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BIBLE TRUTHS

The Most Important Spiritual Principle of the Christian Faith

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I have been involved in ministry for more than forty years and have always been motivated by the conviction that an extensive study of the Bible is necessary in order to properly present the Word of God; yet even as I started my quest to find truth and insight into the complexities of Scripture, I sensed I was missing something—something that applied to everything I studied. It was an elusive truth that I was unable to grasp or even define, and the Lord was not revealing it to me. Finally, after many years of research and teaching, this spiritual principle was made clear to me. It has since shaped my understanding and brought the teachings of Scripture into proper focus.

The Gospel of John presents five chapters (13-17) of the Lord's discourse with His disciples during the Passover week in which He was crucified: Jesus teaches His disciples about the coming of God's Spirit after His ascension; He reflects on the various circumstances He has led them through; and then, in John 15, He reveals the most important spiritual principle of the Christian faith, so called because the meanings of all other biblical teachings are anchored in this simple truth.

John 15 records the Lord's teaching on the vine and the branches. In it He makes three points applying to disciples and their relationship with Him: The branch must abide in the vine in order for the branch to produce fruit (v4); The branch that is abiding in the vine "is producing fruit" (v5a-presented in the original language as a factual statement); "Separate from me, you are unable to do one thing." This last point is the essential truth I had been seeking.

This truth—that separate from the Lord, we are unable to do one thing—is the foundational lesson the Lord is revealing to His disciples prior to His crucifixion and resurrection. He puts them in circumstances designed for God's Spirit to accomplish something through them, not for the disciples to accomplish anything in their own efforts. Their three year journey with Jesus is a revelation that, separate from Him, they are not able to do even one spiritual thing. However, without understanding the spiritual purpose



EDITORIAL

Does God Really Expect Me to Obey the Speed Limit?

James D. Valentine

You're cruisin' along, windows down, sun shinin', got your fish on the back of your sled, crankin' some Casting Crowns – you are the epitome of Christian cool. Then it happens – red and blues in the rearview. You get that feeling in the pit of your stomach. The trooper walks up, asks for your information, and asks why you are in such a hurry today.

- You: a) Think up a lie, and think it up quick, or
- b) turn on the tears (usually only effective by female drivers), or
- c) tell the truth, that you were on your way to church and this is how you always drive.

In my years as a State Trooper, working dayshift Sunday mornings was one of my more vexing tasks. It was on these mornings where I encountered Christians acting unlike Christians on their way to Christian activities. Now, mind you, I was not living as a Christian, either, but this one area – driving behavior – was the one that had a great impact on how I viewed the veracity and relevancy of Christianity. It wasn't until later in my life, as God convicted me of my own driving behavior (along with a host of other behaviors directly related to obedience), that I began thinking of the spiritual side of this most uncomfortable topic.

"So does God really expect me to obey the speed limit?" This seems like such a non-issue, with things like abortion and same-sex marriage and all those "big things" looming in our culture. Even the troopers who are supposed to uphold the law often trample all over the speed limit. Our culture says its ok to fudge a little; after all, who are we hurting? Before getting into scripture, a place where we may be hesitant to go on this topic, let's think about some things spiritually, and rebuff some of the arguments that might be swirling in our heads regarding this issue.

Let's get one out of the way quickly – Christian freedom, and it's associated argument, "Well, Jesus hung out at parties with sinners." Christian freedom works **within** the framework of obedience, not outside of it. As we will see

behind His tests, the disciples give their best efforts to meet the challenges the Lord gives them.

A good example of this is the feeding of the 5,000. (John 6:5-14) Jesus, His disciples, and a crowd of hungry people are on a mountainside. Jesus says to Philip, "From where shall we buy bread, in order that these might eat?" (v5). The next verse tells us, "But this He was saying testing him; for He Himself knew what He was about to do." After the disciples run out of human resources to handle the situation, they come back and explain to the Lord that they do not have enough money or food to feed the people. The Lord then tells them to have the people sit down and proceeds to use the disciples as vessels to distribute His provision for the situation. This is a teaching session that one day would serve to form their approach to life—that they must acknowledge their own inability to do God's work for Him, and must instead submit themselves and their circumstances to the Lord for Him to work His will through them.

One of the greatest examples of this involves Peter's confession that he will not deny the Lord and will die with Him if necessary. Peter proclaims this in spite of the fact that Jesus has told Peter that he will deny Him three times. It is evident that the Lord's statement is one of fact and that He is not chiding Peter for his lack of faith, because Jesus then says, "And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:32) The Lord knows this test will humble and break Peter, better preparing him as His vessel. That is exactly what happens, because after Peter denies the Lord three times, he looks into the eyes of Jesus and weeps bitterly. (Luke 22:62)

Peter is a broken man, but broken people are those the Lord is able use. After He is raised from the dead, Jesus appears to the disciples and reinstates Peter with the encouragement to, "Feed my lambs." (John 21) The evidence that Peter has learned the most important lesson of his life is recorded in Acts 3:12. Peter says to the crowds (on Solomon's porch in the temple, after the lame man has been healed), "Men, Israelites, why do you marvel over this? Or why do you look intently to us as if by our own power or godliness *this* man has been made to walk?" Peter has definitely learned that separate from the Lord, he is not able to do one spiritual thing for the Lord

This is not a new principle in God's kingdom. God was bringing this message to His people back in the days of Isaiah, Zechariah, and Solomon. Isaiah 64:6 records the confession of God's people, "And we all have become as one unclean, and all our righteousness as a filthy rag, and we all wither as a leaf and our iniquities carry us away like the wind." This confession, that their righteousness is as a filthy rag, is the foundation of many of Paul's teachings. When Zerubbabel is sent back to help rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, God gives him a message through Zechariah as to how God's temple work is to be done: "This is the word of Yahweh to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by strength and not by power but rather by My Spirit,' Yahweh of hosts has said." (Zechariah 4:6) God's message is clear; His work is to be done by His Spirit and not by the strength and power of man. In Psalm 127:1, Solomon declares, "If Yahweh does not build a house, its builders labor on it in vain; If Yahweh does not guard a city, the watchman keeps watch in vain." This makes it clear that unless the Lord does the work, people labor in vain.

This principle is carried over into the New Testament, as seen in the discourse between Jesus and Nicodemus. (John 3:1-13) Jesus tells Nicodemus that it is necessary for a person to be born anew in order to see the kingdom of heaven. Looking for confirmation that Jesus is not talking about experiencing a second physical birth, Nicodemus replies, "How is a man able to be born being old? He is not able to enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" (v4) Jesus then says, "That which has been born from out of the flesh is flesh; and that which has been born from out of the Spirit is spirit." (v6). Jesus is confirming that God's Spirit alone can bring about a spiritual birth and that the most a human being can produce is flesh. Therefore, even if a person's human effort is an attempt to do the work of the Lord, its result is still fleshly and not of the Spirit.

This is reinforced by three commands the Lord presents regarding those desiring to be His disciples: "If anyone desires to come after me, let him

later, God wants us to obey the law of the land, so Christian freedom goes out the window as a defense. Besides, think of all the Christian folks you are passing who are offended by your actions – remember that Christian freedom is also only enjoyed within the framework of non-offense to other believers.

The related argument for just about anything enticing is that Jesus hung out with sinners. We must realize that Jesus remained sinless throughout His time on earth. He surrounded Himself with people considered "the sinners" because they were the one's who needed Him and would be most likely the one's to respond to their need given His approach and sinless nature. So, Jesus was called a "winebibber" - He was also called a demon-possessed man, a blasphemer, and many other not-so-nice things. None of these things were true, of course, of the sinless Son of God. He remained sinless. Can we say the same of our own actions when surrounded by "sinners," i.e., other drivers? Are we the beacon of light, or just another radar target? If someone called us a speeder, or an aggressive driver, would it be an empty accusation, or right on the money?

Hmmm. So if our Christian freedom gives no license for bending the limit, and Jesus' associations with sinners bears no resemblance to 70 in a 55, then what does scripture have to say to this issue, if anything? Romans 13:1-7 speaks to this issue somewhat – we are to submit to government. Obviously, if government tells us we can no longer read our bibles or pray or speak openly about Christ, then we go back to what Peter did in Acts 4:29: "But Peter and the other apostles answered and said, "We ought to obey God rather than men." But speeding doesn't seem to be one of those issues, even if we are on our way to church. So our submission to government, government that we see throughout scripture is allowed and used by God to maintain order, is honorable and good and right for the edification of us and the glory of God. Did you ever stop to think that when you pay your taxes on time, you are glorifying God? In the same way, when we lift our foot from the accelerator, we are doing God's will.

Willful rebellion then, becomes the answer to the question, "So what is speeding in God's eyes?" That sounds so very harsh, doesn't it? Especially in a culture that expects us to bend the rules. Drive the speed limit in heavy traffic and you will quickly see what I mean. But when we disobey God, no matter how big or how small the sin may be in our eyes, and we know that it is wrong, God's word tells us we are in rebellion to Him. James tells us in James 4:17: "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is a sin." You see, this issue is so much larger than just obeying a list of rules – it goes to the very heart of our relationship with God, our acceptance of the grace He has given through His Son. We shouldn't want to trample on that relationship. Not because we are afraid of burning, but because we want to live in His shadow always, in the safety of that place of relationship that saves us from ourselves. This could easily become a sword in the hands of a legalist, but these little issues are spoken of throughout scripture as character-defining issues. Little lies that lead to big trouble are sprinkled throughout the narratives of the Old Testament. Jesus spoke a number of times of being faithful in small things and being rewarded greatly. This is a relationship issue.

I once did a public speaking engagement with some teens from our church. I was there in an "official" capacity; I took my Indiana law manual and my Bible with me. I held up the Indiana law manual and said, "This is what man expects us to abide by in order to live together in civilized society." Then, holding up my Bible, I told them, "If you will live by what is in this book (the Bible), you will never find yourselves at odds with this book (the Indiana law manual)." I firmly believe that. As adults, as kids – God's Word is timeless and ageless in its application.

So as we consider this issue of what God expects, remember that He expects nothing that does not culminate in good for us, for as He pursues His glory, we are saved from ourselves. Should our response be one of rebellion, even in the minutiae of life, or one of love, gratitude, and service? So as you drive, breathe easy today, find some time to thank God we don't use horses and buggies anymore, and take some time to communicate with the Creator. God does expect you to obey the speed limit; make the most of the little bit of extra time. That time invested in your walk with God will pay eternal dividends.

deny himself, and let him take up his cross, and let him follow me." (Matthew 16:24) The Greek word used for deny is *aparneomai* (Strong's #533, pronounced äp är n• • m•**), which means "to deny, to disown, to reject." After receiving Christ, a believer's flesh still functions with its feelings and desires; but the Lord states that the believer must deny or reject his/her flesh in order to follow Him. The believer must also take up his cross, the death that Jesus died for him/her, and follow behind the Lord.

As stated earlier, Paul understands this principle and uses it when he explains the struggle he is having in his efforts to obey the Law of God. (Romans 7) His conclusion is, "For I know that there is not dwelling in me (my flesh) *any* good thing; for to will is present with me, but how to work out that which is right I do not find." (v18) He concludes saying, "And the ones being in the flesh are not able to please God." (Romans 8:8) Paul's conclusion is that there is not any good thing in his flesh and that with the flesh it is impossible to please God. He also uses this understanding to minister to some of the churches wherein believing Jews are teaching that believing Gentiles must follow the Law. He says, "This only I wish to learn from you, did you receive the Spirit from out of the works of the Law, or from out of the hearing of faith? Thus are you senseless? After having begun in Spirit, are you now being perfected in flesh?" (Galatians 3:2-3) He says again, "As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him." (Colossians 2:6) Paul is teaching that since we receive the Spirit of God by faith, our walk with God's Spirit is not made complete by the flesh.

Since the Word of God clearly establishes that flesh cannot produce the spiritual things of God, what then is the believer's response and responsibility? It is expressed in one concept, decision making. This starts at salvation with repentance. The word repentance in Scripture is the translation of the Greek word *metanoeo* (Strong's #334, pronounced m• tä n• • **), which means "to make a decision for change." The meaning also carries with it the acknowledgment that the one making the decision for change cannot change him/herself. Therefore, repentance means that a person arrives at a point in life when he/she makes a decision to change, but it is the Spirit who makes the actual change and produces a new creation. (II Corinthians 5:17)

After receiving the Spirit of Christ, a believer is to serve the Lord. Paul writes, "Therefore I appeal to you, brothers, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well-pleasing to God, *whom* you serve with your reasoning process." (Romans 12:1) The word translated "reasonable" or "spiritual" in most English translations is from the Greek word *logizomai* (Strong's #3049, pronounced l• g• dz• m•**), which represents a person's reasoning process, those things passing through a believer's mind as he/she is thinking things through. Therefore, Paul is describing the process of a believer who reasons things out, then subsequently comes to a decision to present his/her body as a living sacrifice, in every situation of life. This is why, in verse 2, Paul uses the present passive imperative to convey the understanding that a believer should not be being conformed by this world, but should be being transformed by the renewing of his/her mind, in order to prove what the will of the Lord is.

In summary, spiritual maturity is represented by two words: ADMIT and SUBMIT—admit your inability to do any spiritual thing for Christ; and then submit life and body to Him for His Spirit to use for His glory. Perhaps envisioning your life as a boat (a prop that Jesus often used) will enhance an understanding of this concept. Any person can direct his/her boat by using its motor, whether against the current, into the wind, to the east, to the west, etc. But things must change when one comes face to face with Christ—because He asks that you shut down the motor and hoist the sail, in order that the wind of God's Spirit can take you where He wants you to go and do with you what He wants to do. In my own life, there have been many times when I have been cruising along, motor off, sail up, only to see a storm gathering on the horizon. Seeking to get away, I have lowered the sail and started the engine; but then found myself fighting against God—because there are definitely times when He sends His people into storms. Now I keep a small sailboat perched above my computer as a reminder to keep the engine off and the sail up

This truth does not appeal to Christians who are following how-to-do-it

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Televangelists and Hypocrisy

Dennis D. Frey, Th.D.

Though overshadowed by the last weeks of the 2008 election, only a few months ago a United States Senator announced he was launching an investigation of six of the nation's largest and most conspicuous televangelists. It seems the Senator is disturbed over the possible misuse of their ministry's tax exempt status. The cable and broadcast media chased the ambulance immediately, seeking and obtaining live interviews with a number of the persons targeted.

In the nearly forty years that I have been in Christian ministry, I have witnessed the rise and fall of many of the media based ministries. I strongly believe pastors and other leaders in the local Church need to take a strong stand against all forms of Christian syncretism and false teaching. Pulpits everywhere ought to ring with Biblical truth, and only that

However, my problem is not with the elite of televangelism, but with the naysayer, the bigot, and the Christian basher who is fond of promoting the notion that all of the media evangelists are crooks and that Christianity is at the core, nothing but a sham or as Karl Marx believed, "the opiate of the people". Both notions are false.

I am not suggesting my support of mega ministries that promote the false teaching that Jesus came to make us all materially rich, physically healthy and powerful leaders. Jesus Christ came to save us from the fair and just penalty of our sin, and "*whosoever will may come*" and be saved...the rich, the poor, the high, the low, the brilliant and the dull. Securing a heavenly home does not mean that one will also secure an earthly mansion. Such a notion is nonsense. What I am suggesting is that that even diluted by false notions, and promoted by teachers without a clear understanding of what the Incarnation was really all about, "Christianity even watered down", to quote G.K. Chesterton, "is hot enough to boil all modern society to rags." Personally, I believe that people who follow some of these mega ministries are a whole lot better off than if they followed the morally sick promotions of the so-called television, movie and music stars.

That, in my view, is where the hypocrisy comes in. For the news media to rant because a televangelist lives in a million dollar home and flies around in a jet while at the same time fawning over secular entertainers who parade their vulgar and despicable craft without shame or apology is the height of hypocrisy. Why they are not outraged over the fact that so many of these people get paid millions to dance dirty while screaming obscenities before throngs of thousands of teenagers puzzles me. When was the last time anyone produced a documentary about filthy rich entertainers getting rich off of filth?

Unlike so many secular entertainers, televangelists who are wealthy do not teach morally repulsive ethics to their followers; they do not encourage them to engage in sexual deviance; they do not lead them into alcohol and drug addiction; they do not preach or sing using vulgar language.

The Senator would do his nation a whole lot more good if he would go after the multibillion dollar secular entertainment industry with the same outrage

books or those being taught to serve the Lord with their best efforts, laboring under the teaching that Jesus has ascended into heaven and left us to do His work for Him until He comes back. This false philosophy is spreading through the Body of Christ like never before, being propagated by ministers who see the Lord as having challenged the disciples to produce spiritual fruit, something that scripture clearly contradicts. However, the sad fact is that many contemporary churches and ministries are praying for and expecting revival while bringing worldly ideas and programs into the church. This may make logical sense to us, given the culture in which we live, but the Word of God teaches differently. Revival will not happen until we stop trying in the flesh to bring it about. Consider the Book of Acts. The disciples of the early Church do not know anything except dependence upon the Lord. Jesus tells them who they will be, what they will do, and where they will go after the Holy Spirit comes upon them. (Acts 1:8) In submission, they go where they are told to go and do what they are told to do: They wait in Jerusalem and receive the Holy Spirit; The Holy Spirit, working miracles through them according to the sovereignty of God, testifies to the truth of their witness; They begin in Jerusalem and eventually are scattered to the farthest places of the earth. The Lord's every word is accomplished by the power of the Spirit; nothing is attributed to the efforts of any disciple. This is His work, not ours. We have only to be His surrendered servants.

****English pronunciation of vowel sounds: ä as in fäther; • as in m•t; • as in •bey; ai=• as in aisle; i=• as in machine; bold indicates an accented syllable.**

Please note that all Biblical quotes are from The Literal English Translation of the Bible produced by BTE Ministries - [The Bible Translation and Exegesis Institute of America](#).



A Hebrew Perspective on Prayer

Skip Moen. Ph.D.

With all the pressures and frustrations of life facing us every morning, it might be useful to consider for a moment the Hebrew perspective on prayer. The shift in focus helps us to see that the answer to our usual questions are not as far away as we might think.

Fundamental to all Hebrew thought about God is this: God is the absolute King and Ruler and Creator of the universe. In theological terms, God is sovereign. The immediate implication is that God is in control of everything. So, the Hebrew view of history, personal and corporate, is saturated with God's purposes. Job tells us that no plan of God's can be thwarted. Proverbs tells us that the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord and is directed like an irrigation channel. The prophets remind us that God uses both good and evil to bring about His plans. In the Hebrew worldview, God is in charge, period.

It is also quite clear that God never makes a move that is not motivated by His purposes. There are no accidental or incidental decisions in heaven. God always does exactly what is the correct thing to do in order to bring about the divine objective.

So, when it comes to the shape and direction of our lives, God is no less diligent in His control, guidance and objective. He wants to accomplish His purposes in us – and He will do that for there is no one and nothing that can prevent Him.

One additional ingredient must be added to the mix before we can truly understand the purpose and process of prayer. God is good. God is absolutely holy, has no second agendas and will always do what is necessary and essential to bring about the best result. Of course, we might not think that what happens in life is the best result, but we are not God. Since God is good, we must rest our evaluation of circumstances and events on His character, *not* the appearance of actions. This is incredibly important for it will often seem as though what happens to us and to others

he seems to feel against the multimillion dollar industry of televangelism. And by the way, where is the Senator who is willing to help us clean up secular television so that it is once again decent family entertainment. I don't watch a lot of these televangelists, but I have yet to see any of them in a sexually explicit scene, engaged in some violent act or cursing like a drunken maniac. You can see plenty of that on regular television (and much worse in movie theaters and on DVDs) any day of the week. That's the hypocrisy of it.

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Lesson's From the Journey

D. Jon Thurman

It seemed so predictable. Yet another Christian man finding himself captivated by a growing sense of unsettledness and haunted by the question of whether his life had any real meaning. Why the lack of fulfillment even in the face of success? Why the sense of loneliness amidst the abundance of relationships? These were the piercing questions staring me in the face as my own journey began towards a life of significance. As you read the unfolding story of "One Man's Journey", it's my heart's desire that you'll see God's handiwork on display as he weaves the tapestry of a life surrendered to His calling. Perhaps along the way you might even find a particular nugget that would be of value in your own life's journey. Travel with me into my own story as we learn together the freedom found in the simplicity of an authentic love for God and for others.

My journey began over twelve years ago with an intentional effort to discern what I was "uniquely purposed" to do. Certainly, this wasn't to be an expedition that had anything to do with finding a new job or a gaining further affirmation of my skills. Rather, it was all about unearthing the unique design God had for my life. It all started with a growing desire to ponder "who I am" vs. "what I do." Like many in the world of business, I had enjoyed a period of measured success as the world defines it but was still longing for more. It seemed that I had my "who-ness" wrapped up in my "what-ness." My identity was largely shaped by what I did for a living. What was it eating away at my soul causing me to be so unsettled in the midst of what the world would see as success? The answer lay in an unquenched desire for living a life that mattered. I thought if I could discover God's unique calling for my life, couple it with my giftedness, then live these two things out in the context of a work platform, I would know a measure of significance unlike I had ever known before. It seemed that anything less would be coming up short of what God purposed for me as His child. Often times we find ourselves driven by goals and objectives only to find that as we attain them the satisfaction derived from their achievement becomes more and more fleeting at best. Why is that? Well, it became clear, at least in my own life, there was no overarching purpose which each of my goals fed. It seemed that even the most insignificant goal could have potentially long lasting, if not eternal, value if it was tied into a larger life purpose for my living. With this understanding and belief, I began to pursue the journey to discover my life purpose with an insatiable abandon.

The initial push towards discovery began with a time of prayer and fasting alone with God to examine His Word and ponder questions that came from a time of reflection and reading. Each question was aimed at peeling the layers of the onion of my life back to the point where I was truly naked before the Lord so I would be certain to answer each question with all honesty and transparency. Doing anything less would be denying me the opportunity to bask in the glory of knowing my true purpose as a child of the King. As I put pen to paper and answered these provoking questions a consistent theme leapt off the pages, a common denominator emerged that pointed to the essence of why God created me. It seemed my unique design had everything to do with being used by God to have a positive impact in the lives of those I encountered. I thought to myself, "Is that it? It

does not make sense. If we were to judge the appropriateness of actions on the basis of our evaluation, we would slip quietly into the Greek model of divinity where Man and Man's reason is the final arbiter of what is good and right. No Hebrew could ever make such a mistake. God's ways are *not* our ways. No man is able to see the biggest picture. The finite mind is structurally insufficient to discern the ways of eternity and the infinite. In the end, we either trust in God's character or we fight for our version of justice.

So, what does this mean when I get on my knees? The Hebrew perspective is different than the usual, Greek-oriented, contemporary Christian approach. The Hebrew prays that his heart will be transformed in such a way that he will be fully prepared to *accept what God has to offer*. This is very different than the usual prayer asking God to provide what I think I need. Hebrew prayer opens the door to the holy, sovereign God to choose what is best and give what is necessary. Hebrew prayer is *always* in perfect alignment with the will of the Father because it assumes that the issue at hand is not with the giver but with the receiver. God will always do what is right, holy, blessed and perfect. I don't have to convince Him of that. It is in His nature to do these things. What is needed is that I become the kind of person who is able to receive what God has to offer. In other words, my heart must be prepared to be in perfect alignment with what God already knows to be the right, holy, blessed and perfect action. When I pray for *anything else*, I run the risk of being out of alignment with the will of the Father, finding my prayers (really requests) unanswered and ending up frustrated (and blaming).

I can always count on God to do what is best for me, and for His entire creation. My job in prayer is to prepare my heart to accept what He is doing. Once my heart is in alignment, I discover peace. I discover joy. I discover purpose and power. Why? Because I know that the heavenly Father *knows what He is doing*, and all I have to do is completely trust Him.

Too often our prayers carry the subtle suggestion that we have to convince God to act with holy intent. We go to prayer as if it were a negotiating session, as if God had to be convinced to act righteously on our behalf. That way is Greek. That way assumes that my view is large enough to see how the pieces *should* fit together and all I must do is get God to cooperate. That view is blasphemous and idolatrous for it sets me on par with God.

The Hebrew knows that God does exactly what is needed to bring about righteousness. Therefore, the Hebrew realizes that the impediment is not with God but with me. My heart must be shaped to receive God's grace as *He desires to provide it*. Paul is entirely Hebrew when he remarks that he has learned to be content in all things. Reaching this stage in prayer is not easy. Even Paul asked three times for God to cooperate with Paul's plans. But the answer sets us all straight. "My grace is sufficient." Now you know why Jesus could say, "Why are you concerned about tomorrow? Doesn't God take care of the birds and the flowers? Won't He also take care of you?"

May your prayers reflect the holiness, sovereignty and righteousness of who God is.

Master's Journey



The Role of Women in the Church

sounds so simple, it's not big enough!"

God would use the ensuing season of time to continue to refine my desires, thoughts and convictions. Daily encounters with others would further impart His understanding to me of how my "life purpose" would be lived out. Amazingly, as I now can see with great clarity, God would use these very encounters to impart wisdom and speak truth into my life all the while holding me accountable to my persevering in this journey of discovery. He was moving me to greater depths of transparency and understanding of His calling on my life. It was as if He was jettisoning all of "my" thinking and replacing it with "His" thinking. Kind of sounds like my mind was being transformed and renewed doesn't it?

As I continued to meet with people, it became painfully clear to me that most of those I was sharing my journey with were at much the same place as me but simply didn't know how to get to the other side where significance could be found. Routinely I would be asked by others to help them in their own journey. God had indeed put me onto something!

Over time God would take the broad strokes of what seemed to be such a simple vision and ultimately shape it into a precise calling for my life. So after a three and one-half year journey of discovery God called me to a marketplace "ministry of availability" to men. So what in the world does that mean? It's very simple. It's an intentional plan to set aside time to meet with men for the sole purpose of encouraging them right where they are. No agenda. Simply just one man showing up to nourish another man by helping him find the bread that brings life. Again I thought to myself, "It sounds so simple. Is it big enough?" Well, let me just say that as I enter my ninth year of "living out" this ministry I continue to be amazed how God can orchestrate the profound in the simple.

Let's talk for a minute if we can about the word, "journey." One dictionary would define this as, "a gradual passing from one state to another regarded as more advanced." Frankly, prior to embarking on a journey towards significance life felt more like I was "trudging through" the abyss of life. Like many, I had my goals and was having some measure of success in reaching them. Yet, the satisfaction from attaining these goals became more and more fleeting as life continued to pass by. It wasn't until I realized that I had no overarching purpose to my life did my view of life's journey really change. I was no longer captivated by where I had been or what I had done. Now, on a journey to discover my purpose, life would be all about *who I could become*. Too often we get mired down in who we're not rather than who we can become as an unleashed child of the King. I guess I somehow lost sight of the sanctifying work that could be done in a heart that was in pursuit of God purposes.

So there I was, captivated by the excitement of living life with purpose and becoming more of the child God created me to be. I needed to know more... or so I thought. Certainly I still had more to learn but I remember the day when the fog lifted as I realized that I just needed to do something with what I already knew. It seemed my formula for living life had been what I might call, Product = Value, or said another way, continue to gather more knowledge and that would equate to a life of significance. I was missing it BIG TIME! The right formula, it seemed, was Product + Installation = Value. We all know that the best product in the world has zero value unless it gets installed (or used). I guess I had been, like many, one of those to gather books, perhaps even read them, only to put them back on the shelf and go on as if nothing had changed other than to accumulate more knowledge. Where is the value in that I thought? Ultimately, I realized that I just needed to do something with what I already knew and in doing so the knowledge would be translated into a greater understanding of my unique purpose.

If you were to talk with those that know me well today, they would tell you of my constant drumbeat that, "the world doesn't need another book (or article in an e-zine for that matter). It just needs people who will do something with what they already know." I believe in many ways this a clarion call for the Christian today whether you're in a vocational or marketplace ministry. Certainly, we all need to enjoy learning more and more BUT let's be sure not to miss out on the real value that comes from the "installation" or application of our knowledge in tangible ways as we become unleashed



Perhaps no issue raises more theological emotion than the current debate concerning the role of woman in the church. In spite of several scholarly works demonstrating a significant theological foundation for a restored Biblical feminism, a large number of Christians and Christian denominations continue to

assert that women are forbidden to play certain roles in the Body, in particular the roles of pastor, teacher and apostle. Perhaps the intensity of emotions that surround this issue may be reduced by noting that a restored Biblical feminism is not the equivalent of contemporary feminist social politics. Rather, a restored Biblical feminism seeks to return the role of women in the church to the Biblical norm presented in Scripture as a whole. In particular, this means that it is not possible to propose a theological position regarding the active engagement of women in the Body unless that position takes into account the full range of Biblical teaching, examples and history on the subject. Paul alone is not enough. In fact, neither is Paul and Peter, those authors most commonly cited in defense of a limited role for women. The objective is to determine the full truth of the canon, and subsequently, to show that each individual author sheds light on that truth.

Ultimately, this becomes a matter of hermeneutics. Henry Virkler reminds us

[1] that the interpretation of Scripture must follow certain historical-cultural and contextual rules. Among these are the determination of the cultural milieu of the writer and his audience, the general historical circumstances and cultural customs, the purpose of the author, the immediate context of the author's work and words, the flow of the argument, the perspective that the author takes and the difference between descriptive and prescriptive truth. [2]

What this implies for the issue of women in the church is this:

1. Paul and Peter both wrote from the perspective of the Hebraic worldview. Consequently, no interpretation of their statements that disregards or ignores or contradicts the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures (commonly called the Old Testament) can be upheld as a legitimate interpretation of their intentions. Both of these men, and Paul in particular, were thoroughly acquainted with the Hebrew Scriptures and both of them claim Torah observance, most importantly, after the resurrection. Their claims invalidate any interpretation that would call into question the absolute authority of the Hebrew Scriptures in the lives of these men.
2. Since Paul also claims to be a Pharisee among the Pharisees and a student of Gamaliel, we can be assured that his understanding of the Torah was deep and demanding. In all likelihood, Paul had memorized the entire Old Testament. His letters are saturated with Old Testament references, allusions and illustrations. It is simply impossible to believe that Paul would mistakenly misuse the Hebrew Scriptures as a basis for an argument concerning the role of women.
3. Both apostles wrote letters with specific contextual and cultural issues in mind. Neither apostle gives any indication that he is intentionally laying down *eternal* church policy. Both men refer to specific issues that must be addressed, issues that can only be thoroughly understood and appreciated within the context of the contemporary culture of the reading audience. This does not imply that the application of the words of these men does not reach beyond their local circumstances, but it does mean that whenever an exegete wishes to jump the gap between the first century circumstances that caused the letters to be written and the contemporary ecclesiology, the exegete must demonstrate unquestioned parallels and authority for making such a leap.
4. Finally, Virkler reminds us that what may be descriptive in the first century cannot be applied as prescriptive in the twenty-first century without very careful logical steps that do not violate any of the other rules of hermeneutics.

This is a tall order. Seeking the mind of Paul or of Peter from a perspective twenty centuries later is a formidable task. But it is a task that we must take to heart for there is simply too much at stake to make general claims about

children of the King. We certainly don't have to travel far. Who knows...it could be just as simple as loving our neighbor.

Jon Thurman is a recently confirmed member of the over fifty-five clan. He is husband to Cindy for the last twenty years and dad to Carly who is nineteen and Chris who is sixteen. On his best days he is a beggar just like you trying to help other beggars figure out where to find the food that brings life. He is just a regular guy that is just now starting to realize the freedom that is found in the simplicity of an authentic love for God and others. In fact, he spends much of his time just practicing the presence of people. Currently, he makes his "tents" as President of Westbrook Service Corporation.

Jon joined Westbrook Service Corporation in 1999 after navigating his own "halftime" journey; a journey that ultimately led to the discovery of the unique design and call on his life. Armed with that discovery he was divinely ushered to Westbrook as a marketplace platform from which he could live out, what he fondly refers to, as his "marketplace ministry of availability." The transition to Westbrook took Jon out of a high-tech, low-touch corporate sales role to a low-tech, high-touch executive leadership role at Westbrook, a Central Florida-based mechanical construction and service company.

Prior to joining Westbrook, Jon worked in both the corporate and privately-held sectors in various sales and management capacities. Today, Jon continues to feast on the fruit that springs forth from an integrated life and an intentional posture of simply being available to feed the hungry hearts of others with encouragement.

If you found Jon's comments encouraging, you can reach him at jont@westbrookfl.com.



Christians and Capitalism - Where Worldviews Collide

John Thorman

As Christians, we are called to be in the world but not of the world. Jesus prayed this to the Father:

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. (John 17:15-19)

The problem for many believers has been the compartmentalization of their faith, resulting in serious tensions and confusion about their roles and responsibilities as business leaders and professionals. They go to church on Sunday but then Monday everything is different. The rules and behaviors on Sunday don't carry over Monday to Friday. For too many Christians, they think that following God doesn't apply at work, especially if they want to be successful. Business success frequently seems to require them to lie, cheat and bend the rules a little if they're going to win in this increasingly competitive environment.

The "Marketplace Movement" has been beneficial for many professionals because it has helped them recognize that God is sovereign over all areas of life, including their business activities.

What is fundamental to achieving spiritual wholeness and aligning our organizations with God's instructions is our understanding of the competing worldviews in capitalism and economics. At times they are polar opposites which explains why Christians can become so spiritually schizophrenic.

the role of women in the church based on tradition, gender bias or ecclesiology. We must know what the Bible really teaches or we run the risk of either ignoring the Word of God or being disobedient to it.

With these preliminary cautions, we can choose a representative of the traditional position that women are forbidden to act as teachers, preachers and apostles. There are several available. James Hurley's *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* is perhaps the best known in recent years. His work has been thoroughly examined and criticized in Gilbert Bilezikian's *Beyond Sex Roles*. Since Hurley represents the most conservative, most traditional position, and since this position has been treated in some great detail by Bilezikian, it is perhaps more useful to select a moderate theologian. For this reason, we will look at the position of Paul Jewett in his book *Man as Male and Female*, a book that predates Hurley's work by several years.

Jewett argues that the ontological equality of the two sexes is firmly established in the creation account of Genesis 1. It seems unlikely that any theologian could argue otherwise since the description of Man as male and female clearly indicates that there is no difference in relationship between men and God or women and God. Furthermore, the account establishes the fact that God views human being (Man) as both sexes.

The difficulty comes with Paul's commentary on the creation account in Genesis 2. According to Jewett, Paul's remarks in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 are based on the "chain of command" established in this second creation story. Adam, the male, is created first. The female is created second. The male proceeds from God's direct interaction with the stuff of human existence (the earth), but the woman proceeds from the man. Jewett argues that Paul wishes believers to recognize this intrinsic and God-given hierarchy and "reflect this understanding by conforming to the proper symbolism"^[3], i.e. head coverings, etc. Jewett claims (*pace* Bilezikian) that the Greek word "head" (*kephale*) is a clear indication of this implicit hierarchy.

This Corinthian passage becomes the bedrock of the traditional view. Because of its clear delineation of a "created" hierarchy, this passage is used to bring interpretation to the remaining Pauline comments in Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, 1 Timothy 2, Titus 2 and to the declaration of Peter in 1 Peter 3. Jewett interprets the relevant passages as declarations that "women . . . are to take a subordinate role to men in the teaching office of the church. While men may teach women, women should not aspire to reverse this relationship, for they are inferior in their gifts, as far as teaching is concerned. This inferiority is inferred from the fact that the male (Adam) was created first;"^[4]

Jewett recounts the history of the traditional interpretation from St. Thomas Aquinas to Calvin and Luther to Karl Barth, noting that in general the position generally holds that in spite of the equality of creation, men and women are assigned different roles in God's order. These roles imply and include a particular hierarchy, a "chain of command", in which the man plays the superior role and the woman the subservient role. This is not to be taken as a reflection on their status before God, but is merely a statement of the reality of the social order as given by God.

Jewett's biggest concern is the Pauline passages. His solution is novel. Paul is a man of two minds. According to Jewett, Paul's rabbinic background and Jewish influence left him with a theology of the woman as subordinate to the man because of the Genesis 2 account. Therefore, Paul speaks from this perspective when he declares that the man is the head of the woman. But Paul is being transformed by his radical experience as a Christian. In this frame of mind, he recognizes the essential equality of all believers, making men and women equal in all things. Jewett's solution to the difficulties of the Pauline passages is to claim that Paul had both perspectives "the Jewish and the Christian" and that even though these perspectives are incompatible, Paul was aware of the dilemma but unable to overcome it. Jewett suggests that Paul "sees a pointer in the direction of equality" as an "uneasy conscience on the part of a Christian theologian who argues for the subordination of the female to the male by virtue of her

If you have achieved some degree of success by following the world's systems and methodologies, yet experience inner turmoil and conflict because you know God expects you to behave differently; you will never be able to reconcile the two – you can't serve two masters. Remember the words of the apostle Paul:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with the darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? (2 Corinthians 6:14-16)

The good news is that not everything we've been taught from the world's system is wrong. The world has incorporated some of God's principles already, which is why capitalism works. The foundation of capitalism and the creation of wealth is found in property rights and a legal system to support and protect those rights – all of which was instituted by God in the Old Testament. That's why we read all those detailed descriptions of the land area divided up among the twelve tribes. God gave Israel an inheritance when they possessed the promise land and the system of laws and judges to enforce it all. "Go and make a survey of the land and write a description of it". (Joshua 18:8)

In Deuteronomy, Moses instructs God's chosen people how they are to live and function when they possess the land – and it included rules for their economy. This is critically important because Moses' audience is the children of generations of slaves that have come out of Egypt. They don't know what owning property is or what creating wealth looks like – they inherited a slave mentality from their parents and they have been wandering around the desert for 40 years.

Deuteronomy gives this new generation of Israelites the instructions they need to steward assets and natural resources and build a wealthy, successful nation. So, this is where we must go to learn what God expects from us in doing the same. We don't live in a theocracy, but God is our King. We serve Him in His kingdom and His rules for success haven't changed. "It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law". (Luke 16:17)

Our culture's insatiable desire for more; more success and the accumulation of more wealth has spawned the worship of the self-made man or woman. So, we would do well to remember this:

You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today. (Dt. 8:17-18)

Unfortunately, a major stumbling block for Christians in a capitalist society is our understanding of economics. Today's dominant economic theories are at odds with God's truth. In economics 101 we are taught a scarcity worldview which defines economics as how we allocate and utilize limited resources to meet the unlimited needs of the consumer. However, this ideology is flawed. It causes us to view our economy or our markets as one big pie with only so many slices to go around. So, if I am to get a bigger slice, then I must be taking pie from somebody else. This has caused many well meaning Christians to think wrongly about making a profit and shy away from accumulating wealth in general. The analogy of the pie and a scarcity worldview is simply inconsistent with the God of the Bible.

We must begin by recognizing that God created something out of nothing and that He is the owner of everything seen and unseen. His supply is unlimited. He is capable of producing whatever He wants, whenever He wants and giving it to whomever He wants. It's His prerogative, He is God. In God's economy there is ultimately no such thing as scarcity, ever. He speaks things into existence and He tells us that He is our provider and that we can trust Him to meet all of our needs.

derivation from the man."^[5] Jewett suggests that contemporary theologians may find this uneasy confluence of perspectives difficult to accept today, but that does not diminish the authority of Paul's claims. I suspect that Jewett's remark here captures the present day conflict of traditional proponents of the headship of the man. Certainly society has made a mockery of this position. Contemporary social systems are shocked and dismayed when traditional Christian proponents exhort women to take their God-ordained place as the feet of men. Certainly no man who proclaims such a theology is immune to how difficult it is to maintain. But if that's what Scripture teaches, then that's what we much endorse. The question about Paul's position is the centerpiece of the debate.

Jewett concludes his book with a favorable vote for the full role of women, as teachers, preachers and ordained ministers, in whatever capacity God might call. His final position is that Christianity must overcome the unfortunate duality of Pauline thought, recognize Paul's own personal struggle with his past rabbinic thought, and move forward. This solution creates a host of other problems, especially regarding the inspired authority of the text. Jewett's conclusion may seem correct, but he has only reached a socially acceptable theological resolution at the expense of sacrificing the integrity of Paul's thought. This is as uncomfortable as the idea that Paul was in conflict.

The key to understanding Paul is to understand his Old Testament theology. It does little good to begin the examination of the Pauline position by dealing with the Greek letters. We must begin with his re-evaluation of the revelation of Scripture, what we would call the Old Testament. In true rabbinic fashion, Paul would never accept or propose an understanding of the Scripture that was not fully compatible with the entire corpus of the Tanakh. That means that Paul would have been quite familiar with the Hebrew thought regarding the creation, design, intention and assignment given to Woman. If we are to resolve apparent conflicts between Paul Christian equality and his rabbinic hierarchy, it won't happen by espousing duality. It can only occur as we seek an explanation that integrates all the text. This means, of course, that we are also not allowed the luxury of espousing any of the Pauline statements as *God-ordained* status until we have shown that they are consistent and compatible with all of Scripture. Paul believed that what he said was, otherwise he would not have said it. Our job is not to write this off as psychological distress nor holy writ until we understand exactly how it all fits together.

We have more work to do, don't we? ~ Editor

^[1] Henry Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids), 1981, especially chapter three.

^[2] Adapted from Virkler, pp. 88-89.

^[3] Jewett, p. 55

^[4] *Ibid*, p. 60

^[5] *Ibid*, p. 113



Views expressed in the Ark Rocker are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the position of Master's Journey or the Divinity School. MJ

God has proven His faithfulness in meeting our needs repeatedly throughout the generations. There was manna and quail in the desert, a successful military strategy for Joshua, jars of oil for the widow, the disciples found a coin in the mouth of a fish, Jesus fed the five thousand with just two small loaves of bread and five tiny fishes and they had leftovers! The stories of God's provision go on and on right up to our present day.

The fact of God's unlimited supply and His ability to meet all of our needs does not negate our responsibility to be wise and effective stewards of the resources that He entrusts to us. This is clearly seen in the parables in the New Testament of the King and the master who gave servants money to put to work for them while they were away. Many Christians have mistakenly assumed that they can do whatever they desire without seeking God's strategy or direction first, ask God to bless their efforts and then expect everything to turn out profitably for them. This presumption and the prosperity gospel that teaches God wants every Christian to be rich are just not consistent with the whole counsel of God's word. What is true and reliable is that God has consistently proven His faithfulness to provide for His own and to deliver and bless those who are obedient to Him. So, we must take God at his word and trust Him to meet our needs today.

While trust in God is the key for Christians in all matters of life, it is interesting to notice that our entire capitalist society is built upon trust too. We trust our government to make and enforce good laws on behalf of citizens, we trust auditors and accountants to truthfully and accurately report on the financial condition of a company, we trust boards of directors to hold executives accountable to fulfill the wishes of the stock holders and we trust executives and business managers to act in the best interest of the stock holders and all of their stake holders.

The difference, of course, is that man is not consistently trust worthy. Today our trust is repeatedly violated from unethical or illegal actions as well as the insatiable greed of our human leaders. This causes our financial markets and our economy to be unreliable and investors and the public at large to suffer substantial losses. We have all witnessed this vividly and repeatedly starting with Enron in 2001 up to our current economic crisis and the havoc on Wall Street.

Sadly, many Christian business people have not followed God's instructions either and as a result they have brought much reproach to the name of Christ. This must stop. I have experienced this first hand and I am tired of hearing people tell me that they would never do business with a Christian, or that they will never work for another Christian business owner again because of how they were treated and how these professing Christians conduct their business affairs. We must repent of our sins and turn from our ungodly business practices.

As Christians in a capitalist society, we are obligated to live as faithful servants to the King of Kings and as ambassadors of the kingdom of heaven. Ours is a higher standard that requires sanctification. Once we understand that there is no scarcity in God's economy, we must trust in the living God to meet all of our needs and we must be obedient to his instructions for successful living.

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Mathew 6:31-33)

We can be confident in seeking first the kingdom of God and aligning our business activities with God's instructions. Moses told Israel that prosperity would be theirs again, after they had returned to the Lord.

You will again obey the LORD and follow all his commands I am giving you today. Then the LORD your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The LORD will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your fathers, if you obey the LORD your God and keep



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his commands and decrees that are written in the Book of the Law and turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 30: 8-10)

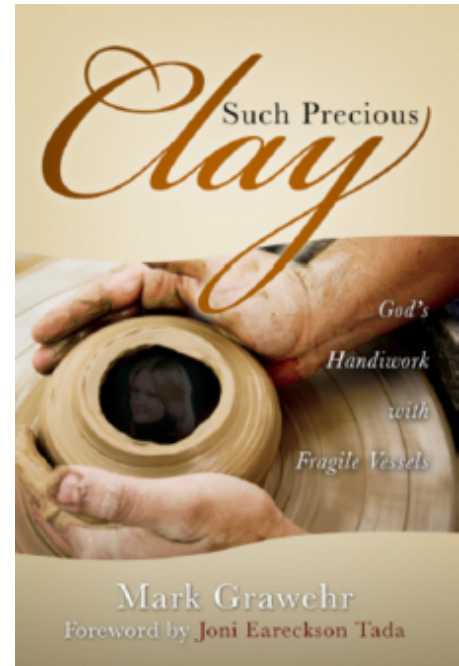
Our God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. So, let's commit to learning and following His instructions, so we can bring glory to the name of our Lord and Savior and be a shining example out in the marketplace.

John Thorman is a management and marketing consultant serving the owners and CEO's of privately held businesses throughout the US and Canada. He is passionate about applying a Biblical worldview to business and investing. He is available to help you improve your business and can be reached at: johnthorman@earthlink.net



Book Reviews

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