

# *Forerunner*

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 15, Number 6

July 2006



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Human technology has advanced to the point that scientists claim they can cure disease using embryonic stem cells to manufacture healthy tissues. Is this true? What is this new research all about? And what are the costs? Is this an area of knowledge God wants mankind to meddle in?

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This free publication is made possible through the voluntary tithes and offerings of its subscribers and members of the Church of the Great God. All American and Canadian donations are tax-deductible.

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# Is the Christian Required To Do Works?

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## Part Four

*As the first article in this series explained, the Bible clearly states that the Christian is required to do good works. The devastation sin has caused through wars, adultery, murder, deceitful conspiracies, greed, disobedient children, multitudes of false religions, and churches in doctrinal disarray proves that humanity has failed miserably. The fruit of mankind's rebellion against God and His way is worldwide in scope. This activity is surely leading to the crisis at the close of this age, which will climax with Christ's return.*

The most serious aspects of this continuing rebellion are located within the "Christian" Western world. They are most serious for us because we are most responsible. None of the rest of the world has had such extensive exposure to God's Word. Our nations above all others should know better. Jesus plainly says in Luke 12:48, "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

The destruction of life can be stopped only one way: by ceasing to sin. Sin is the transgression of the law (I John 3:4). If sin is not stopped, because God is just, those laws will execute their power to destroy.

God would not be just if He did not punish for sin. He would simply be like many parents today who yell at their children, perhaps threaten, but never carry through. Their words are hollow, but God's Word is true and never fails.

How, then, can we escape what is surely coming? God's Word prophesies that man will not only not stop sinning, but will blaspheme the God of heaven even in the face of His powerful punishments designed to bring them to repentance (Revelation 16:8-11)! Most of mankind will have to be forced to stop sinning through death and then raised in a resurrection into a better world later on.

Is there anything we can do now? As shown in the

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last article, the power to quit sinning lies in one's relationship with God. However, a person cannot access God for a relationship unless he repents and is justified by faith in the sacrificed blood of Jesus Christ. Many times and in several different ways, the Bible states the obvious truth given in Leviticus 17:11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul." Jesus Christ voluntarily sacrificed His life so that we might have forgiveness and access to God.

Romans 5:1-2 confirms this process: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Justification acquits us and thus brings us into alignment with the legal standard God has established for access to Him. This, then, allows a relationship with Him to begin.

Justification absolutely cannot be earned based on any work or any combination of works of an already sinful man. In this relationship, justification is a standing that must be given as a gift of God due to the perfect works of another, Jesus Christ. Of all who have been born, only He can present a sacrifice of sufficient value to provide us with atonement. Our gracious Creator then freely accounts Christ's righteousness to those who believe and repent. Romans 4:1-5 corroborates this:

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. . . .

Only Christ's sacrifice and God's grace are sufficient to provide justification.

Along with a multitude of other verses, Ephesians 2:8-10 makes it abundantly clear that, though works do not save a person, they are nonetheless required by God:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God

prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Since works are required, understanding this aspect of the works issue comes down to comprehending *when* they are required and the *reasons* God requires them. While being called of God and led to faith in Jesus Christ and repentance toward God, every person is performing some measure of work to reach those states. We are, after all, called upon to present fruit fit for repentance even before being baptized! We work to bear fruit that provides evidence that we believe God by turning toward giving our lives to Him.

As a means of producing that fruit, we study God's Word diligently and meditate to grasp and arrange our accumulation of truth in its proper order. We begin to keep the Sabbath and perhaps to clean up our language and to tithe as well. We might also set in motion making many other changes in our marriages or our labors on the job.

Nevertheless, even though we may work to make many changes as a direct result of the new information God reveals, none of it will justify us before God. No change of conduct or attitude can erase the stain of our conduct before His calling. We cannot "make up" for what we have done in the past any more than a young man or woman can erase the loss of virginity once it is given away. We may do a multitude of works before baptism, but nothing can erase our past record before God—except the blood of Jesus Christ.

The works done at that time are good, even necessary, to give evidence of belief and repentance. Yet, what carries the day and provides forgiveness and entrance into God's presence is His grace in allowing Christ's sacrifice to prevail before Him.

## Sanctification unto Holiness

There comes a time in Christian life, though, when works have a far different and exceedingly more important application. Hebrews 12:14 says, "Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." Is this not our goal in life? Do we not want to spend all eternity working with and under God and our Lord Jesus Christ in God's Kingdom as He proceeds with His plans to expand his rule throughout all He has made?

Without holiness, we will not be fit for living within that Kingdom. We would be miserable round pegs in square holes, intensely disliking the pattern of life necessary for God's plans to be carried out. We would be as the demons are today, constantly fighting to impede God's work and making everybody else as miserable as possible. In God's mercy,

He will not condemn any of us to that. We must be holy as He and His Son are holy. That is why we must work with the Father and Son now by yielding to Their purpose for us.

Sanctification and justification are not the same. They are, however, different processes within the same purpose, and they are definitely related issues. They both begin at the same time: when we are forgiven, justified, and sanctified. Justification has to do with aligning us with the standard of God's law that in turn permits us into God's presence. We will never be any more justified than we are at that moment; justification does not increase as we move through our Christian lives.

Some believe that Jesus Christ lived and died only to provide justification and forgiveness of our sins. However, those who believe this are selling His awesome work short. Notice what Paul writes in Romans 5:6-10 about this:

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

As wonderful as His work is in providing us with justification, His labors in behalf of our salvation do not end there. Notice that verse 10 says we are "saved by His *life*." Jesus rose from the dead to continue our salvation as our High Priest. God's work of spiritual creation does not end with justification, for at that point we are far from complete. We are completed and saved because of Christ's labor as our Mediator and High Priest only because He is alive.

Sanctification unto holiness continues the process. Hebrews 2:11 states that Jesus is "He who sanctifies," and those of us who have come under His blood are called "those who are sanctified." Note these verses carefully:

· **John 17:19:** And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

· **Ephesians 5:25-26:** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.

· **Colossians 1:21-22:** And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight. . . .

· **Titus 2:14:** . . . who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

Sanctification has a definite purpose that is different from justification. In one respect, justification—as important as it is—only gets the salvation process started. Sanctification takes a person much farther on the road toward completion. It occurs within the experiences of life generally over the many years of one's relationship with the Father and Son. How long did God work with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and the apostles to prepare them for His Kingdom? By comparison, will our perfection be achieved in just a moment?

Sanctification is the inward spiritual work that Jesus Christ works in us. Notice His promise, made on the eve of His crucifixion, in John 14:18: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." Moments later, when asked by Judas, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" (verse 22), Jesus replies, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (verse 23). These clear statements show that Jesus would continue His work with them following His resurrection.

As our High Priest, He continues that work in us after our justification. He not only washes us of our sins by means of His blood, but He also labors to separate us from our natural love of sin and the world. He works to instill in us a new principle of life, making us holy in our actions and reactions within the experiences of life. This makes possible a godly witness before men, and at the same time, prepares us for living in the Kingdom of God.

## Walking in the Spirit

If God's only purpose was to save us, He could end the salvation process with our justification. Certainly, His purpose is to save us, but His goal is to save us *with character that is the image of His own*.

Notice Hebrews 6:1: "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." This verse and those immediately following confirm that, at the time of justification, we are not perfect or complete. Justification is an important

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beginning, but God intends to complete the process of spiritual maturation that He began with our calling. When sanctification begins, our Christian walk truly begins in earnest.

Sanctification, then, is the outcome of God's calling, faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, justification, and our becoming begotten of God by receiving His Spirit. This combination begins life in the Spirit, as Paul explains in Romans 8:9: "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."

At this point in Christian life, the principles of Christianity must be practically applied to everyday life. At this juncture, it might help to recall what righteousness is. Psalm 119:172 defines it succinctly: "My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness." The apostle John adds to our understanding in I John 3:4: "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." Both rectitude and love concisely characterize the same standards, the Ten Commandments, and we are required to labor to perform both.

In several places, John expressly states what the responsibilities of a converted person are:

- **I John 2:29:** If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born [begotten] of Him.

- **I John 3:3, 9-14:** And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. . . . Whoever has been born [begotten] of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot [must not] sin, because he has been born [begotten] of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

- **I John 5:1-4:** Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born [begotten] of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and

keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born [begotten] of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

In these verses, the work of keeping the commandments is plainly shown.

The application of Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:10 is becoming ever clearer. He writes that we are indeed saved by grace through faith. However, he adds, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Sanctification is a process involving a period of intense work: walking in love, keeping the commandments, and overcoming sin and the world, as John's first epistle clearly stipulates. This process within a relationship with the Father and Son brings us to completion.

## Evidence of Conversion

Sanctification does not consist only of a lot of talk about religion. Nor does it consist only of spending large amounts of time studying the Bible and commentaries. As helpful as these might be, God also calls for a great deal of action. The apostle John again supplies helpful exhortation: "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (I John 3:18). It could not be stated more clearly that the love of God is an action. Further, Jesus exhorts all His disciples, "If you love Me keep My commandments" (John 14:15). "Keeping" indicates consistent effort to obey as a means of expressing our love, loyalty, and submission to Him.

Paul writes in Romans 5:5, "Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which was given to us." The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is essential to salvation, and God gives it to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). As we saw earlier, Paul says in Romans 8:9, "Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." God gives His Holy Spirit for the very purpose of making one His child. It also allows one to witness on His behalf, to produce the fruit of the Spirit in preparation for His Kingdom, and to glorify Him.

Jesus says in John 15:8, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." Sanctification is the period of our converted lives when God expects us to provide evidence that we are indeed His converted children. In fact, the fruit produced by our works, themselves enabled by God, are the evidence of our

conversion. Some things in life are absolute certainties: Where the fruit of the labors of conversion are, there the Spirit of God will be found. Where those fruits are absent, the people are spiritually dead before God—they lack the life of the Spirit. Put another way, where there is no holy living, there is no Holy Spirit.

The works of sanctification are the only sure sign that one has been called of God and impregnated by His Spirit. Notice something Peter writes on this: “[Christians are] elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (I Peter 1:2). Paul adds in II Thessalonians 2:13, “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”

He also writes in Ephesians 1:4, “. . . just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” When Paul saw the Ephesians’ attitudes, their manner of life, and the evidence of their conversion, he knew they were part of the elect of God. He could thus honestly write to them with glowing praise. Many more similar verses could be added to these.

Out of ignorance, weakness, or lack of understanding, a person may break some of God’s commands. However, anyone who boasts of being one of God’s elect while willfully living in sin is only deceiving himself—and his claim may very well be wicked blasphemy.

Thus, because of the works that are performed during sanctification, it will always be a visible condition. As Jesus says in Matthew 7:18-20: “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”

## God Is Not Unaware

An important principle can be seen in this process of sanctification. Each believer is personally responsible to our Father and our High Priest Jesus Christ for sanctification. Sanctification requires works. These efforts do not pass by Them unnoticed, even though the works possess no power to justify us before Them.

As imperfect as our works are, Hebrews 13:16 reminds us, “But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” In Colossians 3:20, children are urged, “Obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.” In I John 3:22, John encourages us, “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His

commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” God not only requires works, but they also please Him.

As an illustration, the quality of our works can be compared to those of our children. God declares that He looks on the heart (I Samuel 16:7). We look at our children’s efforts to please us, and we can readily recognize their poor performance in contrast to someone of consummate skill. Yet, we also see their motives and intentions, not merely the quality of the results. So, despite their flaws, we are pleased. In many instances, God sees us in a similar way.

It is a great blessing that it is this way because, without holiness, no one will see the Lord. During sanctification, the works with which God is pleased work to produce holiness. We must present God with evidence of the singleness of our hearts by making strong efforts to submit to Him, glorify Him, overcome sin, and bring forth much fruit.

If anything is certain about the future, there is a judgment according to works for all who live and die:

- **Matthew 16:27:** For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

- **John 5:28-29:** Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

- **Romans 14:11-12:** For it is written: “As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

- **II Corinthians 5:10:** 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.

- **Revelation 2:23:** I will kill her children with death. And all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

- **Revelation 20:12-13:** 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

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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.

What an impressive selection of verses on this subject, and there are yet more! How can anyone who says he believes the Bible claim that works are not required of the Christian when God emphatically declares that they are required of us, even though they do not justify us before Him?

The truth is plain. If a Christian does not work, there will be nothing for God to judge and thus no evidence the person is prepared for His Kingdom. God will not give him salvation because there will be nothing to verify that he belongs there. The lack of evidence proves that he does not belong there! Such a one is not a son of God. A faith that does not work is dead (James 2:17, 20, 26). God is the God of the living, and according to James 2:22, faith is perfected, brought to completion, by works. Sanctification is necessary as a witness to the Christian's character as he passes before the judgment seat of Christ.

## Sanctification and Living in God's Kingdom

Do we not all desire to be in the Kingdom of God? Certainly, we must if we are at all impressed with the glory to which God has called us. However, have we considered deeply whether we would enjoy being there, should we be given that privilege? God's Kingdom will be a holy place inhabited by holy people. Is it not apparent that those in God's Kingdom will have spent a great deal of time being prepared, trained, and formed and shaped for living there?

The concept of deathbed repentance and absolution is a lie palmed off by Satan. Likewise false is the belief in a purgatory following death, in which a person prepares for living in paradise. These are nowhere found in Scripture, nor is the idea that one needs *only* to be justified through Christ's blood. If these things were so, Romans 5:9-10 would not declare:

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

The false concepts above do not take into consideration that God's purpose includes more than just atoning for our sins through Christ's blood. God's purpose includes the work of Jesus Christ as our High Priest, perfecting our character by means of living in us through His Spirit (John 14:18-23). It is our High Priest, Jesus, who intercedes in our behalf (Romans

8:26-27). As Head of the church, He inspires and corrects us, and He gives us gifts to fulfill our responsibilities (Ephesians 4:7). He labors to create in us a clean heart, purified and in the character image of the Father (II Corinthians 3:17-18).

We need to be sanctified as well as justified. Sanctification requires the works of submission to and cooperation with Almighty God to bring to completion His purpose for us. King David writes in Psalm 16:11, "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures evermore"—a brief snapshot of what life will be like in the Kingdom of God. No one can be happy where he is not in his element. An unsanctified person would not find God's Kingdom congenial to his tastes and character. Being there would be a condemnation rather than a blessing.

## Ephesians 4 and Works

Most of us realize that the unity of the church of God courses through the book of Ephesians as a general theme. Paul illustrates the church as a complete body of which Jesus, though in heaven, is the Head, and the elect here on earth comprise the rest of it. Early on, Paul declares how God has planned the organization of His purpose from the very beginning, determining whom He would call, give His Spirit to, and perfect as His children.

In Ephesians 4, the apostle begins to clarify our Christian responsibilities regarding works. He appeals to us in verse 1 to make every effort to live a manner of life that measures up to the magnificence of our high calling. He then makes sure we understand that we must carry out our responsibilities in humility, kindness, and forbearance as we strive to maintain doctrinal accord in purity.

He explains that Christ has given each of us gifts to meet our responsibilities in maintaining the unity of God's church. Foremost among these gifts are teachers who will work to equip us for service in the church and eventually in the Kingdom. This same process will enable us to grow to completion, to mature, no longer wavering in our loyalties, certain in the direction of our lives, and not deceived by the craftiness of men.

With that foundation, the "therefore" in verse 17 draws our focus to the practical applications necessary to meet the standards of the preceding spiritual concepts. We must not conduct our lives as the unconverted do. They are blinded to these spiritual realities and so conduct life in ignorance, following the lusts of darkened minds.

Because we are being educated by God, the standards of conduct are established by His truths and are

*(continued on page 18)*

## EMBRYONIC STEM-CELL RESEARCH:

### THE PROMISE AND THE REALITY (PART ONE)

“Know that the LORD, He is God;  
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves.” Psalm 100:3

Embryonic stem-cell research is both scientifically feasible and morally permissible—at least according to the majority of the electorate in the State of California. In the November 2004 elections, an overwhelming majority of those voters approved an initiative that funds embryonic stem-cell research through \$3 billion worth of bonds. Emotion rather than reason probably generated most of the “aye” votes, many voters responding to the biotech industry’s marketing ploy of airing testimonials from desperately sick or injured celebrities. “Don’t deny us the only hope we have,” they pled. “A vote against embryonic stem-cell research is a vote against life.”

California’s electorate aside—and apparently many in both Houses of Congress, where stem-cell research bills are now being debated, as well—is the harvesting of embryonic stem cells in fact moral? Is there any substantive scientific evidence that embryonic stem-cell research can make good on its promises to cure? Who loses from this research? Who gains?

In this two-part article, we will review embryonic stem-cell research: its nature and goals, its scientific challenges, its moral issues, and its alternatives. What is it all about?

Let us start by getting the terms straight.

#### EMBRYOLOGY 101

*(Underlined words are defined in the glossary on pages 10-11.)*

There are two types of human reproduction: sexual and asexual. In sexual reproduction, the male gamete

(or sperm cell) unites with the female gamete (or egg cell) to produce a zygote. This union is called fertilization. Half the chromosomes of the zygote come from the sperm cell, half from the egg cell.

Sexual reproduction comes in two varieties. The first, and more common, is fertilization through coition. This is in utero fertilization, where the zygote comes into being in the uterus. The second kind is in vitro fertilization (IVF), where the sperm unites with an egg in a laboratory Petri dish. From that point, the zygote (and later, the embryo) can develop in culture.

Asexual reproduction is commonly called cloning. Procedurally, the nucleus of an egg cell is removed in the laboratory. Then, the nucleus from another type of cell, any body cell, is “inserted” into that egg cell. Stimulating this egg cell with an electrical charge creates a viable zygote.

While not usually part of the syllabus of Embryology 101, it is important to understand two things about embryos.

1. First, every human zygote, no matter how it is produced, is a human being who is in his first stage of development. *Every* zygote is an individual. Unless death intervenes, the zygote will become an embryo, then a fetus, then an infant, then an adolescent, and eventually an adult.
2. Second, the absence of a sperm does not render an embryo created through cloning anything less than a full-fledged embryo. *A cloned embryo is an embryo in every sense of the term.* One

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writer mentions that even a stem-cell researcher as prominent as John Gearhard of Johns Hopkins University insists that the cloned organism starts out its existence as a zygote/embryo.<sup>1</sup>

Upon its creation, the zygote has two tasks immediately ahead of it. In the case of natural conception, it must *implant* itself into the wall of the womb. If it does not accomplish this implantation soon, it will perish for lack of nourishment. All human life, at whatever stage, must have sustenance and a proper environment to continue living.<sup>2</sup>

## EMBRYOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

The zygote's other task is to grow—to split into more cells. It starts this process almost immediately, and in the case

of *in utero* fertilization, long before womb-attachment. Growing, the zygote becomes an embryo and later a fetus. Importantly, initial growth does not simply mean adding more cells; it does not merely imply “getting bigger.” At this point, adding size, as a boy does when he “bulks up” by exercising his muscles, is not the aim in a person's development. Instead, *from the single-cell zygote must spring each of the 210 basic cell types in the human body*. Examples of such cell types include brain cells, bone cells, red blood cells. These are called adult cells.

Adult cells by definition perform highly specialized tasks. Red blood cells provide a good example of this specialization. Their task is to supply oxygen to other cells. They are able to carry out that task because they have iron in them. The iron oxidizes; it rusts. (That is why “red” blood cells appear red.) The oxidization process means that oxygen becomes attached to the iron. It is in fact the

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<b>Adult Cell</b>	A specialized cell, like a brain or heart cell. Unlike stem cells, an adult cell can produce cells only of its own type. Many biologists identify about 210 discreet types of adult cells.
<b>Adult Stem Cells</b>	Stem cells present in the extra-uterine individual, retrievable by biopsy. Not to be confused with <i>adult cells</i> .
<b>Cellular Differentiation</b>	The process by which stem cells generate cells quite different from themselves. The generated cells are different in that they are more specialized.
<b>Cloning</b>	A fertilization process marked by the absence of a male gamete (sperm). The nucleus of an egg cell is removed in the laboratory. Then, the nucleus from any other body cell is “inserted” into that egg cell. Stimulating the egg cell with an electrical charge creates a zygote, which can develop in culture. The individual produced is said to be a clone of the donor who supplied the substituted nucleus.
<b>Disassociated Embryonic Stem Cells</b>	Embryonic stem cells that are extracted from an embryo created through <i>in vitro</i> fertilization or through cloning. The cells so “harvested” from the embryo can be nurtured in culture, where they split indefinitely and quickly. The embryo that donates the stem cells dies.
<b>Embryo</b>	An individual (human or animal) from the time the zygote first begins cellular differentiation. In the case of human, the organism is termed an embryo through the eighth week after fertilization.
<b>Embryonic Stem Cells</b>	Stem cells that are the immediate descendants of the zygote. Responding to molecular, electrical, and mechanical stimuli (or signals), these cells produce more specialized stem cells, which in turn produce even more specialized stem cells. The ultimate product is an adult cell, such as a white or red blood cell.
<b>Female Gamete</b>	Egg (ovum).
<b>Fertilization</b>	The process by which the male gamete (sperm) unites with the female gamete (egg). The immediate result is a new individual in the zygote stage of development. Fertilization can be sexual, effected through coition or IVF, or asexual, effected through cloning.
<b>Fetus</b>	In humans, an individual from the ninth week after fertilization until parturition (birth).
<b>Implantation</b>	The process by which the zygote/embryo attaches itself to the womb for sustenance.

rusted iron, carried by these red blood cells, which provides oxygen to other cells.

The zygote’s task, then, is not just to add numbers of cells, but to produce 210 different types of adult cells. The process by which a zygote does this is called cellular differentiation. Here is where embryonic stem cells enter the picture. When a zygote begins to split into other cells, it does not form specialized, adult cells. Rather, it forms stem cells. These stem cells facilitate cellular differentiation. *Stem* in this usage means “source” or “origin,” as in the sentence, “Adultery stems from lustful thoughts.” Thus, specialized (adult) cells *stem* from stem cells.

Cellular differentiation works this way: When a stem cell divides, it forms two cells.

- One is a look-alike; it replaces the original stem cell.
- The other cell is truly remarkable; it has the ability

to split into something new. That *something new* is a differentiated stem cell, and it is quite different from the stem cell that produced it. This new stem cell is a more specialized cell, but it is not yet an adult cell.

## A STEPPING-STONE PROCESS

Think of this new, different stem cell as one “stepping stone” toward the final product, an adult cell. Between original zygote and final adult cell, several stepping-stones will be needed. Each stone brings you closer to that adult cell. With each successive splitting of a stem cell, a more specialized cell comes into being, until, after a number of “generations,” the adult cell appears. That cell may be, say, a red blood cell—highly specialized in its function. It could be a white blood cell, a brain cell, a bone cell—any of 210 distinct types of adult cells.

What might be the basic difference between stem cells

<b><i>In utero</i> Fertilization</b>	Sexual fertilization wherein the male gamete (sperm) unites with the female gamete (egg) in the uterus. This is coition, the traditional method of fertilization.
<b><i>In vitro</i> Fertilization</b>	Sexual fertilization wherein the male gamete (sperm) unites with the female gamete (egg) in a laboratory Petri dish. The embryo can then develop in culture. Acronym: IVF.
<b>Male Gamete</b>	Sperm cell.
<b>Multipotent</b>	Capable of differentiating into (that is, ultimately producing) a number of other types of cells, but <i>not</i> all types of cells, Multipotency is a characteristic of stem cells that are more than one generation away from original stem cells. Such cells are more specialized, and are less able to generate any type of cell. The more specialized a cell (that is, the more generations it is away from the original stem cells) the less multipotent it is. Also termed <i>pluripotent</i> .
<b>Pre-Embryo</b>	An embryo before implantation in the womb. This term has no meaningful biological referent. “Pre-embryo” implies that the fertilized organism, before attachment to the womb, is not an embryo at all. By definition, however, the zygote became an embryo immediately after it began to split. In other words, an embryo is an embryo, regardless of its state of womb-attachment. Before attachment, an embryo is still an embryo—just an un-implanted one. The term <i>pre-embryo</i> implies that a zygote/embryo is not a human organism until attachment and can therefore be destroyed. It is a term coined by politically-minded biotechnicians to give them “time” to kill, a window of time between fertilization and attachment. The term seeks to skirt the moral issue of murder.
<b>Stem Cell</b>	A cell that becomes the source (hence, “stem”) of other cells. Stem cells can produce more specialized cells, such as brain or bone cells. See <i>totipotent</i> and <i>multipotent</i> .
<b>Teratoma</b>	A type of tumor resulting from multipotent (pluripotent) cells. Because the initial cells carry the characteristic of multipotency, they are similar to stem cells. However, the teratoma’s cells follow no blueprint. They do not produce an organism with integrated systems, but a confused mass of tissue. In these tumors appear cell types quite different from that of the surrounding tissue (for instance, an ovarian teratoma may contain hair, teeth, and even sweat glands). Also referred to as <i>teratomata</i> .
<b>Totipotent</b>	Able to differentiate into (that is, ultimately produce) all other types of cells. Totipotency is a characteristic of the zygote and of the stem cells that are its immediate progeny.
<b>Zygote</b>	The highly specialized single cell resulting from fertilization.

# prophecy watch *Embryonic Stem-Cell Research*

and adult cells? It is probably the *type* of cells they are capable of producing.

- Adult cells can produce only after their kind. A white blood cell cannot breed a brain cell, but only another white blood cell.
- However, the zygote and stem cells are able to produce cells quite *different* from themselves. The zygote is called totipotent—able to generate all other cells. The earliest stem cells, those descending directly from the zygote, are also characterized by totipotency; they, too, can ultimately (that is, through several “generations” of splits) produce all other types of cells—brain cells, bone cells, etc.

Importantly, this differentiation is not random but is tightly *organized*. Something signals a particular stem cell to act as the ultimate progenitor of a brain cell. That something also signals another stem cell to produce, after several generations, a liver cell. One expert summarizes the challenge this way:

Embryonic development is one of the most fascinating of all biological processes. A newly fertilized egg faces the daunting challenge of not only generating all of the tissues of the mature animal but organizing them into a functionally integrated whole. . . . If a developing embryo is not to end up a mass of disor-

ganized tissues, it must do more than generate adult cell types. Embryos must orchestrate and choreograph an elaborate stage production that gives rise to a functional organism. They must direct intricate cell movements that bring together populations of cells only to separate them again, mold and shape organs through the birth of some cells and the death of others, and build ever more elaborate interacting systems while destroying others that serve only transient, embryonic functions. Throughout the ceaseless building, moving, and remodeling of embryonic development, new cells with unique characteristics are constantly being generated and integrated into the overall structure of the developing embryo. Science has only the most rudimentary understanding of the nature of the blueprint that orders embryonic development.<sup>3</sup>

Although not understood by man, this “blueprint that orders” is vitally important in the development of the individual. Stem cells that take orders—follow the blueprint—build healthy bodies. Stem cells that do not take orders result in a monster. *Monster* is the English translation of the Greek word teratoma, a type of tumor (benign or malignant) whose initial cells appear totipotent (or at least multipotent). They are like stem cells, keen to produce a wide variety of adult cell types (skin, bone, muscle, hair, teeth). However, the tissue they generate is “all massed together in a chaotic lump. . . . Unlike embryos, tumors generate adult cell types in a hopelessly undirected

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*National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*. This big journal (each issue is over 200 pages) is published by the National Catholic Bioethics Center in Boston. Because of the obvious Catholic focus, members of God’s church will find many articles off base, yet this journal remains one of the best single sources of reasoned information on the subjects of bioethics and biotechnology. Some articles are quite technical. For more information, write the *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*, PO Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834-9772 (\$48/year).

manner.”<sup>4</sup> The teratoma’s initial stem-like cells lack a blueprint, or at least refuse to follow one. The result can be an often lethal, malignant monster.

## DISSOCIATED EMBRYONIC STEM CELLS

What is the nature of this ordering blueprint? Put differently: What generates the signals that tell a particular stem cell to differentiate into a red blood cell as distinct from a bone cell? How does a given stem cell know to generate a line of stem cells that will finally culminate in, say, an adult brain cell?

In this area, there are more questions than answers. Scientists know that there are three types of signals:

1. **Molecular:** Chemical substances are known to provide signals to embryonic stem cells.
2. **Electrical:** It is widely recognized that embryonic development takes place in an electrical field.
3. **Mechanical:** Embryonic stem cells seem to respond to structural tensions provided by cells in their proximity.

In the early 1990s, scientists learned that they could physically “extract” some stem cells from an embryo they had created through *in vitro* fertilization or through cloning. These separated (or “harvested”) cells are called dissociated embryonic stem cells. In culture, these cells reproduce indefinitely—and fast! “One small flask of cells . . . will generate a quantity of stem cells roughly equivalent in weight to the entire human population of the earth in less than sixty days.”<sup>5</sup> However, these harvested stem cells simply reproduce; they do not differentiate into more and more specialized adult cell types. This is because they lack signals. Separated from the embryo, these dissociated cells find no blueprint to follow. They become a mass of unorganized (indeed, disorganized) cells, not unlike a teratoma.

This finding disheartened scientists until they discovered they could simulate (or replicate) those signals, or at least the chemical ones. Wow! What a blockbuster! *Just provide the right signals, and there, in culture, is produced adult, disease-free cells of whatever type is needed to bring about a cure.*

Let us say a scientist “signaled” these disassociated

stem cells to differentiate, ultimately, into pancreatic cells, which are adult cells. Once produced in sufficient number, these adult pancreas cells could be implanted into a person with a bad pancreas, a diabetic. The effect, scientists promise, would be curative. The pancreas would eventually start producing insulin normally.

Such is the promise of embryonic stem-cell research. That is why the celebrities in California praised it so much. That is why a majority of voters added \$3 billion to California’s already burdensome indebtedness. The biotech firms love every minute (uh, dollar) of it!

## IN SEARCH OF A BETTER BLUEPRINT

Bottom line, what is embryonic stem-cell research all about? Certainly, it is about determining which signal produces a pancreas cell, which produces a white blood cell, which one a bone cell, and so on. It is a search for effective signals to embryonic stem cells.

*Far more fundamentally, however, it is a search for a blueprint.* It is a search to find the organizing plan the zygote/embryo follows as it differentiates cells, configures them into systems, and integrates them into the single organism scientists call *homo sapiens*. In short, stem-cell research is the search for the pattern God uses to “fashion” us in the womb.<sup>6</sup> Psalm 139:13-16 makes it clear that God saw David’s blueprint before his first stem cell split; the person David was the result of God’s working “skillfully” according to that plan. David writes,

For You have formed my inward parts;  
You have covered me in my mother’s womb.  
I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully  
made. . . .  
My frame was not hidden from You,  
When I was made in secret,  
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.

We can be sure that scientists, if they could figure out that blueprint, would want to make it “better.” They would want to create *their* kind of person, a superman. Paying no attention at all to Psalm 100:3, they forget that man does not create man. God does.

Next month, we will look at the scientific challenges and moral issues that surround embryonic stem-cell research.

—Charles Whitaker

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Saunders, Jr., William L, “Embryology: Inconvenient Facts,” *First Things*, December 2004, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> After the mid-1980s, bio-technicians spoke of a pre-embryo as an organism before womb-attachment.

The implication is that the pre-embryo is non-human; the implanted embryo human. This false concept will be discussed more fully in Part Two. Suffice it to say that there is really no such thing as a pre-embryo. An embryo is an embryo. An unattached one is an embryo in every sense of the definition. It is just unattached.

<sup>3</sup> Condic, Maureen, “The Basics about Stem Cells,” *First Things*, January 2002, p 30.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See Psalm 119:73.

*“Be ready always to give an answer . . .”* I Peter 3:15

# Desire Earnestly to Prophecy

*“Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy . . .”*  
—I Corinthians 14:39

The ability to prophesy is a precious gift from God. Contrary to popular belief, the apostle Paul admonishes us *all*—not just the ministry—to develop the ability to prophesy. Notice these verses in I Corinthians 14:

- “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy” (verse 1). The word “especially” places a high priority on our need to develop the ability to prophesy. Paul begins this chapter with this call to action, implying that prophesying is an important spiritual tool that is much needed within the church of God.
- “Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy. . .” (verse 39). The word “brethren” includes all members of the church. Evidently, prophesying goes beyond predicting the future or giving sermons, sermonettes, and Bible studies. Paul’s use of “earnestly” suggests that a person needs to have deep commitment to develop this gift properly.

Other verses in this chapter show the benefits of the begotten sons and daughters of God learning to prophesy. It is already obvious that prophesying goes far beyond our normal perceptions of what it entails. What does Paul mean by “prophesying” in I Corinthians 14? How can we put his instruction to use in glorifying God?

## How We Prophecy

Some people call I Corinthians 14 “The Tongues Chapter.” While it is certainly about speaking in tongues, the basic theme of Paul’s instruction is that God wants everyone in attendance to understand clearly the messages given in church services. It is the teaching that is of greatest importance. Anyone interrupting a speaker’s message with an outburst of loud gibberish creates disorder and confusion.

In addition, “speaking in a tongue” correctly refers, not to uttering some sort of “angel’s language,” but to speaking in a real, understandable, yet foreign language. If a speaker uses a different language, an interpreter must be present to translate so that all can understand (see verses 9-11, 27). Verse 28 states: “But if there is no interpreter, let him [the speaker] keep silent in the church, and let him speak to himself and to God.”

Paul gives other guidelines for speakers addressing the congregation in services. The number of speakers, the attitude of the speaker, the content of the message, and the purpose of the message—all should meet certain criteria. As mentioned before, the instruction is paramount.

The act of a speaker addressing the congregation with a prepared speech is referred to as “prophesying.” The speaker “prophesies” to the congregation when he follows the proper guidelines laid down by Paul and the church. Beyond this, as we saw in verse 39, God wants *all* church members to prophesy. From the context of chapter 14, when we speak to each other according to the guidelines given, we are “prophesying” to each other. As we continue, we will see how this works in more detail.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were given special commissions by God to proclaim public messages to an often hostile, stubborn, and rebellious audience of Israelites. In contrast, we are called to “prophesy” (through our personal conversations) to a loving and receptive audience: our fellow church members. Our message should be intended, not to convict them of sin, but to encourage and uplift them.

Our prophesying takes place in the context of church services, as these verses indicate:

- “. . . he who prophesies edifies the church” (verse 4).
- “. . . that the church may receive edification” (verse 5).
- “. . . let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel” (verse 12).

Our purpose should be to edify—that is, build up—each other. I Corinthians 14 begins: “Pursue love. . . .” Thus, our conversations with fellow church members should be the result of God’s love flowing from us to them, and this is certainly uplifting. Verse 3 gives us three ways to show love: “But he who prophesies speaks edification, and exhortation, and comfort to men.” We will define them in their verb forms:

- *Edify*: to increase another’s faith or morality; to instruct or benefit; to improve spiritually.
- *Exhort*: to urge; to persuade earnestly; to caution.
- *Comfort*: to console; to cheer; to encourage.

To prophesy, then, means we have a heartfelt desire to radiate the love of God to all the brethren through our uplifting, helpful Sabbath conversations.

### What We Prophesy

Concerning the content of our conversation, Paul writes, “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (I Corinthians 14:37). Paul’s bold statement that he was God’s spokesman is verified by his life! The story of his conversion, education, and work can be read in Acts 9 through 28, Galatians 1, Philippians 3, and many other passages in Paul’s writings. It is clear that he had thorough training in the Holy Scriptures from his youth. His knowledge and background were that of the strictest Pharisee. His zeal for God is evident, paradoxically, in the way he persecuted the church before his conversion and in the way he endured hardships and persecution after his conversion.

On the road to Damascus, He had a personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:8), who shortly thereafter proclaimed to Ananias that Paul was specially chosen “to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My Name’s sake” (Acts 9:15-16). Paul spent three years of isolated study under the direct revelation of Christ, after which it was found that His understanding coincided with the teaching of the apostles at Jerusalem. He boldly proclaims himself to be an apostle of Jesus Christ at the beginning of most of his letters to the churches.

In terms of prophesying, what I Corinthians 14:37 means for us is that Paul’s writings have the same status as commandments of God. They are just as much Scripture as the Old Testament and the Gospels. Paul’s writings teach us the spiritual application of the law through the sacrifice of Christ. Thus, the total Word of God should be the source of our conversation and conduct. It can be trusted as if we were looking God directly in the eye and hearing Him speak. We prophesy to others in the church when our conversation centers on our study and application of God’s Word.

In I Corinthians 14:1, *The Amplified Bible* explains the word “prophesy” with the phrase “interpret the divine will and purpose in inspired preaching and teaching.” Prophesying combines understanding what God desires and intends with the ability to teach it to others. In this vein, Paul writes, “Yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue” (I Corinthians 14:19). He contrasts five words with ten thousand to show how vital it is that instructors in God’s way correctly understand His will and plan.

Like Paul, we should be very concerned about what our words and conduct teach others. They will form lasting opinions, not only about us personally, but more importantly, about God and the church, the Body of Christ. Regarding our conduct, Paul admonishes us in Romans 12:1-2:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Notice what results when we refuse to conform to this world, present our lives as a sacrifice, and work to transform ourselves into His image: *Our lives prove what is good and acceptable to God.*

### A Varied Audience

We should realize that our brothers and sisters in Christ have varied backgrounds, talents, and levels of maturity. Some will be shining examples for us. Others may have noticeable faults, but possess a lovable spirit and a willingness to change. Still others may say and do things that make us wonder, “Shouldn’t a Christian know better?”

Yet, I Corinthians 12:2 reminds us that we were *all* once “carried away to these dumb idols, however we were led.” In addition, we all have different gifts, though we have them by the same Spirit (verse 4). God Himself has “distribut[ed] to each one individually as He wills” (verse 11), and He “has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased” (verse 18). The physical body teaches us that “those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary” (verse 22). It is God’s will that the church congregation is composed as it is.

We should work hard to develop the ability to extend the love of God to all mankind, but especially to those in the church. I Corinthians 12 ends with a verse expressing a

message similar to how chapter 14 begins: “But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way” (verse 31). The “more excellent way” is, of course, the way of love as defined in chapter 13. Paul teaches that the gifts of tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, and good works are of little lasting value without godly love (verses 1-3). The apostle then provides a spiritual checklist by which we can measure our attitudes against God’s perfect, overarching law of liberty:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. (I Corinthians 13:4-8)

As we saw earlier, all of us are in the developing stages of the process of being transformed into the image of God. Many of the brethren will have interests and spiritual understanding similar to what we have. Others may be new in the faith, and we can find joy in empathizing with them and watching their spiritual growth.

Paul described some people as spiritual babies, even though they have been in the church for a long time (Hebrews 5:12-13). We love our physical babies in spite of the fact that they soil their diapers, scatter food all over, and cry out for attention. We know that some day they will mature, and we delight at even slight signs of progress. Perhaps we can appreciate the spiritually immature if we realize that spiritual growth takes place in the heart. For some that process may be agonizingly slow. Perhaps God has placed them in the body so we can learn a special type of patient love.

We must also remember that outwardly, spiritual growth may not be easily seen. Listening to the less spiritually mature with genuine interest and concern is an important way to help them take steps toward growth. God will reveal to them their faults and deficiencies in His own way—even as He does to us. We must learn to let the Bible be our guide to correct our own conduct first, then teach us how to use our growth to show love to all the brethren.

So, what is prophesying in the context of I Corinthians 14?

Prophesying is, in the setting of church services, speaking in love to others for the purpose of edifying, exhorting, and comforting each other based on our personal experience in studying and applying God’s Word.

## If All Prophecy

God takes special delight in the positive, uplifting conversations of His people. A beautiful picture is painted for us in the book of Malachi:

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. “They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.” (Malachi 3:16-17).

Notice the tremendous value God places on those who prophesy to each other. He calls them “jewels” and promises to “spare them,” declaring, “They shall be Mine” and as “his own son.”

Also note the characteristics of the people. They “feared the Lord,” “spoke to one another,” “meditated on His name,” and by implication, “serve[d] Him.” God responds to such attitudes and good works. He “listened and heard them” and had prepared a special book in which perhaps their good words and deeds were recorded as an eternal testament to them.

Now we can understand why Paul in I Corinthians 14 uses the phrases:

- “. . . especially that you may prophesy” (verse 1);
- “. . . he who prophesies is greater . . .” (verse 5);
- “. . . desire earnestly to prophesy . . .” (verse 39).

Those who do so become a special group, beloved and set apart by the Creator Himself.

Paul also paints a beautiful picture when the whole church is engaging in uplifting conversations regarding the blessings of living by God’s Word:

But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is judged by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. (I Corinthians 14:24-25)

We should all work to develop the ability to prophesy. When we learn to speak in love with the intention of uplifting and encouraging each other, we will draw individually closer to God, we as a church will be more unified, and we will be greater witnesses to the world.

—Bill Cherry

## personal *Is the Christian Required To Do Works?*

(continued from page 8)

therefore exceedingly higher. We must make every effort to throw off the works of carnality and strive to acquire a renewed mind through diligent, continuous effort so that we can be created in the image of God in true righteousness and holiness (verse 24).

In verses 25-29, Paul moves even further from generalities to clear, specific works that we must do. We must speak truth so that we do not injure another through lies, as well as to maintain unity. Because deceit produces distrust, unity cannot be maintained if lying occurs. We must not allow our tempers to flare out of control, for they serve as an open door for Satan to create havoc.

We must be honest, earning our way so that we are prepared to give to others who are in need. We must be careful that what we speak is not only true but also edifying, imparting encouragement, empathy, sympathy, exhortation, and even gentle correction when needed.

In verse 30 is a brief and kind reminder that, in doing our works we must never forget that we owe everything to our indwelling Lord and Master. We must make every effort to be thankful, acknowledging Him as the Source of all gifts and strengths, enabling us to glorify Him through our works.

In the final two verses of the chapter, Paul delineates specific responsibilities concerning our attitudes toward fellow Christians within personal relationships.

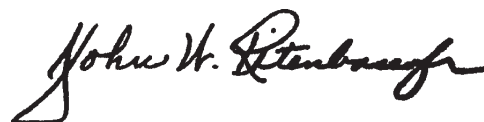
This brief overview of just one chapter shows clearly how much works enter into a Christian’s life as practical requirements that cannot be passed off as unnecessary. How else will a Christian glorify God? How else will he grow to reflect the image of God? How else will he fulfill God’s command to choose life (Deuteronomy 30:19) except by faithfully doing those works that lead to life?

Through the whole process of sanctification, the Christian will make constant use of two additional works: daily prayer and Bible study, which must be combined with his efforts to obey God. No one who is careless about performing these works can expect to make progress growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ during sanctification.

Why? Without them, he will have no relationship with either the Father or the Son, and thus will not be enabled to achieve the required works. They are the Source of the powers that make it possible for us to do the works God has ordained. If we do not follow through on these two works, we will surely hear ourselves called “wicked and lazy” and be cast into “outer darkness” where there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:24-30).

More to come.

In Christian love,



## The Fractured Middle East

While observing the Middle East's perpetual, destructive turbulence, a Westerner easily and thus usually adopts an essentially bi-polar lens—allowing himself only two boxes into which all peoples, beliefs, movements, and events must be stuffed. Sometimes that bi-polar lens consists of Israel vs. everyone else. At other times, the lens pits Islam against the West, Arab against Jew, or Muslim against Christian. These generalities can help to depict broad trends, but underneath, there are significant factors that heavily influence both “sides” of a question. In reality, every corner of the Middle East has multiple sectarian divisions, and a bi-polar approach to interpreting current events can miss essential details.

We can see this in the events now playing out in Muslim areas of the Middle East. Westerners tend to put all Muslims in a single box as a unified front. The reality, though, is that Islam is as fractured and sectarian as both Judaism and this world's Christianity—perhaps even more so.

Islam has two main denominations: *Sunni* and *Shi'a* (or *Shi'ite*). Sunni Islam is by far the predominate form of Islam, accounting for some 85-90% of Muslims worldwide. The rest, roughly 10-15%, are Shi'a.

At their core, the theological differences between them boil down to who is the rightful successor to Muhammad, and thus who has had religious authority throughout history and today. The minority Shi'a believe in authoritative succession only through Muhammad's family. Thus, in order for a religious leader to be recognized, he must be able to trace his lineage back to Ali—Muhammad's cousin and the first *male* convert to Islam (the first convert was one of Muhammad's wives). Shi'a believe that Muhammad's family members were the most qualified teachers of Islam after him and the most trusted carriers of his traditions. Conversely, Sunnis, reject the claims of dynastic authority, instead holding that the Muslim community should elect its leaders. Thus, the interpretation of the Koran and the various sayings and traditions of Muhammad hangs on the issue of authority.

This Sunni/Shi'a schism has existed since Muhammad's death, and while they have not always been at open war, an undercurrent of tension has always existed. This sectarian division is a major factor in why the various Middle Eastern Muslim nations act and react as they do.

To add to the turmoil, numerous schools of thought exist within these two denominations. Within Sunni Islam is *Wahhabism*, a fundamentalist form predominant in Saudi Arabia, which at least partially influences Al Qaida, Hamas, and the Taliban. On the other end of the Sunni spectrum is *Sufism*, a mystic, esoteric—even Gnostic—form of Islam. Ramzan Kadyrov, the 29-year old Prime Minister of the Russian Republic of Chechnya, is Sufist—and has declared war on Wahhabism wherever it can be found, largely because the rebellious Chechen movement is Wahhabist.

These sectarian divisions are playing out in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. Much of the unrest in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein has resulted from these

schisms rather than mere animosity toward Westerners. Under Hussein, a Sunni minority (under the Ba'ath party) ruled over the Shi'a majority with an iron fist. With the Sunnis out of power, the Shi'a are exacting their revenge through summarily executing Sunnis and bombing Sunni mosques—thus, the Sunnis have called for U.S. troops to remain in Iraq to help protect them from the Shi'a. The difficulty in forming an Iraqi government has centered on getting the Sunnis, Shi'a, and Kurds (an ethnic group spanning adjacent parts of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey) to agree on fair representation within the government. The Sunni minority holds the keys to the Iraqi insurgency, and it is unwilling to rein it in, as doing so would leave them politically powerless.

The Sunni/Shi'a division also appears in the Israeli-Hezbollah war. Hezbollah is a militant Shi'ite group given safe haven by Lebanon (itself a country fractured into Sunni, Shi'a, Druze, Maronite Christians, Melkite Catholic Christians, and Greek Orthodox). Hezbollah is supported by, and does the bidding of, Iran—a nation of *Persian* (not Arabic) peoples with a Shi'ite majority—and Syria—an Arab nation with a Shi'ite ruling class, sitting precariously on a Sunni majority. The same day Iran was supposed to decide on the international community's offer regarding its nuclear program, Iran-controlled Hezbollah made an incursion into Israel that succeeded in distracting everyone, momentarily, from the nuclear issue. Similarly, Iran wields tremendous influence with the Iraqi Shi'a, and is keenly interested in the shape the Iraqi government takes. It was a Sunni-led Iraq that attacked Iran with devastating consequences, and Iran will not willingly allow another Sunni-dominated Iraq to arise.

With regard to Sunni/Shi'a relations, Syria is in a tenuous position. As the Israel-Hezbollah war began, Israel made clear its reluctance to destabilize the al Assad government. If Syria were overthrown, chaos would ensue with no one in power to rein in the more radical (Sunni) elements. Israel would face a more dangerous and less predictable foe on its eastern border.

It is also instructive to note Arab reactions to the Hezbollah attacks. At a meeting of 18 Arab leaders, nearly half *condemned Hezbollah*—a bizarre occurrence given their normal penchant to condemn Israel whenever possible. One Sunni cleric in Saudi Arabia even went so far as to declare a *fatwa* (religious edict) against Hezbollah, condemning any Muslim who fought for it. In the Sunni world, Hezbollah's attacks are seen to threaten the status quo, largely because they represent an increasingly powerful Iran. While Arabs have no love for Israel, they also harbor grave concerns over Iran becoming a regional hegemon.

The Sunni/Shi'a division cannot explain everything—it, too, is a bi-polar lens with myriad irregularities and dynamics. Nevertheless, this powerful divide keeps the Middle East continually unstable. We cannot understand Islam, as it affects the Western world, without recognizing its fractured nature.

—David C. Grabbe

## The Parables of Matthew 13

### Part Nine: The Parable of the Householder

The first and last parables in Matthew 13 are key parables. The first, the Parable of the Sower, introduces and anticipates the whole series of parables, and the last, the Parable of the Householder (Matthew 13:51-52), concludes and reflects on them. When Jesus finishes giving the first seven parables, He asks His disciples, “Have you understood these things?” They reply, “Yes.” Their comprehension allows Jesus to give one more illustration to reveal their responsibility as scribes being instructed on the subject of the Kingdom of Heaven. In this eighth and last parable of this chapter, Jesus educates His disciples in their roles as students, teachers, and leaders. The householder represents the true minister doing the work of feeding the household of faith. Our Savior shows that a minister of God’s household has a truly rich, inspired storehouse of essential spiritual treasures from which he can draw to perform his duties.

1. What is the function of a scribe? Matthew 13:52.

**COMMENT:** A “scribe” in the first century had an important position in the Jewish community. Almost five centuries earlier, Ezra the priest had been the archetypal scribe (Ezra 7:6), trained and skilled in the Law of Moses, which God had given Israel. He read the law before all who could hear with understanding on the Feast of Trumpets, helping the people to comprehend it (Nehemiah 8:2-8). In this, we see the function of a scribe—and similarly, the function of what we call a “minister” of God. A minister is a man who dedicates his life to studying God’s written Word so he can expound and illustrate the Bible’s laws, statutes, and principles to help people live God’s abundant way of life.

The word translated *instructed* is from a Greek word meaning “to make a disciple” or “to become a pupil.” Verse 52 could easily read, “. . . every scribe who has been trained for the Kingdom of God is like a master of a house.” In this light, we see the scribe as a student who has been taught and is continuing to be taught. Not only is he a teacher, but he is also learning at the same time. He must continue to learn so that he can continue to teach.

Jesus left an example of sending out His disciples after teaching them to preach the Kingdom of God (Matthew 10:5-7; 28:19-20). In this way, the gospel is spread around the world and God’s flock is fed.

2. What is the householder’s responsibility? Same verse.

**COMMENT:** The scribe is compared to “a householder.” The Greek word translated *householder* means “the master of the house.” “Master” implies great authority as well as responsibility over his house. The master of the house has the final say in deciding what is best for his household.

In terms of government in the church, the minister of God has been commissioned as an authoritative teacher of Holy Scripture (I Corinthians 4:1). This parable suggests that God has granted His ministers authority to expound His Word, calling them “masters of the house.” A minister is thus a student, a teacher, and a leader. Paul expresses in Ephesians 4:7-13 Christ’s view that the ministry is His gift to the church, and that He gives them to do the work of preaching the gospel, equipping the saints, and helping to

bring people to the measure of the stature and the fullness of Christ. He does these things, Christ says, by bringing “out of his treasure things new and old.”

3. What is the new and the old that comes out of the treasure? Same verse.

**COMMENT:** The word *treasure* in verse 52 means something slightly different than it does in verse 44 in the Parable of the Hidden Treasure, where it implies gems and other precious things. In verse 52, it means a place for treasure, not the treasure itself. In other words, Jesus refers to “a treasure house,” “a treasury,” “a storehouse,” or “a storeroom” where a person would keep necessary items like food, clothing, supplies, and family valuables for safekeeping. In context, then, the minister is to use what he has learned and experienced for the benefit of his spiritual family—he is to use as resources all the things he has stored away from his study of God’s truth and his know-how in living God’s way to lead and provide for his flock.

The “new and old” refers to food stored in a storeroom. The master of the house is in charge of ensuring that his storeroom contains everything needed to feed his family. A prudent householder balances serving his oldest store with the new. In this sense, seeing the value in the old, he wisely serves his family old store as well as the fresh “off-the-vine” food, mixing them in balance so that neither is wasted.

Jesus wants His ministers to teach their spiritual families by carefully balancing the teaching of the Old and the New Testaments (Matthew 5:17-19; Acts 26:22-23). It does not mean that the old is thrown away or is wrong. In the parables, Jesus did a similar thing by taking the old understanding of God’s Kingdom and focusing new light on it to expand the people’s understanding of its character and future course.

Ministers of Christ may not grasp and understand all the wisdom of God, but having received His instruction and sufficiently understood His message, they are commissioned to make use of this spiritually rich treasure to enrich others (Galatians 6:10). Taught by Jesus Christ and inspired in understanding His Word, ministers are to reflect that knowledge to their spiritual families, their fellow members of the church.