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A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS:

Psalm 92:12-14 reads, "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall GROW like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing..." What a superb text about the continued and sustained GROWTH God's people can experience. Our aim with GROW magazine is to help our subscribers in some small way to GROW in the faith. Our desire is to provide helpful and thought-provoking articles from our writers each quarter.

We appreciate the time and energy of our writers have put into this issue's material. You will find a great mix of topics, from both the Old and New Testaments; from the prophetic unveiling of the Messiah and His kingdom to the need for each and every one of us to be active promoters of that kingdom, the church, which is the Lord's body.

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Now, come GROW with us!

Cordially,
Sean P. Cavender
William J. Stewart

The Kingdom And Its King

SEAN CAVENDER | BALD KNOB, ARKANSAS

Isaiah prophesied about 700 years before the time of Christ and is one of the most influential prophets of the Old Testament. Many of his prophecies warn rebellious Israel of impending judgment, admonish them to repent of iniquity, and point to the hope of the restoration of the kingdom of God. Some of the more memorable prophecies of the Messiah are found in the book of Isaiah. For example, the prediction that a virgin would conceive and give birth to a Son is found in Isaiah 7:14. Another prominent prophecy is found in Isaiah 9:6-7:

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this,” (New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update)

Notice the government/kingdom language used by Isaiah. We may hear these verses quoted around the Christmas holiday in attempts to celebrate and remember the hopeful anticipation of the birth of Jesus, but this prophecy is filled with much more than just a prediction of the birth of Christ. These verses are acknowledging the dominant role the Messiah would have as the Anointed ruler over the kingdom of God.

Isaiah 9:6-7 is a royal decree of the Messiah’s identity, His mission, and the royal names and offices He would be filling. While The Living Bible is not always a precious translation, it does provide a helpful paraphrase of Isaiah



1 via Amanda Kline | Freemages.com

9:6: “For unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder. These will be his royal titles: ‘Wonderful,’ ‘Counselor,’ ‘The Mighty God,’ ‘The Everlasting Father,’ ‘The Prince of Peace.’” The TLB’s more loosely translated phrase “these will be his royal titles” is a helpful reminder to readers that the names found in Isaiah 9:6-7 are not names by which the Messiah would be called or referred to, but that they are the roles, offices and titles the Messiah would fill.

THE THRONE OF DAVID

David is the prototypical king; he established the kingdom of Israel and conquered its enemies like no other before or after him. Israel would expect the Messiah to be like David – only better! David was a king that demonstrated faithfulness to God. He was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22; 1 Samuel 13:14). God made a promise to David that one of his heirs would sit on the throne and establish an everlasting kingdom (2 Samuel 7:16). Throughout the rest of Israel’s history, the prophets would show how God was working to fulfill this promise to establish David’s throne.

Isaiah's prophecies are based upon the sure mercies of David, the covenant God made with David and Israel, realized through the resurrected Jesus (Isaiah 55:3; Acts 13:34). The New Testament firmly identifies Jesus as the rightful heir to the throne of David. He is a descendant of David according to the flesh (Matthew 1:6; Romans 1:3). After Jesus' death and resurrection, He ascended into heaven where He was exalted to the right hand of God and seated on David's throne (Acts 2:29-33). Jesus is reigning on David's throne and is presently ruling over the kingdom of God.

THE MESSIANIC REIGN

Isaiah 9 announces the great monarch who will reign over the kingdom of God, ruling from David's throne. Isaiah describes the Messianic king as the One who will rule with godly counsel and wisdom ("Wonderful Counselor"), might and strength ("Mighty God"), the giver of eternal life ("Eternal Father"), and establisher of peace ("Prince of Peace"). The Messiah will rule as the royal, benevolent and righteous monarch. Jesus of Nazareth is the One who has been exalted to David's throne and rules in this way.

- Jesus is the One in whom all wisdom and knowledge are found (Colossians 2:3)
- Jesus is the Mighty God who wages war and defeats His enemies (Revelation 19:11-16)
- Jesus is the "founding father" and bringer of eternal life (Hebrews 5:9)
- Jesus is the way to have peace with God (Romans 5:1-2)

Jesus' kingdom is an everlasting one since He is the "Everlasting/Eternal Father" (Isaiah 9:6). The eternal nature of the kingdom is according

to the covenant God made with David (2 Samuel 7:16). The Messiah will rule with righteousness and justice "forevermore" (Isaiah 9:7). The Messianic kingdom is not an earthly, physical, nationalistic kingdom that we should expect to find on the earth – now or in the future. Jesus is presently ruling in heaven and promises to return at the end of the age, at the day of Judgment and the final resurrection to bring saints to their eternal home (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 5:28-29; Acts 17:31-32).

The prophet foretold the expansion or growth of the kingdom of God and Christ. Isaiah 9:7 indicates there will be no end to the increase of the Messianic rule and government. First, the kingdom was made available to all the children of Israel who would accept the Messiah (Isaiah 55:1-3). That is why the gospel was proclaimed to the "Jew first." The kingdom of Christ did not stop there – the proclamation of King Jesus through the gospel (good news) is that all who believe, repent and obey the King can be saved (Romans 1:16)! Sadly, some in the first group – the Jews – reject King Jesus. Therefore, the kingdom was taken away from them and given to all who are willing to confess their loyalty and allegiance to Jesus the Messiah (Matthew 21:43).

CONCLUSION

Jesus is the King that Isaiah prophesied about many years ago. He rules over God's kingdom with fairness, justice, and righteousness. He expects citizens of His kingdom to live by the principles by which He governs. King Jesus offers hope and salvation to any who will come to Him and drink of the waters He freely gives. Jesus is the Son who has been born and to whom the kingdom has been granted! Let us recognize Jesus as the rightful ruler and pledge our lives to Him.

The Progressive Nature Of Church Discipline

REAGAN MCCLENNY | LUFKIN, TEXAS

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.”

After urging the brethren of Thessalonica to “...aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands...” in 1 Thessalonians 4:11, he reminds the strong and faithful brethren to “be patient with all.”

It has been rightly said of this verse, “*The whole is an admonition against a too strictly disciplinarian spirit. The disorderly are not to be too hastily considered apostates, nor the fainthearted to be regarded as cowards, nor the weak called backsliders, nor are any to be hastily cast out; but the church, being slow to condemn, is to bear with offenders, and seek to reclaim them*” (McGarvey/Pendleton).

The prevalent attitudes Christians should show to other Christians are patience and longsuffering. We should show patience and longsuffering even to those who are not what they should be. However, this patience, like God’s longsuffering, is not indefinite. Paul gives us more insight into what the brethren were to be “patient with” in his second letter to the Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 3:6, “*But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.*”

Some of the brethren in the church in Thessalonica had stopped working to watch for Christ’s coming, and in so doing had become idle, disorderly busybodies. The time for



2 via StockSnap | Pixabay.com

withdrawing spiritual fellowship had come for these unrepentant brethren. Paul goes on to emphasize, however, that even when the time for patience and longsuffering has run out, the required discipline should be tempered with love and genuine care for the offender’s well-being.

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, “*And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*”

The principle at work is that of PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE. Like God’s love, our love should never “run out,” but sometimes the patience – the opportunity to make it right without further discipline – is exhausted (see Matthew 18:15-20). Even still, if discipline is required to the point of withdrawing, it is love that drives the actions. It is a different manifestation of that love, but it continues to be grounded in compassion for their souls and compassion that desires a better future for them. Isn’t that love? Instead of allowing these to remain in the same old problems all their lives leading to a rude awakening on the judgment day, we seek to awaken them before that day occurs! Such

discipline is not entered into with flippancy or pleasure, but with soberness and dread, when it must be done, for the well-being of all involved.

What made it necessary, in this passage, for this greater step to be taken? They were “walking” disorderly. Romans 16, 1 Corinthians 5, and 2 Thessalonians 3 all describe Christians living in habitual, unrepentant sin, but trying to still have “fellowship” and influence with the local church. This sin was not a one-time problem, where they had fallen and were seeking to get back up. Instead, the disorderly brethren in Thessalonica were perpetually and habitually idle. They were defiantly living a disorderly life even after being helped, warned, and admonished (even by Paul himself in this case). This wallowing in sin cannot be tolerated – when one is in sin, with no real, lasting attempt to get out of it. This passage describes one who is coming up with any excuse to remain in the desired condition, knowing the whole time that it is not what God wants, but he or she wants it this way, so that’s what he or she is going to do.

Be patient, but if someone refuses to change when given every opportunity, withdrawal is the next step.

What does this action accomplish?

1. It protects the congregation from the leavening influence of the one in sin (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). Protecting the church is an important consideration in church discipline, but not the primary emphasis of this article.
2. It shows a true love for that person in helping them realize their lost condition so they can return to the Father. We “do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” It forces the brothers or sisters in sin to face the facts of their situations. It gives them a very real, concrete choice of right or wrong. It is God’s way of trying to wake them up and show them how far they’ve fallen and how serious their condition is.

1 Corinthians 5:9-13, “I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolators, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolator, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore ‘put away from yourselves the evil person.’”

Remember, this is a brother who is still trying to “pretend” to be a faithful Christian and have spiritual fellowship with the local church. If this is his situation, “do not even eat with such a one.” Our church discipline is forcing a CHOICE! Removing physical association is a visual/physical reminder of the choice the one in sin is making. Do you want to be a Christian or part of the world? The purpose is that he might “be ashamed” (2 Thessalonians 3:14). We are trying to get him to “come to himself” as the Prodigal son did, and choose to come back to God.

Is that love? Absolutely. In fact, in the example we have in the Corinthian church (a man in an ongoing sexual sin) Paul emphasizes that this is done out of love, and if one repents after this necessary action, we should “reaffirm” our love for them.

2 Corinthians 2:5-8, “But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent – not to be too severe. This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.”

Why reaffirm? Love was already AFFIRMED! The text implies that we have already shown our love in “deed and in truth” by our actions – the love was there the whole time, only now we should reaffirm our love as a means of comfort to the returning prodigal brother or sister.

Some say that this kind of sharp discipline NEVER works in practical, real-world situations. Allow me to offer two replies to this line of thinking:

1. This is saying that I know better than God and despising the specific instructions given by the Father. This is HIS means of discipline to bring them back. Who are we to deny His discipline? We would not be so bold with the physical children of another. For example, imagine one of my daughters were to ask for a piece of candy, and I say, “No,” but she disobeys me and tries to get it anyway, so I send her to her room. What if another adult got the piece of candy, took it

to her room and then scooped her up and brought her out? How would any parent respond to someone else denying his rightful discipline? Would we do this with God?

2. This is just flat NOT TRUE. It worked in the New Testament; it works today. I have seen it work even in the congregation with which I work. It is the last resort in the progression of discipline to appeal to the hearts of individuals. If their heart can be softened, and if they have a good and honest heart, then it can be their moment to hear, “Thou art the man!” and repent! Our use of congregational discipline is their opportunity, provoked by our genuine love, to come back into the grace of God and enjoy the benefits of being His children once more.

Feasting On God's Word

CHADWICK BREWER | WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

The word of God is a gut hook. It's as sharp as a two-edged sword that cuts us to the heart. It's a brightly lit mirror that brings our repulsive marred souls into sharp relief. It's a light that shines into our darkness, exposing us for who we really are.

It is wondrously beautiful, deeply insightful, surprisingly simple, and profoundly complex. It makes a wise man look simple and the simple man wise. It is enlightening and more desirable than gold. His word is perfect and altogether righteous.

The word of God is the words of eternal life. There is no other source for such beauty and power. God has granted life to His Son, and the one who hears His word and obeys it will have new life breathed into him by His word. We can be born again to walk in newness of life by the word of God.

Yet for all of its power, all of its majesty, all of its life-changing ability, we find ways to declaw and dilute God's word all the time, often times unwittingly and unintentionally.

STARVATION

David describes God's word as *"sweeter than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb"* (Psalm 19:10). Jesus, the Word, describes Himself and His teaching as *"true food"* and *"true drink"* (John 6:55). He tells His followers that He is the bread of heaven and whoever believes in Him will have rivers of living water flowing out of his heart (John 7:38). Moses in Deuteronomy and Jesus in the *"temptation in the wilderness,"* teach us that God's words are more life-giving and sustaining than bread, for *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4).



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How many times have you eaten in the last seven days? If I would hazard a guess, I would say that we have had at least twenty meals, not to count snacks and desserts. We become hangry when we miss meals and our bodies cry out for sustenance if we miss just one or two of our usual meals. Yet, how many times have you feasted on God's word in the last seven days? Many Christians tout that God's word is vitally important to their Christian walk and yet barely consume any of it on a weekly basis. Consider all the advantages that we have in our modern times to not only have God's word in print but in our own language and cheaply available. Not only that, but most people have more access on their phones to Bible translations, reference materials, and other study tools than almost anyone in the world had just one hundred years ago. With these advantages, we are often like the pickiest of anorexics who causally grabs a verse or two to munch on from time to time. We are often unprepared to bring our ideas to contribute to Bible classes. We allow and often encourage the speakers to put all the scriptures on the overhead to save us the energy of turning in our own Bibles.

There are so many who are wasting away from their self-inflicted starvation from God's word. Have you been a Christian so long that you know so much that you have become full? When was the last time you spent time in Micah? Have you spent time with the Song of Solomon or Leviticus lately? If you don't see how relevant Ezekiel is to your life, then maybe you haven't spent enough time there lately.

PROXY CONSUMPTION

As a preacher, I am well aware that I have much more time to study than the average person. One of the purposes and great advantages of my job is to use my time to study, prepare, and present material to help the members of the congregation to be built up in God's word. This system is not intended as an elimination of the need for personal study and consumption of God's word, but rather it is a help and addition to your personal consumption. Here are a few things I would like to point out.

1. No matter how well, emotionally charged, or motivating a speaker is able to present his message on Sunday, he can never fully convey to you the impact the hours of his personal study had on him. He will always be sharing with you just a percentage of what he gained in the last week or weeks of study.
2. The lesson that you might need this week might not be in the sermon or sermons that are presented. The topics during Bible class may be great and helpful, but they also might not be what is most needed. With God's word so readily accessible, you can read and study the passages and topics that are most needed for you.
3. Error is most readily accepted and spread when personal knowledge of the truth is lacking. Much that is false and misleading sounds really good, and many good people have been led away by "teachers" who sound good when they are teaching. You can help yourself and those around you by being able to recognize false teaching.

Let the word of God dwell in your hearts. Take your time to allow God's word to speak to you, your needs, and allow it to have its full impact.

SNACK FOOD

We cannot live long on snack food. It can quickly make us malnourished and anemic from a diet that is lacking in real nutrients. Yet so many Christians try to live a life on spiritual snack food.

While blogs, devotional books, newsletters, and other materials are great for what they are, no conscientious writer ever intends them to be a substitute for God's word. As accessible, relatable, and easily consumed as they are, they simply will never have the full nutritional value of God's word. They can be extremely helpful and contain much that is beneficial, but please, always use them in addition to your own personal study of the Bible. Snacks are great in between meals but don't become malnourished by failing to truly feed on God's word.

INDIGESTION

With so many helps available, we often form habits that are non-conductive for digestion. In the scriptures, there is milk and there is meat. There are passages and concepts that are easily grasped and understood. There are other passages that are hard to understand and are often twisted and misused, which can compound the problems of comprehension.

Consequently, when we do take time to feast on some of the goodness of God and we come across a bit of fibrous material or gristle, we are often too quick to run to things like commentaries and other helps. Being meat and not milk, some things are designed to take time to digest. We rob ourselves the blessing of meditating on God's word as we should when we try to take the easy route.

This is not to say that commentaries are wrong or even unhelpful, but when they become our first approach we miss out on what God intends. Paul tells us, *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is*

lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things" (Philippians 4:8). Dwelling is an occupation of the mind. Moses tells us, *"These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart"* (Deuteronomy 6:6) Something that is on your heart is something that is occupying the mind. One of the best ways to occupy the mind is to allow it to wrestle with God's word, digest it, and then diligently apply it.

In John 6, Jesus said many *"hard sayings."* Most of His followers turned back after hearing these hard sayings. The apostles also admitted that they were hard sayings, but Peter had the right idea – *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"* (John 6:68). Peter was willing to chew on it for a while, knowing that Jesus has the words of eternal

life.

I would say that we might want to be more OK with not understanding everything immediately. We should be willing to meditate and pray for understanding. This is certainly not a plea to not study with others, or discuss scripture with others, but rather it is a petition to dwell on God's word. Let it be on your heart. Let it be your meditation all the day.

The great and awesome God of all the universe, infinite in glory and majesty, has deemed it fitting to reveal His mind to you in His inspired word. Dwell on it. Meditate on it. Let it be on your heart and keep it as frontlets before your eyes. Write it on your doorposts and on your gates. Let it be your delight and your salvation.

Isaiah's Description Of Christ

JIM MICKELLS | LEWISBURG, TENNESSEE

Isaiah the prophet, has been referred to as “The Shakespeare of the prophets,” “The Paul of the Old Testament,” and as “The Messianic Prophet.” Within the sixty-six chapters of the book he penned by inspiration, there are a great number of prophecies concerning our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The book of Isaiah has been called the miniature Bible.

“The first 39 chapters, like the 39 books of the Old Testament, are filled with judgment upon immoral and idolatrous men. The final 27 chapters, like the 27 books of the New Testament, declare a message of hope” (Taken from Barnes’ Bible Charts, Interesting Facts About Isaiah). Notice with me one of the prophecies stated by this great man as he describes our Lord. *“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”* (Isaiah 9:6).

The prophet was so sure of God’s ability and willingness to fulfill this prophecy, he speaks as if this Child had already been born and this Son had already been given. The Son spoken of is the same One he mentioned in 7:14 whose name is Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:22-23). This Child of whom he speaks, whose government would be upon His shoulder, is King Jesus ruling over His kingdom of which there is no end (Luke 1:32-33). Isaiah gives us at least four names by which our Lord is identified – Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.

Wonderful Counselor – Some translations have a comma between these two words, which indicate two separate thoughts. Yet several others do not, which would imply one thought. When the two words are connected together, one is truly amazed at the advice or counsel which we can receive from our Lord.



4 via Ben White | Unsplash.com

The way we receive guidance from Him is through His word. Peter said, *“You have the words of eternal life”* (John 6:68). Are you in need of salvation? He has the answer. Want to know how to have a happy marriage? Turn to the Bible. Need help raising godly children? He tells us how. Do you need help to overcome some temptation? Instruction is given. Are we worshipping properly? The New Testament supplies the answers. Instead of searching for answers in the writings of men, why not go to our Wonderful Counselor and let Him give us the answers we so desperately need?

Mighty God – This tells us of the deity of Christ. In the gospel of Matthew when speaking about Jesus (Matthew 1:21), as he quotes Isaiah 7:14, he tells us the virgin would give birth to a son whose name was Immanuel, meaning God with us (Matthew 1:23). John, as he describes to us the Christ, calls Him the Word who was not only with God the Father in the beginning but was also God (John 1:1). The apostle Paul speaking of the power which Jesus has as the Mighty God to create all things in heaven and on earth, and by Him they also consist (Colossians 1:16-17). Not only was He God but He was also Man, robed in flesh. While walking this earth as a Man He demonstrated His deity by restoring sight to the

blind, healing those with crippling diseases, casting out demons, calming the raging seas, raising the dead, and forgiving sins, etc.. While in the flesh and facing the same kind of temptations which you and I face daily, He resisted and was without sin. For this reason, He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, knowing the difficulties we face, and is willing to provide aid, grace and mercy to those who boldly come to His throne for help (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16). What a Mighty God we have as our Savior!

Everlasting Father – This obviously speaks of His eternal nature. Jesus said, *“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End ... who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty”* (Revelation 1:8). As a Father He provides for us and protects us. The word “Father” is defined as *“a benefactor or guardian. The Messiah is called the Everlasting Father, Isaiah 9:6”* (Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies, p. 159). He certainly promises to provide our material needs when we seek Him first (Matthew 6:33). Yet the greatest provisions which He supplies for us are our spiritual blessings. He willingly died on the cross so His children could be saved. His word was given to comfort, guide, inspire, and to give hope as we face life each day. Our Everlasting Father is always there for us and will never leave nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5-8).

Prince of Peace – He is the ruler or the captain through whom we can experience peace. The word “peace” is defined as *“to be whole, complete; to be at peace, in friendship with anyone”* (Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies, p. 305). We need peace with Jehovah because of our sins. Those iniquities have separated us from Him making us His enemies (Isaiah 59:1-2; Romans 5:10). Yet Jesus through His death has made it possible for us to be at peace with our Heavenly Father (Ephesians 2:13-14). There is such a beautiful thought expressed in the word shalom (peace). Through what the Christ has done for us we can have tranquility of soul, knowing we have been divinely loved, divinely forgiven, and are assured of our eternal salvation if we are faithful to our Prince of Peace. I can pillow my head at night knowing if I never rise to see tomorrow that all is well with my soul because of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God the Father who gave Isaiah the words so he could describe to us our Savior and Redeemer. He is a Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God, an Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. Go to Him for counsel, trust in His power, look to Him for provisions and protection, and seek Him for the peace which is offered for the souls of all men.

Every Member, Everywhere, All The Time

WAYNE GOFF | KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

“Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Acts 8:4)



5 via Gerd Altmann | Pixabay.com

The thrust of this article is to encourage congregations to have every member be completely involved in evangelism, as opposed to having one or two do all the work. The first church on earth, the church in Jerusalem, was scattered throughout Judea, Samaria, Galilee, and finally a large part of the Roman empire – but they continued to preach the Word! These people were not trained in special approaches or certain “steps,” but they had been taught by the apostles and were convicted. This, I am convinced, is where we need to start today.

So the first step to getting everyone involved in evangelism is to make sure everyone knows enough of the New Testament to be convicted. If there is no conviction on the part of disciples, then there will be no conversion of others. The believers at Pentecost (A.D. 33) were convicted of their sins, and especially of murdering the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Acts 2:23, 36, 37). When they were told that there was forgiveness of their sins in the name of Jesus Christ, they gladly accepted the avenue of escape from eternal death and were baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38-42). We read then that these convicted disciples constituted the first church on earth (Acts 2:42-47), and “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, in the breaking of bread, and in fellowship” (v. 42). This steady diet of “the apostles’ doctrine” (New Testament) taught them more about their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and about the church for which He died (Matthew 16:18). The convicted disciples learned the five acts of public worship, how to work together as a congregation, how to care for each other as brethren in the household of God, and how to spread the gospel simply by telling others the good news (Acts 2:42-47).

In time, and by the providence of God, the first church was strong enough to endure the persecution that sent these disciples all over the world, Acts 7:58-8:4. It was like trying to put out a fire over dry land by stomping out the fire – only to send the embers throughout the field, setting everything on fire as they went! Within only a couple of decades, the apostle Paul could write that the gospel “...has come to you, as it has also in all the world...” Colossians 1:6). He again affirmed that “the hope of the gospel ... was preached to every creature under heaven” (Colossians 1:23). In other words, the Great Commission (Mark 16:15-16) had been accomplished in their lifetime. And that is all that anyone can ask of the church today.

So the first question we must ask ourselves as members of any congregation, is this: “Do I care enough about those whom I know to share the Good News with them?” My observation is that the answer is “Yes, we care about our friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers,” but “we’re not really convinced that they are going to die and go to hell.” In other words, we lack conviction. If this is the case, then we need to go back and start over with the teaching process and hopefully convict our hearts. There is no greater evangelistic opportunity than for Christians to use their influence with acquaintances to open doors and ears to the gospel message! When I moved into a new community, I urged the members of the local church to simply make contact with folks and give an endorsement of me as a faithful Bible teacher. Then, the

opportunity is available to set up a Bible study in their home, my home or at the office. This is what the business world calls a “warm contact.” You are using your influence to point others to a recommended Bible teacher.

Today we are using all the “cold contact” methods that we can find, and some of them work. MeetUp.com (a service used to organize online groups that host in-person events for people with similar interests), social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), church web pages (www.roanridge.org), and our e-mails (bulletins, sermons – audio & powerpoint, Bible class material, etc). The younger generation seems to do everything via their phones these days, and some of them are “checking out” opportunities to learn more about the Bible. So we can each use our electronic resources to reach out to others. However, once again, this will be most effective if our acquaintances see us advertise the Word online. Your endorsement will go a long way to getting that first in-person Bible study. The “warm contact” is going to be most effective. Look for opportunities. So many of us are “afraid” to talk to others about the gospel, and we allow that fear to paralyze us. However, Paul told Timothy that “...God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). So again, this points to personal conviction. Print out business cards with ideas that might spur on a spiritual incentive, and then place contact information for the preacher, the church, or even yourself, if you don’t mind being contacted to set up a study. Then look for places to give out these cards – grocery store clerk, bank teller, barber or hairdresser, even a stranger on the street, a co-worker, a family member, a school mate. You are not responsible for their response, but you are responsible for giving them the opportunity to say yes or no to the Grace of God!

At the very least, leave one in the doctor’s waiting room, the hospital’s emergency room, or on a grocery store bulletin board – so you don’t have to speak first. This falls into the category of “cold contact” – very cold, but repeated views of these business cards all over town will get the word out. Let me give

you an example of what I’m talking about now.

In Michael Shank’s book, *Muscle and a Shovel*, the co-worker that helped convert him gave him a piece of paper with the question, “Have you obeyed the gospel? 2 Thessalonians 1:8.” Michael took that, and having a little bit of a biblical background, wondered how you “obey” the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? To him, “gospel” meant the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. So when he read 2 Thessalonians 1:8, he was curious to find out how to obey the gospel. Michael’s co-worker, Randall, then had the privilege of answering his questions, and it led to his ultimate conversion. Michael learned that salvation was not by “faith only” (requiring nothing but a verbal acceptance), but salvation “by grace through faith” (faith being active, obedient, James 2). So you could print out some business cards with that question on the front, and your contact information on the back. This is one suggestion. There are a myriad of other verses, questions, etc. which you could use, but this is one example I have been considering.

By the way, I would recommend the entire congregation spend a quarter studying Shank’s book, *Muscle and a Shovel* because it’s title is suggesting that if we want to convert our friends and neighbors, we’re going to have to get in there and do a little digging! If we are afraid of getting our hands dirty, figuratively speaking, then we are not going to get very far. One of our members here in Kansas City has developed the talent of turning almost any conversation at work into a spiritual discussion. If we are looking for an opportunity to talk to someone about the gospel, it is surprising how small an opening we need. For example, if he is talking to someone and the subject of politics comes up, he can turn it into a discussion of the best political system there is – a Divine monarchy! If he is meeting someone for the first time, he asks them what they think of “Jesus,” or “the Bible,” etc. When using this method, the best idea is to suggest a word, a thought, or an idea, and then let the person come back later with a question or comment. If they do not return with a suggestion, then you move on to another person, or at least look for

another opportunity to put another spiritual thought in their minds.

Keep in mind that many Americans today are narcissistic – self-centered, obsessed with themselves, and pretty unconcerned about eternity. This does not make them bad people, but it makes getting the gospel to them a bit harder than it used to be when Americans generally believed that God, the Bible, and “church” were good things. So don’t get discouraged in your efforts and do not expect immediate results. Galatians 6:9, Be patient, longsuffering, kind and tender in your approach, and confident.

Whatever approach we use, keep in mind that the Lord’s Word is sharp, powerful, and better than a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12) and can pierce the heart of an honest soul. The apostle Paul explained that his “method” did not include “error or uncleanness, nor ... deceit” (1 Thessalonians 2:3). Paul was honest in his approach with people, and he refused to use “flattering words” (1 Thessalonians 2:5). He sought to save men because he loved their souls, and he could relate to them, having been a convert from stone cold Judaism himself! “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children” (1 Thessalonians 2:7). So if you truly

love the souls of others – especially your circle of friends, family, etc. – then honesty, sincerity, and a kind approach is the best route to take. If every member of the local church will actively do this, then God will be well-pleased and whatever conversions take place will be what God expects.

Encourage the members of the local church to pray for an “open door.” So many times in Paul’s epistles, he mentions this very thing. “For a great and effective door has opened to me...” (1 Corinthians 16:9). “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord” (2 Corinthians 2:12). “Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains,” (Colossians 4:3). Yes, Paul even looked for evangelistic opportunities from prison! And he was not disappointed. He helped to convert a runaway slave, Onesimus (Philemon 10), and the “whole palace guard” knew that he was being punished for preaching the gospel (Philippians 1:13). Now if Paul could do that while in prison, cannot each one of us look for someone in the free world? God bless your efforts.

Every member, everywhere, all the time – it’s not as hard as you think!

The Inspiration Of The Scriptures

SEAN SULLIVAN | PARAGOULD, ARKANSAS

INTRODUCTION

This world is full of books. Solomon in ancient days proclaimed, “Of making many books there is no end...” (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Many thousands of books are inspirational, but only one small collection of books is “inspired.”

The collection of 66 books that we know as the Bible, is the revelation of the mind of God. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul said, “*All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God...*” It is this divine action of “inspiration” that sets the Bible apart from any other book on the planet.

The Holy Word is not, as so many assume, the various authors’ take on God’s will – it is the divine directed recording of God’s will. The Apostle Peter, in 2 Peter 1:20-21, proclaims, “...*no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*”

ONE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT’S GREAT WORKS

The first time we are introduced to the Holy Spirit is actually page 1 of our Bibles. The Holy Spirit was involved in the creation of our material universe. Genesis 1:2 tells us the Holy Spirit was present and working at our creation. We are further told the Holy Spirit adorned the heavens (Job 26:13). King David, in Psalm 104:30, declares that the Holy Spirit worked the creation of all things according to the Father’s will.

There are also three great works of the Holy Spirit revealed to us through an ancient prophecy. In Acts 2:17-21, the prophet Joel is quoted by the Apostle Peter and it is there that Peter attributes three great works to the Holy Spirit: Revelation (17-18), Confirmation (19-20), and Salvation (21, see 22-41).



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The will of God was revealed to mankind in various ways in the ancient days, according to Hebrews 1:1. However, there is one specific way the information for these “last days” becomes ours – *through Jesus Christ, His Son* (Hebrews 1:2). Jesus clearly explains that the Holy Spirit was going to lead the writers with the words that He (Jesus) received from the Father and then would give to the Holy Spirit, to give to us (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15). The action of the Holy Spirit communicating the will of God to the writers is called “inspiration.” Through the divinely inspired writers, we have the word of God (John 16:13-16; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

THE POWER OF THE INSPIRED WORD

Since the words of the Bible are the inspired words of God, they are powerful. The Hebrew writer, in Hebrews 4:12, states, “*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*”

Yes, the Bible is powerful because it is inspired, but its powers are of influence and education; they are not miraculous in nature.

What can the word do? It can produce faith (Romans 10:17). It can guide our feet through life (Psalm 119:105). It can instruct proper understanding (Psalm 119:98-105; Ephesians 5:8-10). It can make one spiritually alive (Ephesians 2:1). It can make one a disciple indeed (John 8:31). It can justify (Romans 2:13). It can comfort (1 Thessalonians 4:18; Romans 15:4).

The Holy Spirit, by the work of inspiration, has given us:

- all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3);
- the knowledge of God's power to salvation (Romans 1:16; 2 Peter 3:20);
- the knowledge of freedom (John 8:31-32);
- the right to become children of God (Romans 8:16-17; 1 John 3:1-3);
- the hope of everlasting life (Galatians 6:8).

CONFIDENT OF THE WORD, FROM GOD, BY GOD

There are some who see the Bible as a moral guide – one among many, while others see the Bible as the only source of truth about life and hope. Some have claimed the Bible is a myth or a hoax, still others believe the Bible causes more problems than it solves. God tells us plainly that this book is His word. Moses was the first to be told to “write” God's words in “the book” in Exodus 17:14 and then, in the final revelation, John was also told to “write” (Revelation 1:11).

God tells us to see this book as complete. Jude 3 speaks of “*the faith once delivered for all.*” “All” includes all times, all people, and all places – this means you and me too. God's word is a complete, fully sufficient, and

functional guide in not only what we could be but also exactly how we can achieve it (2 Timothy 3:16-17). God tells us to see this inspired book as something that must not be tampered with. The Bible clearly warns us three times not to take away from nor to add to what has been revealed (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18). That's one warning near the beginning of the divine record, one in the midst of it, and another near the end. It is not our role to add our own ideas or to eliminate any of God's ideas. We must see the Bible as a complete, finished, sealed work that simply requires hearers willing to submit to it (James 1:22-25).

CONCLUSION:

Why is it that after these many centuries the Bible remains relevant for life? It is because it is from God. God the Father originated the will, he gave it to Jesus, who gave it to the Holy Spirit, who revealed it to the writers.

The Bible's pages hold the direction we need for every part of our life. The Bible can direct you from youth to death – beginning to end (Ecclesiastes 12). The Bible's pages instruct us in the way of salvation – in fact, salvation is the keynote of the entire Bible. The Bible prepares us for passing the ultimate test – that is the test of life, and in the end, the Day of Judgment.

The inspired word of God, the Bible, will be the standard of judgment for all souls. Jesus said in John 12:48, “*the word which I have spoken will judge him in the last day.*”

The “secret” to personal fulfillment, ethical and moral guidance, truth and righteousness is right in your hands when you pick up your Bible. The Bible is much more than just an old book – it is the inspired word of God, delivered from heaven for your hope and mine.

OCTOBER 2019 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE	Balaam was commissioned by Balak to curse Israel, but he could not. <u>William Stewart</u> will lead us in a character sketch of this Old Testament prophet.
CHURCH ARTICLE	1 Timothy 5:1-2 describes a family dynamic which is important to the church. <u>John Hains</u> will focus on the need for Christians to develop close relationships with one another.
WORSHIP ARTICLE	Fasting is mentioned in the Bible well over 100 times. <u>Marshall McDaniel</u> will lead us in a study on the topic of fasting.
APPLICATION ARTICLE	Balaam is an Old Testament prophet, but he is spoken of in the New Testament. <u>Trey Haskett</u> will share lessons from those New Testament texts for our learning.
EVANGELISM ARTICLE	As Christians, we need to share our faith. <u>Josh Welch</u> will urge us to be active by pointing out motivations for evangelism.
BEYOND THE BASICS	The world is full of bad things. <u>Chuck Bartlett</u> will supply us with biblical instruction on how to deal with suffering.



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