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Godliness. Reverence. Obedience. Worship.

GR W magazine

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growth in faith and service to God



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From the Editors...

Greetings! We are delighted that you are receiving GROW magazine, and hope you will find it useful and encouraging for your faith. If you do benefit from the material, feel free to share it with others. You can forward the notification email, post a link on social media to the site or to a specific article, or print out it out. The material is freely given for the benefit of all who have the opportunity to read it.

We're thankful for the good group of writers who have diligently studied and developed the material presented herein. May their work challenge us to GROW in faith and knowledge.

Now, come GROW with us!

Cordially,
Sean P. Cavender, chief editor
William Stewart, editor & designer



Choose This Day Whom You Will Serve

SCOTT LONG | MARIETTA, PENNSYLVANIA

We see it all the time; one who, after he has come to understand the truth, loses confidence in what he knows. He listens to teachers of error and begins to doubt. Maybe, he says, I was too hasty.

The Galatians were such people. Paul reminds them in Galatians 3:1, “*Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified,*” yet, he marveled because they were turning away from that truth and toward “*a different (or another kind) gospel, which is not another (gospel at all),*” (Galatians 1:6).

In order to help them understand their error, Paul first asks five pointed, rhetorical questions immediately prior to Galatians 3:6:

Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth? Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain? Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Though they knew the answers, they were bewitched (deceived) by other teachers. Paul speaks in verse seven of “*some who trouble you.*” In Galatians 2:1-10, he speaks of false brethren, teaching **circumcision**, secretly brought in. In Galatians 4, he contrasts Hagar and Sarah as the old (bondage) and new (free) covenants, respectively, and says the Galatians were children of the free. He has harsh words for the teachers of the **circumcision** in Galatians 5:11-12. He says the reason some teach **circumcision** is that they may then “*boast in your flesh,*” (Galatians 6:13). These Galatians had begun thinking the truth about Christ they had heard was not really truth, but the truth lay in the



dictates of the Mosaic Law.

The dichotomy illustrated by Paul’s questions is between faith, and the enduring value of it, and Mosaic Law-keeping, and the passing away of it. The Mosaic Law had become that different gospel. The Spirit whom they had received, who was perfecting them, and by whom the miracles were worked, did not come by the law but by the faith they had when they heard about the crucified Christ.

Paul wants to shake them back to reality in chapter three and brings three witnesses (arguments) to the table: Abraham’s righteousness, the curse of the law, and God’s covenant with Abraham. Woven through all three is the promise itself. Why would God have given such a promise to someone who was unfaithful and unrighteous? Did Christ not put away the law to bring the promise to bear for the Gentiles? Did the law originate the promise?

The first of these arguments, in Galatians 3:6-9, centers on faith. What is faith? Faith is a belief in something, driving one to act on that belief. There is no arguing God saw Abraham as righteous, but on what basis did He see him so? Long before the law, Abraham believed God. He had demonstrated faith in God, who then preached the gospel to him in the form of the promise, “*In*

you all the nations shall be blessed." The real and blessed descendants of Abraham, who had faith and was seen as righteous by it, are those who are of faith, not those who try to keep the law.

The second argument of Galatians 3:10-14 centers on the law itself. We sometimes make the mistake of thinking because there was the Mosaic Law, there was no faith. Such is not the case. There was faith under the law. The difference is that doing the things of the law (cf. Leviticus 18:5) only brought one into a right relationship with the Lord. His salvation would still be contingent on the death of Christ on the cross and not only his law-keeping. Paul consistently makes the point that law does not save (Romans 3:20). Notice Galatians 2:16:

knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

The Israelite concept was that keeping the law brought salvation (Romans 9:31-32). In fact, the law (and the idea of law-keeping) does not bring salvation; it brings a curse that one who lives by the law must do the law, and do all of it, to be saved. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26, *"Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."* James concurs in James 2:10, *"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."* In fact, Paul will later say in Galatians 5:3, *"And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law."* If one cannot keep the law perfectly, he cannot be saved. How does one live then? Paul answers by quoting Habakkuk 2:4, *"But the just shall live by his faith"* or *"But the justified by faith shall live."*

Christ, the only one to keep the law perfectly, Himself became a curse and nailed the law to the cross (Ephesians 3:15) in order that the

Galatians might receive the promise through faith and not law. Notice Romans, 15:8, *"Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers."*

Paul uses the promise made to Abraham as the third argument in Galatians 3:15-18. God made a promise to Abraham and His seed, Christ. Abraham had merely wanted a son of his own to inherit from him (Genesis 15:2-3), but God had greater plans. He was not only going to give Abraham an heir, his descendants were going to bring the Savior of mankind into the world (Ephesians 3:20 comes to mind).

Paul's argument is timing. When was this promise, this covenant, made in relation to the law? The law, Paul says, came four hundred and thirty years **after** God had made this covenant with Abraham. Did the law set the promise aside? How could it; the promise was made before the law. It neither originated from the law nor depended on the law. It was not made to those under the law. God's promise to Abraham was independent of the law. And Paul's conclusion, then, is since it is not of the law, the inheritance resulting from the promise is of faith as Abraham's promise was of faith. Notice also Romans 4:14, *"For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect..."*

Paul's appeal to these beloved brethren to remain in the truth they had come to know is impassioned but logical. It is based on the facts that Abraham was considered righteous by God because of his faith, that going back to the law requires perfect law-keeping which no one but Christ has done, and the promise came before the law and is not set aside by the law. Galatians, do not be deceived by the teachers of the law who seek to drag you back into bondage. The Spirit whom you have been given, who continues to perfect you, who works miracles among you, and all that for which you have suffered is not from the law but by promise, by faith. *"So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham."* (Galatians 3:9)

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Joining The Disciples

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIOS

At the beginning of Acts 9, Saul of Tarsus left Jerusalem, headed for Damascus. His aim was to arrest any Christians he found there (Acts 9:1-2). On the way, he met the Lord. Having arrived in Damascus, he was taught the gospel and baptized by Ananias (Acts 9:17-18). Immediately, he began to associate and work with the Christians in Damascus (Acts 9:19-22). However, a plot against his life (Acts 9:23-25) made it necessary for Saul to leave Damascus.

He returned to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples there (Acts 9:26). Understandably, they wanted nothing to do with him. He claimed to be a faithful Christian, but they did not believe him. The last time they had seen or heard of him, he was persecuting God's people. It seems Barnabas had knowledge of Saul's conversion and work among the disciples in Damascus since he took him to the apostles (Acts 9:27). To do so without evidence of Saul's faithfulness would be unwise and potentially devastating for the church since he was a known enemy of the faith (Acts 8:3; 9:1). After hearing about Saul's conversion and preaching, the church at Jerusalem received him into fellowship (Acts 9:28).

Luke didn't write this as a neat tidbit about the apostle Paul's life. This text is one of a handful on congregational membership. Let's notice what the Bible reveals about becoming a member of a local church.

1. Being a member of a local church is important. If it were not, Paul wouldn't have sought to join the disciples. The benefit of fellowship is in the local church. God-designed spiritual leadership is in the local congregation. The go-it-alone Christian is a foreign concept to the Bible.
2. Membership with the local church is assumed for the one who has just been baptized. There is nothing about Paul or any other individual who had just been baptized



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making a request for membership or being examined by the church leaders prior to being received into fellowship. By obedience to the gospel (which includes the repentance of sins and confession of faith, Acts 2:38; 1 Timothy 6:12; etc.), they are accepted into fellowship. Acts 2:41 simply says they were added to them. The only time this may not be the case is if an individual were baptized while traveling and has no intention of remaining in the locale where they were baptized. In such a case, new converts ought to find a group of faithful disciples to join after returning home. A good example of this is Onesimus, who was baptized by Paul in Rome. Paul felt it necessary for this runaway slave to return to his master (Philemon 1:10-17), who was from Colosse. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul referred to Onesimus as "one of your number" (Colossians 4:9, NASB). Presumably, he was accepted as a member in the church at Colosse.

3. It is right for those in leadership to seek proof of the faithfulness of any who desire membership in the local church. It was after they heard details of Paul's conversion and work in Damascus that he was received in fellowship. We want to be sure those who seek membership in the local church have actually obeyed the

- gospel. Further, we want to know they are faithful to God. In the New Testament, we read of a practice where people who went from one place to another might have a letter of commendation (2 Corinthians 3:1; Acts 18:27; cf. 1 Corinthians 16:3; Romans 16:1-2). Such a practice is never commanded or deemed mandatory, but there is certainly value to a recommendation from brethren for the one who is seeking to be received as a member, and a benefit for the leadership of the congregation who they are seeking to join.
4. If an individual comes our way, seeking to be a member of the local church, it is right to find out if there is sin present for which they have been withdrawn from by another congregation (1 Corinthians 5:1-5; Romans 16:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14). All such sins would need to be remedied and repented of before they could be received into fellowship with the local church.
 5. Likewise, before receiving someone as a member, we want to know what they believe or teach. Paul commanded the Christians to be of the same mind and the same judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10). To that end, John said we must test the spirits to see whether they are of God or not (1 John 4:1). Again, John warned the church of those who go beyond the doctrine of Christ and said not to receive them (2 John 1:9-10). If there are differences on matters of opinion, it is neither here nor there. However, there should be agreement on matters of faith if we are going to have fellowship with one another.
 6. There is a distinction to be made between attending a church and being a member of a church. Unless we have closed assemblies, anyone may attend a meeting of the church. That does not make them a member. Non-Christians may assemble with us – they are not members. Christians who are traveling may assemble with us – they are not members. It is even possible that a Christian might assemble with a local church for a lengthy time and still not have been received into membership for one reason or another (see points #4 & 5 above).
- Paul went to Jerusalem, seeking to join the disciples. After his faith and works were known, he was received as a member. He was then described as being “with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out” (Acts 9:28).
- It is important for each Christian to be a member of a local church. God’s plan is for us to share fellowship with people of like precious faith and for local churches to work together in the cause of Christ. It is equally important for local churches to be careful in receiving members to know they are not receiving wolves in sheepskins, or those who have been withdrawn from due to sin elsewhere.

Hear My Prayer

SEAN CAVENDER | BALD KNOB, ARKANSAS

Prayer can be a challenging aspect of our worship to God. It requires concentration and focus. All our mental energy must be focused upon coming reverently before God's throne, communicating our praises, fears, needs, and thanksgiving to the Creator of the universe. Praying to God is a blessing we have as Christians and it is an expression of adoration to God. Prayer is a time when we come face to face with our struggles, realizing our genuine need for God's strength.

The Psalms give us insight into the heart of one who is attuned to spiritual activities, like worship, especially prayer. The psalmist said,

*Give ear to my words, O LORD,
consider my groanings. Heed the
sound of my cry for help, my King
and my God, for to You I pray. In the
morning, O LORD, You will hear my
voice; in the morning I will order my
prayer to You and eagerly watch
(Psalm 5:1-3).*

Christians need to spend time praying with one another, just as the early saints did in the book of Acts (Acts 2:42-47). We also must learn to pray alone. This is easily one of the great struggles for many Christians. Churches often prepare and teach men how to lead prayer in congregational worship. Yet, many churches neglect teaching all Christians how to enrich their worship and private prayers. If we study the book of Psalms, we will learn how to pray, making our worship much better.

Have You Stopped Praying?

While we could spend time studying the importance of prayer within congregational worship, I believe if we want to have an active commitment to prayer as a congregation, then we must have a commitment to prayer as individuals.



There may be many things that stand in the way of a diligent life of prayer. However, I want to think about one thing in particular: fear. We should not be afraid to approach God in communication. Yet, many people are timid in their view of God and prayers. There seems to be a fear of saying things in the wrong way. Don't let a fear of the mechanical aspects of prayer hinder you from praying. We may read the book of Psalms, for instance, and realize we are not poets and we will never be that eloquent in our words. That's okay; we may not have the ability to pen words like David. However, we should not let that stop us from engaging in prayer. A child may look up to a sports star and think they cannot do that, but it is with that childlike innocence, they want to become like their hero. So, they practice and try to become like their favorite athlete. Do not stop praying; use the Scriptures to motivate you to pray and draw closer to God.

Personal & Private

One aspect of prayer that should be viewed as a positive is the personal and private nature of prayer. Notice the use of personal pronouns in Psalm 5:1-2, "*Give ear to **my** words ...*

consider my groanings. Heed the sound of my cry...” Prayer is a deeply personal and private activity when we engage in it. Collectively, as a body of believers in the public assembly, it also gives us an identity based in unity. Prayer unifies us as a church. Prayer strengthens our personal fellowship with God.

The psalmist says in Psalm 4:1, *“Be gracious to me and hear my prayer.”* Speaking in such a way with the One who is worshiped and praised is a remarkable and humbling experience. Prayer is not intended to be a show or parade before God; it is a time to examine our life and be brought into the presence of God. David said, *“Give ear to my prayer, which is not from deceitful lips,”* (Psalm 17:1). David knew the status of his life and how he stood before God. Prayer is uniquely able to open our eyes to our own life and our own standing before God. The personal and private nature of prayer is a blessing we should not forget.

Timely & Often

The Psalms pull back the curtain on the authors’ personal commitment and faith in Jehovah. At times they reveal things such as when they prayed and took time to think on spiritual things. In Psalm 4:4, David encouraged readers to meditate, *“upon your bed.”* That indicates either at night before falling asleep, or before arising in the morning. When do you pray? We teach young children to say their prayers at night before bedtime. David said, *“In the morning, O LORD, You will hear my voice; in the morning I will order my prayer to You and eagerly watch,”* (Psalm 5:3). Staples of our daily routine, sleeping and awaking, are especially appropriate times to commune with God through prayer.

Not only should we establish a routine time for prayer, we should also pray as often as we can. The New Testament teaches, “pray without ceasing,” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). David prayed at an acceptable time (Psalm 69:13); he knew there was never a time when prayer would be a burden to God. While there may be never a time our requests will be a burden to God, there will be a time when He cannot be found. We must

seek Him while we have time and opportunity. Do not let a lack of prayer be something that causes your soul to stand in jeopardy before God.

“Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found...” (Psalm 32:6)

Reverence & Humility

One of the things that stands out about the Psalms is the openness and honesty of the psalmist. He writes in such a way that he does not beat around the bush or hide how he feels. There is a sense of raw emotion which is important to prayer. Vulnerability could easily be perceived as a weakness, yet in prayer it shows the degree of trust we place in God, not in ourselves. Pride causes us to hide our troubles; humility trusts in God to take care of our problems!

David writes about “fools” (Psalm 14:1) and his “enemies” who seek to destroy him (Psalm 22:6-8). In Psalms 32 and 51, David describes the terrible realities of sin and how it destroys and corrupts us. Asaph, another psalmist, wonders why the ungodly fare well in life, while the righteous suffer. These fears and doubts reveal the discouraging moments believers may face. Prayer and meditation help reorient believers to the truth; praying turns people towards God.

God is the object of our prayers. He is the Creator and sovereign of the universe. He is able to judge the wicked and destroy our enemies. Jehovah blesses us and has the right to command us. Notice the reverence for God found in the Psalms, *“O LORD God of hosts...”* (Psalm 80:4) or *“O LORD, the God of my salvation...”* (Psalm 88:1). These titles and descriptions recognize God as the commander of all creatures and the One who is able to secure ultimate eternal blessing. For this, God is to be worshiped – *“Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights!”* (Psalm 148:1).

Conclusion

We worship God in a variety of ways, but one that is repeated throughout Scripture is worship through prayer. We should spend much time in prayer. Fear of failing in the mechanics of prayer and how we say things should not hold us back. Learning to spend quality time in prayer is critical because through prayer we have a unique outlet to express thanksgiving to God. When we pray, God hears us. Knowing we have a God who loves us and wants us to speak to Him should humble us and motivate us to be devoted to prayer.

*For He has not despised nor
abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;
nor has He hidden His face from him;
but when he cried to Him for help,
He heard. (Psalm 22:24)*

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Live Like Children of Abraham

REAGAN McCLENNY | LUFKIN, TEXAS

In John 8, Jesus has one of the most pointed discussions of his ministry concerning the “fatherhood” of His Jewish opponents. They claimed Abraham as their father, but Jesus replied, *“If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the work of Abraham,”* (John 8:39). Instead, Jesus points out their true father – the devil! *“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do,”* (John 8:44).

In the broadest terms, a son can be identified because he looks like (and imitates) his father (John 5:19). Spiritually, the way we live reveals who our father really is. What does your life say about the identity of your father?

Our text in Galatians 3 describes the ultimate fulfillment of the promise to Abraham in “the faith,” the gospel of Jesus Christ. The nation of Israel were the chosen people by whom the Christ would come, but now all followers who live by faith are the spiritual “seed” of Abraham and *“heirs according to the promise.”* As Galatians 3:7 says, *“Therefore, know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.”* This is what it really means to be a child of Abraham: to live by faith! To do the works of Abraham is to take on the qualities of our spiritual “father.”

Yet, some were insisting on a return to the law of Moses and justification by meritorious works. As was discussed in the expository article, Paul makes three arguments in Galatians 3 to prove the folly of this thinking:

1. Abraham was justified by faith, not law (v. 6-9).
2. The Law only justifies those who keep it perfectly, and so no one is justified by the law in the sight of God (v. 10-11), necessitating the need for Christ. Christ redeemed us from the “curse” of perfect



law-keeping under the Law of Moses being required for righteousness before God (v. 12-14).

3. The promise to Abraham came before the law, and the law cannot annul the covenant of those promises; therefore, the inheritance to the “heirs” of Abraham is by promise (faith) and not the law (v. 15-18).

It was not that the law didn’t serve a purpose (v. 19-22), but it was never intended to be anything more than a temporary “tutor” to bring us to the ultimate fulfillment of the promises to Abraham in the gospel of Jesus Christ, “the faith” (v. 23-29).

Paul concludes this portion of his argument in Galatians 3:26-29,

For you are all sons of God through the faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

No greater practical application can be made than what Paul does here. Why are so many Christians not what they ought to be? Why are so many not experiencing the spiritual blessings available in Christ? Could it be as simple as, *“those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham”* (Galatians 3:9), and those who are not of faith are not blessed? These last four verses of Galatians 3 suggest three ways we should imitate *“believing Abraham”* to truly be his *“seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*

TO BE HEIRS ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE, LIKE ABRAHAM, WE MUST DENY OURSELVES AND FOLLOW GOD BY FAITH.

Paul reminds the Galatian brethren, and us, that we *“put on Christ”* (v. 27) when we were baptized, but what does that mean? It means we imitate Christ to the point that we become the very “image” of Him (Romans 8:29). To do so, we must “put off” ourselves and our own will. It requires absolute, obedience, trusting faith in His direction. I’m not sure that is the kind of faith we are always willing to give.

One of our elders came to me recently and told me about his prowess as a marksman. Ranked first in his battalion when he was in the army, he is still able to put three bullets through the same hole from 200 yards. He described the process through which he goes and the mindset he has to keep to be able to shoot with such precision.

After explaining all of this, he asked, “Do you believe me?”

My response was definite and immediate, “Of course!”

Then he asked, “What if I told you to take an apple, walk out 200 yards and put it on your head, and I’m going to shoot it off your head. Would you do it?”

My response was definite and immediate: “Not a chance.”

“Why not?”

I’ve been trying to reason through that question since he asked it! I believe him, sure, but to put myself in the position he suggests is asking too much. It’s risking too much. I don’t understand why he would ask that. Perhaps, if he explained it to my satisfaction, I’d be willing.

That illustrates perfectly the difference between “belief” and genuine faith. My problem, whether justified or not, is a lack of faith. It is not a lack of belief in what he told me is true, but a lack of total, trusting dependence! It is trusting in self – my own experience, reason, and self-preservation – over what he has asked of me. We may be justified in not fully trusting fallible men, but we must trust the infallible God and His Word! A God who cannot lie is to be fully trusted (Hebrews 6:13-18).

Jesus said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven,”* (Matthew 18:3). If I asked my 6-year-old daughter to do the same thing this elder asked me to do, to go stand 200 yards away with an apple on her head, she would do it without hesitation. She would do so because she would fully believe that if I told her I would shoot the apple, I would shoot the apple. She would believe this, not because she “believes” any facts about my marksmanship, but because she totally trusts me.

That’s the kind of faith Abraham had in God – one that denied self and followed God’s instructions, whether they made sense to *him* or not.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even

from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. (Hebrews 11:17-19)

Abraham could have said, "That's asking too much. It's risking too much. I don't understand why He would ask that. Perhaps, if He explained it to my satisfaction, I'd be willing." Instead, he humbly obeyed God's will by faith.

Paul expressed it in beautiful terms earlier, in Galatians 2:20, where he said,

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Paul wasn't Paul anymore; he was Christ! Whatever Christ wanted Paul to do, that's what he did. We should do the same, by faith, in every area of our life. We must follow God's direction for marriage, modesty, raising children, loneliness, finances, the work and worship of the church, worldliness, and more, not because we believe and understand every instruction, but because we trust the Instructor.

TO BE HEIRS ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE, LIKE ABRAHAM, WE MUST FIND OUR IDENTITY IN FOLLOWING GOD.

Our text says,

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (v. 28)

Who was Abraham? For that matter, who was Paul? How do we describe them without their devotion to God?

Abraham gave up who he was to become who God would have him to be. He gave up much of his family, his home country, and his physical land ownership to become a stranger and pilgrim dwelling in tents. He gave up his heritage, his physical inheritance, and most of all his control of his own life! In short, Abraham

gave up almost everything that defined him up to that point in his life.

Why? Because Abraham found his true purpose and identity in being a follower of God.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:8-10)

People find their "identity" in all sorts of things, both good and bad. Sexuality, intelligence, relationships, jobs, popularity, talents, fandom, geographical location, money, goals, and children all provide "identity" for some people. For Christians, who we "are" is defined by Jesus Christ. "Jew or Greek," "slave or free," "male or female," are not primary classifications anymore. I am a Christian, and anything else is secondary. As soon as I lose sight of that reality and start defining myself primarily in other ways, I have lost sight of my calling and inheritance! I am no longer a son of God, but a son of something or someone else, and no longer an heir of God.

TO BE HEIRS ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE, LIKE ABRAHAM, WE MUST RELY ON THE PROMISES OF GOD INSTEAD OF STRIVING TO EARN OUR SALVATION THROUGH OBEDIENCE.

Paul says we are "heirs according to the promise" (v. 29). We are not heirs according to the law, or even heirs according to rote obedience. It is through the promises fulfilled in Christ that our inheritance comes. While our faith must be an active and obedient faith, we have missed the point if we think our works will

“earn” our salvation. In fact, we make a similar mistake as the Jewish Christians in Galatia to whom Paul was writing! Only perfection can save me according to my works, and the Scriptures teach “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23). I need the blood of Jesus, the “seed” by whom all nations of the earth would be blessed, to be saved. It should humble and relieve us to remember we are saved “by grace through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast,” (Ephesians 2:8-9). We all recognize assembling with the saints, abstaining from worldly lusts, and doing good works are fruits of a transformed life, but why are we doing them? Are we living that way because we have a desire to be conformed to the image of Christ or because we are “checking the boxes” to get to heaven? Properly keeping a “list” will not atone for my sins or make me a son of Abraham.

Perfect law-keeping (sinlessness) was not what was required for Abraham to be saved, and neither is it what is required for us. What is required to be saved is a totally dependent faith that denies self to fulfill the will of God, finding our purpose and identity in following God, and reliance on the promises of God for our salvation.

Of course, we are not just “sons of Abraham” by faith, but “*you are all sons of God through the faith in Christ Jesus,*” (Galatians 3:26). This greater “sonship” comes with a greater, eternal inheritance, one Abraham longed for (Hebrews 11:13-16), and one we can now receive with him (Hebrews 11:39-40). May we have the faith in God to receive the promises. May it be said of me, “*he believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*”

Not Without Aim | Making Evangelistic Goals

B. COLTON McDANIEL | SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

We know we ought to be evangelistic, do we not? We also know how to go about saving souls. I have confidence in my brethren that they are both able and willing to go out and work. I often hear them speak of the importance and necessity of evangelism with passion. It is that yearning that led you to read this evangelism section in the first place. The trouble is making the determination to “Go.” For whatever reason, be it fear or uncertainty, we can lack the drive to just get up and get to work. This is where goals come into play.



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Goals motivate us to action. Some, however, say making goals hurts evangelism. Perhaps they assume this because previous attempts failed to deliver or because they think goals will stifle on-the-spot evangelism. This could not be further from the truth. In fact, I would venture to say that nothing is accomplished in evangelism without setting goals. We will not get to work if we have not made the decision to do so.

God is a God of goals. The phrase “the purposes of God,” could even be considered synonymous with “the goals of God.” There’s nothing about goals that undermines the sovereignty of God. He always accomplishes what He intends to accomplish. With that in mind, consider Ephesians 3:8-11. Paul says God planned the gospel and the church in eternity: “according to the eternal *purpose* which He accomplished in Christ” (emphasis mine).

We have several examples in the Scriptures of individuals making plans and commitments. Job made a goal not to lust after women (Job 31:1). David determined not to transgress the Lord with his mouth (Psalm 17:3). Paul purposed to go to Rome after he went to Jerusalem (Acts

19:21). He even described the life of a Christian as reaching for a goal (Philippians 3:14).

The chief example of setting goals – especially evangelistic goals – is Christ. In Jesus’ ministry we find a consistent purpose: save the lost (Luke 19:10). In fact, the first two sentences recorded of our Savior’s ministry are evangelistic (Matthew 4:17, 19). When you read through the Gospels, it becomes obvious; Jesus was accomplishing His goals.

What is incomprehensible is that, when Jesus finished *His* saving work and left this world, He entrusted *us* with His goals of saving the lost (Matthew 28:18-20). He trusts us. And, we can have confidence in our work because of this promise: “I am with you always.” When we say with Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20), we are saying that Jesus’s aim; His ambitions, His actions are all ours. Christ’s goals have now been made our own. When it comes to evangelism, we can do this because He did – and He lives in us. Will you live up to that? Well, if we want the evangelistic zeal of Christ, we must first recognize we are nowhere near it. If, however, we make intentional plans as He did, we will be one step closer.

To start, we ought to make S.M.A.R.T. goals.¹ This is a common method of planning and has become the standard for setting goals. The acronym is easy to remember, and it addresses the requirements and qualities of a focused, successful goal.

S.M.A.R.T. evangelistic goals would be...

Specific. You have to narrow down your thinking and no longer think of evangelism in generalities. The more vague your goals, the less likely you will be to follow through on them. “I want to teach people the gospel” is a noble sentiment, but it is not enough. Ask yourself: What *precisely* do I want to accomplish?

Measurable. You need to see yourself making headway to stay motivated with each milestone. Your goals must be quantifiable, or you will lose focus. Ask yourself: How will I know when my goals have been *accomplished*?

Achievable. You should make sure you actually can reach your goals – though they ought to push you to your limits. This needs to be a goal *you* have control over. For instance, you cannot determine how many will obey the gospel. Ask yourself: How can I *realistically* accomplish these goals?

Relevant. You must actually have goals you and others care about. Thomas Merton said, “People may spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.” More on relevancy below. Ask yourself: Are these goals the most effective use of *my* time?

Time-bound. You need to make a deadline for yourself. If you do not have a proper timeframe, you will not accomplish what you intend, because you will always have other things to do. As Dempsey Collins teaches in his classes on evangelism, “*Someday* is not on your calendar.” Ask yourself: *When* will I get these goals done?

To illustrate, a S.M.A.R.T. goal could be, “I will go to the Starbucks near my house (*specific*) every weekday from 7 to 8 A.M. (*time-bound/measurable*) to study my Bible and greet people who pass by (*achievable*) to build trusting relationships and make contacts for individual studies (*relevant*).”

What does your S.M.A.R.T. goal look like? Write it down.

In creating these goals, we must understand a

couple things. After we have made our goals, we must allow for flexibility. If our evangelistic goals are failing, it is most likely because some or all of the S.M.A.R.T. qualities are missing or unfocused. Also, not everyone’s goals will be exactly alike. Everyone *can* do evangelistic work, but everyone must evaluate what *their* work may be (see Galatians 6:4-5). This goes back to our R in S.M.A.R.T. goals.

Do you know yourself well? Your talents? Your limitations?

Personality tests are helpful in answering these questions as they are designed for self-evaluation. Legitimate tests – not the goofy, inaccurate options on social media – are out there. Two respected standards in this category are the Littauer Test² and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).³ The Littauer Test shows where we lean when accomplishing tasks – which directly applies to our discussion. It forces us to decide, “Do I prefer the fun way, my way, the right way, or the easy way.”⁴ The MBTI produces sixteen personality-type results based on dichotomies. Is my attitude prone to Extroversion or Introversion? Do I function dominantly by Sensing or Intuition? Thinking or Feeling? I prefer which lifestyle – Judgment or Perception?

Understand, when you take these tests, that none of these personality types are wrong for evangelism. All have their strengths and weaknesses, helping or hurting your work. For example, on the MBTI, my wife and I are polar opposites. We function and process the world in two completely different ways, which means we also will approach evangelism in two completely different ways. I approach evangelism always asking how I can motivate someone to action, while my wife meticulously analyzes and can see if that same individual does not understand something in the study. (Personally, I think we make a pretty good team!) All personalities are needed in the body of Christ.

Knowing where we stand as individuals will show us how to best reach people. If we don't know ourselves, we cannot make successful goals. And let me suggest not to worry too much about your limitations – as long as they are not taken to their sinful extreme. If you focus too much on your weaknesses, your strengths will also begin to fade. **USE YOUR STRENGTHS** (Romans 12:3-8)!

Each of us have abilities. Let's use them to the glory of the Father. The Scriptures are not asking you personally to begin a world-outreach ministry. God simply wants you to use the time you have to the best of your ability, so that souls might be saved (Colossians 4:5-6). I recommend that you write down a list of five evangelistic goals you hope to accomplish by the end of the year. Look back at that list every week to see where you are. Christ is behind you in your work to save souls. Make goals that will help you accomplish the goals of Christ.

What we need to do now is get to it! You may be familiar with this short story. Two farmers both prayed constantly to God for a good crop. Both had all the tools and equipment they needed. One prepared his fields – plowing, spraying, and seeding the ground. The other just waited. Which farmer was ready to receive an answer from the Lord? Which one are you?

“The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:37-38).

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- 1 For more on S.M.A.R.T. goals, see mindtools.com
 - 2 A fillable PDF of this test can be found at rockthechurch.com
 - 3 A printable PDF of this test along with an explanation of its results can be found [here](#).
 - 4 I would highly recommend buying Florence Littauer's book on these four personality types, *Personality Plus: How to Understand Others by Understanding Yourself*. The book includes her personality test along with full explanations of each personality.

In The World ... Not Of The World, Part 1

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In John 17, as Jesus prayed to the Father for His disciples, He focused a lot on the relationship between His disciples and the world (John 17:11-18). Though we are in the world, we are not to be of the world. What does this mean? How do we apply this truth in our daily lives? John would also write:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.
(1 John 2:15-17)

Other Bible writers contribute to the discussion of the Christian's relationship to the world. James states "*pure and undefiled religion...*" involves keeping "*...oneself unspotted from the world*" (James 1:27). Later in the same epistle, "*Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*" (James 4:4). Peter acknowledged the possibility of a return to worldliness, stating some had "*...escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...*" but "*...are again entangled in them and overcome...*" (2 Peter 2:20). Paul characterizes what surrounds us as "*...a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world...*" (Philippians 2:15).

We should be careful about our association with the world and participation in the things of the world. Some zealously take extreme measures to separate themselves from the world, choosing to live in monasteries (from the Greek, *monazein*, meaning "to live alone"). Others subscribe to asceticism, defined by



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m-w.com as "*practicing strict self-denial as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline.*" Extreme asceticism often involves self-flagellation and other forms of harm to the body. Less severe, but still strict, are those who refuse the use of modern technology (cars, electricity, telephones, etc.). Still on the asceticism spectrum are those who oppose reading, watching, or listen to entertainment belonging to this world. The list could (and does) go on: playing card or board games, secular observance of Christmas, celebrating birthdays, taking family vacations, etc.. In fact, I know an individual who is adamant that if it is not of God and does not give glory to God, then it is of the devil and sinful for a Christian to participate in.

Ascetic measures may seem extreme. However, those who ascribe to these practices and restrictions believe such is necessary to keep the Lord's command not to be of the world. So, what is the truth? What does the Lord expect us to do (or not do) so we are in the world but not of the world? All agree that one can be too permissive, but can one also not be too rigid? Is it a "black and white" issue? Is there a "one size fits all" solution?

The criteria for what we should or should not do is not determined by whether it is of this world (secular) or of God (spiritual). It is erroneous to infer that everything we do must be spiritual in nature, and that if it is not, we are displeasing to God. There are many things we do which are

neither pleasing to nor displeasing to God. They are spiritually neutral. Should you have salmon or roast beef on your sandwich? God doesn't care. Neither is pleasing to Him; neither is displeasing to Him. 1 Corinthians 8:8 reads, "...*food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.*" Should you work as a grocery store clerk or as an electrical engineer? Again, it makes no difference to the Lord. Neither are spiritual in nature, nor are they sinful in nature. The Lord also doesn't care what brand of car you drive, whether you own your home or rent it, what neighbourhood you live in, how many children you have, etc.. There are a host of things in life that are neither here nor there to the Lord. He is not in the business of micromanaging our lives.

Paul quoted an Athenian poet in Acts 17:28, who had written, "*For we are also His offspring.*" We don't have access to the entire poem Paul cited from, but we know it was not Scripture. It was the work of a pagan poet. Paul read the word of an Athenian poet and quoted it! Why would an apostle of Christ do such a thing?

To the church at Corinth, Paul wrote, "*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful*" (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23). He is not speaking about things that are inherently sinful (i.e., idolatry, fornication, theft, etc.). Such things would not be deemed lawful. He is speaking about spiritual neutral things; things that are a matter of choice, preference or interest. Some things are part of life, but not part of our service to God. Again, do we eat the salmon or the roast beef? Both are lawful. One may be healthier (i.e., more helpful) than the other, but neither is sinful.

First Corinthians 6:12 continues, "*all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.*" Some things, even things that are lawful, can be addictive. Again, they're not inherently wrong, but if we come under their power (i.e., we absolutely need it), then we have a problem. Things that are lawful (spiritually neutral, not inherently right or wrong) can become sinful if we become obsessed with

them.

The latter part of 1 Corinthians 10:23 says, "*all things are lawful for me, but not all things will edify.*" Something may be lawful for us but discouraging to others. In the context, Paul uses the eating of meats as an illustration. "*Eat whatever is set before you, asking no questions for conscience' sake*" (v. 27). All meats are OK to eat, they are lawful. He gives one caveat; if you are told, "*This was offered to idols,*" don't eat it. Why? Not because the idol is anything (1 Corinthians 8:4), but to avoid violating the conscience of the one who is cognizant of the idol. The meat was still "lawful," but because one who may be offended by the consumption of the meat, Paul said do not eat out of concern for the weak brother's faith (Romans 14:1-2). That said, the weak brother's faith does not become the standard for all others in all situations. Paul said, "*let not him who eats despise him who does not eat and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him*" (Romans 14:3). The brother who sees no problem with the meat offered to an idol is free to eat, except when the weak brother is present, lest he violate the weak brother's conscience.

So, how does this apply to secular entertainment and activities? First, let's acknowledge they are spiritually neutral; they are things which are a matter of choice, preference or interest. Unless there is something inherently sinful in them (i.e., vulgarity, sensuality, blasphemy, etc.), they are not sinful. They are things which are "lawful," but "do not edify."

As per 1 Corinthians 6:12, we need to be careful not to be "brought under the power" of such things. It is fine to have hobbies, to enjoy spiritually neutral activities, but our participation should be with moderation. Anything has the potential to become an addiction – to consume too much of our time, energy, or money. Non-spiritual secular pursuits are not sinful, but they are not the purpose of life. May we not treat them

as though they were. If an activity keeps us from serving the Lord or affects our devotion to Him adversely, we need to make changes. The Lord must always be our first priority.

Something may be lawful for me, but offensive to my brother. I should be conscientious of the weaker brother. I should not invite him to participate in what I know will violate his conscience. Equally, the weaker brother should not judge me or seek to impose his conscience on me. In matters of opinion, we need to respect one another's freedom, and not demand that a brother or sister concede to our opinion as a necessary standard. Each one is free to have their own personal faith on what secular activities they will or will not participate in. Creating rules and making restrictions God has not made doesn't make us more holy. Outlawing things that are "lawful" is a self-imposed religion bolstered by false humility. Note Paul's message to the Colossians:

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!' (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) - in

accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence. (Colossians 2:20-23, NASB).

Being in the world but not of the world does not require us to be hermits; it requires us to use discernment and discretion. Are there things we shouldn't read? Sure. Are there movies we shouldn't watch? Absolutely. Are there places we shouldn't go and activities we shouldn't engage in? Indeed. However, that doesn't mean everything in the world is sinful and must be avoided. Why did Paul read the works of an Athenian poet? I suspect he enjoyed poetry. He understood it was not inherently sinful to read the writings of a pagan. The same apostle made reference to athletic activity in his inspired writings (1 Corinthians 9:24-26; 1 Timothy 6:12; Jude 1:3; etc.). Surely he was not citing inherently sinful activities to teach us about serving God. To be in the world but not of the world means we abstain from the wickedness of the world, not from living in the world.

JULY 2018 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Sean Cavender will use James 2 to consider the relationship of faith and works in the life of a Christian.

CHURCH ARTICLE

Wayne Goff will investigate the meaning of ekklesia (rendered “church” in our English translations), and its significance for us.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

Jim Mickells focuses on what we need to do before we worship, while we worship, and after worship.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

William Stewart will challenge us to show our faith by our works via James 2:18.


EVANGELISM ARTICLE

Chad Brewer will share seven common hesitations to personal evangelism.

BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE

William Stewart continues to look at what it means to be “in the world ... not of the world” in a follow-up to this quarter’s article.





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