

# **“Here We Stand”**

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## **Abbreviations for Versions of the Bible**

### **NKJV**

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### **NIV**

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## **Introduction**

Someone described times like ours this way: “It is a time when everything that is not nailed down is coming up and the devil is pulling out nails as fast as he can.” The changes in our culture are indeed mind boggling.

The temptation for Christians is always to conform to the culture (the world). Yet, Scripture clearly tells us in Romans 12:2 (NASB): “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” In addition to our culture, we are also facing increasing change in many doctrines that are controversial.

The series of messages entitled *Here We Stand* seeks to clarify what the Bible says about changing issues in our culture and about controversial doctrines. In a world of constant change, Christians must hold tight to the unchanging Scriptures.

My prayer is that each person who reads these messages will be better equipped to confront is love those whose eyes are blinded to the truth, and to seek to lead them to the one who said in John 14:6 (NASB): “I am the way, and *the truth*, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

Phil Jones



## Chapter 1: Here We Stand On Christians and Government

### Romans 13:1-7

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a tormented Catholic Monk who tried to do all that the church told him he needed to do, and yet had no assurance of salvation. It was while studying the book of Romans that God opened his spiritual eyes. The main verse that the Holy Spirit used to bring Luther to savingly believe in Christ was Romans 1:17b (ESV): “The righteous [*just*’ in some translations] shall live by faith.”

Set free from the Roman church’s works righteousness, Luther began to proclaim what came to be known as the three great Reformation principles:

1. Man is justified by faith alone.
2. Every believer has direct access to God.
3. The Bible is the sole source of authority for faith and life.

Needless to say, Luther’s teaching and tracts caused quite a stir in the Roman church. Luther was summonsed to appear before the Diet of Worms (pronounced “Vormz”). A *Diet* was not an eating plan that would result in weight loss. A *Diet* was a formal assembly of government and church leaders to call Luther into account and to mete out punishment. Luther was commanded to recant what he had written and taught, and then was given a few hours to think about it. When he was brought back in before his accusers, he gave them this answer:

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of Popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise.

Every Christian and every church must determine if they are going to stand on the Word of God or stand with the world system. If we do not stand on what the Bible says about issues and doctrines, we will find that the culture around us (called “the world” in Scripture) will conform us to its views and values. God has called His people to be counter cultural.

In recent days, since the Supreme Court’s decision on homosexual marriage, some pastors and churches that I respected have been very, very vague on where they stand on homosexuality. When pressed, they say that they believe what the Bible says, but they don’t want to turn lost people off with an unpopular counter cultural position that is interpreted as not caring. That sounds noble, but it shows a flawed view about how lost people are drawn to the Lord. It is the Spirit of God who opens blinded eyes and draws people to Himself. Let me be clear that when I talk about taking a stand on “hot button” doctrines and cultural issues, I am not talking about a harsh, unloving, “in your face” approach to those who are bound up in sin and captives of the devil. I am talking about sharing truth as is described in Ephesians 4:15 (ESV) as “speaking the truth in love...” I am talking about always proclaiming the Gospel to those to whom we proclaim the counter cultural truth of what the Bible says about important cultural issues and doctrines.

David Platt, the President of our denomination's International Mission Board, says this in his book, *Counter Culture*:

What if Christ in us actually compels us to counter our culture? Not to quietly sit and watch evolving cultural trends and not so subtly shift our views amid changing cultural tides, but to courageously share and show our convictions through what we say and how we live, even (or especially) when those convictions contradict the popular positions of our day. And to do all of this not with conceited minds or callused hearts, but with the humble compassion of Christ on constant display in everything we say and do. Isn't this, after all, the essence of what it means to follow Christ in the first place? Luke 9:23 (ESV) "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Talk about countercultural. In a world where everything revolves around yourself – protect yourself, promote yourself, comfort yourself, and take care of yourself – Jesus says, "Crucify yourself. Put aside all self-preservation in order to live for God's glorification, no matter what that means for you in the culture around you."  
[David Platt, *Counter Culture*, page xix]

The series that we are now beginning lays before us what the Bible says about some difficult, often controversial, topics related to doctrine and ethical stands. Since so many of the topics we will be looking at involve our government (homosexual marriage, transgender issues, and many more), it seems that a good place to start this series is "Here We Stand on Christians and Government."

## **I. The Biblical Role of Government**

The role of government is clearly spelled out in Romans 13:3-4 (ESV):

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but too bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

In a sentence, God instituted government for protection of the populace. God instituted government because the world is full of sinners. There are two words that describe the role of Government.

### **A. Protection**

The government is to provide protection for its residents in several ways.

First, there is protection from aggressive countries who would seek to conquer from the outside. A strong military protects us from nations who would do us evil.

Second, the government protects us from fellow residents who would do evil from the inside. This protection is through a police force.

Third, the government is to protect us from injustice through a legal system.

In addition, I think regulating agencies, fire departments, and vital services are means that the government protects its citizens. The service of government is to restrain and protect the populace from evil without and within.

## B. Punishment

Follow the scriptural logic here. All responsibility for vengeance belongs to God. Romans 12:19 (ESV): “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” God has the authority to take vengeance on evildoers.

He has chosen to delegate authority to human governments to punish evil deeds. Look again at Romans 13:4b (ESV): “For he [the context shows that he is referring to government] is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.”

The government, that God has ordained and allowed to be in power, is God’s agent to carry out God’s wrath, God’s vengeance, and God’s punishment on wrongdoers. Christians are to submit to the government’s delegated from God authority. The government is a servant of God, but the government is not God! Romans 13:3-4 lays out God’s ideal for government, but corrupt governments do not always follow God’s ideal. The principle is that if a Christian suffers at the hand of any government, it is to be because the government is unjust and not fulfilling its true purpose and never because the Christian did evil.

What is the *sword* the government bears? The sword speaks generally of punishment and the use of force. It may also have reference to capital punishment since the common method of capital punishment was being beheaded with a sword. It is ironic that Paul defended the right of the government to render the sword and tradition tells us that he himself was decapitated by the Roman government for preaching the gospel.

From the Old Testament we learn the principle that the punishment of evildoers by the government is to be proportionate to the wrong done. Exodus 21 is speaking of the governing of Israel. Exodus 21:24-25 (ESV): “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” I believe that this principle is still valid today for government (not individuals). The principle is that the punishment is to be in proportion to the crime. Not only is the punishment to be proportionate, it is also to be swift. Ecclesiastes 8:11 (ESV): “Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.” In other words, when justice is not carried out swiftly, it encourages more evil.

This is the role of government whether it is a bad or a good government.

## II. The Christian’s Response to Government

The Christian’s response to government is found in Romans 13:1-2 (ESV): “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.” This basic command for Christians regarding their relationship with government is hard to misinterpret. We are to submit to the government that we are under. This submission goes beyond just obeying the laws. It also involves giving honor and respect to governing authorities.

This principle is not limited to this one passage. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:13-14, 17 (ESV): “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. <sup>17</sup> Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”

The word “subject” is a military term that means to line up under the one who has authority over you. Just as the Private is under the Sergeant and the Sergeant is under the Major and the Major

is under the General, we are under the governing authorities. This command has nothing to do with whether or not the governing authorities are *worthy*. There are no qualifications given here.

We will see exceptions to this command in a moment, but there are not many. Let me make sure that you understand how radical this command really is. Consider the following facts about the government that Paul was under when he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write this passage.

First, it was a government that condoned and facilitated slavery. It was not racial slavery as was the shameful slavery in the early days of our nation. It was mostly people from lands that the Romans had conquered. Some estimate that 60% of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves. Yet we are told, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.”

Second, it was a government of absolute rulers. Nero, the Emperor was a vile, perverted despot who ruled with almost absolute unchecked authority. Yet the Scripture says, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.”

Third, it was a government that was characterized by high and extremely unfair taxes. People bought the privilege of collecting taxes and corruption was the norm. They had a quota and everything they collected above their quota, they could keep. Yet the Scripture says, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.”

Fourth, this was a government that, in just a few years after Paul wrote this, would begin a wholesale persecution and execution of Christians. Yet the Scripture says, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.”

Because sinful human beings run the government, government is inherently dangerous. George Washington said, “Government is a dangerous servant and a fearful master.” How true that is!

### **III. How Christians Influence the Government**

Wayne Grudem in his book, *Politics According to the Bible*, says that there are six views concerning religion and government. I will only mention the three most prominent of those views.

#### **A. Government Should Compel Religion**

When we hear this one, we think of Islam and governments compelling and allowing this one religion. If you go back in history, Christians also tried to control governments. For example, the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648) began as a conflict between Protestants and Catholics over various territories. Today, I am unaware of any major Christian group that believes the government should compel people to follow Christianity. Jesus Himself distinguished the realms of God and the realm of Caesar when He said in Matthew 22:21b (ESV): “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

#### **B. Government Should Exclude Religion**

This is basically the view of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). This view basically says that religious views should be kept at home and kept quiet. You see this view when people object to pastors or others giving a prayer at government meetings, graduation ceremonies, or even ball games. This is quickly becoming the view of many in places of power and influence in our government. It manifests itself in the refusing to allow nativity scenes and crosses on public property.

Many times people show their ignorance of history in saying that our constitution says there must be a separation of church and state. That phrase “separation of church and state” is not in the constitution! It was pulled out of context from a letter Thomas Jefferson sent to a group of Baptists

in Connecticut. Jefferson's comment was aimed at protecting the churches from government designating certain denominations as the state church. Our founding fathers would be shocked and appalled at how that phrase is being used today.

### C. Christians Should Seek to Influence Government

This third view is the one that I believe is biblically correct. This approach is called "the significant influence view." Grudem states this view as, "Christians *should* seek to influence civil government according to God's moral standards and God's purposes for government as revealed in the Bible (when rightly understood)." That parenthesis is added to avoid inaccurate interpretations of the Bible.

I believe that this view has much to commend it from the Bible. Two primary examples are Joseph and Daniel. Joseph exercised *significant influence* over the king of Egypt and Daniel exerted influence over Kings from two empires (Babylon and Persia). In the New Testament we see Paul, while in prison in Caesarea, taking an opportunity to seek to *significantly influence* a government official by sharing biblical truth with him. Acts 24:24-25 (ESV):

After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you."

We also see John the Baptist seeking to *significantly influence* Herod.

Today, there are numerous ways that this *significant influence* can be carried out. Here are a few ideas.

Christians should be encouraged to run for political office to be able to influence from the inside.

Christians should examine the views of all candidates at every level running for office and vote based on how they line up with biblical principles.

Christians should pray diligently for those in government – from the President of the United States to the school board representative.

1 Timothy 2:1-2: "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." The verse I most often pray for our president is Proverbs 21:1 (ESV): "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will."

## IV. When Civil Disobedience Is Proper

When I speak of civil disobedience, I am talking about refusing to obey or follow a directive of the government. Let me say right up front that simply disagreeing with something in government does not give the right to civil disobedience. For instance, disagreement with some of the things tax money is used for is not a ground to quit paying taxes.

The Roman government in the first century was unspeakably corrupt. Yet Paul said in Romans 13:6-7 (ESV): "For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed."

What are justifiable reasons to refuse to obey the government? I believe that the key passage in making this determination is what Jesus said in Matthew 22:21b (ESV) “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” This was a very radical statement in the context of the Roman Empire in the first century. What belongs to Caesar is taxes and obedience to all government directives except those that contradict the directives of God. For instance, the early Christians paid their taxes, but when the Roman Government required Christians to bow before a bust of Caesar and offer incense (a form of worship) and confess “Caesar is Lord,” they disobeyed. Why? Because worship belongs to God alone and only Jesus is Lord! Christians by the thousands were martyred because they refused to bow the knee to Caesar. The authority of human rulers is always subject to the ultimate authority of God.

The clearest example of civil disobedience in the Old Testament is Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they refused to bow to a statute of the King, and Daniel when he refused to stop praying and was thrown into the lion’s den.

What about today? The Bible is not an American only book! In much of the world, just becoming a Christian is illegal. Certainly it is justified civil disobedience to receive Christ. In many places in the world, it is against the law to share the Gospel and invite a person to receive Christ. We have a command in Scripture that is best summarized in Mark 16:15 (ESV): “And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.’”

We will obey God rather than men. If it ever becomes law (and it almost certainly will) that we as a church must hire a person who is living in what the Bible calls sin, we will disobey. If it becomes law that certain parts of the Bible cannot be taught, we will disobey the governing authorities. If our pastors are required to perform marriages that the Bible forbids or our facilities are ever required to be used for weddings that are ungodly, we will disobey. If we are ever required to accept as a member anyone that we are aware of who is living a sinful lifestyle, we will disobey the government.

Let me also say that I believe that those who practice civil disobedience must be willing to pay the penalty for disobeying the law. That may mean fines or imprisonment. Daniel nor his three friends gathered armies to fight when they were sentenced to death. They went compliantly to the fiery furnace and the lion’s den.

The summary point is that what belongs to God must not be given to Caesar – whatever the cost.

## **V. The Priority of the Church**

The church (pastors and teachers in the church) must preach the Word – however countercultural and however opposed to government its truths may be. But the church must never be lured into a time consuming crusade against bad laws and bad government. The devil is elated to get the church involved in the fight for reforming government and getting the *right* people in office and in so doing neglect the reason that God put us here. If we succeed in reforming laws and getting moral people into office, and in doing so we neglect the great commission given to us by our Lord to make disciples, we will have succeeded in sending people to hell more moral that they would have been. The priority of the church is making disciples of Jesus Christ! Nothing must divert us from that.

## **Conclusion**

No matter how bleak things look in our nation. No matter how hopeless if it seems that we will never see America turn to God in repentance and revival, there is something that we must



remember. In the end, Jesus wins! The government has delegated authority, but Jesus has all authority.



## **Chapter 2: Here We Stand On the Reality of Hell**

### **Various Scriptures**

Dr. D. James Kennedy called the doctrine of Hell the most unpopular subject in the world. I would have a hard time arguing with him. The vast majority of our culture rejects the concept of a literal Hell as described in the Bible. One of the ways our culture deals with Hell is to trivialize or make light of it. One of the ways that our culture trivializes the concept of Hell is to use it as a description of hard times or even as a curse word. We say, “My marriage was hell” or “Going through that surgery was hell.” I can assure you that no matter how bad your marriage was; it wasn’t as bad as Hell. I understand that surgery can be extremely difficult, but it is not Hell. In addition to using Hell to describe some earthly trial, we use it as a curse word. We say, “hell yes” or “hell no.” When extremely angry, we flippantly tell someone to “go to hell.” That de-sensitizes us to the real and awful and literal place.

Even those of us who believe in a literal Hell should treat it seriously and certainly feel no glee over it. We see how God views the judgment of the wicked in Ezekiel 33:11a: “As I live,” says the Lord God, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” Let’s face it, Hell isn’t an enjoyable subject. That is why even Bible believing preachers seldom mention it, much less preach about it.

The all too often response of the church, in its desire to be accepted by the culture, is to seek to soften or jettison unpopular doctrines such as Hell. I remember a clear example of this response of one denomination just a few years ago. In my opinion, one of the greatest hymns written in the last fifty years is *In Christ Alone*. Most everyone here would list that hymn in their top 10 favorites. I personally love the line that says, “No power of Hell, no scheme of man could ever pluck me from His hand.”

It turns out the Presbyterian Church (USA) faced a dilemma with this theologically rich hymn. They were putting together a new hymnal for their churches and, since so many of their people loved and sang this hymn, they thought they could consider adding it to their new hymn book. However, there was a line in the song that was causing some real problems for the people who were compiling the hymns to put in the new hymnbook. There was a large problem with the line from the third stanza that said, “Till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied.” In this increasingly liberal denomination, the wrath of God was no longer acceptable to sing about. To talk about God’s wrath puts us in a counter cultural position. The committee charged with the task of putting this hymn book together came up with a solution. They would change the line to, “Till on that cross as Jesus died, the love of God was magnified.” Of course, because of copyright laws, they had to have permission from the copyright holder. The co-writer of the song, Keith Getty, was the one who had to give permission. Keith Getty is not just a writer of songs; he is a committed Christian who has a strong knowledge of biblical theology. He refused their request, as well he should have. What an example of a church ashamed of the Gospel that includes as a key part the satisfying of God’s just wrath through the cross. The Presbyterian Church (USA) hymnal was published without the great hymn, *In Christ Alone*.

I want you to see the truth about Hell from the Scriptures – not from Dante or *The Far Side* cartoons. I will remind you that our task is to stand on the never changing Word of God and not to conform to the culture around us.

## **I. The Names for Hell in the Scripture**

Perhaps a good place to start this overview of the doctrine of Hell is to define it. I love the simple and yet accurate definitions of the various doctrines that Wayne Grudem gives. He defines Hell like this – “Hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked.” In the Bible there are several words that are often translated as “Hell” or are used referring to Hell. Let me make something very clear. Each of these names refers to literal places. They are not symbolic or *a state of mind*.

### **A. Sheol**

This Old Testament word is used sixty-five times. The King James Version translated it “hell” thirty-one times, “grave” thirty-one times, and “the pit” three times. In more modern translations, the Hebrew word is just transliterated – “Sheol.” We see this word in Psalms 9:17: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, *and* all the nations that forget God.” It is also in Isaiah 5:14a: “Therefore Sheol has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure.”

Sheol includes the grave, but it is more than the grave. Sheol is simply the place where the dead go to be either in torment or bliss. Those who died believing in God’s provision (evidenced by their offering of sacrifices through the Jewish sacrificial system) and who were then counted as righteous by God went to a place of bliss and were with their ancestors. For others Sheol was a dark and foreboding place. We see the contrast in Daniel 12:2: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.” The Bible was progressively revealed and the Old Testament teaching on Hell or Sheol is not clearly laid out. We get much more detail in the New Testament.

### **B. Hades**

In the New Testament we see three names for Hell and one description. The first name we will examine is Hades. I believe that Hades and Sheol are the same place. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek more than two centuries before the birth of Christ, the scholars translated Sheol as “Hades.” When the New Testament quotes an Old Testament passage with Sheol in it, it is translated “Hades.”

Hades, or Sheol in the Old Testament, had two compartments. In the New Testament, those compartments are called *Abraham’s Bosom* and *torments*. We see these in a story Jesus told in Luke 16 about an unbelieving rich man and a believing beggar named Lazarus. Luke 16:22-23: “So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.”

I cannot be dogmatic about what I am going to share next, but I believe it to be true. I believe that the section of Hades called “Abraham’s bosom” no longer exists as a compartment of Hades. I think that Ephesians 4:8 which quotes Psalm 68:18 describes some of what Jesus was doing during that time His body was in the grave. Ephesians 4:8 (NIV): “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” We read in 1 Peter 3:18-19: For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison.”

I believe that when His body was in the grave Jesus went to those Old Testament saints and *preached* or proclaimed to them that all the sacrifices were fulfilled in Him and the price has now been paid. He told them that the blood of the Holy One had been shed and now they had somewhere way better, and then He took them to the Father.

In the Bible, it does not say of New Testament saints who die that they go to Hades. 2 Corinthians 5:8: “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” On this side of Calvary, those who die without Christ go into Hades (torment) and those who die in Christ go immediately to be “with the Lord.”

### **C. Tartaros**

Tartaros is the Greek word that is translated “Hell” in 2 Peter 2:4: “For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.” This verse is the only place in the Bible where this word is used. It is a place of incarceration for a special class of especially wicked demons who committed sin that is described in Jude 1:6: “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”

### **D. Gehenna**

This is the most commonly used word for Hell in the New Testament. It was used twelve times in the New Testament and eleven of those times was used by Jesus. Gehenna referred to the *Valley of Hinnon* which was located south of Jerusalem. It was in that valley that the people of Judah stooped to new lows under the wicked kings Ahaz and Manasseh when Jews sacrificed their own children to the pagan god Molech. Later this valley was turned into the garbage dump where refuse and the bodies of executed criminals were burned. The fire was kept going to hold down the stench. This horrible place served as an appropriate picture of the literal place called Hell.

### **E. The Lake of Fire**

This is a description of the final abode of the unsaved. At the final judgment, all those in Hades will be brought up to stand before “The Great White Throne of Judgment.” We read about it in Revelation 20:10-14:

The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Only the lost will stand at the Great White Throne. Notice in verse 13b, “And they were judged, each one according to his works.” This is not referring to their works being good enough that some will escape the Lake of Fire. It speaks of the fact that there are degrees of punishment in Hell. I do not understand that because the Bible doesn’t elaborate on it. I think that this is the event that Jesus was speaking of in Luke 12:47-48a “And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few.”

## II. The Description of Hell

I want to emphasize that Hell is an actual place. There are four things that describe what is happening in Hell.

### A. Hell Is a Place of Torment

I know that this is unpleasant to think about but it is reality. In the story Jesus told about the rich unbelieving man who died and went to the *place of torments* in Hades, He said in Luke 16:24b: "... send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame."

In Revelation 19, 20, and 21, Hell is referred to as "the lake of fire and brimstone." That certainly could be literal fire since the unbelieving dead will have new bodies of some type and those new bodies could be constructed by God to not burn up in the flames. If the fire is symbolic, there is no *break* there. The symbol or picture of the real thing is normally not as bad as the thing it symbolizes. The classic example is the question, "Which is worse, a picture of a forest fire or the actual fire?" If the fire is only symbolic, then the reality would seem to be worse than the symbol. Erwin Lutzer says this about fire being symbolic: "Another kind of 'fire' might be worse than literal fire. That is the fire of unfulfilled passion, the fire of desires that are never satisfied. Perpetually burning lusts never subside, and the tortured conscience burns but is never sated or appeased. Hell, then, is the raw soul joined to an indestructible body, exposed to its own sin for eternity." [Erwin Lutzer, *Moody Magazine*, May/June 2001, page 22]

### B. Hell Is a Place of Memory

The rich man in Luke 16 hears these torturous words in Luke 16:25b: "Son, remember..." Memories of loved ones; memories of others influenced to take the horrible pathway to Hell. "Son, remember."

### C. Hell Is a Place of Hopelessness

Hell is hopeless because it is eternal. It never ends. A view that is growing in popularity today is the annihilationist view. This view has sadly been accepted by some otherwise orthodox writers and teachers. There are various views in the annihilationist group. Some say that at death unbelievers just cease to exist. If they cease to exist, how are they going to be raised to stand before the Great White Throne of Judgment? Others believe that they will be punished for a time and then annihilated. That is speculation.

Read these key verses. Matthew 25:46 (ESV): "And these will go away into *eternal* punishment, but the righteous into *eternal* life." Hell here seems to last as long as Heaven lasts. The word, *eternal*, referring to punishment and life is the same Greek word. The most graphic New Testament statement of the eternity of Hell is Revelation 14:11a:

"And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night..."

2 Thessalonians 1:9 (NASB): "These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

Daniel 12:2: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame *and* everlasting contempt."

There are other verses, but the bottom line is that Hell is a place of hopelessness because it never ends.

#### **D. Hell Is a Place That Glorifies God**

This is one that will cause some people some problems. What is the glory of God? His glory is the sum total of His perfections. Anything or anyone that magnifies or displays any of God's perfections displays God's glory. Does Hell display any of God's perfections? Yes! It displays His holiness, His justice and His wrath that flow out of His justice. If Hell is not real, then we have robbed Jesus of the glory of His love and compassion on us by taking the wrath of God in our place. To deny Hell is to cheapen the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross.

### **III. What We Deny When We Deny Hell**

I want you to see the consequences of abandoning or denying the orthodox views of Hell. Typically, those who used to be orthodox and left the view of the eternality of Hell did so based on human emotions. John Stott was a gifted scholar and teacher. His commentary on Romans is widely acclaimed as one of the best available, but later in life he abandoned the doctrine of the eternality of Hell. Listen to his reason. "Emotionally, I find the concept [of eternal conscious torment] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain..." [Quoted in a sermon by John Piper, *Behold the Kindness and Severity of God, Part One*, 6-14-92]. What do we deny when we deny Hell (the orthodox view of Hell)?

#### **A. We Deny the Plain Sense of the Bible**

The Bible is not at all vague when it comes to the existence of a literal Hell. To deny the orthodox view of Hell requires a lot of re-defining and re-interpreting. To deny the orthodox view of Hell involves taking what is clear in the Bible and making it cloudy. It involves interpreting a large number of texts as symbolic rather than literal when there is no hermeneutical justification for doing so. What has been called, "the golden rule of interpretation" says, "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense seek no other sense."

Jesus had more to say about Hell than anyone else in Scripture. It was Jesus who described Hell as containing fire that burns but does not consume. It was Jesus that spoke of the foreboding outer darkness in Hell. He described it in Matthew 8:12b as a place where, "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Some people seem to forget where most of the details of Hell come from. The greatest number of details comes from Jesus. To deny the orthodox view of Hell requires me to declare that Jesus was wrong or else I must severely distort what He said by making it symbolic.

#### **B. We Deny God's Justice**

Without Hell, there is no justice for Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot (the Cambodian killing fields), or Jack the Ripper. When we understand the holiness of God and the justice of God, we begin to see the necessity of Hell. The wicked often prosper here and live in luxury. What about Galatians 6:7 which says, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap"? Without Hell, that verse makes no sense. If Hell is just annihilation, that would be like telling Hitler, "For all your sins and the atrocities you carried out, your punishment is to cease consciousness and be annihilated." That doesn't sound a lot like justice! Perhaps some would say, "I'm no Hitler or Stalin; I'm not perfect, but I'm not that bad." Ah, but the Bible says of all who are not in Christ in Romans 3:10-12: "As it is written: *There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.*" Our sins that were committed in time were against an eternal God. God's justice calls for an eternal punishment for sins against an eternal God.

Hell will not be an eternal blot on the character of God; it will be an eternal reminder of God's justice. Hell will be an eternal testimony to the sinfulness of man and the justice of God. When we deny Hell we deny God's perfect justice. Nahum 1:3b (NASB): "And the Lord will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished."

### **C. We Deny the Clear Teaching of the Church through the Ages**

The orthodox teaching on Hell is the near unanimous teaching of the church throughout church history. The Westminster Larger Catechism of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century gives a good summary of what the church has believed throughout the centuries. "The punishments of sin in the world to come, are everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God, and most grievous torments in soul and body, without intermission, in hell fire forever."

### **D. We Deny the Full Beauty of the Gospel**

This is perhaps the greatest consequence of denying the orthodox doctrine of Hell. To deny Hell cheapens the Gospel! Look at Revelation 14:11a: "And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night..." Listen to the results of the Gospel in Revelation 21:4: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

The Baptist theologian of long ago, J. L. Dagg said, "To appreciate justly and fully the Gospel of eternal salvation we must believe the doctrine of eternal damnation." [J. L. Dagg, quoted in Tim Challies blog 2-11-15]

Charles Spurgeon said it even better. "Think lightly of Hell, and you will think lightly of the cross. Think little of the sufferings of lost souls, and you will soon think little of the Savior who delivers you from them." [Charles Spurgeon, *2200 Quotations from the Writings of Charles H. Spurgeon*, page 98]

## **Conclusion**

Hell is not up for a vote or revision. To live with the reality of God's wrath, motivates me to live to live in gratitude for God's love that caused Him to pour out His mercy and grace on me. To understand the wrath of God makes me eternally grateful for the bloody cross where my Savior died not just to give me life and life more abundantly; He also died that I might not have to suffer an eternal literal Hell.

Keith Getty got it right. "Till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied."



## Chapter 3: Here We Stand On Abortion

### Various Scriptures

Genesis 1:27 (ESV): “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Jeremiah 1:5 (ESV): “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Since Jan. 22, 1973, when the Supreme Court in the case of Roe vs. Wade opened the door to legal abortion in the United States of America, most estimates are that more than 56 million babies have been killed in their mother’s womb. Across the world, there are an estimated 42 million abortions per year. The United States of America now has the highest abortion rate in the western world. It is estimated that one of every three women in America have had or will have an abortion. In one recent year in Washington D. C. there were more abortions than live births. It is not an exaggeration or in any way inaccurate to call abortion a modern day holocaust. [David Platt, *Counter Culture*, page 57]

Abortion is not new to our day. It was very common in ancient Greece and Rome. In his *Republic*, Plato wrote that ill-conceived embryos should not be brought to birth, and if the children were born, the parents should dispose of them. Aristotle was also of the opinion that deformed children should be exposed and left to die. [John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, page 139]

In early Christianity there was great opposition to abortion that was so commonly accepted by the Romans. In the *Didache*, a manual of Christian ethics and church affairs from the second century, there was opposition to abortion. The *Didache* said, “Thou shalt do no murder... thou shalt not procure abortion, nor commit infanticide.” (19.5)

Tertullian, an apologist in the late second century said, “...as homicide is forbidden, it is not lawful to destroy what is in the womb...” By the fourth century, Christian condemnation of abortion was reflected in canon law. Augustine, the most influential of the church fathers in the West, condemned abortion in no uncertain terms. [Davis, page 139-140]. The church has a long history of opposing abortion.

Several years ago an angry couple left our church, never to return. In a morning service, we dealt with abortion, and the husband and father of the family, in very clear terms referring to that service, said that they would not be a part of a church that dealt with political issues from the pulpit. That incident is an example of the lie that the enemy has propagated in our nation – “Abortion is a political issue.” If you believe that, hopefully after this message, you will see that abortion is not a political issue; it is a biblical issue. Because so many in our nation have bought into the lie that abortion is a political issue, or a private issue between a woman and her doctor, we have some amazingly warped and illogical laws.

Matt Chandler recently shared this illustration that proves my point. “If you’re a young woman... and you were pregnant in your first or second trimester, and you were driving toward the abortion clinic to have an abortion, and on the way to the abortion clinic you were hit by a drunk driver [and lost your child], that person is charged with involuntary manslaughter of your baby. But if you make it to the clinic, the doctor in the clinic is legally allowed to take a vacuum pump and

[take the baby's life]." Chandler literally said, "rip that baby to shreds in your womb." [Matt Chandler Sermon] What clear evidence that is of how messed up our nation is on the issue of life. As of today, the right to choose overrides the right to life.

There are so many voices speaking about abortion in our nation that people are confused. Let's look at some of those voices and then focus on the one voice that should drown out all of the other voices and make them irrelevant.

## **I. The "Keep Abortion Legal" Movement Speaks**

Rather than go in depth with what the "pro-choice" advocates say, I will just state their argument in bullet points and give a one or two-line response without a lot of comment. We will get to the comments later in the message.

- "It is uncertain when life begins; that is a religious question that cannot be answered by science."  
We will see that the overwhelming evidence is that life begins at conception and the fetus is a person. Even if this statement is true, shouldn't life always get the benefit of a doubt?
- "Every woman has a right to choose to abort or carry the baby to full term."  
What is the basis of that "right"?  
It is certainly not given in the constitution or more importantly the Bible. What if someone believes they have the right to rob, the right to rape, or the right to lie in court? From the government's point of view, our rights are limited when our actions hurt others.
- Every woman should have control over her own body.  
The unborn child is not the mother's body. The child is in the Mother's body and receives nourishment from the mother's body, but the baby is not a part of the mother's body.
- I am personally against abortion, but I don't believe that the government has the right to take the choice away from women.  
What is the purpose of government? Romans 13:1-7 tells us that the task of government is to protect its people. Surely that protection should include the most helpless among us – a child in the womb.
- Abortion frees women from a stressful unwanted pregnancy and thus contributes to their psychological well-being.  
That is a very damaging lie. The stress of an unwanted pregnancy is nothing compared to the agony of realizing that you made a decision to take the life of a person. I have counseled with women in agony over the decision they made, and they would literally give anything if it could be undone.

There are other arguments coming out of the "Keep Abortion Legal" or "Pro-Choice" movement, but those are the main ones. None of these arguments are valid or even logical, and yet in 1973, seven of the nine members of the Supreme Court ruled that the baby in the womb has no rights. Some would say, "But the government should not legislate morality." That is a bogus argument that quickly falls apart. Laws against stealing, murder, child abuse, and rape are legislating morality. One of the main purposes of government is to impose morality; that is what protecting citizens is all about. Another argument is that the government should not take away the individual's right to choose. It depends on what is being chosen. It is interesting that we don't have people protesting about being pro-choice for robbery, rape, or lying under oath. When it comes to children, no one is pro-choice about kidnapping or molesting children. Why should anyone be pro-choice about murdering them?

Allow me to give an interesting parallel to legalized abortion. In 1973 the decision of the Supreme Court was seven to two to legalize abortion. In 1857, the court also made a seven to two decision that said black Americans are not “legal personages” that can be citizens, and thus in essence upheld slavery (*Dred Scott vs. Sanford*). In 1857 the court’s decision of personhood was based on skin color. In 1973 the decision was based on living environment (inside or outside the womb). In 1857 the court gave in to the pressures of wealthy landowners. In 1973 the court gave in to pressure from feminists and humanists. That is an interesting parallel.

## **II. The Bible Speaks About the Beginning of Life**

As Christians, our ultimate authority is the Bible. It is true that the word “abortion” is technically not in the Bible. However, the Bible has a huge amount of content that directly relates to abortion. The key issues relating to abortion are “When does life begin” and “How is life to be treated?” If the Bible teaches that life begins before birth and life is to be protected, the issue of abortion should then be settled for Christians.

The first verse we looked at in the opening of this message was Genesis 1:27 (ESV): “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Every human being is a bearer of the image of God. That means that every life is valuable. If we can show that the fetus in the womb is a person, that should settle the issue of abortion. One of the arguments of the pro-choice group is, “Abortion is such a complex issue, and there are no easy answers.” But if the preborn child is a person, then it is not complex and the answer is easy. If the preborn child is a person, then abortion is murder. It is not complicated to decide whether to commit murder or not. I want you to see that the overwhelming evidence of Scripture is that the unborn child is a person. Listen to a few of the verses that evidence the personhood of the preborn child.

Jeremiah 1:5 (ESV): “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” That is a description of a person! God had a plan for Jeremiah and God is no respecter of persons.

Listen to the intricate care He takes in forming every person in the womb. Psalms 139:13-16 (ESV):

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

So much of that forming takes place early in the pregnancy. Just a few weeks after conception, sometimes before the woman knows that she is pregnant the baby’s heart is beating circulating its own blood – that may be a different type than the mother’s blood. Within a few more weeks, fingers are distinct from one another and brain waves are detectable. Soon after that the kidneys are functioning. By the twelfth week, all the organs of a boy or girl are functioning and the baby can cry. This is all within the first trimester. This is a person in the image of God.

We read in Luke 1:44 (ESV) what Elizabeth said concerning her son, John the Baptist while still in her womb, when Mary, the mother of Jesus came into Elizabeth’s presence, “For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” That is not a description of a blob of protoplasm!

With little comment, let's look at several other passages that show that the Bible teaches that life begins at conception and the baby in the womb is a person in the image of God:

Isaiah 49:1b (HCSB): "The Lord called me before I was born. He named me while I was in my mother's womb."

Galatians 1:15 (ESV): "But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace."

Luke 1:15b (ESV): "...he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb."

There are many more verses, but the facts are clear. God calls, blesses and even names babies from the womb. The Bible teaches that life begins at conception and the baby in the womb is a person, a person in the image of God.

Even when a person rejects the clear evidence of Scripture, even science tells us that the fetus in the womb is a person. Dr. Alfred Bongioanni, a professor of obstetrics at the University of Pennsylvania said:

I have learned from my earliest medical education that human life begins at the time of conception... Human life is present throughout this entire sequence from conception to adulthood... any interruption at any point throughout this time constitutes a termination of human life."

[Dr. Alfred Bongioanni, quoted in Randy Alcorn, *Why Pro-Life?* page 26]

The God who creates life in the womb is the only one who has the right to take life. Deuteronomy 32:39a (ESV): "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal..." Only God gives life and only God has the right to take life away.

Christian ethicist Dr. John Davis says:

In the New Testament, the incarnation of Jesus Christ is a profound testimony to God's affirmation of the sanctity of prenatal life. In theory it might have been possible in the eternal plan of God for the Savior to come to the earth as a grown man, but in the wisdom of God, Jesus Christ recapitulated the full span of human existence – from conception through death – in order to fulfill the purposes of God. The personal history of the Son of God on earth begins not when He was "born of the Virgin Mary," but when He was "conceived by the Holy Spirit." His human history like ours began at conception.

[Dr. John Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, page 158]

Here is the bottom line, if the baby in the womb is a person, no human being has the right to take its life. Biblically and scientifically the evidence is that the baby in the womb is a person.

### **III. The Bible Speaks About the Hard Cases**

There are three areas where many people who call themselves "pro-life" differ on the proper response. Let's look at principles from Scripture to deal with these three areas that some call the hard cases.

#### **A. What About Rape and Incest?**

I cannot imagine anything more evil than rape or incest. I have counseled with victims of rape and incest and I have seen the pain and damage that come from those sins. While conception from

these two sins propagated on a person is extremely rare, it is possible. Is abortion acceptable in those two cases? Let's go back to our previous point. Is the child conceived from rape or incest a person? The answer is yes because all of the verses we read about life beginning at conception apply to conception in these situations. Would it be acceptable to kill a two-year-old who was conceived through either of these horrible sins? Of course it would not. Then it is truly not an option when the child is in the womb. The rapist and sexual abuser needs to be punished, but not the child that is born from their sinful act.

I realize that this stance might sound cruel, but when we understand the sovereignty of God and His amazing grace that comes with all that He allows to happen, we begin to see that even these situations can serve to bring about the fulfillment of Romans 8:28 (ESV): "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." If that sounds flippant and uncaring, that is not my heart. However, I do believe that it is the truth.

### **B. What About Disabilities and Birth Defects?**

Some estimates are that ninety-two percent of all pregnancies where the baby has Down syndrome are terminated. Really the same logic must be applied here that is applied in the previous point. Would it be acceptable to take a two-year-old child's life who has special needs? Of course not! And if the baby in the womb is a person, there is no difference. Some of the greatest blessings imaginable come to parents of special needs children. I am taking nothing away from the difficulties and the grief the parents of a special needs child experience, but there are special blessings and special endowments of grace that God gives. In addition to the Romans 8:28 blessings of seeing an all-powerful sovereign God conform us to Christ, there is the special love that most special needs children can give.

### **C. What About When the Mother's Life Is in Danger from the Pregnancy?**

Let me make clear that these situations are extremely rare. While Dr. C. Everett Koop was the U. S. Surgeon General, he stated that in thirty-six years as a pediatric surgeon, he was never aware of a single situation in which a preborn child's life had to be taken in order to save the mother's life [Randy Alcorn, *Why Pro-Life*, page 76]

There are some rare cases where a difficult decision has to be made. If the mother has a fast spreading uterine cancer, the surgery to remove the cancer may result in the child's loss of life. A tubal pregnancy involves a child developing outside the uterus. In such a pregnancy, the child has zero chance of survival and may have to be removed to save the mother's life. Surgery in such cases wasn't to kill the child but to save the mother. Pro-life also means being pro-life about women. The principle is that the life that can be saved must be saved. [For more information, see Randy Alcorn, page 76-77]

## **IV. The Gospel Speaks**

As a pastor, I have had to deal with the aftermath of what seems like a quick fix for an unwanted pregnancy. I have seen lives so torn apart. Let me be very clear that the solution is not to minimize the sin of abortion. The solution is to maximize the grace of God that results in forgiveness and healing by God. Abortion is sin. It is the taking of an innocent human being's life. No healing can come as long as the sin is denied or minimized.

1 John 1:9 (ESV): “If we confess [agree with God] our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This forgiveness and cleansing is neither just on the surface nor partial.

1 John 1:7b (ESV): “...the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” This includes even the sin of abortion.

Isaiah 43:25 (ESV): “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”

Here is more good news for sinners. He not only forgives, He heals. Yes there will be scars, but the peace of God can flood into your life and the grace of God can lift you up on eagle’s wings and give you abundant life and enable you to be His ambassador of reconciliation with others who are in the prison of sin.

## **V. Our Actions Speak**

How do we respond to this plague on our land? Let me share some things to consider. The first one is the most needful and the most powerful.

### **A. Pray**

Pray for the end of legalized abortion. Pray that God would move on the leaders of our nation, state, and local area to stand for the sanctity of life. When someone does stand, encourage them. Pray for them to never compromise. Pray for a great revival in our land that would touch the hearts of our leaders. Pray for the women who have been ravaged by this sin to come in contact with someone who could share the Gospel with them and lead them to the healer of broken lives.

### **B. Help**

Our church has long been partners with Choices Resource Center in Oak Ridge. Volunteer, contribute, and pray for these vital ministries. You can also help by considering foster care and adoption. Many in our church have and they would be glad to talk with you.

### **C. Vote for Life**

I choose who not to vote for based on one issue. I will not knowingly vote for someone who supports the killing of little human beings in their mother’s womb. If all the candidates are supportive of abortion, I will not vote. I know that some criticize that one issue approach, but I would encourage you to think it through. What if a candidate was right down the line with you on the issues, but he said that he believed bank robbery should be legalized since banks have plenty of money. Would you vote for that person? Which is worse – bank robbery or the murder of a human being who is created in God’s image?

## **Conclusion**

This issue deserves your attention and your action. Speak the truth in love as you have opportunity. Love those who are weighed down with sin and be an ambassador for God and His grace.

## **Chapter 4: Here We Stand On the Sovereignty of God and the Responsibility of Man**

### **Various Scriptures**

Few subjects stir a livelier debate than the biblical teaching on God's sovereignty and man's responsibility in salvation. Many of the problems and arguments come because we try to categorize ourselves and others into some man-made theological system instead of just letting the Scriptures speak. Our elders do not want to be put into the man-made boundaries of a theological system. We simply want to be true to the Scriptures.

Here is a statement that sets up much of this message. While the Bible does not contradict itself – ever, there are truths that we struggle with putting together in a neat system. Those who subscribe to a doctrinal system put together, by man, will likely be upset with this message.

In the Bible there are paradoxes. A paradox is an apparent contradiction that is not an actual contradiction. Jesus often used paradoxes in communicating truth to His disciples. For instance, He said in Matthew 10:39 (ESV): “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” That one doubtlessly made His hearers scratch their Heads.

Jesus said in John 11:25-26 (ESV): “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” More head scratching for His hearers.

Even though what Jesus said didn't make sense to all of His hearers, what He said was true and did not contradict. The paradox that we are looking at in this message is this: God is sovereign in salvation, but man is responsible to repent of sin and savingly believe on Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

In order to deal with this paradox, mankind has come up with systems of explaining these so that there is no longer a tension between the two. The problem with these man made systems is that they tend to weaken what the Bible says about God's sovereignty or they tend to weaken what the Bible says about man's responsibility. The bottom line is that we are called to believe that God is sovereign in salvation (in fact He is sovereign in everything), and man is responsible to repent of sin and savingly believe in Christ. If man does not repent and believe, he will be responsible for the fact that he will spend eternity separated God in a place the Bible calls Hell. The Bible has more than one “whosoever will may come” invitation.

In my opinion the person in history who had the most consistent balanced view of this truth of the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man is Charles Spurgeon. This London pastor in the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century firmly believed in the sovereignty of God and yet he was passionate for souls to come to Christ, and pleaded for them to do so. Spurgeon said:

The foreordination of God [God's sovereignty in salvation] in no degree interferes with the responsibility of man. I have often been asked by persons to reconcile the two truths. My only reply is, “They need no reconciliation, for they never fell out.” Why should I try to reconcile two friends? The two facts [the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of

man] are parallel lines. I cannot make them unite, but you cannot make them cross each other.  
 [Spurgeon Quote Book, page 163]

To leave this as Spurgeon presented it seems to almost drive some people crazy. I think that is a manifestation of pride. It doesn't bother me in the slightest that there are some things that I cannot figure out. There are some truths that I cannot put in a nice neat little package and say, "Oh, now I understand it completely." I love the quote by Evelyn Underhill that I often use that says, "A God who is so small that He can be fully understood is not big enough to be worshipped."

Listen to the Scriptures.

Isaiah 55:8-9 (ESV): "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Deuteronomy 29:29a (ESV): "The secret things belong to the Lord our God..." There are some things that God tells us and we believe it because He is God.

There is a glorious and yet humbling truth in Romans 11:33 (ESV): "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable [hard to interpret] are his ways!"

Here is what I want to encourage you to do. Let the Scripture say what it says and realize that you are never going to get these twin truths to fit together in your brain. The struggle to understand is good, but humility requires that we recognize our limitations.

## I. The Sovereignty of God in Salvation

Perhaps the greatest statement short statement of God's sovereignty in salvation is Jonah 2:9b (ESV): "Salvation belongs to the Lord!" In my opinion, the greatest passage on the sovereignty of God in salvation is Romans 8:29-30 (ESV): "For those whom He foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called he also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified." There is enough scriptural meat in those two verses to keep 1,000 theologians busy for fifty years and then they would confess that they had only scratched the surface. Let's look at some key words in these verses.

### A. Foreknowledge (v 29a)

It is very important that we let Scripture define "foreknew" and not let our understanding of this word be influenced by flawed human logic and our American concept of *fairness*. Let me begin by telling you what this does *not* mean. It does not mean that God looked down into the future and saw who would on their own choose to receive Jesus. Dr. John Phillips deals well with why this cannot be the meaning of *foreknew*.

Reduced to its simplest terms the problem can be stated thus: Did God choose me because I chose Him or did I choose Him because He chose me? To say that God chose me because with His ability to foreknow the future he saw me choose Christ, robs God of His sovereignty. It would mean that He has no alternative but to choose those who chose Christ – His choice is governed by ours. It throws the initiative on man. But God is sovereign and acts in accordance with His own will, and, as Paul demonstrates in a later



chapter, is under an obligation to nobody (Romans 9:15-23).  
 [Exploring Romans, John Phillips, page 135]

The object of God's foreknowledge is not the actions of a certain people, but the people themselves. It says "For those whom He foreknew."

Let's look at some other passages in the New Testament where this word *foreknew* or a form of it is used.

Acts 2:23 (ESV): "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." Peter, preaching at Pentecost, is not telling his listeners that God looked into the future and saw that Jesus would be crucified and so because of that He was sent by the Father to be crucified! Nobody believes that! God determined beforehand that Jesus would be crucified; it was God's *definite plan*.

1 Peter 1:20 (ESV): "He [Jesus Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you." That word *foreknown* is the exact same Greek word translated "foreknew" in Romans 8:29! Just as it was ordained before the foundation of the world that Jesus Christ would come and shed His precious blood for us, God foreordained that those He chose would be securely saved and kept all the way to glorification.

### **B. Predestination (v 29b)**

Sometimes people will ask a not so good question – "Do you believe in predestination?" Well everyone who believes the Bible believes in predestination! Look at the text, "He also predestined." How could any Bible believing person say that he doesn't believe predestination? The real question is "What do you believe about predestination?"

Let's examine the word - predestination. While foreknowledge looks at the beginning of salvation, predestination focuses on the end of God's purpose for saving us. The word "predestine" means to appoint, determine, or mark off beforehand. The Bible uses predestination to refer to those who are foreknown by God. Those who are foreknown are predestined to what? They are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son, Jesus Christ. This is one of the most glorious truths that I can imagine. Oh how this illuminates the security of our salvation! When we see verse 29 in light of Romans 8:28, we see that everything God allows in our lives is for the purpose of conforming us to the likeness of His Son. We are secure because Almighty God has predetermined that we will be conformed to the likeness of his Son. Let me let a great Bible expositor of days gone by explain it.

Christ was altogether lovely and we are altogether filthy. It is the most amazing concept, and yet it is the very heart of the plan of God. Looking out over the race of men the Lord God definitely determined that He was going to take us from the earth, and join us to Christ. The plan involved a transformation that was to make us lovely as Christ. Therein would be the greatest glory to God: we would be the foulest and would become the loveliest. We would be the most unlike Christ and would become like Christ. Our predestination is that we might be conformed to the image of God's Son.  
 [Donald Barnhouse, *Romans Volume III*, page 164]

Are you beginning to get the idea that we are a part of a grand plan and it is not primarily about us; it is all about the glory of God and the worthiness of His Son?

### **C. Calling (v 30a)**

The theologians call this “the effectual call.” When we begin to synthesize what the Bible says about God’s calling in relation to salvation, we find that there are two kinds of calling. One calling is the external, general, universal invitation to all of mankind to repent of sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. This universal, outward, general call is where we participate. We are told by Jesus in Mark 16:15 (ESV): “And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.’” The Bible is full of this type of calls. Matthew 11:28 (ESV): “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

The problem with this outward general call is that left to themselves, no person would respond positively. Why? Because they are spiritually dead and have ears that cannot hear and eyes that cannot see. To expect a lost person to respond to this outward call on their own would be like offering a blind man a large sum of money if he would just see. He is blind. 2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV): “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” John 6:44a (ESV): “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

The second type of calling is that effectual calling. It is an inward, supernatural, enabling call. In other words, with the call comes the ability to respond. God enables the dead in sin person to hear, see, and respond. If He didn’t, they couldn’t. A great illustration of these two types of callings is in the resurrection of Lazarus in John 11. He had been dead for four days when Jesus came to His tomb. What a picture of us in our unsaved state who were dead in trespasses and sins. Suppose one of Lazarus’s sisters had come to the grave and cried out, “Lazarus, come forth; we miss you; we need you; PLEASE come out.” Would he have come? Of course he would not. He was dead. He had eyes, but could not see; he had ears, but could not hear. What was the difference when Jesus called out “Lazarus, come forth” and he came out alive? With Jesus’ call came an enabling! His words may have been the same, but this was an effectual calling. He received life into his previously dead body and now had ears to hear and eyes to see. Now he is enabled to obey the Master’s voice and respond to the calling to come to Jesus.

Here is how it works; we proclaim the Gospel to every creature in every people group. That is our command. We are disobedient if we do not. That is why we send out teams locally, in North America, and to the ends of the earth. That is why we give to support missionaries and minister to missionaries so that they can be more effective in their task. Out of that general call, God in His sovereignty chooses to enable some through that effectual call to hear, see, and desire to respond with repentance and faith. We see that in action when Paul proclaimed the gospel to Lydia in Philippi. Acts 16:14b (ESV): “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” Do you see the chain? There is foreknowledge, predestination, calling...

### **D. Justification (v 30b)**

Justification basically involves a believer being declared right with God, by God, when the sinner responds to the Gospel with repentance and faith. Justification involves God gifting us with a righteousness that was not ours but Christ’s. As to our own righteousness, the Bible says in Romans 3:10 (ESV): “as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one’” Justification is God declaring us to be right with Him through the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us when our faith is in Christ alone to save us. Justification is a point in time when the one foreknown, predestined, and called is declared to be right with God through faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning work on Calvary’s cross.

### **E. Glorification (v 30c)**

It is interesting that the word *glorified* is past tense. In time, it is literally in the future. This is what is called “the prophetic past tense.” In other words it is so certain that God considers it already done! You talk about security! Our glorification is when the plan is completed and we are conformed to the image of Christ and are brought to be with Him for eternity. 1 John 3:2b (ESV): “...when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” Salvation included everything from God’s election before the foundation of the earth (Ephesians 1:4) all the way to our ultimate glorification when we are made like Jesus.

Allow me to share a summary quote by Warren Weirsbe. “This election was not based on anything we had done, because we were not on the scene. Nor was it based on anything God saw that we would be or do. God’s election was based wholly on His grace and love. We cannot explain it, but we can rejoice in it.” [Warren Weirsbe, *Commentary on 1 Peter*, page 19]

## **II. The Responsibility of Man in Salvation**

God’s sovereignty does not cancel our responsibility. It is God’s plan that people come to Christ through the sharing of the Gospel. Romans 10:13-14 (ESV): “For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching [proclaiming]?’” God, who is sovereign in salvation has sovereignly chosen that the means to the end of salvation is the proclamation of the Gospel. Why should we proclaim the Gospel to the lost when it is God who saves? The easy answer to that question is, “Because God commanded us to.” The God who chooses the ends of salvation also chooses the means of salvation – the proclamation of the Gospel.

To better understand the responsibility of man in salvation, we need to answer some hard questions.

### **A. Does Unsaved Man Have a Free Will?**

The answer to this question depends on what we mean by free will. If free will means a will that is unencumbered by any other influence, then the answer is “no” – lost people do not have a free will in that sense. If someone means by free will that a person without Christ can make choices, the answer is, “Yes, even a lost person can make choices.” A person without Christ can choose which clothes they are going to wear, they can choose the route they want to take to work and thousands of other choices. What about the choice to repent of sin and savingly believe on Christ? Here is the problem. The will chooses based on the information it is given by the mind and emotions. In an unsaved person, there is a problem with the mind. Ephesians 4:17-18 (ESV): “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.”

I submit to you that the will of an unsaved person is not free; it is in bondage to sin. John 8:34: “Jesus answered them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.’” We read about redeemed sinners in Romans 6:22a (ESV): “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God...” Therefore a saved person has a “freed will.”

A saved person is still pulled toward sin by the power of sin and the flesh and the world (all three energized by the devil), but we are no longer slaves to those pulls to sin.

The London Baptist Confession of 1689 says it like this, “As a natural man, he is dead in sin and altogether opposed to that which is good. Hence he is not able, by strength of his own, to turn himself to God, or even prepare himself to turn to God.” The lost can make choices, but their will is as Martin Luther said – in bondage.

### **B. What Must Happen Before a Lost Person Will Choose Christ?**

I believe that the Bible tells us that three things must happen before an unsaved person can be saved.

1. Sight must be given to blinded minds.

Remember 2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV): “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” It is God who enables the darkened mind to see the truth.

2. The Holy Spirit Must Convict of Sin

John 16:8 (ESV): “And when He comes [the Holy Spirit], he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” The natural man’s conscience may feel guilty, but it is only the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin and strips us of our self-righteousness.

3. The Father Draws the Lost Person to Christ

John 6:44 (ESV): “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” I do not pretend to know how God does all of this, but I know that no one is saved apart from the opening of spiritual eyes, the convicting of the Holy Spirit, and the drawing of the Father.

While it is very clear that no one can be saved apart from a choice to repent and savingly believe on Christ, it is essential that we understand what has to happen in a person’s life before they can choose to believe Christ. When it comes down to the bottom line, no man has anything in which they can take glory unto themselves in being saved. In reality the repentance required for salvation and the faith are both given and enabled by God. 2 Timothy 2:25b (ESV): “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.” Acts 11:18b (ESV): “And they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.’”

Not only is repentance a gift of God, faith, the channel of God’s saving grace, is also a gift of God. Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV): “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Where does this saving faith come from? Is it simply something I decide and with my own will just do? Would that not be “of your own doing”? Would that not give me something to boast about?

Look at verse 8b and 9a. Would simply choosing and then in my own strength and wisdom believing, be grace? One of the controversies surrounding this verse is the word “this” in verse 8. Is it referring to faith or grace? Scholars disagree. The grammatical evidence points to the interpretation that “this” is referring to faith. If it is referring to “grace” it would seem to be redundant. Grace by its definition is a gift of God. It is either referring to grace or faith or both. The evidence says “faith,” but even if not, when we see faith as something we *work up*, it becomes a work that we can boast of. We could say, “I was saved by my faith.” No, even the faith is a gift of God and if it was my faith then it is partly of myself that I am saved. What does verse 8 say? It says, “not your own doing.”

I love the old hymn written by Augustus Toplady in 1775 or 1776, entitled *Rock of Ages*:

Not the labors of my hands  
Can fulfill the law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save, and thou alone.

Note the words – “thou alone” in the last line.

### **Conclusion**

We freely choose Christ because He empowers us to. J. I. Packer gives a good summary. “In the Bible, divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not enemies. They are not uneasy neighbors; they are not in an endless state of cold war with each other. They are friends, and they work together.” [Quoted in Randy Alcorn, *Hand in Hand*, page 127]

When it comes to how what we believe affects our sharing of the Gospel, I would say that Spurgeon said it best. “Let us arouse ourselves to the sternest fidelity, laboring to win souls as much as if it all depended wholly upon ourselves, while we fall back in faith upon the glorious fact that everything rests with the eternal God. [Quoted in Randy Alcorn, *Hand in Hand*, page 1]



## Chapter 5: Here We Stand On Homosexuality

### Various Scriptures

Often it is easy to forget how far from Scripture our culture has gone in such a short period of time, especially when it comes to the issue of homosexuality. Listen to this quote,

Even in purely nonreligious terms, homosexuality represents a misuse of the sexual faculty and, in the words of one ... educator, of “human construction.” It is a pathetic little second-rate substitution for reality, a pitiable flight from life. As such it deserves fairness, compassion, understanding and, when possible, treatment. But it deserves no encouragement, no glamorization, no rationalization, no fake status as minority martyrdom.

[Quoted in Robert Jeffress, *Hell? Yes!* page 95, from *Time Magazine*, January 21, 1966, page 41]

Do you know the source of that quote? It is from *Time* magazine in 1966. Can you imagine something like that being in *Time* today? Notice especially the labeling of homosexuality as “pathetic” and “pitiable.” I am especially surprised by the line that homosexuality deserves no “fake stature as minority martyrdom.” The attempt to present homosexuals as a mistreated minority people is exactly what is happening today.

To me, the shocking thing is not that the world has changed so quickly as to its assessment of homosexuality; the shocking thing is how much of the professing church (with an emphasis on *professing*) has reversed 2000 continuous years of church history in which the church deemed homosexuality as immoral, and thus a sin. Today we are seeing denominations that once stood for the trustworthiness of Scripture in every area (no matter where the culture stood) now abandoning the faith of their founders and condoning homosexuality and even endorsing it as normal.

The approach that I am going to take on this important subject is to first just focus on the Scriptures themselves as to what is taught about homosexuality. Secondly, we will focus on the false justifications for homosexuality, and then we will close with a focus on the Gospel.

### I. A Focus on the Scriptures Relating to Homosexuality

The word “hermeneutics” is defined as “the science of interpretation.” In most any Bible college or seminary, you must take a class on hermeneutics and learn guiding principles to enable you to correctly interpret the Scriptures. Today in much of the professing church we have what one scholar calls “A hermeneutic of legitimization.” He is referring to the attempt to twist the interpretation of the Scriptures to legitimize homosexuality. Here is a summary of what this “hermeneutic of legitimization” does.

The homosexual movement has employed a well-documented hermeneutic of suspicion toward biblical texts that address homosexuality... When that effort is crushed on the

shores of reality, they then suggest that, though the passages do speak of homosexual acts, they reveal a patriarchal and oppressive bias that must be rejected by the contemporary church. Furthermore, it is commonly argued, Paul did not know of the reality of homosexual orientation, and thus Romans 1:26-27 must be read as if it referred to homosexual acts on the part of otherwise heterosexual persons.

[Albert Mohler, *Desire and Deceit: The Real Cost of the New Sexual Tolerance*, page 52-53]

Let me make sure we understand what he is saying. Let's look at the passage that is referred to. Romans 1:26-27 (ESV):

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

What the “hermeneutic of legitimization” is saying that this passage only refers to those who are born heterosexual and not to those that are born homosexuals. The Apostle Paul was ignorant of what they call “the reality of homosexual orientation” and so what Paul says must be changed and modernized based on our superior knowledge of reality. That is an example of the twisted hermeneutics of the homosexual movement.

Let's look at some key passages that must guide us as to where we stand on homosexuality.

#### A. Genesis 1, 2

Genesis 1:26-28a (ESV):

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...”

Genesis 2:24 (ESV) “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

There is no other way to read the creation account except that God's plan was that a man and a woman come together in marriage, and they, in a “one flesh” union, bring forth children. Anything else would require a totally different creation account. There is no other legitimate way to read Genesis 1-2. The very way that woman was physically created indicates that she was divinely designed as the compliment and counterpart to man. A straightforward reading of Genesis 1-2 clearly indicates that sexual “one flesh” union is not designed to be between any two people but between a male and a female. Later we see it revealed that it is a man and a woman in a committed covenant relationship called marriage. The phrase “one flesh” points to a sexual union that can result in children. That sexual union that can result in *being fruitful and multiplying* presupposes two persons of the opposite sex. This is really basic, but so many seem to be missing the obvious, likely because they want to miss it. To biblically condone a homosexual union would require a totally different creation account.

We see a commentary on the creation account in Malachi 2:15 (ESV): “Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring.



So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.” God designed marriage as a part of His plan to bring forth children to be *godly offspring*. Certainly bringing forth children is not the only reason for marriage I but it is an important reason. The bringing forth of children requires a male and a female.

## B. Genesis 19

The events that are recorded in Genesis 19 show the perversity of the city of Sodom where Abraham’s nephew Lot and his family settled. Throughout the rest of the Bible Sodom and its sister city Gomorrah are synonymous with evil and wickedness that brings God’s judgment. The sinfulness and resulting judgment that came to Sodom and Gomorrah are referenced in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Lamentations, Amos, Zephaniah, and Matthew and Luke in the New Testament. The word “sodomy” that is used today to refer to homosexuality comes from the city of Sodom.

The events recorded in Genesis 19 are horrifying. Lot meets two strangers at the gate of Sodom. These strangers were actually angels. Lot invites them to stay in his house. Later, the men of Sodom surround Lot’s house and make some horrifying demands. Genesis 19:5 (HCSB): “They called out to Lot and said, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Send them out to us so we can have sex with them!’” Lot refused their demand and as a result the men of Sodom began to try to break in to Lot’s house to get to the two strangers. Genesis 19:9b (ESV): “Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down.” As they started toward the door to break it down, the two angels pulled Lot back into the house. We see what happened next in Genesis 19:11 (ESV): “And they [the two angels] struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door.” The angels then proceeded to tell Lot to get out of the city since the certain judgment of God was coming. Genesis 19:13 (ESV): “For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it.”

It is interesting to observe the *hermeneutic of legitimization* as it is applied to this passage. Those who are interested in making the Bible *homosexual friendly* say that these men of Sodom were simply trying to be hospitable to these angels who came as men. That interpretation has no legitimacy all. The hermeneutic of legitimization says that the sin of Sodom had nothing to do with homosexuality. They often point to Ezekiel 16:49 (ESV): “Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.” Let’s look at both of these claims.

If the men of Sodom were only trying to get to know the men that came to Lot’s house, why did Lot call their actions “wicked” in Genesis 19:7 (ESV): “and said, ‘I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.’”

As for the Ezekiel passage, we need to see some context of the verse we quoted that says their sin was, “pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.” Look at Ezekiel 16:50 (ESV): “They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.” That word “abomination” is the word used in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 to refer to homosexual acts (we will examine those two verses in a moment). We also see in that it was homosexuality that brought the judgment of God. Jude 1:7: “just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.”

### **C. The Old Testament Law**

Leviticus 18:22 (ESV): “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”  
 Leviticus 20:13a (ESV): “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination.” Any time we refer to the Old Testament law, we must be very careful to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Those who want to discount the Old Covenant law are quick to point out that the same law that prohibits homosexuality also prohibits eating pork, charging interest on a loan, and wearing garments with two kinds of fabric. This approach to the Old Covenant law basically says that it is all irrelevant to today. How do we rightly divide the word of truth? We need to understand that the law had three parts.

#### **1. The Civil Law**

The civil law was given to govern Israel under a “Theocracy” (God as King). There were two main purposes of the civil law. The first was to govern the people by revealing acts that were considered wrong by God and to lay out the penalties for those wrong or neglectful deeds. The second purpose of the civil law was to keep the Israelites separate from the pagan cultures around them. The dietary laws, the laws about mixed fabrics, the death penalty for multiple crimes (including adultery) are all part of the civil law.

#### **2. The Ceremonial Law**

The ceremonial law is basically the sacrificial system and all the details about how the sacrifices are to be prepared and offered. Also included in the ceremonial law were the special feasts. Most of the ceremonies pointed to and prepared the way for Christ who is the fulfillment of the sacrifices.

#### **3. The Moral Law**

The moral law is summarized in nine of the Ten Commandments and also included those moral acts that were abominable to God such as homosexuality. How do we determine what part of the law is still applicable to those under the New Covenant? The ones that are still binding are those that are repeated in the New Testament. For instance, nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament. The only one not commanded in the New Testament is the fourth commandment – “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.” The Old Testament Sabbath is a part of the ceremonial law that pointed to Jesus. Jesus is our Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:3-13). We worship on Sunday in remembrance of the day that Jesus rose from the dead. So the relevance of the law concerning homosexuality is based on whether or not homosexuality is presented as a sin in the New Testament. We are going to see that homosexuality is presented as a sin in the New Testament and thus it is still an abomination to God.

### **D. Romans 1**

We have already dealt with this passage in the introduction to the message. I want to add just a few things to what has already been said. What we see in Romans 1 is a downward progression of fallen men in a fallen world when as Romans 1:18 (ESV) says, they “by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”

The first result is idolatry.

Romans 1:21-23 (ESV): “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”

The next result is that mankind exchanges the truth for the lie.

Romans 1:24-25 (ESV): “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”

The third and ultimate result of a people or nation or culture suppressing the truth is homosexuality.

Romans 1:26-27 (ESV): “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.”

This passage can be twisted, added to, and attempted to explain away, but the meaning is so clear. This is not talking sexual orientation; it is talking about gender. The issue is exchanging the natural God ordained relationship between a man and woman for unnatural same-sex relationships.

What is the result of this downward progression? Romans 1:28 (ESV): “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.” The word “debased” means depraved (NIV) or unable to discern. God gives them up to their sin.

### **E. 1 Corinthians 6; 1 Timothy 1**

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (ESV): “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

1 Timothy 1:9-10 (ESV): “understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.” Time does not allow us to look at these lists in depth, but the point is that homosexuality is included in a list of sins that when practiced as an unconfessed pattern of life give evidence of an absence of genuine salvation which results in not inheriting the kingdom of God.

David Platt gives a good summary of what the Bible teaches about homosexuality. “The Bible is clear and consistent, affirming with one voice from cover to cover that homosexual activity is sexual immorality before God.” [David Platt, *Counter Culture*, page 171]

## **II. A Focus on False Justifications of Homosexuality**

I never cease to be amazed at how those who seek to justify this sin are enabled to creatively twist the Scriptures. To try to justify homosexuality is saying that the church started and built by Jesus Himself has been wrong about homosexuality for 2,000 years. Brilliant Bible scholars like Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wesley, Owen, Edwards, Whitefield, Spurgeon, Torrey, Machen, and scholars of today were all wrong. What arrogance!

What are some of the most common objections to the traditional, orthodox interpretations concerning the sinfulness of all homosexual acts?

### A. “Jesus never said anything about homosexuality”

Carl Lentz, the pastor of Hillsong Church in New York City, said this about homosexuality, "Jesus was in the thick of an era where homosexuality, just like it is today, was widely prevalent. And I'm still waiting for someone to show me the quote where Jesus addressed it on the record in front of people. You won't find it because he never did." [*World Magazine*, June 2014]

That statement can be refuted on many grounds. First, it assumes that only what Jesus said in Scripture (the red print) has authority. 2 Timothy 3:16a (ESV): “All Scripture is breathed out by God...” Since Jesus is God who came in flesh, the entire Bible is His Word.

Second, while Jesus is not recorded as saying the word homosexuality He did speak against it in two ways. First, He affirmed the creation account which evidences the fact that homosexuality was never a part of God’s plan. Matthew 19:4-6 (ESV): “He answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.’”

Third, Jesus often pronounced fornication as a sin, and by definition, fornication is an umbrella term for all sexual activity other than between a man and a woman in a covenant marriage. There is no doubt about where the Lord Jesus stood and stands on homosexuality.

### B. “Homosexuality is like being left handed; it is the way some are born”

The tests that *prove* some people are born with attraction for the same sex are suspect, but is really doesn’t matter. When sin came into the world, all of creation fell, including man. Jeremiah 17:9a: “The heart is deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked.” Even if a person has same sex attraction, that doesn’t cancel what the Bible says. To act out those desires is sin. In the power of the Holy Spirit, every Christian can walk in victory over sinful sexual desires whether it is heterosexual desire for someone other than your spouse or homosexual desires. This argument is irrelevant in light of what the Scriptures clearly say.

### C. “Isn’t the church supposed to love everyone?”

The problem with this objection is that it seems to assume that if the church calls a behavior “sin,” that is a lack of love. Also, this question seems to assume that to love a person means allowing them to be a part of the church without forsaking their sin. So the answer to this question is that we are supposed to love everyone and it is because of that love that we tell those involved in homosexuality that it is a sin to be repented of so that the Gospel can set them free. To condone homosexual behavior in the name of love would be similar to a doctor telling a person with a fast growing cancer that they are in good health because they love them too much to tell them they have cancer and they must undergo drastic surgery to save their life.

Here is the bottom line: we must establish our understanding and/or dealings with homosexuality based on what the Word of God says and not on what the culture around us, that leaves God out, (the world) says about it.

## III. A Focus on the Gospel

Let me be clear about something. The majority of sexual sin is heterosexual sex outside a covenant marriage and pornography. To rail against homosexuality and ignore pornography and heterosexual sex outside a covenant marriage is hypocrisy. Just as adulterers and adulteresses are

delivered and forgiven through the power of the Gospel, even so those involved in homosexual activity can be delivered by the powerful Gospel that we proclaim.

Learn this – if you are involved in a homosexual lifestyle, the homosexuality is what you do; it is not who you are. The blood of Christ shed for you can cover your sin and baptize you into Christ so that you have a new identity. You are a child of God, adopted into His family. You are a new person. The power of the Gospel is greater than the power of the sin of homosexuality; in fact it is greater than the power of any sin.



## Chapter 8: Here We Stand On Manhood and Womanhood

### Various Scriptures

The University of Tennessee Office of Diversity caused quite a controversy when they posted items on the University web-site encouraging all students to use “gender neutral pronouns” when referring to others. Instead of “she” or “he” students should say “ze” to refer to both sexes. That is only one of the many changes suggested on the website to make the university more “transgender friendly.” After Tennessee legislators spoke very strongly against this, the gender neutral terms were deleted from the website. It seems that we have a University that is on the cutting edge of societal change.

The transgender movement has pushed its way to the forefront of our culture with what seems to be blinding speed. Recently, *Time Magazine* dubbed the whole transgender issue as “the new civil rights movement.” Allow me to give you a few more facts. Just over a year ago (May 30, 2014) a review board of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services ruled that people receiving Medicare may no longer be automatically rejected for coverage for sex reassignment surgery. The latest count I saw (it is likely much higher now) is that 15 states, and the District of Columbia, have enacted laws that provide explicit protections for transgender people. California enacted a law that enables students to use restrooms and play on athletic teams of the gender they identify with, regardless of their biological sex. Public schools in New York City and other localities have issued guidelines that permit students to participate in sports and physical education in accordance with their gender identity, not their biology.

[All of the above from *Baptist Press* 6-11-14]

Let’s drop back for a moment and look at some basics about this topic that is warring against the biblical view on manhood and womanhood. Exactly what is “transgender,” or more technically, transgenderism? Here is a definition from Joe Carter of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (ERLC). “Transgenderism is an umbrella term for the state or condition of identifying or expressing a gender identity that does not match a person’s physical/genetic sex.” [Joe Carter, *5 Facts about Transgenderism*, ERLC website]

Some studies claim that there are as many as 700,000 people in the USA who consider themselves transgendered. [ERLC].

What does the Bible say about this *hot button* topic that is beginning to permeate our culture? In the Bible, gender is God-given and not dependent on how a person feels about himself or herself. *It is a matter of biology, not emotions.* I remember counseling a person several years ago, (who would definitely call herself a transgendered person) who gave the standard line of those who claim to be transgendered. She said, “All of my life I have been a man trapped in a woman’s body.” Here is what we are going to see in the Scriptures. There is more to manhood and womanhood than biology and genetics. However, neither manhood nor womanhood is ever separated from biology and genetics. At its root, being male is determined by biology, or more specifically, genetics. It is never determined by what you feel. The same is true of being female. When a child

was born in the Bible it was identified as a “male child” or a “female child.” This was way before they could even express what they felt about themselves. There is not even a hint in the Bible that the sex of a person could ever be changed. Even when, through medical science, an operation is performed to “change the sex” it has been found impossible to truly change a person’s sex. Johns Hopkins University became the first American hospital to offer “sex-reassignment” surgery. Later, after many follow up interviews, they stopped doing these surgeries. Dr. McHugh, the former Psychiatrist in Chief at Johns Hopkins said, “Sex change’ is biologically impossible ... People who undergo sex-reassignment surgery do not change from men to women or vice versa. Rather, they become feminized men or masculinized women.” [Joe Carter, *5 Facts about Transgenderism*, 4-16-2015, ERLC]

That is very revealing. Where does the Bible stand on manhood and womanhood? It is very important to answer that question because where the Bible stands is where we stand.

## **I. The Origin of Manhood and Womanhood (Genesis 1-3)**

There is nothing that God created that was created with the hands on care that man was created with. Psalms 33:6-9 (ESV):

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

Think on this for a moment. Think about the universe. I continue to be overwhelmed with the immensity of the universe. There are possibly billions of galaxies and billions of stars in the individual galaxies. Yet the Bible says that God spoke them into being. I am moved to ask the same question the Psalmist asked in Psalms 8:3-4 (ESV): “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?”

When God created the animals, He spoke them into being. Yet, the Bible tells us that our God who spoke the universe into being and spoke the animals into being, when He created man, He created man with His own hands. Genesis 2:7 (ESV): “then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” The word “formed” is the same root word that is used of a potter forming a vessel out of clay. The God who spoke the universe into existence took the earth he created and from it He formed man like a potter forms a vessel. Then God breathed into man His own breath – the breath of life. Man was not just one creature among the many; he was “handmade” by God and given life from God’s breath. Let’s look at some details of this special creation of God.

### **A. Male and Female Were Created Equal in God’s Image (Genesis 1)**

Genesis 1:26-27 (ESV):

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.



Both sexes bore the divine image. What does that mean – the image and likeness of God? The Hebrew word translated “image” has the meaning of shadow or carving – that is, not the real thing but similar. We are not gods but God put some of His qualities in us. The Hebrew word translated “likeness” means pattern, or model, or example. In other words, God himself was the model in the creation of man and woman.

Let’s go a little deeper in what it means that God created both male and female in His image. It does not refer to our bodies, because John 4:24 tells us God is a spirit. Like God, man has a rational personality and a moral consciousness. We have intellect, the ability to think abstractly, emotion, and will. We can rationally think, feel, and choose. Again, the Hebrew word for image and the word for likeness do not mean man was the essence of God – unable to sin, omnipotent, omniscient, unchangeable, etc. We were created in His shadow and likeness. Also, the image of God means that we are spiritual beings with a spirit that allows us to worship God, know God, and have an intimate relationship with God. We are spiritual beings that possess a soul, and we are housed in a body. The fact that both the male and the female bear God’s image demonstrates that they are equal in dignity and being. Both are equally necessary and important to God’s design for the human race.

### **B. Male and Female Were Created with Differences (Genesis 2)**

Equality of status does not mean interchangeability of function. In other words, being equal does not mean that there are not distinct differences. Males and females are different physically way beyond the obvious differences. The individual cells are different. The brain functions differently and is even formed differently. We respond to stress differently. Not only are we different physically, we are different emotionally and intellectually we process information differently. Equal does not mean the same.

Let me give you the most basic physical difference. Genesis 2:21-22 (ESV): “So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.”

The woman was made from the man, not from the dust. This is not some allegory or a myth about origins. This is literally how man and woman were created. Adam really was created from the dust of the earth. The elements that make up our body are the elements of the earth. Eve really was taken from Adam. Genetic research has shown that one pair of human chromosomes labeled X and Y determines the gender of a child. All males have both X and Y chromosomes; all females have only a pair of X chromosomes. From a purely biological standpoint, the Y chromosome determines maleness. If the child inherits an X chromosome from the father – it will be female. If the chromosome is a Y – it will be a male. The father’s seed is the determining factor in the gender of the child. Genetically therefore it is possible to create a female from a male. However, it is not possible to extract a male’s genetic code from a female because a female has no Y chromosome. This is perfectly harmonious with the Biblical account of Eve being taken from Adam.

When we examine the origin of manhood and womanhood we see that both male and female were created equal in God’s image and yet they were created with significant differences.

### **C. Male and Female Were Cursed by the Fall (Genesis 3)**

By “fall” we are speaking of their disobedience and the resulting consequences. God said in Genesis 2:17 (ESV): “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Adam and Eve ate of the tree of life and they died. It wasn’t an immediate physical death, but it was an immediate spiritual death (they were separated

from the life of God and communion with God). Also, there was the entrance of a power called sin that dwells in our members (Romans 7:23) that gives Satan inroad to our life to tempt and entice and enslave those who have not been born of God. Every sin, every perversion of God's plan for maleness and femaleness comes as a result of sin coming into the world, as recorded in Genesis 3.

## II. The Functioning of Manhood and Womanhood in a Fallen World

Because men and women (who are created equally but different) live as sin cursed people in a sin cursed world, there are problems with manhood and womanhood. One of the stated goals of the National Organization of Women is to work toward, "an end to all distinctions based on sex." It is this mindset that laid the groundwork for the whole transgendered movement that is so effective in our culture today. Here is what is happening all around us. We are raising a generation of "girly men" and "manly girls." Popular Christian author, Stu Weber, speaking to men described the problem like this:

Our culture is in deep trouble, and at the heart of its trouble is its loss of a vision for manhood. If it is difficult for you and me as adult males, to maintain our masculine balance in this gender-neutral culture, imagine what it must be like for our sons, who are growing up in an increasingly feminized world.

Femininity is being as vigorously attacked as is masculinity. Elizabeth Elliot said:

I find myself in the sometimes quite uncomfortable position of having to belabor the obvious, and hold up examples of femininity to women who almost feel apologetic for being feminine or being womanly. I would remind you that *femininity* is not a curse. It is not even a triviality. It is a gift, a divine gift, to be accepted with both hands, and to thank God for. Because remember, it was His idea.

[Quoted in *Think Biblically*, John MacArthur et. al. page 169]

The sad thing is that so many in the church (notice that I didn't say "in Christ") have bought into this *gender neutral* mindset. The key to restoring biblical manhood and womanhood in the church lies with the parents. What are parents to do? Parents are to train their children in what it means to be a biblical man and what it means to be a biblical woman. Allow me to give you some principles for parents.

### A. Developing Biblical Masculinity

#### 1. Point Him to Biblical Examples

We could learn a lot about biblical masculinity from many heroes of the Bible. Joshua exemplified biblical masculinity when he took leadership in Joshua 24:15: "And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

There was David who as a teenager killed a lion and a bear and in the confrontation with the giant, Goliath, he ran to the battle, not away from the giant. In the New Testament, we see the Apostle Paul who constantly ran to the battle, not away from it. Even after being stoned, he went back into

the same town where he was stoned. What an example of a fearless risk-taking man of God who illustrates biblical manhood.

The greatest example of masculinity is the Lord Jesus Himself. Being perfect in all His ways, Jesus is the highest example of biblical masculinity. While Jesus was fully God, he was also fully man. Growing up as a carpenter, or stone mason (the word can mean either), Jesus was no emaciated washed out pathetic man that is pictured in many artist's renderings of Him. He was a hard worker. He had no fear. He faced demonic spirits and always triumphed. He faced hostile Jewish leaders who wanted Him dead and wouldn't give an inch to them. We see the respect He had for women and the tenderness with which He treated His mother as he hung in agony on the cross.

Here in Christ Jesus we see the essence of biblical masculinity. He was kind and tender, fearless, the epitome of self-sacrifice, a man with a servant spirit who performed the slave labor of washing the disciples' feet, kind compassionate, and yet unyielding to evil. Oh what a man!

### **2. Teach Him to Submit to Authority**

All authority resides in Christ. Matthew 28:18b Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Everyone, who is or will be in authority, is and will be under authority. The best way to prepare your son to be the head of his home when he is married is to train him to submit to the authorities in his life while he is a boy. He must learn through discipline to be under his parents' authority, to be under the authority of teachers and administrators at school, and to submit to authority at church. The one under authority will be effective when the time comes for him to be in a position of authority.

### **3. Teach Him to Take Responsibility and Reject Passivity**

With our modern invention of "adolescence" which covers people even in college, there is pressure to just float along, have fun, and just do what you have to do to get by. Boys in our culture are taught to put off taking responsibility till later in life. That is a partial explanation for the problem we have with 30 year olds addicted to video games. Passivity is very unmanly! Leaders are aggressive and take responsibility. Boys need to learn, at a young age, that some fun and games are acceptable, but life isn't about fun and games. Grow up! At least by teenager years (if not before) help him get an age appropriate job where he is given responsibility and where he is rewarded for being aggressive instead of passive.

### **4. Teach Him Manners, Especially Manners that relate to His Treatment of Females**

Teach him to open doors for females – including his sisters. Teach him table manners how to speak politely to all adults and, especially, women. Teach him how to shake hands while looking the person in the eye.

### **5. Teach Him How to do Manly Things**

Randy Stinson in his book, *A Biblical Guide to Manhood*, lists twenty-five things that a dad should teach his son. Here are a few. Read good books (readers are leaders). Teach him how to jump start a car. Teach him how to use basic tools (hammer, saw, screwdriver, etc.). Teach him how to manage money. Teach him how to serve others. Teach him how to handle a loss (life is full of disappointments; don't allow them to define you). You can add your own.

I have left out many things but these are the kind of things to help him develop his maleness and not get confused as to his sexual identity. What about single mothers? We need some men in the church to step up and spend time with boys who don't have a Father who is active in their life.

## **B. Developing Biblical Femininity**

### **1. Hold Up Biblical Examples Before Her**

Probably the example you should hold up most prominently when it comes to what a godly woman looks like is the ideal woman of Proverbs 31:10-31. What we find in Proverbs 31 is a picture of true biblical femininity, and it blows apart most people's view of what true femininity looks like. This woman is a teacher of her children, an accomplished business woman who runs a successful home based business. She keeps the home going, and makes her husband look good. A good summary statement is from Doug Wilson, "This passage denies that a woman's place is *in* the home. It affirms that her *priority* is the home." [*Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Fall 2009, page 32]

This woman is not downtrodden, oppressed, or unfulfilled. She is not an unhappy doormat that her husband walks on. She is confident, but not arrogant, organized, but not obsessive, inwardly beautiful, but not flaunting it. Mothers – become a Proverbs 31 scholar and teach these ideals to your daughters. Look at the result of this kind of femininity: Proverbs 31:28 (ESV): "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her."

### **2. Teach Her Modesty**

What is modest is not determined by culture. Immodesty is a huge problem even in the church. Adult women – PLEASE *set the example*, and mothers, modesty ought not to be a suggestion (and I understand what a battle this can be).

### **3. Teach Her That Inner Beauty Is the Best Kind of Beauty**

Inner beauty is the only kind that lasts. Outward beauty is fleeting. You will get old and there is only so much you can do. Inner beauty can keep becoming more beautiful as the years pass.

### **4. Teach and Model for Her the Biblical Roles in Marriage**

Even if you are not married, teach them diligently to her.

### **5. Teach Her What It Means to Be Feminine**

## **Conclusion**

Masculinity and femininity are not a part of the curse of sin. They are God's perfect plan. It is sin that has distorted masculinity and femininity. Those who have experienced the gospel and have victory over sin, and the indwelling enabling Holy Spirit, must model for the rest of humanity that God's plan is always best. Our response to a culture that is reaping what has been sown is not, "I told you so." Our response is to give them the gospel and do all that is possible to raise masculine boys and feminine girls.

## Chapter 9: Here We Stand On the Mystery of Suffering

### Various Scriptures

Allow me to introduce the Hiam family to you. I read about them in the excellent devotional book by John Piper entitled, *A Godward Life* (pages 57-58). In his Cambodian village in 1975, Hiam, a Christian teacher, knew that the black clad Khmer Rouge soldiers, now heading across the field, were coming for him. He had already determined that when his time came, he would die with dignity and without complaint. Hiam's entire family was rounded up that afternoon. They were called "enemies of the glorious revolution" because they were Christians. The family spent a sleepless night comforting one another and praying for each other as they lay bound together in the dewy grass. The next morning the soldiers led them to their place of execution, *viel somlap* known later as "the killing fields." The family was ordered to dig a large grave for themselves. Then they knelt and held hands as they prayed. Hiam began exhorting the Khmer Rouge soldiers and the onlookers to repent and believe the gospel.

In panic, one of Hiam's youngest sons bolted away into the surrounding bush. With amazing calm Hiam persuaded the soldiers to not go after him, but to let his Father call him back. From the pit Hiam called out to his son, "What comparison my son, stealing a few more days of life in the wilderness, a fugitive, wretched and alone compared to joining your family momentarily in this grave and then being together around the throne of God free forever in paradise." After a few tense moments, the boy came out of the bush and rejoined his family kneeling in the grave. Here on this earth, the end was swift for them. Their lifeless bodies toppled over in the pit that they had been forced to dig, and their souls and spirits soared to be with the Lord whom they loved.

A Barna poll asked, "If you could ask God only one question and you knew that He would give you an answer, what would you ask?" The most common response was, "Why is there pain and suffering in the world?" [Randy Alcorn, *If God Is Good Why Do We Hurt?*, page 8]

As we deal with the subject of suffering, let me give you a caution. We must be careful to avoid the temptation of trying to explain more than God has explained in His Word about the reasons for individual suffering. We will never be able to understand all the "whys" of individual cases of suffering. Why was the Hiam family killed for their faith when other families have been supernaturally delivered? Why was James killed by Herod in Acts 12, and days later Peter was supernaturally delivered from Herod's prison and his approaching execution? Why are some people healed from cancer and others suffer and die? Why in some cases are marriages supernaturally put back together and others end in divorce, and the divorcing spouse remarries and seems, at least on the surface, to be happy? I don't have the answer to any of those questions except to say that God is sovereign and He does all things well. There is a mystery when it comes to individual suffering. God said in Isaiah 55:9 (ESV): "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." We must avoid trying to explain what God has not explained. This much I know, suffering is a part of the sovereign will of God. Our Savior was a suffering Savior. As we take up our cross and follow Him, the narrow road we walk is lined with suffering. While we can know *what* God is doing through our suffering,

we must accept the mystery of the *why* and leave that in the hands of a sovereign, omnipotent God who loves us and is always good in all He does.

You cannot really talk about suffering without talking about Job. Job holds the world's record in suffering. He wanted to understand and know why, but God never told him why; God just gave him a deeper revelation of Himself. I am blessed by this quote from R. C. Sproul:

Job's faith wavered. He mourned. He cried. He protested. He questioned. He even cursed the day of his birth. But he never cursed God. In the face of his adversity, he remained firm in his only hope – God. While God never explained His secret counsel to Job, He did reveal His character. Such divine revelation is sufficient in the absence of explanations to carry us through every severe heartbreak.

Job found comfort not in the mystery of suffering revealed, but in the mystery of God's person unveiled. Basically God's answer to Job's desire to understand was, "Trust Me I know what I'm doing." To try to pour the infinite wisdom of all God's ways into our little finite brains would be akin to trying to pour the Atlantic Ocean into a plastic kiddie wading pool in your back yard. There is a mystery to individual suffering that we cannot solve. However, there is much about the fact of suffering and the purpose of suffering that we can know. That is what I will focus on without denying the mystery of individual cases of suffering.

## I. The Origin of Suffering

There is an obvious link between evil and suffering in the world. One of the most emotional events that I have experienced was visiting the Holocaust Museum in Israel in the early 1990's. It was agonizing to say the least. The pictures of the gas ovens, the emaciated bodies, and the mass open graves filled with Jews who had been executed, were almost more than the emotions could endure. The most impactful thing was the continual reading of the names of the six million Jews who were tortured and killed. How do we explain such horrific evil?

To better understand suffering, we need to focus on the existence of evil in the world. The Bible tells us that in the beginning of God's creation, there was no evil, no suffering, and no death. When we read Genesis 1-2 we find a world in which everything was good. We see the origin of sin and suffering in Genesis 3. Suffering is the result of sin coming into the world. With sin, came more sin, and more suffering, and more sin, etc., etc., God warned in Genesis 2:17 (ESV): "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." In Genesis 3 we see the first act of disobedience and the horrific results. Adam and Eve truly did die when they disobeyed God. Their spirit (that part of mankind that allows us to know and fellowship with God) died immediately. Their soul (mind, will, and emotions) was darkened (Ephesians 4:18) which gave them a distorted view of reality, and their body began to age and die. In Genesis 3 we also see that the results of sin were passed on to their descendants and in the New Testament, all mankind are seen as being, "in Adam." That means that we were all born with a spirit dead to God, a soul that is darkened in its understanding, and a body that is dying and destined for physical death.

This explains the entrance of evil and the origin of suffering. As time passed, the evil became more pervasive until God brought widespread judgment. Genesis 6:5-8 (ESV):

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, "I will blot out

man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

What follows this passage is the account of the flood that wiped out all of mankind with the exception of Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives. However, after the flood and as man multiplied, there was evil that continued because Noah and his family were “in Adam” with the curse of sin very much a part of their lives.

This is the biblical account of the origin and continued existence of evil in mankind. Not only did mankind fall, but all of creation fell when sin came into the world and that explains natural disasters, sickness, and all suffering not directly attributed to man’s actions. The origin of all suffering is sin coming into the world.

## II. The Mercy of God and Suffering

A common way the problem of suffering is phrased is, “Why do good people suffer?” In reality, there are no truly good people from God’s perspective. We say certain people are *good*, but we mean good in comparison to other people. In comparing them to God and His perfect standard, we must confess Romans 3:12b: “...*There is none who does good, no, not one.*”

You see, there is a tougher question than, “Why do we suffer?” The really tough question is, “Given the absolute holiness of God and the sinfulness of man, why is there anything other than suffering?” We think many times that God owes us a suffering free life. The fact is all of mankind deserves condemnation and suffering because of sin, and it is only by God’s mercy and grace that we have a single moment free from suffering. If we got what we deserved, we would all suffer now and for eternity. Praise God for His mercy!

## III. The Sovereignty of God in Suffering

The Bible is clear that suffering isn’t random. God is sovereign in all things and suffering falls under that sovereignty. Nothing happens apart from His sovereign causing or allowing. There is no fate or bad luck or bad karma. God is sovereign over suffering. Ephesians 1:11 (ESV): “...the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.” When you study the Scriptures, you see that God is sovereign over the failing of sight (Exodus 4:11), the giving and taking of life (1 Samuel 2:6), the loss and gain of money (1 Samuel 2:7), the persecution of Christians (Hebrews 12:4-7), the suffering of His saints (1 Peter 4:19), and even the crucifixion of His Son (Acts 4:27,28).

Some people, in an effort to make God *look good* by man’s false standards, say that God has nothing to do with suffering. They picture Him as a helpless by-stander. An example of this weak view of God is Rabbi Harold Kushner who wrote a bestselling book entitled, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Rabbi Kushner lost his son to a rare disease and came to this conclusion: “...even God has a hard time keeping chaos in check.” He presents God as a “God of justice and not of power.” Rabbi Kushner concludes his book with these words - “Can you learn to love and forgive Him despite His limitations, as Job does, and as you once learned to forgive and love your parents even though they were not as wise, as strong, or as perfect as you needed them to be?” [Quoted in Robert Jeffress, *Hell? Yes!*, page 52]

Do we explain suffering by presenting God as a well-meaning but impotent parent? That is not the God of Scripture!

The God revealed in the Bible is omnipotent and sovereign over all. God is in complete control. Psalms 115:3 (ESV): “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.” Romans 8:28 (NASB): “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.” Because this God, who is sovereign over suffering, is also love, we can trust Him even when the reason for the suffering is a mystery to us.

#### **IV. The Purpose of God through Suffering**

The Atheist Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) is known for his famous “dilemma.” Here is a paraphrase of that dilemma:

1. If God is loving and gracious and still allows evil and suffering, it is because He is unable to prevent it (this was Rabbi Kushner’s view).
2. If God is able to prevent evil and suffering, but doesn’t, it is because He is evil.

If one rejects both of those alternatives, he must accept Hume’s third conclusion.

3. There is no God since evil and suffering run rampant in the world.

[From Jeffress, *Hell Yes!*, page 49]

Many people have agreed with Hume’s conclusion, but there is something that Hume left out. What if God had a good purpose for allowing evil and suffering to come into the world? The fact is that God does have a purpose for suffering. God neither causes nor allows any *purposeless* events or incidents of suffering. Our highest desires tend to be pleasure from things tied to this world, and a comfortable existence free from pain or suffering of any kind. God, however, desires us to find our pleasure in Him and to receive our comfort from Him in the midst of the circumstances He has allowed to turn our hearts to Him alone. I never find in the Scripture where God has a value placed on our being comfortable (there is a difference in being comforted and being comfortable). What are the purposes of God for allowing or even causing suffering?

##### **A. To Purify Us**

The Bible is clear that God uses episodes of suffering to reveal our maturity level and our depth of commitment to Him. Job 23:10 (ESV): “But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.” The analogy here is of gold ore that is mixed with impurities and as it is heated, the impurities are separated from the pure gold and float to the surface and are skimmed off. The fire revealed the impurities. Even so, times of suffering reveal impure motives and unchristlike attitudes that we would have never known had we not been placed over the fire. We see that same process, except for silver, is referred to in Psalms 66:10 (ESV): “For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.”

In the New Testament we see that same truth in 1 Peter 1:6-7 (ESV): “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Suffering has the ministry of testing and purifying.

##### **B. To Discipline Us**

Sometimes the suffering is the result of our sin, and God uses it to bring us to repentance and obedience. Much of our suffering is simply the working out of the reaping what we have sown principle. Here, the suffering is God’s corrective discipline, not to make us pay for our sin, but to train us to live in obedience.



At other times, however, the suffering has nothing to do with our sin, but is to discipline us and to develop, in us, endurance for the mission God has planned for us. In boot camp in the military, trainees are put in some very painful circumstances (long marches, survival exercises, obstacle courses, and other painful events). These painful circumstances are not for punishment, but for disciplining and training for the mission they have been called to do.

We are compared in several places to soldiers but especially in 2 Timothy. 2 Timothy 2:3 (ESV) says: “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” Sometimes we never really understand God’s word apart from suffering. Psalms 119:71 (ESV): “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.” Have you ever heard anyone give a testimony that their greatest lessons in life came through times of ease and comfort? I haven’t.

I read one of the greatest quotes on suffering from Samuel Rutherford. Samuel Rutherford was a Scottish pastor who was born in about 1600. He was imprisoned for preaching the word of God. From prison he wrote over 200 letters that are still preserved. Listen to what this man who endured so much suffering said:

If God had told me some time ago that He was about to make me as happy as I could be in this world, and then had told me that he should begin by crippling me in all my limbs, and removing me from all my usual sources of enjoyment, I should have thought it a very strange mode of accomplishing His purpose. And yet, how is His wisdom manifest even in this! For if you should see a man shut up in a close room, idolizing a set of lamps and rejoicing in their light, and you wished to make him truly happy, you would begin by blowing out all his lamps; and then throw open the shutters to let in the light of heaven.  
[John Piper, *A Godward Life* page 288,289]

All of the suffering that God allows purifies us and disciplines us and in doing so conforms us to Christ’s likeness. That’s why we are told in James 1:2 (ESV): “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.”

### **C. To Glorify God**

In John 9 Jesus and His disciples came upon a blind man and the disciples were asking why he suffered with blindness and Jesus gave them the bottom line John 9:3 (ESV): “Jesus answered, ‘It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God [God’s glory] might be displayed in him.’” This blind man suffered that the works (the glory) of God might be put on display.

At the end of Job, after all of his suffering, after all his so called friend’s mostly worthless advice, after Job’s complaining, God parades His glory before Job. From nature, He shows Job His power, His wisdom, and His providential care. Job is overwhelmed with the glory of God and answers the Lord. Job 42:1-3 (ESV): “Then Job answered the Lord and said: ‘I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.’”

Job doesn’t have to know the answer; God is the answer and in seeing His Glory Job is satisfied. Job 42:5-6 (ESV): “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Job didn’t know the purpose, but it was enough to know that there was a purpose. Another, more modern, learned what Job learned when he said, “Joy is not in the absence of pain but in the presence of God” (Teilhard DeChardain). Without suffering we would never know God’s comfort, God’s enabling grace, God’s healing, or God’s compassion. Our suffering puts these and many more of God’s perfections on display.

**Conclusion**

At the cross, God the Son suffered – suffered far more than any man or woman has ever suffered. His suffering was not just the physical suffering. His suffering was the suffering of 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV): “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Because He took our sin, he suffered both the wrath of God, and abandonment by God, the Father, as He became our substitute on Calvary’s cross. Because of His suffering, our suffering has a limit. When we repent and believe, we will one day leave suffering behind forever. Romans 8:18 (ESV): “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

## Chapter 11: Here We Stand On Church Membership

### Various Scriptures

I grew up in a church of seventy or so in average attendance, in a rural town of 500 people, in the *Bible Belt*. How did one typically become a member of a church like that? In my home church, you simply walked forward at the invitation at the end of the service and told the pastor that you wanted to join the church. He would usually ask if you had been saved and baptized, and if the answer was “yes,” he would call over a deacon who had a little clip board with a card (bought from the Sunday School Board) entitled something like “Application for Church Membership.” The music leader would keep singing - *Just as I Am*, until the deacon got all of the information filled out. The music would stop and the deacon would hand the card to the pastor, the pastor would then introduce you to the church, give all the pertinent information about which church you were coming from, and the congregation would vote to accept you into membership. I never remember anyone being turned down.

If the person coming forward was coming to be saved, the process was similar. Instead of filling out the card, the deacon or the pastor himself would kneel down with you at the front pew and he would ask you if you were willing to repent of your sins and trust Jesus. If the answer was “yes,” and it most always was since that is why you came forward, the deacon or the pastor would then lead you through the sinner’s prayer, then you would be introduced to the church and everybody would celebrate your salvation. Before you left church, or soon thereafter, a date would be set for your baptism and the baptism made you a member of the church.

Later, I found out that my rural small church was not that different from larger churches in more highly populated areas in the Bible Belt. We moved to Knoxville when I was sixteen, and the church of about 300 received members basically the same way. When Kathy and I were married and moved to Nashville, the church we joined had about 350-400 in attendance, and they received members in a similar way.

To be fair, there were many things good about the three churches that I was a member of before being called to ministry. I am convinced that the casual, *hurry up*, no examination, low expectation way that members were received into most evangelical churches in the Bible Belt, is a foundational cause of a lot that is wrong with many evangelical churches today. The way of receiving members outside the Bible belt may not have been much better, but my experience was in the Bible belt. A sad fact is that many evangelical churches still receive members in a similar way to what I have described.

Let’s look more closely at the probable consequences of that traditional (at least in the Bible belt) way of receiving members.

First, because prospective members who join by letter, or statement, are not dealt with concerning assurance and evidence of salvation, there are likely many unconverted people on church rolls. In many churches, prospective members are not even asked to share their testimony.

A second consequence is that most Baptist churches in the Bible Belt have inflated membership rolls that are often two, three, or even four times their attendance. In fact, there are so many

members that the church cannot locate (the FBI couldn't locate many of them), that a new category of members was established – “inactive members.” In many churches those two categories of members are close to the number of active members and even larger in some churches.

A third devastating consequence of the way churches have received members, and treat membership, is that formal church discipline has all but been ignored in most Baptist churches, at least in the Bible Belt. When I speak of church discipline, I am speaking of the biblical practice of lovingly confronting sin in the body of Christ that is openly bringing reproach on Christ and the church. Jesus outlined the church discipline process in Matthew 18:15-17 (ESV):

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

We will deal with the subject of church discipline in a later *Here We Stand* message, but church discipline is all but impossible in a church that can't even find a large portion of their members.

A fourth consequence, of the way many churches have treated membership, is that there are many members who sometimes attend, but are involved in no ministry. Though there are many causes of that sad situation, one main cause is that expectations for members are not made clear when someone joins the church. There are many other consequences to treating membership lightly, but just these four ought to motivate us to give membership the priority it deserves.

I want to approach this topic by asking a series of questions.

### **I. The *What* Question: “What Is the Church?”**

The root cause of the problem with church membership is that most professing Christians do not understand “ecclesiology” – the doctrine of the church (the Greek word for “church” is *ecclesia*). The word *church* is used in two primary ways in the New Testament and the context makes it clear as to which of the two each passage is referring.

First, the church is sometimes referring to what Wayne Grudem calls “the community of all true believers of all time.” This concept of the church is sometimes called “the invisible church” or “the universal church.” An example of this use of the word *church* is in Ephesians 5:25 (ESV): “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” There are about twelve uses of the word *church* that is referring to *the invisible church* or *the universal church*.

Second, the majority of the time that the word *church* is used in the New Testament epistles it is referring to a specific group of people in a specific location. This is often called, “the local church” or “the visible church.” In the New Testament, about ninety-nine times when the word church is used, it is referring to a specific church in a specific locality. When we talk about the church in this message, we are referring to the local, visible church.

The Protestant Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was primarily about the doctrine of salvation, but it was also about the doctrine of the church. Arguably, the two prominent personalities in the Reformation were Martin Luther and John Calvin. Both of them often spoke about the doctrine of the church and they were mostly in agreement.

The Augsburg Confession (1530), which was the Lutheran statement of faith, said this about the church: “The church is a congregation of the saints in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered.” John Calvin’s definition of the church was, “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.” [Both quoted in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, page 865]

A commonly agreed upon statement of the purpose of a church is that a true church exists for:

1. Ministry to God – Worship
  2. Ministry to Believers – Edification
  3. Ministry to the World – Making Disciples at Home and Around the World
- [All three adapted from Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* pages 867-868]

A true church must practice the proclamation of Word, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, baptism, worship, edification (being built up), and disciple making, locally, and around the world. But there is something else about the church that is not understood in our culture. The church has been delegated authority by the founder and builder of the church – the Lord Jesus Christ. Make no mistake that Jesus is the ultimate authority that we must all submit to.

The simplest early church confession was “Jesus Christ is Lord.” Jesus Himself said in Matthew 28:18b (ESV): “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” The Lord Jesus who has all authority has delegated some authority to the Government. Romans 13:1a (ESV): “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.” We are to submit to the government’s authority unless it contradicts Christ’s authority.

God has delegated some authority to the family. The wife is to submit to her husband unless he violates Christ’s ultimate authority. The children are to submit to their parent’s authority unless the parent’s authority violates Christ’s authority. In the same way Christ has delegated authority to the church. “The local church is the authority on earth that Jesus has instituted to officially affirm and give shape to my Christian life and yours. [Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership*, page 24]

Jonathan Leeman gives a good summary:

Just as the Bible establishes the government of your nation as your highest authority on earth when it comes to your citizenship in that nation, so the Bible establishes the local church as your highest authority on earth when it comes to your discipleship to Christ and your citizenship in Christ’s present and promised nation. [Leeman, page 25]

The church has authority to determine the requirements for joining, authority in church discipline to remove a person from membership, authority to determine who is baptized and who does the baptizing, who receives and administers the Lord’s Supper, what constitutes false teaching, and many other things. When you join a local church, it is not like joining a club or a civic organization; you are putting yourself under the authority of that church. Only when the church’s authority contradicts Christ’s ultimate authority are we to refuse to submit.

## II. The *Where* Question: “Where Is Church Membership in the Bible?”

You will not find the phrase “church membership” in the New Testament, but I believe that we clearly see church membership there.

Let’s go back to the beginning of the church on the day of Pentecost that is recorded in Acts 2. When the Holy Spirit came upon the believers to unite them with Christ, indwell them, and fill them, Peter began to preach, and we are told in Acts 2:41: “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”

Who is the “*them*” that was added to? It was the 120 persons in the upper room waiting for the promised coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:15). Now, after the Day of Pentecost, there were about 3,120! The point is that they had records; they kept track of individuals.

As they continued in the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, prayers, and taking the Lords Supper together, we are told in Acts 2:47b: “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” They knew who these people were.

In the early church, elders (also called overseers and bishops) were made responsible for specific groups of believers. 1 Peter 5:2 (NIV): “Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers...” We see that same principle in Acts 20:28: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” It was the elders of a specific local church, in a specific location (Ephesus), that Paul spoke of. They knew that they had the responsibility to oversee a specific group of professing Christians.

Another line of evidence for church membership is that Christians were to submit to specific leaders - Hebrews 13:7: “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of *their* conduct.”

Are you seeing the pattern? New believers were added to the local church, and there were records that revealed who they were and how many there were. There were specific elders over specific believers, in a specific location, and the believers in local churches were to submit to their leaders - who watched over their souls.

All who came to Christ that we know about in the early church were baptized and then they were “added to the church.” When a person who was identified with a specific church was involved in sin that was bringing reproach on Christ and His church, they were exhorted, in love, to repent. If they did not repent they were put out of the church (1 Corinthians 5:11-13). There was a specific group of people who were recognized as making up the local church. In 2 Corinthians 2:6, Paul refers to a man on which the church carried out church discipline and says, 2 Corinthians 2:6: “This punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority *is* sufficient for such a man.” *Majority* of what? That only makes sense if there was a recognized membership.

## III. The *How* Question: How Does One Become a Member of a Church?

If there was some type of membership in the New Testament church, what was the requirement to join? There is no list of requirements found in the New Testament, but by synthesizing what the New Testament says about the church, it seems that there were at least two requirements.

### A. Salvation

That certainly should come as no surprise to us! The church is the body of Christ, the family of God, and the bride of Christ. All of those depictions of the church assume that those in the church

are truly saved people. Acts 2:47b says, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” We, of course, do not know in a final, perfect way who is saved and who is not. But, it seems to me that the church has a responsibility to help a potential member who is joining the church examine their life to discern if they truly are a Christian. The Bible gives us a tool to do just such an examination. That tool is the book of 1 John. John tells us why the Holy Spirit inspired him to write the book of 1 John in 1 John 5:13: “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life...” The book of 1 John contains a series of tests for a person to examine their life to see if they truly have eternal life. Every person who joins this church goes through those self-graded tests.

## **B. Baptism**

The only kind of water baptism taught in the New Testament is believer’s baptism. There are some very godly people who believe in infant baptism. The primary case for infant baptism is based on some interpretations, that I don’t agree with, and on human logic. They believe that water baptism replaced the sign of the old covenant which was the circumcision of infant boys. They leap to the conclusion that the sign of the new covenant (which they say is baptism) should be administered to infants of believing parents. I believe that the evidence of Scripture does not teach that baptism replaced circumcision. The two are compared, but baptism was not the replacement for circumcision. The fact is that there is never a command to baptize infants and every example of water baptism is of believers.

Baptism in the New Testament is primarily a public profession of faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as our only hope for salvation. It is also a testimony of our identification with Christ, through the Holy Spirit, baptizing us into Christ at salvation. Not only did Christ die, the old us under sin’s slavery died with Him. Not only was He buried, the old us, in Adam, was buried with Him. When He rose from the dead, we were raised to a new life, with a new nature, being partakers of Christ’s resurrection life (which is called “eternal life”). The identification with Christ that water baptism pictures is described in Romans 6:3-5:

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection.

While the New Testament does not teach that baptism saves us, the New Testament knows nothing of a saved person who refuses to be baptized. The assumption in the New Testament is that all Christians have been baptized. Why would the early church assume that? It was because Jesus commanded it! Matthew 28:19: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

To be His disciple is to submit to His Lordship. How could a person come to Jesus and say, “I trust in You alone to save me; I confess you as Lord of life, but the first thing you told me to do after I become your disciple, well, I think I’ll take a rain check on that one; maybe later?”

The mode of baptism is total immersion in water. We believe that for two reasons: First, that is the meaning of the Greek word for baptism. It means to immerse. Second, only immersion gives an accurate picture of what baptism is to picture – our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. The two qualifications for membership are genuine salvation and believer’s baptism.

## **IV. The “What Then” Question: What Comes After Church Membership?**

As a member of a church, you have a responsibility that is twofold.

### **A. Members Are Responsible to Remain in Covenant**

Though it is nowhere specifically stated in the New Testament that joining a church has all of the qualities of a biblical covenant. A covenant is a commitment based on trust and involving personal relationship. *Covenant* is the language of personal relationship. Think of the most important commitments in your life and you will see that they are covenant commitments that involve the deepest personal relationships you have.

There is the covenant of marriage. Marriage is a commitment based on trust that we will love and cherish one another through sickness, health, poverty, and riches until death do us part. Marriage is called a covenant in Malachi 2:14: “Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant.”

When we really understand the significance of joining a local church, we see that it has all the qualities of a biblical covenant. All of the commitments in joining a church are in trust and in the realm of personal relationship. We make a commitment to God to worship Him in spirit and in truth and to represent Christ as a part of His body; we make a commitment to one another to love, edify, and serve. That’s got covenant written all over it!

Until the middle of the last century, it was common to require people to sign a covenant that summarized the commitment expected before they could join the church. I think that abandoning of that practice has contributed to the “consumer mindset” (what can you do for me) that plagues the church today. We have gone over the covenant with prospective new members for many years in the First Step Class, but a few years ago, we started asking them to sign it before joining. In this series, each of you will get a copy of that covenant. It is not a bunch of legalistic rules, but a summary of very clear biblical expectations for those who are members of the church Christ is building.

### **B. Members Are Responsible to Exercise Their Spiritual Gifts**

Every believer has been given a Spiritual Gift. 1 Peter 4:10: “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” It is in exercising our spiritual gifts that the body of Christ is edified (built up).

## **Conclusion**

How dare we make little of what is so important in the New Testament! Are you a church member? If not, why not? If you are a member, are you living in covenant with the other members of the body?



## **Chapter 12: Here We Stand On Church Discipline**

### **Matthew 18:15-20**

Church discipline is both modeled and demanded in the New Testament. When it comes to church discipline, a church faces two options, and only two options. We can practice church discipline in obedience to God or we can neglect church discipline and be disobedient to God. It really is that simple.

Before I get any further into this message, let me openly confess before you that we have not always been as diligent in practicing church discipline as we should have. We *have* practiced church discipline multiple times, but we have not, however, always been as diligent with church discipline as we should have been. I make that confession with great regret and sorrow, and I think that I speak for all of our elders. The primary reason we were not as diligent with church discipline as we should have been, relates to the fact that we were not as diligent with member care – shepherding God’s flock – as we should have been. We cannot do a good job with church discipline until we do a good job with member care. I want to assure you that member care (shepherding the flock that God has given us) has become a top priority of the elders. We are praying for and seeking more non-staff elders to bring on board, from the congregation, to help us with the current feeling of being overwhelmed with this responsibility.

Having shared this failure, and having assured you that we are diligently working toward doing it right, I want to present in this message what we believe “doing it right” looks like.

Dr. Al Mohler, the President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, gives a great summary of why the majority of today’s churches no longer practice church discipline.

The decline of church discipline is perhaps the most visible failure of the contemporary church. No longer concerned with maintaining purity of confession or lifestyle, the contemporary church sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other.

[From an article entitled *Missing the Mark*]

Notice those words, “...a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other.” In other words, the concept that joining a church is becoming a part of a local manifestation of the body of Christ and putting oneself under the authority of the church, has largely been rejected in evangelical Christianity. Joining a church in today’s culture is like joining a club or a fraternal organization where we do what we like, when we like, and it really is no one else’s business.

It is interesting that in one of the confessions of the church during the Protestant Reformation (the Belgic Confession of 1561), the marks of a true church are given. We would do well to listen carefully:

The marks by which the true church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as

instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only head of the church. Hereby the true church may certainly be known...

[Quoted in Mohler article, *Missing the Mark*, page 11]

That is certainly not the way the church is thought of today. We have strayed from our biblical roots. If time allowed, we could go into the history of our denomination and see that there was a time when church discipline was the norm in our churches, rather than the exception. In pre-civil war days, Southern Baptists put out of the church almost 2% of the membership every year and yet, during that same time period, experienced tremendous growth at twice the rate of the population growth [Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, page 165]

Before we delve into the details of church discipline, we need to see that there are two types of church discipline.

First, *directive discipline* is constantly going on in the church. It is the normal day to day confrontations in love that take place between members of the body.

Second, there is *corrective discipline* that is a more formal procedure that takes place regarding certain sins that have more consequence when it comes to the reputation of Christ in the world and the health of the church.

To put it in terms of the physical body, directive discipline is more like admonitions to eat correctly and exercise. Corrective discipline is more like surgery [adapted from Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, page 67]

It is corrective discipline that we are focusing on in this message.

## **I. The Purpose of Church Discipline**

In the short run, it is easier to just ignore church discipline. Believe me, in this day where most church members see the church as, “a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other,” we can expect conflict, misunderstanding, and out of control emotions when we obey God in this area. Why is ignoring church discipline not an option for a church that desires to please God? What is the purpose of church discipline?

### **A. Church Discipline Upholds the Reputation of God**

As God’s adopted children, we must take seriously our Father’s reputation in the world. Let’s face it; the world primarily forms its opinions about God from observing the lives of those who profess to be His children. When people in the church do that which even the world recognizes as wrong, the world never sees the holiness of our God. The church must take seriously the reputation of God in the world. One of the horrible consequences of David’s sin of adultery with Bathsheba was stated by the prophet Nathan when he confronted David. 2 Samuel 12:14a: “However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme...” Our behavior affects God’s reputation in the world. The basic motivation behind all corrective church discipline is the glory of God. We must not allow the actions of one who claims to be His child cause His name to be blasphemed by unbelievers.

### **B. Church Discipline Is a Retardant for Sin**

In both the Old, and New Testaments, sin in Israel (Old Testament), and in the church (New Testament) is compared to leaven, or as it is better known today, yeast. Just as yeast spreads throughout all of the dough, even so ignored, unrepentant sin spreads through the church and is not taken seriously when church discipline is ignored.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul is dealing with blatant sin that was being ignored in the church. After admonishing them to deal with the sinning member, he says in 1 Corinthians 5:6-7a (NIV): “Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast--as you really are.” In 1 Timothy 5, Paul is referring to elders who have unrepentant sin and says in 1 Timothy 5:20 (NASB): “Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful *of sinning*.”

### **C. Church Discipline Facilitates the Restoration of a Sinning Brother or Sister**

The goal of church discipline is the restoration of the sinning member. The goal is not to excommunicate them from the church (though that may happen if they refuse to repent). Some people say church discipline is like soldiers shooting their wounded. Bob Russell has a good rebuttal for that. “Confronting a [sinning church member] is not shooting the wounded; it is trying to prevent fatalities. It is removing the bullet and disinfecting the wound.” [Bob Russell, Source unknown] Amen!

If the person who is the subject of the discipline is unrepentant, they are put out of the church, but if after being put out, they genuinely repent, they are to be restored. Church discipline, as it is presented in the Scripture, is not like a group of self-righteous spiritual policemen out to punish a criminal in the church; it is a group of broken hearted brothers and sisters seeking to restore a sinning member of the family. Jesus said in Matthew 18:15b, that when the sinning member repents, “...you have gained your brother.” Paul, in Galatians 6:1 writes about restoring a sinning brother and the Greek word translated “restore” literally means to set a broken bone so it can heal and thus function as it was meant to function.

## **II. The Provocation of Church Discipline**

I've heard people say something like this, “Sin is sin; no one sin is worse than another.” I think I understand what they mean by that. All sin is truly offensive to an infinitely holy God, and no sin should be excused. However, there are some sins that have greater consequences than others. While many sins should be dealt with through directive discipline, not every sin calls for corrective church discipline. When we examine the Scriptures, the sins that call for corrective discipline seem to be the sins that have a harmful, public effect on God's reputation and the congregation. To put it another way, the sins that call for formal corrective discipline are those public sins that harm the reputation of Christ and His church. Those sins can be summarized in three categories.

### **A. When God's Truth Is Twisted – False Teaching**

A church must protect the purity of what is being taught in the church. I am talking here about the fundamentals of the faith, not the timing of the rapture. The New Testament is filled with warnings and directives for dealing with false doctrine in the church. 2 Peter 2:1: “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction.” These false teachers creep in undetected.

Jude 1:4: “For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.” When a member of the church is teaching false doctrine, especially in a fundamental of the faith, they should be confronted in love, taken out of any official teaching position, and forbidden to teach their false doctrine. If the false teacher refuses to repent, corrective church discipline must be exercised. This would go beyond those who hold an official teaching position; it would include one who is informally meeting with members and teaching them what is false.

We read about two false teachers who were disciplined by the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 1:20: “of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.” We are told what provoked this discipline at least on the part of Hymenaeus in 2 Timothy 2:17-18: “And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.”

We see the biblical view toward those who teach false doctrine especially in the area of the fundamental truth of the Gospel in Galatians 1:8-9 (NIV):

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

### **B. When God’s Holiness Is Ignored – Flagrant Sin**

When a member of the church is involved in moral impurity that is bringing reproach on Christ and grieving the Spirit of God, they need to be confronted with directive love, taught the Scriptures, and encouraged to repent. If they rebel against the Scriptures and thus against God and refuse to repent, then corrective love (church discipline) is begun.

In 1 Corinthians 5, we are told of a man at Corinth who was involved in moral impurity and was bringing reproach on Christ. We see what his sin was in 1 Corinthians 5:1 (ESV): “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife.” This church member was committing sexual immorality with his step mother! Paul said that even those outside the church recognize this as abominable. Paul gave instructions as to what was to be done with this sinning member that was bringing open reproach upon Christ and His church at Corinth. 1 Corinthians 5:11-13 (ESV):

But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.

In the next point, we will see exactly how to do that. In addition to the man committing immorality with his stepmother, there are other examples of sin that call for church discipline. The word translated “sexual immorality” is an umbrella term for all sexual sin – pre-marital sex, adultery, and homosexuality. “Greed” seems to refer to a person who will do anything for money (honest or dishonest). An idolater would refer to one involved with false religion or a cult. A reviler is a person who is known for his abusive filthy speech. The Phillips paraphrase renders it “a man with a foul tongue.” A drunkard is one who is given over to drunkenness (not one who is struggling, seeking

help and yet sometimes stumbles). A “swindler” is a thief, an embezzler or an extortioner. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but a representative list of sins that bring reproach on Christ and His church. Again, we are speaking of sins like these that the member refuses to genuinely repent of.

### **C. When God’s Desired Unity Is Undermined – Fellowship Disruptions**

When a church member is divisive and has a pattern of disrupting the fellowship of the church, they must be lovingly confronted with directive love by showing them the Scriptures, but if they refuse to repent, and continue in rebellion, corrective discipline takes over. Titus 3:10-11 (ESV): “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” Romans 16:17-18 (ESV): “I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.”

These are the three areas that according to Scripture require corrective discipline if there is a refusal to repent.

## **III. The Process of Church Discipline**

Once we see the purpose of church discipline and the provocation of church discipline, we need to see the process by which that corrective discipline is carried out. I believe that we see the normative process detailed in Matthew 18:15-17, but I believe that some offenses are so damaging and often so public that discipline must be expedited. In 1 Corinthians 5, where the man was living in sexual immorality with his step mother, there are no steps commanded. The church is commanded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:5 (ESV): “you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” To deliver him to Satan is to put him out of the church, and the protection of the church, and into the realm that Satan is in control (he is called “the god of this world” in 2 Corinthians 4:4).

Having given that exception, I believe that the discipline process is not to be hurried. Jesus gives us the normal steps of corrective discipline in Matthew 18:15-17.

### **A. Corrective Discipline Begins with a Private Confrontation (Matthew 18:15)**

Sin in the Body of Christ is against God first of all, but secondly, it is against every member of the body. We are parts of a whole and no one’s sinful actions affect only them. I am convinced that if just this first step was taken in the church 90% of all sin problems could be dealt with. Before we go to the sinning brother or sister, we are to examine our own lives so that we are not being hypocritical and then to make sure that our motive is love. 1 Corinthians 16:14 (ESV): “Let all that you do be done in love.”

### **B. Corrective Discipline Continues with Two or Three Witnesses (Matthew 18:16)**

By the second step, there is obvious rebellion since they have not repented after having the first confrontation and appeal to repent. The purpose of the witnesses is to protect against there being a personal vendetta, misunderstandings, or making too much of a minor issue. This second step

also shows the sinning member the seriousness of the situation when he is lovingly confronted with three or four people who are pleading with him to repent.

### **C. Corrective Discipline Moves to the Whole Church (Matthew 18:17)**

How this is carried out is left up to each church and the situation. I don't think that it involves giving all the details of the sin. It should therefore be left to the elders of each church as determine the details. The principle is that the church begins to pray for this person and those, who were not aware of the problem, should confront the person, and encourage them to repent. The sinning member should be inundated with expressions of love and admonitions to repent by the whole body.

Sadly, if the unrepentant member refuses to repent after the church is brought in on the situation, they are put out of the church (excommunication). This last step is always done with grief and the assurance that, when there is repentance, the rebellious member will be received with open arms and love. When Jesus said in Matthew 18:17b: "But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.," He is saying that he is to be treated as an unbeliever and prayed for diligently that his eyes will be opened and that he will repent. Normally, the corrective discipline is not for committing a sin; it is for refusing to repent of sin. When the church is told to treat the unrepentant member as a heathen and tax collector, it is talking about what we saw in 1 Corinthians 5:11 (ESV): "But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother ... not even to eat with such a one." They need to sense the loss of fellowship with other members of the body as a consequence of their refusal to repent.

### **Conclusion**

Here we stand on church discipline. May God give us the wisdom, courage, and resolve to deal with sinning brothers and sisters in love and compassion as we obey the directives of Scripture.

## Chapter 13: Here We Stand On Helping the Poor

### 1 John 3:17-18

In our day, one of the most difficult commands in Scripture to obey is the command to help the poor. Personally, my problem is not a lack of compassion for the poor; it is knowing how to truly help the poor without actually hurting them. That is not an excuse; it is just a fact that we have to deal with in our culture.

It not as simple today as just setting aside our excess over basic needs and giving it to the poor. To simply give food, shelter, and clothing to those who say they have a need for it, is not always meeting *true* needs. When we indiscriminately give to anyone who has an apparent, or felt need, we actually have the potential of harming some by affirming and enabling an unbiblical lifestyle. It may be that they are in poverty because of laziness, an entitlement mentality, unwise use of funds that would have been sufficient to meet their basic needs, had they been spent based on good stewardship principles. Oftentimes in our culture basic needs aren't being met many because available funds were spent on drugs and/or alcohol. When we step in and give to meet those basic needs, we are simply making more funds available to them for sinful purchases.

Then let's look at the problem internationally. Those of us who have had the privilege of traveling to third world (the new phrase is "majority world") countries have seen the dire poverty and how heart breaking it is. I have been in the world's largest slum in Nairobi, Kenya and I have seen horrible slums in Brazil, in Guatemala, Nigeria, and numerous other places around the world that has broken my heart. But what do we do? In many countries, the street children work for organized crime and give the money they get, by begging, to the criminals who sent them out! Our hearts are filled with pity and a desire to do something. What do we do?

Do you see what I mean when I say that it is a complicated matter? In addition, we must always combine alleviating poverty with the making of disciples. If all we do is meet the basic need for food, clothing, and shelter, they will simply die and go to hell with a full belly and a body that has been sheltered from the elements.

I want to make sure that we understand that poverty is indeed a genuine problem in other nations and within a few miles of this church as well. We do not have the option of throwing up our hands in frustration and just ignoring the problem. The statistics are staggering. Approximately 1.4 billion people live on \$1.25 or less a day. Every day about 22,000 children die from diseases that are tied to poverty (don't let that statistic go in one ear and out the other). They die quietly and without publicity. Is all the poverty overseas? No, it is not. In Knox County, the latest figures I can find indicate that 12.6% of Knox County residents live below the poverty line (20.8% in the Knoxville city limits). In the broader region of East Tennessee, it is estimated that 167,000 live in poverty. It is estimated that 15.33% of the residents of Knox County are "food insecure" (not sure they will have enough to eat in the future). These statistics are very important because most of us are not around poverty on an average day. Let's look at an overview of the Scriptures and what they say about poverty and what our responsibility is.

## I. The Bible Speaks to Poverty

### A. The Old Testament

The Israelites had an ingenious welfare system that involved the recipients working. Leviticus 19:9-10 (NASB):

Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God.

We see an example of that working, in the book of Ruth, as Ruth went to the field of Boaz to gather grain for herself and her mother-in-law. A good general verse on what God desires for His people in relation to the poor is Deuteronomy 15:11 (NASB): “For the poor will never cease *to be* in the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.’”

God is never pleased when His people harden their hearts to the poor. When we get to the book of Proverbs, we find a huge number of verses that speak about the poor. We are told to have mercy on the poor in Proverbs 14:21 (NASB): “He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor.” When we come to the end of Proverbs, we see a description of the ideal woman. One of the things that characterize her is her attitude and actions toward the poor. Proverbs 31:20 (NASB): “She extends her hand to the poor, and she stretches out her hands to the needy.”

A common theme in the prophets is how God judges those who are unjust to the poor. No prophet speaks more boldly against injustice against the poor than Amos. Look at Amos 5:11-12 (NASB):

Therefore because you impose heavy rent on the poor and exact a tribute of grain from them, *though* you have built houses of well-hewn stone, yet you will not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine. <sup>12</sup> For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, *you* who distress the righteous *and* accept bribes and turn aside the poor in the gate.

### B. The New Testament

When a man invited Jesus to a feast He answered the man in Luke 14:13-14 (NASB): “But when you give a reception, invite *the* poor, *the* crippled, *the* lame, *the* blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have *the means* to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Galatians 2:10 (NASB): “*They* only *asked* us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.” James tells us that helping the poor is evidence that we do not have a dead faith.

James 2:15-17 (NASB): “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.”

That is only a sampling of the multitude of passages in the Bible related to commands and principles for responding to the poor.



## II. A Brief History of the Church and Poverty

We see from history that Christians were known for taking care of the poor. Let's just look at the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. We see that it was almost exclusively the Christians that ministered to the poor. They took care of their own first, but they didn't stop there. An example would be George Mueller, born in 1805, and after a wild young adult life he was saved and called to the ministry in Bristol, England. Mueller saw so many orphans roaming the streets that his heart was broken. He started several orphanages and operated them by faith, trusting God to provide through Christians. He never asked anyone for help but God and over the course of his ministry he saw the equivalent of over 7 million dollars (that is 1800's dollars) come in through the gifts of churches and individual believers. When Mueller died in 1898, over 10,000 orphans had been housed and cared for in the five orphanages he built.

Let's move on to America. Prior to the early 1900's the US government didn't get involved in payments to individuals to ease poverty. President Grover Cleveland (President 1885-1889; 1893-1897) stated the prevailing policy of the US government on giving to "charity." In response to a move for the government to help a worthy charity, President Cleveland said:

I will not be a party of stealing money from one group of citizens to give to another group of citizens; no matter what the need or the apparent justification. Once the coffers of the federal government are open to the public, there will be no shutting them again... It is the responsibility of the citizens to support their government. It is not the responsibility of the government to support its citizens.

[Quoted in Larry Burkett, *The Coming Economic Earthquake*, page 33]

That was the prevailing view prior to the New Deal of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Who cared for the poor if it wasn't the government? The overwhelming majority of care was from the church and Christian organizations. Think about it: Who started the hospitals? Look at their names: "Fort Sanders Presbyterian Hospital and Oak Ridge Methodist Hospital. Until recent years, it was Saint Mary's Catholic Hospital, and Baptist Hospital. Look at other large institutions for helping those in need: The Salvation Army, the Red Cross, and on and on we could go. Even though many have lost much, if not most of their Christian emphasis, the name still stands on many to remind us that it started with Christians who were concerned with helping the poor and hurting.

What happened? Why did the government step in and virtually take over the care for the poor? I will tell you the short version. The church dropped the ball and the government picked it up. The government is way less qualified to help the poor, but the evangelical church failed to obey the Scriptural commands relating to the poor. When theological liberalism began to rise in the late 1800's and early 1900's, they de-emphasized salvation, and man's relationship with the God he was separated from, and began practicing what is called "the social gospel." The social gospel is really no gospel at all. It emphasized just meeting temporal need and for the most part taught "universalism" that says everyone will be saved in the end. The Evangelicals over-reacted to the liberals or "modernists" as they were called. The Evangelicals began to pull back from helping the poor and emphasized only salvation. This shift away from helping the poor was so dramatic that church historians refer to the period of 1900-1930 as the *Great Reversal* in the church's response to the poor.

Do you see the correlation between the churches' pulling back from the biblical mandate to care for the poor and the government's picking up the ball and trying to run with it, as ineffective as it was and is? I will readily admit that what I have given you is a simplification and generalization of a complicated process, but I think it is an accurate generalization. Instead of being biblically

balanced in helping the poor in their temporal need while sharing the gospel that deals with eternal life, the evangelical church over-reacted to an error and found itself in error also.

### **III. The Root Problem that Must Be Addressed**

Most every physician has two great fears: First the physician is afraid of only treating symptoms and not dealing with the problem that underlies those symptoms. Second, the physician is afraid of misdiagnosing the underlying problem and giving treatment that doesn't affect the real problem. Often the church has done both of those things in trying to help the poor. We have treated symptoms (hunger, homelessness or inadequate housing, addictions, etc.) and left the root cause untouched. We have also misdiagnosed the root cause and have been trying to help the poor in ways that not only does not help the root problem, but many times makes the real problem worse.

Many churches, and individual Christians, set out with great zeal to help the poor but they have the same problem the Jews had that Paul spoke of in Romans 10:2 (NASB): "For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge." Let me just cut right to the core of this problem. Other than the poor, who are temporarily poor because of a catastrophe in their life (natural disaster, home burned, job loss, etc.), the underlying problem with most of the long term poor in America is an unbiblical worldview. Your worldview is the lens through which you see everything. Your worldview is your perspective on yourself, your perspective of God and your relationship with Him, and your perspective on your circumstances. In other words, your worldview colors how you see God, yourself, others, and your circumstances. Everybody has a worldview whether they know it or not. The root of most long term poverty (especially in the USA) is a worldview that is not in line with the Scriptures. Any true help for the poor has to deal with this root problem. In other words, there must be a "holistic" approach instead of just giving material things. There will certainly be times that giving money, clothing, and food (especially to children) is appropriate in this holistic approach, but if all we do is give money and material things, we have likely done more harm than good. By just continually giving money, clothes, and food, we have often *affirmed* an unbiblical worldview instead of helping them have a God-centered, Biblical worldview. While the giver may *feel good* about their gift, they have not truly helped the poor. Let's look at some key elements of a Biblical worldview.

#### **A. A Biblical View of God**

God is sovereign! That means that God is in control. Our goal in life is to give glory to this sovereign God. This sovereign God is the source of every supply we truly need. The government is not our source; other people are not our source; God is our source. God is the center of all that is, and pleasing and glorifying Him is the reason we exist.

#### **B. A Biblical View of Self**

Every person needs to see himself as being created in the image of God, but having that image twisted by sin that came into the world through Adam. The greatest need of every person is to be rightly related to the God who created us for His glory. Through the new birth we are reconciled to God and made a new person. As a sinner who has become a saint (a set apart one), I now have the capacity to glorify God, and I am neither inferior to nor superior to any other person. I am a unique, Holy Spirit indwelt, loved, accepted, forgiven, justified, blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, and a child of God. The old me in Adam is crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:6) and I am no longer a slave to sin.

Most people that perpetually live in poverty have a very unbiblical view of themselves. They may not be a Christian, but even if they are, they often feel inferior to the non-poor, inadequate to make it on their own in the world, beat down, failures that have little, if any, hope of ever being anything other than they are. On the outside, they often look like they're lazy (some are), but in reality many are beat down and hopeless. If we are really going to help the poor, we must get to this root of an unbiblical view of self.

### C. A Biblical View of Circumstances

The long-term poor often see themselves as victims. That is not a Biblical worldview. I am not being flippant here. When you hear the stories of many who are caught up in this cycle of poverty, your heart breaks, and you truly wonder if you had been through what they've been through if you would even do as well as they do! To really deal with the underlying cause of poverty, they must see their past as Joseph saw his in Genesis 50:20 (NASB): "As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." The New Testament equivalent of that verse is Romans 8:28-29 (NASB):

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.

What do we call this process of coming alongside a person to instruct them in and model for them a Biblical worldview? It is discipleship. There is no real help for those in poverty (or even those rich in this world's goods for that matter) but that they become a truly surrendered, growing disciple of Jesus Christ. Giving money to them won't bring about their becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ.

## IV. Stages of Helping the Poor

Several years ago our elders and several of our ministry directors read a book written by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert entitled *When Helping Hurts*. The sub-title is *How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor and Yourself*. In that book (which has a very biblical base) they give three categories of help that truly help the poor.

The first category is *Relief*. Relief is the urgent and temporary provision of emergency aid to reduce immediate suffering from a natural or a man-made crisis. An example would be the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, a house burning down, a woman who has escaped an abusive home, an unexpected job loss, etc.

The second category of help is *Rehabilitation*. This category is longer term efforts to help restore a person to their *pre-crisis* circumstances. This becomes a great opportunity for discipleship since a time of crisis often serves to open people up to needed biblical change.

The third category of help is *Development*. Development is the long term process of discipling the long term materially poor so that they are dependent on God alone and with God's help can meet their need for the basic necessities of life. This development requires a huge time investment and a willingness to make the tough decisions that involve saying "no" to relief type help when the need is development. It involves not only teaching a biblical worldview, but coming alongside the materially poor to equip them to live out that biblical worldview. This world view training is a part of discipling the materially poor person. Our task is not just to teach them a biblical worldview of

work, but also to tutor them in getting a GED, build a network of people that help the materially poor find a job, to teach budgeting and saving, etc. This leads a person out of material poverty to see God as their source and live independently of the gifts of others. To treat a long-term materially poor person like they are in a relief category is not only not helping them; it is hurting them and keeping them from doing the hard work required to reach a state where they are materially dependent on no one but God.

This brings me to the last point.

## V. The Plan to Help the Poor

In a word, the plan is *discipleship*. We are probably doing more than many of you may be aware of. Our plan locally is to go to where the long term poor are and disciple them, including teaching them a biblical worldview. We have churches and ministries in mobile home parks, government subsidized housing, and a campus in a local government subsidized housing area. We do help financially with those in the relief and rehabilitation stages. There are lots of people in our congregation involved. We do not just give out money! We want to truly help and do nothing to help perpetuate an unbiblical worldview and affirm an unbiblical lifestyle. We do help children with immediate needs even though their parent(s) may not be living according to a biblical worldview. Our desire is to do more. Some rearranging of our deacon's focus will help in this with practical training in budgeting, GED preparation, and job placement help.

When it comes to poverty in other countries, we simply seek to invest our time and resources in two areas of ministry – planting new churches and strengthening existing churches. A part of the DNA we seek to instill is teaching the poor a biblical worldview and giving practical help in equipping the poor who come to Christ to be able to get work. Let me give you an example. We have been working with Pastor Gideon Makuthi for over a decade. The town in Kenya where Gideon was led to start a church was on a major road with many truckers and the town was known for its prostitution. As the prostitutes started getting saved, there was a problem with how to support themselves and their children. The Salama Baptist Church took responsibility for doing something about it. There was a Holy Spirit initiated plan to buy gas ovens so that the women could bake bread and sell bread to the truckers instead of selling their bodies. Where would the money come from to buy the industrial ovens? A group of our women, and others, raised the money, the ovens were bought in Kenya, and as far as I know the women are still selling bread to support themselves and their families. That is just one illustration of how helping the poor must work. It is a lot easier to just give money, but that isn't truly helping!

## Conclusion

If in any way you look down on or feel superior to the poor, you need to repent. We are all messed up people who desperately need Jesus. Just like you, those in the depths of poverty are in the image of God – an image that has been twisted by sin and can only be restored by Jesus Christ. They are the objects of God's love and Christ's heart of compassion, and the last thing those in poverty need (whether it is in the inner city of Knoxville or in the slums of South America, Africa, or India) is a condescending attitude of pity on a lesser being. Many of the poor have been through such traumatic things in their lives that if you or I had been through them we likely wouldn't be doing as well as they are. One of the ways we injure the poor is to give them things but not be willing to sit down with them to listen and share our time and life, and to share the love and the life of Christ with them. Yes, many of them have been subtly taught that the government is god

when it comes to meeting needs. God desires for them to turn from their idolatry and to turn to Him whose name is Jehovah Jireh (the Lord who provides). We want to be a part of that.



## Chapter 14: Here We Stand On Divorce and Remarriage

### Matthew 19:3-9

In the traditional marriage ceremony, the pastor usually ends with these words, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.” That is from the King James Version and “asunder” is translated “separate” in most all modern translations. We are in a culture where husbands and wives are regularly putting asunder, even in the church.

Marriage is treated flippantly in our culture (that word “flippant” means to refuse to take something seriously). That *flippancy* is evidenced in two primary ways. First, many simply see no value in marriage and just choose to live together, have children, and then part when they no longer feel the same toward one another. The second way marriage is treated flippantly is evidenced in couples who choose to get married, but end the marriage when there are problems, their feelings begin to change toward one another, or they just get bored. According to the Bible, God takes marriage seriously (that is the opposite of *flippantly*). The Bible very clearly teaches that sex and having children are reserved for a man and a woman in a covenant marriage. God’s design for marriage is that it is ended only by death. Divorce was not a part of God’s original plan for marriage. God’s view of divorce is summarized in Malachi 2:16a (NASB): “For I hate divorce,’ says the Lord, the God of Israel...”

One of the scandals of modern Christianity is the conforming of the church to the culture’s views of marriage. Even in our denomination that boldly stands for the inerrancy of Scripture and declares that we are a people of “the Book,” divorce has often been accepted as normal and really “no big deal.”

That flippancy led many of the leaders of our denomination to take some bold public action a few years ago. At our annual convention in Orlando in 2010 the messengers passed a lengthy resolution concerning divorce. The resolution was entitled, “On the Scandal of Southern Baptist Divorce.” It is a very lengthy resolution, but I will give a few excerpts:

WHEREAS, The Bible reveals that marriage is a gospel mystery, pointing to Christ’s union with His church (Ephesians 5:22-32); and

WHEREAS, The Bible teaches that marriage was established by God “in the beginning” to be a permanent one-flesh union (Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:1-9); and

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus commands us that what “God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mark 10:9);

and

WHEREAS, The acceleration in rates of divorce in Southern Baptist churches has not come through a shift in theological conviction about scriptural teaching on divorce but rather through cultural accommodation;

RESOLVED, That we express our conviction that a denomination defined theologically by our belief in the authority and inerrancy of Holy Scripture ought to proclaim the whole counsel of God, especially when the Bible confronts our own patterns of sin; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we call on our churches to proclaim the Word of God on the

permanence of marriage, and to provide ongoing marriage enrichment opportunities, in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ and God's abhorrence of divorce; and be it further RESOLVED, That we call on our churches in our wedding services to maintain the gravity of the vows being undertaken, not simply as a token of a couple's romance but as a covenant before God, until death do them part; and be it further RESOLVED, That we pray that the true peace of our Lord Jesus Christ will reign in us such that the next generation will see the gospel not only in the counter-cultural nature of our verbal witness but also in the counter-cultural love and fidelity of our marriages.

There have been times in the past that I have been ashamed of our denomination, but this resolution thrilled my heart and accurately reflects my desire for our church and indeed all true churches. May God convict us as to how we have brought reproach on Him by being conformed to the world.

When Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees in Matthew 19, they were attempting to entrap Him and totally discredit Him. We see their question in Matthew 19:3b (NASB): "...Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" Divorce was just as controversial in Jesus' day as it is in ours. The Rabbis lined up on two different sides concerning the correct interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1, specifically the phrase, "some indecency in her." One Jewish Rabbi (Shammai) interpreted it to mean "gross uncleanness" which meant sexual unfaithfulness. Another Rabbi (Hillel) took a very lax view and said that "some indecency" is any disappointment with her – dissatisfaction with how she cooked, looked, talked, etc. The followers of Hillel basically believed that anything could be a ground for divorce. It was Hillel that the Pharisees sided with. The Pharisees thought that if they could get Jesus on either side, He would alienate the other side.

## **I. The Bible Speaks to Marriage (Matthew 19:4-6)**

Jesus threw them for a loop with His answer. He didn't even touch the Hillel, Shammai controversy; He went to the Old Testament Scriptures all the way back to creation to emphasize God's ideal. Here is what we learn from Jesus' answer: It is impossible to deal Biblically with divorce until we understand God's design and plan for marriage. Divorce has no place in God's design for marriage. If a marriage is built according to God's ideal, divorce is a non-issue.

### **A. Marriage Is Planned by God (v 4)**

We can see how marriage was planned by God in His design in creation of making one male and one female. Genesis 1:27-28a (NASB): "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth..." The fact that God designed marriage is even more clear in Genesis 2:18 (NASB): "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.'" Notice that it is God who made a wife for Adam. Marriage did not evolve into existence. It was planned by God as is evidenced in the very distinct manner He created the first two people and His stated reason for creating Eve. After God created Eve, He gave the bride to the groom. Genesis 2:22 (NASB) says "The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man." In giving Eve to Adam, God established a new kind of relationship called marriage.

### **B. Marriage Is a Physical Union (v 5-6a)**

The Puritan Thomas Adams said, "As God by creation made two of one, so again by marriage He made one of two" [*Puritan Quotes*, page 178].



The union of the husband and wife takes precedence over and is more binding than the relationship between parent and child. Notice that it is a union of flesh and not of spirit because if they became one spirit, death would not break the union. Since they are one flesh, the marriage bond is broken by physical death. In a marriage, the body of one's spouse is as his own body. 1 Corinthians 7:4 (NASB): "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*." Ephesians 5:28 (NASB): "So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself."

Why does God make the husband and wife one flesh in marriage? It is to illustrate the covenant that God the Son has with His church. 1 Corinthians 6:17 (NASB): "But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*." To illustrate the "one spirit" relationship, God gave marriage as a "one flesh" relationship to give a visible, physical picture. That is the whole point of Ephesians 5:22-33. Marriage is a picture of Christ and the church and their "one spirit" union. After quoting the same verse Jesus quoted (Genesis 2:24), Paul says in Ephesians 5:32 (NASB): "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church." Marriage is a physical union that illustrated, gives a physical picture of the relationship of a Christian with Christ. This is a very important truth in understanding why Jesus' teaching on marriage was so extreme.

### C. Marriage Is a Permanent Union (v 6b)

The word translated "separate" when used in the context of marriage always meant to divorce. When a man and a woman enter a covenant with one another evidenced by vows given to God, they become one flesh and divorce is to never be considered as an option.

The Bible recognizes the entrance into marriage as being a covenant. Malachi 2:14b (NASB): "...the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant." Most people see contract and covenant as closely related terms, but they are not even cousins.

A contract is entered because of a lack of trust. A contract says, "I do not fully trust you and so we need to set some things in writing that will insure I don't get 'taken.'" A contract focuses on limits, rights, and even how to break the contract. A contract basically says, "Let's make a deal." In a contract, both parties agree to do certain things for the other for a certain period of time.

A covenant, on the other hand, is rooted in trust and not terms. A covenant is more about giving than what we get. A contract is about legalities and loopholes. A covenant is about love and loyalty. In marriage counseling, I can usually tell within a few minutes if one or both parties in the marriage are viewing the marriage as a covenant or a contract. If there is a view of "I've been doing my part, but my spouse is not holding up his/her end," it is a dead give-away that this person sees marriage as a contract. If I hear, "I just don't love him/her anymore," it is a contract. If I hear, "I'm willing to do my part if he/she will do their part," it is a contract. A covenant emphasizes the relationship, the giving of self, faithfulness until death, and a servant spirit. Listen to the traditional vows and see if you hear contract or covenant: "I \_\_\_\_\_ take you \_\_\_\_\_ to be my lawful wedded [husband/wife] for better, for worse, in sickness and in health, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish till death do us part." That *screams covenant*, not *contract*.

God's ideal for marriage is that it is a permanent, covenant union between a man and a woman until death do they part. John Piper says it well:

Jesus demands that husbands and wives be faithful to their marriages. He does not assume this is easy. But He teaches that it is a great thing because marriage is the work of God Himself whereby He creates a new reality of 'one flesh' that surpasses human

comprehension and portrays to the world in human form the covenant union between God and His people. Marriage is sacred beyond what most people imagine, because it is a unique creation of God, a dramatic portrayal of God's relation to His people, and a display of God's glory. Against all the diminished attitudes about marriage in our day, Jesus' message is that marriage is a great work of God and a sacred covenant breakable only by death.

[John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World*, page 301]

When we begin to see marriage as a display of God's glory, it elevates the seriousness of marriage to a new level. Ultimately, marriage is about God's glory and not about my happiness or fulfillment. Marriage is the ultimate display of the faithfulness of God (a part of His glory) to His covenant people. That is why Jesus' teaching on the permanence of marriage is so extreme. When two people in a covenant marriage who have been made one flesh by God divorce, the display of God's glorious faithfulness to His covenant people is marred and distorted. That is not an insignificant thing. Here is the mistake that many good churches make who really want to see marriages last. They emphasize the human pain involved in divorce. I would by no means want to minimize the pain and agony caused by divorce – pain not only for the couple (especially if there is an innocent party who did not want the divorce), and not only for any children involved but even the extended family. However, that misses the point of the greatest evil of divorce.

Divorce destroys the God ordained display of His glorious covenant faithfulness. Staying married therefore is not ultimately about the quality of the relationship between the husband and the wife. It is about keeping a covenant. It is about keeping a vow to God. It is about the accurate display of His glory. The reason there is no marriage in Heaven is because there is no need for the picture, because the covenant people of God (the church) who are called "The Bride of Christ" are with the bridegroom and there is no more need for the picture.

## **II. The Bible Speaks to Divorce (Matthew 19:7-9)**

The Pharisees continue their attempt to trip Jesus up and discredit Him.

### **A. Error (v 7)**

When Jesus appealed to God's ideal, He went back to creation. The Pharisees then tried to put Him at odds with Moses. They weren't interested in the truth; they were interested only in defending their traditions. They made some serious mistakes with their interpretation of Scripture. They were referring to Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Nowhere in this passage, or in any of the books that Moses was inspired to write, is divorce *commanded*. Actually, this is simply Moses regulating what was going on and it relates primarily to a man divorcing his wife, she marries another, and that second marriage ends (divorce or death), but she cannot go back and marry the first husband. The only command Moses gave was *not* about divorce, but about remarriage. The error of the Pharisees was that they saw divorce as simply getting the paperwork right.

### **B. Explanation (v 8)**

Jesus set straight their faulty interpretation of Scripture. Moses did not command divorce; he permitted it. The fact is that men were arbitrarily divorcing their wives without any reason at all leaving them without any way to care for themselves. He at least set strict regulations on it and made it so that it was not an arbitrary, whimsical act. Why did Moses have to even speak to divorce? Jesus said that it was because of the hardness of their heart. Think about it: Divorce is always the result of a hard heart on the part of one or both spouses – always, always! Without

exception! If there was an openness and yieldedness to the Lord, divorce would never happen. I have watched in counseling and seen the hard heart. Perhaps the husband has been really lousy and she put up with him and finally says, “That’s it.” He sees what he is about to lose and seemingly repents and tries to change and begs for another chance, but her emotions are dead toward him and her heart becomes hard and she doesn’t listen. You may as well be talking to a concrete wall than try to talk to her – hard heart. I’ve seen the same thing reversed where the husband loses his affection for his wife and hardens his heart and won’t listen. Divorce is always the result of a hard heart on the part of one, or both, of the marriage partners.

### C. The Exception (V9)

Jesus says that when a person is divorced from their spouse and marries someone else, they have committed adultery. Then He gives one exception where a divorce is permitted and many Greek scholars tell us that the grammar of this verse indicates that a Scriptural ground for divorce is a ground for remarriage. What is this exception? It is translated in the NASB “immorality.” In the NKJV and the ESV, it is “sexual immorality.” In the KJV it is “fornication,” and in the NIV it is “marital unfaithfulness.” There is some disagreement among Bible believing teachers as to the meaning of this exception.

There are some great Bible scholars who say that this is not truly an exception as we apply it today. Some call them “absolutists” and their view is called, “the permanence view.” The most common explanation they give of this passage is that it is talking about immorality during the *betrothal* phase which is when a couple are committed to one another, but the marriage has not been sexually consummated. This was the situation of Mary and Joseph when Mary was told that she was with child by the Holy Spirit. I would in some ways like to believe this view. It would make hard decisions on who I can remarry easy. It would just be “no” to all who ask who have been divorced. As I look at the evidence of Scripture, I cannot accept the *Absolutist* view. I am convinced that “sexual immorality” refers to sexual unfaithfulness by one marriage partner. This seems to me to be the obvious interpretation in the context it is used. The word translated “sexual immorality” is *porneia*.

The evidence leads me to believe that it is an umbrella term for all sexual activity outside a covenant marriage. It would include under the umbrella, adultery, homosexuality, and for those not in a covenant marriage, premarital sex. This is the commonly accepted interpretation of most of the reformers and most evangelical scholars today. The Westminster Confession puts it this way: *In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out [secure] a divorce: and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead [XXIV. 5-6].*

This sexual immorality breaks the covenant and divorce is allowed, but still divorce is not commanded. Even when there is unfaithfulness, I believe that every effort should be made to restore the marriage, but if there is no repentance, divorce is allowed. Divorce in Scripture is the last option, not the first option. I encourage the offended party to remember the story of Hosea and his unfaithful wife that he waited for and eventually took her back. In light of that, do not end a marriage until there is a peace from God and an obvious unwillingness to repent.

The passage here is clear that divorce for any other reason is wrong and to remarry is to commit adultery. It should be noted that the Holy Spirit adds another exception in 1 Corinthians 7:15 for when a believer is married to an unbeliever and the unbeliever departs (leaves in a final sort of way), remarriage is allowed. 1 Corinthians 7:15 (NASB) says, “Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.”

Keep this in mind. Divorce in Scripture is permitted only because of mankind's sin. That is why all believers should hate divorce as God does.

### **Conclusion**

Allow me to conclude with a special word of warning about marriage. I want to address three different categories of people. To the single, I say "Be careful!" Don't marry for the wrong reasons. Treat marriage seriously because it is for life! To the married I say, "Be committed." Divorce is not to be seen as an option. Don't look for a way out; look for a way through. To the divorced I say, "Be confrontive." If you divorced for unscriptural reasons, quit rationalizing it, confront it as a sin, repent, and receive the blessings of a repentant heart. If you divorced and were remarried unscripturally, confront it, stop rationalizing, and repent. God honors a repentant heart.

Marriage is serious. Be careful, be committed, and be confrontive.

## Chapter 15: Here We Stand On Creation and Evolution

### Various Scriptures

Where we stand on origins will ultimately affect our worldview on almost every category of life. To have a biblical worldview, a worldview grounded in truth, requires that one has a biblical worldview of origins. Most Christians draw way too large a circle to include all sorts of views toward our origin and say that it isn't that big of a deal as long as we believe the Bible about sin, Jesus, and the plan of salvation. I hope to show you that this approach is in error, serious error. In fact, the circle drawn around views on origins that are truly biblical and foster a biblical worldview is a very small circle. I am not saying that all those who are outside that small circle are not Christians; I am simply saying that their worldview will be off kilter, contain contradictions, and they will be adversely affected by it.

The book that tells us most about origins is, of course, Genesis. The word "Genesis" means beginnings. The foundational part of Genesis is chapters 1-3. If we are wrong about these three chapters, we will be wrong about the most important areas of life. When a person is wrong about Genesis 1-3, their doctrine will be wrong, their worldview will be wrong, or at least inconsistent, and while they may believe enough truth to be saved, they will not see the past, the present, or the future completely from God's perspective.

As you likely would guess, the major enemy of a biblical worldview of origins is Darwinian evolution. The lie of evolution from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until today has permeated every layer of culture. Since this message is going to focus on contrasting biblical creation and evolution, let's define some terms.

*Biblical Creation*— When I speak of biblical creation, I am talking about a literal interpretation of Genesis 1-3. God created all that is in six days. Adam and Eve were literal people. Sin came into the world just as Genesis 3 describes it and the consequences of sin were exactly what Genesis 3 says they were. This view is not "blind faith." It is faith, but genuine, biblical faith is not blind; it is always based on evidence.

*Evolution* – When I speak of evolution, I am speaking of macroevolution (the prefix "macro" means large and the prefix "micro" means small). I am speaking of the teaching that current species evolved from other species. To focus on man, macroevolution says that the evolution was from a one-celled animal → fish → amphibian → primate → man (with several forms between those).

What is sometimes called "microevolution" is observable and scientifically proven. Microevolution refers to small changes within species such as birds, horses, and even humans. Perhaps a better word would be "adaptation." All the varieties of dogs, horses, and humans came from the ones God originally created. A surface knowledge of genetics gives us the means through which these changes happen over a relatively short period of time. Adaptation is a testimony to the amazing way the Creator made each species. Here is a key statement: Adaptation never results in one species becoming another species altogether.

Microevolution (adaptation) does not contradict Scripture. Oftentimes evolutionists will try to pull what is called a "bait and switch." They will show the evidence of microevolution and then

say, “See, there is much evidence for evolution,” and then they move into macroevolution of one species into another species. Let me give you an example. Several years ago during a huge controversy over action by the Kansas State Board of Education when they dared question the *fact* of evolution, a defender of evolution, a reporter named Jonathan Weiner wrote an article in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. He said in the article, “Every time a farmer sprays pyrethroids and cotton moths go right on eating his cotton, that farmer is confronting evolution in action.” This writer assumes that because moths develop a resistance to pesticides over time, such a change is proof for Darwinian evolution that teaches that one species evolves into another species. Don’t fall for the bait and switch. When I speak of evolution from this point on, I will be speaking of macroevolution.

The proponents of evolution oftentimes use outright lies to bully their contemporaries and their students into acquiescing to Darwinian evolution. Let me give two examples. Dr. D. James Kennedy quotes from one textbook entitled *General Zoology* that states, “All scientists at the present time agree that evolution is a fact.” [D. James Kennedy, *Why I Believe*, page 47]

That is just a lie! In reality there are an ever increasing number of scientists who believe that the evidence points toward the biblical view of creation.

A Christian student at a major secular university wrote a paper in his senior Microbiology class with a title a half-mile long (*Comparing and Contrasting the Regulation of Lactose and Galactose Operons and Regulons in Streptococcus Thermophilus, Streptococcus mutans and Lactococcus Lactis*). The student graduated at the top of his class, but in this paper he made a huge mistake that sent his professor ballistic. On the first page he said, “This genetic group-control mechanism is a wonderful designed informational system...” The word “design” implies a Designer and that sounds suspiciously like God had something to do with it. Here is what his professor wrote on his paper:

... I suggest you grow up and think very hard about your major in Biology. Creationism is not science – it is not testable, it cannot predict future behavior. [This paper] is poorly focused, immature, pedantic, much irrelevant information, blatantly apologetic. Inappropriate for a science course. Poor science. ... Pick another field where personal opinions are all that matters...

[Jobe Martin, *The Evolution of a Creationist*, page 13]

That isn’t all that unusual. We have a real job to do in equipping our children. This is one the major motivations behind starting First Baptist Academy.

## **I. Creation or Evolution: Their Commonality**

The commonality is that both the biblical creation account, and evolution, are matters of belief. About two years ago in an opinion column in *USA Today* Tom Krattenmaker argued that there is no essential conflict between evolution and believing the Bible’s account of creation. He said that evolution and religious belief are completely separate modes of knowing [whatever that is]. He argued that evolution is “settled science” that requires no belief. Religion, on the other hand, is a faith system that is based on a totally different way of knowing – a knowing that requires belief and faith. The problems with Krattenmaker’s article are multitudinous! First, there is no such thing as settled science. If science is settled, when would we declare it settled? 1500? 1850? 1900? 2000? In 1500, what was accepted as *scientific fact* has changed drastically compared with 2016.

The main problem with Mr. Krattenmaker’s article is his allegation that science and religion represent two separate types of truth. Truth is truth! There are no different kinds of truth that

operate by different intellectual rules. Every mode of thinking requires belief in some presuppositions. Evolution requires belief. The biblical truth of Genesis 1-3 requires belief [The preceding two paragraphs drew heavily on an article at AlbertMohler.com, *Evolution Is Most Certainly a Matter of Belief – and so Is Christianity*, 1-15-14]

Actually, evolution is the key doctrine of a religion called “Naturalism.” Many would desire to quickly change my statement from “a religion called naturalism” to “a philosophy called naturalism.” However, when you examine naturalism, it is completely faith-based and meets the qualifications of a religion.

Naturalism says that every law and every force operating in the universe is natural, rather than moral, spiritual, or supernatural. Naturalism rejects a personal God and assumes that things made themselves. Naturalists say that they believe only in what is based on science, but *true science deals with what can be observed and reproduced by experimentation*. Naturalism, in reality, ends up being a religion because its beliefs cannot be observed or reproduced by experimentation. Naturalism’s key doctrine of evolution is an explanation about origins that must be accepted by faith because it cannot be observed or reproduced. Naturalism operates under the presupposition that there is no supernatural power in existence. Since that cannot be observed or tested, it is a faith statement. That is more evidence that naturalism is a religion. Someone may say, “Yes, but biblical creation is also a religion because it too is based on faith.” That is true! Hebrews 11:3: “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”

Creation is faith based but there is a tremendous amount of evidence that it is true, however, in our culture, the deck is stacked for naturalism because it is passed off as science. The naturalists like to think that all scientists are practitioners of naturalism, but the fact is that the greatest scientists of history were creationists. Here is a sampling: Kepler in Astronomy, Pascal in Hydrostatics, Boyle in Chemistry, Newton in Physics, Faraday in Magnetic Theory, Babbage in Computers, Simpson in Gynecology, Mendel in Genetics, Pasteur in Bacteriology, Kelvin in Thermodynamics, Lister in Antiseptic Surgery, Maxwell in Electrodynamics, Ramsay in Isotopic Chemistry [Norman Geisler, *When Skeptics Ask*, page 214]

Randy Wysong, an instructor in human anatomy and physiology says, “Evolution can be thought of as sort of a magical religion. Magic is simply an effect without a cause, or at least a competent cause. ‘Chance,’ ‘time,’ and ‘nature’ are the small gods enshrined in evolutionary temples. Yet these gods cannot explain the origin of life. These gods are impotent. Thus, evolution is left without competent cause and is, therefore, only a magical explanation for the existence of life...” [John Ankerberg, *The Facts on Creation VS Evolution*, page 27]

John Ankerberg gives a good summary: “What this boils down to is that evolution demands a personal choice – faith, if you will – to believe in natural processes rather than believe in what must logically be acknowledged as a far more credible option – creation by an infinite Designer.” [Ankerberg, page 27]

Since both evolution and biblical creation require faith, the real question is, “What does the evidence point to?” Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen.”

## II. Creation or Evolution: The Evidence for Our Belief

Volumes have been written concerning the problems with evolution and the lack of credible evidence. I will just give a brief look at what I believe are the two most glaring problems

### A. The Origin of Life

The Law of Cause and Effect demands that there be a first cause. Evolution has no first cause. The best the evolutionist can do is to say that the universe, or at least matter, is infinite (which is assigning it one of the characteristics of God). Creation says “In the beginning, God...” He is the first cause. Here is the best that one evolutionist can come up with: “The current state of knowledge can be summarized thus: In the beginning, there was nothing, which exploded” [T. Pratchett, Quoted in *Creation* magazine, December 1999, February 2000, page 22]

Paleontologist Duane Gish calls evolution, “A fairy tale for adults.” Someone said, “In Grimm’s fairy Tales, someone kisses a frog and in two seconds it becomes a prince; in evolution someone kisses a frog and in two billion years it becomes a prince.”

### B. The Fossil Record Does Not Match Evolution

In Darwin’s day, fossils were scarce, but today there are hundreds of thousands of them. All of the fossil evidence points to a sudden arrival of fully developed species (which is evidence for creation). If evolution were true, you would expect to find that the older the fossil, the less complex would be the organism. That is not the case. You find the simple and the complex all together. However, the main problem with the fossils is that with evolution you would expect to find all kinds of transitional fossils between one species and the more complex species that it was evolving to. We could call these fossils the LINK between two species. Have you ever heard of “the missing link?” The evidence is that the species show up at all levels with no links; they are missing because they never existed. I had a great little tract entitled *Illustrated Guide to Transitional Fossils*. The tract says at the bottom of the cover page, “Every evolutionist should have one!” When you open it up, here is what you find: Primitive → Modern Plants – MISSING, Single Cells → Invertebrates, MISSING, Invertebrates → Fish – MISSING, Fish → Amphibians – MISSING, Amphibians → Reptiles – MISSING, Reptiles → Birds – MISSING, Reptiles → Mammals – MISSING ... Apes → Man – MISSING. Under each are quotes from evolutionists affirming that there is no fossil record. Some evolutionists say, “Well, the transitional fossils are missing, but the similarity between species is evidence of a common ancestor.” I would argue that the similarities are evidence of a common Designer.

There are mounds and mounds of evidence for creation and none clearly for evolution. Even one of the most esteemed evolutionists, astronomer Carl Sagan has admitted that the chance of man evolving is about one in ten to the two billionth power [Ankerberg, page 21]

Dr. H.S. Lipson, a physicist and self-avowed agnostic, concludes, “I think... the only acceptable explanation is creation... I know that this is anathema to physicists, as indeed it is to me, but we must not reject a theory that we do not like if the experimental evidence supports it... To my mind the theory [evolution] does not stand up at all.” [Quoted in Robert Jeffress, *Hell, Yes!* page 166]

Yes, both creation and evolution are steps of faith, and not pure science, but the scientific and logical evidence points clearly to creation.

## III. Creation or Evolution: What Is at Stake?

The issue of evolution and creation is not a minor one. If we are going to be logically consistent there are some major issues that are affected by whether we stand on evolution or whether we stand on biblical creation.



### **A. The Recognition of the Sovereignty of God over Mankind**

Evolution serves not to do away with the concept of god, only the God of the Bible who is sovereign. By sovereign, I mean in control, the right to rule. In the Scriptures, God's sovereignty over man is evidenced by His creating man. Psalms 100:3 (NASB): "Know that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; *we are* His people and the sheep of His pasture." Listen to Romans 9:20-21 (NASB):

On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

If I admit that God is my creator, then I have to admit that He is sovereign over me and I must give an account to Him. The real reason many reject creation is they don't want anyone telling them what they can do and cannot do. Over and over God's sovereignty over our lives is tied in to His creating us.

### **B. The Trustworthiness of Scripture**

If Darwinian evolution is true, the Bible cannot be trusted. If Genesis 1-3 doesn't tell us the truth, why should we believe anything else the Bible says? If God did not create man in His image, then we have no purpose, no meaning, and no hope. We are mutants headed for being fertilizer. If God is not the creator, then maybe He is not the redeemer either. Many evolutionists understand that. Thomas Huxley, probably the most famous proponent of evolution who ever lived said, "It is clear that the doctrine of evolution is directly antagonistic to creation... Evolution if consistently accepted, makes it impossible to believe the Bible." [D. James Kennedy, *Why I Believe*, page 50]. He's right! There are many who come up with various schemes to reconcile evolution and Genesis 1-3. The most common is "Theistic Evolution" which says that God started and superintended the evolutionary process over billions and billions of years. This approach makes the Genesis account little more than an allegory and Adam and Eve as mythical or fictional characters. All of these approaches have huge interpretation problems. If we apply these methods of interpretation to the rest of the Scriptures, we rob the Bible of its trustworthiness. We can make the Bible say about anything we want it to.

Let me give you one of the major criticisms of biblical creationism. "It is too simplistic for such a complicated universe." Oh really? You want to talk about simplistic, how about this formula – "Nobody X Nothing + Billions of years = everything." That's what I would call simplistic!

### **C. Moral Stability**

History is filled with moral evils that were either encouraged or allowed by a Darwinian (evolutionary) world view. Here are a few examples.

#### **1. Racism**

Darwin's theories motivated philosophers to see certain races more highly developed than others. Hitler was deeply influenced by these philosophers. I am not saying that all evolutionists are racists, but evolution allows for and even encourages racism. Let me quote an excerpt from a letter from Charles Darwin in 1881. "The more civilized so-called Caucasian races have beaten the Turkish hollow in the struggle for existence. Looking to the world at no very distant date, what an endless number of the lower races will have been eliminated by the higher civilized races of the world." [Hank Hanegraaff, *Fatal Flaws*, page 9]

## 2. Abortion

Because of Earnest Haeckel's intentional deception of showing in textbooks that the human embryo, as it develops, passes through all the evolutionary stages reflecting its ancestry, people did not think of the developing fetus as human and were much more open to eliminating it. Abortion existed before Darwin, but evolution gave it respectability.

## 3. Communism & Fascism

Mao, Marx, Stalin, and Hitler based many of their views on evolution. Their belief in evolution did not cause them to murder millions, but it paved the way for their views. John MacArthur makes a bold and I believe accurate summary:

The simple fact of the matter is that all the philosophical fruits of Darwinism [evolution] have been negative, ignoble, and destructive to the very fabric of society. Not one of the major twentieth-century revolutions led by post-Darwinian philosophies ever improved or ennobled any society. Instead, the chief social and political legacy of Darwinian thought is a full spectrum of evil tyranny with Marx-inspired communism at one extreme and Nietzsche-inspired fascism at the other. And the moral catastrophe that has disfigured modern western society is also directly traceable to Darwinism and the rejection of the early chapters of Genesis.

[John MacArthur, *Think Biblically*, page 60]

## Conclusion

There was a time in my life as a college student that I bought into the lie that you can believe the Bible and accept Darwinian Evolution (macroevolution). I came to a place in my early 20's that I no longer believed that. You must choose between evolution and the Genesis account of creation. They cannot both be true and they cannot be reconciled. If you believe in the inspiration of the book of Genesis, you cannot believe in evolution. If you accept evolution, you must reject the Genesis account of creation.

## Chapter 16: Here We Stand On the Role of Women in the Church

### 1 Timothy 2:9-15

One thing we have talked about over and over in this series is the tension between the truth of Scripture and the values, beliefs, and practices of the culture we live in. The culture is constantly changing, but the Scripture does not. There is always pressure from the culture to conform the church to culture's values. To stay true to the Scriptures, a church must be "counter cultural." The church is to influence the culture; the culture should not be able to shape the church by pulling the church away from the truths that offend the culture.

Nowhere is the pressure to conform to the culture stronger than in the area of roles in the church – especially the role of women in the church. Over the last few decades a whole new group has been formed that is called "evangelical feminists." Evangelical feminists have labored to bring "equality" (uniformity) to the roles and responsibilities of men and women in the home and in the church. This labor has taken different approaches. Some feminists just say the writers of Scripture were influenced by the repressive views toward women of their day and thus the parts of Scripture that differ with the feminist viewpoint are just considered wrong and ignored. That approach simply decimates the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures. Other feminists profess to believe the Scriptures are inspired by God, but seek to reinterpret the *troublesome passages* to make them say something that is not offensive to the feminists.

Let us examine some examples of incorrect interpretations that seek to make 1 Timothy 2:9-15 more palliative to feminists. Using our text some feminist "scholars" say that Paul forbade women to teach in the public gatherings of the church because the women at Ephesus (where Timothy was ministering) were teaching false doctrine. They then say that Paul's instructions in verse 12 were only for Ephesus and the problems there and have no application to our day. The problem with that interpretation is that the only false teachers named at Ephesus were men. 1 Timothy 1:19-20 (NASB): "keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme." No evidence of female false teachers at Ephesus is found anywhere in the New Testament.

Another claim by feminists is that the women at Ephesus were less educated than the men and that is the reason for the *temporary* prohibition for women to teach in the public services of the church. Today, since women have opportunities for education just like men, this prohibition no longer is relevant. The facts are that very few men or women had education beyond basic literacy skills.

What we are going to do in this message is to find out what this passage in 1 Timothy is saying, using sound hermeneutical principles. However, we are going to find that what Paul was saying in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 is going to be offensive to many in our culture. Remember that our authority is the Scriptures rightly interpreted, not the views that twist the Scripture to accommodate our culture.

To prepare us for this passage that deals with the role of women in the church, I want to make several biblically accurate statements that we need to understand.

First, the New Testament clearly teaches equality of the worth, the value of men and women. It is that worth or value that Galatians 3:28 (NASB) is speaking of. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Both men and women are in the image of God. Both men and women are of equal worth in their standing before God, their being loved by God, and their capacity to please God. However, while there is equality in the worth of males and females, there are different roles. That statement shouldn’t trouble us; that statement is even true of the Trinity! 1 Corinthians 11:3 (NASB): “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.” The Trinity is co-equal in person and in being deity, but there are different roles within even the Trinity. *Equality of status before God does not equate to interchangeability in function.* With these basic truths laid out before us, let’s look at one of the most controversial passages in the New Testament when it comes to roles or function for men and women in the church.

### **I. The Propriety of Women in the Church (v 9-10)**

Paul is writing to Timothy, his son in the faith who was pastoring the church at Ephesus. This church had a special place in Paul’s heart since he planted it and stayed in Ephesus for three years. The context of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 is the public worship service of the church (that is very important). The opening word of verse 9, “likewise,” goes back to 1 Timothy 2:8 (NASB): “Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.” In verse 8 Paul is telling men to come to worship with a heart that is pleasing to God. “Holy hands” is a figure of speech that means a life with no hidden sins or motives. The phrase, “without wrath and dissension” means that as much as is possible with people who come to church, their relationships with others must be made right. Just as men are to come having sins confessed and relationships with others made right, even so the women are “likewise” to come prepared to worship and hear from God.

Timothy was facing several problems in the church at Ephesus with women and their preparedness to worship in a way that was pleasing to God. One of the problems was their dress in the public services and also some confusion seems to have developed over the roles of the women. Paul is dealing with the confusion here.

Paul firmly lets the people of Ephesus know that the public services of the church are to be when corporate worship happens, not where people put on a show. A key word in verse 9 is “adorn.” The Greek word is *kosmeo*. It literally means to arrange or to put in order. He is saying that a woman must arrange herself properly for public worship. A part of a woman’s adornment is external and a part is internal (the most important). The principle is that the outer adornment ought to be in line with the inner character. The next important phrase is “proper clothing.” It is translated “respectable apparel” in the ESV. There are no new problems in the church today. In the first century as well as the 21<sup>st</sup> century some women were dressing immodestly to draw attention to themselves when they came to the public gatherings of the church. Men who struggle with maintaining a pure thought life (that includes most all men) should not be confronted with immodest seductive clothes at the public gatherings of the church. If you are unsure about some article of clothing, you probably should not wear it. If you need counsel, why not ask an older spiritually mature woman such as one of the elders’ wives.

Let your apparel reflect your character not necessarily the style of the world. The hair, gold, pearls and costly clothing are not referring to all jewelry and clothing; it is only that which is gaudy and ostentatious and that draws undue attention to yourself. There are descriptions of wealthy women of that day who would weave strings of pearls through her hair. It was the putting on of a show to

impress others. Again, the principle here is that the clothing and jewelry should reflect your inner character. In verse 10, Paul says that instead of outward adornment, there should be the adornment of good works which must characterize a woman professing godliness.

Here is the test. Does your outward adornment conflict with your profession of godliness? Are your sins confessed (*lifting up holy hands*) and are your relationships made right so that there is no *wrath and dissension*?

## II. The Prohibition for Women in the Church (v 11-12)

Ah, here is where the sparks begin to fly! The question is, “What part can a woman fulfill in a church service, in its leading and teaching”? The words “receive instruction” in verse 11 were revolutionary for the first century. In the Jewish, as well as pagan culture of that day, women were on about the same level as slaves. Most Jewish Rabbis would not teach women. One of the prayers quoted by many Rabbis was “I thank God that I am not a barbarian or a woman.” It was of little concern whether women learned anything or not. The common Jewish view did not come from the Old Testament but from traditions of man.

In Greek culture (which prevailed in New Testament times) women were thought unworthy of the learning process. Yet, verse 11 says “A woman must quietly receive instruction.” This was really radical. He was affirming that women and men are equal in worth. This word “instruction” is the same root word we get disciple from. He is commanding that the women be disciplined. He then gives two descriptions of how she is to be disciplined.

First, she is to learn in silence. That simply means that she is not to do the teaching in the church’s gatherings. We will see in the next verse that this silence isn’t for every situation – only the public teaching of the church. She speaks in song and prayer and testimony, but when it comes to the authoritative teaching, she listens and learns.

Second, she is to listen in submission. That means that she recognizes that she is not in authority but is under authority. The implication is that she doesn’t chaff under authority, but wholly aligns herself under authority. There is to be no hint of bitterness in her.

In verse 12, Paul is enlarging on what he said in verse 11. The word “allow” means to permit or give liberty to. There are two things he as an apostle does not permit. The first is that a woman is not permitted to teach men. The word “teach” refers in this context to the authoritative imparting of facts that results in the listeners’ spiritual growth. It refers to the authoritative pastor/teacher role of proclaiming the Word of God. It is speaking of authority in proclaiming doctrine and making interpretation. Elizabeth Elliot and her husband Jim Elliot were missionaries in Ecuador. Jim Elliot along with four other missionaries sought to take the Gospel to a remote unreached savage tribe called the Huaorani in the Ecuadorian jungle. When they landed their plane on the beach close to the tribe, they were all five killed. Sometime later Elizabeth Elliot and her two-year-old daughter along with some female missionaries went back to live among the tribe that had killed her husband. When she went back, God in His mercy allowed her and the three other missionaries to lead several in the tribe to Christ. They planted a church among the Huaorani. Elizabeth Elliot was the only biblically trained person who could speak the language, but she was so concerned about violating God’s pattern that she would help one of the Huaorani men with the sermon in private so that he could lead the public services. She understood that this directive from the apostle Paul was meant to be obeyed.

There is a second thing the apostle does not permit. He does not permit a woman to exercise authority over a man in the church. That refers primarily to an office in the church – an elder or

a pastor/teacher. In chapter 3 of 1 Timothy and in Titus 1, Paul gives the qualifications of an elder in the church. This office is also called “Bishop” and “Overseer.” “Pastor” refers to the shepherding work of the elder. I am just going to refer to this office as elder. It is an office that carries with it authority from God. It is certainly not unlimited authority, but it is an office that has authority in the church. The writer of Hebrews was speaking of elders when he said in Hebrews 13:17 (NIV): “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

We read the qualifications of an elder in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 (NASB):

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), *and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

We see basically the same list in Titus 1:5-9. In both lists it is obvious that the elder or overseer is a man. The doctrinal teaching in the public services of the church is to be done by an elder or a man appointed by the elders.

Is the Bible saying that women cannot teach in the church at all? When you walk in the front doors of the church, if you are female do you have to zip your lip? No, the Bible is not saying that. I thank God for gifted women in our church who are gifted in teaching. Women can exercise their gift of teaching in settings other than the corporate meetings of the church. They can teach other women and children. They can share testimony and report on ministry or the Lord’s work. They can pray. They can share the Gospel with the lost. They simply cannot authoritatively teach doctrinal truth in the gatherings of the church where men are present. The pattern for women is that older women are to teach the younger women. Titus 2:3-5 (NASB):

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, *to be* sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

We have opportunities for women to teach other women. We have needs for teachers in the children’s ministry. There are so many opportunities for women to exercise the spiritual gift of teaching that God has given them.

It is not my place to explain all of the *whys* when it comes to God’s commands. We are to obey whether we know all of His *whys* or not. On this command to women in verse 12, however, I think we can see some of the whys if we think about it. Without this prohibition for women to teach authoritatively and exercise authority over a man, there would be confusion between the God given role of the wife in the home and at church. Suppose my wife was made an elder and I was not. Suppose she stood in the pulpit and authoritatively taught doctrine. At home, I am to lead, but at church she must lead. Where do we switch over? Is in at the mile marker that is half way to the church that suddenly she takes over? This brings confusion and 1 Corinthians 14:33: “For God

is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” Let me state again that this prohibition has nothing to do with worth, ability, or equality. It has to do with the roles and responsibilities that God has assigned to men and to women.

Why does that cause so many people to get so angry? Women can’t sing bass and men can’t have babies. God has different roles for men and women. I find it interesting that women who want to defy or explain away 1 Timothy 2:11-12 typically justify it by saying, “I know that God has called me to this.” Some inner impression or feeling or desire does not negate the clear teaching of Scripture.

### **III. The Pattern for Women in the Church (v 13-14)**

Some try to explain away this whole passage by saying that it was only for that time in that culture to avoid conflict in a male dominated culture. But in these two verses, Paul doesn’t base the roles in church on the culture of that day; he bases it on creation. According to Genesis 2:18, God made Eve after Adam to be his “helper.” God gave Adam the qualities needed for leadership. Eve, who stepped out from under Adam’s authority was vulnerable to temptation and indeed gave in to it. When a woman exercises authority over a man in the church or home, the order and roles from creation are violated. God created man to lead in the home and in the church. Violation of that God given order all the way from creation never has a good outcome. The pattern for male leadership goes all the way back to creation.

### **IV. The Preservation of Women in the Church (v 15)**

The key word in this verse is “preserved,” or “saved,” in other translations. This word means to preserve safe or to deliver from. Paul is obviously not teaching that women are saved in the sense of being reconciled with God by having children. That would contradict numerous passages in the Scripture about salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Here is what I believe that this verse is saying. I think it means that women are preserved from the stigma of being the ones Satan deceived and brought sin into the world by bringing up children who love God. John MacArthur summarizes this view well. “The rescue, the delivery, the freeing of women from the stigma of having led the race into sin happens when they bring up a righteous seed.” What a perfect counter! Women are far from being second class citizens because they have the primary responsibility for rearing godly children. Mothers spend far more time with their children than do their fathers, and thus have the greater influence. Fathers cannot know the intimate relationship with their children that their mother establishes from pregnancy, birth, infancy and early childhood. Paul’s point is that while a woman may have led the race into sin, women have the privilege of leading the race out of sin to godliness. This does not mean that God wants all women to bear children; some He doesn’t even want married (1 Corinthians 7:25-40). Paul speaks in general terms. The pain associated with childbirth was the punishment for the woman’s sin (Genesis 3:16), but the joy and privilege of child rearing delivers women from the stigma of that sin.” [John MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary 1 Timothy*, pages 89-90]

The qualities necessary for a mother to have that kind of influence on their children are in 1 Timothy 2:15b (NASB): “...faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.” John Wesley said, “I learned more about Christianity from my mother than all the theologians of England.” [Source unknown]

## **Conclusion**

Don't be confused about the roles of men and women in the church. The men are to hold positions of authority in the church and to teach doctrine in the corporate gatherings of the church. The women are to learn, teach the children, the older women are to teach the younger women, and above all the women with children are to focus on raising godly children. This is God's plan for males and females in the church.



## Chapter 17: Here We Stand On the Future of Infants Who Die

### Various Scriptures

The death of an infant or young child is one of the hardest things that a parent or grandparent ever has to bear. As a pastor, speaking at the funeral service of an infant is heart-wrenching. Nothing you could ever learn in seminary could prepare you for the depth of grief that is experienced with the death of a little child. A part of the healing is knowing the answer to the question, “Can I be *certain* that my baby is in heaven”?

At a time like this, they don’t need answers based on sentimentality or conjecture or human logic. Sometimes people, trying to say something to help the parent, end up making them feel worse. I am referring to such things as, “You are young; you can have more children.” Yes, but not this child! They need solid answers concerning whether their child is in heaven from the Word of God. This is no minor matter. It affects millions each year.

The Scripture is very clear that life begins at conception. Therefore, when we talk about the death of a baby, we are talking about miscarriages, abortions, children who are stillborn, as well as children who die before they have the capacity to understand sin and the provision of the Savior. Some would say it is those who die before “the age of accountability.” I don’t believe that there is an “age of accountability.” I think a more accurate phrase would be the “condition of accountability.” I think that children reach this condition of accountability at different ages. It is the time when a child can comprehend God’s law (revealed either in Scripture or in their conscience), and thus comprehend sin, personal guilt, and grace.

When I speak of children, I am also including profoundly mentally handicapped people who die, but have never come to that condition of accountability. Again, we are not talking about just a few people here. Some “experts” believe that through abortion and miscarriage, up to twenty-five percent of all human conceptions do not complete the 20<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy [Quoted in a sermon by John MacArthur from the book *Empty Arms*]

The number of infants who die is truly staggering. What does the Scripture say to these who have lost a child or Grandchild? What does the Scripture say to the woman who has come to grips with the sin she committed when she aborted her baby but now has repented and experienced God’s forgiveness? Can this woman be sure that her aborted baby is waiting for her in heaven? These are heavy matters and deserve a thoroughly biblical answer. Let me give you what I believe to be the biblical conclusion to this issue. After I give you what I believe is the biblical conclusion, we will look at some unbiblical answers and show from Scripture why they are unbiblical. Next, I will give the specific biblical reasons that I have come to the conclusion that I have come to. *I believe that based on Scripture (not sentiment) that all little children that have not come to a condition of accountability and the profoundly mentally handicapped go instantly to heaven at their death.*

## **I. Answers That Must Be Rejected Concerning the Future of Infants Who Die**

I am certainly not going to answer every non-biblical approach, but I want to deal with three of the most common views that must be rejected.

### **A. All Babies Go to Heaven Because They Are Not Sinners**

We are going to see in the next point that there is a sense that babies are innocent when it comes to the judgment of sins, but the fact is that all descendants of Adam are sinners from the moment of their conception. The error that denies that we are born sinners has been around for over 1500 years. It is usually called “Pelagianism” since the first major teacher of this false doctrine was a monk named Pelagius who died in 418 AD. The theological name for the fact that all descendants of Adam are born with a sin (Adamic) nature and in a state of spiritual death is “original sin.” Pelagianism is the denial of original sin. This false doctrine teaches that we are all born neutral and Adam’s sin affected only Adam himself. Based on this heretical view, since babies have done nothing wrong and have nothing in their nature to separate them from God, they will all go to heaven. Jesus’ atonement is unnecessary for children.

Pelagianism was denounced as heresy by most every council of the church after Pelagius’ death. In spite of those pronouncements, Pelagianism is alive and well today. Why was Pelagianism rejected? Because it contradicts the Bible! The Bible is very clear that human sinfulness is universal. If there was not something in the nature of mankind, you would expect to find a few perfect, sinless people. Search if you like, but you won’t find any.

Here are just a few examples of the Bible’s proclamation of the universality of sin:

1 Kings 8:46a (NASB): “When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin)...”

Ecclesiastes 7:20 (NASB): “Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins.”

Romans 3:23 (NASB): “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

The Bible’s repeated claim that all humans need salvation presupposes universal human sinfulness. The Bible traces that sinfulness all the way back to the beginning of our existence.

Psalms 51:5 (NASB): “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”

Psalms 58:3 (NASB): “The wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth.”

The only child ever conceived who was not given a sin nature at conception was the Lord Jesus Christ. He was not born in sin because the sin nature is passed through the father and Jesus was conceived and born of a virgin. Other than Jesus, we know that sin is universal because Scripture clearly teaches it, but we can affirm it by experience with children. Children do not have to be taught to sin. Babies certainly do not commit acts of sin, but they are sinners in their nature and need a Savior.

### **B. Infants Who Die Will Be Given a Chance to Be Saved after They Die**

This view is often called post-mortem salvation, and you may be surprised how many people believe and teach it. This view has absolutely no Scriptural basis. Some try to base it on 1 Peter 4:6 (NASB): “For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God.*” This verse is obviously referring to those who were spiritually dead and they were made alive in

Christ, but now are physically dead but still spiritually alive. As we are going to see in the next point, the final judgment is always based on pre-death actions.

A view somewhat akin to this one is the view that says that God in His omniscience knows what these babies would have done if they had not died (be saved or reject Christ) and judges them based on His knowledge of a future that never happened. There is no hint of anything like that in the Scripture. Judgment is always based on what was done in real time in a person's life.

### **C. Only Infants Who Are Baptized Go to Heaven**

This view is called “baptismal regeneration” and it contradicts Scripture. Let me be clear that while infant baptism is nowhere found in the Scripture, and baptism of believers is found in many places in the Bible, not every group that baptizes infants teach that the baptism saves them. Many reformed denominations along with Methodists see the baptism of infants much as the circumcision of Jewish babies. It marked them out as children of the covenant. I still think it is not biblical and post salvation baptism is both commanded and modeled in the New Testament. The most prominent group that believes in baptismal regeneration applied to children is Roman Catholicism. Early in church history, this false doctrine began to creep in. Ambrose (fourth century) believed that baptized children went to heaven and unbaptized infants did not. Since these early leaders could not accept that unbaptized infants went to hell, they created (in their minds) a place where they went. It was not heaven, but neither was it hell. It was called “Limbo.” The Bible does not teach baptismal regeneration and Limbo is an imaginary place that is found nowhere in the Bible. Baptism is a human work and we are told in Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB): “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God*; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

## **II. Answers That Are Grounded in Scripture Concerning the Future of Infants Who Die**

Before we deal specifically with babies, I want to affirm some biblical truths that are applicable here. First, the Bible teaches that all descendants of Adam are born sinners with a sinful (Adamic) nature that renders us in a state of spiritual death. Second, only the elect will be in heaven. That certainly doesn't cancel out or in any way minimize human responsibility. There are multiple “whosoever will” promises in the Bible. We have dealt at length in other messages with this antinomy (two statements that seem to contradict one another but in reality do not). If you are interested in an in depth and Bible centered treatment of the twin truths that God is sovereign in salvation and that man is responsible before God as to whether he believes the Gospel or rejects it, I encourage you to read the book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* by J. I. Packer. Having said that, the Bible is clear that all who go to Heaven are the elect. Ephesians 1:4 (NASB): “just as He chose us [election] in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.” 2 Peter 1:10 (ESV): “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election...”

There are none who are worthy of salvation. The doctrine of election takes the pride out of salvation. Every person who is saved is saved purely as a result of God's grace that initiates our salvation and then carries us through and secures us. Third, the Bible teaches that the basis of all salvation is the substitutionary atonement of Jesus when He absorbed the wrath of God on the cross and shed His blood for the cleansing of sin. Fourth, the Bible clearly teaches that there is a dual destiny for mankind – those who have received Christ (the elect) go to heaven and those who have rejected Christ will spend eternity in hell. With that as a background, let me give you two

biblical truths about babies and children who die before the condition of accountability and also the profoundly mentally handicapped who die.

### **A. All Infants Who Die Are Elect**

I believe that the biblical evidence for children who die before the condition of accountability being chosen of God (elect) is plentiful.

#### **1. Scripture Connects Eternal Judgment to a Person's Works**

The greatest sin is the act of willful unbelief. John 3:36 (NIV): "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." Notice the basis of condemnation at the great white throne of judgment where all the unsaved will appear in Revelation 20:11-13 (NASB):

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds.

Let me quote from an article by two Presidents of two of our denomination's seminaries, Drs. Al Mohler (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) and Danny Akin (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary):

The imputation of Adam's sin and guilt explains our inability to respond to God without regeneration, but the Bible does not teach that we will answer for Adam's sin. We will answer for our own. But what about infants? Have those who died in infancy committed such sins in the body? We believe not.

[Al Mohler, Danny Akin, *The Salvation of the Little Ones*, an article in *The Tie*, Summer 2006, page 5]

There is a sense that babies are innocent before God. They are not innocent as to their guilt in Adam and their spirit that is dead to God, but they are innocent as to deeds of sin. Let me give you an illustration. In Deuteronomy 1, God is angry with the Israelites because they would not trust Him and enter into the Promised Land. He says in Deuteronomy 1:39 (NASB): "Moreover, your little ones who you said would become a prey, and your sons, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall enter there, and I will give it to them and they shall possess it." In other words, God says to the older Israelites, "You are *not* going into the Promised Land because of your willful sin, but your children who have not reached the condition of accountability will go in and possess the land." Yes, those children had an Adamic, sinful nature, but they had no acts of willful sin because they could not discern good and evil. In a sense, they were innocent of the rebellion and unbelief their parents were guilty of and did not experience God's judgment of never entering the Promised Land.

#### **2. Infants Are "With Excuse" Based on Scripture**

In Romans 1 & 2, it is as if the apostle Paul is the prosecuting attorney showing that all mankind is without excuse before God for their sins (especially unbelief). The evidence he gives is two-fold. First, they have the witness of creation. Romans 1:20 (NASB): "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that *they are without excuse.*"

The primary application here is those who have never heard the Gospel. They have the witness of creation that they have rejected and are thus without excuse. The second witness is their conscience. Romans 2:14-15 (NASB): “For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.” It is the witness of creation and conscience that renders the lost without excuse for their sin. However, children who die before the condition of accountability cannot reason that there is a creator when they see creation and they cannot discern conscience and its witness. Therefore, we can say that when it comes to judgment for sin, they are “with excuse.”

### **3. There Is an Example of an Infant in Heaven**

Out of an adulterous relationship, David had a child with Bathsheba. The infant was not well and David began to fast and pray and agonize over this child. When the child died, his servants were afraid to tell him. They reasoned that if he was this distraught over the baby’s facing death, what would happen to him if the baby died. They were surprised at his response when he found out the baby died. 2 Samuel 12:20-23 (NASB):

So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed *himself*, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate. Then his servants said to him, “What is this thing that you have done? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but when the child died, you arose and ate food.” He said, “While the child was *still* alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live.’ But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.”

This is the same man who earlier wrote Psalms 23:6b (NASB): “... I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” In contrast, we see David’s adult son Absalom who led a rebellion against him. When Absalom was killed in a battle, David grieved so badly that he had to be rebuked by Joab (2 Samuel 19:1-8). Why did he grieve so after Absalom’s death? Because he was well past the condition of accountability and had willfully rebelled and therefore would be judged for his sin.

### **B. All Infants Who Die Are Saved by the Amazing Grace of God**

That’s not true only of babies; it is true of everyone who is saved! Those who are past the condition of accountability are saved by grace through faith. Babies are saved by grace apart from faith because they don’t have the capacity to understand. But remember that the faith we place in Christ is also a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). Jonah 2:9b: “...Salvation is of the Lord.” Since babies are with excuse and without sinful works to be judged, we can confidently say that all babies who die are elect and saved by the grace of God. To add to that, there is never any hint of infant damnation taught in the Bible. An argument from silence should never be the primary argument, but combined with other evidence, it is important.

### **C. An Apparent Contradiction Is Explained**

Romans 5:19 (NASB): “For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.” Compare that to what Jesus said in Matthew 7:14 (NASB): “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” In Romans, the many that are made righteous through the sacrifice of Christ includes the hundreds of millions of babies who have died. In Matthew, Jesus is speaking

of those who have come to the condition of accountability and must repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and as evidence of a transformed life walk in a way that is different from the world (narrow way), and of all humanity, this is indeed a few.

In Revelation 5:9, we see the scene around the throne in Heaven. Revelation 5:9 (NASB): “And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.’” The child you miscarried will be there. The baby who died during birth will be there. The preschooler who died and your heart still breaks will be there. The baby you aborted and still mourn over in deep repentance though you know you are forgiven will be there giving glory to God for all eternity. Will we know them? David said of his baby who died, “I will go to him.” He didn’t say “to his place.”

Time does not allow me to give you quotes from giants of the faith that believe that all babies are saved – such as John Calvin, John Newton (*Amazing Grace*), Augustus Toplady (*Rock of Ages*), Charles Spurgeon, Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and more recently Adrian Rogers and John Piper. I also wanted to focus on giving caution that this doesn’t change what the Bible says about abortion and its wickedness. The lack of time does not allow me to spend more time emphasizing that this has nothing to do with the fact that those who are to the condition of accountability and have never heard the Gospel are lost and headed for hell without Jesus because they have the witness of creation and conscience and are thus without excuse.

## Conclusion

I want to close with this quote and exhortation by Al Mohler and Danny Akin:

When we look into the grave of one of these little ones, we do not place our hope and trust in the false promises of an unbiblical theology, in the instability of sentimentalism, in the cold analysis of human logic nor in the cowardly refuge of ambiguity. We place our faith in Christ, and trust Him to be faithful to His word. We claim the promises of the Scriptures and the assurance of the grace of our Lord. We know that heaven will be filled with those who never grew to maturity on earth, but in heaven will greet us completed in Christ. Let us resolve by grace to meet them there.

[*The Tie*, page 5]

## Chapter 18: Here We Stand: Courage, Compassion, and the Power of the Gospel

### Various Scriptures

As we conclude this series on *Here We Stand*, let's take a moment to review where we have been. We have looked at *Here We Stand* on:

1. Christians and Government
2. The Reality of Hell
3. Abortion
4. The Sovereignty of God and the Responsibility of Man
5. Homosexuality
6. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit
7. Speaking in Tongues
8. Manhood and Womanhood' (gender issues)
9. The Mystery of Suffering
10. Racism
11. Church Membership
12. Church Discipline
13. Helping the Poor
14. Divorce and Remarriage
15. Creation and Evolution
16. The Role of Women in the Church
17. The Future of Infants Who Die

In addition to the Sunday evening services, we have used several "Body Life" times in the morning service to deal with some important issues such as 'Here We Stand on Gambling,' 'Capital Punishment,' 'The Consumption of Alcohol,' and 'Homosexual Marriage.'

I want us to wrap this series up by looking at three essentials that must be evident in our lives if we are going to effectively engage our increasingly secular culture with the Gospel. Those three essentials are *Courage*, *Compassion*, and a confidence in *The Power of the Gospel*.

Here is the point that I want to drive home. You can believe right (biblically) on each of these twenty plus issues that we have covered in the evening messages and Body Life, and still be displeasing God. It is not *just* accepting the biblical facts (it is that, but it is more). Those who believe right but lack the courage to stand against the unbiblical views of our culture have more *fear of man* than they have *fear of God*. However, we can courageously stand on God's truth and yet displease God when we do it with harsh, condemning, caustic attitudes and words. We can courageously take a biblical stand on the issues and stand in opposition to the views of others in a spirit of kindness and with compassion, and still displease God by not taking the powerful, life changing, Gospel to those who are captives of sin or false doctrine with the desire to see them set free. In summary, simply believing the right thing is a necessary starting place, but it is not enough.

In some ways being a Christian in today's culture is really exciting. Allow me to explain what I mean by that strange sounding statement. It is true that our culture has probably made more negative changes in the last ten years than any other ten-year period of our 240-year history. Why would God allow such changes that move us further and further away from His biblical standards? I believe it is likely that He has allowed it to rescue true Christianity in America.

Let me explain. For much of America's history, cultural Christianity has flourished. Historically, for our culture, the *religion of choice* has been Christianity. Coming out of the First Great Awakening in the mid-1700's, and then the Second Great Awakening at the early part of the 1800's, a large percentage of Americans were probably genuine Christians (that is, they were born again). The United States of America has not experienced a national revival since "The Prayer Revival" of 1858. The norm in any nation is a drifting away from biblical Christianity. One of the ways God brings a reversal of that downward trend is a revival. The United States has been on a downward trend for a long time. The strategy of our true enemy (Satan) has been to promote and spread "cultural Christianity." Cultural Christianity is mental assent to the fundamentals of the faith, but a drifting away from the Scriptures in individual lives. Cultural Christianity is, in essence, hypocrisy covered with a thin "Christian" veneer. Cultural Christianity is like a vaccination. A vaccination gives you a small dose of the real thing to prevent you from actually getting the real thing.

America has long called itself a *Christian Nation*, but using a biblical definition of a Christian, we have not been truly a Christian nation for many decades, and perhaps for more than a century. We have, until this generation, enjoyed the benefits of the Christianity of our forefathers and the Christian principles woven into our founding documents and institutions. In the last decade everything has changed. Cultural Christianity has died. The churches are emptying out at a breathtaking rate. Those who identify themselves as "nones" (those who check "none" in surveys asking about religious preference) are increasing at a shocking rate. Some are saying that we are experiencing the death of Christianity in America. I disagree. I believe that we are experiencing the death of Cultural Christianity. Is that really a bad thing? I think not. It is painful because we are experiencing the loss of the benefits of living in a nation that was established on Christian foundations. I grieve when I think of the world my grandchildren are growing up in. However, true Christianity is alive and well. Cultural Christianity is what is dying. Could God be allowing this massive cultural shift in America to reveal those who are truly His?

Dr. Russell Moore is the President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. I have never met him, but I really like him. Here is a great quote from his excellent book entitled, *Onward, Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel*:

The shaking of American culture is no sign that God has given up on American Christianity. In fact, it may be a sign that God is rescuing American Christianity from itself. We must remember that even Israel's slavery in Egypt was a sign of God's mercy. The people of God were in a strange land not because God had forgotten them, but because He was sparing them from a famine in Canaan that would have wiped out the line of Abraham, and, with it, the gospel itself. The church has an opportunity now to reclaim our witness, as those who confess that we are "strangers and exiles on earth." (Hebrews 11:13).

In the last message in this series, I want to give us a *battle plan* for living in these days of moral collapse in our nation. What do we do? I want to call us to three things.



## I. Courage

One of the surface *advantages* of cultural Christianity is that the culture itself adopts many (never all and maybe never even a majority) of the stances concerning “what is right” that agree with the Bible. For instance, let’s go back to the early 1960’s. When it came to issues such as homosexuality being accepted as just an alternative lifestyle, same sex marriage, whether gender is determined by biology or how one feels about himself/herself, abortion, capital punishment, creation vs. evolution, most Americans agreed with what the Bible said whether they were actually true (born again) Christians or not. That is no longer the case. With the diminishing of cultural Christianity, Christians on most social issues find themselves in the distinct minority. To take a stand on some of these issues today marks us as *bigots*, *Neanderthals*, *behind the times*, and just plain *ignorant*. My point is that courage is required to stand on truth in moral issues and even many doctrinal stances today. To speak up against homosexuality, gender based on how one perceives one’s self, abortion, and many other issues, often brings the wrath of culture upon us. I am speaking of rejection at the least and persecution at the worst.

It is interesting that today, there are certain issues (especially among younger adults who profess Christianity) when it is popular to be on the Bible side, and on other issues, not so much. For instance, standing against sex slavery (young girls involuntarily turned into prostitutes), alleviation of poverty, and even racism are popular stands to take, but many who stand clearly on the biblical side of these issues won’t touch abortion, homosexual marriage, or gender issues. If we truly are “a Bible believing Christian” (there really is no other kind of Christian), we don’t have the option to go with the culture instead of the Bible on some issues, take a biblical stance on others, and on some issues just say, “I’m just not going to deal with that one.”

To be consistently biblical requires courage. I ran across this really good quote from Martin Luther.

It is the truth which is assailed in any age which tests our fidelity... If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christianity. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proven, and to be steady on all the battle fronts besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

[Martin Luther quoted in David Platt, *Counter Culture*, page 18]

In America, we are somewhat spoiled. Because of our Christian heritage, most biblical stances were not met with vehement anger, rejection, and ostracism. Those days are gone – even in the Bible belt.

To stand on God’s truth requires large doses of Holy Spirit dispensed courage. I am encouraged by the passages on courage that God gave to Joshua as he was about to enter the Promised Land. Joshua 1:6-9 (NASB):

Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

We are facing a battle that is just as real as the battle Joshua and the children of Israel were facing as they went in to claim the land of Canaan that God had given them. We are in a real war and neutrality is not really an option.

## II. Compassion

Ours is a war characterized by compassion. Our goal is not to destroy, incapacitate, or make fools of those who stand on the non-biblical side of the culture issues. Our goal is free them from their captivity to the evil one. The Planned Parenthood advocates, the pushers of the homosexual agenda, the advocates for homosexual marriage, ardent evangelists for Darwinian evolution, the activists for transgendered acceptance, the legalized gambling advocates – these people are not to be the recipients of our hatred. They are not our enemy; the powers of darkness that seek to control the darkened minds of those the Bible calls “natural man” (1 Corinthians 2:14) are our enemies. With compassion in our hearts and the truth of Scripture on our lips we go into battle to see captives set free.

To balance (not contradict) what I have just said, these captives of the enemy don’t realize that they are captives. They have accepted the devil’s lies and don’t see themselves as captives. 2 Corinthians 4:4 (NASB): “in whose case the god of this world [the real enemy, Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” We are to look upon these people with blinded minds, not with hatred and animosity, but with compassion.

Remember that Jesus said in Matthew 22:39 (NASB): “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” These captives are our neighbors. There is never a justification for vicious rhetoric, hate filled speech, or name calling. Having said that, don’t expect that these captives of the evil one will appreciate your kindness as you courageously stand for the truth. If you choose to stand for truth, you will likely be the recipient of vicious rhetoric, hate filled speech, and name calling. When the Holy Spirit fills your life, He produces spiritual fruit in your life. Four qualities of that fruit are “kindness,” “goodness,” “gentleness” and “self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

Dr. Russell Moore expressed my heart when he said this:

If we are too afraid of seeming inordinately Pentecostal to talk about the devil, we will find ourselves declaring war against mere concepts, like “evil” or “sin.” When we don’t oppose demons, we demonize opponents. And without a clear vision of the concrete forces we as the church are supposed to be aligned against, we find it very difficult to differentiate between enemy combatants and their hostages.  
[Russell Moore, page 192]

Robert Frost described Abraham Lincoln as being “a velvet covered brick.” What did he mean by that? A brick is unbending and refuses to crumble or give in under pressure. Velvet is nice to be close to – soft and warm. That is what I want to be! I want to be courageous, unyielding to evil, never compromising the truth, willing to suffer or be rejected or to be vilified for standing for biblical truth. But I also want to be filled with compassion, kindness, goodness and self-control, and love those who see me as their enemy. I want us to be a church full of “velvet covered bricks.”

### III. Confidence in the Power of the Gospel

In spite of all that is happening in our culture, I am optimistic because I believe that the Gospel is powerful and that through the sharing of the Gospel, things can change – only God through the Gospel can change individuals who are captives of the enemy into soldiers of Christ.

What do we mean by “the Gospel? Many, today, make the Gospel so broad and inclusive that it ends up being nothing. I like David Platt’s definition of the Gospel:

The good news that the just and gracious Creator of the universe has looked upon hopelessly sinful men and women and has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin on the cross and to show His power over sin in the resurrection, so that everyone who turns from their sin and themselves and trusts in Jesus as Savior and Lord will be reconciled to God forever.

This message of the Gospel is powerful, supernaturally powerful. Romans 1:16 (NASB): “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

The apostle Paul was not saying that the Gospel contains power; he is not saying that the Gospel is powerful. He is saying that the Gospel is the power of God. In other words, the Gospel is one of the means God chooses to manifest His omnipotence. The Amplified translation of Romans 1:16a (AMP) says, “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel (good news) *of Christ*, for it is God’s power working...” The Gospel is the omnipotence of God operative in salvation. Mankind without Christ needs to be changed, and yet he finds it impossible to really change himself, especially to change his nature. Jeremiah 13:23 (NASB) says, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? *Then* you also can do good Who are accustomed to doing evil.” Ah, but God, who is omnipotent can take a hell bound, condemned, helpless, polluted, enslaved to sin, spiritually dead sinner and change his destiny to heaven, justify him, forgive him, make him alive in Christ, baptize him into Christ, and make him become a partaker in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). There is no one too far gone for the omnipotence of God. This power of God brings about justification (I have been saved from the penalty of sin”); it brings about sanctification (I am being saved from the power of sin); this power of God keeps us all the way through to glorification (I will be saved from the very presence of sin and be made fully in the likeness of Christ). Oh the saving, changing, preserving power of God through the Gospel!

Our hope is not in protest marches or getting the right people elected to office. Our hope is in the power of God operating through the Gospel. Courage, compassion, and a confidence in the power of the Gospel – Here we stand!