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Godliness. Reverence. Obedience. Worship.

GR W

magazine

a quarterly e-magazine designed to promote
growth in faith and service to God

– in memory of Sean Cavender –

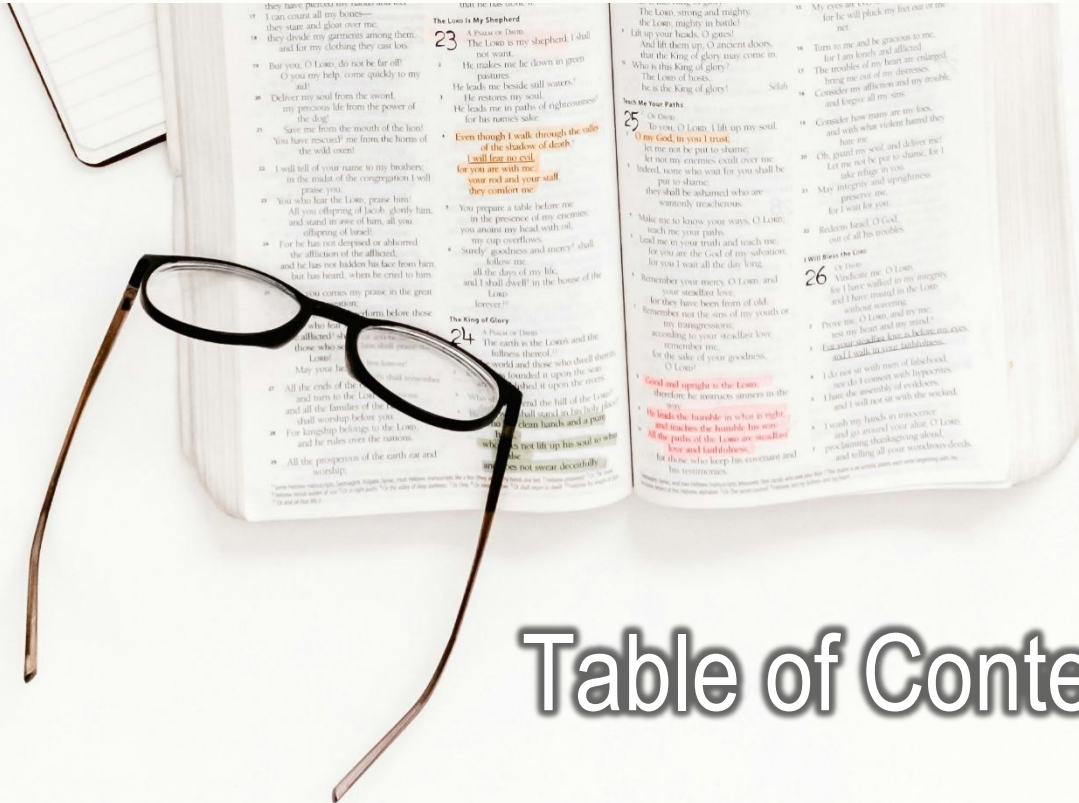


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From the Editor...

Spring is the season for planting; summer is the time for endurance; and autumn brings days of harvest. The work of the other seasons comes to fruition as the land yields its fruit.

In our spiritual lives, fall invites us to take stock of the fruit God has produced in our lives. It is a time to give thanks for God's ongoing provision and reflect on our walk with Him. Consider three words which characterize this time: gather, prune, and rest.

Gather – after the summer of growth, the farmer is busy harvesting his crop. He cannot gather in what was not sown. Thus, he must sow with diligence. Galatians 6:9 reminds us, “...*let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*” God's promise is that if we will diligently pursue Him and His way, we will reap accordingly. Thus, let us take care to sow well.

Prune – in preparation for winter, the trees shed their leaves. A skilled farmer or horticulturalist will also prune trees of the dead or unhealthy areas so when the next growing season comes, the whole will become more fruitful. In John 15:2, Jesus teaches that the Vinedresser prunes the branches so they will be more fruitful. May we willingly and humbly allow God to clear away the things which are unhelpful in our lives so we can become healthier for the next cycle of growth.

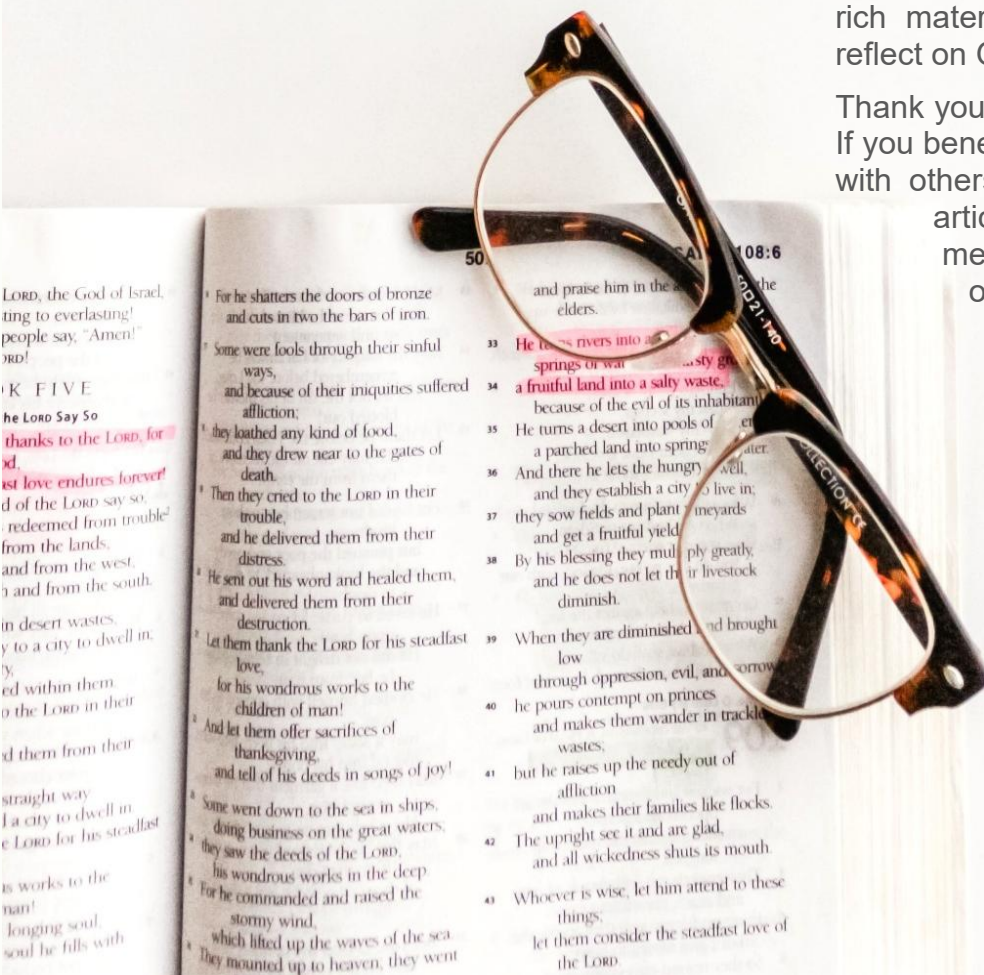
Rest – healthy soil requires periods of stillness to replenish its nutrients for the future season. We also benefit from times of rest and reflection, rather than continuous, relentless striving. In Matthew 11:28-29, Jesus invites us: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

It is our aim to promote thoughtful study, to build living and lasting faith, leading to maturity. We're thankful to our writers in this issue for producing rich material designed to help us learn and reflect on God's way – and to make it our own.

Thank you, readers, for your interest in GROW. If you benefit from this issue, be sure to share it with others. You can share a link to specific articles or to our site, post on social media, or pass along this PDF or print out a copy to give to a friend.

Now, let's GROW together!

William Stewart



Hall of Faith: Daniel & His Friends

JEFF CARR | TUSTIN, CALIFORNIA

Faith is defined in Hebrews 11:1 as “the certainty of things hoped for, a proof of things not seen.” We are to have confidence or trust in things that we cannot see. For God to ask us to live by faith is not a stretch at all from our daily routine. Every day I start my car, use a microwave oven, etc. I “live by faith” in that I hope those things will work. I do not look under the hood nor break open the machine every time I use them. Sometimes these items let me down. God will never let us down!

Another definition of faith comes from a few verses later in Hebrews 11:6 which comes in two parts: faith is 1) understanding that God exists, and 2) believing that God will reward those who seek after Him. If you want an example of what that looks like look no further than the rest of Hebrews 11 where various godly individuals are named as they meet these definitions of Biblical faith.

For this article I have been asked to write from Hebrews 11:33b-34a, about those who by faith, “shut the mouth of lions and quenched the power of fire.” These stories come from the book of Daniel.

“Shut the mouth of lions” (11:33b; cf. Daniel 6)

Daniel 6 opens with a regime change. This was not the first for Daniel. He grew up in Jerusalem and then was carted off as a prisoner to Babylon. Then he lived under Babylonian rule and thrived. Daniel 5 starts the transition from Babylonian rule to Medo-Persian rule. That was enough to make anyone lose their faith, but Daniel remained faithful during all this upheaval and uncertainty.



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What we see in Daniel 6 is a good person, Daniel, living among pagans and doing the right thing. For Daniel, even though the details of his life change, he remained faithful to the one and only God. And not only does Daniel live – he thrived! He was promoted under each regime. This ‘outsider’ made others jealous so the “commissioners” (Daniel 6:4) set a trap in order to get rid of him. They convinced the new leader, Darius (Daniel 6:1), to test his subjects by passing an edict that no one was to pray to anyone other than Darius for 30 days. Regardless the circumstances, Daniel would obey God rather than men (cf. Acts 5:29). None of this stopped Daniel from his regular routine! He continued to pray as he always did: three times per day in the same location in front of whoever was paying attention (Daniel 6:10). He made no alterations to his prayer habits. To prove this was a set up, the commissioners immediately brought this to the attention of Darius (Daniel 6:10-11). As they tried to frame Daniel as being disloyal to the king, it was the commissioners themselves, who were disloyal! Getting rid of Daniel was bad for the king and the empire. For Christians, the more favored you are, the more the world notices (cf. Matthew 5:10-11). Daniel was charged essentially with not being like the Persians (Daniel 6:13).

Daniel put his trust in Yahweh and not the princes. Darius could not revoke the decree. To help us appreciate this concept, God's laws cannot be revoked either. When Darius realized one of his favorites had to enter the lions' den, he had to go through with it. Yahweh cannot ignore sin and its punishment, but He went into the proverbial lions' den for us! Perhaps this was what Daniel understands and why he was unwilling to give up on Yahweh.

When Daniel was cast into the lions' den and survived, it brought relief to Darius. Daniel made it clear how he was saved – it was "My God" (Daniel 6:22). We can easily give glory to ourselves, but Daniel's faith caused him to always give glory to God, even in front of monarchs and their unbelieving, hostile crowds. Eventually Darius came to respect Daniel and his God (Daniel 6:25-28). In the end, Daniel's faith was rewarded and God was glorified.

"Quenched the power of fire" (11:34a; cf. Daniel 3)

In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that terrified him. He challenged his "experts" to interpret it, but they could not (Daniel 2:3f). Eventually Daniel interpreted the dream: a statue in 4 parts representing 4 major empires, Babylon being the first. These empires would rise and fall, followed by a 5th empire that would never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44-45). The king recognized and appreciated Daniel and his faith and was moved to honor Yahweh (Daniel 2:46f).

Since Nebuchadnezzar had a terrifying dream about a statue in Daniel 2 what did he do in Daniel 3? He decided to build a statue dedicated to himself for all to worship. Anyone who did not bow down to the statue would be thrown into the fire and burned to death. Enter the three faithful friends of Daniel: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Daniel 1:6), or as they were renamed in captivity: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (Daniel 3:12). The friends were as devoted

to Yahweh as Daniel was. They knew the first and second commandments (Exodus 20:3-4).

The king gave the three friends every opportunity to "do the right thing." In his mind, Nebuchadnezzar was making things easy. After all, no one was being told to stop worshipping the god of their choice; they just had to pay homage to the Babylonian image. But the friends were adamant! They display amazing faith in their refusal to bow down to this statue and steadfastly serve Yahweh. Consider Daniel 3:16-18,

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to respond to you with an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to save us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will save us out of your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods, and we will not worship the golden image that you have set up. (LSB)

Please note what this important text says. The friends made it clear that even if "our God" did not save them, they were "not going to serve your gods and we will not worship the golden image that you have set up." It is hard to find a stronger faith than this!

How easy is it to trust in God? This was the same God who let Jerusalem and the Temple fall, etc., yet this was the God whom they trusted implicitly. They told the King and all who could hear, "God can save us, but if He does not we still won't bow down to this idol." They knew that God could deliver but would He?

Idolatry is as rampant today as it was then. It just takes on various forms. If you don't think idolatry exists today, then you must not be paying attention. We idolize sports teams,

athletes, social media influencers, celebrities, politicians, political parties, each other, etc.. ... ANYTHING but Yahweh! We know more about these than we do about God and His word. We are busy worshipping the created and not the Creator (Romans 1:25). In temptations and trials, the three friends remained faithful and are an example for us.

One final lesson from this story is that God is with His faithful. God did not spare them from the fire, but He was with them all the way. We will walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and God will be with us each and every step of the way.

The Church at Laodicea: The Lukewarm Church

JIM MICKELLS | SELLERSBURG, INDIANA

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy; and you have need of nothing’ – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked – I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 3:14-22).

There probably has been more said and written about this church than any of the others mentioned in Revelation chapter 2 & 3. There is nothing good revealed about this church at Laodicea in the text. What a sad



commentary on a group of Christians who had been saved by the grace of God, washed in the blood of the Lamb, and now lacked a zeal in serving the Lord. There are a great number of things for us to glean from these verses to avoid receiving the same condemnation.

The Lord knew their works or lack of because He is the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness and the Beginning of the creation of God. These terms describe Him as faithful, trustworthy, truthful in dealing with God’s counsel, and the author of all creation. So, what is revealed about this church is the absolute truth and certainly is to be taken seriously by these brethren. Their deplorable condition is described as somewhere between cold and hot, which may not sound too bad to men yet is extremely repulsive to the Lord. It has been revealed that Laodicea got its water from the hot springs of Hierapolis by aqueducts and by the time it gets to the city is lukewarm. Trying to drink this tepid water would have been extremely disgusting. Think of how Jesus must have felt when beholding a group of people whom He had died to redeem and see such lack of service from them? He would vomit

them out of His mouth.

What they thought of themselves and what Christ thought of them was the very opposite. Material prosperity can lead one to feel self-sufficient and in need of nothing, which is what happened to them. Yet they are described as being wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked from a spiritual perspective. The city was known for three major businesses (1) banking center (2) black wool and the manufacturing of clothing (3) medical school which specialized in the making of medicine for the eyes. The Lord gives them counsel to repent by buying gold from Him to possess true riches, white garments to be clothed in to cover their nakedness, and their eyes anointed with eye salve to be able to truly see. True wealth comes from laying up treasures in heaven with a genuine faith in serving God (Matthew 6:19-21; 1 Peter 1:7). They needed to be clothed with white garments washed in the blood of Lamb, living a truly holy and righteous life (Revelation 7:13-14; Colossians 3:12-15). Having eyes focused on things about, seeing themselves as God sees

them (Colossians 3:1-2; Hebrews 4:13). Even though their spiritual condition was extremely poor, the Lord did not give up on them. They were encouraged to repent and be zealous.

What a tender picture of One pleading with His people, “behold I stand at the door and knock” (verse 20). He does not force His way in the hearts of individuals nor churches. I have heard people hundreds of times through the years thank Jehovah for making them creatures of choice. Yet with the choices we make there are also consequences to be received, whether good or bad. If they would allow Him and His word to dwell in their heart then you can easily see the results, fellowship with Him. The blessing of overcoming any problem as an individual or a church may face is eternal life with our Lord, His Father, the Spirit, and all the saved. The question we all must answer is this, would the Lord say that we are lukewarm? Is the church which we are members of lukewarm? And if it is, is it because of our lack of zeal for Jesus? We must hear what the Spirit says to us through His word!

Let All Things Be Done For Edification

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

On Paul's second missionary journey, he lived and taught in the city of Corinth for about 18 months (Acts 18:11). Sadly, after his departure, things began to unravel. We don't know the exact cause(s), but a report from the house of Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11) and a letter from some in the church (1 Corinthians 7:1) informed Paul of various issues and struggles the congregation was facing. Thus, the need for Paul to write the first letter to the Corinthians while he was labouring for the Lord in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:8).

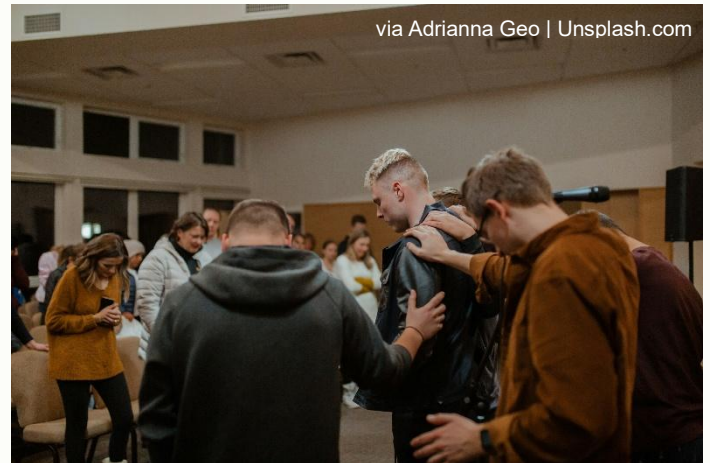
The Corinthian church was blessed with an extraordinary wealth of spiritual gifts, and several were zealous to use their abilities in the assembly. However, their gatherings degenerated into a chaotic and competitive mess focused on self rather than one another. In their eagerness to exercise the gifts, they had forgotten a fundamental purpose for their gatherings. Thus, Paul urged restraint and thoughtfulness,

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

This command serves as the central principle in 1 Corinthians 14. The immediate context involved the use of gifts such as tongues and prophecy, but the underlying principle transcends this first-century setting. The assembly of the saints must not be an occasion for individual gratification but for exclusive exaltation of the Lord God and the mutual edification of the saints.

What is "Edification"?

The weight of the apostle's mandate is evident when we consider the word used. The Greek



via Adrianna Geo | Unsplash.com

noun *oikodomē* (and its related verb, *oikodomeō*), is a compound formed from *oikos* (house) and *demo* (to build). It is an architectural term about the act of constructing or repairing a building.

When applied to the church, we're not talking about erecting and renovating a physical edifice. It is the building up of God's people. We undermine and diminish the importance of edification if we liken it to the camaraderie experienced in a social club or the mutual delight felt by an audience gathered to view a performance. The church is "God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9) made of "...living stones ... being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4-5). The edification of the church is not a vague feeling of warmth, comfort, or enthusiasm – it is not emotional hype. While emotions may accompany spiritual growth, biblical edification is the deliberate strengthening of believers in faith, knowledge, holiness, and unity.

Paul pointedly contrasted edification (*oikodomē*) with self-serving displays. Earlier in the epistle he warned that knowledge, apart from love, "puffs up," but that love "edifies" (*oikodomeō*) (1 Corinthians 8:1). To "puff up" (Greek, *physioō*) is "to inflate, blow up, to cause to swell up" (Thayer). It creates the illusion of size but without

substance. By contrast, to “edify” is to truly build, using the right material and with beneficial results.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul subjects every practice in the assembly to this architectural test. Does this activity lay solid stone upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, or does it simply inflate the ego of the participant?

Seek to Edify One Another, Not Ourselves

Paul wrote,

He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

(1 Corinthians 14:4-5)

The apostle acknowledged the gift of tongues was spiritually valuable to the one speaking even if others could not understand. But he insisted that in the assembly, any personal benefit experienced by the one must yield to things which advantage the whole group. Thus, in the absence of one who could interpret, the gift should not be used in the gathering (1 Corinthians 14:27-28).

Understanding Is Essential to Edification

Paul demonstrated in verses 6-11 how the gift of tongues, which they were very zealous for, could lead to uncertainty, a lack of understanding, and even alienation – which certainly do not produce edification. Thus, he stated,

Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.

(1 Corinthians 14:12)

He emphasized the role understanding plays in edification. From 1 Corinthians 14:13-20, he used the word “understanding” seven times. When an unknown tongue is used, those who

do not understand find the experience to be “unfruitful” (v 14), they “occupy the place of the uninformed” (v 16), and are “not edified” (v 17). He illustrated the point and focused on the mutual benefit of all, by saying,

...in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. (1 Corinthians 14:19)

Though the assembly is inherently for the Christians, Paul instructed the church to be mindful of unbelievers who might be present. If someone began to jabber away in an unfamiliar tongue with the “uninformed or unbelievers” present, they would likely conclude these people are crazy (verse 23). And thus, rather than being brought closer to faith in Christ they are driven away.

A Lack of Order Destroys Edification

Let’s revisit Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 14:26. He reasoned,

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

(1 Corinthians 14:26)

The disorder and chaos are evident. While not explicitly stated, it seems at least some of these activities were occurring concurrently. Paul instructed the brethren to take turns speaking, not to speak over one another (verses 27, 31). He set limits on how many should speak – no more than two or three (verses 27, 29). He established restraints for who should speak and situations which should limit speech (verses 28, 30, 34-35). He asserted that speakers exercise self-control in the assembly (verses 30, 32) so all could learn and be encouraged (verses 29, 31).

In Galatians 4:18, Paul wrote, “...it is good to be zealous in a good thing always...” The Corinthians were zealous, but it was not in a good thing. Their inclination was to do things which they (individually) found uplifting, even if it brought no benefit to the church.

Paul's instruction would correct the raucous disarray which their first day of the week gathering had descended into. The Corinthian commotion was completely out of step with the way of God, who *"...is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all churches of the saints"* (1 Corinthians 14:33).

A Principle for All-Time

It is natural in the reading of 1 Corinthians 14 to look at historical and theological considerations about the nature, duration, and use of spiritual gifts. However, in doing so we must be cautious not to overlook the underlying standard in the text. The miraculous gifts in Corinth provided the occasion for the instruction, but the principle articulated is universal.

In our modern-day – with the absence of miraculous revelatory gifts – we can still produce the selfish Corinthian spirit which led to chaos and discouragement. When we hyper-focus on perfecting the tune rather than digesting the substantive truth which should be in the lyrics, our singing loses its divinely appointed role (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). If the "sermon" is delivered by a braggart puffing his chest rather than a humble servant exalting Christ, the message of hope has been supplanted. When worship is treated like a theatrical performance and the goal is simply to evoke an emotional response, we fail to build faith, and thus faithfulness to God, settling for momentary attractions and distractions over the life-changing word of God. When we cater to or cave to individual whims, notions, or preferences we create an environment which sets aside God's authority, inviting doctrinal vagueness and loopholes which undermine the basis of our faith. Any of these and more will cause us to repeat the error of Corinth.

The standard remains unchanged. The exercise of any practice or teaching in the church must be judged by whether it 1) fulfills the will of God and 2) contributes to the collective spiritual maturity of the congregation. Paul concluded the chapter by saying, *"Let all things be done decently and in order"* (1 Corinthians 14:40). Not some things – all things.

If we will embrace this comprehensive standard for our assemblies, then every part of our service becomes an opportunity to exalt God and encourage one another.

Individual Responsibility

Certainly, those who are leading the various aspects of the service hold a great responsibility to do so with integrity. Those leading prayers, the song leader, the ones serving at the table, the Bible class teacher or preacher, even the reader – everyone leading in the service must do so with the intention of edifying one another. Yet every believer who enters the assembly has the duty to be a faith builder for one another. The writer of Hebrews commanded, *"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith..."* (Hebrews 10:22), *"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering..."* (Hebrews 10:23), and *"...let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works..."* (Hebrews 10:24)

Friend, do not come to the assembly with a consumer mindset. You are not there to be entertained. You are not there to see what you can "get out of it." Experience will reveal that you will "get out" of worship what you are willing to "put into" worship. If we will all come as givers and builders – as encouragers and edifiers – the result will be the mutual growth of the saints. In the Ephesian letter, Paul stated God gave leadership within the church to equip all the saints *"...for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..."* (Ephesians 4:11-12). The goal is to

...come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God ... that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro ... but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.
(Ephesians 4:13-16)

“Let all things be done for edification” is more than a historical correction for a troubled first-century church. It is the permanent principle for the house of God. When a local church commits itself to this standard – communicating God’s truth clearly, maintaining an orderly manner, and prioritizing the spiritual growth of one another over self-interest – God will be exalted and saints will be edified to the glory of God.

Becoming Like Jesus: In Serving Others

T. SEAN SULLIVAN | PARAGOULD, ARKANSAS

Introduction

The Scriptures hold great details that are sometimes missed. Ephesians 4:2 is often used to teach the inspired exhortation from Paul, “...*bear with one another in love.*” This is a good and right pursuit to maintain our unity by helping each other. However, if we only concentrate on the exhortation point itself, we miss the detailed list of tools that we need to gather in order to accomplish the task of “*bearing with one another.*”

There are three things that Paul tells us to take on in order to enable us to bear with one another in love. We need lowliness (humility). We need gentleness (care). We need long-suffering (patience). With these abilities, we will be able to help others in their pursuit of truth and their hope of salvation. Let’s open the Scriptures and consider the necessity of these attitudes of heart, and how we can skillfully use them to take on “the heart of a servant.”

A Humble Heart

What does it mean to be a humble helper to a brother or sister in the Lord? First, it is a role that is greater than self. This was the approach that we see in the life of Epaphroditus, who did not consider his own health in his efforts to supply help for Paul (Philippians 2:25-30). When we approach the need of helping our brethren, we must see beyond self to the greater good of a soul being rescued (James 5:19-20).

We must also see that the “helping role” is one that might reverse. We are called to help a brother or sister in times of trouble (1 Thessalonians 5:14-15) and, at some point, we may be the one in need of help. With this in mind, we will want to provide the best because



that is what we would want (Galatians 6:1-2). This helping role is also a role of necessity, not an option.

We need to be humble enough to know that we are responsible to seek the best for our brethren—this is our role (Romans 12:9-15). We are to love them in truth; we are to offer them all that we would prefer; and we are to “*distribute*” to their needs—the greatest of which is continued faith, leading to salvation.

From time to time, our brethren stumble, or, at least, they are slowed down by this life. We must seek their restoration to faith and strength, being humble enough to use God’s plan, not our own. God’s plan calls for a proper course of action (Matthew 18:15-17) and a willingness to act. We need to apply the energy of a shepherd seeking a lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7) or the diligence of one who searches for a lost coin (Luke 15:8-10). Yes, we can bear with one another, with humility.

A Caring Heart

What does it mean to be a caring helper? It means that we are at a level of involvement with our brethren that causes us to care about their successes or failures (Romans 12:15). Also, this means that we are mature enough to know that *when they are weak*, we are weakened (2 Corinthians 11:25-29). Being a “caring helper”

truly calls us to be compassionate toward our brethren. Jesus taught us compassion and care (Matthew 9:36; 14:14), and we know the extent to which He was willing to apply that compassion toward us—He supplied what we needed, no matter the cost (Hebrews 9:22-28).

To be a caring helper for our brethren, we must be empathetic, not apathetic. When we become numb to our brethren's distress, we are no longer a help to their success. We are actually encouraging their failure, since we are not helping them find their way back out of perdition, in which they lose their hope (Hebrews 10:38).

When sin interrupts our growth, we must care. In the church, we are in a situation that causes mutual strength to be an individual concern (1 Corinthians 12:20-27). The church is a gathering of abilities in which we combine our strengths for effectiveness (Ephesians 4:11-16). To be a caring helper for our brethren, we must get involved with them. Yes, we can bear with one another, with care.

A Patient Heart

Patience is always a challenge when we are dealing with things we are passionate about. Knowing how important our service to God is, we constantly want to be more than we are right now. Not only do we tend to lack patience with ourselves, but we also tend to lack patience with others when they struggle to grow in the Lord. We need to be patient with: self (James 1:2-4), the

weak (Romans 15:1-6); and, as Paul says, with “all” our brethren (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

Patience is the willingness to nurture growth. Jesus spoke of the “tiny mustard seed” that can grow into a large tree (Matthew 13:31-32). This process, even in ideal conditions, takes time. When we try to push and force, we destroy more than we gain; instead, we are to exhort (Hebrews 3:13-14), edify (Ephesians 4:29), and comfort (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Yes, we can bear with one another, with patience.

Conclusion

Paul, in Ephesians 4:2, exhorts us to “bear with one another in love.” This is a challenge that is achieved by the use of the proper tools and techniques. To accomplish this task of continuing to “bear with one another in love,” we need humility – understanding that we too are subject to weakness. We need care – being involved in the success of our brethren, because it matters to us. We also need patience – knowing that growth takes time, but it is possible.

The beauty of this spiritual family is our willingness to help each person find their way home successfully. Are you on the right track today? Do you need some help? Hope is awaiting you; if you are not a Christian, obey the gospel today to gain it. If you are a Christian with sin in your life, return to God to have it again. We can make it home; with humility, care, and patience, we will “bear with one another in love” all the way there.

Can We Turn The World Upside Down?

OSAMAGBE LESLEY EGHAREVBA | LAGOS, NIGERIA

“These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.”
(Acts 17:6, NKJV)

What would it take for the church today to have the kind of influence that makes the world take notice? What would happen if Christians became so committed to the gospel that their communities could not ignore their message, their example, and their devotion to Jesus Christ?

In Acts 17:6, the enemies of the gospel made a remarkable accusation against Paul and his companions: “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.” The statement was intended to condemn them, but it became an extraordinary testimony to the influence of the practices, and calling people to submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ. They were not proclaiming a message that demanded a change of heart, a change of allegiance, and a change of life. Through the gospel, people were being delivered from the power of darkness and brought into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Colossians 1:13). Can we have that kind of influence today? More importantly, are we willing to do what it takes?

A World That Needs Turning

The world has always needed the transforming power of God’s word. Humanity’s fundamental problem is not merely ignorance, poverty, corruption, immorality, or injustice. Beneath these problems lies the universal problem of sin, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Our society offers many solutions to human problems, but no human philosophy, political programme, educational system, or technological advancement can reconcile sinful humanity to God. Only Jesus



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Christ can provide the redemption that we desperately need (Acts 4:12). This does not mean that Christians should be indifferent to the problems around them. Rather, it means that we must understand the unique mission God has given us. We must bring the good news of salvation to people who need forgiveness, hope, and reconciliation with their Creator.

Jesus came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Before His ascension, He commissioned His disciples to preach the gospel to all creation (Mark 16:15-16). This mission was not intended to end with the apostles. That gospel was to be taught to others who would, in turn, teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2). The world still needs the gospel. The question is whether the people who have received it are willing to share it.

The Gospel That Changed The World

The early Christians did not possess the political influence and communication technology available today. Yet the message they preached spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and beyond (Acts 1:8). What made the difference?

First, they believed in the power of the gospel.

Paul declared, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). They understood that the gospel was not merely an interesting religious message. It was God’s means of bringing salvation to those who would believe and obey Him.

Second, they preached Christ. When Philip went to Samaria, he “preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). When Paul met the Ethiopian eunuch, he began with the Scripture the man was reading and preached Jesus to him (Acts 8:35). At Corinth, Paul determined to know nothing among the people except “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). The early Christians did not make themselves the centre of their message. They pointed people to Jesus, His death, burial, and resurrection, and the salvation available through Him (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Third, they preached with courage. When the authorities commanded Peter and John to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, they answered, “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Their conviction was stronger than their fear of opposition. The result was not that every hearer accepted the message. Some believed, while others resisted. Nevertheless, the gospel continued to spread. Even persecution scattered believers who went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:1-4).

The lesson is clear: the power to change the world is not in the cleverness of our arguments, the attractiveness of our programmes, or the strength of our personalities. It is in the gospel of Jesus Christ, faithfully taught and lived.

Every Christian Must Become A Gospel Worker

One of the greatest obstacles to evangelism today is the assumption that it belongs mainly to preachers, elders, or those who have received

specialised training. Certainly, those who preach and teach publicly have an important responsibility. Paul charged Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5). But the New Testament also presents evangelism as a work in which all disciples participated.

Following the persecution in Jerusalem, the scattered believers “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). These were not merely the apostles; Acts 8:1 distinguishes the apostles from the believers who were scattered. This should challenge every member of the Lord’s church. A congregation may have a preacher, a meeting house, a sound programme of worship, and well-organised Bible classes, yet still fall short of its mission if its members are not actively reaching the lost. We must ask ourselves: How many people have heard the gospel because of our personal efforts? How many neighbours, colleagues, classmates, friends, or relatives have we invited to study the Bible? How many conversations about spiritual things have we avoided because we feared rejection or embarrassment? We do not all have the same abilities, opportunities, or circumstances. Nevertheless, every Christian can contribute to the spread of the gospel. Some may teach publicly; others may arrange Bible studies, invite people to worship, distribute biblical literature, encourage new converts, or help remove practical obstacles that prevent others from hearing the truth. Whatever our circumstances, we must not allow evangelism to become somebody else’s responsibility.

Turning The World Upside Down Begins With Ourselves

There is an important truth we must not overlook: before we seek to influence the world, we must allow God’s word to transform our own lives. Paul urged Christians not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Romans 12:2). We cannot effectively call people to repent while

deliberately accommodating sin in our own lives. We cannot persuasively teach the importance of truth while being dishonest or speak about Christian love while treating people with contempt. Jesus declared that His disciples are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). Our good works should cause others to glorify our Father in heaven. Our conduct does not replace the preaching of the gospel, but it should support and commend the message we proclaim.

Consider the influence of a Christian who remains honest in a dishonest environment, shows kindness to difficult people, forgives those who offend him, keeps his promises, and treats others with dignity. Such a life can create opportunities for meaningful conversations about Christ. However, good behaviour alone does not tell people what they must believe about Jesus or what God requires for salvation. We must be ready to give an answer for the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15). Our lives should open doors, and our words should faithfully communicate the gospel. The church's influence becomes most powerful when its members combine biblical teaching with sincere love, holy living, and a genuine concern for the souls of others.

We Must Speak The Truth In Love

If we desire to turn the world upside down, we must be prepared to challenge error. The apostles did not remain silent when confronted with false teaching. Paul reasoned from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 17:2-3). In Ephesus, he reasoned daily in the school of Tyrannus, and the word of the Lord spread throughout the region (Acts 19:8-10). Yet boldness must never become an excuse for arrogance, hostility, or personal abuse. We are commanded to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). The Lord's servants must not be quarrelsome but gentle, patient, and able to teach (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Our aim is not to win arguments at the expense of souls. It is to help

people to understand and obey the truth of God's word. This requires us to know the Scriptures, listen carefully to people's questions, answer honestly when we do not know something, and patiently encourage further study. We must neither dilute God's word to make it more acceptable nor present it in a manner that needlessly alienates those who need to hear it. The message of the cross may be offensive to some, but the messenger must not become an unnecessary stumbling block through pride and unkindness.

What Must We Do?

If we are serious about reaching our world, our commitment must move beyond good intentions.

We must pray for opportunities. Paul asked the Colossians to pray that God would open a door for the word (Colossians 4:3). We should pray for open hearts, wisdom, courage, and opportunities to teach.

We must prepare ourselves. Peter instructs Christians to be ready to give an answer for their hope (1 Peter 3:15). Regular Bible study equips us to explain the gospel accurately and respond thoughtfully to questions.

We must build relationships. People are not projects or numbers to be added to a congregation's attendance figures. They are souls made in God's image. Genuine friendship, compassion, hospitality, and concern can create opportunities for spiritual conversations. We must be willing to invest time in people, even when their response is slow.

We must teach the whole counsel of God. Our responsibility is not merely to encourage people to become religious. We must teach them to observe all that Christ commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). Like the apostles, we must proclaim God's message faithfully, including the demands of repentance, faith, confession, and baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:35-38; Romans 10:9-10).

We must follow up with those who respond. Evangelism does not end when someone first hears the gospel or obeys it. New Christians need teaching, encouragement, fellowship, and

opportunities to grow. The Lord's commission includes teaching disciples to observe His commands (Matthew 28:20).

We must persevere. Not everyone will believe, and not every Bible study will result in conversion. Nevertheless, we must not become discouraged. Paul reminds us that we should not grow weary in doing good (Galatians 6:9). Our responsibility is to sow and water faithfully, recognising that God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

Can We Do It Again?

Can we turn the world upside down? The question is not whether we can reproduce the exact historical circumstances of the first century. Nor is it whether we can guarantee that every person will accept the gospel. The question is whether we will faithfully proclaim the same unchanging message with the conviction, courage, and commitment demonstrated by the early church. We cannot save souls by our own power, but we can point people to the Saviour. We cannot force people to obey the truth, but we can teach it clearly and lovingly. We cannot control the response of every hearer, but we can

ensure that fear, apathy, or complacency does not silence us.

Perhaps the world will not always describe our work as turning it upside down. Some will welcome the gospel; others will oppose it. Our success must not be measured solely by public approval, numerical growth, or immediate conversions. We must measure our faithfulness by whether we are doing what the Lord has commanded. The church needs more than admiration for the courage of the early Christians. It needs to imitate their faithfulness. We need members who see lost souls as people who need Christ, congregations that make evangelism a regular priority, and Christians whose lives reflect the message they proclaim.

Let us therefore return to the Scriptures, renew our commitment to the Great Commission, and take the gospel into our homes, workplaces, schools, neighbourhoods, and communities. The world still needs the transforming power of Jesus Christ. The gospel is still God's power unto salvation. And the Lord still calls His people to carry that message to the lost. Will we answer the call?

Romans 5: Are We Born Guilty In Adam?

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Calvinists love the book of Romans, believing it strongly supports their doctrine of Total Hereditary Depravity, particularly chapter 5. I suggest their reading of Romans 5 fails to grasp the true teaching of the apostle Paul (and the rest of Scripture). Advocates of the depravity doctrine often cite several verses in this chapter:

- Romans 5:12, "...through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned..."
- Romans 5:15, "...by the one man's offense many died..."
- Romans 5:18, "...through one man's offense judgement came to all men, resulting in condemnation..."
- Romans 5:19, "...by one man's disobedience many were made sinners..."

Without careful study, one might conclude we died "in Adam" – that his specific sin brought spiritual death to every infant born thereafter. But there is a phrase at the end of verse 12 that serves as the master key to the entire context. Paul's point is not that we inherited a sinful nature from Adam (as Arminius suggested) or the legal guilt of his sin (as Calvin taught). While death indeed entered the world through Adam's transgression, the apostle explicitly stated that it spread to all men, not because of Adam's sin, but "because all sinned."

Because All Sinned – Romans 5:12

Sadly, many commentators acknowledge those final three words of verse 12 only to dismiss their force. For instance, B.W. Johnson claims,

The personal sins of responsible persons are not now spoken of, but all



created via
Gemini

the race sinned in Adam, its representative, infants, idiots, and all. Hence all die.

The "Amen" chorus is massive – including names like Albert Barnes, Charles Spurgeon, John Wesley, Adam Clarke, Matthew Henry – all declaring in unison that we die not because of our own actions, but exclusively because of Adam's.

If Paul merely had physical death in mind in Romans 5:12 their argument might carry some weight. Adam's sin certainly brought physical death by barring access to the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:19, 22-24). The spread of physical death to all is a function of a fallen physical world – there is no "guilt" to be charged against the "infants, idiots, and all."

However, Paul is not simply addressing physical death, he speaks of spiritual death. God told Adam, "...**in the day** you eat of it **you shall surely die**" (Genesis 2:17). Adam lived another 930 years, but he died spiritually that day. The correlation between personal sin and spiritual

death is fundamental to Scripture (Romans 6:23; cf. Ezekiel 18:4-32; 33:11, 13-16, 18-19; Ephesians 2:1; Colossians 2:13).

We are told that Adam is our federal or universal head, our representative before God. I do not dispute that Adam stands as a representative of mankind – the latter verses of the context (v 18-19) establish that affiliation. It is the “first Adam /second Adam” concept which Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 15. The question is not if but how. Is Adam our head by imputation or imitation? Calvinists read imputation into verses 15, 18, 19 – the idea that Adam did the deed and we inherently suffer the judicial consequences.

Imputation or Imitation?

What does “imputation” refer to? Robert Hawker defines it as *“to charge a thing upon a person whether guilty or not.”* In the context of our relationship to Adam, M.G. Easton, in his *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, states,

...the sin of Adam is imputed to all his descendants, i.e., it is reckoned as theirs, and they are dealt with therefore as guilty.

Under the heading of “imputation,” the ISBE, explains,

...when God is said ‘to impute sin’ to anyone, the meaning is that God accounts such a one to be a sinner, and consequently guilty and liable to punishment ... It is not meant that Adam’s sin was personally the sin of his descendants, but that it was set to their account, so that they share its guilt and penalty.

It seems exceptionally unfair for God to charge those who did not commit the crime with the guilt and penalty associated with it. If such were to occur in a human court, the masses would cry foul. Beyond the glaring malfeasance of holding people accountable for what they did not do, this Calvinistic concept of imputation simply does not match what the Scriptures say. It may be necessary to support Total Hereditary Depravity or Original Sin, but it does not agree with the teaching of Scripture, included Romans 5.

Paul affirmed, *“until the law, sin was in the world”* (verse 13) and that *“death reigned from Adam to Moses”* (verse 14). Sin existed in the world before the Law of Moses came – not merely Adam’s sin, but individual sin. Before the Mosaic Law ever codified them, people practiced lying, murder, adultery, and other sins, and God counted those acts against them. They did not sin “according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam” (v 14b) – none of them ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – but that does not mean there was no violation of law.

God clearly stated to Cain, **“sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it”** (Genesis 4:7). Those between Adam and Moses could not break the law Adam broke – the tree was gone. They could not break Moses’ Law – it had not yet been given. However, they were not without sin. There is clear evidence of a universal moral law, and sin offerings existed long before Moses (Job 1:5).

Statements in verses 15-17 might appear to support the imputation view:

- “...if by **one man’s offense** many died...” (verse 15)
- “...the judgment which came from **one offense** resulted in condemnation...” (verse 16)
- “...if by the **one man’s offense** death reigned through the one...” (verse 17)

But these verses do not say we died *in* Adam. They acknowledge that Adam’s sin was the doorway through which death and condemnation entered the world. The “how” and “why” that death spread to all is already given in verse 12 – “because all sinned.”

When we reach verse 18, this imputation approach creates a logical catastrophe. Paul writes that judgment came – *eis pantas anthrōpous* – “to all men” – through Adam, and in the very same breath says the free gift came *eis pantas anthrōpous* – “to all men” – through Christ. The phrase is identical in both halves of the verse. Paul structures the statement with an explicit “just as ... even so” parallel. If unconditional imputation is the mechanism in Adam, then consistency demands

the same in Christ. If Adam's sin is legally imputed to every human without their choice, then Christ's righteousness must be legally imputed to every human without their choice. This would necessitate universalism – a doctrine Calvinists (and the Bible) reject.

Under an imitation understanding, however, the parallel remains intact: all who imitate Adam's rebellion die and all who imitate Christ in obedient faith live.

The phrase “were made sinners” in verse 19 does not require the imputation of Adam's personal guilt. “Were made” is from the verb *katestathēsan*, and can denote appointment, establishment, or being brought into a condition without specifying the mechanism by which that condition is entered. Paul does not say we were made sinners “in Adam,” but that through his disobedience the many were constituted sinners – a reality which verse 12 explains occurred “because all sinned.”

The Testimony of the Language in Romans 5

The New Testament word often rendered “imputed,” “accounted,” or “reckoned” is *logizomai*. McClintock and Strong argue,

...in the N.T. logizomai, is employed in the Scriptures to designate any action, word, or thing, as accounted or reckoned to a person; and in all these it is unquestionably used with reference to one's own doings, words, or actions, and not with reference to those of a second person.

Notably, *logizomai* does not appear in Romans 5, though it occurs multiple times in Romans 4. The word rendered “imputed” in Romans 5:13 is *ellogētai*, a bookkeeping term meaning “to set to one's account” (Thayer). This word appears only here and in Philemon 1:18, where Paul offers to have any debt belonging to Onesimus charged to his own account. That was a voluntary imputation – quite different from the involuntary model proposed by Original Sin and Total Hereditary Depravity.

Returning to Romans 5:12, the Greek *eph' hō* means “because.” The Old Latin renders it *in quo* (“in whom”), a translation that significantly influenced Western formulations of Original Sin. Had the translators rendered *eph' hō* causally, they would have used *in eo quod* (“in that” / “because”). If “in whom” were correct, it would naturally refer to Adam. But “because” explains the prior clause – death spread to all men *because all sinned*. Translating the Latin *in quo* back into Greek would yield *en hō* – not what the inspired apostle wrote.

While a few English translations preserve the Latin reading (Douay-Rheims, Wycliffe, Knox) most follow the Greek text and render it “because all sinned.” The Reformation movement didn't remove all the appendages of Catholicism. Rather than abandoning the doctrine of Original Sin, it was tweaked and rebranded Total Hereditary Depravity. While the terminology changed, the reliance on the Latin thought over the Greek text remains.

The Testimony of History

The understanding that “because all sinned” refers to individual sin is not a modern innovation. Some of the early Greek commentators – native speakers of the New Testament language who predated the later Western theological developments – saw no doctrine of imputed guilt in Romans 5:12.

Clement of Alexandria wrote:

Neither praises nor censures, neither rewards nor punishments, are right, when the soul has not the power of inclination and disinclination, but evil is involuntary.

Theodoret of Cyrus wrote,

...death came upon all men, in that all have sinned, for not on account of our first father's transgression, but for his own, each receives the sentence of death.

Quotes from the early Greek writers tend to differentiate between physical consequences of Adam's sin (mortality and human frailty) and

personal moral guilt. They readily admit we inherit the former, but not the latter.

Cyril of Jerusalem's catechetical lecture #4 did not address Romans 5 specifically, but "of the soul," he stated,

...before it came into this world, [it] had committed no sin, but having come in sinless, we now sin of our free-will.

We are born into a sin-cursed world with a body destined to die, but we enter the world as sinless individuals, not guilty of Adam's. We are guilty of our own sin, not our first forefather's sin.

Conclusion

The Scriptures and many early witnesses to it agree – sin is not an innate inheritance, nor a legal debt transmitted from a distant ancestor. Adam opened the door through which sin and death entered the human experience, but each person walks through that door on his own volition and by his own transgression. We are not born condemned for a crime we did not commit; we are condemned because we have confirmed Adam's sentence by our own hand.

Yet, Romans 5 does not end in despair. Paul declares,

...where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might

reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
(Romans 5:20-21)

The problem is personal sin – and the solution is personal faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ. May we turn to Him, obey His word, and trust in His abundant grace.

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JANUARY 2027 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Jeff Carr will pen our next article in the Hall of Faith series focused on Hebrews 11:34b-e (escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness made strong, valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens).

CHURCH ARTICLE

Bruce Reeves will offer the first article in a new series focused on Membership Responsibilities. This initial writing addresses what it means to be a member of a local church.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

Should we keep the Sabbath? Kevin Kay will consider with us what the New Testament says for those who are servants of Jesus Christ with regard to the Sabbath.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

Shane Carrington brings the first article in a new series looking at the “One Another” texts in the Scriptures, beginning with “Love One Another.”

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

Ken McDaniel will pen our next article for this section. As of the publication of the October 2026 issue, the topic has not yet been determined.

BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE

William Stewart focuses on Psalm 51 in our next article in the series looking at proof texts used by those trying to justify the depravity doctrine.



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