The words for *alert* (*agrupnountes*) and *perseverance* (*proskarternesis*) have similar meanings. One lexical translator states that this means “to continue to do something with intense effort ... to devote oneself to, to keep on, to persist in.” This coupling of the ideas of timely *prayer* with *alertness* and *perseverance* is replete throughout Scripture:

Prayer manifests itself in
perseverance just as ***perseverance***
manifests itself in ***prayer***.

They fuel each other; that is to say, our *prayers* must be *determined*! Note this spirit of determination in *prayer* as modeled in the following passages:

In the Gospels, Jesus told His disciples to *watch and pray* (Matthew 26:41).

In Colossians, Paul told believers to *devote themselves to prayer* (4:2).

In the parables, the widow wore out the judge (Luke 18:2–9) because of her relentless *perseverance* in *petitioning*.

Years later Peter would say from earlier failure, *Be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer* (1 Peter 4:7).

All of them—Jesus, Paul, the widow,
and Peter—were tenacious ***prayer***
warriors. We should be too!

When a believer is faced with spiritual challenges like an election, his first response should be to *pray* with determined *perseverance*; such is the *time* to put on our game face and *pray* with earnestness! God will strengthen and empower our *petition* as we step out in obedient faith to *pray*!

Notice that this is the fourth time the word *all* has been used in the passage. The believer is to use *all prayer* forms in *all critical times* with *all perseverance* (intense effort) for, lastly, *all the saints*. (*More about that in the final point*).

The NT uses other words in the context of *prayer* that provide us with an even deeper understanding of the subject. More specifically, in verse one of 1 Timothy 2, Paul uses four words to elaborate on specific kinds of *prayers*. Two of them have already been examined from our home passage

in Ephesians 6. But let us expand our study to include the two we have not previously mentioned:

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority... (vv. 1–2).

Notice that the direct object of *prayer* mentioned in this passage is not merely *all men*, but specifically public servants, i.e., *kings and all who are in authority*! If you are a special, singled-out focus of *prayer*, it follows you should be an expert on the subject, i.e., what other people are supposed to be doing for you! Each of the following words are in answer to that:

A. ENTREATIES

The Greek root for the English word *entreaties* (*deesis*) means “to lack, to be deprived, to be without something.” Its use in the context of *prayer* here and elsewhere throughout the Scriptures carries the idea of the *prayer* warrior’s inner realization of the needs of the lost. The believer is to *pray*, motivated in part by the hope that God would supply the sinner the remedy for his sin via the cross of Christ. The object of our *prayers*—men and women who have enormous spiritual needs—should compel us to *pray* that God would touch each public servant with His grace and forgiveness and lead them to the way of salvation (if they are not already saved)! Accordingly, we must *entreat* God to save lost politicians, versus hating them because of their lack of character (which is equally present in less visible people as well).

B. THANKSGIVING

The other Greek word we have not yet studied is the English word *thanksgiving* (*eucharista*), which means that the believer should be motivated to *pray* for the lost because this great privilege has been granted to him by God. As an *ambassador for Christ*, every believer is given a role to play in the salvation of others. Exercising the privilege of leading another to Christ begins with *thankfulness* to God for the opportunity! Here then is an additional motivation for *prayer*: what a great and powerful opportunity the *fellow soldier* in Christ has to battle for the souls of public servants!

In summary of this point, believers are to *petition* God *on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority* motivated by their understanding of these four distinct facets of *prayer* found in part in Ephesians 6 and more fully in 1 Timothy 2:

We *entreat* Him because we are sensitive and in concert with the needs of lost political leaders.

We *pray* to Him and give Him glory because of His power to save.

We *petition* Him because we are concerned for their future without Christ.

We *thank* Him because we are grateful for the opportunity to witness on His behalf.

These four biblically revealed, specific aspects should motivate us to address God to receive His answers to our *prayers*. May these aspects of communion with God inspire us to *pray*, especially in *critical times*, and may they increase our determination to *pray*!

VI. OUR PRAYERS MUST BE DYNAMIC

for all the saints.

Remember that Paul is addressing the Ephesian believers as he is teaching about *prayer*. Accordingly, per the first point, *prayer* is a discipline for believers. In applying this concept to *praying* for a God-glorifying outcome to an election, it follows that believers should be *praying* that believers will win office!

The ideal candidates for public office are those who have a great résumé, understand and abide by God's stated purpose for government in Romans 13:1–8, have a proven track record, and are mature in Christ. We need to ask God to raise up candidates who are mature believers and possess all of these characteristics. We need many more mature believers in office. *Praying for all the saints*, applied here, means our *prayers* must be for believers to gain office and those in office to come to Christ!

VII. CONCLUSION

Believers are enlisted in a spiritual battle. Just as nuclear wars cannot be won with rifles, spiritual battles cannot be won by engaging the Enemy

with the wrong weaponry. Voting believers (and every believer should vote) must be sober to the spiritual dimension to elections.

Furthermore, the qualified believer who is in office or is a candidate must be sober to the fact that the battle is *not against flesh and blood*. Ours is ultimately a spiritual battle, and herein is the armament: not the least of which is *prayer*—and specifically for His elevating believers in public service in the upcoming elections! Remember, our *prayers* aimed at achieving these goals will be most effective when they are enDorsed, Detailed, Deliberate, Determined, and Dynamic! *Pray* accordingly with each of these critical elements—elements common to those who are the most powerful *prayer* warriors—and then watch with anticipation as these *prayers* are answered and make a difference in the direction of our nation!

How to Resist the Schemes of the Devil

The Scriptures tell us to *be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might*. In the same passage (Ephesians 6:10–11), we are informed as to what God equates with being *strong in the Lord*. It is this: *you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil*. It follows then, that understanding the various *schemes of the devil* is a consequence of being *strong in the Lord*. Put another way, if you are not spiritually discerning and understanding of Satan’s ways, then you are not very *strong in the Lord*.

What are the ploys of the *devil* that dupe so many people—and how can you see through them?

I. INTRODUCTION

This week I would like to take a close look at Ephesians 6:10–11.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

I would like you first to notice the command of the passage: *Finally, be strong in the Lord*. Next, see the cause for one being *strong in the Lord* (or discerning in the Lord): it is accomplished not in our own abilities, determination, or willpower but, rather, in *the strength of His might*. That is to say, we walk not in our human abilities but by faith in His sufficiency. The believer’s strength is not derived from self; it is a function of how closely he is tethered to the Lord Who gives him his strength. Lastly, notice the

consequence of our invoking His *might* in our lives, of being *strong* or discerning in the Lord: *you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil*. This outline—The Command, The Cause, and The Consequence of being *strong in the Lord*—will be elaborated on in our study that follows. The proposition of this week’s study is as follows: it is normative for obedient believers to be spiritually *strong* and discerning!

II. THE COMMAND TO BE DISCERNING

Finally be strong in the Lord...

The command of this passage is more than simply one person telling another what to do. The Greek construction reveals the idea that the believer should be able to do what is commanded! It is the idea of being who you already are in Christ! Let me explain. Paul is communicating this idea by his choice and use of Greek verb tenses: the Greek word before his verb of choice is “finally” (*loipos*) meaning “henceforth and in the future.” He uses that in combination with the genitive neuter singular definite article “be.” In other words, as a result of knowing and believing in our high calling in Christ (Chapters 1–3 of Ephesians) and then manifesting the resultant mature outward character and behavior incumbent with and keeping with our high calling (Chapters 4–6:9), what should naturally result “henceforth and in the future” (6:10) will *be* the enablement and ability *to stand firm against the schemes of the devil* (6:11).

The schemes of the devil, we will see, are spiritual in nature but are manifest physically through his pawns—non-believers (sometimes referred to as “tares” in Scripture)—in the world in which we live. Notice in this regard the verse in Ephesians that follows (6:12); it elaborates on this core thought:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Understanding this is fundamental to spiritual maturity! This passage is a mainstay in the study of the doctrine of demons (aka, demonology), but suffice it here to say, per this passage, that

The actual battles believers face in office over certain biblically based policy issues are not necessarily with adverse human beings but with Satan's surrogates.

Believers who are mature in Christ will have this perspective on both personal and professional battles wherein God's specific revealed will is in jeopardy; they will see things this way. They will also possess the discernment and the ability to *stand firm* against the *devil's schemes*.

Unilaterally Leaving D.C.

One former White House Cabinet member once confided in me that a well-known believer was "checking out" of D.C. and moving to a remote area to raise his family. He was retreating from the battle for the soul of the nation.

The Cabinet member asked me, "How should I respond to him? What should I say?"

My answer was, "He needs to be in Bible study and understand his calling to God's institution of civil government! If he understands the argument of the Ephesian epistle, it will aid him in his decision making. Does he realize he has been chosen by God before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1)? Does he understand that he is commanded to **walk in a manner worthy of the calling** (Ephesians)? Does he understand that he is called to **stand firm** in Ephesians 6? Does he understand that he may have been put in office '**for such a time as this**' (Esther 4:14)? I know of no other way to counsel someone who has unilaterally decided to desert the battle than to point him to this command in Scripture aimed at all believers: **STAND FIRM!** There is no option here once you realize you have been bought with a price and are a slave to Christ."

The Greek word for *stand firm* (*histemi*) is used in ancient literature in a military context to mean “holding your ground while under attack.” The Apostle John uses it in Revelation 2:25 in reference to the church at Thyatira—itsself under Satan’s attack—when he quotes Jesus, saying, “*Hold fast (histemi) until I come.*” It follows that one is not *strong*, discerning, or mature in Christ if he lacks the ability—for whatever reason—to *stand firm against the schemes of the devil*. Believers who are deceived or seduced by the *devil’s* various *schemes* are termed *infants in Christ*, per 1 John 2:12–14 (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1–9) if in fact they are even saved. Per this passage, a babe in Christ knows only that his or her sins are forgiven, whereas a *young man* in the faith has definitely *overcome the wicked one* (v. 14). In other words, a mature Christian has spiritual discernment and can see through the profusion of antics served up by Satan. He can and does *stand firm*.

In the larger context of what follows in Ephesians 6, he or she is armed for spiritual battle. In fact, Paul uses *stand firm* three times in this section of Scripture that introduces spiritual warfare. He will go on to list seven disciplines a believer must practice in order to *stand firm*. How to *stand firm* is the essence of the remainder of the passage.

Now notice from Ephesians 6:12 who it is that one needs to *stand firm* against. Our *struggle* is *not against flesh and blood* but against the one who presently controls his physical pawns: Satan. Ephesians 2:1–2 is abundantly informative, foundational, and elaborative regarding those who have never repented of their sin. Paul says of them,

And you were dead in your trespasses and sin in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

What Paul teaches us in this earlier passage is that all unbelievers are under the control of Satan, *held captive by him to do his will*. They are his minions, often without realizing it. Second Timothy 2:26 underscores this point when the Apostle Paul offers hope for the unregenerate, that they

... may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

III. THE CAUSE OF BEING DISCERNING

... in the strength of His might ...

Apart from regeneration in Christ, unbelievers are used by Satan especially to lash out at believers in the most vindictive ways. As a matter of fact, *devil* (*diabolos*) is used 35 times in the New Testament (NT) to describe Satan. The Greek word means “slanderer,” or “accusing falsely.” The English word “diabolical” and its meaning are a near trans-literation. Further, the Greek word for Satan (*satanas*) means “adversary.” To understand what the Bible teaches in this regard is to understand that the ultimate *struggles* in the Capitol are not political, but spiritual. And there are really only two combatants behind all the scenes that play out on the Hill: Christ vs. Satan. Regardless of political affiliation, everyone works to some degree for one or the other: Christ or Satan. And the way you can ascertain who’s on what side is by this:

Know and expect that Satan’s
surrogates always battle against
those who represent God’s precepts.

So what side are you on? What side should you be on? This is why unbelievers need to come to Christ and why it is so important for believers who serve in the Capitol to be maturing in Christ, which only comes through knowing and applying His Word. It is the only way to become *strong in the Lord* and fully appropriate *the strength of His might*. It is the only way we can *stand firm*, i.e., hold our ground while under attack as we defend God’s immutable truths. It is the only way we can see Satan’s *schemes* for what they really are. Unfortunately, many remain unsaved or spiritual babes and fall to the *devil’s methods* of deception. The Greek word for *schemes* (*methodia*), from which we derive the English word “method,” has a negative connotation to it, (which is not found in its transliterated English equivalent). It means “craftiness, cunning, and deception.” Ephesians 4:14 echoes this idea and adds much clarity and amplification in this regard:

We are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming.

It saddens my heart when people who name the name of Christ in the Capitol have little, if any, desire to be trained in the Word through regular participation and intentional interaction in Bible study so as to gain an increasing understanding and ability to *stand firm*. Instead, many are seduced, flattered, deceived and misled so as to remain ineffective in battles—battles that are ultimately spiritual in nature. Satan has them where he wants them because they don't realize his *schemes*, the *schemes* of the *devil*. If saved, they remain babes, walking in their own "strength" versus *the strength of His might*. The idea behind *the strength of His might* then is not so much, "Let go and let God," as it is "Get in and get trained!" The causal agent of your spiritual discernment is God Himself—His *might* and His Word—being manifest in your life. The cause of your strength and discernment should not be from self-derivation, but rather from God's imputation. The degree to which you are tethered closely to Christ is the degree to which you will effectively be able to *stand firm*. God is your causal agent.

IV. THE CONSEQUENCE OF BEING DISCERNING

... so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

What are the *schemes of the devil*? We should know what they are—be conscious of them—in order to be armed and properly equipped to fight such *schemes*. It is appropriate that their identification should dominate the remainder of this study. It is all too easy to be deceived and seduced if you know nothing of your enemy's multiple fronts in the spiritual war that you are engaged in. Whether you like it or not as a believer, per Ephesians chapter 1, you have a high calling and a high duty to fulfill for God's glory. Again, per the earlier sidebar, if you have been called by Him into serving Him in His institution of civil government, then you are commanded here to *stand firm* against all the methods of the *devil*.

Before exploring these *schemes*, notice in addition that the Greek definition of *scheming* (again "craftiness, cunning and deception") connotes the idea that one does not necessarily realize that Satan is behind the scenes creating the effect. *Deception* means "inculcating of one so that he takes

the false as true, the unreal as existent, the spurious as genuine” (*Merriam-Webster*). Satan is the ultimate stealth bomber in the spiritual sense. Keep in mind that neither angels nor fallen angels procreate. That is to say, Satan and his minions have been around since before the fall of man in Genesis 3! They are seasoned and skilled in their craftiness to deceive. Note too in this regard that in the Church Age in which we live, you do not see accounts in the NT of pastors “binding Satan” or doing exorcisms! Believers are not to act laterally when dealing with him. They are to appeal up the organizational chart like Michael the Archangel did in Jude verse 9 (“***The Lord rebuke you!***”). Believers need to carry a healthy respect for the wiles of the *devil*.

Oh, beloved, if only more could see this! My heart is often broken over the successful scheming of the *devil* in the hearts of so many whom I love—and what is so painful is that those he holds captive in the Capitol don’t even realize it! First Timothy 4:1 serves to underscore this point:

But the Holy Spirit explicitly says that in the later times [now] some [apostates] will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons.

Apostates are those who seemingly at one time were followers of Christ, but like the tares in the parable of the soils, they are disingenuous, not the real thing. When the pressure comes for naming the name of Christ, they are found for who they really are, unbelievers. These are those who let down the name of Christ. These are those who do not *stand firm* against the *schemes* of the *devil*.

It is not the intent of this study to provide an exhaustive listing of all of Satan’s *schemes*, but what follows are four of them—four categories of satanic craftiness, cunning, and deception that you must be alert to today and *stand firm* against! Put another way,

The greatest problem in American Christianity
is a lack of spiritual discernment.

Why do you think this is so? Because so many American believers today are biblically illiterate; people do not know the genuine article by which

they can compare the false! Here then are some of the common *schemes of the devil* to be found in the world today:

A. SECULAR HUMANISM

Lest you think Secular Humanism and its adherents—including radical leftists and modern Progressives—are not *satanic*, one of their leading lights is Saul Alinsky. Alinsky offers an over-the-shoulder acknowledgment to the very first radical, “Lucifer” (Satan himself) in his book (their bible), *Rules for Radicals*.

There are three aspects of Secular Humanism in particular that have an increasing hold and devastating effect on American culture. They are as follows:

1. Same Sex Marriage and Homosexuality

In past Bible studies, I have expositied many Scriptures regarding this *scheme*. This is Satan’s perversion of God’s beautiful blessing of sex between a man and a woman in the confines of holy matrimony. It destroys the building blocks of society—the family. God designed marriage to be between a man and a woman; a family headed by a father and a mother is the best incubator for creating civility in the next generation. Study after study—statistics—bear this out.

2. Women’s Liberation

Satan knows that if he can get women out of their intended complementary role to their husbands that he will own the next generation. And that is exactly what is happening in America today. Children desperately need their moms’ attention so that they are not hooked by Satan’s *schemes* of drugs, sex, and slothfulness among other sins, in their formative years, which then often destroy their later productive years. The Women’s Liberation movement largely disconnects God’s plan for child incubation and catechism. Again, if Satan can destroy the family, he can destroy the nation.

3. The New Morality

This is code for “no morality.” It is also known as the woefully misnamed “wokeness”—a new supposed higher morality—that is not that at all! It is a

“morality” invented by man, not God. It is a *scheme* to override and anesthetize the conscience of man. A close cousin to Postmodernism, the New Morality leads people to believe that they are their own judges of what is right and wrong. Truth is relative, so they think.

In his book, *The Audacity of Hope*, a past occupant of the White House spends an entire chapter arguing precisely this point—that there is no absolute truth.

The acceptance of these anti-biblical worldviews has a disastrous effect on the productivity of human beings.

B. FALSE RELIGIONS

Satan also deceives people by entrapping them in false religions—religions that appeal to their pride, i.e., systems that in essence declare that each of us is good enough to save ourselves. Similar to Satan’s temptation of Adam and Eve, all false religions have at their core personal merit—versus God’s meritorious work on the cross on behalf of every person—as their central agent of salvation attainment. When you think about it, all such religions deem Christ’s death utterly useless.

1. Islam

This religion has historically spread through the sword and seeks nothing less than world conquest for Allah. Allah was the moon-god worshipped in the Middle Eastern part of the world long before Mohammed came on the scene to found his religion (hundreds of years after the life of Christ). Salvation per Islamic theology is not attained via a loving, self-sacrificing act of God (as per Christianity); it is attained by jihad, a sacrifice of self in combating the infidels. Whereas in biblical Christianity God gives His life for man, in Islam man must give his life for his god. Islam is but one of many illustrations of a deceptive false religion being proffered by the *devil* himself.

2. Works-Based “Christianity”

In Ephesians 5:11 Scripture commands believers to *expose the schemes of the devil*—the passage specifically states, *do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them*. This is especially

incumbent on someone in my profession to do more than someone who has been called to serve in civil government.

There are forms of “Christianity” that have devolved a wayward doctrine of salvation in comparison to what the Scriptures teach.

These other “Christian” religions teach as if salvation were gained in some other way than by faith in Christ alone. There are those who believe they are to work their own way to heaven. Such thinking is diametrically opposed to what the Scriptures teach. (I realize that one can have a cultural connection to a religion and believe what the Bible says about salvation over and above the teachings of their religion—but why they remain associated with a religion that believes differently than they do is difficult to understand). To be clear, the scriptural teaching on salvation is summarized in Ephesians 2:8–9:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Works-based “Christianity” deludes people into thinking they can save themselves via their own effort, when in reality they cannot. ***All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God***, states Romans 3:23; it is a deception of Satan to think otherwise.

3. Liberal “Christianity”

Modernism is another name for Theological Liberalism. Many of America’s Christian denominations (and their educational institutions) have been affected by this and as a result are only shells wearing the name “Christian” today. Their doctrines are vastly different from what the Bible teaches. Theological Liberalism or the Social Gospel form of “Christianity” is far from the real thing. It is a delusion of the *devil*.

About 100 years ago, religious liberals began stirring together human rationalism with Biblical revelation. This in turn suffocated historic, reformed biblical Christianity.

Specifically, Higher Criticism was imported, which subjected Scripture to a cynical, skeptical brand of scholarship, falsely concluding that the source documents that make up our Bible were in error. Higher Criticism was an outright denial of the authenticity and historicity of the Bible—as though the inspiration and transmission of God’s words to man were erroneous. Scripture became subjugated to man, versus the other way around.

What followed was a wholesale disaster: humanistic rationalism substituted for divine revelation. And today the results are equally disastrous: congregations that call themselves churches who have no sense for the authority of God's Holy Word. The movement remains today (but is dying because its doctrine creates no incentive to evangelize folks outside their churches). In relatively recent years, Theological Liberalism was repackaged in the form of the multiyear "Jesus Seminar," where liberal scholars met semi-annually to vote on the sayings of Jesus so as to decide what was inspired and what was not. Liberal theology is a ***scheme of the devil*** that plays in and through the arrogant, self-righteous intellectual faculties of man. It serves to elevate his ego and proves hostile and poisonous to biblical revelation and Christianity.

Secular Humanism and false religions are but two of Satan's ***schemes***, his attempts to deceive. There are two more that must be mentioned.

C. POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES

Not only does Satan deceive through secular movements and false religions, but he also uses political ideologies as well. Throughout history there have been many forms of human government influenced by Satan that have attempted to destroy God's purposes. For instance, the Roman Empire would not tolerate Christianity until the time of Constantine. Today Communism, in its atheistic political ideology is another such illustration; it persecutes the Church wherever it goes, as do Islamic theocratic ideologies as they expand their religiously exclusive political ideology. *These are political **schemes** empowered by Satan that require godly political leadership to defeat—political leaders who can **stand firm** against such **schemes of the devil**!* Ronald Reagan is a great illustration: he possessed such discernment when he stood against Communism during his presidency.

D. PERSONAL TEMPTATIONS

The last of four broad ***schemes of the devil*** in the world today are those of personal temptations that are orchestrated by him. How many are caught in immorality, pride, worldliness, self-reliance, and self-indulgence today? Luke 8:12 adds to our study on demonology:

The devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved.

So tricky and deceiving is he that many who continually practice the aforementioned would tell you that they are saved. Why? Because he has sold them on the fact that they “believe in Jesus.” But the *devil* “believes in Jesus” as well and is certainly not saved (cf. James 2:19). He deludes people into thinking that intellectual assent is all that it takes—as if you need not repent of your habitual sins and come to Christ humbly, attitudinally submitting to His Lordship. John 10:10 states further:

The thief[Satan] *comes only to steal and kill and destroy.*

Remember, Satan does all his work very stealthily. He will do his best to try to trip up your effectiveness for Christ by enticing you with various personal temptations. See his deceptions for what they are and objectify them: Do not allow him to sideline you! Walk *in the strength of His might!*

V. SUMMARY

These four areas, secular movements, false religions, political ideologies, and personal temptations are what, in a broad sense, begin to illustrate the deceptive *schemes of the devil* in today’s world. God will enable you to be conscientious and victorious over all of them to the degree you are *strong in the Lord and the strength of His might*. You are *strong in the Lord and the strength of His might* to the degree you are obedient to Him and therefore tethered to Him! Your strength is derived from Him—and He was victorious over Satan at the cross! So are you to the degree you walk in the *strength of His might!*

God has graciously blessed us with the book of Ephesians in order that we might know of our high calling in Him (chapters 1–3), how our behavior ought to be in relation to our high calling (chapters 4–6:9), and lastly, how we can be most effective for Him (6:10–24) as a result. In light of this last point of the book, we must know our adversary, the *devil*, and be able to *stand firm* against his various *schemes*, i.e., his various forms of craftiness, cunning, and deception. Failure to do so keeps us in spiritual diapers, far from becoming the soldier of the cross clad in the *whole armor of God* that He intended when He foreordained and adopted us for His purposes!

Don't underestimate, undervalue, or underperform in your high calling, my friend. May many people be blessed because of your strength and spiritual discernment in Christ! Amen!

CONCLUSION

May we partner together to reach political leaders for Christ in America and throughout the world for the praise of Christ, the salvation of souls, the fulfillment of the Great Commission, and the preservation and illumination of our nation.

By this point, I hope you are asking, “How can I become involved in helping to reach political leaders for Christ?”

A movement for Christ among our nation’s political leaders will occur only to the degree we establish strong, fruitful ministries in the federal and state capitols of our nation *and, in addition, in the thousands of local city and county government offices throughout our land.* This much larger portion of the initiative is perhaps where you can best play a key role in God’s mission that can only be achieved by healthy, Bible-believing churches taking up the cause of founding and building (for starters) weekly Bible studies in these public buildings. (Keep in mind that the supposed legal prohibitions against using public buildings for Bible studies have been consistently defeated in the courts; usually only a sponsoring elected official is needed to host a Bible study in a government building.)

For example, your church might want to cater a weekly lunch at city hall or a county building or courthouse, and you could either help organize, host, or teach a Bible study for staff and elected and appointed officials. In addition to the sixty-five Bible studies in this book, Capitol Ministries provides hundreds more that may be downloaded at no cost from our website capmin.org.

These in-depth Bible studies have been written specifically to meet the professional and personal faith needs of public servants. Each study is exegetically deep with specific applications to public servants.

I am hereby issuing the call, and I hope we will soon see thousands of such ministries. Capitol Ministries is eager to train, mentor, help, serve, certify, equip, and provide ongoing support for the task all at no charge!

By stepping out in faith in this manner, you will become acquainted with those in governmental leadership and establish a personal ministry, hopefully leading to their salvation and joining your local congregation! It is as simple as that to best impact our nation.

Capitol Ministries provides training, certification, and Bible study materials at no charge to help you build new ministries to local leaders in city and county governments. We also offer annual training conferences.

The body of Christ is called to share the good news of Christ. By employing the Bible's time-tested and successful top-down missions strategy of reaching governmental leaders—***all who are in authority***—first in order of importance, together we can reach every elected official from mayors and county commissioners to state and provincial legislators to congressmen and parliamentarians in the U.S. and throughout the world with the good news of new life in Christ! Where do you fit in?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ralph Drollinger, President and Founder of Capitol Ministries, leads separate Bible studies every week on the Hill in Washington, D.C., to U.S. Senators, Representatives, and White House Cabinet Members, with sitting and former Governors joining the Cabinet study by Zoom.

Capitol Ministries was founded by Ralph and his wife and ministry partner, Danielle, in 1996 with the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ in the political arena throughout the world. To date, the ministry has established discipleship Bible-study ministries to legislators in 44 states, to city and county local leaders in communities in nine states. Ministries have also been launched to local, regional, and national political leaders and parliamentarians in 85 foreign nations.

Ralph is an expository, historical evangelical pastor who teaches the Bible one book at a time, verse by verse. Additionally, every week Bible studies that Ralph has written on topical issues are delivered to several hundred U.S. senators and representatives and are sent via email to thousands of people who request them. Ralph believes that nothing can substitute the basic discipline of written studies in ministry. Transformation and discipleship stem from *the renewing of your mind* (Romans 12:1–2).

Ralph earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography/Ecosystems from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). He earned a Master of Divinity degree from The Master's Seminary.

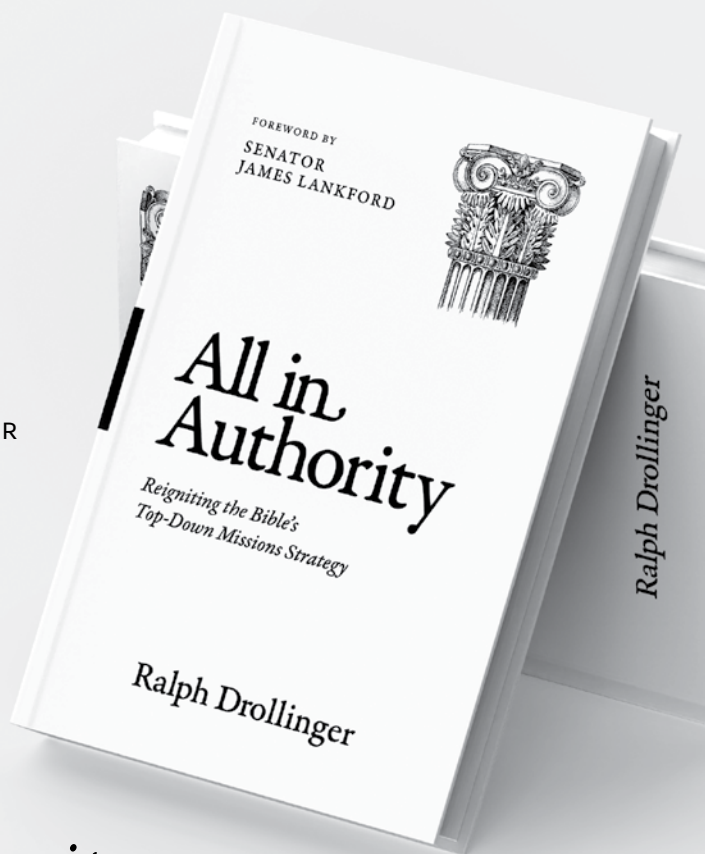
He played basketball at UCLA under coach John Wooden and was the first player in NCAA history to go to four Final Four tournaments. Ralph was taken in the NBA Draft three times but chose to forgo the NBA to instead play with Athletes in Action, an evangelistic basketball team that toured the world and preached the Gospel at halftimes. In June 1980,

Ralph signed with the Dallas Mavericks as a free agent, becoming the first Dallas Maverick in the history of the then-new NBA franchise.

A former world-class mountaineer, Ralph is the first person to have climbed every peak on the main ridge of the Sierra Nevada between Olancha and Sonora Pass, CA, the 250-mile section known as the High Sierra. Ralph and Danielle have three married children and eight grandchildren.

Ralph is the author of *All in Authority: Reigniting the Bible's Top-Down Missions Strategy* and *Oaks in Office: Essential Bible Studies for Political Leaders*.

Also available
FROM RALPH DROLLINGER



All in Authority

Reigniting the Bible's Top-Down Missions Strategy

The book of Acts records how a small band of men—the apostles—in very short order impacted the whole world during the first century in which they lived. These men were not elite leaders, yet they fulfilled the Great Commission one soul at a time through evangelism and discipleship by concentrating on a particular group: *kings and all who are in authority*.

Since 1996, Capitol Ministries has been compelled to employ this successful biblical missiology to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to political leaders in Washington, D.C., state capitols, cities and counties, and at all levels of government in foreign nations.

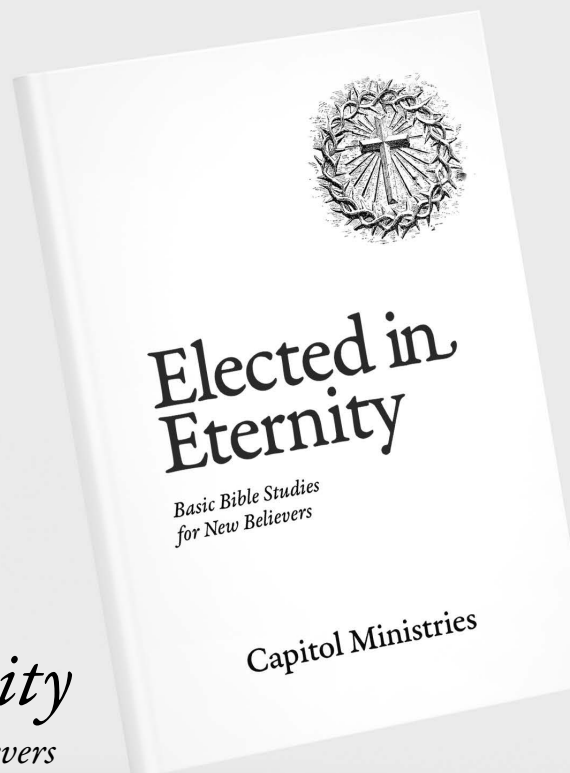
All in Authority is a manifesto; it provides the biblical exegesis of why we must reach public servants with God's truth and disciple them to maturity in the Faith with His Word. Paul was all about that, Timothy was all about that. God's Word confirms that we must be all about that too.

Also available

FROM CAPITOL MINISTRIES

Elected in Eternity

Basic Bible Studies for New Believers



The Bible studies in *Elected in Eternity* offer an introduction to the Christian faith and serve as a vital complement to the studies in *Oaks in Office*.

Elected in Eternity covers basic Christian tenets. Bible studies in the book introduce the seeker, the new believer, or the seasoned Christian who desires to learn more, an intimate introduction to Christ, His attributes, gifts, purpose, roles, and His sacrificial gift to mankind as Lord and Savior. The studies also inform the believer of his obligations to God, reveal the responses God expects from believers to His directives, and disclose the relationship God desires to have with each believer and how that is achieved.

Provided in a workbook format, *Elected in Eternity* offers the reader the opportunity to take notes that will benefit him when he delves into the deeper studies in *Oaks in Office*. Without this rudimentary understanding of the basics of Christianity, the student of *Oaks in Office* may become overwhelmed. It is recommended that both books be studied in a small group.

