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Godliness. Reverence. Obedience. Worship.



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



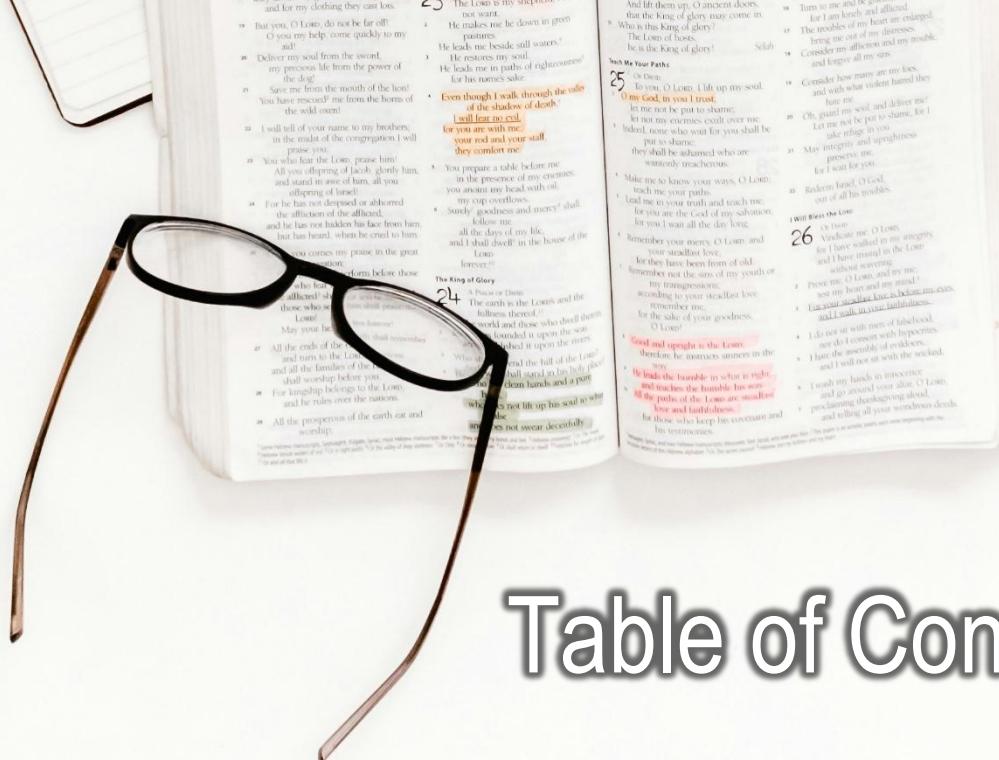


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Spring is an amazing time of year. The doldrums of winter have passed, new life is all around us. Grass that was dormant for months is beginning to GROW. Trees and flowers are starting to bud with the promise of new GROWTH. Seed is being prepared for vegetable gardens and fields alike with anticipation. New life and GROWTH are synonymous with spring. Our spring issue of GROW magazine (as with each issue) is intended to help us GROW our faith in and knowledge of God and His word.

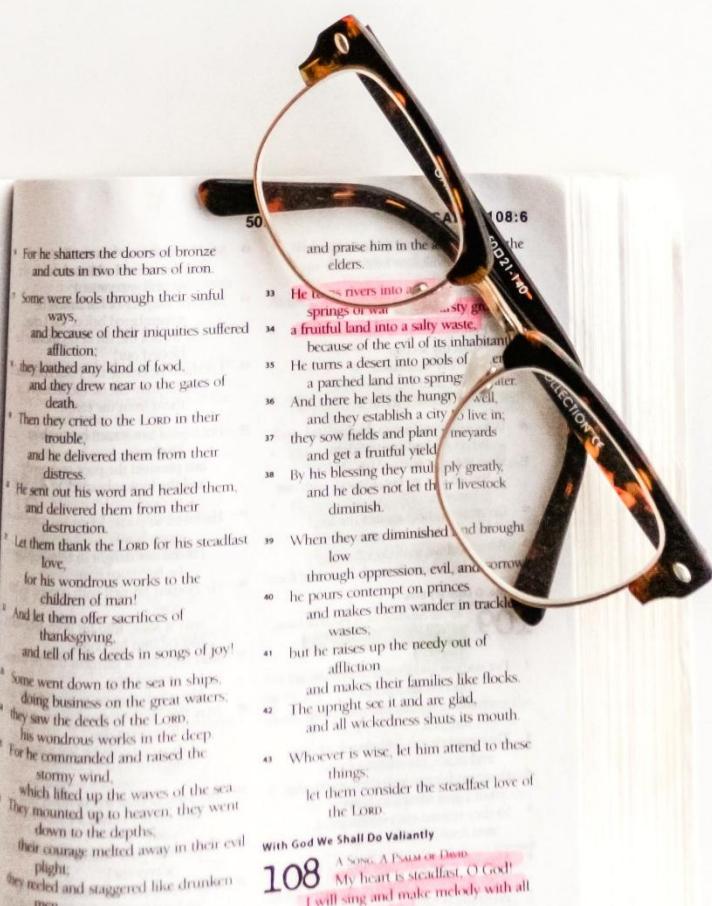
We're thankful to our writers who have prepared an excellent set of articles for us this quarter. And thank you for subscribing. We encourage you to share GROW magazine. If you've benefited from GROW, then others will also. Feel free to forward the notification email or post a link on social media or share a printed copy of the material. GROW magazine is a free e-publication. Freely you have received – freely give.

Now, come GROW with us!

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

LORD, the God of Israel, bring to everlasting! people say, "Amen!"

K I N G
the Lord say so
thanks to the Lord, for
I love endures forever!
d of the Lord say so,
redeemed from trouble
from the lands,
and from the west,
and from the south.
in desert wastes,
y to a city to dwell in,
the Lord for his steadfast
within them.
o the Lord in their
d them from their
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is works to the
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longing soul,
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and in the shadow
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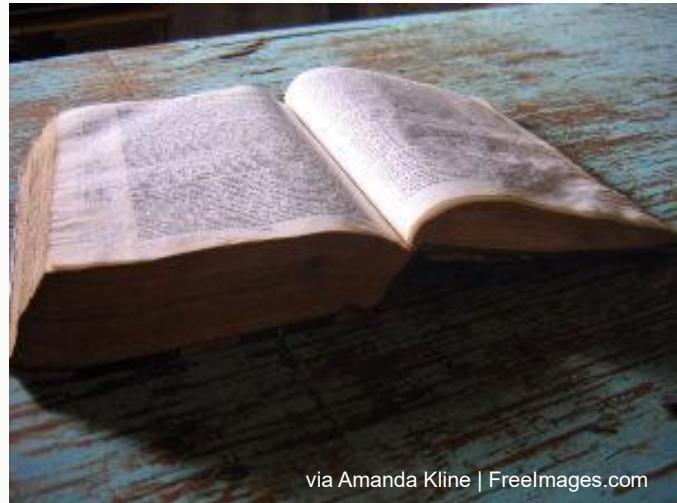
Elijah – A Man With A Nature Like Ours

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

Elijah is the most memorable of the prophets during the early days of the divided kingdom. There were others before him, but they came and went quickly and with little fanfare. However, we have substantial detail about portions of Elijah's work beginning in 1 Kings 17 and ending in 2 Kings 2. Additionally, he is referenced thirty times in the New Testament, which is more than any other Old Testament prophet (except Moses).

One of the first things I am prone to do when studying an individual in the Bible is to look at the meaning of their name. Often we will find something significant. Elijah's name does not disappoint. His name in Hebrew is 'Eliyah, which is a combination of two vital Hebrew words – Elohiym (God) and Yahweh (Jehovah). Without even opening his mouth, the prophet declared, **"Jehovah is God."** What a needed message for the people of Elijah's day as they were being led away from the Lord and into Baal worship through the wicked leadership of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 16:29-33).

Hebrews 11 has often been called the "hall of faith," listing individuals who were exemplary in the service of God. Elijah's name is not mentioned specifically, but he certainly fits a few of the depictions in verses 34-35. His prominence among the faithful is further confirmed in Matthew 17, where Elijah is used as the representative for all the prophets on the transfiguration mount. Despite his status as a "giant of the faith," James said, *"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours..."* (James 5:17). Understand, the New Testament writer is not seeking to belittle Elijah nor to undermine his faithfulness to God. Rather, his aim is to encourage us. Elijah was not endowed with some special prophet DNA. When Elijah



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prayed, he didn't have exclusive VIP access credentials. There was nothing inherently special about him. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. He put his tunic on one arm at a time, just like the rest of us. He faced struggles and trials in life, had doubts and fears, and he prevailed in the same way we will – through faith in God and obedience to His will.

1 Kings 17:1 indicates he was born in Tishbeh of Naphtali and resided in Gilead of Gad, but beyond this we know nothing about him. Who were his parents? Which tribe was he from? What was his occupation (before he was a prophet)? We like to know the details. We are moved by a person's story. We are intrigued by heritage and fame. The Sanhedrin sent messengers to Elijah's New Testament counterpart asking, *"Who are you?"* (John 1:19). He didn't speak about his father Zecharias, nor his heritage in the tribe of Levi. He identified himself as *"the voice of one crying in the wilderness"* (Isaiah 40:3). Like John, Elijah was a voice. He was there to proclaim the message God gave him. The focus was not on who he was, but on what he said and did. When it comes to God's servants, it should never be a matter of pedigree. What matters is faithful

service before God.

He Prayed And It Did Not Rain

So far as we know, Elijah's first public declaration was, "...*there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word*" (1 Kings 17:1). He proclaimed a drought, which would result in a severe famine. Moses had warned the nation centuries earlier, if they turned aside from God after foreign gods, the Lord would "...*shut up the heavens so that there be no rain...*" (Deuteronomy 11:16-17).

In the remainder of 1 Kings 17, we see God's provision for Elijah while these difficult times were upon the nation. At first, the Lord employed ravens to bring him food by the side of the Brook Cherith (v 2-6), however, the brook eventually dried up (v 7). Then God commanded the prophet to go to a pagan town where a widow would tend to his needs (v 8-9). This trip challenged Elijah's faith. Getting away from Israel may have been desirable (Jezebel was massacring the prophets of God and Elijah was #1 on her hit list), but Zarapheth was in Sidon, Jezebel's home nation. In fact, her father still reigned as king there! And if that were not enough, God didn't send Elijah to a wealthy widow who had a storehouse of food, but to a woman who was down to the very end of her rations. While there, the woman's son died, resulting in conflict and extra hardship for both he and his hostess (though God restored the boy's life in response to Elijah's prayer). 1 Kings 17 shows that God's plans may not always make sense to us – thus the need to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Every meal in the widow's house was God honouring Elijah's faith and the woman's faith. Elijah didn't find refuge in Jezebel's backyard; God was his refuge (Psalm 91:2-4, 9-10). Going to Sidon was not about safety, it was about trust in and obedience to God.

Showdown At Mount Carmel

In 1 Kings 18:1 God commanded Elijah to go to Ahab. This had to be a challenge. He had to leave behind the comfort of the widow's house and the guaranteed meals to present himself to

a king who wanted to see him dead. Like Abraham of old, we don't see Elijah questioning God – he simply went. Ahab, seeing Elijah, identified him as the "*troubler of Israel*" (v 17). Ahab blamed Elijah for the drought and famine which plagued the land. It was Elijah who had said over three years previous that it wasn't going to rain, and then he disappeared. Of course, Elijah wasn't Israel's troubler, Ahab was. He turned away from God's will to serve false gods. He had taken as a wife the daughter of a pagan king and allowed her to influence him. He permitted Jezebel (perhaps even backing her) to put to death the prophets of God. Elijah was a messenger, not a troubler.

Why didn't Ahab just kill Elijah right there and then? Recall the prophet's proclamation, "...*there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word*" (1 Kings 17:1). As much as Ahab didn't like Elijah, as much as he would like to slay him, it seems he understood that he could not harm the prophet. Elijah was Ahab's only hope to see rain again. The Baals had done nothing. So, he was forced to listen to and follow Elijah's instructions. Ahab was to gather all Israel to Mount Carmel, along with the prophets of Baal. Elijah challenged the people, "*If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him*" (v 21). They answered nothing. Elijah would demonstrate in a very public way that Jehovah is God (remember, that's the prophet's name!).

Picture the scene: on one side there is Elijah, the prophet of God; on the other side, there are 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah. To the human eye, the odds for Elijah looked worse than it did for David standing before Goliath. But we know how that worked out, right? Two bulls were brought out and the showdown began; who would answer with fire, Baal or Jehovah? The prophets of Baal prepared their bull and petitioned Baal to set it afire. They prayed and prayed. Nothing. They leaped around the altar. Nothing. Elijah mocked them, maybe he is meditating or sleeping, perhaps he's busy or out of the office (v 27). His words spurred them on. They shouted louder. They even began to cut

themselves. They did this throughout the day but “...there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention” (v 29). Despite all their prayers, shouting, screaming, leaping, dancing and cutting, nothing happened. The sacrifice remained on the altar, untouched, except for the flies who no doubt had gathered about it. The point is clear – idols cannot do anything (cf. Psalm 115:4-9).

Having displayed the utter failure of Baal and his prophets throughout the day, Elijah finally called for the people to come near to him. He repaired the altar of God which had been broken down (v 30). He dug a trench around the altar large enough to hold about 15 litres of water (v 32). He commanded water be poured over the sacrifice and the wood of the altar (v 33). He commanded it be done again, and again (v 34). Twelve barrels of water in all were poured over the sacrifice, and then for good measure, the trench surrounding it was filled with water (v 35). That’s a lot of water! Don’t forget, it had been 3+ years since it had last rained. The brooks and likely many rivers had dried up. Can you image how upset the people may have been at this “waste”? The prophets of Baal failed, but they didn’t waste resources. If Elijah failed, the use of water in this way was likely the last thing he would do on this earth. Then the prophet prayed (v 36-37). He finished his prayer and fire came down from heaven which “...consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stone and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench” (v 38). What could they do but acknowledge God’s power? They began chanting, “Elohiym Yahovah!” – “The LORD is God!”

Elijah commanded the people to seize the prophets of Baal and put them to death. He informed Ahab the rains were coming. Had the king’s heart turned to the Lord? No, but the heart of the people had, at least for the present. That was the purpose of the drought and famine, to turn the heart of the people back to God. Elijah

prayed for rain and then sent his servant to watch the sky in the direction of the Mediterranean Sea. Six times the servant looked, and six times he saw nothing but blue skies. The seventh time, there was a small cloud rising from the sea. Soon there was heavy rain, just as the prophet said there would be.

WHEN VICTORY FEELS LIKE DEFEAT

Have you ever had a great victory in life, and then almost immediately, things took a huge turn for the worse? A lot of good things happened for Elijah at Mount Carmel: the drought was over, the prophets of Baal were dead, the people were focused on the LORD, his days of running and hiding were done. Or maybe not. In 1 Kings 19:2, a messenger from the palace informed Elijah that Jezebel vowed to kill him within the next 24 hours! The victory of that day faded out of view. His reaction was very different from the confident man who stood before the entire nation earlier, who mocked the prophets of Baal and eventually would put all of them to death by the sword. A day that had brought victory and a great spiritual high in Israel now ended with the promise of defeat and an equally great spiritual low for Elijah. He arose and ran southward to the wilderness near Beersheba (v 3-4).

When he stopped running, he prayed, but look at his prayer: *“It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!”* (v 4b). He had done all that he could do and it still wasn’t enough. He was distraught, exhausted and tired of running. Sure, there had been a victory that day, but with spineless Ahab and spiteful Jezebel still in power, how long before Israel would be worshiping Baal again? He had done all he could do and still he felt like a failure.

Elijah is not the only man of God in the Bible to desire death in the midst of difficulties. Moses (Numbers 11:14-15) had all he could handle with the exodus generation. They constantly made demands, complained, threatened his life, and

blamed him for their troubles. It was overwhelming. Job (Job 6:11; 6:16; 9:21; 10:1) had endured awful loses and despaired about life. To make matters worse, his comforters were a wife who told him to curse God and die, and three friends who constantly accused him of sin and beckoned him to repent. Jonah (Jonah 4:3) also wearied about life, though his reasons were suspect. He was upset that the Assyrian people responded to his preaching in sackcloth and ashes, resulting in God relenting from destroying them.

Elijah was in a dark place. He despaired for life, he had no appetite. The circumstances of life weighed heavily upon him. The Lord sent an angel to him with food and water (v 5-7). If He had not provided for the prophet, Elijah might have withered away and died under the broom tree. The second time the angel came to Elijah, he said, “Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you” (v 7). What journey? Elijah had fled from Mount Carmel to Beersheba (about 200 km), but that journey was already complete. After receiving the food, Elijah went an additional 425 km south to Mount Horeb (v 8). This wasn’t the journey either. The word “journey” in the text refers to more than a trip from A to B; it is about the course of life. Elijah was struggling with the journey – he was ready to quit. He had fled 625 km from Carmel and was hiding in a cave at Horeb. The Lord knew it was too tough for Elijah to walk alone, so he provided nourishment and encouragement.

Notice the Lord’s question to the prophet, “*What are you doing here, Elijah?*” (v 9). Why did you travel to Mount Horeb? Why did you walk (run) 625 km due South? Elijah explained, “*I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they seek to take my life*” (v 10). Sure, things were bad, but not as bad as Elijah believed. He had convinced himself he was the only one who was

faithful to God; that the rest of the world was against him and wanted him dead. So far as we know, the average Israelite did not want Elijah dead – just Jezebel. But fear can paralyze us and leave us feeling alone; it can cause us to be suspicious of others and make us believe things that are not so. Elijah was not alone. What about the 150 prophets Obadiah saved (1 Kings 18:4)? And the Lord would reveal to the prophet he was not alone in his zeal for God, for He had “...reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal...” (v 18).

Elijah was wallowing in self-pity and self-righteousness. The Lord commanded Elijah to exit the cave (v 11). He did not. The LORD passed by with all manner of noise and power accompanying His presence (a mighty wind, a powerful earthquake, and fire). And yet the Lord was not in any of these. These all displayed the power of God, but He came to Elijah in a still small voice. And it was not until the prophet heard this voice that he exited the cave. Again, the Lord asked Elijah, “*What are you doing here, Elijah?*” (v 13), and once more the prophet gave the same answer (v 14; cf. 10).

Recall Jonah’s effort to flee from the Lord? He intended to go to Tarshish, which was about 5,000 km away from where he was supposed to be (Nineveh). God used a severe storm and a huge fish to turn him around. Elijah was on the run from his responsibility to God and His people. He’d gone 625 km in the wrong direction. Now, it was time to turn around and go where the Lord needed him – Damascus (v 15), which was 100 km north of Mount Carmel. The wording of the text sounds like Elijah may have already been commanded to go to Damascus, but he did not go. When we follow our plans, we will find ourselves somewhere other than where God wants us to be. The trip to Horeb was Elijah going AWOL for a bit. Now it was time to get back on track. God had a plan. Appoint Hazael over Syria, Jehu over Israel, and Elisha as the next prominent prophet. If Elijah would follow the Lord’s plan, the threat from Ahab

and his house would be taken care of.

Standing And Speaking In Faith Again

In 1 Kings 21:17, again Elijah comes into view. He is sent to rebuke the house of Ahab for their wickedness. The prophet plainly speaks of the calamity which would come upon the king and his posterity because of their wicked deeds. Ahab identified Elijah as his enemy (v 20), but there is no threat made against the prophet's life. In fact, after hearing Elijah's message from the Lord, Ahab "...tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about mourning" (v 28). After years of blatant evil at the behest of his pagan wife Jezebel (v 25), the king of Israel humbled himself before God (v 29).

After the death of Ahab, his successor was severely injured by a fall. The king sent messengers to inquire of the prophets of Baal in Ekron about his recovery. Elijah intercepted the messengers and gave the prognosis – it wasn't good (2 Kings 1:1-4). Discovering it was Elijah who had disrupted his messengers, Ahaziah sent a troop of fifty men to seize the prophet and bring him in. Those fifty men were consumed with fire from heaven (v 9-10). Another captain of fifty men followed the first, and they too were consumed

with fire from above (v 11-12). The third captain of fifty approached Elijah pleading for the lives of his men (v 13-14). Elijah went with them fearing nothing, just as the Lord commanded him. Coming to Ahaziah, the prophet reaffirmed the message he had sent before – the king would die, for he rejected the God of Israel and turned to Baal (v 16).

Carried Home In A Chariot

Without doubt, there was much more to the life and service of Elijah than what is recorded in the Scriptures. What is recorded about him is exceptional, right down to his departure from this earth. Departure, not death. He did not die. The Lord sent a chariot of fire for Elijah, he was separated from his protégé Elisha, and caught up into heaven by a whirlwind. He is just one of two people we know of in the Bible who did not die (the other being Enoch, Genesis 5:23-24).

There are so many great lessons to learn from Elijah: boldness to speak God's word, dependence upon God as our refuge in times of trial, and confidence in the power of prayer. May we also learn from his struggles, not to lose heart or to engage in self-pity. We serve a God who will give victory to His people.

They First Gave Themselves To The Lord

BRIAN SULLIVAN | JORDAN, ONTARIO

One does not have to look far in the Scriptures to learn God has a special place in His heart for “*orphans and widows*,” those who are incapable of providing for themselves (Malachi 3:5). Christ maintained the “*poor*” you have always with you (Matthew 26:11), not to discourage His followers from helping the poor, but to alert them to this reality. Articles on the church and its role in benevolence are essential because too many begin to examine the question with their “*emotions on their sleeves*” and reach “*emotion-driven*” conclusions that force them to act outside of the authority of the Scriptures (Colossians 3:17). Benevolence, or assistance to those in need, is not difficult to understand if we “*first give ourselves to the Lord*” as those of Macedonia did in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. Whether it be through the church or as an individual, we should do what we are able to do because it is in accord with Christ’s desire for His people to share what they have been blessed with (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

It is ironic that the first problem encountered among the Lord’s people in the book of Acts centered around giving help in benevolent situations. In Acts 4:34-37 benevolence was handled correctly, but in Acts 5:1-11 Ananias and Sapphira died as punishment for lying. They had sold property like other disciples in Acts 4, but instead of honestly telling the apostles that they had only given a portion of what they had profited, they wanted the glory for giving **all** of the proceeds from their land sale just as others had done in order to meet the temporary need. It was their decision as to how much they would keep and how much they would give of the proceeds (Acts 5:4) but they lied about it and death ensured for each of them when they were questioned by the apostles.



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In God’s plan both the individual and the church have responsibilities in the matter of benevolence. There are times when we need to open our hearts and open our wallets to help individuals who need help (James 1:27; Galatians 6:6, 10). Some have been known to say, “I gave at the office” to imply that if they gave their money to the church through the first day of the week’s contribution, then the church should do their work for them. Two grievous mistakes may follow. First, as an individual Christian, you fail to carry out the mandate that God gave you in benevolence. Second, the local church may then seek to make up for the individual’s lack of responsibility, and as a result, gets involved in a wider effort of benevolence than God assigned. The individual is to help both those within and without the church, but the church’s responsibility in benevolence is limited to “the saints.”

God Made the Distinction (1 Timothy 5:3-16)

Open your Bible to 1 Timothy 5:3-16 for a study of the work of individuals and the collective work of the church in regard to the care of widows. There are several distinctions drawn in the

immediate text that are important for us to notice. First, there is a difference between one widow and another in this context. One widow has relatives (children, or other relatives to assist her), while another widow (the “widow indeed” of the King James Version) is all alone and has no relatives (1 Timothy 5:3-5). Second, there is a distinction drawn by God’s Spirit that would show who the church **can** provide for and who the individual **must** provide for (see verses 8 & 16). if someone has relatives, the relatives are to take the responsibility of the widow’s care (v. 8). If she does not have relatives but is all alone, the church has authority to assist her. Third, God has given some insight into who is worthy of this help from the church in verses 5-16. This context demonstrates that God also gave them a way of determining whether the woman was to be helped by the church. She must be a very spiritual person (consider the description of verses 5-10 which shows basic qualities of a believer). Younger widows are warned of the dangers that lie before them and are encouraged to marry and bear children (v. 14). Fourth, God has also established an age category for widows indeed to be provided for by the church (v. 9; sixty years of age). Check carefully the Scripture and its context, then you will see God set the parameters just as He said He would (Matthew 16:19).

The Sum Total of Truth on Benevolence as a Work of the Church

There are in total nine passages in the New Testament that speak of the work of benevolence for the church. These provide the pattern for us in that work today. In each case, we ask you to open your Bible and view the whole context. We will draw attention to portions of the texts that contain especially pertinent information. The NKJV is used for all citations.

Acts 2:44-45: “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided

them among all, as anyone had need.”

This sharing of goods was not “communism” but “community.” People had come a distance to celebrate the Passover and Pentecost. They were there when the gospel was first preached and they stayed longer perhaps to learn more from the apostles. When their supplies ran low, others among those who had responded to Christ met their needs by sharing what they had.

Acts 4:32-37: “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses shold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”

The practice of Acts 2:44-45 continued here in Acts 4.

Acts 6:1-7: “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’”

There was a matter of neglect to certain widows who were being overlooked and the problem was resolved by the apostles having the brethren choose men to handle it, ensuring that

benevolent care to all widows was provided.

Acts 11:27-30: *"And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Cladius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."*

Though the famine may have reached a wider circle than just the believers, this passage shows that the church at Antioch responded by "sending relief to the brethren dwelling in Jerusalem."

Several passages speak of elements of the collection and delivery of financial help for the poor saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-32; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9). These local congregations did not pool their resources or funnel them through one church, but each independent congregation chose messengers to deliver their help directly to the ones in need. Each local church's independent work will become evident in the mention of "messengers" in several places in these scriptures that deal with this major effort. Here are just a few of the pertinent verses out of this selection.

Romans 15:25-33: *"But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints."*

1 Corinthians 16:1-4: *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:*

On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me."

These ones who would be approved by letters from the Corinthian church are mentioned in 2 Corinthians 8:16-24 ("messengers of the churches"). These messengers are possibly the same men listed in Acts 20:4 who were travelling with Paul.

2 Corinthians 8:1-24: (please read the entire text from your Bible, we will draw attention to some specific mentions within the text, bvs).

- The help was from "the churches of Macedonia" (v 1).
- They wanted to be part of this effort: *"imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints"* (v 4).
- Paul's words to those at Corinth encouraged them to fulfill their commitment to this effort: *"For I do not mean that others should be eased and you be burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack – that there be an equality."* (v 13-15).
- As mentioned previously, messengers were selected by the churches who sent help and this was for the purpose of doing things honorably in the sight of God and men: *"avoiding this, that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us – providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men"* (v 20-21).

2 Corinthians 9: (please read the entire text from the Bible, we will draw attention to some specific mentions within the text, bvs)

- Who was this help for? *"Now concerning the*

ministering to the saints... “You might want to consider Paul’s use of “saints” in 1 Corinthians 1:1-2 and 2 Corinthians 2:1.

- “For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God” (v 12).
- “while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men” (v 13).

Some want to argue that the church was involved in helping all people, Christians and non-Christians alike, by appealing to the phrase “all men” in verse 13. Yet, we have had a host of references throughout this chapter that connects the benevolent gift as being for “needy saints.” The UBS New Testament Handbook Series comments on the phrase, “for them and all others,” by stating:

“The pronoun ‘them’ refers to the ‘saints’ in Jerusalem. ‘All others’ refers to Christians in other places.” (from the UBS New Testament Handbook Series. Copyright © 1961-1997, by United Bible Societies; PC Study Bible).

1 Timothy 5:9-16: (see the text in your Bible and the discussion in the earlier part of this article, bvs).

Conclusion

Does the individual have a responsibility to help others? Yes, our own family and anyone around us in need of help. Consider James 1:27, Galatians 6 and Jesus’ instruction to the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:21). Loving our neighbor involves more than merely not doing him harm, but we must also be prepared to do him good – to help him in difficulties and to love him as we do ourselves. Does the church have authorized work in the matter of benevolence? Yes, the churches are to respond to the genuine need to help the saints. When the need is greater than any one local church can handle, other churches can decide to participate in the benevolent aid. However, this is not to be done by pooling funds. Instead, local, independent congregations may raise funds and send them with their messenger(s) to the intended place to meet the needs of the saints. May God help us to do what He desires us to do, in the way He desires us to do it.

Unlocking The Meaning Of The Lord's Supper

SEAN CAVENDER | BALD KNOB, ARKANSAS

The Lord's Supper is an esteemed part of our worship on the first day of the week. It is communion with the body of Christ and time we use for solemn reflection on the importance of the Messiah and His death. The Lord's Supper is something that should be observed each and every first day of the week (Acts 20:7). However, there is a danger in routine, that we could turn our minds off and be aimless in our observation. Perhaps the Lord's Supper is especially challenging in this respect since the time is quiet and solemn, which seems to invite our minds to wander. We need to combat this and train our minds for proper observance of the Lord's Supper. In this article, we want to delve into a study of the Lord's Supper so we are better equipped to offer worship to God as we partake of this weekly memorial meal.

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover) with two emblems: the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. The Jews were commanded to purge their homes of any leaven. The only bread that could be in the house was unleavened bread. Therefore, the bread we are authorized to use is unleavened bread. The unleavened bread is the body of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 26:26). The second emblem is the fruit of the vine. Our Lord told His disciples that the fruit of the vine is the blood of the covenant that would be for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28).

Jesus and Metaphor

Jesus identified the bread and fruit of the vine as His body and blood. He said, "Take, eat; this **is** my body" (Matthew 26:26) and "this **is** my blood..." (Matthew 26:28). This has aroused much debate among many people. First, there is no indication that upon receiving



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the bread or the fruit of the vine that they literally become the body and blood of Jesus. Secondly, I have heard people argue it is wrong to say, "the bread/fruit of the vine **represents** the body/blood." Their argument rests on the fact Jesus said the "bread **is** the body" or the "fruit of the vine **is** the blood." Therefore, they conclude it is wrong to use the word "**represents**." What both positions fail to understand is the nature of language and the figures of speech Jesus was using. Jesus' language must not be taken literally, but as a figure. Jesus spoke of one item (the bread) and compared it to another item (His body)—which we would call a metaphor. Jesus frequently spoke in metaphor. He said, "I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:7). Jesus did not mean He was literally an opening which sheep walk through. The idea behind the metaphor is that Jesus is the way to God. The door becomes a symbol, representation, or figure for who Jesus is and what He came to do. The same type of language is being used when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. The bread represents Jesus' body; the fruit of the vine is symbolic of the blood of Jesus. Our Savior was not teaching that the emblems literally become His body or blood. Neither is it wrong to refer to the bread and fruit

of the vine as symbols, representations, or emblems.

The Bread and Body of Jesus

When taking the Lord's Supper, what does it mean to remember Jesus' body? It is critical to understand that Jesus had a body. Jesus was Immanuel, God with us. God became incarnate, that is, He became flesh (John 1:14). The fact that Jesus was God in the flesh and became incarnate is integral to our faith. The incarnation of Jesus began with His birth. That is why we are called to believe and know the story of His birth. Both Matthew and Luke take time to give account of Jesus' birth, along with the genealogies of Christ. These prove that Jesus was fully man and took part in a common experience that all human beings share—birth. While birth is something that is common to the human experience, so is death. When Jesus humbled Himself and became a man, He was willing to experience death (Philippians 2:8).

Through Jesus' humanity and incarnation, He also experienced temptation. Yet, He remained perfect and was found to be without sin (Hebrews 4:15). His humanity, perfect obedience, and overcoming temptation uniquely qualified Him to serve as our mediator and high priest (1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus became the perfect **embodiment** of what humanity ought to be! This is one reason why we ought to remember the body of Jesus. Partaking of His body should remind us of what we are striving to become in the sight of God.

The Hebrew writer, who spends a great deal of time defending the high priesthood of Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice for sins, offers a defense of the body of Jesus. In Hebrews 10, the author quotes from Old Testament passages as if they were the words of Jesus Himself, and the message is clear: animal sacrifices were not sufficient. In God's desire for sacrifice, He also desires a commitment to obey (Hebrews 10:5-7). Therefore, in order for Jesus to offer Himself

as a sacrifice before God, it would be essential for Him to have a body that would demonstrate perfect obedience (Hebrews 10:10). In order to fully characterize Jesus' act of dying on the cross as a 'sacrifice,' it would be essential that Jesus have a body.

Therefore, remember and "take eat; this is my body" (Matthew 26:26).

The Blood of the Covenant

Just as remembering the body of Jesus causes us to reflect on particular aspects of the Messiah, the fact that the fruit of the vine represents the blood of the covenant should lead us to reflect upon aspects of Jesus' death. Particularly the concepts of blood and covenant ought to awaken our minds to the nature of Jesus' death as a sacrifice. When Jesus died His blood established the new covenant (Hebrews 9:14-16). In Hebrews 9, the author talks about how a death is necessary for a covenant to come into effect. This is not simply an acknowledgment that death must take place but offers a qualification for the **type** of death necessary—a willing sacrifice (cf. Hebrews 10:5-7). Just as the old covenant was established by the blood of a sacrifice (animals), the new covenant is established through the blood of a sacrifice (Hebrews 9:13-14, 18, 28).

Under the Old Testament system of sacrifices, the blood of animals was unable to obtain eternal redemption and cleanse the conscience (Hebrews 9:12-14). The blood of animals was unable to make anyone perfect or take away sins (Hebrews 10:1-4). Yet the blood of Jesus is able to cleanse the conscience and provide a new and living way to God (Hebrews 10:19-22). Entrance into the new covenant is based on faith and being washed in pure water. By these, the promise of the new covenant is that God will remember our sins no more (Hebrews 10:17).

Jesus' blood was the necessary component to inaugurate the new covenant, bringing it into full effect since there is no forgiveness without the

shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22).

“You Proclaim the Lord’s Death Until He Comes”

When we observe the Lord’s Supper, we proclaim the Lord’s death. As we partake, we are obligated to consider the purpose of Jesus’ sacrifice and why He went to the cross. This proclamation is central to the gospel itself. Paul stated earlier in 1 Corinthians that he had only preached Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul was summarizing the core essence of the gospel. Paul was not suggesting the only sermon he preached was on the crucifixion of Jesus. Neither was he suggesting that other aspects of Jesus’ life had no importance. In fact, Paul would later say that the death, burial, **and** resurrection were of “first importance,” or primary to the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). As we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we are proclaiming and participating in the gospel. Jesus died so we may be forgiven and redeemed, so it is fitting that we would remember His death each and every week. Every time we take of the bread and cup, we remember His death and the salvation we have received.

Christians are to keep the Lord’s Supper “until He comes.” This implies that we are not only remembering the death of Jesus. Jesus is now in heaven, from which we are eagerly waiting for Him to make His appearance once again (Philippians 3:20-21). This implies that our Savior is not a dead Savior, but a living Savior who will die no more. Jesus must be living to “come again.” Also, since we are proclaiming the gospel through the memorial of His death until He comes, this implies that we are remembering the whole scope of God’s redemptive plan and how Jesus fulfills that plan. We should remember Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, ascension into heaven, exaltation to the right hand of God, and His promised return! And until Jesus does return, we are to continue

to remember Him.

A Time of Reflection and Meditation

From childhood and into my adult years, I remember thinking the Lord’s Supper was a time to concentrate upon scenes of Jesus’ crucifixion and death. I would do my best to play out the scenes of what it must have been like to be nailed to a cross. Those scenes need to be in our minds, but we should not be afraid to broaden and deepen our reflection and meditation. We should think of how the Old Testament sacrificial system was unable to take away sins and how they anticipated the coming of the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. Meditate on the numerous prophecies of the Messiah and how He would bring blessing and salvation to all people, which are fulfilled by being united with Jesus and His crucifixion. Maybe we need to allow our mind to meditate on the fact that Jesus willingly laid down His life in perfect and complete obedience to God and that is something we should emulate in our life. Or consider Jesus’ own teachings about His death and resurrection as the “sign of Jonah”—which requires some familiarity with the story of Jonah. You see, broadening the thoughts we have when we partake of the Lord’s Supper can become enriching to our faith and help us realize how the Lord’s death fits within the scope of God’s plan of salvation. The memorial meal is a tribute to Jesus the Messiah and how He is the better mediator of a better covenant.

Whatever our meditations may be, they must be centered around the gospel and Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan. We must not allow ourselves to be distracted by the ball game, or lunch plans, as we partake of the Lord’s Supper. We must be careful that we partake in a worthy manner lest we condemn ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). When we reflect upon the Lord and the implications of His death, then we proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.

Standing Strong In A World Gone Wrong

JOHN MADDOCKS | TORONTO, ONTARIO

All alone. Most of us can remember a time or season when we experienced that unpleasant sensation. I live in Toronto, a city with millions of people, yet despite that huge population, it is a common experience for many to feel alone, even when surrounded by so many people. I know that it is true because I've experienced it myself.

Elijah stood alone. King Ahab had sent for the children of Israel and they assembled at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal. Elijah called out to the people, “*How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.’ But the people answered him not a word*” (1 Kings 18:21). Elijah was, from all appearances, very much alone. But was he? Of course not! Elijah had not for a single moment been on his own and he knew that very well. The “*Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel*” (1 Kings 18:36), was with him every step of the way. I’ll leave it to you, dear reader, if you’re unfamiliar with the rest of the story to read 1 Kings 18. I’ll give away the ending, though, and tell you that by the power of the Almighty God, Elijah triumphed over those false prophets. Elijah took a stand, even though it might cost him his life, against the evil of false teaching and false teachers. He stood up to the king of Israel, Ahab, and his evil wife, Jezebel. He did this because they had forsaken the commandments of God, as had their fathers, and were following instead the Baals (1 Kings 18:18).

Like Elijah, we live in a world given over to error and we see it manifested in a myriad of ways. There are false prophets all around us. Some prophets speak lies that are clearly false. Other false teachers speak lies that sound good and



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pleasing. Remember, Satan is the master deceiver. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:13, “*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.*”

Our battle is a spiritual one. Again, Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12, “*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*”

Those false prophets that stood against Elijah were men of flesh and blood. They were susceptible to the deceptions of the great deceiver, our great enemy, Satan. They had bought into the lie.

Though Elijah the prophet lived nearly 3,000 years ago, and despite the fact that in those intervening years we have advanced in amazing ways, people have not changed at all. Those false prophets believed the lie, just as false prophets do today. The people of Israel, who should have rallied to Elijah’s side, remained silent when called upon by Elijah to choose a side

“answered him not a word” (1 Kings 18:21). We may be technologically ahead of these ancient people, but inside, we are no different.

So, what about you? Would you say that you are more like Elijah or the people of Israel? As is true in every generation, there is a need for the people of God to take a stand against error, both in word and in action. Are you taking a stand? if you find fear hindering you from doing what is right, remember, you are not alone. After his victory in 1 Kings 18, we find Elijah experiencing, what we may find ourselves experiencing on occasion, doubt.

“So he said, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they seek to take my life” (1 Kings 19:10; cf. 14).

Elijah felt alone. As the chapter continued, Elijah persisted in this feeling of isolation, but then God revealed this to him, “*Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him*” (1 Kings 19:18).

He was not alone, just as we are not alone. Even when we feel isolated and afraid, God is there and so are others who share our faith. Do not let doubt and fear hinder us from the good we can do in our stand against what is false. We can stand strong in a world gone wrong!

Like Paul, we can confidently say, “*I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me*” (Philippians 4:13). Like the brethren in Smyrna, we can “*be faithful until death*” and receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

Continuing to feel alone will hinder us, though. God never intended for his people to view life as a solo journey. So in this age in which we live, where all authority has been given to Christ (Matthew 28:18), we need to utilize the spiritual family that we have in Christ (Hebrews 10:24-25). We need to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We need to tap into the Almighty strength of our Heavenly Father (Ephesians 6:10). We need to fill our minds with the word of truth (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” The account of Elijah, taking a stand against Ahab, Jezebel and the 450 prophets of Baal, is not there without a reason. It reminds us all that we can, and indeed we must take a stand against error. We can do it! You can do it!

You Are The Light Of The World

KEITH SHARP | MOUNTAIN HOME, ARKANSAS

The world in which we live is in the darkness of ignorance and sin (John 3:19). Our neighbors are among those benighted souls. Our obligation, both individually and congregationally, is to lead them to salvation in Christ (Matthew 28:19). A primary way we do so is by being lights in the world to show them by example the way to heaven (Matthew 5:13-16).

Christ the Son is the Sun which brings the light of life to the world (John 1:9; 8:12). We are the moon reflecting the light of the Son to a darkened world. They must see Christ living in us (Galatians 2:20). Christ is our perfect example and we must pattern our lives after His (Matthew 10:24-25; 1 Peter 2:21-22).

How shall we live in this benighted world so that we may lead some to the light? The apostle Peter provides the blueprint in his first letter. Above all else, we must look to Jesus, our perfect example, as the pattern to follow.

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed (1 Peter 2:21-24).

Following His example, we will do right in the various relationships of life.

We will obey the laws of the government under



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which we live, honor our rulers, pay our taxes, and pray for those who rule us (1 Peter 2:13-17; cf. Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-2). We will only refuse to obey civil law if it contradicts divine law (Acts 5:27-29).

We will treat all people with respect, fear God, and love our brethren (1 Peter 2:17).

Employees will obey their employers, even if the boss is rotten (1 Peter 2:19-20), give sincere, diligent service, as to the Lord (Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22-25), show them respect (1 Timothy 6:1-2), and be honest (Titus 2:9-10). Workers will thus “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things” (Titus 2:10). Likewise, believing employers will treat their employees fairly, justly, and mildly (Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 4:1).

Wives will submit to their husbands, live pure lives before them, place their emphasis on the inward, unfading beauty of a “gentle and quiet spirit” rather than on the outward, temporary beauty of elaborate hairdos, fancy clothing, and jewelry, speak to and of their husbands respectfully, love their husbands and children, and be homemakers (1 Peter 3:1-6; cf. Ephesians 5:22-24, 33; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:3-5). In this way, believing wives may lead their

unbelieving husbands to Christ without nagging them (1 Peter 3:1-2).

Husbands will treat their wives with respect and understanding of feminine weakness, recognizing the wives are their spiritual equals (1 Peter 3:7). They will love their wives (Ephesians 5:25-33) and not hold a grudge against them (Colossians 3:19).

Young people will be subject to their elders (1 Peter 5:5) and all people will show a submissive attitude toward others (Ibid).

In February 1992, while I was in Nigeria, the late Brother Joseph Onyemaechi took me far out into the bush near Aba to preach on Sunday evening to a new congregation he had started. We were honored with the presence of several

village dignitaries. When I was through preaching, the chief spoke for the villagers. He welcomed me and the new, little church. He acknowledged I had spoken the truth. Then he observed, "We will watch the people you convert. If they live good lives, you will convert many from our village. If not, you will not." The chief was both wise and a fine judge of human nature.

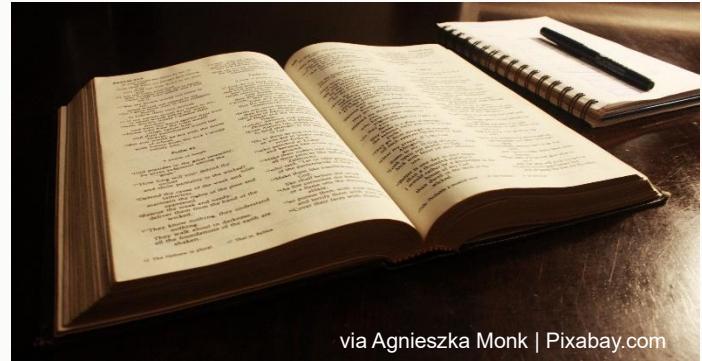
Wouldn't this be a wonderful world, "a foretaste of glory divine," if all lived the way the apostle Peter exhorted us to live? Won't we be lights in the world to guide the lost to Christ if we as Christians live this way? *"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."*

Beyond A Mere Reading Of The Bible

SCOTT LONG | MARIETTA, PENNSYLVANIA

Some Christians are content with a habitual, yet casual reading of the word of God. They believe that since they are not aiming to become preachers, that reading is all that is necessary. how many times have we heard someone say, "I have read the Bible seven times from cover to cover" as if to convey some deeper level of understanding? To which I say, "So what?" Paul chastised Christians for such an attitude, *"I fed you with milk and not with solid food, for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able"* (1 Corinthians 3:2). They had not moved beyond the basics. But what about the Christian who wants to be a true follower of the Lord? Is reading enough for him? In no way. Reading a biology textbook does not make someone a doctor. In the same way, simply reading the Bible will not make a person become a faithful disciple. Let's spend some time talking about why Christians must move beyond reading of the Bible into deeper studies of God's word.

Reading the Scripture is necessary and presents great benefits up to a point. Paul says in Ephesians 3:4, "...when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ." On the other hand, Peter says in 2 Peter 3:15-16, "...consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation – as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which some things are hard to understand..." Paul says read and understand, but Peter says what Paul writes is sometimes hard to understand. This seeming contradiction shows us that Paul must have intended more than a casual reading would be



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necessary for understanding.

What eventually happens to a Christian who merely reads the Bible without any deeper effort to study, investigate and meditate?

1) A lack of growth in the scriptures and regression. Peter commands us to "...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). How do we grow in the knowledge of Jesus? Through time spent in His word, but not through shallow reading alone. 2) An avoidance of prophetic passages in the Old Testament and difficult passages in the New Testament, such as Revelation. Many Christians have become satisfied with never understanding Revelation. We must move beyond a simple reading of the Bible. Consider Nehemiah 8:8. After Ezra and others read the word publically to the people, "...they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading."

So, what should our time spent in the word look like? We should transition from merely reading into studying. Studying is necessary for all Christians of all ages. No one expects the average Christian to teach college-level classes, but there should be an expectation of being able to rightly divide the word, especially as the years go by (2 Timothy 2:15). I have known Christians whose scriptural knowledge has not really grown

in relation with their years as a disciple. They have not been studying. How much time do we spend studying?

First, let us define the concept of study. My favorite dictionary, the 1828 Webster's, defines studying in this way: "Literally, a setting of the mind or thoughts upon a subject ... for the purpose of learning what is not before known." Obviously, studying involves more than reading. Studying involves the mind, a subject, and a purpose. How do we set our minds on the Scriptures to learn what we had not before known? Before we discuss some ideas on studying, remember that any successful effort in the service of God must be accompanied by prayer to the Lord. Daniel says that the Lord "*gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding*" (Daniel 2:21).

In addition to praying, there must be a resolve to study. We will never have enough time to do all the things we have to do or want to do. There is a constant battle between the enjoyable things of life (family, recreation, entertainment, etc.) and the spiritual things, like studying scripture. We must resolve that spending time in the scripture is the best use of our time. Then, we must put that resolution into action by making the right choices as to what we do with the precious time God has given us. We must make the choice between binge-watching *Monk* or spending time with the Bible.

Maybe you do not know how to proceed to go beyond mere reading into real study. I am not a degreed scholar in the Bible; I do not know Greek. I did not study at the feet of Jesus. Chances are neither are you and neither did you. Ask yourself, what do I want to get out of my study? The purpose of studying is to gain an understanding of the word of God and to make sense of what it says.

Let me describe my process by using 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 as an example text, which

is a difficult passage. For many years, I simply listened to what preachers told me the passage meant, but then I studied it for myself and came to a different understanding.

Start out with the Bible passage and a blank notepad or Word document. Clear your mind of everything you have previously thought about the passage. Doing so will allow you to test what you have believed. Some people suggest to copy the passage longhand. Also, it helps to know the basics of the book (ie. author, audience, background, etc.). Read the passage several times, then make comments and list questions in the document. Compare multiple translations to spot variations. Try to establish the context. Why does Paul discuss this matter where he does? How does it fit into his message to the Corinthians as a whole? What do the previous and succeeding passages discuss?

Look for keywords. What does "pray" mean? How about "prophecy"? Paul uses the word "head" several times. What does he mean in each case? It may help to determine the meanings by looking at other passages where the word is used. However, be careful to remember even though the same word is used in two places the meaning may not be the same. Ask questions such as how were the praying and prophesying being done? Who was praying and under what circumstances? Identify phrases such as "for this reason" which indicate a conclusion being drawn from what was said before. Look for transition words like "but" which indicate a change in tone. In verse 3, Paul says "but." He had just praised the Corinthians in verse 2 and now he must correct them.

Make note of the universal principles Paul appeals to in this passage:

verse 3, "*But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*"

verses 8-9, "*For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the*

woman, but woman for the man.”

verses 11-12, “*Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God.*”

Ask yourself what argument Paul is making, why these principles are used, and how these principles bolster the argument Paul is making.

Other important questions arise through a study of 1 Corinthians 11. What type of covering is Paul speaking of? Metaphorical? Literal? Separate from the hair? What other Biblical passages might bear on this subject? In this case, a study of 1 Corinthians 14 would be relevant.

After writing all of your own thoughts and questions, looking at all the particular words and principles, and trying to determine the setting and actions dictated by the passage, you may then turn to outside sources. Sometimes we don’t know the questions to ask in regard to a passage. Commentaries can be useful in introducing us to other ideas and helping us see if we are on track with our thoughts. Many older commentaries can be found online for free. Be warned that you will have to sift through any man-made notes to test whether they harmonize with scripture. Online websites such as netbible.org, bible.org, studylight.org, and blueletterbible.org offer tools such as search, commentaries, and interlinears (direct comparison between the English and original language texts).

We’ve read the passage. We’ve dissected the passage and put it back together again to understand its meaning and its place in the larger context. Now we are done, right? If we think so, we are no different than the man James speaks of in James 1:23-24, “*For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a*

mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.” He has looked at his face (read it) and considered the wrinkles and contours and whiskers (studied it) but then gone away and completely forgotten. If we read and study only, we miss out on other opportunities to grow, meditate, and contemplate the scriptures. Any preacher will tell you that often ideas strike while driving in the car, showering, or mowing the lawn. Why? Because he is meditating on the things he has read and studied. He has not forgotten.

Meditating on the word is a great way to gain deeper understanding. The psalmist says in Psalm 119:148, “*My eyes are awake through the night watches that I may meditate on your word.*” Now, we are not talking about mystical eastern meditation, chanting “Om” and all that. We are talking about giving consideration of thought beyond the time it takes to read and study. Have you ever been lost in the contemplation of a butterfly or a cloud? Paul says in Philippians 4:8, “*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things.*” Take time to contemplate on spiritual things.

Paul’s advice to Timothy rings true for all who are working toward growth in the word: “*Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all*” (1 Timothy 4:15). Think about and contemplate the things you have studied. Roll them over and over in your mind. Eventually, more questions come. Often understanding comes where there may have been little before. Give yourself entirely to thinking about the word you have read and studied. It is in this way that we become immersed in it and will grow.

Reading is not enough for the Christian who wants to please the Lord. While reading is important, it is only the starting point. Study is essential to gain the sense of the scriptures. And meditating on the word, pondering it, will help us gain deeper insight and make it truly part of our being. As Paul says in Colossians 3:16, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.”* Hopefully, the desire exists within all of us to explore and gain a greater understanding of the riches that His word affords to all who want to serve him.

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EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Sean Cavender will share thoughts from Isaiah 9 about the King and His Kingdom.

CHURCH ARTICLE

Reagan McClenny will focus on what the Bible says about Church Discipline.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

Chad Brewer will use the Psalms to discuss meditation and reflection on God and His goodness.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

Jim Mickells will make an application of Isaiah 9 for our service to God.

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

Wayne Goff will address the need for all Christians to be involved in the work of evangelism.

BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE

Sean Sullivan will dig into a discussion of the inspiration of the Bible.



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