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William J. Stewart

– in memory of Sean Cavender –

GROW



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In This Issue...

3 | EXPOSITORY ARTICLE | Marshall McDaniel
Faith Waits On God

6 | CHURCH ARTICLE | Wayne Goff
Jesus Christ,
Our Great High Priest

8 | WORSHIP ARTICLE | T. Sean Sullivan
1 Corinthians 14
and Edification

10 | APPLICATION ARTICLE | Sean Cavender
How To Answer
A False Doctrine

12 | EVANGELISM ARTICLE | Joshua Welch
Evangelism Lessons
from the Seventy

15 | BEYOND THE BASICS | Jeremy Diestelkamp
Israel's Role In
The Divine Plan

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:

Greetings friends,

A year ago today my good friend, fellow preacher, and co-founder / co-editor & co-author of GROW magazine perished in a car accident (07.20.2023). I miss Sean immensely. Though a year has passed, there are still times when I think, "I need to chat with Sean about _____." But, of course, I cannot. My heart continues to hurt for Kristin and their boys. But I take solace and rejoice in the hope of the faithful – in our Lord's eternal kingdom, for all the faithful of the Lord will be reunited and share eternity together with our great God.



I am thankful for your interest in GROW magazine. GROW would not exist without Sean – it was his desire to start an online magazine focused on encouraging fellow Christians to GROW in the faith. I am delighted to continue in his honour and with the confidence that GROW magazine is beneficial to those who are subscribed. Thank you to the authors in this issue. I appreciate your diligent study and work in developing articles which will serve to encourage the initial recipients, but which will also be available, Lord willing, for years to come through the web site.

If you find the material herein to be helpful and profitable, feel free to share it with others. Forward this document, pass along the notification email, share a link to GROWmagazine.site on social media, or print a copy to hand to someone.

Now, let's GROW together!

Cordially,
William J. Stewart

Faith Waits On God

THE HALL OF FAITH

MARSHALL MCDANIEL | ATHENS, ALABAMA

Do we trust God, even when He asks us to wait? Scripture repeatedly issues the command to wait on the Lord and often associates it with divine blessing. The Bible affirms that believers who wait on God will experience His goodness, joy, salvation, and strength (Lamentations 3:15; Psalm 27:13-14; Isaiah 25:9; 40:31). Hebrews 11 mentions several notable people – Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, and the Israelites – who waited for God and received His gracious gifts. In this study, we will consider the perseverance of Moses, Joshua, and Israel. Their examples show us that waiting on the Lord always yields the best results.

Untouched by the Destroyer

The Israelites sojourned in Egypt for centuries, and even after the birth of their deliverer Moses, they still had to wait eighty years before God released them from Egyptian oppression. Following a forty-year “exile” in Midian, Moses returned to Egypt and ordered Pharaoh to release God’s people. Because Pharaoh refused to acquiesce, God punished him, the Egyptians, and their so-called gods with terrible plagues. The writer of Hebrews focuses on the last of these plagues, the death of the firstborn: “By faith he [Moses] kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them [the Israelites]” (Hebrews 11:28 NASB). The night of the first Passover, God judged Egypt and so delivered Israel from slavery (Exodus 11–12). Passover therefore became an annual, memorial feast and “commemorated the turning-point in Israel’s existence” (David McClister).

Passover revealed the faith of Moses and Israel. They believed the warning and the promise of God, specifically that judgment was



1 via Ruth Lindsay | Pixabay.com

coming on the disobedient Egyptians but that salvation from the destroyer was available to the obedient Israelites who smeared the prescribed blood on the doorposts of their houses. They recognized the necessity of submission, even before God gave them the written law, and obeyed without excuse or doubt. They did not question God’s word by raising objections like, “Surely God will not kill the children,” or “We didn’t have to do anything like this for the other plagues,” or “Why in the world would God ask us to put animal blood on our doors?” Moses and Israel understood that God had reasons for doing what he was doing and that their faithfulness to God would stay the hand of the destroyer.

Several months had lapsed from the first plague and the last plague. During that time, Moses and Israel had to wait (and suffer)! Their loyalty to God led them to victory. God protected his people even as he punished the Egyptians. The Israelites would probably have preferred immediate deliverance, but God was showing them (and everyone else) that they were his special people and that he would fight for them. The ultimate proof of this was Passover. The continued observance of this feast reminded Israel of its privileged relationship with God and previewed the salvation that we enjoy in Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Fear Not, Stand Still, and See the Salvation of the Lord

Following Passover, the exodus began. The Egyptians drove out the Israelites, and God took his people to the shores of the Red Sea (Exodus 13:17–14:9). Meanwhile, however, Pharaoh hardened his heart (again) and pursued Israel. When the Israelites saw the Egyptians, they initially acted in unbelief (14:10–12). “[They] were anything but heroes here. They panic[ked], turning to Moses with harsh complaints” (Daniel R. Lockwood).

Moses, on the other hand, responded in faith, commanding Israel to wait on the Lord: “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent” (14:13–14; see vv. 15–18). The angel of God barricaded the camp of Israel so that the Egyptians could not overtake them (vv. 19–20). Moses then stretched his hand over the sea, and God caused a strong wind to blow overnight, parting the water and allowing the Israelites to walk through the sea on dry ground (vv. 21–25). And when their foes tried to follow, God released the waters and drowned the Egyptians (vv. 26–31).

The Israelites were slow to believe. They needed the reassurance of Moses. They had to feel the divinely wrought wind and see the watery corridor. But they learned trust—at least for a time! Their faith was “driven by necessity and confirmed by physical evidence, but it [was] ... faith just the same” (Daniel R. Lockwood). The writer of Hebrews affirms the saving faith of Israel: “By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned” (Hebrews 11:29). Israel needed to stand still and be quiet. When they did, God rescued them from disaster.

The Egyptians, on the other hand, persisted in unbelief. They put their confidence in Pharaoh to devastating results. “It was their belief in God and in his word that saved the Israelites,

and it was the unbelief and persistent disobedience of the Egyptians that brought on their ruin” (Robert Milligan). Both the Israelites and the Egyptians had to wait on God, but only the former received the reward of salvation because of their faith.

We too must learn to wait on the Lord—putting aside our fears, standing still, keeping quiet, and watching God work. When we do, he does the “impossible” in, for, and through us. In this sense, the exodus from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea foreshadows the Christian experience (1 Corinthians 10:1–4). The same God who saved Israel from Egypt can and will rescue us from sin and peril—if we wait on him!

A Glaring Omission

Following his description of the crossing of the Red Sea, the author of Hebrews skips to the conquest of Jericho (Hebrews 11:29–30). Why omit forty years of Israelite history? He may do so because the journey through the desert is a period of national infidelity. Though God providentially cared for his people as they traveled from Egypt to Sinai and on to the border of Canaan, the Israelites doubted and refused to enter the promised land (Numbers 1:1–14:19). God therefore forced them to wander in the wilderness south of Canaan for forty years, until the faithless generation died (14:20–38).

The New Testament rarely mentions the wilderness wandering, but each time it does, it reminds us that unbelief results in tragedy and heartbreak. Jude warns “that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe” (Jude 5 ESV). Paul instructs Christians to learn from the failures of the wicked Israelites (1 Corinthians 10:5–11). The writer of Hebrews comes to a similar conclusion: “Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ... Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience” (Hebrews 4:1, 11 NIV; see 3:7–19; 4:2–10). These warnings urge us to trust the Lord, wait for his salvation,

and look expectantly to the true, promised rest.

The Walls Came Tumbling Down

Hebrews 11 next moves to the destruction of Jericho (Hebrews 11:30). Following the conquest of the land east of the Jordan River, Joshua replaced Moses as the commander of Israel, the people renewed their covenant with God, and God promised to fight their battles for them, if they would put their confidence in him (Joshua 1–5). Jericho was the first city of the campaign.

God gave the Israelites a strange battle plan. He told them to march around the city for seven days (6:1–11). David McClister draws attention to the divine intention behind this unorthodox strategy: “There was no logical connection between the method and results, and God used this method because it required that his people act in faith in his orders.” God wanted Israel to trust him. Thankfully, Joshua did not question the Lord, and the army did not object. They obeyed, and the walls collapsed (vv. 12–27). Faith secured victory: “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days” (Hebrews 11:30). Israel had to wait on God, but by trusting him, they conquered Jericho.

We may likewise face seemingly unwinnable battles. The divine path to victory may seem to be illogical and ineffective (e.g., “God wants me to turn the other cheek?!” “Forgive him after what he did?!” “Pray?!”). God knows what he is doing. He never disappoints those who put their faith in him (Isaiah 28:16; Romans 10:11). He breaks down satanic barriers, makes us more than conquerors, and bestows on us an eternal inheritance in the true land of promise. “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ... But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:31, 37). We need only to wait on the Lord.

Conclusion

Moses, Joshua, and Israel waited on God. His timing and methods often did not make sense, but they always yielded the best results. We too must learn to trust the Lord, even if it means we must wait. F. B. Meyer offers the following insightful comment: “If God told [us] on the front end how long [we] would wait to find the fulfillment of [our] desire or pleasure or dream, [we would] lose heart. ... But He doesn’t. He just says, ‘Wait. I keep My word. I’m in no hurry. In the process of time, I’m developing you to be ready for the promise.’” Faith waits on God.

Our Great High Priest

HOW CHRIST RELATES TO THE CHURCH

WAYNE GOFF | FRANKLIN, NORTH CAROLINA

The book of Hebrews presents Jesus Christ as our Great High Priest.

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. (Hebrews 3:1-2)

In order for Jesus to be High Priest from the tribe of Judah, there had to be a change in the law. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is that last will and testament which establishes Him as the High Priest over the church today. He is both King and Priest!

As Mediator, Jesus Christ, the High Priest, represents man to God. He speaks on our behalf when we go to the Father in prayer asking for the forgiveness of our sins, for help in strengthening us, and for other blessings. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (4:16). Without the blood of Jesus Christ to take away our sins (Ephesians 1:7), we would have no avenue of forgiveness and no right to "**come boldly**" to the Father. We would be forever lost in sin. But Jesus offered Himself one time **for all time** to take away sin, Hebrews 9:11-12. Imagine what our lives would be like if we had no recourse for sin. Imagine being lost forever, as Paul said, "having no hope and without God in the world," Ephesians 2:12. Yet, that is what every unbeliever faces — a life without God, and without any valid hope of going to heaven!

We also know that Jesus Christ is the only One capable of offering Himself as our sacrifice for sins!



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But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; ... But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption, (9:7, 11-12).

He is "the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world," John 1:29.

Furthermore, Jesus Christ leads us to heaven as our great "Forerunner," Hebrews 6:20. That is, He shows us the way by coming down to earth, living life as a man, dying on the cross, and then being resurrected never to die again — leading the eternal path toward heaven — and we simply follow in His footsteps! He is the "firstfruits" (1 Corinthians 15:20) of all who will die in hope of eternal life, and to be resurrected unto that eternal life just as Jesus Christ has done. His example and path-blazing shows us the way and gives us confidence to do the

same thing. We “hold fast our confession” (4:14) because we have faith and hope.

Jesus aids us in coming to God because He has lived the earthly life we all live now. He understands everything we go through and intercedes on our behalf.

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (4:15).

He **ever lives** for us, not to condemn us, but to save us when we are unable to save ourselves.

Unlike the earthly priests of the Jewish system, Jesus was called by God to be High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,” 5:10. What Melchizedek was in type, Jesus Christ became in reality! Jesus is greater than Abraham (7:1-2, 4-10), without parents (7:3), and hence eternally existent as God, and thus our eternal High Priest, 7:3! We never have to worry about losing Him. He will ever and always be in heaven. We may always access Him through prayer. There was never a high priest like this before, and there will never be another one in the future! Jesus is truly the way, the truth, and the life in coming to the heavenly Father!

And having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled

from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. (10:21-23).

Notice what the Hebrew writer encourages to do: (1) draw near with a true heart fully assured; (2) have a clean conscience because Christ’s blood has cleansed it; (3) hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, because there is no need to doubt, worry, or fear! This pretty much describes the life of the Christian, a life lived with faith, hope, confidence and trust. A day never goes by that we don’t need the help of our great High Priest. There is never a day we live that Jesus does not see, hear and care about. He ever lives, and He ever sees, and He ever helps. How wonderful a great High Priest is He!?

Finally, Jesus is “Minister of the **sanctuary** and of the **true tabernacle** which the Lord erected” (8:1-3), the church. This is the place where you and I gather to provide a spiritual habitation of God, Ephesians 2:21-22. We blend our hearts together in true worship. We share the same mutual love and admiration for Jesus Christ. We humbly worship in song, prayer, the Word, giving, and commemorating His life, death and resurrection until He comes again. Dear readers, never grow weary or discouraged because you can ever look to Jesus as the Author and Finisher of our faith. He will not fail us. Let us not fail Him!

1 Corinthians 14 and Edification

T. SEAN SULLIVAN | PARAGOULD, ARKANSAS

Introduction

Being built up in the knowledge of God's will was different way back when Paul penned the first epistle to the Corinthians. In the early church, before the completion of God's inspired revelation, the hearts of the brethren were built up by the information given through gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:1-40).

The first verse of 1 Corinthians 14 says, "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy". Many want to define the ability to "prophesy" as foretelling the future, but by true definition it is proclaiming God's word. So, according to chapter 14, the ability to prophesy was the best gift—this was the ability to edify the brethren by the speaking of God's word. The theme of chapter 14 is often seen as "desiring spiritual gifts", however, let me offer you an alternative theme for this context, "Desire to edify". Let's consider these thoughts to better understand the need and the necessities of edification.

The Want of Edification

Faithful daily courage requires edification (1 Thessalonians 5:4-11). The last few decades have witnessed less attendance at scheduled assemblies (Hebrews 10:24-25), and far less Bible reading and studying in our homes (Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 2:15). It is quite obvious that too many Christians believe they are strong and sure when they are weak and faltering (Revelation 2:4-5). The increasing distance between the average Christian and God leaves us vulnerable and exposed to the temptations of worldly ways (1 John 2:15-17). As with all that this world boasts, we are left in a place of "want". What we are needing is a refreshing and renewing of our faithful courage (James 4:8).

This world has always been a perilous place for the faithful to God; the philosophies of men



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and the resistance of the faithless is difficult to avoid. Consider Psalm 1:1-6, written nearly 3000 years ago and warns of the danger of this world's advice, "Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful..." (Psalm 1:1). With what seems like an ever-rising tide of difficulty today, the Christian's want for edification is also on the rise. We must gain a proper understanding of God's word—to have the strength to stay the course (Ephesians 6:10-18). We must want the strength of endurance so we can keep going no matter what (1 Peter 1:6-9). We must want the strength to do all that is necessary to be welcomed home (Matthew 25:21, 23).

Our role in this is to seek and supply the necessary edification, so we might stay faithful all the way through.

The Words of Edification

The Apostle Paul instructed the brethren in Corinth to desire the ability to communicate God's word, for the edification of all (1 Corinthians 14:1). More than any other gift, the sharing of God's word is necessary—spiritual well-being is more important than physical well-being. Today, when we no longer have any gifts of the Holy Spirit, we still have the word of

God to build up one another. The knowledge of God's will, clearly explained, is a requirement of edification—with words, only those that are understood lead to edification (1 Corinthians 14:9-15).

There is one source provided by God to supply the words necessary for edification (James 1:17-22). The establishment of faith is from the word (Romans 10:17). The understanding of the gospel plan is from the word (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:44-47; Acts 2:38-42). Through the proper use of the word, we are instructed (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We can be "approved of God" (2 Timothy 2:15). We have all the directions for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). We secure the knowledge of eternal life (1 John 5:13).

It is the word of God that must be shared clearly and understandably, for souls to be edified (2 Timothy 4:1-2a, "Preach the word!").

The Willingness of Edification

The goal of preaching and teaching the word of God should always be to provide a proper understanding of God's will. Whichever part of preaching we must put to work—convincing, rebuking, or exhorting (2 Timothy 4:2b)—we must seek to produce understanding among those who hear us (1 Timothy 4:16).

Some things are required of a preacher or teacher who would edify their brethren.

Humility: It is not about impressive degrees,

demonstrations of high intelligence, or the speaker at all, it is about God's word—to God be the glory (John 12:21 "Sir, we wish to see Jesus"). It is the word of God that must be shared clearly and understandably. Having a proper scriptural lesson planned and sharing it with meaning and purpose (Romans 1:16)—do not wander as if unprepared, preach the word (1 Corinthians 15:1-11). Love: For God, His word, and the souls of man (2 Corinthians 12:15).

All Christians require edification to maintain their diligent walk through this life (Hebrews 10:35-39). We need teachers who are willing to properly edify us with every lesson, study, and sermon presented—so that we might be saved (1 Timothy 4:13, 15-16).

Conclusion

In the past, before the word of God was complete and revealed, there were gifts of the Holy Spirit that enabled instruction in and proof of the will of God (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). Paul exhorted saying, "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy". The ability to "speak God's word" was the best gift—with it the brethren would be edified.

When we gather for worship, we need proper edification—from those who are willing to edify our faith. Humble, clear, and loving teachers, who want what is best for us. ~tss

How To Answer A False Doctrine

SEAN CAVENDER | IN MEMORIAM

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– via Meditate On These Things, May 2014
(from Sean’s days in Bradley, Arkansas)

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Quite possibly one of the most difficult things you will ever have to deal with is your approach to false teaching. There are many factors that one must give thought towards in this important discussion. False teachers have been a plague to the Lord’s church since the days of the apostles. Paul identified false brethren who had snuck into the churches of Galatia (Galatians 2:4). Peter warned of how false brethren would distort the teachings of Scripture to suite their own purposes (2 Peter 3:16). John warned of many deceivers that were in the world, and identified their deception as anti-Christ doctrine (2 John 1:7). Jude dealt very plainly with false teachers, identifying their false teachings, and warned of how God deals with such false teachers (Jude 1:4).

The Intent of False Doctrine

Knowledge of false teaching is necessary because we must be prepared to answer false doctrines so that others will not be swept away by these deceivers. It is important to know how to answer false doctrines. It should come as no surprise that there will be those who are maliciously striving to lead people away from the truths contained in God’s word. The object of false doctrine is not to benefit you. False teachers proclaim their doctrine in order to gain followers, gain popularity, and to cause harm to the Lord’s body. Paul warned of how he would not give a platform for these false teachers to proclaim their deceptions because of their intent to lead people astray (2 Corinthians 11:12-15; Galatians 2:5). We must be extremely cautious towards false doctrines and those who espouse such things.

Jude exhorted brethren to “earnestly contend



4 via Sammy Williams | Unsplash.com

for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). We need to be ready to embattle those who would deliver some false teaching to the churches. There seems to be a growing number of people who do not want to hear sermons on false teachings. Some might object because they feel it is mean-spirited to identify such false teachers and their doctrines, but how else might we warn brethren to remain faithful and be guarded against such falsehoods? If we do not contend, or fight, for the truthfulness of the gospel then we are laying the perfect groundwork for false teachers to come in as the guardians of truth and deceive us. It is for this reason that Paul encouraged Titus to rebuke false teachers sharply (Titus 1:13). We must not be mean, but we must not give them an inch. False teachers will be argumentative, and strong in their teaching. We must be equally strong with our presentation of truth.

How NOT To Answer A False Doctrine

When we are answering a false doctrine, and false teachers, there are some things that we must not do.

1. Don’t get personal. We are to remain in control of ourselves, and especially our temper, when we are dealing with false

teachers. When answering their doctrine, do not attack the person. We should not give others a way in which they find fault in us, and will not hear us. Attack the false teaching, not the person.

2. Don't answer an argument that wasn't made. We need to be prepared to listen to those who are espousing the false doctrine, and be ready to answer what they are teaching. If we waste our time dealing with arguments they never made then how does that benefit anyone? It is also not dealing with the doctrine that they are actually teaching. If we are to stamp out the false doctrines that may enter the Lord's church, then answer the arguments that are being made in attempts to deceive.
3. Don't accuse a person of believing the consequences of their doctrine. There may be several consequences of believing any number of false teachings, but that does not necessarily mean they accept the logical consequences of their position. Point out, and teach them the logical consequences of accepting such a false position, but do not accuse them of something that they do not believe.

How To Answer A False Doctrine

First, you must identify the false doctrine. When identifying false teaching, you must identify the source of that teaching. The Holy Spirit was quite plain in revealing the desire of these false teachers – they desire to lead people astray (Galatians 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:14; 2 John 1:7). It will only benefit you to have knowledge of those who are teaching falsely, and what they are teaching. The Scriptures teach that faithful brethren need to mark and identify false teachers (Romans 16:17).

Secondly, you must be fair towards false teachers. You cannot misrepresent their

doctrine. You do not want others to sympathize towards them because of your unfairness. Acknowledge what they say, and answer the false teaching. If they say they do not believe in something, do not force it upon them. If they are attacking you, be courteous towards them. Do not sink to their level. Conduct yourself as a Christian at all times, especially when dealing with false teaching.

Thirdly, study to show yourself approved (2 Timothy 2:14-15). Paul warned Timothy of false teachings, the need to be aware of those false teachings, and how he must study the truth to be prepared to encounter those false doctrines. If we are not continually studying the word of God then we are prime candidates to be deceived by some who might be well studied, and dynamic speakers (2 Peter 2:2). A false teacher will not claim to be a false teacher. We must be ready, and guarded.

Fourthly, deal with objections. When you encounter false teachers they will certainly have objections to the truth of the gospel. You need to be ready for their objections. Sometimes it will require additional study, but it is essential in trying to stamp out their false notions. Patience and longsuffering are essential qualities that will help you in dealing with these teachers. Do not ignore their teachings, and squabbles. Deal with their arguments and objections to the truth.

Conclusion

We must be prepared and constantly ready to deal with false teaching. The main purpose when answering false teachers is the salvation of their souls. Never forget that. They must acknowledge the falsehood of their doctrines, and the truthfulness of the gospel. They must recognize they are fighting against the Lord. Will you help lead them out of their error?

Evangelism Lessons From The Seventy

JOSHUA WELCH | ANDERSON, INDIANA

Luke 10:1-16 contains an account where Jesus had sent out “seventy” of His disciples “into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.” This evangelistic method has some simple pointers that may help us as we try to reach lost souls in our own communities emulating the methods and marching orders of Jesus. Consider a few points to help you in your own evangelistic efforts.

Jesus didn’t try to do it alone. He had already sent out “twelve disciples” (Luke 9:1-5) in the Limited Commission text. He was sending out “seventy others” in this passage (10:1). Evangelism is a team effort and if even the Son of God utilized helpers, then why would we think we should do it alone?

He sent them out “two by two” (10:1). There may be wisdom in going with an evangelism partner as we evangelize a lost world. Sometimes, our partners may provide an alternative approach or have an ability we do not have enabling them to be more effective. For example, when I went door-knocking on a preaching trip to Barbados recently, my partner spoke French. It was helpful so we could communicate with those who had immigrated from French-speaking islands to Barbados. Without the aid of my traveling partner, I would have been nearly useless in communicating with others.

Furthermore, traveling in numbers may provide protection. There is safety in numbers especially as we speak to those who may not be receptive. Additionally, working together with another person provides accountability. When James and John wanted to blow up a Samaritan village, it was good Jesus was there to reason sense into them (Luke 9:54-55). If we are accused of some wrongdoing, it may be helpful if “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (Matthew 18:16). This accountability is



5 via Ben White | Unsplash.com

especially important due to the danger of sexual temptation. Just the accusation of sexual misconduct in a one-on-one study can ruin one’s reputation and those encounters should be avoided.

He asked for pre-evangelism work in “every city and place where He Himself was about to go” (10:1). Perhaps one of the greatest forms of preparatory evangelism is prayer. As Jesus noticed the harvest ahead, he said, “Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:38). Before we open our mouths to speak with the lost, may we open our mouths to seek the Lord’s wisdom in prayer. A second form of “pre-evangelism” may just be the inviting we do prior to evangelism opportunities. Cornelius, for example, had “called together his relatives and close friends” prior to Peter’s arrival to share the gospel (Acts 10:24). Effective gospel preaching needs an audience. Jesus sent out the seventy to generate an audience and the Lord needs us to do so prior to organized evangelism opportunities. Do you share announcements of upcoming sermons to prepare the crowd whether it be in-person, through mass mailings, or through social media invites? Do not underestimate the importance

of this type of preparatory work in organized and planned evangelism opportunities.

He was optimistic saying “the harvest truly is great” (10:2). Sometimes a pessimistic approach to evangelism is like pouring water on hot coals. Saying things like, “People just don’t want to hear the gospel anymore” or “Evangelism just is not as effective these days” are discouraging, untrue, and symptomatic of a deeper faith issue. When the twelve spies were reporting on the promised land to Israel it was Joshua and Caleb who admitted there were challenges but courageously said, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it” (Numbers 13:30). Yet, it was the ten cowardly spies who brought a negative report and said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we” (13:31). Only Joshua and Caleb were allowed to enter the promised land forty years later! They were commended for their faith in God who is able! God is pleased with those who trust in His power to accomplish His will. Be positive and pray.

Jesus was also realistic saying “I send you out as lambs among wolves” (10:3). There will be opponents, enemies, and hurdles to climb. So, do not be naïve as you do this work. Kingdom work is not always sunshine, rainbows and unicorns. There will be gray clouds, thunderstorms, wolves, and lurking lions. Paul spends a great deal of his second letter to Timothy reminding him of the challenges of doing “the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5). He calls him to avoid “a spirit of fear” (2 Timothy 1:7). He tells him he “must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3). He warns him “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Yet, while Paul is realistic with Timothy he also optimistically speaks of “the crown of righteousness” ahead for the faithful and “to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8). Yes, there are real challenges, but they are buoyed by real hope.

He wanted them **dependent upon his provision** as they carried “neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals” (10:4, 7-8). God will

“give the increase” and provide (Matthew 6:33). Perhaps one of the most difficult lessons to learn in evangelism is the lesson of contentment as we do our work. The apostle Paul had to learn this lesson too. He would write, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:11-13, NKJV). God will provide for those who do His work. It may not always be an abundance. It may even be through the strength He gives us to work with our own hands, when needed, as Paul demonstrated (Acts 20:34-35). Nevertheless, the Lord will provide “our daily bread” so we might keep doing His work.

He taught them to go into “houses” (10:5-6). They would change hearts one conversation at a time. The best evangelistic work is not always done in pulpits, but often in living rooms. The early church at its height of growth would follow this same template. They were successful, in part, because of their consistent habits of evangelism. Acts 5:42 says, “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (NKJV). Could it be the comfort of one’s living room might be a better starting point for a conversation about Jesus than the cold formality of a church assembly full of strangers?

He encouraged helping people (10:9). He says, “heal the sick there.” This miraculous ability would have a drawing power. Yet, behind this miraculous ability was an endearing compassion and love for fellow man. Our open doors to evangelism will increase as our reputation for good deeds abounds. It is amazing how many conversations we generate with those outside of the body of Christ, when we are willing to step outside of the building and do good deeds. How many nurses and doctors can we impact when we visit those in rehabilitation facilities or in hospitals? How many family members might we meet when we just take the time to stop by someone’s house

and bring them a home-cooked meal or dessert in a time of need? When brothers and sisters work together to help meet individual needs it generates a good reputation and goodwill amongst others. The opposite is true as well.

He knew there would be a time to walk away (10:10-11). Not all will hear or receive the message. So, when that occurs, we must not keep forcing it but know when it is time to go and “wipe off” the “very dust of your city” and move on (Luke 10:11). We can do great damage by not just respecting the wishes of our audience. In Acts 24:25 Felix says to Paul, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you” (NKJV). We do not see another word spoken by Paul after Felix’s statement of rejection. There are no rebuttals. Paul made his case. Felix made his decision. Paul left. When the message is rejected, then it is time to move on to a new city, a new house, or a new person.

He reminded them **not to take rejection personally (10:16)**. “He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who

rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.” One of our biggest mistakes in evangelism is when we blame ourselves as the gospel does not take root. The greatest leaders of the Bible, including Jesus, faced the disappointment of rejection. The rejection of God’s leaders is a constant theme throughout the Scriptures and is even pointed out by Jesus (Matthew 23:32-35). Yet, in the Luke text, Jesus reminds us they are not rejecting the messenger as much as the God we serve. This is, indeed, the most disappointing part of a rejected gospel appeal.

After the seventy went out and obeyed the instructions of Jesus, they **“returned with joy” (10:17)**. This is the great news about the good news. When we go out and live the mission of Jesus then we will enjoy success as we see the gospel of Jesus grow in the hearts of hearers. Yet, even better, we ourselves will experience great joy knowing of our own great hope. Jesus would say to those same seventy disciples, “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). Are you sharing the joy of the Lord’s salvation with the lost world?

Israel's Role In The Divine Plan

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In today's religious world, there are plenty of teachings surrounding the nations of Israel that simply are not found in scripture. Some teach that Jews today cannot be saved, contradicting what Paul said in Romans 11:1, while others teach that one day, all Jews will be saved, which is not only a misunderstanding of Romans 11:26, but also a contradiction of how one obtains faith according to Romans 10:17. Some teach that the Jews played the only role in the crucifixion of Christ (discounting the role of the Romans), while others teach that the Jews played no role in the crucifixion by casting aspersions on the accounts given to us in the Gospels. But perhaps the most famous unscriptural teaching today about the nation of Israel concerns the second coming of Jesus, for there are many who believe that when Jesus returns, he will set up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem, rule the entire world from there, making Israel the world capital of the Kingdom of God. The reason that none of these teachings are correct is not because people don't go to scripture to try and prove their point, but because people are either misusing, mischaracterizing or misinterpreting scripture due their fundamental misunderstanding of Israel's role in the divine plan of God to save mankind from sin. With that in mind, let's now examine the scriptures closely in order for us to know what the truth of God's Word reveals about the nation of Israel, both in the past, and in the future.

The first question we need to answer is why was there a need in the divine plan to select any nation, Israel or otherwise? The answer of course is because mankind sinned, and so, if God wanted to save mankind and still be true to Himself (and His justice), the shed blood of a sinless man needed to be offered (Hebrews 10:10). And since all men and women have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), that required God Himself



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(Jesus) to come to this earth, take on our flesh by being born of a woman, live that sinless life so that he could die on the cross and shed that blood as the payment for sin (Hebrews 2:14-18). By necessity then, God needed to make a choice as to which nation would be the one through whom the Messiah would come. And when God made that choice, he chose the seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3).

Which brings us to the second question: why did God choose Abraham? Was it because Abraham and his family were so mighty? No, for God later would tell Israel that they were not chosen because their numbers were great, for they were the least among the peoples (Deuteronomy 7:7). Was Abraham chosen because he had grown up serving God, and that this was part of some reward for doing so? Again, the answer is no, for Joshua would later reveal that Abraham grew up in an idolatrous family, meaning that at least for a time, Abraham would have been an idolater himself (Joshua 24:2). Scriptures don't reveal to us if Abraham worshipped the true God of Heaven before he was called in Genesis 12 or as a result of his call, but what we do know is that before God called Abraham, God knew Abraham's heart and Abraham's character. God would have been angry with the idolatry,

yes, but God, who, as our Creator, knows us better than we know ourselves, also knew that when confronted with the truth, Abraham would obey the voice of God (Genesis 18:19). And we see that foreknowledge borne out through Abraham's faith and actions following God's call of him in Genesis 12.

Ultimately though, God's choice of Abraham as the one through whom the Messiah would come, didn't rest on this knowledge about Abraham's heart and character, for the world at that time had to have had other people who would have done the same thing when presented with God's call. Melchizedek would be one that comes to mind. Rather, God's choice of Abraham rested on God's choice alone (Romans 9:11). In other words, God selected Abraham because God selected Abraham. And while that might sound confusing, it is imperative that we understand this because plenty of false doctrine is rooted in a misunderstanding of the purpose and result of God's selection here. Contrary to what many believe, Abraham was not saved because he was called in Genesis 12. And neither was Israel. Every person who has ever been saved has been saved the same way: by God's grace received through obedient faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). That was true for Abraham (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:1-4). And it was true for Israel (Romans 9:30-33). The selection of Abraham therefore was simply the means by which God continued his plan to bring the Messiah into the world to save mankind from sin (which he would accomplish through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, David and finally Mary).

If God's selection of Abraham didn't automatically confer salvation on Abraham or his descendants though, the third question we must ask is: did it confer any advantage on Abraham's family? And to that, the scriptures are quite clear that the answer is: yes. In Romans 3, Paul writes:

1 What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? 2 Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. 3 For what if some did not

believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? 4 Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged (Romans 3:1-4).

The advantage to being a Jew was that God had given the Jews a law to follow, one that would have revealed to them their sin, and thus pointed them to their need of a Savior (Romans 7:7-25). God had given them the prophecies about the Messiah so that they could be on the lookout for the one who fulfilled those prophecies. Now this doesn't mean that every Jew in the Mosaic time was saved, for we know those with a lack of faith weren't, but having the Old Testament should have resulted in an easy transition for the Jew from Moses to Christ, because Moses spoke of Christ (Deuteronomy 18:15-22). Thus, the selection of Abraham, conferred on them this advantage.

All of this leaves us with one final question: with Christ having come, and died on the cross for our sins, does God have any future role for Israel in His divine plan? To many, the answer is yes, and the reason is because they believe that God's divine plan is to set up an earthly kingdom when Christ comes again, with passages like Romans 11:11-36 being used to support that argument. However, believing in an earthly kingdom like this would contradict what Jesus told Pilate in John 18:36 about his kingdom not being of this earth. It would contradict what Peter and Paul both said about Christ's return being one of final judgment, where the righteous would receive Heaven, where the wicked would receive Hell, and where this world would be burned up (I Thessalonians 4:13-18, II Thessalonians 1:7-10, II Peter 3:10-13). And in context, it would contradict what Paul meant from Romans 11.

When studying scriptures, we must remember that every verse, every sentence, every word has a context, and so to rip a passage out of its context, oftentimes strips it of the meaning that the author intended when he wrote those words. Romans 11 is a summation of an

argument that really began all the way back in chapter 1 centering around how God saved mankind. The Jews thought God saved mankind through the Law of Moses, a teaching that was never true, even before Christ. Mankind has always been saved by grace through obedient faith, with Abraham being a testament to the Jews of this truth due to the fact that Abraham lived before the Law of Moses. After the death of Jesus on the cross, having faith in God meant believing in Jesus as the Son of God and obeying Him through repenting of your sins and being baptized for the remission of your sins (Romans 6:1-4, Romans 10:9-17). The Law of Moses in essence died when Jesus shed his blood on Calvary (Romans 7:1-25), freeing the Jew to become married to Christ, and allowing the Gentile not to have to adhere to the Law of Moses in order to be saved.

That God saved man this way became a stumbling block to many of the Jews, but that wasn't God's fault, it was the Jew's fault for misunderstanding the promise made to Abraham in which it would be through Abraham's seed (Christ), not seeds (the Jews) that the whole world would be blessed (Galatians 3:16). God wasn't going to change his plan of saving people in Christ simply because many of the Jews rejected Christ. Instead, he would allow them to blind themselves and trip over the cross of Christ to their own detriment (Romans 11:7-8), choosing to save all, both Jews and Gentiles, who truly come to saving faith in Christ (Romans 11:1-6). That is the message of the cultivated olive tree that Paul gives to us in Romans 11:16-24. The root of the olive tree is not the Jews, it is faith in God (Christ). Those faithful Jews under the Old Law were the original branches, while the Gentiles who had gone off into idolatry were part of a wild olive tree and as such, not part of the original olive tree. Any Jew who was unfaithful (at any point in history), would be cut off from the tree, while any Gentile who was faithful, would be grafted in. If a branch was cut off, could it be grafted in again? Yes, for God is able to do so, if that branch will come to faith in Christ (Romans 11:23-24). And if a branch that had been grafted in does not

continue in faith, would they remain? No, because if God didn't accept the original branches that didn't remain faithful, why would the grafted branches believe He would accept them in the same condition (Romans 11:21-22)?

The truth of Romans 11:1-25 presents a question: what does Romans 11:26 mean when it says: "And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;"? In context, it simply means what the entirety of Romans 11 has been saying all along: to be God's covenant people, you had to be a part of the cultivated olive tree, and if you were a part of the cultivated olive tree, you would be saved. Thus, in verse 26, when Paul speaks of all Israel being saved and the deliverer out of Zion turning away ungodliness from Jacob, he is saying that all Israel who will be saved, will be saved by that deliverer that would come out of Zion: the man Jesus Christ. All Israel that would be saved would be a part of the cultivated olive tree, not having been cut off in unbelief. It's not that every physical Israelite would be saved: it is that all Israel that would be saved: would be saved by faith, which after the cross, meant faith in Christ. Nothing more and nothing less.

In conclusion then, Israel's role in the divine plan was simply to be God's vehicle through whom He would send the Messiah, Jesus, to save all mankind from sin. With that role being accomplished, there is no further special role for Israel in God's divine plan. However, let's not think that God's divine plan is finished, for salvation in Christ through faith is the ultimate role that God wants each and every one of us (whether we're Jews or Gentiles) to be a part of so that we can obtain eternal life (II Peter 3:9). God doesn't force this upon any of us though, for he gives us the power to choose for ourselves whether or not to obey Him in faith. But it is God's desire that we choose to obey Him. The question is: will we?

** All verses are from the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise *

OCTOBER 2024 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE	Our next article in the Hebrews 11 series, by <u>Reagan McClenny</u> , will look at the faith of Rahab (v 31).
CHURCH ARTICLE	<u>William Stewart</u> will continue the series on how Christ relates to the church with a view of Jesus as the King of kings.
WORSHIP ARTICLE	Singing is a significant part of our worship to God. <u>Jeremy Woodman</u> will delve into the importance of singing with the understanding (1 Corinthians 14:15).
APPLICATION ARTICLE	<u>John Maddocks</u> will pen our next article in our “Becoming Like Jesus” series, focused on humility.
EVANGELISM ARTICLES	Redeem the time; speech seasoned with salt. These are directions given by Paul regarding our conduct to those who are outside. <u>Jeff Carr</u> will use Colossians 4:5-6 to speak about effective evangelism..
BEYOND BASICS ARTICLE	Jesus emphasized the kind of love we need to have, “...love one another, as I have loved you...” <u>Kyle Boyd</u> will lead us in the study of this great love we are called to have for one another.



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