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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:

What a difference one letter makes. Since the inception of GROW magazine, the heading above has always ended with an "S". From day 1, GROW has been a cooperative effort between Sean Cavender and myself. In fact, GROW magazine was Sean's idea. In late 2016, he asked if I would be interested in starting an online publication with him. We hammered out details over the next few months, set up a website, started a mailing list, sought out several writers to participate, and GROW magazine was born.

For the first 23 issues, Sean was responsible for the majority of the editing and I was responsible for the design and distribution of the publication. For 23 issues, it was a joint effort – but sadly, issue #24, the first issue in the 7th year of GROW's existence, this note comes from a single editor.

I suspect most if not all GROW magazine subscribers are now aware of the fatal accident which took Sean's life. He was at the Truth Lectures 2023 in Athens, Alabama where he spoke on the Kingdom of God at 8 a.m. on Thursday, July 20. That evening, after the lectures ended, he was struck and killed by a vehicle which ran a red light. Friends, please pray for his widow, Kristin, and their two children, Xander and Zeke. Pray for his parents, Randy and Brenda, and his sister, Savannah. Losing a loved one is never easy, but when it happens in such an unexpected and tragic way – there are simply no words to adequately convey the heartache I feel for Sean's family. Pray for his brethren at Westside Church of Christ in Wichita, Kansas. Pray for the many people who loved Sean and called him friend. If you want to provide financial help to Kristin, you can do so at [GiveSendGo](#).

The plan is for GROW magazine to continue. Eventually, I will seek another to join as an editor, and we will continue to honour Sean's desire to produce a quarterly publication focused on helping Christians to GROW in faith. This issue includes two articles from our brother Sean, one published in the September 2014 issue of Meditate On These Things (edited by Keith Sharp), the other from the April 2020 issue of Truth Magazine.

We are thankful to the writers who continue to devote their time

and energy to produce quality articles for your benefit. And we appreciate you, our subscribers, and the kind words we receive from time to time. If you deem the material herein profitable, please share it with others. Forward this document, pass along the notification email, share a link to www.GROWmagazine.site on social media, or print a copy to hand to someone.

Now, let's GROW together!

Cordially,
William J. Stewart

A Tribute To Sean Cavender

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

“Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man’s counsel is sweet to his friend.” (Proverbs 27:9)

I confess to knowing very little about oils and perfume. Certainly, a fragrant aroma is better and more desirable than a putrid smell. Soap and deodorant are more pleasant than the lack thereof. Beyond that, I’m not the guy to speak to about fragrance. Of course, Solomon’s purpose is not to exalt the excellence of beautiful odours – this is the lesser through which he introduces the greater – the value, the sweetness, and the delight of a close friend. In 2011, I was a speaker at the annual High School Road lectures in Indianapolis, Indiana. There, I met a young man who was also on the lectureship schedule, Sean Cavender. Over the next several years, he and I would become very close friends. We have always lived 1,200 miles or more apart but through social media, occasional visits, reciprocal gospel meetings, shared vacations, and being co-founders of an online publication (GROW magazine), our relationship and mutual respect continued to grow. Without a doubt, he was one of my very closest and best friends.

Sean was at the Truth Lectures 2023 in Athens, Alabama. On the morning of July 20, he spoke at the 8:00 a.m. slot on [The Kingdom of God](#). That evening, after the lectures had concluded, his vehicle was struck and Sean was killed at the intersection in front of the Athens Bible School. He leaves behind his wife Kristin and two young sons, Xander and Zeke; his parents Randy and Brenda, his sister Savannah (Benjamin), his nieces Olivia and Evelyn, and his grandparents Aubrey and Kay.

In 2 Samuel 1, we find *“The Song of the Bow,”* a tribute written by David lamenting the death of King Saul and his son Jonathan who died in



battle against the Philistines. David mourned the loss of these two great heroes of Israel. Saul and Jonathan were very different men. One was a valiant and powerful king, yet unfaithful to the Lord; the other, David’s best friend (1 Samuel 18:1, 3; 19:2; 20:17), a kindred spirit, and most importantly a man of God. David eulogized these two important figures with the phrase, *“How the mighty have fallen”* (2 Samuel 1:19, 25, 27). He was not addressing their spiritual condition – one of them was faithful, and the other was not. It was not a statement of scorn or to disparage them in death; quite the opposite, for he called them *“...the beauty of Israel ... beloved and pleasant in their lives ... swifter than eagles ... and stronger than lions”* (2 Samuel 1:19, 23). It was an acknowledgement of the great place they occupied among the people of Israel and the hole their departure had left for the nation. But beyond that, David closed his song with a personal note,

“I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the

love of women. How the mighty have fallen..." (2 Samuel 1:26-27a).

Though my brother in the Lord was not as prominent among the people of God as Saul or Jonathan were, a mighty warrior in the Lord's church has fallen and a hole remains. Sean was a perpetual encouragement to many, a diligent Bible student and a humble, yet powerful proclaimer of truth. There was so much potential good to come from this young man to God's glory – but alas, how the mighty have fallen. I am distressed for you, my brother Sean. You have been very pleasant to me.

Those who knew and loved Sean are in sorrow, but not without hope.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are

asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words."
(1 Thessalonians 4:14-18)

I am so glad to have known and loved Sean in the here and now. I anticipate a great reunion with him and all of the righteous in the there and then.

– William Stewart

An archive of articles by Sean can be accessed on the [GROW magazine](#) site. An archive of audio sermons by Sean is at [Westside church of Christ](#), Wichita, KS

Abraham & Sarah: Faithful Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth

THE HALL OF FAITH

JEREMY DIESTELKAMP | TORONTO, ONTARIO

Hebrews 11:8-19

Oftentimes, when we read Hebrews chapter 11, we believe that the Hebrew writer was penning this section in order to raise up the people found in it as examples of perfect faith, of people who lives sinless lives. Perhaps we come to that conclusion because of the first two examples of faith given: that of Abel and Enoch. All we really know about Abel is that he was a shepherd, he offered a sacrifice to God by faith that was accepted by God, and was subsequently killed by his hateful brother, Cain (**Genesis 4:1-8**). No words of Abel are ever recorded, yet though he is dead, he still speaks (**Hebrews 11:4**). And then when it comes to Enoch, if it weren't for the Book of Jude, we'd know even less about him, for all the Book of Genesis tells us about him is that he was the father of Methuselah, and that he walked with God in faith three hundred years before he was taken directly to Heaven by God (**Genesis 5:21-25**). It is Jude that tells us that Enoch was a prophet to his generation, proclaiming to them that they needed to repent of their ungodly deeds, for the righteous judgment of God would condemn them for their sins if they didn't (**Jude 14-15**). But because we know so little about Abel and Enoch, we might come to the false conclusion that these men had perfect faith, and that Enoch was even taken to Heaven because he never sinned.

So instead of being an encouraging chapter, meant to show Christians that we can persevere through persecution and living in a sinful world while at the same time remaining faithful, it becomes a discouraging chapter, where we compare our faith to that of these people, and decide to give up, believing our



1 Ruth Lindsay | Pixabay.com

faith doesn't measure up to theirs. And that truly is sad, because the Hebrew writer is not holding these men up as superhero-like characters who lived in sinless obedience to God, for Paul's statement still holds true: all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (which includes all the people in Hebrews 11) (**Romans 3:23**). Rather, the Hebrew writer is holding these people up as regular people, who lived regular lives, but because they believed in God and trusted in the promises He made to mankind, their faith allowed them to persevere in the face of all their troubles, and ultimately receive that which God promised.

Abel died at the hands of a vengeful brother, but he lost nothing because he would receive salvation through Christ's sacrifice. Enoch lived in a largely wicked society, and yet received eternal life through God's grace. Noah lived in a world so corrupt, that it is said that God regretted making man, and yet not only did Noah find grace in the sight of the Lord to be physically saved from it through the flood, but he found grace to be saved eternally as well because of the shed blood of Christ. None of these men lived in different situations to the Hebrew Christians (or to Christians today), and

so, if these men and women could walk by faith and receive the promises that God had made, the Hebrew Christians could as well (as can we).

Perhaps what we've just expounded on is more easily seen through the man Abraham and his wife Sarah. Back in Genesis 12, when God first spoke to Abraham, Abraham was in Ur of the Chaldees. For those who don't know where that is, that is in modern-day Iraq. Abraham likely thought that Ur would be his lifetime home, but God had other plans. He told Abraham to leave Ur with his wife Sarah and their extended family and go to a land that He would show them. Note, God didn't tell Abraham to leave Ur and go to Canaan. He was simply to go to the land that God would show him, wherever that land was. If someone came up to you and said follow them to a place they would tell you about later, would you follow them? Not likely. But Abraham wasn't asked to follow some person, he was asked to follow God, by God Himself. And so, because Abraham trusted in God to lead him (because Abraham had faith in God), Abraham followed in spite of not knowing where he was going to, nor having ever seen the land before.

What this tells me is that Abraham believed in God long before God appeared to him (even if Joshua 24:2 seems to imply that Abraham didn't worship God properly earlier on in his life). And what's more, Abraham was a family leader who could raise his family to have faith in God and follow God too, for Sarah willingly followed God to Canaan as well (**Genesis 18:19**). Now Abraham and Sarah didn't have some Herculean amount of faith in order to do this: but they did have enough faith in God and trusted in God to provide for them, even in a foreign land. If you look at a map and drew a straight line from where Ur is believed to be to Haran, you would come up with about 1000 km or 600 miles. And then if you drew another straight line from Haran to where Shechem is located (Abraham's first stop in Canaan) you come up with another 700 km or 435 miles. So at a minimum, Abraham and Sarah travelled about 1700 km or 1035 miles to leave Ur and come to that land that God would show them. Was Abraham's faith perfect, even

though he followed God this far? No, for when God promised Abraham that his children would inherit the land of Canaan, Abraham doubted God. Why? Because Abraham was old, and his wife Sarah was well past her childbearing years. Instead of fully trusting in God, Abraham complained, pointing out that he was childless and his only heir was Eliezer of Damascus. Would God give Eliezer the inheritance? (**Genesis 15:1-3**). God would not do so, telling Abraham that one who would come from his own body would be his heir (**Genesis 15:4**). After being told this by God, Genesis tells us that Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness (**Genesis 15:6**). No, Abraham wasn't counted righteous on the basis of faith alone as our Calvinist friends like to claim, but on the basis of a faith that obeyed. Abraham believed in God and trusted Him enough to come to Canaan though having never seen that land before, and then Abraham further trusted that God would provide him with a son in spite of his old age.

But even after all this, Abraham's and Sarah's faith wasn't perfect, for they got impatient with how slowly God was acting and so they tried to help God by having Abraham bear a son with Hagar, Sarah's handmaid, instead of Sarah. This son, Ishmael, would be from the body of Abraham, so Abraham and Sarah didn't give up their faith in God in that regard, but again, in trying to help God out, it shows us that Abraham and Sarah weren't perfect and that they had their faults. And these faults got them into trouble here, for as the child grew, Sarah became jealous of Hagar and the child she bore, and wanted to cast them out (something that would eventually happen). If only Abraham and Sarah hadn't become impatient, they could be spared all this, but even people of faith suffer from their mistakes, something we can certainly attest to. Did God reject Abraham and Sarah because of their impatience? No, but he did reprove them, in not allowing Abraham to immediately cast Hagar out, only allowing it to happen after the birth of Isaac: a constant reminder to them of the cost that comes from trying to help God accomplish his promises.

And so, when the fullness of time had come, God revealed to Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son whom they would name Isaac. How did they receive this message? Well, they both laughed and said how could someone who is ninety years old give birth to and nurse an infant (**Genesis 17:17, Genesis 18:10-15**)? In response, the Lord simply asked them: is anything too hard for the Lord? Of course, the answer was no. God could raise up heirs to Abraham from stones if he wanted to, but he could also give strength to an old woman not only to have the seed and strength to bear a child, but to nurse and raise that child too. Abraham and Sarah believed God's message to them there and continued on in faith. How do I know? Because God didn't promise to miraculously conceive this child like he did with Jesus. Isaac would have an earthly father and an earthly mother, meaning that Abraham and Sarah needed to be physically intimate with one another in order to have this child. All that God did was open Sarah's womb, enabling her to conceive this child. That part of Isaac's birth was miraculous, but the means of conception was not.

With Isaac now being born, Abraham could at least see that part of God's promise was fulfilled: he had an heir. And if you follow the genealogies found in Genesis, you would find that Abraham lived long enough to see his grandson Jacob be born. But Abraham never lived to see his descendants inherit Canaan. Both he and Sarah lived their entire lives considering themselves strangers and pilgrims on this earth (**Hebrews 11:13**). How did their faith persevere? Because for one, they had seen God work throughout their lives thus far, and were therefore fully confident that God would fulfil his promises to them concerning the land of Canaan. Not even God telling Abraham to offer Isaac deterred them, for Abraham knew that if Isaac was sacrificed to God, God could raise Isaac up from the dead in spite of us never reading of anybody being resurrected from the dead before that point in time (**Hebrews 11:17-19**).

But there was another reason that Abraham and Sarah's faith persevered: which was they

had their eyes set on a better inheritance: one in a heavenly country, where they could live with God forever. You see, sometimes we get so focused on the land promise to Abraham, or the great nation promise, or the seed promise, that we forget the benefits that came through those promises: which was that all the nations of the world would be blessed through the seed given to Abraham (**Genesis 12:3**). The seed wasn't Isaac, it was Christ (**Galatians 3:16**), and the blessing wasn't physical, it was spiritual. The forgiveness of sins comes only through Christ. The hope of eternal life in Heaven comes only through Christ. All spiritual blessings come only through Christ (**Ephesians 1:3**). Abraham understood that even if he gained all the land in the world, if he didn't have faith in God, he would die and leave it all behind, leaving him with nothing but hopelessness and despair to look forward to after death. However, if Abraham had faith in God, even if he never saw the promises of God fulfilled in his lifetime, he knew based on the evidence of God's faithfulness in the past, that God would fulfil them all: including the spiritual blessings of a home in Heaven with God forever. God though, works in His time, not man's: we simply need to be patient, and keep the faith.

In conclusion, the life of Abraham and his wife Sarah was a life of faith in God: a faith that led to obedience, but a faith that didn't make them perfect people. They needed the forgiveness of sins just like you and me. They needed to persevere through hardship, just like you and me. And they needed to keep their faith in God patiently to the end, just like you and me. Having faith in God and remaining faithful to God is not always easy, but it is always doable for we are surrounded by so great a cloud of faithful witnesses who have come before, like Abraham and Sarah. Knowing this, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, who is the author and finisher of our faith for the strength to carry us through.

** All verses are quoted from the New King James Version of the Bible **

Paul's View of the Local Church

SEAN CAVENDER (FONDLY REMEMBERED)

As the apostle Paul introduces many of his epistles, he takes the time to praise the congregation for their strengths. Some local congregations had more to be praised for than others did, but usually he could find some good to complement the local church to whom he was writing. The opening of the epistle to the Colossians is no different. Paul first states, "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," (Colossians 1:2). It is easy for us to look over these statements about the local churches that Paul was writing to because they are not addressed to us in the 21st century. However, we can learn several important lessons concerning the local church and how it is to be conducting itself.

First of all, Paul addresses his audience and plainly identifies them as "saints and faithful brethren." The saints and faithful brethren are the constituents of the local church! The saints of the church are not voted on sometime after they have passed from this life. They are not even people who had performed some great miracle. Saints are members of the Lord's church who have been forgiven of their sins, cleansed by the blood of Christ (Colossians 1:14; 2:11-13). A saint is a person who has been sanctified and set apart for the purpose of glorifying God in heaven (cf. Colossians 3:2, 3). Paul also identifies the saints as "faithful brethren." All of the blessings of joy and fellowship that are available to Christians within the context of the local church are dependent upon their faithfulness. Those who complain about a lack of fellowship, love, joy, care, and



2 via ulrichw / Pixabay.com

concern existing within the Lord's church may need to first consider whether they are being faithful members of the Lord's church. The blessings we desire will only be found when we are being faithful brethren.

Paul then goes on to identify several factors in the local church that Colosse needed to be praised for. These are all good characteristics that churches need to desire.

The Foundation of the Church

The foundation of every local church must be faith in the Lord and Savior who purchased the church with His own blood, "Since we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus..." (Colossians 1:4). Faith in Jesus as the Son of God must be acknowledged by those who would be members of the Lord's body. This was the great truth that Peter acknowledged, and Jesus promised to make it the foundation of His church (Matthew 16:16-18). Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the church (Ephesians 2:20).

As elementary as this may seem, we must make sure that we are beginning with the proper foundation. We cannot have an improper foundation and expect to build the church of Jesus Christ. We cannot follow after the teachings of men and expect to build the church of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:12-13). We cannot follow after Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Alexander Campbell, etc. Our faith must be in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

The Motivation of the Church

Paul then recognizes that the church in Colosse is filled with brotherly love. He wrote, "...and of the love which ye have to all the saints," (Colossians 1:4). The driving motivation of the Lord's church needs to be brotherly love! This is what the church in Corinth lacked (cf. 1 Corinthians 13). When there is no love for our brethren it will lead to division, cliques, embitterment, and strife (cf. Galatians 5:14, 15).

Love is not going to excuse or ignore wrongdoing. However, someone else's sin is not a reason for us to abandon love. Love must be present even when we preach the truth (Ephesians 4:15). Love is what ought to motivate a church to be like Christ (Ephesians 5:2). Love and compassion will unite the body of Christ (Colossians 3:12-15).

The Goal of the Church

The one, clear and obvious goal of every local church should be to go to heaven. Paul recognized the common desire and expectation of the church, "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven..." (Colossians 1:5). As Christians who are working and striving through this life, the one thing we all can help each other do is to be with the Savior and Father in heaven for all of eternity.

Far too many times we think of the hope of heaven as something that we may be able to obtain if we are only lucky. We think of it in terms of luck, rather than confidence. Hope is not luck or wishful thinking; hope is a confidence and an assurance that we can have!

Look at how Paul uses the term "hope" in other places, such as in Philippians 1:20. He spoke of the work of preaching the truth of the gospel as an "earnest expectation," "hope," and "boldness." His desire was to ultimately glorify Christ through preaching, or being faithful to the point of death.

Do you talk about hope in the same terms that Paul used? Do we speak of our "earnest expectation" to be with Christ for eternity? Do

we consider ourselves to have boldness in regard to where we will make our eternal home? This is what the word "hope" means. We don't need to think of what the word "hope" means. We don't need to think of hope as mere luck or wishful thinking; we need to think of it as something that is our expectation!

The Growth of the Church

Each local church needs to make its spiritual growth a point of emphasis. This is what Paul desired for the church at Colosse, "...and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding," (Colossians 1:9). The church at Colosse was in danger of being influenced by false teachers. Paul encouraged these brethren to remain rooted in Christ, built up in the faith, and established (Colossians 2:7, 8). He also warned of the false humility of false teachers (Colossians 2:18). Paul was concerned for the well-being of this church.

The way to battle and overcome false teachers is through knowledge of the truth and the will of God! The church must make spiritual growth a priority for its own well-being. Local churches are not to be influenced by false teachers, being carried away by every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). And if you want to see the spiritual immaturity of a local church, just look at how they live their lives. When we learn the truth and grow up in Christ, then we are to put off that old man of sin (Ephesians 4:21, 22). Yet, those who are spiritually immature will allow that old man of sin to linger around and have an influence on their lives. Spiritual growth must be an important part of the local church. Spiritual wisdom is essential in battling false teachers and in overcoming sin.

Conclusion

Paul's view of the local church ought to be what is implemented in each and every local church. The church at Colosse serves as a prime example for us to follow. A church that is built upon Christ, established in love, expecting to receive heaven as their eternal home, and that is filled with knowledge and spiritual wisdom is a church that we ought to be in. The

local church is sufficient in helping us live faithfully while offering us encouragement, love, and opportunities for growth.

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via Meditate On These Things | Sept 2014
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Love One Another BECOMING LIKE JESUS

BRIAN SULLIVAN | JORDAN, ONTARIO

In Romans 8:28-30, the apostle Paul by inspiration gave a concise treatment of God's Eternal Plan or Purpose for mankind. Within its context it is a clear demonstration of the principle expressed in verse 28: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose". Every part of His plan and purpose is intended to bring us closer to Him. In verse 29, Paul writes: "For whom He foreknew". That would be His choice to bless those who enter into Christ (1 Peter 2:4-5; 9-10; Ephesians 1:3; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-29). However, it is what we learn next that sets the stage for what we hope to develop in this article. "He also predestined (determined in advance, bvs) to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29b, NKJV). From eternity it was God's will, desire, and intention for those who follow His Son to enjoy the blessings in Him (Ephesians 1:3; 1 John 3:1-3), but to also be like Him.

Realizing that, the Christian seeks to be more like Christ day after day (Paul stated it clearly in Galatians 2:20, and Romans 6:7 shows where our death to our old life took place.) Before we get to our assigned text, let us share a few ways in which we are to be like Christ. 1. We are to be "holy" as He is "holy" (1 Peter 1:13-16). 2. We are to be "righteous" as He is "righteous" (1 John 3:7). 3. We are to be "pure" as He is "pure" (1 John 3:3). 4. We are to be "forgiving" as He is "forgiving" (Matthew 6:17-18). 5. We are "love" as He is "loving" (Ephesians 5:1-2; 5:25). You might think of other examples, and you can add them as you discover them.



3 via Priscilla du Preez | Unsplash.com

The Greatest Illustration of God's Love Is the Cross

Though many people can almost quote John 3:16, we are going to put it here in the words of Scripture: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (NKJV) There is no act of love that can surpass that on the part of the Father to save us, and on the part of the Son to lay down His life for us (John 10:17-18; 12:27). The apostle Paul gives us further insight on this manner of love when he writes to the church at Rome (see Romans 5:6-11). At verse 8, Paul writes: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us". At verse 10, he adds: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." That passage abounds with words that relate the love of God at the cross, and the willingness of Christ to die for us to our salvation ("justified by His blood", v. 9; "saved from wrath through Him", v. 9; "reconciled to God through the death of His Son", v. 10; "saved by His life", v. 10; "through whom we have now received the reconciliation").

Living the Example of the Cross (1 John 3:16-18)

John, the inspired penman makes his appeal to us in 1 John 3:16a. He writes: "By this you know love, because He laid down His life for us." Jesus in the good shepherd passage (John 10) declared: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (v. 11). At verse 15, He states again, "and I lay down my life for the sheep". In verse 18, Jesus makes it clear "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself, I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father." Without doubt we "know love" because of what Jesus did at the cross. It is ours to share in, ours to rejoice in, and ours to cherish. What an impressive example of love, sacrificial love that did not hold back in His quest to bring us back to God (Romans 5:6-11; Ephesians 5:25-27). It impresses on us the significance of properly remembering Him in partaking of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-29; Acts 20:7).

The sobering reality comes into the next statement in 1 John 3:16: "And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (NKJV) We know what He did for us, but the question is are we going to be as willing to lay down our lives for the brethren? Many of us in the Western World have not yet known the full extent of persecution, or facing death over our faith and trust in God, as some have in other parts of the world. Let us not boldly step forth with claims of what we will do or how we will handle it (remember Peter's in Matthew 26:31-35, and Jesus spoke of his soon to be experienced failure in this regard). No, God is not desiring a boastful commitment when not under fire, but a steadfast determination, a hope through the atonement of Christ that even if death is my end, hope is still my reality and the promises of God will stand (see Hebrews 12:1-4)

Dealing with brethren...meeting their needs

In the lesson on the distribution of the "talents" (money units, bvs) according to each man's ability (Matthew 25:14-15) (personal skill,

business sense, or attained experience) Jesus speaks of a man who was given five talents, another two, and a final one (a single talent). When he comes back for them to give account of what they had done, we find that the first two (the five and two talent) individuals met with his approval. What was said of the first was also stated of the second. Here is the exact wording of Matthew 25:21: "21 His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord' (NKJV). We mention that in order to draw that evaluation from the lesson in which Jesus commends each of them for their service with what was entrusted to their care, and further states: "you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things". Then, they receive what the old-time gospel preacher's used to call 'The welcome plaudit' (commendation followed by an invite into the presence of the Lord). There is a great lesson that fits with our current context in 1 John 3. Though the writer John has already stated that like Christ "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (v. 16), he gives us what might be called a test of our love on a lesser scale. If we are willing to rise and to meet that need, perhaps another day a greater test of our love will come and not appear so daunting. If we have a willing heart, the rest will follow (think of those of Macedonia in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5). At 1 John 3:17, we find: "But whoever has this world's goods, and see his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (NKJV). If I as a Christian close my heart to my brother's needs and do not help him, how can I claim to love God on one hand, and to love my brother on the other? Both James 1:27 and Galatians 6:10 are individual responsibilities that provide me with an opportunity to share God's blessings with others, but also quietly offer me a way to demonstrate that "love" is not just idle words, but deeds and actions. If Jesus had simply said, 'I am prepared to die for you, and yet never did... we would be without a Savior and without hope.' Helping someone is not near as significant as dying for them, or laying down your life for them, but it may prepare you for greater service one day, and it may be the difference between their own survival and their

ability to help others one day.

God desires us to love “in deed and in truth”. It is not our boast that puts help in front of others or demonstrates courage, it is quietly, faithfully carrying out the will of God in your life. When you see a need you do what you can to assist, to encourage, to help. Anyone can declare what they are willing to do, but the Christian does what they are able to without fanfare, without ceremony, without public knowledge (see Matthew 6:1-4), and God will reward them one day for their doing (1 Timothy 5:25).

Remember those word of James 2:18: “But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have

works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (NKJV). Not only is faith demonstrated by what we do (works) but so also is our “love”. We close this with one simple thought from Ephesians 5:1-2: “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” (NKJV). May the love of God and the willing sacrifice of Christ allow us to love beyond anything we ever dreamed was possible, whether it be in those small tasks to help our brethren or the ultimate giving of our very selves for God’s cause and glory.

Being Salt and Light in the World

JOHN MADDOCKS | TORONTO, ONTARIO

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:13-16)



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Context is always crucial in our understanding of most everything in life. In dealing with disputes, in understanding cultural nuances, in raising our children, in living with a spouse according to understanding. Context plays such a huge part in dealing with these, and a myriad of other situations that demand our attention, every day. Context is most certainly, and vitally, needed in our proper understanding of scripture. The context of our text is found in the previous 13 verses. Jesus sees a multitude of people. Taking advantage of this opportunity He ascends a mountain, takes a seat with His disciples, and begins to speak.

The context reveals that the words Jesus spoke in vs. 13-16 were to this large audience. Jesus begins with beatitudes (vs. 3-12). These are blessings that will be hallmarks of those who will be a part of His coming kingdom. In order to properly understand their calling to be salt and light in the world, they needed to remember what Jesus had just said. His kingdom disciples were called to be poor in spirit, to mourn, to be meek, and to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Also, they were to be merciful and pure in heart, and they were to be peacemakers. To be a part of His kingdom would also include persecution. They would be reviled (criticized in an abusive or angrily

insulting manner) and many evil things would be spoken against them that were not true. If Jesus had stopped there they might have been confused at His teaching, but, of course, He doesn't stop. He continues: “for great is your reward in heaven,” and he reminds this Jewish audience that suffering for God's sake was certainly nothing new. Their history was full of accounts of prophets who were similarly mistreated.

Now, come forward in time several millennia, to this present point in history. We today, as followers of Christ, understand that the words that Jesus spoke to this great audience were in preparation for their being a part of the coming kingdom. Well, we are now a part of that kingdom. That kingdom came! These words that were shared with an audience in a very different place and time were intended to be heard and understood, and to be true of us today. We are called to be the salt and the light of this world in which we live. We should desire to be an influence for health and healing in this world that is so grossly disfigured and fractured by sin, and the depravity that resulted from it. There's no need to wonder how this is to be accomplished, Jesus has revealed this to us. We've got to put the beatitudes into practice.

To be salt and light we have to be poor in spirit, or humble (cf. Philippians 2:5-8). The world needs to see us living like Jesus. This life isn't about me, it's about serving Christ and my fellow human beings. Jesus is God, but he humbled Himself and came and dwelt among us. He left us the ultimate example of one who is truly poor in spirit. What does the world see when they observe me and my actions?

To be salt and light we have to be those who mourn. Everyone mourns, we all experience loss. But I don't believe this is the mourning that Jesus is talking about. Blessed are those that mourn over the sins they have committed. In Acts 2:37, having heard Peter's defence that Jesus was indeed the Christ, many were cut to their hearts and cried out, what shall we do? Though there would certainly be fear in their hearts as they've come to understand that they were complicit in the murder of God's son, I think we have a real example here of the mourning that Jesus is referring to in the beatitude. They are devout Jews, who, all their lives have been looking for and praying for the Messiah to come. He came and they killed Him! Peter's words in verse 38 are a comfort to them. They are called to repent (what God has always called sinners to do) and to be baptized so that their sins – including this grievous one of murder – could be wiped away. Wow! What a merciful and gracious God we serve. You want to be salt and light in the world? Be humble and let the world see that when you make a mistake you admit it, repent of it and make it right. Let them see your desire to live a good and honourable life. What does the world see when they observe how you respond to your sins?

To be salt and light we are to be meek, and this carries with it the idea of being patient, gentle, submissive, and quiet. The world often believes that might makes right, that the loudest voice is the one that will be heard. The world wants instant gratification and doesn't want to bow down to anybody. But Jesus said that it's the meek who are blessed. Jesus could have called for 10,000 angels to put an end to his suffering on the cross. He certainly had the strength at His command to force obedience. By right of who He truly was, he could have

made kingly demands, which He surely deserved as "God with us". By human reasoning, Jesus should have done so many things differently than He did. "But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:7-8). What does the world see when they observe my character? (Cf. Hebrews 12:1-3).

To be salt and light we are to hunger and thirst for righteousness. What are you watching on TV? What are you reading? What places are you visiting from day to day? What is the nature of the conversations you have with others? What is it that you hunger and thirst for? Brethren, what example are we setting in the various relationships that we have in life, by our appetites? Paul in Philippians 4:8, wrote, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things." Be honest, and understand that the world observes these things.

To be salt and light we are to be merciful. Consider a couple of verses. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). "Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). The context in this passage is our need to be praying for all, including those who rule over us. God is a merciful God. Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh because he knew this was true. God was merciful; Jonah was not. God's desire has always been the best for all. That all would repent and come to Him. What about you? How do you feel about those who've done wicked things? How much mercy, or compassion, do you show those with whom you disagree? Have you ever felt a sense of delight when an evil person dies? To Israel God said through the prophet Ezekiel, "'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in

the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?" Again, these words were for Israel, but God felt the same way about Nineveh, didn't He? What do people observe in how you react to the evils of mankind? How about in the way you treat and speak of those in authority?

To be salt and light we are called to be pure in heart. Again, my mind goes to Philippians 4:8. What are we letting in? The internet, which can be used for and is a source of so much good, is an easy access to the worst sorts of sin and depravity. What are we letting in? "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." What would Jesus let in? He is our great example. We are encouraged in scripture, again and again, to guard our hearts and minds. Am I doing that? Are you?

To be salt and light we are called to be peacemakers. In the early verses of Ephesians 4 Paul petitioned the brethren "to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (v3). Brethren, we are to strive for unity. We are to go to great lengths and make every effort to be at peace among ourselves. Paul, in his letter to the Romans reminded the brethren that they needed to be mindful of each other's opinions and that they were not to force their opinions on others. Similarly, here to the Ephesians, Paul says to be lowly and gentle with one

another. They were to be longsuffering and to bear with one another in love. This is the heart of a peacemaker. Is this your heart?

Finally, Jesus taught that persecution, in one form or another, will come. Paul wrote that, "and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." It is the lot of Christ's followers that they will be reviled, and evil lies will be said of them. Jesus said to his disciples that the world hated him and the world would hate them. How do we respond? Do we patiently bear it, as our Lord did, or do we lash out against it? The world is watching. They must wonder why in the world Christians endure such hostility against them, but how can they not be impressed as we patiently bear the same reproaches that our Lord endured?

Ours is not an easy calling. Being salt and light in a world that doesn't like our taste and that enjoys the darkness makes it all that much harder. How are you doing? Never be too proud to seek help if you're struggling. God has given us a spiritual family, in part, for that very purpose: to stir one another up to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). Let us encourage one another to be salt and light in a world that so desperately needs both these things! And brethren, keep on praying and asking for God to give you wisdom and strength to be what you should be in this world.

Amillennialism

SEAN CAVENDER (FONDLY REMEMBERED)

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Amillennialism recognizes the use of figures and symbols in the book of Revelation and how God, through Jesus Christ, has established His kingdom, defeated Satan, and gives hope to faithful saints.

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Introduction

People are often captivated by various teachings about the end of time, the return of Christ, and the kingdom of God. Many people expect that God still needs to complete His promises regarding the land that He would give to Israel, as well as the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. Millennial doctrines often assert that the kingdom of God will be established in Jerusalem. They also interpret the 1,000 years of Revelation 20 in a literal way, expecting Jesus will reign on the throne of David in Jerusalem for a literal 1,000 years.

Famous authors like Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, and Jerry B. Jenkins have sensationalized the “end times.” The popularity these authors have may give the appearance that amillennialism is a fringe theory. However, amillennialism has been the dominant way to understand Revelation 20 and other passages throughout much of “church history,” with Origen, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin all taking an amillennial interpretation of the book of Revelation (Elwell and Yarborough, 361).

Defining Amillennialism

Both pre- and post-millennial theories argue for an earthly kingdom of God. The amillennial view, and the teaching of Scripture, denies an earthly kingdom. Instead, amillennialism emphasizes the nature of the millennial kingdom. Baker’s Encyclopedia defines amillennialism as: “The amillennial (no



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millennium, at least of a visible, earthly nature) interpretation stresses the symbolism of Revelation and holds that now, during the present age, Satan is bound and the church is experiencing the millennium” (Elwell and Beitzel, 1460). Koester offers this brief comment: “Amillennialism describes theological systems that do not include an explicit thousand year period...” (Koester, 180). So, we see that an amillennial interpretation of the book of Revelation opposes millennial concepts of an earthly and nationalistic Messianic kingdom that will exist for a literal 1,000 years.

Various interpretations about the 1,000-year reign are derived from the text of Revelation 20:1-6. Amillennialism denies assertions of a literal 1,000-year reign of Jesus on the earth because Jesus affirmed that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). Christ did not teach that His kingdom would be established in Jerusalem after His second coming, where He would reign for 1,000 years on the earth. Jesus said that His kingdom would exist, i.e., “come with power” within the lifetime of His generation (Mark 9:1). In the preaching of the apostles, they make it clear that Jesus was reigning as king over His kingdom (Acts 2:33, 36; 8:12, 35). They announced that Jesus is seated in heaven at the right hand of God. He is king

over His kingdom, and He established His kingdom after His earthly ministry (cf. Matthew 16:18). The kingdom of God is not something that will be established on earth at the second coming of Christ because it has already been established. All who are saved by the blood of Christ are citizens of His kingdom (Colossians 1:13).

Figurative Language in Revelation

One of the first keys to an amillennial interpretation is first understanding the literary context in Revelation. The book of Revelation is from the apocalyptic literary genre. Apocalyptic literature frequently used various signs, symbols, and numbers that represent real circumstances experienced by the original audience. The figurative imagery and symbols used are not to be interpreted as if they would literally come to pass. Apocalyptic writing also gives a glimpse into things that would shortly come to pass (Revelation 1:3). While apocalyptic books, like Revelation, can and do at times provide insight into the future, final judgment, that is only secondary to its purposes. Its primary function was to explain the present reality to whom the message was initially given.

Explaining Revelation Chapter 20

Revelation 20 is used by those who argue for a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on the earth. However, we want to examine Revelation 20 in light of what the Bible teaches. We must remember that we must allow clear and straightforward passages of Scripture to explain more difficult and figurative passages of Scripture.

Satan Bound (Revelation 20:1-3)

Revelation 20 opens with the devil cast into the bottomless pit, or the abyss, and bound for 1,000 years. Readers must identify the abundant use of figures in the chapter. Satan is described as a “dragon,” “the serpent of old,” and “the devil” (Revelation 20:2). This is a reminder of the terrible things that Satan did in waging war against Christ and the church through the violent persecutions against Christians (Revelation 6:9-11). Revelation 20

reminded the suffering saints that the devil has been judged and defeated by Jesus.

Christ came to earth to bind the devil and to destroy sin and death (Mark 3:27; 1 John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14). Since the devil has been defeated, the kingdom of God has come and has been established (Matthew 12:28). Satan’s defeat is associated with the inauguration of the kingdom of God. Revelation 20 describes God’s judgment and the binding of Satan. This has been accomplished through the work of Jesus.

Saints Reign with Christ (Rev. 20:4-6)

Revelation 20 not only considers Satan’s defeat but also describes the victory given to faithful Christians! Brother Dan King makes the point that Revelation 20 does not depict the so-called “1,000-year reign of Christ”; the chapter actually describes the reign of the martyred saints with Christ for 1,000 years (King, 319).

Jesus is presently reigning as King and has been since He ascended to be at the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33-36; Ephesians 1:20-23; Revelation 3:7, 21). Revelation 20 offers vindication and hope to those who have been loyal and devoted servants to King Jesus, even at the cost of their lives. The martyred saints have hope because they have taken part in the “first resurrection,” having been raised in newness of life (John 5:25-27; Romans 6:3-6). This “first resurrection” is associated with salvation; it does not refer to the bodily resurrection at the end of the age. Those who have taken part in the “first resurrection” have nothing to fear in eternity since “the second death has no power” over them (Revelation 20:6).

The 1,000 Years: Literal or Figurative? (Rev. 20:1-6)

Numbers in the book of Revelation are highly symbolic. Large numbers appear in Revelation to describe something vast and innumerable (Revelation 5:11; 7:4, 9). The number 1,000 is used throughout Scripture to be inclusive and exhaustive of particular items. In Psalm 50:10, the parallel statements, “every beast of the field” and the “cattle on a thousand hills,” emphasize that every creature belongs to God.

The use of 1,000 is not meant to limit the number of cattle that belongs to God to only those on a thousand hills. Rather, it is used in a fuller sense to describe all creatures that belong to God. Also, God assured Israel that He would bless them to the thousandth generation if they would be faithful to His covenant (Deut. 7:9). The number 1,000 depicts the defeat of Satan. By contrast, the 1,000 years is a symbol to faithful saints, assured of total victory for being loyal to Christ.

Conclusion

Amillennialism looks to the Scriptures to see how God has been faithful to His covenants and has established the kingdom of promise by setting His Son, Jesus Christ, upon the throne of David to rule over the everlasting kingdom. Praise to God that the kingdom has been inaugurated, the New Covenant established, and that King Jesus offers forgiveness of sins and citizenship in His kingdom (Colossians 1:13).

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OCTOBER 2023 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE	My apology. Sean and I did not have writers and topics selected for the October 2023 issue of GROW yet. We had some brainstorming notes, but as yet, did not have any concrete plans. In the near future, I will be in touch with writers and will aim to have the October issue out in early October 2023.
CHURCH ARTICLE	No writer selected yet.
WORSHIP ARTICLE	No writer selected yet.
APPLICATION ARTICLE	No writer selected yet.
EVANGELISM ARTICLES	No writer selected yet.
BEYOND BASICS ARTICLE	No writer selected yet.



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