

# Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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## About Our Cover



Europe and America have been on friendly terms for more than half a century, but lately, the stresses of the times have strained the relationship. Is the anti-American sentiment in Europe temporary or more longterm? Is this the end of the Atlantic alliance? (CGG)

## Forerunner Magazine

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# The Elements of Motivation

## Part Seven: Fear of Judgment

The motivating element covered in this concluding article is probably the one we hear of most often. It is also the only one with a strong negative flavor. It is a desire *not* to do something that provides impetus to do something else instead. This impetus can be so strong as to drive us immediately to face sacrifice and emotional and sometimes physical pain because we know that to go the way of human nature—while it may be immediately pleasurable—will in the end have far more disastrous consequences. This element is our need to have a very real, almost palpable fear of sin and judgment.

Much of the force of the kind of message that might instill respect for the consequences of our actions has been blunted in the last half-century because of the increasing reluctance of ministers to preach about sin, judgment, and hell. A recent news article in the Holland, Michigan, *Sentinel*, July 6, 2002, stated:

The tendency to downplay damnation has grown in recent years as nondenominational ministries, with their focus on everyday issues such as childrearing and career success, have proliferated and loyalty to churches has deteriorated. “It’s just too negative,” said Bruce Shelley, a senior professor of church history at the Denver Theological Seminary. “Churches are under enormous pressure to be consumer-oriented. Churches today feel the need to be appealing rather than demanding.”

This attitude disagrees with the preaching of the One they claim as Savior. He strongly believes in both judgment and a fiery hell—the Lake of Fire. He teaches that we should be very concerned about the far-reaching consequences of sin and make every effort to please God by yielding to Him to avoid that fiery end (Matthew 5:22; Mark 9:43-47)! Christianity is a forward-looking

way of life that operates by faith in our Savior’s words, not by following a consumer-oriented, “feel good” religion aimed at living the “good life.”

### The Opposite of Love

We have all heard this message of the fear of God’s judgment before, but it bears repeating because we need to realize the damage sin eventually does. Most sin is deceptive because it is often pleasurable to human nature. However, this short-term pleasure obscures the fact that its effects are ultimately devastating. In most of us, though, human nature is willing to gamble that sin’s effects will somehow manage to miss us. This thought was pithily captured on a Methodist church sign near our church offices: “Are you willing to gamble that Jesus was wrong?”

Those preparing for God’s Kingdom live a way of life in which human nature and its way of sin do not belong. Human nature is antagonistic to that way of life (Romans 8:7). It is divisive, uncooperative, and rebellious. It thinks it knows more and better than others do. It is assertive, controlling, deceptive, and critical. The evidence for this is readily available in the histories of all the world’s cultures past and present. Chaos, confusion, sickness, despair, and violence follow in sin’s wake.

Perhaps it could be made clearer, but despite the record of history, human nature is hard to convince. Of all people, Christians must be convicted that the way of sin pays off over time only negatively. All the good things we anticipate in the resurrection of the just hinge on whether we are overcoming human nature’s proclivities toward self-centered non-cooperation with God, His laws, and His people (Revelation 21:7). This means we strive to overcome sin’s seductive pulls, the world and its attractive but distracting temptations, and the onerous trials of life to show God that our faith is firm and steady.

II Corinthians 5:10 reminds us, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” It does not matter how much prophecy we know, whether we can recite from memory large portions of Scripture, or know perfectly every doctrine’s technicalities (I Corinthians 13:11-3). In terms of judgment, what matters is whether we are striving to live what we know to be the way God lives because it is how those in His Kingdom will live. His way is the way of love, and love is something we do.

Humanly, the opposite of love is hate. This is because we judge things largely according to the senses. Love, therefore, is a strong feeling for a person or thing; hate is a strong feeling against. However, this definition is not biblical. Biblically, the opposite of love is sin. Like love, sin is also something we do. According to I John 5:3, love is keeping God’s commandments, and sin, then, is the breaking of His commandments. Though feeling is certainly involved in biblical love, the will of God and truth play a far larger part.

Seriously consider this: If we sin, then biblically, we do not love God, our fellow man, or for that matter, ourselves, because sinning means we have taken steps toward committing spiritual suicide! If we do this, it also means that we do not appreciate that God has given us life and has given His life so that we can claim His awesome promise of living eternally with Him.

Stripped of all possible nuances that might affect God’s judgment, this is the stark reality of what faces us since God has opened our eyes and revealed His purpose to us. It brings to the fore that, if we love what He has revealed, then we must hate sin because it destroys everything God’s wonderful revelation stands for.

## Sin’s Effects

The following illustration of how sin affects relationships is perhaps an over-simplification, but it fairly describes sin’s effects. Suppose that, at sometime in a person’s life, he reckons that two plus two equals five. Obviously, no math problems involving these figures will ever work out correctly. Every time this combination of numbers arose, he will get a wrong total. No matter how sincere and well meaning he is, they would not add up right!

Suppose that besides his addition error, other people, just as sincere and well meaning, believe three plus three equals seven, and still others believe four plus three equals six. Before long, people are angrily suspicious of one another, feeling they have been taken advantage of, squabbles arise, tension fills the air as they try to sort out their differences either through violence or compromises. Each group argues for the strength of its position, but meanwhile nothing really works out to anyone’s satisfaction.

There is an additional factor. This well-meaning mathematical mistake, this deviation from a correct standard, this sin, has an addictive power not only to make one hold on to his position, but also to make more math deviations. Meanwhile, everybody else is insisting to one degree or another that his answers are correct, and no one can agree on what the right standards should be. The competition gets fiercer, and they go to war against each other to impose their answers to life’s math problems on everyone else.

The reality is that, in the world of mathematics, there are rigid standards that nearly everyone agrees upon, and so no wars are fought over mathematics.

There are also standards regarding relationships. Even though there is almost universal agreement as to what many of these standards are, people ignore them because they cannot or will not control themselves to submit to their authority. This is largely attributable to the human drive to compete and control for their own benefit or satisfaction being too strong for most people to overcome. In this world, self-interest rules the day. No good culture will exist until each person controls himself within the right standards. God has summoned us to learn and believe in the right standards and take strong steps to master ourselves to submit to them.

If we are ever going to overcome sin, it will be because we are motivated to take strong measures against it. The fight is difficult because human nature sees sin as an alluring and appealing possibility. We must come to see it as a pernicious, persistent, and destructive enemy that desires to leave us without hope and to inflict us with as much pain as possible along life’s path. To hate it, we need to see why we must come to respect its power, so we can be motivated to fight it with every fiber of our being.

The Bible views sin as a malignant power absolutely possessing mankind. So basic and pervasive is its grip that it is not merely an external power, but it resides in our every fiber and deceives a person into thinking he is in control when, in reality, sin is! Talk about being brainwashed!

Jesus’ comment in John 8:34-35 underscores this: “Jesus answered them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.’” A slave is one who is at the disposal of his master. He has no right to choose his path in life or, in fact, even his daily routine. The master makes those choices since he owns the slave. Verse 35 reveals how spiritually serious this is in relation to God, sin, and everlasting life since the slave does not abide in the house forever. “The house” implies God’s house. From a statement like this, John later infers that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (I John 3:15). This is very serious business.

## What Is Sin?

As early as Genesis 4:6-7, God reveals that this problem must be met and overcome. “So the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.’”

We can interpret this two ways. First, from the beginning of God’s dealings with mankind, He shows a major objective for man is to be accomplished by overcoming, mastering sin’s desire to control and manipulate. Sin’s desire is always lurking within man’s moral and ethical choices, and he needs to be aware of it and have the drive to conquer it.

Second, it is a warning contained in a prophecy to all but given specifically to Cain. God perceived in him a strong proclivity to sin, so much that he would become a master of it. In today’s parlance, Cain would become a real “pro” at sinning. The warning is not to allow oneself to follow Cain’s example, which gives the impression that he nurtured sin dwelling in him.

We all know that I John 3:4 says, “Sin is the transgression of the law,” a broad definition. However, there is an unfortunate tendency to apply it very narrowly, defining sin strictly in terms of law. Modern translations render it, “Sin is lawlessness,” a stronger interpretation suggesting that sin simply ignores the rules as if they do not exist. That, though, just scratches the surface. The Bible’s overall approach to sin is much more specific.

Ephesians 2:1-3 provides insight into why sin can be viewed as a living and malignant power:

And He made you alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Sin is generated through inspiration and persuasion of the living and malignant “prince of the power of the air.” Because sin’s source lies in a living being, the Bible considers it dynamic rather than static. Verse 1—“[we] were dead in trespasses and sin”—is especially enlightening. God calls things exactly what they appear from His point of view. Up to the time of our calling, we thought we were alive, but that is how wrong our thinking is. God considered sin to have already killed us, but in His mercy He made us alive so we could overcome it.

Of course, we were alive as far as animal life is concerned but dead to the kind of life God desires for us. We were dead to holiness and spiritual life. A corpse is insensible; it cannot see, hear, smell, touch, or taste. So

were we in regard to the beauty of holiness and godly spiritual life.

Sin is not something the ministry invented to hold people in its thrall. The first sentence of Ephesians 2:1 includes the terms “trespasses” and “sins,” both of which illustrate simply and clearly why sin is such a universal problem. “Trespasses,” the Greek word *paraptoma*, means “to go off a path,” “fall” or “slip aside.” When applied to moral and ethical issues, it means “to deviate from the right way,” “to wander from a standard.”

“Sins” is translated from *hamartia*, a military shooting term that means “to miss the mark,” “to fail to achieve a bull’s-eye.” In terms of morality and ethics, it means “to fail of one’s purpose,” “to go wrong,” “to fail to reach a standard or ideal.” The New Testament always uses *hamartia* in a moral and ethical sense, whether in commission, omission, thought, feeling, word, or deed.

Defining sin as lawlessness, while certainly true, tends to make one think of it only in legal terms. We can readily agree that the robber, murderer, drunkard, child-abuser, and rapist are sinners, but in our hearts we think of ourselves as respectable citizens. These two terms, however, bring us face to face with sin’s breadth. The Ten Commandments alone cover broad areas within which many specific sins lie.

Commentator William Barclay cogently catches the essence of sin: “Sin is the failure to be what we ought to be and could be.” The Bible contains numerous specific standards, and Christianity is a way of life that touches upon every aspect of life. The central notion contained within these two terms is *failure*—failure to live up to the standards of this way of life as established by God and revealed by His Son, Jesus Christ. As such, sin reaches into marriage relationships, childrearing, cleanliness, clothing, cosmetics, hospitality, health, and work. Ephesians 2:3, speaking of sin swaying us to “[fulfill] the desires of the flesh and of the mind,” exposes it as reaching into our very heart, involving itself in vanity, pride, envy, hatred, and greed.

## Convicted of Sin

Ephesians 4:11-15 reveals the Bible’s lofty standard:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning

craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the Head—Christ.

Jesus Christ is the standard and example, the pinnacle of all things a human should be. Not only was He legally sinless, He was also humble, meek, merciful, sacrificial, kind, encouraging, positive, and patient. When considering what He was in His total personality for the purpose of comparing ourselves to Him, we need to recall Romans 3:23: “All . . . fall short of the glory of God.” None of us measure up to His standard in any area of personality, and this is what *hamartia* and *paraptoma* describe: falling short of the ideal. Together, *hamartia* and *paraptoma* directly tie what we might think of as minor, unimportant, and secondary issues of conduct and attitude into the Ten Commandments.

If sin did not do negative things to us, God would not be concerned. However, its effects go beyond death, its final enslaving act. Its impact varies according to one’s awareness and conviction of it. The greater these are, the greater sin’s impact. Thus, God states, “Whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23). When we fail to live up to what we know and believe is righteous, integrity is destroyed, and the greater the knowledge of the standard, the greater sin’s destructive power psychologically. Not only does it produce a guilty conscience but also an addictive power that tends to motivate us to repeat the sin until the conscience is so defiled that it no longer feels guilty! In the end, it develops a heart of stone.

The apostle John writes:

My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. (I John 3:18-21)

If an act, even a lawful one, is not done with the conviction that it is right, it becomes destructive to character and self-esteem. If what we do does not measure up, we know it! Conversely, when we know to do good and perform it convicted it is right, it produces confidence, joy, and peace.

We can broadly conclude that sin does two things simultaneously, and both are bad. It produces and destroys. In his commentary, William Barclay lists a number of devastating characteristics we should understand and fear, and we will use them as an outline for the remainder of this article.

## Sin Destroys Innocence

Innocence is being free from blame, pure, virtuous,

above suspicion, simple, fresh, undefiled, and harmless. An innocent is one around whom others feel no threat or competition. Instead, there is a sense of openness, warmth, and union.

Genesis 3:7-10 illustrates how no one is ever quite the same after sinning with knowledge:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?” So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?”

Notice their sin occurs after God had instructed them (Genesis 2:16-17). Nobody had to tell them they had done wrong—they knew! Now they looked at things differently than they had before; a sense of wrong rushed in on them immediately. Just moments before, all had been friendly and joyful. All of nature seemed obedient to their every wish, and life was good. Suddenly, however, they felt guilt and fear, and it seemed as if every creature in the garden had witnessed their act and condemned them. Feeling exposed, they sought to hide, illustrating that separation from the purity of God began immediately. The virtue of their innocence began to lose its luster.

David writes in Psalm 40:11-13:

Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O LORD; let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me. For innumerable evils have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me. Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me; O LORD, make haste to help me!

Sin creates a sense of estrangement from God, leaving a tarnishing film on a person’s mind. Paul reminds Titus, “To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled” (Titus 1:15). Sin perverts the mind so that one does not look at life in the same way as before. Jeremiah 6:15 describes a sickening end to repeated sin: “‘Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore

*(continued on page 14)*

# Does Scripture Allow for Self-Defense?

**A**mong mainstream Christianity, a growing sentiment allows for—or even endorses—Christians taking up weapons for their own defense or the defense of other Christians. Proponents often point to an incident in South Africa, where attackers charged into a church service one Sunday and began shooting and hurling grenades. The hero of the story, a heat-packing “Christian,” returned fire with his .38 caliber pistol, killing or wounding a number of the attackers.

Enthusiasts of this story look at it partly with satisfaction that some of the attackers were “taken out” and partly with disappointment that more worshippers were not carrying guns so more could have been “saved.” They do not mean “saved by grace through faith” but by a good old-fashioned shoot-out between believers and nonbelievers.

Some Christians even go so far as to declare the Bible a “book of war.” They gleefully point to God’s instructions to the nation of Israel to destroy the idolatrous Canaanites (Numbers 33:50-53, 55), but fail to recognize God’s original promise to Israel that

*He would drive out the inhabitants of the land if Israel would obey Him (Exodus 23:20-30). They also point to the commands in the Old Testament to kill lawbreakers within the church-state of Israel. (It is ironic that one of the death-penalty crimes is improper Sabbathkeeping, something they would rather overlook!)*

Their basic premise is that Christians are perfectly justified in killing in self-defense or in anticipation of a crime. They claim society in general would be much safer if we had a more fully armed citizenry. Statistics *do* indicate this: In a secular nation like the United States, society will be safer with an effective deterrent against violent crime, something the government has not been and may not be able to provide without stripping citizens of many civil liberties.

The question for Christians to ponder is this: Even though we benefit from living in a society where gun ownership is a constitutional right, are we ever justified in intentionally killing another human being? The sixth commandment is very clear: “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13). However, what about this seemingly

gray area of killing someone to protect our life or property or that of the empirical self (family, church, neighbors, etc.)?

## God’s Instruction

The children of Israel, before they demanded a king in I Samuel 8:5-8, were both a nation and a religious congregation. The human government that God ordained over Israel had both civil and religious authority. As such, many of Israel’s civil laws given by God through Moses are not directly applicable today because we do not live in a church-state with God at the helm and directly bearing on the judicial process. Nonetheless, these laws still show God’s intent and will concerning civil matters.

God instructed Israel about what to do when a man was killed. Numbers 35:9-28 shows that God recognizes **only two** classifications of killing: accidental and intentional. “*Self-defense*” is not even listed as a possibility! God illustrates “accidental death” as occurring when there is no intent to kill or to harm. It is accidental when there is no awareness

*“He who strikes a man so he dies, he shall surely be put to death.”*

*—Exodus 21:12*

that an action will result in the death of another. Deuteronomy 19:5 provides a clear example of such an accident: “. . . as when a man goes to the woods with his neighbor to cut timber, and his hand swings a stroke with the ax to cut down the tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies.”

However, when there is intent to kill or injure, God’s law defines it as murder *regardless* of what the other person was threatening to do, about to do, or in the process of doing. If a man fires a gun with the foreknowledge that it has the potential to kill another man, it is murder. The “self-defense” category is something afforded by the law of the land, not by the law of God.

### Suspension of the Law?

If, as some assert, it is justifiable to break the sixth commandment to protect oneself or one’s interests, is it also permissible to break any of the other commandments when threatened? Consider the same question of defense, but substitute any of God’s commands for the sixth commandment:

- **First Commandment:** Could we have another god before the true God if it meant protection for our families and properties? For instance, would God look kindly upon us accepting Allah in order to stay alive?
- **Second Commandment:** Can we fall back on idol worship if it will keep us alive? Aaron built the Golden Calf for the Israelites because he feared them more than God (Exodus 32:1-9)—and God was very displeased!
- **Third Commandment:** Can we take on God’s name, only to renounce it when trouble comes? Could we diminish the quality of our worship of God if it meant safety and security? Would God be pleased if we ignored His true nature—His character, mind, plans, will, promises—in

hope of putting ourselves in a better position?

- **Fourth Commandment:** The seventh-day Sabbath is a weekly reminder of some of God’s attributes, as well as a unique sign and everlasting covenant between Him and His people (Exodus 31:12-17). It plays a crucial part in our relationship with God. Would He ever approve our renouncing the Sabbath to keep from harm? Imperial and Papal Rome martyred many Christians because they held this part of God’s law as inviolate.
- **Fifth Commandment:** A current cultural trend is disrespect toward parents by both adolescent and grown children. However, in Deuteronomy 27:16, God pronounces a death sentence on children who treat their parents with contempt. Likewise, He would condemn a person who broke this commandment to save his skin.
- **Seventh Commandment:** The spiritual principle behind adultery and fornication is *faithlessness to an agreement, covenant, or contract*. God accuses Israel of harlotry because they were un-

faithful to their covenant with Him. Even though it is highly unlikely that we would ever be “asked” to commit sexual immorality to save our lives, could we break an agreement or contract to protect our lives or properties? Would God wink at our breaking our eternal covenant with Him—sealed with His Son’s blood—in the interest of self-preservation?

- **Eighth Commandment:** The psalmist writes that, in all of his life, he has “not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread” (Psalm 37:25). We would *not* be justified in stealing food—or anything else—to preserve life when God shows repeatedly in His Word that He will provide for the righteous (Matthew 6:25, 33).
- **Ninth Commandment:** It is extremely easy to lie to save oneself or one’s family. Anyone up against a wall with a gun to his head would be tempted to tell a “little white lie” to stay alive. Under the perceived threat of death because of Sarah’s beauty, Abraham told a “half-truth” to Abimelech. God did not accept

## Is Exodus 22:2

**E**xodus 22:2 seems to contradict the idea that Christians should not kill in self-defense: “If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed.” At first glance, this seems to support the “self-defense in one’s home” argument, but like Numbers 35:16-28, the distinction is accidental versus intentional. The next verse, Exodus 22:3, explains this: “If the sun has risen on him [the killer], there *shall be* guilt for his bloodshed.”

This statute illustrates that God differentiates between a killing committed when it is dark and one done when it is light. The meaning is not that darkness gives us license to break God’s law, but rather that in the dark it is more difficult to determine what level of force is necessary to restrain an unknown intruder. The law gives the homeowner the benefit of the doubt in assuming that he would not deliberately use lethal force, since that falls under intentional or premeditated murder (Exodus 20:13).

this behavior from the “father of the faithful.” Would He be pleased with us in any similar situation?

- **Tenth Commandment:** In its wider application, the command against coveting deals with the root of one’s sin against his neighbor: attitudes, desires, and secret thoughts. If our “neighbor” is robbing or threatening us, would God hold us guiltless for “coveting” our neighbor’s life—desiring that his life be taken—if God has not ordained it?

It is evident that God does not allow us to suspend His inexorable law if our life is threatened. Human nature, though, insists on a “self clause.” Human nature tells us that God’s law is fine *unless* it goes contrary to what we perceive as our best interests.

## Sovereignty and Submission

At the core of this question, as with our entire Christian walk, is *government*—not the government of a nation but the issue of *whom* we will allow to govern us. In this instance, either we can govern ourselves by “deciding” when it is

permissible to kill, or we can submit to God’s benevolent authority and His explanation of morality. In the final analysis, we are not allowed to determine what is right and wrong—God has already done this. Our only decision is *if* we will act in accordance with God’s law!

Each of the nine examples above arrays the “all-important” self against God and His royal law—polar opposites. What we decide demonstrates what we hold in the higher regard, that is, what we worship. For example, if we break the Sabbath or deny its importance in our lives, we are choosing the self over God. Likewise, if we intentionally—non-accidentally—take another man’s life in defense of our own, we are worshipping the self rather than God.

Romans 8:7 describes this power struggle perfectly: “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.” Human nature puts its own cares and interests above God, and the result is that the carnal man will not submit himself to God’s clear commands. The carnal man will be willing to harm, even kill, another created human being to protect his own interests, in spite of God’s law and Jesus Christ’s striking example to the contrary.

## Judge, Jury, and Executioner

To further illustrate how prominent the self is in this, in taking another man’s life, one is acting as his judge, jury, and executioner. This, then, also involves the sin of presumptuousness. Of these three roles, the only authority God has given us is to *judge*. He commands us to judge—to consider a matter in the light of His definition of right and wrong—but it is not our place to decide a sentence or to carry it out. To do so presumes authority not granted to us.

As we saw earlier, we saw that the self-defense scenario does not hold up when considered in light of the other nine commandments. We can undertake a similar exercise in terms of one acting as judge, jury, and executioner. What other scenarios could we imagine that would justify killing another person in response to or in anticipation of a sin? Should we emulate the radical followers of Islam and kill anyone who does not convert to Christianity? Should we shoot someone because he has an idol in his house? Can we murder a man because we overheard him telling a lie or stone a woman taken in adultery?

These examples are absurd because God says *every* sin requires the death penalty (Romans 6:23). Not a single person would be alive if God responded to sin as carnal man wants to respond to sins that directly affect him. Also, consider that, in the scenario of killing in self-defense, the one killing is judging that *his* life is more important than the life he is willing to snuff out. One sinner accounts his life to be of more worth than the life of another sinner. Would God make the same determination?

## Protection According to God’s Will

The rewards and benefits of the Old Covenant were largely centered on physical health, material wealth, and national greatness, while its purpose

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## Contradictory?

Jesus Christ came to fulfill the law, and James also exhorts us to “fulfill the royal law” by loving our neighbors as ourselves (James 2:8). Jesus teaches that murder begins in the heart and has everything to do with intention, even if the act of killing is not followed through: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of

the judgment” (Matthew 5:21-22).

This instruction reiterates that murder is either accidental or intentional, based on what is in the heart. When applied to Exodus 22:2-3, Christ’s words show that when a thief is killed in the dark, there is a good chance that the homeowner acted without animosity or premeditation. But if a homeowner kills a thief when nothing in the circumstance hinders his judgment, he is without excuse—the act was intentional, and he is guilty of murder.



# A GROWIN

**E**urope has a set of primary interests which to us have none, or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence, therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves, by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities.

Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course. . . .

Why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor or caprice?

It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world. . . . (George Washington's *Farewell Address*, 1796)

Such was the wise advice of America's first president, a man called "the father of our country." He could see that the United States had been blessed with the "peculiar . . . situation" of being defended by two huge oceans and removed by thousands of miles from the frequent and often bloody troubles of Europe. The fledgling nation had the wonderful advan-

tage and opportunity to grow and prosper on its own, and Washington believed that, in tandem with this geographical separation, the longer America remained unattached by political alliance to any foreign nation the better.

The young United States was indeed able to avoid most of Europe's conflicts but not entirely. As the nation expanded and grew more powerful and influential, its political dealings with other nations likewise increased. By the end of the nineteenth century, the U.S. was definitely a "player" on the world scene, a fact that became apparent with America's decisive entrance into World War I.

Armistice Day also marks the beginning of Europe's increased influence on American thinking. U.S. soldiers climbed out of the trenches of Europe's battlefields and brought home ideas about government, politics, philosophy, art, and culture that isolated Americans would never have conceived on their own. Some have seen this as the inevitable beginning of the end of a distinctive American culture and ideology, particularly in social and moral terms.

In recent years, however, the tide has turned; ideas and attitudes have reversed flow. Europeans are now complaining that they are being Americanized by McDonald's, Coke, and Disney. They feel that American-driven globalism is subsuming their native cultures, and they fear that unbalanced American power will lead to total U.S. domination in every sector and on every level of life.

And they are letting us know.

## POWER

Militarily, economically, and politically, European nations once dominated the world scene. Spain, Portugal, England, France, Holland, Germany—all at one time or another held sway over vast areas of the earth. However, those days are long past.

Today, no one speaks much of European power because it has faded to a mere ghost of its former glory. Though the media still beg to know what the European governments think about world affairs, the impact of their views is inconsequential. In the end, these once-proud nations have little strength to leverage any significant change.

This is particularly true of American policy. France, Germany, and Britain hold permanent seats on the UN Security Council as a legacy of their past achievements, not on the merits of their current importance. They can veto any initiative the U.S. brings before the UN, but as President George Bush clearly threatened on September 12, 2002, America will do what it deems necessary whether the Security Council passes a resolution or not.

The reaction of Europeans to this loss of power has been, predictably, to lash out at America and its perceived abuses of power. William Drozdiak, executive director of the Transatlantic Center in Brussels, Belgium, remarks, "There's a feeling that America is becoming too infatuated with its own power and showing its arrogance."<sup>1</sup> Spyros Economides, who teaches international relations at the London School of Economics, agrees, "Right now the vast majority of European states—excepting perhaps Great

# ING DIVIDE



Britain—are resentful if not fearful of what they see as American unilateralism.”<sup>2</sup>

Germany and France seem to be the hotbeds of anti-Americanism these days. For instance, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, lagging in the polls in the run-up to elections, promised Germany’s opposition to “aggressive” U.S. plans for Iraq and promptly took the lead. France, for its part, decided to honor a convicted murderer, Philadelphia’s Mumia Abu-Jamal, as an honorary citizen of Paris, just to spite America’s continued use of “barbaric” capital punishment,<sup>3</sup> even though it was legal in France until 1981.<sup>4</sup>

Britain, however, has its share of U.S.-bashers. On Independence Day this year, London’s *Daily Mirror* ran a headline that read, “Mourn on the Fourth of July: The USA is now the world’s leading rogue state.” One of its competitors, *The Telegraph*, usually considered a conservative newspaper, ran an editorial by Harold Pinter on November 12, 2002, titled, “The American administration is a bloodthirsty wild animal.”

The fact is that America must use its military power because, in comparison, Europe does not have any. On average, European nations spend less than two percent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on military

needs, while the U.S. spending level is more than twice that.<sup>5</sup> Because the U.S. GDP is several times what individual European nations can muster, this is a significant difference indeed. The U.S. outspends the next nine largest national defense budgets combined, pays for nearly eighty percent of the planet’s research and development in military matters, and accounts for about forty percent of all global defense expenditures.<sup>6</sup>

On the playground, if one boy has a stick—and the will to use it—while the other boys do not, the only recourse the stickless boys have is to heckle and disparage the boy with the stick as a dangerous bully. As Josef Joffe, editor of the German newspaper *Die Zeit*, has concluded, Europe has become a stickless boy, what he calls an “Axis of Envy.”<sup>7</sup>

## ECONOMICS

Europeans do not just envy American power but American prosperity as well. We are inclined to believe that the European standard of living compares to the American, but this is becoming decreasingly true. European Union countries, for example, register a combined GDP of less than two-thirds of America’s. Moreover, Europeans pay a higher percentage of their wages in taxes. The divide economically is widening so rapidly that the average European would place somewhere in the middle of America’s lower class.<sup>8</sup>

A huge part of the problem is Europe’s infatuation with socialism, a very expensive form of government. At its foundation is the belief that the state, as a collective of the people,



A focal point of recent anti-American sentiment in Europe is President George W. Bush. He is seen as the force behind America’s determined efforts to eradicate terrorism since September 11, 2001—efforts many Europeans consider “arrogant.”

should cushion and control the lives of its citizens from the cradle to the grave. In effect, it is “soft” Marxism, and the history of communist states leaves telling evidence of non-productivity, excessive regulation, low worker morale, non-existent competition, low wages, and eventual economic implosion. The economies of Europe are on this track, albeit the train is moving more slowly.

By comparison, American capitalism is vibrant, productive, expansive, and competitive. Its workers produce more and work harder than their European counterparts. For instance, an EU laborer produces only three-quarters of what a typical American does, and the U.S. worker works more hours and takes less vacation time. Socialist Europe demands employers give their workers short workweeks, a month or more of paid vacation, and multiple social amenities. It is no wonder their employees slouch on the job.

In addition, the U.S. economy has produced 57 million new jobs since 1970, while EU nations have produced only five million, and most of these were government positions. Add to this that much of European growth during this time can be traced back to American business expanding into Europe or infusing capital into established European companies.

A good example of Europe’s economy is its “strongest” nation, Germany. Over the last decade, Germany grew at a paltry 1.4 percent annually, better only than languishing Japan of all major industrial nations. Imports have plunged more than 28 percent since 1991 (while America’s rose by 34 percent). Unemployment has frozen at about ten percent, and Germans who have jobs pay upwards of two-fifths of their wages in taxes.<sup>9</sup>

It is no wonder, then, that Europeans think of Americans as fat, money-tossing, boorish consumers, who drive gas-guzzling SUVs, live in oversized houses, wear expensive Nike clothing, eat fast food for every meal, and watch HBO most of their waking hours. Though they may not want to do any of these things, they would like to be able to, but their nations’ economies are heading in the other direction.

## CULTURE

More than just the wide Atlantic separates the cultures of Europe and America. From the beginning, the people of New World America proved themselves a breed apart from those they left behind on the Continent. Particularly evident are America’s independent spirit and pragmatic approach to life’s difficulties.

Europeans, on the other hand, are products of centuries of frequent upheaval and close living, which has made them typically conformists and consensus-builders. Europe has had to rely repeatedly on tenuous balance-of-power alliances and paper-thin treaties to create a semblance of peace and security for its people, and by this method, many fundamental problems have been allowed to continue. In other words, they are used to living with their problems, a situation Americans find untenable.

Another cultural difference is the perspective toward government. America was founded on the principle of “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” Although it has strayed significantly from this ideal, the United States government is still more responsible to the electorate than any European government.

In fact, to Americans, European nations hardly seem democratic at all, and the EU looks alarming like an oligarchy. Most of the decisions of government—particularly thousands of picayune regulations—are made by a handful of bureaucrats, who are unaccountable to the man on the street. This is an aftereffect of the “old” European class system, in which the “peasantry” allow their “betters” to make all the important decisions. As journalist Clive Crook writes, “Europe’s leaders see themselves as wise parents, and their citizens as children.”<sup>10</sup> Such an assertion over here about an American politician could get him tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail.

Finally, Europeans see their ancient cultures being torn down at a rapid rate, and they blame America as the locomotive of globalization. However, they should look no further than two of their own pet ideas: integration and

multiculturalism. Globalization has merely carried these concepts faster and farther than their proponents ever believed could happen, and now they are witnessing cultural breakdown at an undesired pace. American business makes a good scapegoat because of its relentless self-promotion. Europe, however, is merely reaping the harvest of its own liberal philosophies.

## SEPARATE WAYS

Do all these indicators point toward the U.S. and Europe going their separate ways? A case can be made that most of it is just talk—Europeans venting their angst. Another argument could be that it is merely a reflection of Europe’s dislike for the present American administration, and as soon as it is replaced, the Atlantic alliance will resume its warm embrace. Alternately, we may be witnessing the beginnings of a painful divorce.

For many years, we have maintained that a great power, which the Bible calls “the Beast,” will rise out of Europe as the last reincarnation of the Roman Empire (Revelation 13:1-10; 17:1-13). As described in Daniel 2:40-43, it has ten “toes,” composed of iron and clay and divided on two “feet”—Eastern and Western Europe, we have interpreted—as the Roman Empire was similarly divided. This Beast power would dominate the world politically and militarily (Daniel 11:36-39), bringing on the “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time” (Daniel 12:1).


Present-day Europe, however, appears particularly unqualified for such a role, which opens up a few possibilities:

1. The Beast is not European. Our long-held understanding is hard to toss aside because the biblical clues seem to fit the Europe-based Roman and Holy Roman Empires so squarely. If Europe or the EU is not the Beast power, then it must surely have a European component.
2. Christ’s return is farther off than we think. Europe is so weak—

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# Godly Friendship

## *A Priceless Commodity*



As the greater church of God has continued to fragment, splintering asunder congregations and creating yawning chasms between former friends and acquaintances, my wife Julie and I have come to the conclusion that a close friend who has God's Holy Spirit is one of the most valuable commodities one could ever desire. As more of our former friends and acquaintances drift away from the teachings that we once collectively valued—or seemed to—the ones that stay loyal become precious as rare gemstones.

God Almighty has set in motion the laws that bond one person to another and groups of people to each other. He invented friendship and has set into motion laws that sustain it.

The God of the Old Testament, who later became Christ, actually formed several friendships with human beings. The Bible refers to David as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22; I Samuel 13:14). Abraham is called the "friend of God" several times:

- And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the *friend of God*. (James 2:23)
- But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham, *My friend*. (Isaiah 41:8)

- Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham *Your friend* forever? (II Chronicles 20:7)

We can never overestimate the value of a true friend. Solomon considers friendship as something to be valued, protected, and nurtured: "Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, nor go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity; for better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away" (Proverbs 27:10).

### Ties That Bind

We find Solomon's classic exposition on the value of friendship in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12:

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

The last portion of the passage refers to a threefold cord. If one individual and another individual make  
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they shall fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down,' says the LORD."

Some children are adorable because we love to see the beauty of their innocence. But what happens on the trip to adulthood? Sin alters the way a person looks at life and the world. With maturity, people become distrustful, sophisticated, competitive, cosmopolitan, cynical, suspicious, sarcastic, prejudiced, self-centered, and uninvolved. It is sin that drives people apart and creates fear.

## Sin Destroys Ideals

An ideal is a concept or standard of supreme value or perfection, something perceived as the ultimate object of attainment. It is indicative of this world's cynical attitude that it often calls a person with high ideals impractical, a visionary, or a dreamer. This is interesting because most of us had high ideals in our youth. What enters to destroy our idealism? We meet the world, and sin enters to a degree we have never before experienced.

A tragic process begins when we become involved in sin. At first, we regard it with horror. Then, if we repeat the sin, we feel unhappy and ill at ease about it. Yet, if we continue to commit it, we will soon do it without a qualm. Each sin makes the next one easier because the ideal is gradually being lowered. Along with it, one's conscience also adjusts downward, and it will quit working at its former higher level. Like a drug, sin has an addictive quality that pulls a person down each time a he surrenders to it.

Mark 10:17-24 relates the story of a young man who greatly desired to be in the Kingdom of God. But when Jesus, who loved him, told him what was required of him, his sin of coveting trumped his desire for the Kingdom, persuading him to lower his ideal to the things of this world! Such is the fruit of sin. It causes us to adjust our standards, hopes, and dreams downward and convinces us to settle for something far less than what could have been.

Jeremiah 4:22 shows what happens as we repeat this scenario: "For My people are foolish. They have not known Me. They are silly children, and they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge." Eventually, godly ideals are gone. The people Jeremiah speaks of had practiced sin so frequently and fervently that they had lost the knowledge of godliness. What is the result? A person blind to truth. Like a slow suicide, this process destroys the standards that make life worth living.

## Sin Destroys the Will

The will is the power or faculty by which the mind makes choices and acts to carry them out. At first, against his will, a person engages in some forbidden pleasure because he wants to, but if he keeps it up, he soon finds that he has no strength to resist it. This process does not

happen anymore quickly than an addiction to alcohol, but in the end, he keeps sinning because he cannot help but do so! Once a thought or act becomes a habit, it is a short step to being a necessity. The old saying is true: "Sow an act and reap a habit; sow a habit and reap a character; sow a character and reap a destiny."

Hebrews 3:12-13 reveals a worrisome characteristic of sin: "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Sin is seductive, enticing, deceitful, and hardening.

Sin's deceitfulness is that it cannot deliver what it promises. It deludes a person into thinking he can "have it all" or "take it or leave it." It promises pleasure, contentment, fulfillment, and life, but what it delivers in those areas is fleeting, which leads to its addictive quality. The pleasure is never quite enough to produce the desired contentment and fulfillment. Sinners are forced into greater perversions until it kills them.

Sin offers rationalizations and justifications. It puts on a plausible appearance and can even seem to be virtuous, as in situation ethics. However, sin's drug-like quality always demands more because what formerly satisfied no longer will. The person in its grip gradually becomes its slave, and all along the way, his heart becomes hardened as well.

In Hebrews 3:13, *hardened* is translated from the Greek word for a callus. A callus forms around the break in a bone, on the palms of hands and on fingers from constant hard use, or in a person's joints, paralyzing its actions. In a moral context, it suggests "impenetrable," "insensitive," "blind," or "unteachable." A hardened attitude is not a sudden aberration but a habitual state of mind that shows itself in inflexibility of thinking and insensitivity of conscience. It can eventually make repentance impossible.

Jeremiah 9:1-5 describes people in this state, so inured, so enslaved to sin that they weary themselves pursuing and doing it:

Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! Oh, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place for wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! For they are all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. "And like their bow they have bent their tongues for lies. They are not valiant for the truth on the earth. For they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know Me," says the LORD. "Everyone take heed to his neighbor, and do not trust any brother; for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbor will walk with slanderers. Everyone will deceive his neighbor, and will not speak the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity."

## Sin Produces Slavery

A slave is a person whose liberty to make many choices in life has been either given or taken away. Virtually all people want to be free to make, at the very least, the most critical choices in life. Slaves feel a distinct and sometimes emotionally painful loss of control. Nobody wants circumstances or another person dictating what they should or should not do. But slavery of the worst sort, spiritual slavery, follows in the wake of sin.

Jesus Himself asserts in John 8:34, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." When a person sins, he is not really doing what he likes but what sin likes. Even though a person may enjoy his sin while he is doing it, the person is not in control but sin is. This is doubly so when one sins with knowledge. I Corinthians 6:12 shows that Paul clearly understood this: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." He is proclaiming that he would not be the slave of any practice that might corrupt his mind or his witness and destroy his liberty to do his job well.

As seen earlier, Genesis 4:7 gives us God's directive regarding what we should do about sin. "If you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." Our responsibility is clear. We are not to allow sin to dictate our choices. To do so ensures yielding our liberty to make right choices. This requires not only knowledge but also the will to exercise vision, love, duty, and the fear of God in the form of self-control.

## Sin Produces More Sin

We saw in Jeremiah 9:3 how God describes the people as proceeding from one sin to another in an unbroken chain. Genesis 35:1-35 describes in detail how Jacob's unwise favoritism of Joseph developed into the sinful interaction between Joseph and his brothers, leading from one sin to another. The initial sin, Jacob's favoritism, falls under the umbrella of respect of persons. The brothers' irritation from this grew into jealousy and hatred. Soon they were conspiring against him, during which they deceitfully plotted to kill him. Selling him into slavery instead, they then lied to their father to cover their guilt.

Each sin may not produce such a convoluted mass of other sins, but the potential is always present for one sin to lead directly to others and to affect the lives of people not involved in the original sin that began the sordid mess.

## Sin Produces Degeneracy, Sickness, and Pain

Multitudes of scriptures provide evidence of the truth of this painful fruit, but a few will paint the general picture.

Jesus says in Mark 2:5, when healing a paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." In John 5:8, 14, He clearly connects a man's paralysis with forgiveness of his sins: "Jesus said to him, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk.' . . . Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, 'See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.'"

## Sin Produces Death

In death, there are no ideals. No exercise of our will can overcome it because our will has been totally overcome. Degeneracy has reached its nadir and ended in the ultimate slavery. According to I Corinthians 15:54-56, death is the last enemy to be destroyed in God's plan. James 1:13-16 provides us with a brief overview of the course of sin, telling us succinctly where everyone not under the redemption of Christ ends:

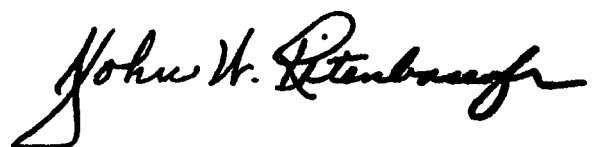
Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

We must see sin for the enemy it is, or our attitude toward it will be tolerant. We must regard it as a formidable and devastating opponent. However, it is not so formidable and devastating that God in us cannot conquer it. We, of course, must do our part. If we do not fear its power and hate its evil fruit, our sins will be acceptable to us because they are ours. We cannot afford to have this approach because we will not be motivated to overcome it. We will have the apathetic, Laodicean approach that we are rich and increased with goods and need nothing (Revelation 3:17).

Sin is responsible for the pain in our lives, and it does not matter whether it was our sin. Sin caused it. Sin is not selective about whom it seeks to destroy. We can do nothing to change others who sin, but our responsibility is to work on changing ourselves. We also need to work hard to understand how sin has caused our pain. Once we do, it becomes far easier to be motivated to take positive steps to avoid having it happen again.

Eternal judgment is upon us now (I Peter 4:17). This is our one and only chance to show God by our works that we hate sin and are loyal to His way.

In Christian love,



# Godly Friendship

(continued from page 13)

a twofold cord, the threefold cord must have an additional element that we can infer to be God Almighty. If God is not placed first in every liaison that we human beings make (marriage, friendship, or church fellowship) the relationship will be short lived.

Consider these scriptural warnings:

- Though they *join forces*, the wicked will not go unpunished; but the posterity of the righteous will be delivered. (Proverbs 11:21)
- Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; though they *join forces*, none will go unpunished. (Proverbs 16:5)

Any alliance or friendship not based upon God's laws and principles will not succeed. We are warned to stay away from any such bond:

If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods," which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, . . . you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him. . . . (Deuteronomy 13:6, 8)

Close or intimate friends should have an intense love for God's law. Any alliance made between two people that explicitly or implicitly subverts God's laws is destined to be destroyed.

God set in motion those immutable laws that bind one person to another. There are laws of attraction that bring human beings with similar traits together. Cliques also adhere or cohere on this principle.

Some studies in human behavior suggest that people bond with one another because they see aspects of

their own personalities in others (sometimes good, such as a common love for music or literature, and sometimes bad, such as a proclivity to be a clutter-bug or indecisive). The recognition of a parallel trait in someone else causes us to feel protective toward that person.

For instance, some social analysts have speculated that the reason the United States Senate did not carry out the House of Representatives recommendations to expel President Bill Clinton from office was a timidity rising from their own parallel sins and iniquities. As the wife of a prominent radio commentator has suggested, "Bill Clinton makes us comfortable with our own sins."

Even the phenomenon of "love at first sight" has frequently been explained as projecting onto the other person certain personality traits found in the person doing the projecting. Carl Gustav Jung has written that each man carries around in his psyche an idealized image of his own "Eve." Conversely, each woman carries in her own psyche an idealized image of her own "Adam." According to Jung, these images are influenced by the parent figures in their lives.

Sometimes the things that draw people into alliances may seem questionable or dubious. Several years ago, a student of mine spoke to me about a new relationship within which she found herself. She admitted that she had begun dating this other individual because they shared the same *dislikes*:

- They both hated the Dean of Students.
- They both hated going to Forum or Assembly.
- They both hated the food in the cafeteria.
- They both had the same aversion to the same faculty member.

The whole premise of their relationship stemmed from negatives—often the basis for the bonding of maverick political parties. For some reason, I did not think that these parallel "things in

common" provided much of a basis for a long-term relationship.

## Better Bonding

We are admonished to bond with people who will encourage our better behaviors and characteristics. We eventually take on the characteristics of the people with whom we bond. We find numerous biblical cautions on this principle or law of bonding:

- Can two walk together, unless they are agreed? (Amos 3:3)
- He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed. (Proverbs 13:20)
- Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul. (Proverbs 23:24-25)

The world's psychology claims that friendship is enhanced by communication. Godly psychology stresses communication but with a slightly different emphasis. Encounter groups (products of well-meaning but misguided psychological principle) encourage, "Let it all hang out—give vent to your pent up feelings." One psychologist suggests that, if one genuinely feels like saying, "I hate you! I hate you!" he should just say it, if it is an honest feeling. However, consider God's instruction: "A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back" (Proverbs 29:11).

God's psychology insists that friends build up instead of tear down. The Scripture gives ample instructions for godly communication between friends: "Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Proverbs 27:5-6).

A friend ought to be able both to offer and receive encouragement and loving criticism. As we in our local memberships now number in the teens rather than the hundreds, our faults become more transparent to one another. We need to come to appreciate both the encouragement and the can-

did criticism from our friends, as well as their kindness and generosity.

A friend should never commiserate with or encourage his friend's bitter attitude or rebellion against any of God's laws, statutes, or principles but should encourage him to change course:

- Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man's friend does so by hearty counsel. [A true friend both gives and accepts good counsel.] (Proverbs 27:9)
- As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

Godly communication between friends involves sharing common interests, giving and accepting advice, giving and accepting criticism, and giving and accepting encouragement. A healthy relationship requires both giving and receiving, with the primary emphasis on the way of give.

## Sharing Confidences

As an extension of godly communication, the ability to confide freely in another with no fear of betrayal is a mark of a mature friendship. In Clayton Steep's 1982 *Good News* article, "Why Was Abraham Called the Friend of God?" he writes, "You can discuss what is on your own mind, sharing your joys, your observations, your plans and, yes, your regrets and sorrows. In the most intense friendships nothing needs to be held back."

The article goes on to say, "Best friends are not only persons in whom you can confide, they can confide in you. Trustful confidence is a two-way street." However, a cynical Yiddish proverb gives the caution, "Your friend has a friend—so tell him no secrets."

In I Samuel 18, Jonathan and David share many secrets and confidences. Neither worried about betrayal because each loved the other "as his own soul." If friends and family members would emulate David and Jonathan, loving others as themselves, there would not be betrayal of confidence.

Unfortunately, blackmail is often the incentive to silence in some "friendships." "Friends" say, "I won't tell

what I know about you if you don't tell what you know about me"—much like the missiles aimed at Washington, Beijing, and Moscow at the height of the Cold War guaranteed the "friendship" between America and its Cold War enemies. Confidences held together with the glue of blackmail are destined to fail.

There is perhaps no more disheartening experience, in or out of the church, then to have a confidence betrayed. It hurts and it burns like napalm spread on the most sensitive parts of the anatomy. It guarantees a destroyed friendship. God says, "A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle" (Proverbs 18:19).

In "The Cowboy Code," authored by Gene Autry, rule #2 states, "The cowboy must never go back on his word or a trust confided in him." God Almighty is the recipient of more confidential pieces of information than anyone else is, yet He is not bursting at the seams to tell anyone. After He forgives a transgression (told to Him in deepest confidence), He forgives and absolutely forgets (Jeremiah 31:34). It is up to us as the begotten offspring and emulators of God, if we cannot forget the sensitive confidences our friend has entrusted with us, at least not to spread them around.

Perhaps the most desired quality in a marriage or friendship is loyalty. Regardless of the circumstances, a Christian friend is both a fair-weather and a foul-weather friend—the kind who sticks closer than the brother born for adversity (Proverbs 17:17). Jesus Christ and God the Father have already made such a commitment to us: "Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5).

## Glued Together

If a friendship or a relationship is based on the way of get, it will crumble as stormy weather sets in. This often occurs in cases in which a person stupidly marries another for money rather than mature love. Liaisons based upon the mortar of mammon have very short duration. Consider:

Many entreat the favor of the nobility, and every man is a friend to one who gives gifts. All the brothers of the poor hate him; how much more do his friends go far from him! He may pursue them with words, yet they abandon him. (Proverbs 19:6-7)

In the words of the old Yiddish proverb, "There are three types of friends: those like food, without which you can't live; those like medicine, which you need occasionally; and those like an illness, which you never want." We certainly want to eliminate the last type, but we need to build and strengthen godly friendships. God's work is a love-building work, forging bonds between fathers and children and children and fathers (Malachi 4:6), in essence, the entire family of God. Godly friendship is the cement that makes this all happen.

Here is a recap of the essential characteristics of a Christian friendship:

1. It places God first, the middle strand in a threefold cord (Ecclesiastes 4:12).
2. It follows the principles or laws of bonding (interest in the same things), which include at the forefront a love for godly principles.
3. It involves a give-and-take communication involving advice, criticism, and encouragement.
4. It involves a climate in which the most sensitive of confidences can be exchanged without fear of betrayal.
5. It consists of an unbreakable bond that lasts through good and bad times.

A minister once taught, "A friend is someone, who, if you make a colossal botch of something, doesn't think you've made a permanent job of it." God is such a friend. Let us try to emulate Him.

—David F. Maas

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was to prepare the nation for the Messiah's first coming (Galatians 3:19, 24). Because of this emphasis on the physical, many scriptures in the Old Testament demonstrate God's intent to shield and protect Israel if they would obey. They could depend on their national and individual protection if they adhered to God's Word. If they remained faithful to the covenant, God would protect them—it was a sure thing!

Because the reasons for the Old Covenant and the New Covenant are very different, we have to look at the subject of God's protection through the lens of God's purpose. The intent of the New Covenant is to develop a personal relationship with God, leading to eternal life and godly character. God is willing to do whatever it takes to bring us to the point He desires. Thus, He will sometimes remove His protection when it serves His purpose.

Even faithful Christians may have their houses burglarized, their cars stolen, or their property vandalized. They may be the victims of physical

or sexual assault. They may be persecuted and even martyred. While some may be the recipients of violence as a natural consequence of their actions, others will receive it more or less undeserved, just as Jesus Christ did.

God might allow a man to suffer violence to see how His creative work is coming along, as a potter tests to discern the quality of his clay and the design of his vessel. He might remove a portion of His hedge, not necessarily to punish us, but to instruct us when nothing else will get through.

Under the New Covenant, God does not promise us complete protection (Matthew 5:11-12, 44; 10:23; John 15:20; 16:33; I Thessalonians 3:4; II Timothy 3:12; II Corinthians 11:23-28). However, we *are* assured that, if we fall victim to violence, it is either because of our actions (Galatians 6:7) or because God is working something out that we may not discern at the time. If we are called by God, and if we reciprocate by loving Him, we have His sure promise that all things will work together for good (Romans 8:28).

## Pacifism or Faith?

Some contend that God's prohibition against killing is "pacifist" or "weak." Does it take more strength to abide by God's law and suffer the consequences from man or to give in and lash out like the rest of mankind? Others argue that we have to "do our part" in taking care of our property and ourselves. But where does God ever tell us that "our part" includes *sinning*?

What it really boils down to is what a person's faith is in: God or self. Do we trust God to shield us according to His will after we understand the moral limits He has set on our actions?

Our Creator has called us to a personal relationship with Him, and our trust in His nature and faithfulness will determine our responses and actions. A living faith goes far beyond lip service and demonstrates what we truly believe. If God is real to us, and if He is sovereign in our lives, we will conduct ourselves according to His law—even when threatened—because we believe in His ability to accomplish His purpose and bring us into His Kingdom.

—David C. Grabbe

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militarily, in particular—that it could take years for its war machine to grow to world domination. In particular, Europe is in no shape to defeat the U.S., a present necessity for world hegemony.

3. Something other than Europe will destroy the U.S., and the Beast will fill the power vacuum. A few nuclear bombs or other weapons of mass destruction—possibly terrorist-related—might cut America down to size (Ezekiel 7:1-9). Europe could then appropriate NATO assets abroad and become a superpower overnight.

4. The U.S., originally colonized and founded by Europeans, will become a part of the Beast power, supplying its military might. Many have wondered if any Israelite

country would join with the Beast, especially since the prophecies seem to suggest it is a Gentile empire, like Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. However, the nations of Israel today believe they are Gentiles and function as Gentiles in many respects, meaning it is not beyond the realm of possibility biblically (see Romans 9-11).

Other possibilities surely exist, and in this time of uncertainty, there is no way to determine whether any of these are real. Such is the character of prophecy. We are assured, however, that, "Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). We will keep our eyes and ears open for any indication of which way world events will turn.

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Rubin, Daniel, and Gerlin, Andrea, "Europeans frustrated, irritated with U.S. foreign policy," *Miami Herald*, November 10, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Housego, Kim, "U.S. Inmate Named Honorary Parisian," *Associated Press*, December 9, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Rubin and Gerlin, *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Bourge, Christine, "United States and Europe in different worlds," *Cayman Net News*, July 24, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Zinsmeister, Karl, "Old and In the Way," *The American Enterprise*, December 2002, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Friedman, Thomas L., "A war on terrorists to wage together," *The New York Times*, November 4, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Zinsmeister, *ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Crook, Clive, "Europe Embarks, Ignorantly, On Its Big Adventure," *National Journal*, January 5, 2002.



# BIBLE STUDY: THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

When the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God is preached in all the world as a witness, the ears that hear it are not always receptive of this priceless knowledge. In the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-8, 19-23; Mark 4:3-9, 14-26; Luke 8:4-8, 11-15), Jesus reveals why, using three component elements: the sower, the seed, and the soils.

This parable describes what happens after the seed is sown, the different types of soils on which it falls, and the resultant effects. The parable's focus is not on the sower as much as on the various soils. Nevertheless, the sower—Jesus Christ (Matthew 13:37)—is not incidental, for without Him there could be no sowing and thus no possibility of fruit being produced.



1. What natural conditions regarding seed and soils is Jesus describing? Matthew 13:3-8; Mark 4:3-9; Luke 8:4-8.  
**COMMENT:** A farmer places seed in the ground so it will sprout and bear fruit. Some seeds fall on hard ground that the plow has not turned. Here, the seed cannot sink into the soil, and the birds easily find and devour it.

Some seeds fall on stony places, where there is little or no soil for the roots to take in sufficient nourishment for the plant. Initially, they appear to grow quicker because, with less soil to grow through, it does not take them as long to reach the surface. When the sun grows hot, however, the sprouts wither away, the result of insufficient root systems.

The seeds that fall among thorns—in a part of the field where the thorns and shrubs had been sloppily cleared but not removed—are crowded, shaded, and choked by debris.

The seeds that fall on fertile and rich soil produce a crop that varies in its yield. It is common to produce a hundred, sixty, or thirty grains for each one that is sown. Some strains of wheat will produce a crop twelve or fifteen hundred times the original amount of seed sown.

2. Does God's Word fall only on the ears of those chosen by Him? Matthew 13:4, 19; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12.

**COMMENT:** The seed represents the Word of God communicated in various ways: in writing, preaching, and acts of divine intervention. Understanding the gospel comes only by the power of the Holy Spirit; without this spiritual power, the hearer is susceptible to having the knowledge of God stolen by Satan, the accuser and tempter.

God's Word sometimes falls on the ears of people whose heart is calloused by sin, on whom it makes no real impression. Like seed on a hard-packed road, it is consumed before it ever has a chance to develop. Such hardened people soon lose interest in Christ's good news and continue in the ways of the world.

3. Are all who are intrigued by God's Word chosen by Him? Matthew 13:5-6, 20-21; 22:14; Mark 4:16-17; Luke 8:13; 13:23-24.

**COMMENT:** The stony ground represents those who hear the gospel and feel intrigued and excited by it because it is new or interesting, yet they have no depth of understanding. Since they have not changed their minds or repented, they are not true Christians. Seeing no sin in themselves, they do not realize the true value of Christ's sacrifice. Not having internalized God's truth as a personal conviction, when they face trials and persecution, they fall—as a

rootless seed shrivels before the scorching of the sun.

These people suffer anxiety from sin, and when they hear God's offer of mercy, they *seem* to respond properly. God's truth offers them peace of mind, pardon from sin, and salvation with eternal life. Since they think they are forgiven, their anxieties seem to disappear, and they feel a temporary peace and happiness. However, they have no foundation for permanent joy. Their gladness soon subsides, as does their desire to live righteously. Without appreciation for Christ's sacrifice and conviction to resist temptation, trial and persecution causes them to fall away. All they ever had was mere excited human emotion, an insufficient motivation to sustain a person throughout the long process of conversion.

4. Are God's chosen people above being enticed by the world? Matthew 13:7, 22; 7:13-14; Mark 4:18-19; Luke 8:14; I Timothy 6:7-11.

**COMMENT:** The thorny ground represents those who are consumed by the cares and anxieties of this physical life and the deceitful enticements of wealth. The constant pressures of ordinary life—providing for our needs, education, employment, social duties, etc.—can be distracting, causing us to ignore God and Christian growth.

The desire for wealth magnifies this distraction. Wealth is enticing but never yields the expected rewards; it promises to make us happy but, when gained, does not. Further, in pursuing wealth, we are tempted to be dishonest, cheat, oppress, and take advantage of others.

5. Does God's calling require more than just an emotional response? Matthew 13:8, 23; Mark 4:20; Luke 8:15; Acts 22:14; Ephesians 4:1-6.

**COMMENT:** The good ground corresponds to those whose hearts and minds are softened by God's calling and receive it genuinely. It is a rich and fine soil—a mind that submits itself to the full influence of God's truth. They not only accept God's Word—the message of Jesus Christ, as rich soil accepts a seed for growth—they also live by it and bear fruit.

In agricultural circles, it is commonly thought that three-fifths of the seed sown does not grow to harvest. According to Jesus' parable, three-fourths of the audience received seed but produced no fruit. Realistically, how much increase of spiritual fruit are we producing? Are we returning thirty-fold, a reasonable return; sixty-fold, a more productive return; or a hundredfold, an outstanding, God-honoring return?