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Godliness. Reverence. Obedience. Worship.



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A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS:

2020 has been a tough year for the world. The coronavirus pandemic has caused a considerable amount of sorrow and struggle. All have experienced changes in varying degrees in day-to-day life. Masks and physical distancing have become the norm for many places. Some have had financial struggles due to lost employment. Some have experienced the sorrow of losing a loved one. Indeed, it has been a difficult year.

Thankfully, though the world and its events are unpredictable, even unnerving at times, we serve a God who is faithful, in whom we can trust. May we learn to rely upon Him more and more. He has been with us in 2020, He will be with us in 2021. We wish you a happy and blessed new year.

We cherish our writers who have devoted their time and ability to provide articles for this issue. We are thankful for you, our subscribers, and for your interest in GROW magazine. If you find this material useful, feel free to share it with others. Forward the notification email, post links to social media, or print out a copy and give it to someone. Thank you!

Now, come GROW with us!

Cordially,
Sean P. Cavender
William J. Stewart

The Suffering Servant

ALEX HALE | CABOT, ARKANSAS

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is perhaps the most well-known passage in the entire book. This prophecy serves as the fourth and final servant song within the book (cf. 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-9). Isaiah inserts references to “the servant of the LORD” throughout chapters 40-55. While it is true that this servant is called Israel (49:3), he should be viewed as distinct from the people as a whole. To put it another way, the servant Isaiah speaks about is the representative of the whole. The servant is charged with two primary tasks: to bring salvation to Israel and serve as a light to the Gentiles (49:6). In chapters 50-52, Isaiah presents this servant as the true hope of Israel.

Chapter 53 explains how the servant, or Messiah, would bring that hope. Such hope would not come to the people through military conquest or political triumph, but through sufferings that would leave the people astonished and appalled (52:14). Isaiah 53 is the culmination of the servant songs, explaining **the process of the servant’s rejection and the purpose of such suffering.**

THE PROCESS – HOW DID HE SUFFER?

Most did not believe. Though Israel would hear the Messiah’s message, they would not believe the prophets’ report (53:1). This text introduces a sad reality: many people, if not most, will not believe. The Messianic message was rejected by the Jewish leaders in the days of Jesus (John 12:36-39) and the entire Jewish nation in the days of Paul (Romans 10:16). It is certain that the primary causes of their unbelief were their sinfulness and unwillingness to repent. It is also important to note, however, that Jesus is not what they were expecting. Verse 2 illustrates this in at least three ways:

1. The young plant. The imagery of the servant growing up before the Lord, like a tender shoot, pictures a close relationship



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between the Father and the Son. But it also speaks to ordinary and even unworthy beginnings in the eyes of many. John’s gospel reveals that many rejected Jesus because he came from Galilee (1:46; 7:41, 52). Even his countrymen were skeptical because of his upbringing (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3).

2. Dry ground. Though we can connect the image of a root (or shoot) to Messianic prophecy (cf. 11:1, 10), Isaiah uses the picture of dry ground to refer to the spiritual condition of Israel (cf. 32:15; 35:1, 6; 40:3). John the Baptist, and later Jesus, came during a period of spiritual darkness. Just as you would not expect a plant to grow in the middle of a desert, one would not expect the spiritual wilderness of first-century Israel to lend itself to the coming of the Messiah.
3. No form or majesty. Jesus is perhaps the most painted and sculpted figure in all of Western art, but most artists get it wrong. This text reveals that Jesus would not have been the most physically attractive in the scene. He did not have a regal look and would not have stood out as a natural leader due to his appearance. Because of their unbelief, they despised and rejected

the servant (53:3). The gospels bear this out, showing us that during Jesus' ministry, there was a long-standing opposition from the religious authorities.

- They questioned the practices of him and his disciples (Matthew 9:11; 12:2, 9; 15:1-2).
- They repeatedly sought a sign from him (Matthew 12:38; 16:1).
- When he did perform miracles, they remained unsatisfied. They complained that he did miracles unlawfully (Matthew 12:10-13), and without divine authority (Matthew 21:23). They even supposed that his power came from the devil (Matthew 9:34; 12:24).
- They were unsure of what to do about him (Matthew 21:45-46). Yet, they knew they needed to do something.

His life was filled with sorrow and grief. The prophet reveals that Jesus experienced suffering, pain, and sickness. The fleshly incarnation of Jesus is a central theme of Scripture. The Messiah coming in the flesh was prophesied (7:14; Genesis 3:15; Daniel 7:13-14), fulfilled (Luke 1:31-33), and continued to be taught by the apostles (Galatians 4:4). Jesus experienced humanity to its fullest (Philippians 2:7-8). He was born as a baby and grew up to be a man (Luke 2:51-52). Along the way, he went through times of hunger and thirst (Matthew 4:1-2; John 4:6-8; 19:28), anger (John 2:14-16), weariness (Mark 4:38; John 4:6), sorrow and grief (Matthew 26:38; John 11:35), and temptation (Matthew 4:1-11; Hebrews 4:15). Though in Jesus was the fullness of deity in the flesh (Colossians 2:9), he was not immune to sickness, suffering, and pain.

Yet through it all, he endured. This suffering servant did not seek to defend himself nor fight back, even though he had the power to do so (John 10:18; Matthew 26:53). Instead, he remained silent (53:7). No one else spoke up

to defend the servant or speak out against this miscarriage of justice. Isaiah laments this sad reality, writing, "By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?" (53:8). Generations later, using the Septuagint, the Ethiopian eunuch read, "In his humiliation his justice was taken away" (Acts 8:33).

Governments are designed to provide a justice system that rewards those who do good and punishes those who do evil (Romans 13:3-4). However, any justice system directed by man is bound to have flaws. This is particularly true when those involved manipulate the system. In such instances, some who are guilty go free. Even more disturbing is that, at times, those who are innocent will be unjustly punished. Jesus should have had the law on his side. After appearances before Caiaphas, Annas, Pilate (twice), and Herod, it is obvious that Jesus has done nothing wrong. Both Pilate and Herod proclaim Jesus' innocence (John 18:38; 19:4, 6; Luke 23:14-16). Yet he would still be crucified, treated in every respect as a common criminal.

Even though he was associated with the criminals, he was not buried with them. The CSB picks up on this idea, reading, "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man at his death" (53:9). The authorities likely planned to dump the body of Jesus in the Valley of Hinnom. However, Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body and buried it in his tomb (Matthew 27:57-60). Isaiah uses this detail to point us back to his primary point: the innocence of the servant (53:9b).

THE PURPOSE – WHY DID HE SUFFER?

It was God's will. As New Testament Christians, it is difficult for us to comprehend the shock of Isaiah's original audience as they heard his prophecy. We know, as Paul Harvey would have said, "the rest of the story." As they listen, however, they hear injustice, suffering, and pain. They are introduced to an unnamed servant who does nothing wrong yet is punished. To top it off, Isaiah makes it clear

that all of this fell squarely under the umbrella of God's will (53:10). Through the suffering and death of the servant, God's plans are accomplished.

It brings reconciliation and peace for us.

The cross reveals that sin is a curse. Later in Isaiah, the prophet will explain that sin brings separation from God (59:2). Though many of those who watched Jesus die surely believed that he was receiving God's punishment for something he had done, Isaiah asserts that the sin of humanity is the cause of the servant's wounds (53:4-6). Through his use of personal pronouns, Isaiah narrows the scope, declaring that our sins put Jesus there. I must never lose sight of a personalized version of the crucifixion account, which reminds me that my sins put him there. I sinned. Jesus did not. Yet he suffered so that I could be cleansed of my sins. This is what the gospel writers are teaching when they speak of Jesus as the ransom (Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:5-6).

The servant is rewarded. Though we are thankful for the victory we can have in Christ, we also see a reward for the suffering servant (53:10-12). Though killed, he shall prolong his days. This is the language of resurrection. The servant can witness the result of his work from an exalted place at the right hand of God. The servant's story does not end with him battered, bruised, and bloody. Jim McGuiggan correctly quips that "as amazing as were his sufferings, so his exaltation would be." This theme of humiliation and pain followed by exaltation is carried throughout scripture (45:22-23; Matthew 28:18; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:5-11; Revelation 5:12-13). As his followers, we can share in this exaltation. However, we must also be willing to share in his suffering (Romans 8:17; Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 4:13). As our society moves away from the Lord, let us be willing to go with him outside the camp, bearing the reproach he endured (Hebrews 13:11-14).

What Is The Church?

JEFF ASHER | NACHAGDOCHES, TEXAS

Church is one of several words that entered our language through the influence of the King James Bible. In his rules for the translators, King James I of England desired “the old ecclesiastical words to be kept.” Therefore, *ekklesia* was never actually translated but transliterated, sort of. Church comes into English from the Scottish *kirke*, which is derived through Germanic influences from a shortened form of the Greek *kuriokon* meaning “belonging to the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:20; Revelation 1:10). Complain, as many do, about the word, it is nevertheless a scriptural designation (cf. Matthew 2:6; Romans 9:25–26; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Matthew 16:18). However, it is not a translation.



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A more precise translation does not eliminate all the difficulty. *Ekklesia* appears over 100 times in the Greek New Testament. Three times, the word is translated assembly; twice it refers to a mob (Acts 19:32, 41); once it refers to a public assembly, much like a Town Hall Meeting (Acts 19:39). Once the word church appears for *ekklesia* designating the nation of Israel (Acts 7:38; cf. Joshua 8:35). And it is translated church when the emphasis appears to be on an assembly of believers (that is, the arrangement, 1 Corinthians 14:28–33). *Ekklesia* means an assembly, but who assembles, or the purpose of the assembly, or how long it is assembled is not determined by the word alone.

It is often pointed out that the Greek word *ekklesia* is formed by compounding two other Greek words: the preposition *ek*, which means “out of,” and the verb *kaleo*, which means “to call” (*Strong’s Concordance*, #1537, #1577, #2564, #2573). It is then observed that the

church are those who have been called out of the world and into Christ by the Gospel (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:13–15; 1 Peter 2:9). While this is true, care needs to be taken not to leave the impression that *ekklesia* means to be called out of the world by the Gospel. It means an assembly.

Translation, etymology, or even a dictionary will not determine any word’s specific use at any specific moment. The context will always be the final arbiter in these matters.

PEOPLE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Except for the previously mentioned instances, the word *ekklesia* always designates people in a unique relationship with God. The word may refer to all of God’s people everywhere on earth (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 3:10), or it may comprehend only those people in a specific location (Romans 16:1; 1 Corinthians 1:2). Yet, the use is broad enough to include not only those on the earth but also those in heaven (Hebrews 2:12; 12:23). The context determines the scope of the word.

The word *church* designates the saved relationship (Acts 2:47). The church is not the Saviour (Ephesians 5:23; cf. 1:22–23), but the church consists of all those saved by Christ (Acts 20:28). It is anti-scriptural to speak of the church as non-essential. How is it possible to be the “purchased possession” (Ephesians

1:14), or the “purchased people” (1 Peter 2:9) and not part of that which is “purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28)? If the blood of Christ is essential, then that which the blood purchases is essential (Matthew 26:28; Ephesians 1:7).

The church is those in a unique relationship with God the Father. Paul says that the *ekklesia* is “in the Father” (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1). Paul may be referring to the fact that they are united to the Godhead through their common faith in Christ (John 17:20–21; Matthew 28:19). However, it is “the church of God” (1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; et al.) because it is founded according to His eternal plan, purpose, agency, and will (Ephesians 1:3–6; 3:10–11; Galatians 4:4–6). Those who are added to the church are “the sons of God” and can call upon Him as their Father (John 20:17; Romans 8:14–17). We are “in the Father” and the Father is “in us” having been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ (John 17:20–23; Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18; Colossians 1:19–20; 2:9–10; 3:3). The church is those whom the Father has redeemed through faith in the death of His Son.

The church is those in a unique relationship with God the Son. The *ekklesia* is described “in Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; Galatians 1:22; 1 Thessalonians 2:14). The church is that realm in which the fullness of the blessings that the Godhead has to offer are realized (Ephesians 1:22–23; Colossians 1:18–20; 2:9–10). When we are united to Christ through water baptism into His death (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–28), we are born again as kingdom citizens (John 3:5; Colossians 1:12–13; 2:11–13) in the church (Acts 2:38–41, 47; Matthew 16:18–19; Acts 2:33; Colossians 1:13–18). We become joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:16–17); we receive a share in His inheritance (Revelation 3:21; James 2:5; Titus 3:7); we become a kingdom of priests praising Him (1 Peter 2:9). There are no blessings apart from Christ (Ephesians 1:3), which means there are no spiritual blessings outside the church (Ephesians 1:23; Colossians 1:19; 2:9).

The church is those in a unique relationship with God the Holy Spirit. The *ekklesia* is described as “a habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22), a “spiritual house” wherein a “holy priesthood” offers up “spiritual sacrifices” (1 Peter 2:5). This is possible because those who are “in the Father” and “in the Son,” *the church*, are those who “walk after the Spirit” and not “after the flesh” (Romans 8:9–14), that is, the Spirit of God dwells in us (Romans 8:11, Ephesians 2:13–22). It is the Spirit of God that leads the church and bears witness that we are the sons of God (Romans 8:14–16). The church minds the “things of the spirit” being subject to the Law of God (Romans 8:5–7). Every believer in which the Spirit of God dwells is a living stone in this great house of God, the church.

THERE IS ONLY ONE CHURCH

As simple as this is, there remains great confusion about the church and those who comprise it. Most of this confusion is rooted in the popular belief concerning denominationalism and ecumenism. However, denominationalism is antithetical to what the New Testament reveals concerning the unique character of the church. The church’s singular, undenominational character is evident in the figures used to describe the church.

Every figure describing the church reveals there is only *one church*. There is only *one* kingdom. There is only *one* family. There is only *one* body. Furthermore, the church is not composed of churches. The church is composed of individual believers, sanctified persons (saints), disciples of Christ.

The Kingdom is comprised of citizens (Ephesians 2:19). Branches abide in the vine (John 15:5–6). Members “in particular” constitute the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 12:4–5). The flock of Christ is “one fold” with many “sheep” (John 10:16). The believer is joined to Christ (Acts 2:47; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 2:10).

The idea that the various denominations are joined to Christ cannot be supported by the picture drawn of the church in Scripture. There

is no division, “no schism” in the body (1 Corinthians 12:25). There is no contradictory practice or diversity in doctrine (1 Corinthians 4:17; 7:17). There is no rival leadership within religious parties (1 Corinthians 1:12–13). The church is one people that belong to God walking under the authority of their head Jesus Christ while being led by the Holy Spirit of Truth.

THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Some have said that this one church is invisible and that it has no organization. However, that is not entirely correct. Indeed, the church, the body, the kingdom, etc., is not constituted by any ecclesiastical hierarchy headquartered here upon the earth. However, in any community, the church may exist by preaching the Gospel and obedience to it (Luke 8:11–15).

What did the church look like when it began? Acts chapter two presents to us the reality. Baptized believers were continuing steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine (2:42). When the church was scattered, this is what appeared in every place where the Gospel was preached (Acts 9:31). These communities were never tied together by any structure, organization, or creed enforcing hierarchy. The epistles are addressed to the church in a place or the churches in a region (a geopolitical designation, not an ecclesiastical unit, parish, diocese, or conference). This is the only visible manifestation of the church known in Scripture. These communities are called the churches of Christ (Romans 16:16). Each one stood in equal relation to Christ, the head (Revelation 1:12–20). They each were under the authority of Christ, but each was independent of the other. They preached and practiced the same thing because they followed the same standard (1 Corinthians 4:17; 7:17; 14:33; 16:1).

Denominationalism, by definition, requires local churches to be tied together under any authority inferior to Christ. Catholicism does this through the papacy. Anglicanism and

CHURCH	TEXT	CHRIST	FATHER	CHRISTIAN
Kingdom	Luke 19:11-27	The King	The Father	A Citizen
Vineyard	John 15:1-11	The True Vine	The Husbandman	A Branch
Household	Hebrews 3:1-6	The Heir	The Owner	A Servant
Family	Romans 8:15-17, 29	The Firstborn	The Father	A Child/Heir
Temple	1 Peter 2:1-8	Head of the Corner	The Architect	Living Stones
Body	Ephesians 2:10-22	The Head	The Creator	A Member
Flock	John 10:1-18	The Good Shepherd	The Father	A Sheep
Bride	Ephesians 5:22-33	The Bridegroom	The Father	Member

Methodism does this through the bishopric. Presbyterianism accomplishes it through the presbytery. Lutheranism does the same through the synod. Each denomination ties the churches together with a hierarchal organization, imposing their creeds and divides themselves from other denominations. In response, Scripture asks, “Is Christ divided?” Some denominations, like the Southern Baptists, are more “democratic,” but the result is the same, more division. This is not the church of Christ, nor are these churches of Christ.

SIMPLICITY, WISDOM & FAITH

Man has ever wanted to deviate from this reality of the church by usurping Christ and His people, placing themselves in authority over that which is not theirs to rule. We need faith to see the wisdom in God’s order for the church. We must find the humility to be satisfied with the simplicity which defines it. The greatness of the church is not found in pageantry, power, or prestige. Its beauty is seen in the transformation effected upon the people called into it by the Gospel. Its strength is in the service which its members render to one another. Its power is in the message of redemption it takes to hearts hurting under the duress of sin. This is the one true church of Christ that arises from that single seed sown in an honest and good heart.

Preaching That Glorifies God

JOHN HAINS | SMITHVILLE, ONTARIO

“...glorify God for His mercy...”
(Romans 15:9).

Everything we do, whatever it is, should be done to glorify God – that must always be our purpose! Whether it is the way we live our lives, the goals we set, how we conduct ourselves with others, and especially how we conduct ourselves in God’s presence, with heart-felt worship according to His pattern. All we do **MUST** be to offer Him glory since we desire to bring Him joy! That includes the teaching and preaching we choose to hear, or, if teachers, the Bible lessons we present to others. Always—in all ways—all things must centre around the praise and glorification of our wonderful God!

WHY DO WE SEEK TO GLORIFY GOD?

I encourage you to stop and think about it – and consider your reasons – before you read on. And then, I think you’ll agree that we seek to glorify God because:

- God alone is worthy of all our praise and adoration!
- He is a very benevolent Creator who nurtures His creation!
- He is the Master who loves the unlovable servant —sacrificially!
- And God is the adoptive Father. He purposefully opens His arms to us when we deserve it the least, inviting us and including us in His family if we obey Him!

The list can go on and on...and really, it should, because we need to consider and remember God’s goodness to the children of men! Let’s continually focus on the graciousness of God so that we’ll live lives bringing Him glory, in thanksgiving to Him!



3 via Timothy Eberly | [Unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com)

When we consider the biblical accounts, because of God’s greatness, omnipotence, goodness, and majesty, we see that He has always deserved glory:

- In Leviticus 10:3, we discover the heart-breaking report about two young priests who chose not to revere and glorify God. Their irreverence cost them their lives! In response, Moses said to Aaron, the young priests’ father: *“This is what the LORD spoke, saying: “By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.”* Oh—what a lesson for us to learn from these young priests, about giving God the glory and reverence! (You would benefit by reading the entire account, from Leviticus chapters 8-10.)
- When Gideon led Israel into battle against the Midianites in Judges 7:2, *“... the LORD said to Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’”* And when they were victorious because of God’s might and deliverance, who do you think the people glorified? Not Gideon. They glorified the

Lord because they knew He was the One Who gave them the victory, using only 300 men against the thousands of Midianites!

- Consider how God was not pleased with King Nebuchadnezzar when he took the glory to himself and would not give it to God. His punishment was severe because of his arrogance. Daniel 4:28- 33, *“All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of the twelve months, he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. The king spoke, saying, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?” While the word was still in the king’s mouth, a voice fell from heaven: “King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.” That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws.”*

It is never a good outcome when we do not give glory and praise to God. God has always deserved glory for everything and in every aspect of our lives. God deserves glory, even in our preaching and teaching:

1 Peter 4:11 cautions, *“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

Let’s take a closer look at this passage of Scripture, and break it down:

1. Our English word “speaks,” in this text, comes from the Greek word *laleo*, which means to talk, i.e., utter words. The KJV

translated the word as preach, say, speak, talk, tell, utter. So, in this setting of 1 Peter 4, when a preacher speaks, we are talking about a declaration he makes of God’s holy will to man—because only that will glorify God. Not human opinions. **The responsibility to convey God’s truth, clearly, and in its purity, to another human soul is a very grave and weighty task.** If we won’t or can’t do that, then we need to shut our mouths.

2. The second word in the passage we want to look at is “oracles”: *“...let him speak as the oracles of God”*. **Preaching that glorifies the Lord is preaching that:**
 - stays with the holy scriptures, or His “oracles,” meaning “an utterance of God” (from the Greek).
 - stays true to what God revealed in the text and context.
 - is the product of plenty of study time and prayer. It is necessary to spend time in order to be able to handle the word of God accurately before teaching it.
3. Another word we need to look at from 1 Peter 4: 11 is the word “ability.” *“If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies...”* The word ‘ability’ means might, power, or strength. **Any ability or strength the faithful preacher has is quickly recognized as coming from God.** The faithful preacher will never preach in a way that glorifies himself to showcase his intelligence, education, charismatic personality, or opinions. No, a sound preacher will do everything he can to **make sure that God is the star attraction in any teaching or preaching.** That preacher will not want to be in the spotlight in any way. And any good that may come through his humble efforts, he is quick to glorify God. The humble preacher knows that any abilities he possesses are only gifts from the mighty Lord, whose truth it is he’s trying to share. Any preacher looking for personal praise needs to

remember James 3:1, where the Bible speaks of the teachers receiving the “stricter judgment”! In the presence of God, how could we possibly want to steal His glory?!

WHY is it so vital that a preacher **speaks** as the **oracles of God**, honouring and glorifying Him through his God-given abilities? The best part of 1 Peter 4:11 is this: **“...that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”**

Glorified means “rendered or esteemed glorious.” God is honoured and magnified! God deserves to be glorified through Christ because He is worthy of the glory and dominion forever and ever! May all Bible preaching reflect that truth.

All these different words should help the good preacher be incredibly careful with what, how, and why he is preaching. All to the praise and glory of the Lord!

This also means, if he is glorifying God in his preaching, he will be willing to deal with more challenging subjects in love. Topics like the inspiration of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Jude 3); atheism (Psalm 14:1); marriage, divorce, and remarriage (Matthew 5:31-32; Matthew 19:4-10), or the work of the church (1 Timothy 3:15); or the subject of local church discipline (1 Corinthians 5:9-11). Preaching that glorifies God calls for speaking **“the whole counsel of God”** (Acts 20:27). Instead of skirting the difficult issues, they need to be dealt with faithfully. The faithful preacher understands that some will be upset with him, but who is he wanting to please? He should not be afraid of losing his “job.” **The faithful gospel preacher will faithfully preach the truth without fear or favor, whatever it costs him personally. His purpose is to bring God the glory through his preaching.** And always, in preaching that glorifies God, the preacher needs to be careful and tactful. The preacher should pray to God for wisdom because the faithful preacher wants to preach the truth—always to save the soul.

I love Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 2:5, **“... that your faith may be in the power of God—and not in the wisdom of man.”** That is why he preached. He did not preach with excellency of speech or with persuasive words of human wisdom, but he demonstrated the Spirit and power.

There will always be churches that wish to have their ears tickled. **But a faithful church won’t only appreciate having a faithful preacher—they won’t have anything less. They will always demand preaching that glorifies the Lord** because they want to please God. Galatians 1:9-10 affirms, **“...if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.”**

One more passage to consider: Paul’s directive to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-4: **“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”**

We need preachers that are equipped “in season and out of season” We need preaching of the truth when it’s not so popular and when it is popular. We need preaching that will never compromise God’s truth to please the people. And all preaching should be done in a way so that glorifies God!

So, to my preaching brethren, I leave these thoughts for your consideration...and to my dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, I encourage you to only stand for preaching that genuinely glorifies God—because: **“...you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”** 1 Corinthians 6:20.

How To Love My Brothers

JACOB HUDGINS | LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS

Just before dying, Jesus gives instructions to his disciples. “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). Love for our brothers is what most closely identifies us as connected to Jesus. This is how people will know that we are his.

Paul writes 1 Corinthians to a fragmented church and at odds with one another. They have divided allegiances, disputes that have gotten out of hand, separations in taking the Lord’s Supper, and divisions based on the perceived importance of their spiritual gifts. Yet none of these is the core issue. The root problem is a lack of love. So while Paul addresses the other problems throughout the letter, his goal in 1 Corinthians 13 is to describe how love acts.

Love is one of those frustratingly nebulous ideas that we struggle to define, identify, and put into action. We often think that we love because we feel warmth toward others (or at least don’t hate). Paul teaches me how to love my brothers.

I love my brothers by being patient and kind. “Love is patient and kind” (1 Corinthians 13:4). Sometimes my brothers and sisters are demanding and insensitive. Wrapped up in their own little worlds, they don’t consider how their expectations, judgments, and words affect me. I love them when I am patient and kind, giving them my understanding, responding to unpleasantness with warmth, and treating them better than their behavior deserves. At other times, my brothers are weak. I need them to do more in the local church, or respond better to hardship, or understand the word more deeply. I love them when I am patient with them, giving them room and time to grow into the person God wants them to be. This does not mean



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that there is no place for frank conversations about improper behavior, but that such talks are preceded by and soaked in patience and kindness.

I love my brothers by not being envious, boastful, or arrogant. “Love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant” (1 Corinthians 13:4). Sometimes my brothers and sisters do great things. Their God-given talents help them excel, and they are honored—in business, in the public sphere, or even among other Christians. I love them when I respond to their success by celebrating them instead of envying them. When others excel, I love them by not taking it as a statement about me. At other times, my brothers and sisters are respectful and submissive. They try to praise and honor me. I love them by not being boastful, assuming I deserve their praise or growing proud. Sometimes my brothers and sisters are themselves proud and selfish. They treat me disdainfully, denigrate my service, or insult me to make themselves look better. I love them by not competing with them—by not puffing my own chest out—by never becoming arrogant myself.

I love my brothers by not being rude and demanding. “it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way”(1 Corinthians 13:5). Sometimes my brothers and sisters are rude to me. I love them by not responding to their rudeness with my own. When others treat us unkindly—even our brothers, spouses, and friends—we often feel justified in firing back with the same intensity. They started it! Yet

love is not rude. At other times, my brothers have foolish opinions (in my judgment). Our ideas and viewpoints clash strongly. Yet love “does not insist on its own way”—meaning that I am not only concerned about what pleases and helps me. I do not have to be right. Sometimes I love when I allow others to steer the conversation, project, or decision—without bitterness. Love does not have to get its way.

I love my brothers by not being irritable or resentful. “It is not irritable or resentful” (1 Corinthians 13:5). Irritable people are easily provoked and angered. Something is always bothering them. Sometimes my brothers and sisters are irritating, but I can love them by not being irritable. Instead of always looking for conflict (“what did she mean by that?”), assuming the worst (“I know why he didn’t come to the party”), or venting my frustrations (“I just can’t stand him!”), we seek to calm tensions and give others the benefit of the doubt. At other times, we have real conflicts with our brothers and sisters. Hurtful words are said, and damaging things are done. In such situations, I love my brothers and sisters by not being “resentful”—not holding bitterness toward them, staying angry, or always bringing it up. I love my brothers by not holding grudges or slandering them to others. I love them by letting our past go and moving forward.

I love my brothers by supporting them in good. “It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:6). Sometimes I will notice my brothers struggling with sin and growth. They will get stuck in ruts, or they will stumble publicly, or they will say something that reflects immaturity. I love them by not even considering how their struggles reflect on me. I do not pat myself on the back and think about how much better I am than they are. I do not condescend when I talk to them. I do not seek to be a hero and rescue them to feel great about myself. All of these are “(rejoicing) in wrongdoing.” Instead, I love my brothers by supporting them in their efforts to do good. I celebrate their repentance. I encourage them and check up on them. I commiserate with them because I know what it is like to struggle with sin. I praise their good work and acknowledge their growth. I love my brother

when I rejoice with the truth.

I love my brothers by not giving up on them. “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends” (1 Corinthians 13:7-8). Over the course of years, we get used to our brothers. We know each other’s quirks. We have our share of difficulties and run-ins with one another. Sometimes we strongly disagree. Yet we also help each other up when we fall. We also do battle together against false teaching and evil. We encourage and support each other. The temptation is that over the course of so many interactions together, we get frustrated and walk away from each other. “He’ll never change!” “I’m so sick of her!” “I’d love to just start over with totally different people!” I love my brothers by staying with them and working with them despite the frustrations it brings. Paul is well aware of the many serious problems in the church at Corinth, yet this doesn’t lead him to throw up his hands and walk away. Instead, he doubles down on his efforts to teach them and help them grow. I do not love my brothers by thinking about what they do for me. I love them by continuing to stay with them when they are exasperating, galling, and seemingly hopeless because of our long history together. Love doesn’t give up on people.

The temptation in all of these situations is to be reactive to my brothers’ and sisters’ moods and behaviors. It is easy to become frustrated with their imperfections and overlook the need to bear with them. Paul teaches us to respond lovingly—not seeking to please ourselves, but to truly help others. This kind of love is not merely a feeling but a carefully considered active response.

Far too often, our relationships with our brothers are based on what they do for us. We love other Christians who honor us, help us, or give us something. We love being a part of groups where lots of others do things for us. We also enjoy people who are forever kind and loving to us. Yet Jesus teaches us, “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even tax collectors do the same?” (Matthew 5:46). He challenges us to

love others who are not particularly lovable. He wants us to care about others who offer us little. The entirety of the New Testament demonstrates that this type of love is at a much higher spiritual level. It will challenge and exhaust us. Yet without such love, we will continue to have problems like Corinth—fragmented, immature, self-serving churches

full of people always on the edge of dividing.

Jesus says that “by this all will know that you are my disciples: if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Do you love your brothers?

Come And See

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What is the most effective approach in evangelism today? Is it street-preaching or town square proclamations? Could it be a radio call-in program or a TV show on the local cable channel? How about a weekly newspaper article or a mass mailing campaign? What about Facebook, Meetup, or maybe YouTube? To be certain, all of these have their place and have been used successfully to develop contacts and lead people to Christ. But they are not the most effective approach in evangelism today. What works today is the same thing that has worked for generations, which is a personal invitation. Of course, a simple invite alone is not sufficient to convert someone to Christ, but for most, this is where it begins.

When asked, “What brought you to church?” one survey discovered:

- 6-8% Walked in by their own initiative
- 2-3% Liked a program offered
- 8-10% Liked the “pastor”
- 3-4% Had a need that the church met
- 1-2% Were evangelized
- 3-4% Attracted by Sunday School
- 70-80% Invited by a relative or friend
<https://churchtrainer.com/the-power-of-an-invite/>

Could it be that simple? Could it be that just a warm and friendly invitation to a worship service, a small group Bible study, a gospel meeting, a song and prayer service, a lectureship on a relevant topic, a one-on-one Bible study, or a casual visit in our home could put someone on the road to salvation? Yes, it is that simple, and it is something we all can



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do.

Personal invitations have been a part of evangelism since the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (John 1:35-51). Upon returning from the wilderness temptations, John the Baptist pointed his disciples to Jesus and identified Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Two of them were so intrigued that they began to follow Jesus. When Jesus asked what they were seeking, they indicated an interest in where He was staying – implying that they wanted to spend time with Him and learn from Him. Jesus responded with a hospitable invitation, “Come and see” (V. 39). After just one day, Andrew was so convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, he went and found his brother Peter and invited him to come and meet the Lord; as they say, “the rest was history.” The following day, Jesus met Phillip and invited him to join Him on His journey to Galilee. He, too, was convinced that Jesus was the promised Messiah and went and found Nathanael and invited Him to come to the Lord.

Two things are notable in these few short verses, 1) the number of invitations that were extended, and 2) the ripple effect that they had. Yet, it comes as no surprise. When we realize who Jesus truly is and what He is willing to do

for us, it is something we enthusiastically want to share with others. When they come to the same conclusion, they, too, will want to do the same.

Another account of someone eager to share the good news of salvation with his friends and family is found in Acts 10. Here we are told about Cornelius, a good man who worshiped God, but he had not yet been saved. An angel appeared to him and instructed him to send for the apostle Peter who would tell him words by which and his household would be saved (Acts 10:1-9, 11:13-14). While waiting for Peter to arrive, Cornelius not only gathered his household, but he also invited other relatives and close friends (Acts 10:24). Because of a simple invitation, several people were saved that day (Acts 10:24, 44-48).

It is encouraging to know that though times have changed, people are still favorable toward invitations today. In a recent Lifeway survey, 51% of people who do not attend a church said that a personal invite would be effective. If we take into account our friends and relatives who attend a church of one type or another, that number would likely rise significantly. The survey went on to say that among the “unchurched,” 35% say they would attend a worship service if they were invited by someone they knew. (Some studies report a much higher percentage).

9 TYPES OF EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM AND CHURCH INVITATIONS

It should be obvious that personal invitations are by far the most effective way to help lead people to Christ, but sadly, it is estimated that only about 2% of church members do so.

Just Ask

If we could somehow help our brethren see how effective invitations are and encourage them to invite people every week, we would no doubt see the church grow unlike anything we have seen in recent years.

Coincidentally, I heard a story just this morning about a preacher who went to an advertising agency to seek their expert advice about

effectively reaching the community for Christ. Should the church purchase a billboard sign, TV ads, radio spots, Facebook advertising, or what? The agent replied, “Purchase a large billboard sign and place it right in front of the church building. Do not point it toward the street but point it directly toward the parking lot of the church with this message ‘Don’t forget to invite someone this week’. Then you will see your church grow.” Isn’t it amazing how simple and obvious the answer is, and yet so many of us stumble right over it?

What we need, brethren, is to build the faith and conviction of today’s Christians so that we, like our brethren of old, are eager to share what we have found with others (John 1:40-45, Acts 4:19-20). We need to light a fire. That fire needs to burn in the hearts of believers so that we are zealous for and active in good works (Titus 2:14). We need to create evangelistic opportunities so that brethren can invite their friends and relatives. We need to have small group Bible studies that focus on topics of interest for those outside of Christ (Acts 10:24), or timely and relative lectureships and gospel meetings, or song and prayer services. We need to teach brethren the importance and effectiveness of hospitality toward those outside of Christ. We need to be a holy people who excel in brotherly love and offer heartfelt, reverent worship to God. When we have such an atmosphere, many would be pleased to invite people they know to the assemblies. In short, we need to remember who we are, what we have found, and what the Lord expects of us.

God expects us to do the same thing that Andrew, Phillip, and Cornelius did. He wants us to speak to our relatives, close friends, and all that we find the opportunity to invite them to come to Him. It might begin with a simple invitation, something similar to “Come and see.” “Come visit our worship service.” “Come check out our small group Bible study.” “Come join me Friday evening for a lectureship on how to find peace in a troubled world.”

Invitations are a powerful tool. As recent studies show, there are people all around us who would respond favorably if we were to

invite them. So, when we think about an invitation, let us not become overly nervous or apprehensive. Some will be interested, and some will not. But for those who are, they

might end up cleansed of their sins and eager to share what they have found with others. So, go ahead, invite them.

The Grief of Losing a Loved One (Part 2)

TOM RAINWATER | CHITTENANGO, NEW YORK

Maintaining the proper attitude and outlook is crucial during times of grief. When my wife died, I learned I couldn't allow a broken heart to rule over me and affect my judgment. Bible study taught me the importance of not losing perspective. In particular, I was moved by the examples of God ordering, under unusual circumstances, the suspension of grief.

EZEKIEL, ABRAHAM, AND THE CONTROL OF GRIEF

In Ezekiel 24:15-27, God told the prophet not to cry over his wife's passing: "Sigh in silence, make no mourning for the dead; bind your turban on your head, and put your sandals on your feet; do not cover your lips, and do not eat man's bread of sorrow." (v.17). Ezekiel did as God commanded and the people noticed, giving him the opportunity to teach more about the imminent fall of Judah. How hard it must have been for Ezekiel to suppress his feelings! His wife was gone and nothing could change that. Her story was written. But there was something greater at stake than Ezekiel's personal grief: the spiritual condition of the people. It wasn't time for Ezekiel to take a sorrow break. It was time to preach an urgent message! Judah was given over to idolatry and the people needed to repent!

When loved ones pass, we wonder how we'll fill the void. But we can't possibly fill up their old place exactly. So don't think about filling anything. Think about finding your focus. Find something wholesome to do and be busy about it, like Ezekiel. Find people to love. Be a mentor to someone. Pay extra care to the elderly in the church who need a friend. The more we focus on the Lord and others, the less time we have to feel sorry about ourselves.

When God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22), the patriarch had to suspend grief in order to go forward in



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obedience. For at least 3 days, Abraham's faith was tested; then God stopped him: "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (v.12). Abraham had passed the test. The application: God must come first over family. He must be obeyed even in the most difficult circumstances.

If, in our grieving, we diminish our service to God or put something else over Him and what He wants, then we must push our grieving aside. These examples teach us that we can do it. Remember, no matter how heavy our grief is, our mourning is not everything. It's not even the most important thing happening — not even close. Knowing that clears the head, keeps sorrow in check, and heightens our awareness of other people's needs. We must never shed the role of a servant, even in the worst of times.

NAOMI AND THE BITTERNESS OF GRIEF

After her husband and sons died in Moab, Naomi wanted the people of Bethlehem to call her "Mara," which means "bitter," "for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." (Ruth 1:19-21). The city was excited at her return, but her pessimism likely dampened the occasion.

Her early attitude reflects a temptation common to grieving people: the onset of bitterness.

When a sister in Christ lost her husband of 40 years, her widowed friends told her, "Just wait, you'll be bitter!" She answered, "Why? I don't want to be. Bitterness is a choice. No, I choose to be thankful to the Lord for the wonderful times I had with my husband." She was right! You can choose thankfulness now and always, cherishing the good memories and letting go of the bad. Unfortunately, I can easily access the emotions I felt at watching my wife suffer and die from cancer. But what good does that do? She wouldn't want me to do that! Why choose to drown myself in sadness? We must avoid negative thoughts and destructive emotions like bitterness and anger. Instead, let's bask in the joy of happy memories. In Naomi's case, she made new happy memories through Ruth, Boaz, and her new grandchild, Obed. (4:14-17).

DAVID AND THE RELIEF OF GRIEF

King David suffered various intensities of grief. When his son Absalom rebelled and died, David became inconsolable. (2 Samuel 18:33; 19:4). His ungodly son was forever lost, thus causing a grief not easily relieved. We experience this pain when loved ones die outside of Christ. In contrast, when David's infant son died, David ceased the usual acts of

sorrow. (2 Samuel 12:15-20). His servants thought this odd. David answered: "...now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." (v.23). David knew his infant son was now safe in God's care, and he could see him again after his own death. In this instance, David's grief found relief in hope. So can ours. Yes, we miss our dear ones who've died in the Lord, but the anticipation of an eternal reunion cheers our hearts and keeps us moving forward. Nothing comforts and motivates better than hope.

JESUS AND THE SOLUTION TO GRIEF

All anxiety about death is lifted in Christ. The Thessalonians shouldn't have worried about their brethren who passed (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Mary and Martha didn't need to grieve so heavily at their brother's death. Why? Jesus is in control. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." (John 11:25). Death is only temporary. Resurrection defeats it and thus overcomes all our grief forever: "...there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, and there shall be no pain..." (Revelation 21:4-5). "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1Corinthians 15:57). Amen!

APRIL 2021 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Among the great Messianic texts in the Scriptures we find Psalm 22, which foretells in detail the suffering and victory of the Messiah. Sean Cavender will share thoughts on this wonderful text with us.

CHURCH ARTICLE

Continuing to look at the use of the word “church,” Sean Sullivan will look at the characteristics of the local church.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

In John 4:24, Jesus said those who worship the Father must do so in spirit and in truth. In Ephesians 4:23, we are told to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. William Stewart will consider these texts and more as we seek to worship God with a renewed spirit.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

In 1 Peter 2:21-24, the apostle commands us to follow in Jesus’ steps. John Maddocks will use this text to discuss our responsibility to be imitators of Jesus Christ.

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

We might have the latest and greatest outreach method, but if we are not living right, it will do no good. Tim McPherson will discuss the power of godly living as we seek to influence others for the gospel.

BEYOND THE BASICS

The apostle Paul speaks about the freedom to marry another after the death of a spouse (Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39). Tom Rainwater will address this important, yet rarely discussed topic.



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