

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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A COMMANDMENT
WITH PROMISE

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Three generations pose for a family picture. The fifth commandment is the first of the Ten to deal with our relationship with other people, in this case, those who are closest to us, our parents. It is also the only commandment to contain a specific promise, length of days. How does honoring one's parents lead to long life?

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The Christian Fight

Part Four

Previously, we had reached Hebrews 11:4 and its example of Abel's use of faith in God, Jesus Christ, and the instruction God provides to us in Scripture. We had seen that our faith in them comes about by hearing the Word of God, most specifically the gospel. However, to understand this specific faith properly, we need to realize that it is *not* truly and completely *our* response to hearing the gospel. Rather, it is more spiritually correct to understand that God gives this specific faith, and that the hearing of the gospel is the avenue by which He gives this awesome gift.

This specific faith is the faith required for salvation. One can have faith in any number of people or products through mere human experience. We commonly make statements like "He has faith in General Motors automobiles," or "She is faithful to Kenmore washing machines." We can even have faith in another person's character.

In John 6:44, Jesus declares for our humble acceptance, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." Not a single person could come to God for salvation unless God draws him through Jesus Christ. Saving faith is a very special faith, existing in an individual only because of a miraculous gift from God. It is not generated internally by logical human reason, common sense, or human experience. If faith were not a graciously and freely given gift of God, but rather our own inter-

nally generated response to hearing the gospel, God would be indebted to us. In other words, He would owe us because we, on our own, provided the faith to begin and continue in His way.

Notice the conversation Jesus had just moments before what is recorded in John 6:44:

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you...." Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." Therefore they said to Him, "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?" (John 6:27-30)

Jesus clearly says that believing in the One God sent—Jesus Christ—is God's work! He clarifies this in verse 44, declaring that God is that specific belief's Originator and Source; otherwise, we would not have the faith of which He speaks. As usual, the Jews did not completely understand.

In Ephesians 2:1, 8-10, Paul reemphasizes this same foundational fact:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins. . . . For by grace you

personal *The Christian Fight*

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.

Notice first how this chapter begins: *He* has made us alive. Paul makes sure that we understand that it is God who gives what we spiritually possess. As for verse 8, it does not matter whether we believe that the pronoun “it” refers to grace or faith; both are gifts of God.

Grace is God’s kindness to us, shown or demonstrated by His revealing Himself to us. It might help to think of this in reference to God revealing Himself to Moses in the burning bush before He sent him to Egypt. If God did not freely purpose on the strength of His own sovereign will to reveal Himself, neither Moses nor we would ever find Him. If a person cannot find God on his own, how could he possibly have faith in Him? Satan has deceived us so well that men have only the foggiest idea of what to look for.

Faith—with God as its object—begins and continues as part of His gift of kindness. The gift includes His calling, the granting of repentance, the sacrifice of Christ for our forgiveness, and His giving of His Spirit. It is a complete package of many individual gifts. The gospel is the medium that provides the objects of the faith He gives, that is, what we believe and trust in. Paul, perceiving these gifts as a package, uses “grace” as its label. In verses 9-10, he advances to the logical “next step” in God’s purpose.

The Faith/Works Connection

Our works in no way jump-start the process of justification, sanctification, and glorification. All our works, beginning with repentance and continuing through our period of sanctification, depend directly on the freely given kindness and faith God provides. Our God-ordained good works are the result of our response to the gift of faith that God gives. Works, then, are the external evidence of the unseen, internal faith that motivates them. A person could not do them unless God had given the gift of faith beforehand. Good works follow, they do not precede.

II Corinthians 5:17-18 confirms this: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” This corroborates that it is God working in the person. His work is termed a “new creation.” Since nothing new creates itself, we are the workmanship of another. We are God’s workmanship. In sum, because of what God does, we cooperate and produce works that He ordains.

The apostle Paul adds to our understanding in Philippians 2:12-13: “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in

my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” He is not saying that we should work in order to obtain salvation. These verses indicate the continuing use of something one already possesses. They suggest carrying something to its logical conclusion, which is for us to live lives worthy of the gospel, doing the works God ordained, as in Ephesians 2:10.

In Romans 9:9-19, Paul, using Jacob and Esau’s pre-birth circumstances as a foundation, provides a clear illustration to show that from beginning to end, the whole salvation process depends upon God’s involvement. Jacob, representing those called into the church, received God’s love in the form of gifts designed to prepare him for the Kingdom of God. To Esau, representing the uncalled, God has simply withheld His love for the time being.

What had happened to the people to whom the book of Hebrews was written? They were losing—indeed, had already lost—much of their former conviction. Though they had plenty to believe in relation to God, as Paul shows within the epistle, their conviction was dissipating through neglect. They were not working out their salvation; thus, they were losing it!

Conviction is the opposite of superficiality. This does not mean a superficial person cannot be religious. Rather, he may appear religious outwardly, but in terms of a true, inward transformation of the heart, he is lacking, as seen in the absence of zeal in seeking change or in real application of righteousness.

In Paul’s judgment, the Hebrews had lost the internal certainty that what they believed was right, trustworthy, and so important that they should willingly give their lives to it. They were allowing other concerns like business, social, and entertainment matters too much time and attention. In the world, the forces of hostile skepticism are everywhere and constantly pressuring a Christian from every angle. The Hebrews’ works showed that they were steadily retreating before that pressure.

This world is the Christian’s largest, broadest field of battle, and nearly constant influences designed to drive a wedge into our carnality emanate from it. What happens if we neglect the right use of God’s gift of faith? Hebrews shows us that a Christian does not immediately “lose it,” but as he slowly spirals downward, spiritual life becomes merely an intellectual position to be held, not a striving after righteousness. God becomes merely an object of intellectual thought, not a motivation for change of behavior and attitude to imitate Him. Church attendance and religion become intellectualized but not experiential. That is how Laodiceanism becomes a reality in a Christian’s life. This is especially likely to occur when a Christian group is economically comfortable.

God’s gift of faith is intended by Him to be intellectual, practical, and motivational. This brings us back to the many examples Paul uses in Hebrews 11 to illustrate how faith

is most profitably used. He provides an orderly arrangement of instruction from basic definitions and builds toward the more difficult principles.

Faith, Christ's Death, and Justification

One of the most basic truths in God's program involves the fact that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). The death we are intended to understand is the second death. There are only two ways to satisfy this basic truth: First, all humans must be paid that wage because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Second, another, an innocent One on whom death has no claim because He never sinned, must pay that wage in our stead, substituting His death for ours.

We find both aspects applied to practical Christian life in Romans. Paul writes in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." It is essential that we thoroughly understand that Christ died, not merely as a benefit, but *for* us, that is, in our place. His death substitutes for our well-deserved death, which we earned through sin. Earlier, the apostle had written in Romans 4:1-5:

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.

When confronted by such scriptures that cannot be broken, our only possible conclusion is that the sin-debt that each person owes to God absolutely cannot be worked off. It is so huge and serious that an already sin-defiled person cannot pay it off. Once a person sins, his debt is absolutely irredeemable by anyone or any action except through death. Either each individual pays for himself, or Christ pays in his place. These are the only acceptable payments. Romans 4:11-13 clarifies further:

And [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Circumcision represents any work or any body of works that an individual might attempt to use as payment—they

are unacceptable *for this use*, any and all of them.

Verse 16 continues, "Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." Paul states a major reason why justification absolutely must be by grace through faith: It is by means of grace that everybody receives a fair chance for salvation. Grace levels the playing field. What would happen to those who could not match the impressive body of works of an Abraham? They would fail to be justified. The truth is that even Abraham was not justified by his circumcision works. He, too, was justified through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and God's grace. It has been this way from the beginning; Genesis 6:8 testifies that Noah found grace in God's eyes.

Romans 4:18-21 continues Abraham's story of justification:

... who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.

God made possible the faith Abraham demonstrated in this example of how he lived his life. A very positive result came of all of this, as verses 22-25 testify:

And therefore it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

The key word is *imputed*, which means "to credit to; to reckon or assign to; to ascribe or account to." Because of what God does, forgiveness and justification occur. We are credited to be in alignment with the laws of God because the righteousness of the sinless One who substituted for us by dying in our place is imputed—reckoned to—our account. Romans 5:1 declares that justification opens the way to all that follows:

1. Acceptance into God's presence so a true relationship can begin.
2. Having the hope of eternal life and the glory of God.
3. The receipt of God's Holy Spirit.
4. The writing of God's laws on our heart.
5. Making our legal, imputed righteousness before God into practical, experiential, personal righteousness through sanctification.

An Important Symbolical Death

To this point, Jesus Christ's substitutionary death has been emphasized, but an additional death must also occur to make justification a practical reality. This death is our own, but it is symbolical in nature and is based in the certainty of life that God makes available and effectual. Paul writes in Colossians 3:1-3: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." We must amplify this with Romans 6:5-6:

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

This symbolic death and resurrection is achieved through repentance, which we do because we believe we are sinners in need of God's forgiveness, having broken His law and earned death. Again, this occurs only because of what God does first. It also forges a link between God and us. That link is God-given faith, established because we believe and act on right, true knowledge. These subsequent actions provide evidence that the right connections have been made.

This brings us back to Hebrews 11:4 and the lesson contained in Abel's example of faith: "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks." Abel offered his sacrifice by faith. Since faith comes by hearing the Word of God, Abel believed what God said and followed through in obedience to it. His belief motivated and produced a work in agreement with what God ordained that those being created in Christ Jesus should walk in. From whom did Abel hear God's Word? Perhaps from God Himself, but it was most likely from Adam and Eve.

Even so, Abel's act of faith must follow the same pattern as everybody else's. He, too, is saved by grace through faith, thus it was God, working out His purpose, who enabled Abel to believe. By this act, to this very day, he is testifying to us that this process, the creation of salvation in each of us, begins and continues in this manner. God is consistent (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17). In things pertaining to salvation, everybody is dealt with in an evenhanded, fair manner. Why?

Why has God made Himself solely responsible for the existence of the faith that enables a person to be justified and go on to perfection? We have already seen one

reason: to give everybody a fair chance because no one could muster the works sufficient to pay for the wages of sin. A second, very important reason begins to be explained in I Corinthians 1:19-21, 26-31:

For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. . . . For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put shame the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, God has chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption—that, as it is written, "He that glories let him glory in the LORD."

God has purposely chosen this means to put proud and stiff-necked man totally in debt to Him for the most important achievement in all of life. Men have accomplished much and will continue to do many great things. However, verses 19-21 expose why the wise of this world will not submit to God. The reason becomes clear in the phrase, "the foolishness of preaching" (verse 21, King James Version [KJV]). This translation is somewhat misleading in the King James; it should read "the foolishness of the message preached," as in the New King James Version (NKJV). Paul is not saying that the wise of this world reject the act of preaching but that they consider the content of the message preached to be foolish. In other words, the wise will not believe the gospel, most specifically that God in the flesh has died for the sins of the world.

It cannot be overestimated how important humility expressed by faith before God is to the overall spiritual purpose of God for each individual! Each person must know as fully as possible that Christ died for him, that his own works do not provide forgiveness, and that he has not created himself in Christ Jesus. Nobody evolves into a godly person on the strength of his own will. It is God who works in us both to will and to do (Philippians 2:13). No new creation creates itself. So, by and large, God calls the undignified, base, weak, and foolish of this world, people whom the unbelieving wise consider to be

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THE SECOND EXODUS

PART TWO

While the *sequence* of prophesied latter-day events seems to be fairly straightforward—the captivity and scattering of Israel; the tribulation of Jacob’s Trouble; God’s intervention on behalf of the remnant of Jacob; the Second Exodus back to the Promised Land; the reunification of Israel and Judah; God’s restoration and blessing of His covenant people—the *timing* is a large unknown.

It is unclear when these events will begin, nor is it entirely certain how long their aggregate duration will be. Even so, Isaiah 27:13 gives a clue regarding when the Second Exodus will begin:

So it shall be in that day: *the great trumpet will be blown*; they will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, and they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem. (Emphasis ours throughout)

The context is “[the] children of Israel” being “gathered one by one” (verse 12). “They . . . who are about to perish” seems to refer to the peoples of Israel enduring the time of Jacob’s Trouble. The turning point, then, and the beginning of deliverance, is when “the great trumpet will be blown.” The Olivet Prophecy correlates to this, for Jesus Christ says,

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great

glory. And He will send His angels *with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect* [chosen people] *from the four winds*, from one end of heaven [the Greek word is plural—“heavens”—referring to things within earth’s atmosphere (e.g., “the four winds”) rather than to the heaven of God’s throne] to the other. (Matthew 24:30-31)

The trumpet is a symbol of considerable consequence in the Old and New Testaments. In general, it can signify an alarm of war, a call to assemble, or a command to march (see Numbers 10:1-10). The fourth annual holy day is the Feast of Trumpets, a “memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation” (Leviticus 23:24; Numbers 29:1). Psalm 81:3-5 indicates Joseph was released from prison in Egypt on the Feast of Trumpets, making for rich symbolism regarding the future release of Israelite captives. God, through the prophets, often uses “Joseph” to represent, not just Ephraim and Manasseh, but also all of Israel (see Ezekiel 37:16-19; Amos 5:6, 15; 6:6; Obadiah 1:18; Zechariah 10:6). In addition, God caused the walls of Jericho to fall after seven suc-

prophecy watch *The Second Exodus*

cessive days of trumpets sounding (Joshua 6:4-20).

Various end-time prophecies show that a trumpet precedes the Day of the Lord (Joel 2:1; Zechariah 9:14-16), when Jesus Christ returns as King of kings and overthrows the nations of this world, establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. The resurrection from the dead is also connected to a mighty trumpet blast (I Corinthians 15:52; I Thessalonians 4:16). While the book of Revelation tells of *seven* trumpets (Revelation 8:2-11:15), when the *last* one sounds, “the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15), indicating He has returned. This all shows that the timing of the Second Exodus in general corresponds to the return of Christ.

JUSTICE AND MERCY

After the peoples of Israel have endured the chastening of Jacob’s Trouble, they will be liberated and brought back to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

“For it shall come to pass in that day,” says the LORD of hosts, “that I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; foreigners shall no more enslave them. But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up [resurrect] for them. Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob,” says the LORD, “Nor be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, and no one shall make him afraid. For I am with you,” says the LORD, “to save you; though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished.” (Jeremiah 30:8-11)

In all of God’s dealings with Israel and Judah, and especially regarding the Second Exodus, we see His perfect application of justice and mercy. He is just, because He does not allow their sin to go unpunished. We could not trust God if He did not hold to His promises of blessing and cursing (Numbers 23:19; Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). If He allowed Israel and Judah to sin with impunity, His laws would have no authority, and His words would be of no consequence. However, for the sake of what is best for Jacob, God has to show him that He is serious about what He says. So His justice will be upheld as Israel and Judah are brought to the painful realization that they have forsaken Him and have been living the wrong way.

Yet, we can also see God’s mercy in His dealings with His people. Today’s Western culture—a product of the nations of Israel—is not so very different from Sodom and

Gomorrah. The same sins are committed in the same brazen manner. Our regard for humanity is so low that in America alone during the last three decades, an estimated 40-50 million pre-born children have been killed for the sake of convenience. Further, God has been systematically removed from schools, from government, and from public life. Post-Christian Europe has transgressed even further. Even Jerusalem—the “Holy City”—has an annual “Gay Pride” parade, and is essentially secular.

Despite these atrocious sins, God will not utterly destroy Israel as He did to Sodom and Gomorrah. A number of latter-day prophecies of various peoples—the Edomites, for example—foretell that God *will* make a complete end of them (Jeremiah 46:28). However, He has chosen not to do this with Israel and Judah, though not because they are righteous in any way.

He will show them mercy because of the promises He made, not because they deserve it. Ezekiel 36 shows this clearly. God repeats several times that He is bringing Israel back for *His* name’s sake, and not for Israel’s sake:

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “I do not do this [restoring Israel and blessing the land; verses 6-15] for your sake, O house of Israel, but *for My holy name’s sake*, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD,” says the Lord GOD, “when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. . . . Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations. *Not for your sake do I do this*,” says the Lord GOD, “let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!” (Ezekiel 36:22-24, 31-32)

God would be unfaithful to His own promises if He annihilated Jacob’s descendants—even though, by all accounts, it is exactly what they deserve.

PEACE AND PROSPERITY

After Jacob is chastened, God will demonstrate His mercy and providence:

Thus says the LORD: “Behold, I will bring back the captivity of Jacob’s tents, and have mercy on his dwelling places; the city shall be built upon its own mound, and the palace shall remain according to its own plan. Then out of them shall proceed thanksgiv-

ing and the voice of those who make merry; I will multiply them, and they shall not diminish; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small. Their children also shall be as before, and their congregation shall be established before Me; and I will punish all who oppress them.” (Jeremiah 30:18-20)

God will destroy the nations to which Israel and Judah are scattered, and He will correct Israel and Judah in measure, as verse 11 says. But when the punishment is done, He will bring His people back to the land that He promised them and give them rest and peace. A number of other prophecies concerning the Second Exodus relate how God will bless the land, which will once again produce abundantly. Israel and Judah will have the Promised Land, they will have peace—because this time their enemies will be completely destroyed, which Israel failed to do the first time—and they will have prosperity. They will also be blessed numerically, as the remnant begins to multiply.

But this time the peace and prosperity will last, because two factors will be different. First, Israel and Judah will have perfect leadership: Jesus Christ will be King, and David will be His prince (Ezekiel 37:24-25; Jeremiah 23:3-7; Hosea 3:5; Micah 2:12-13). Corrupt or ambivalent leadership will no longer lead Israel astray; instead, the leaders will set the example of righteousness for the people to follow. Additionally, the twelve original apostles will be resurrected and sit as judges over the twelve tribes, ensuring that proper judgment is given (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30).

Second, Israel and Judah will both make the New Covenant, meaning that they will be given the Holy Spirit, which will enable them to keep the law in its spiritual intent (Jeremiah 31:31-34). They will be given a new heart, and will finally be able to know their God (Ezekiel 11:17-20; 36:24-29).

PEACE ON GOD’S TERMS

Lest the grievous reality of Jacob’s Trouble stray too far from his reader’s mind, Jeremiah again cites the coming judgment for sin:

Behold, the whirlwind of the LORD goes forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind; it will fall violently on the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the LORD will not return until He has done it, and until He has performed the intents of His heart. *In the latter days you will consider it.* (Jeremiah 30:23-24)

These verses actually repeat Jeremiah 23:19-20 almost word for word. This repetition is significant because Jeremiah 23 is a warning against false prophets. In particular, it is about men, claiming to speak for God, who tell the people—whose lives deny God—that, “The LORD has said, ‘You shall have peace.’” These prophets say to the people, who were walking according to the dictates of their own hearts, “No evil will come upon you.” In essence, they

deny God’s justice, and the fact that sin has consequences. They are telling the people not to worry about God’s judgment upon them—everything would be fine; no change of course would be necessary.

However, the people, in reality, have declared war on God and His way of life through the conduct of their own lives. Whether or not they realize it, their carnal minds hold great enmity for God’s way of doing things. They can never have peace with God until they repent and change.

God always desires peace, but if the sinning party is unwilling to face reality and repent, then His response will be a painful one. There will be peace with God only when the sinner is broken and submits to God. Yet, the false prophets insinuate that God does not care and that it does not matter how one lives. Nevertheless, these verses show that God destroys those who promote the idea that sin does not have consequences, who say God’s justice is of little concern. These ideas keep getting Israel—indeed, all of mankind—into trouble.

The symbol of the whirlwind, then, represents God’s fury and anger. Just as no man can control or divert a tornado or hurricane, so God’s anger at the sin of the wicked cannot be resisted. It will continue until He has performed the intents of His heart. In the latter days, which we are in, God says we will consider it, meaning that Israel and Judah have not yet learned this lesson. However, when that chastening is over, Israel and Judah will be restored to the land, and, more importantly, they will be reconciled to God and able to live in peace.

A HAPPY ENDING

Jeremiah 31 continues chapter 30, and it contains the proverbial “happy ending” as a humbled Israel and Judah are reconciled to God, who blesses them physically and spiritually:

“At the same time,” says the LORD, “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people.” Thus says the LORD: “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness—Israel, when I went to give him rest.” The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you. Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! You shall again be adorned with your tambourines, and shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice. You shall yet plant vines on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant and eat them as ordinary food.” (Jeremiah 31:1-5)

After God performs the intents of His heart, as it says at the end of the previous chapter, and His wrath has consumed those He will consume, then peace in the relationship between Israel and God becomes possible because all of those who declared war on God through their conduct are dead. God does not believe in “peace at

(continued on page 16)

The previous articles established the importance of the two subjects of Luke 21:36, watching—giving careful attention to overcoming—and praying always. This verse ties these two subjects together and inextricably links the job (overcoming) with the tool to build the faith necessary to do that job (praying always). Before seeing how to apply this information, we need some background about the spiritual battle we face.

Notice Jesus' words in Matthew 11:30: "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Have we found the Christian way either easy or light? In contrast, most of us seem to stagger from trial to trial!

Consider the following questions: If it is God's will that we be saved and grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ—which it is (I Timothy 2:4; II Peter 3:18)—why is it so hard? If God is working with us—which He is (Philippians 2:13)—should we not be more successful? Most of us have some sin or sins that so plague us that we fail miserably to overcome time after time. So, if our salvation is God's will, what is the problem? Why can we not be more successful in overcoming?

Is Christ just exaggerating, speaking in hyperbole, or is He telling it like it can be? Because Christ does not lie, the latter is true. The problem, then, must be with us. Where are we falling short? What are we missing in our efforts to overcome?

One answer is that spiritual Israelites are making the same mistake as their forefathers, the people of physical Israel. Because the Old Testament was written to teach spiritual lessons to those under the New Covenant (I Corinthians 10:11), some interesting implications arise when we apply the examples spiritually.

Notice God's promise in Deuteronomy 1:30: "He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes." God promises to fight Israel's physical battles for them. Egypt's destruction through the ten plagues is an extraordinary example of how God supernaturally fights for His people.

Israel was a slave people in Egypt, the most powerful nation on earth at the time. However, as powerful as Egypt was, it was never a match for God, as He demonstrated by devastating it through supernatural occurrences. God freed Israel without them "firing a shot," as it were. God did the heavy lifting of freeing them from Egypt. Israel had only to walk out. That was it!

In the Exodus from Egypt, not one Israelite had to do physical battle and risk injury, maiming, or death. Could our battle against our Egypt be easier by doing the same,

single requirement—that we walk, that is, walk with God? All Israel had to do was flee, walk away from Egypt, a type of sin (I Corinthians 6:18; 10:14; I Timothy 6:11; II Timothy 2:22).

A Promise

Another promise from God along the same lines can be found in Exodus 23:20-30:

Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then **I will** be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and **I will** cut them off. You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars. So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And **I will** take sickness away from the midst of you. No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; **I will** fulfill the number of your days. **I will** send My fear before you, **I will** cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And **I will** send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you. **I will** not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beast of the field become too numerous for you. Little by little **I will** drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land. (Emphasis ours.)

God offered to play a major role in driving out the inhabitants of the Promised Land: "I will cut them off." At this point, there is no mention of killing the enemy. There would be little need to shed much of their own blood because of God's promises to fight on their behalf. To receive this supernatural help, God gave a condition—obedience. The Israelites had to obey Him (verse 22) and walk in His ways.

Praying Always

Part Three

Forty years and mostly negative experiences later, Numbers 33:50-53, 55 describes an entirely different picture of Israel's conquest of the land than the one given in Exodus 23:20-30. The people disobeyed and forfeited much of the supernatural help God had offered. Israel now had to use a great deal of their own strength, rather than God's, to do the driving out.

Israel did not obey—they did not submit to God's rule—because they did not believe just how good God is and how much He loved them (Psalm 78:22). Without that faith, they did not have the power to overcome what they could see versus what God said and thus be victorious (I John 5:4).

II Chronicles 16:9 is another example of the fruits of faithlessness: "The Lord's eyes scan the whole world to find those whose hearts are committed to him and to strengthen them. You [Asa] acted foolishly in this matter. So from now on, you will have to fight wars" (God's Word). Are we making the same mistake, having to fight our own battles because we are not faithful and not praying enough to have the right kind of faith (Matthew 17:19-21)?

Even though the wandering Israelites had to fight many of their own battles, God still worked with them, still performed miracles for them, still used them to accomplish His purposes. They were still His people. They had just chosen the more difficult path. Many suffered and died along the way, but it did not have to be that way. It was the result of a bad choice or a series of bad choices. Conquering the Promised Land did not have to be as difficult and bloody a path as they chose. God would have taken care of much of that for them, but instead they chose to fight the battles themselves. They chose the hard way instead of the easy way.

Are we acting foolishly and making the same choices spiritually that they did physically? After all, as the saying goes, the acorn does not fall far from the tree. Most of us are Israelites physically and all of us are Israelites spiritually (Romans 9:6-8). We are cut from the same bolt of cloth. God promised to help physical Israel in its battles, and we can be sure that God will provide that same help to spiritual Israelites in their battles—if they let Him. Romans 12:2 gives the same sense: "Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him" (Contemporary English Version).

The Battlefield

Are we letting Him help us? How do we go about getting out of God's way—obeying Him, submitting to His rule—so that He can help us fight our battles? Christ gives us an answer in Luke 21:36: "pray always." Whether we are "praying always" or not "praying always" clearly shows

on whom we are relying in our fight. The extent of our overcoming, the outcome or fruit of our spiritual battles, will tell the tale.

If we are going throughout our day with almost no thought of God, as it is all too easy to do, then who is doing battle with all the ungodly influences that are bombarding us? Isaiah 65:2 gives an answer: "I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts." For whatever time during our day we are not conscious of God, we are walking "according to [our] own thoughts," a way that God labels as "not good"! It is not good because we are fighting on our own, having to resort to our human ways and means. II Corinthians 10:3-4 tells us we are not to fight this way: "We are human, but we don't wage war with human plans and methods. We use God's mighty weapons, not mere worldly weapons, to knock down the Devil's strongholds" (New Living Translation).

Psalm 18:2 makes an interesting point: "You are my mighty rock, my fortress, my protector, the rock where I am safe, my shield, my powerful weapon, and my place of shelter" (Contemporary English Version, CEV). God was David's very "powerful weapon." Are we making full use of Him in our spiritual battles? Can we say we are if He is not in the forefront of every battle? Where does that battle take place? In our minds. Our battles are not physical, but rage in our minds, which contain the thoughts, philosophies, and ideas that motivate our behavior.

Since the day we were born, Satan's influences have assailed us, and through them, before our conversion, he was molding our minds into his image. Who will be able to change that? Who will fight the battle necessary to conquer our evil nature sold under sin? Who will free us just as God freed Israel in Egypt? Paul answers in Romans 7:24-25: "O unhappy and pitiable and wretched man that I am! Who will release and deliver me from [the shackles of] this body of death? O thank God! [He will!] through Jesus Christ (the Anointed One) our Lord!" (*The Amplified Bible*).

Enemies

Who will conquer our enemies? Romans 8:37 tells us: "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." Paul answers that God and Christ will conquer our enemies! Our most determined enemy is, of course, Satan. Another foe is the world under the influence of Satan, a society full of distractions designed by the Devil to take our minds off God at every step. Finally, our own nature pulls us away from God because Satan has influenced it to do just that since the day we were born.

How are we to overcome these enemies? Do we

overcome them or does God? Where does David look for help when faced with his mortal enemies? He answers this in many places (Psalm 44:5, 7; 60:12; 143:9, 12), but notice Psalm 17:8-9: “Keep me as the apple of Your eye; hide me under the shadow of Your wings, from the wicked who oppress me, from my deadly enemies who surround me.” Our enemies are more deadly than David’s because they can kill us eternally, not just physically.

In the following two passages, reminiscent of the “I will” statements in Exodus 23:20-30, notice who is fighting these spiritual battles with our enemies:

Psalm 37:5-6: “Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and *He shall* bring it to pass. *He shall* bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.”

Philippians 2:13: “. . . for *it is God* who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

Are we taking advantage of the power and weapons God offers to us in the fight against our enemies, to win the battle for our minds?

Weapons of War

In Psalm 56:9, David informs us about one of the weapons he used against his enemies: “When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; this I know, because God is for me.” David used prayer, “when I cry out.” It was only “then” that God turned back his enemies.

David expected God’s help to send his enemies into retreat so that he would not have to do all the fighting. God would do much of it for him. Why? God was for him. David believed in how much God loved him, a wholehearted love that Jesus reveals in John 17:23. Are we like David? Do we believe God loves us that much?

David was a man after God’s own heart (I Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). We should follow his example and use the weapon that worked for him—prayer. Christ concurs with David’s belief in God’s desire to protect us and send our enemies into retreat:

• **Matthew 6:13** (*The Bible in Basic English*): “And let us not be put to the test, but keep us safe from the Evil One.”

• **Luke 11:4** (*Revised English Bible*): “And forgive us our sins, for we too forgive all who have done us wrong. And do not put us to the test.”

• **Luke 22:40:** “When He came to the place, He said to them, ‘Pray that you may not enter into temptation.’”

• **Luke 22:46** (William Barclay’s translation): “Why are you sleeping?” he said to them. “Up and pray that you may not have to face the ordeal of temptation!”

These verses are not asking for success to overcome but rather that He not allow temptations or trials to reach us. We are, in our flesh, too feeble and weak for the task without the help of God (Romans 8:26). The verses above show that prayer can protect us from temptation, quenching the fiery darts of Satan *before* they ever get near their target. Even Jesus initially asked God to take away His trial in Luke 22:42: “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” We can thank God that Christ chose to put our welfare above His physical life and submitted to His part in God’s plan for our salvation.

What weapons are we to use in this battle against our enemies? Simply, God Himself, as Psalms 18:2 (“my powerful weapon”) shows. Prayer allows God to become our weapon, one we desperately need.

Our Need

All of us should be aware of just how inadequate we are to accomplish the task of overcoming and growing in the way God is showing us. If we are not deeply aware of this need, we will never turn to God in the first place. We will not continuously turn to Him, thinking like the Laodiceans that we need nothing—we have all we need within ourselves.

Remember Peter, who confidently boasted that, unlike others, he would never desert Christ (Matthew 26:33; Mark 14:29). Then, shortly thereafter he grossly failed in a way that should be a sobering lesson to us all (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72). One principle we can take from this is that the secret to overcoming lies largely in realizing our powerlessness and acknowledging it before God.

Do we believe Christ when He tells us in John 15:5, “for without Me you can do nothing?” Without help from a Source greater than ourselves, we can do nothing of a true, godly, spiritual nature that could ever meet God’s standards (Isaiah 64:6). We are far short of the mark. It is time to turn to God with all that is in us (Deuteronomy 10:12). We cannot just play church at this time in history. Judgment is now on us (I Peter 4:17), and if we fail, there never will be a greater failure.

However, if we turn to God with all our heart—and prayer is a major part of that process—He promises that He will hear from heaven and respond: “. . . if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (II Chronicles

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ready answer

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

The Promise in the Fifth Commandment

**“Honor your father
and mother,
which is the first
commandment with
promise.”
—Ephesians 6:2**

Part One

Have you ever been curious about the connection between keeping the fifth commandment and enjoying a long, fulfilling, productive life on earth? Perhaps God has chosen to emphasize the fifth commandment’s linchpin status, providing a bridge between the physical and the spiritual, the earthly and the heavenly, the mortal and the immortal, and the physical family of Adam with the immortal Family of God. Indeed, the family is the only institution that will survive into eternity. God ordained the family from the beginning of creation:

Genesis 2:24: Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Mark 10:6-9: But from the beginning of the creation, God “made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.

Ultimately, God’s purpose is to reproduce Himself, bringing many offspring into a spiritual or divine Family that will endure forever:

Romans 8:29: For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

ready answer *The Promise in the Fifth Commandment*

Colossians 1:18: And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

I John 3:2: Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Recent Family History

We live in a disturbing period when the sanctity of the family structure is under attack by the secular progressives. In his book, *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler described a disturbing new phenomenon in the late-twentieth century called “modular relationships.” People, he wrote, losing the security of the extended family and small community, would begin to form short-term commitments with barbers, mechanics, plumbers, bankers, grocers, doctors, dentists, etc., replacing them frequently as disposable modules rather than forming decades-long, or perhaps lifetime commitments as formerly would occur in small rural communities.

This “disposable” aspect became more prevalent when the entire society became more mobile, and the extended family (Grandpa and Grandma, Mom and Dad, and the children all living in the same locale, as in the television program, *The Waltons*) was replaced by the nuclear family (Dad, Mom, and kids against the world). Sadly, to an emerging, morally relativistic culture, even the components of the nuclear family have become modular and recyclable.

Secular progressives have been chipping away at the family since the 1960s, when the hippies of Haight-Ashbury, free-love, the so-called new morality, LSD, and militant feminism were happening events. In February 2004, the Massachusetts Supreme Court struck another blow at the nuclear family and thumbed their noses at God Almighty by approving same-sex “marriages.” In August 2005, *USA Today* reported that the “marriage rate is also on a steady decline: a 50% drop since 1970 from 76.5 per 1,000 unmarried women to 39.”

Not surprisingly, the fruit of savaging the family structure (or the fifth commandment) is a higher mortality rate. In their landmark book, *The Case for Marriage*, Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, citing a 1990 study by Ross, report:

Married people live longer as well. Single men have mortality rates that are 250% higher than married men. Single women have mortality rates that are 50% higher than married women, and moreover, married men are half as likely to commit suicide as single men, and one third as likely as divorced men.

Kristin Ketteringham, in her article, “Single Parent Household—How Does it Affect the Children?” observes:

... single-parent homes are also associated with criminal activity in the U.S.A. Children from a single-parent household account for 72% of teenage murderers, 60% percent of people who commit rape crimes and are eleven times more likely to exhibit violent behavior.

One Community’s Family Woes

Perhaps the most devastating statistics, demonstrating the effects of trashing the fifth commandment, emanate from the black community. In their book, *Come on People*, Bill Cosby and Alvin F. Poussaint present some grim statistics. They describe how the destruction of the black family has dramatically increased mortality and crime statistics among young black males, corroborating the connection between honoring parents and having a long and prosperous life.

Cosby laments, “In 1950, five out of every six black children were born into a two-parent home. Today, that number is less than two out of six.” Over 70% of black babies are born yearly to single mothers. He reminds those of his race, “In 1950, we still feared our parents and respected them.”

In addition, according to Cosby, in 1950 twice as many white people occupied prison cells as blacks. Since 1950, the following astounding trends occurred:

- Homicide is the number one cause of death for black men between fifteen and twenty-nine years of age and has been for decades.
- A black man is seven times more likely to commit a murder than a white man and six times more likely to be murdered.
- Ninety-four percent of black people are murdered by other black people.
- The life expectancy at birth of black men is 69 years compared to 75 years for white men; 76 for black women, 80 for white women.
- In the past several decades, the suicide rate among young black men has increased more than 100%.
- In some cities, black males have high school drop-out rates of more than 50%.
- Young black men are twice as likely to be unemployed as white, Hispanic, and Asian men.

- Although blacks make up 12% of the general population, they comprise nearly 44% of the prison population.
- At any given time, as many as one in four of all young black men are in the criminal justice system—in prison or jail, on probation, or on parole.
- By the time they reach their mid-thirties, six out of ten black high school dropouts have spent time in prison.
- About one-third of the homeless are black men. (Cosby and Poussaint, pp. 8-9)

The above statistics conclusively establish a relationship between breaking God’s fifth commandment and having a severely truncated lifespan.

The well-being of a nation is directly dependent upon the well-being of its families. As the family comes under attack, so does the nation. In his sermon, “Honoring Those Who First Loved Us,” J. David Hoke declares:

You see, while we are involved in a larger society, there is a basic social unit within the society, the family. It is in the context of the family that we must work out our most important social relationships. There, in the family, we learn our value as human beings. There we are affirmed, corrected, encouraged, criticized, praised, and ignored. There are so many possibilities that present themselves within the context of the family.

The connection between what takes place in the family and what goes on in society is again highlighted in a *Good News* booklet on *The Fifth Commandment*, emphasizing the parents’ role in ensuring their offspring’s future safety:

Learning to obey this commandment helps children establish a lifetime pattern of respecting proper rules, traditions, principles, and laws. Honoring others should be a normal, natural habit learned during youth. The universal application of this important biblical principle is plain.

Families Teach Wisdom

Experience may be an effective teacher, but it is not the best teacher. Wisdom gleaned from those who have preceded us is far superior. One could experiment using Sani-Flush as confetti on ice cream, but it would be far better to adhere to the skull and crossbones warning, “Swallowing contents may be fatal.” John Ritenbaugh, in his June 1997 *Forerunner* “Personal,” suggests:

Obedience to parental admonitions, gained from years of experience living in this difficult and dangerous

world, results in the building of knowledge, character, and habits of avoiding recklessness, lawlessness, violence, wrong companionships, and rebellion against authority. These often result in untimely and violent death at a young age.

M. Wayne Ichenhower, in “That Your Days May Be Long,” suggests that the prolonging of life has both a physical and a spiritual dimension:

Physically, parents keep their children out of harm’s way, letting them know when what they are doing is unwise or unsafe. Your life will be extended simply by heeding their instruction and avoiding the hazards life brings. Spiritually, obeying your parents pleases God and He will in turn grant you life—even after you are grown and can keep yourself from danger.

Honoring parents as they follow God’s instruction provides a tap line to accumulated wisdom. Wisdom personified in Proverbs represents, on one level, the teachings Solomon had received from his father, David, and his mother, Bathsheba, as they received it, on another level, from God Almighty.

Consider:

Proverbs 3:1-2: My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you.

Proverbs 3:13-18: Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her.

Proverbs 9:10-11: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For by me your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you.

Parents in the church should have been learning godly wisdom since their conversions, and this wisdom is available to be passed on to their children as long as there is open communication between them. God shows that it is to the child’s advantage to make use of this valuable resource as they mature to adulthood. He promises that blessings—such as “peace,” “riches and honor,” and added “years of life”—can result from following His principles of life.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—David F. Maas

prophecy watch *The Second Exodus*

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any price.” He works toward repentance, but if there is no repentance, the only solution is to destroy those in rebellion against Him. Yet, after the destruction, He promises once again to be the God of all of Israel, and Israel will again be His people.

Verse 2 provides the qualifier that the remnant will be those who have survived the sword. Ezekiel 5:1-4 illustrates this time:

And you, son of man, take a sharp sword, take it as a barber’s razor, and pass it over your head and your beard; then take scales to weigh and divide the hair. You shall burn with fire one-third in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall take one-third and strike around it with the sword, and one-third you shall scatter in the wind: *I will draw out a sword after them.* You shall also take a small number of them and bind them in the edge of your garment. Then take some of them again and throw them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will go out into all the house of Israel.

From these verses and the remainder of Ezekiel 5, it is evident that a great deal of violence will be done to the peoples of Israel, but when it is over, God will give them rest (Jeremiah 31:2). The people who survive the sword will find grace. God begins to demonstrate His lovingkindness and to rebuild and restore Israel. Jeremiah 31:4 contains the imagery of a festive occasion with dancing, something that the Israelites probably will not have felt like doing for quite some time. There will

be food in abundance, and the time of famine will be over (verse 5). On all counts, Israel’s outlook is brightening.

For thus says the LORD: “Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, ‘O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel!’ Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and the one who labors with child, together; a great throng shall return there. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn. Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.’ For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he.” (Jeremiah 31:7-11)

By the time these verses are fulfilled, something critical has happened. We do not know exactly how or when, but this passage hints that the peoples of Israel once again know who they are. They no longer believe themselves to be Gentiles. Israelites understand that they are God’s people, and this is cause for “singing with gladness” and giving praise.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—David C. Grabbe

Praying Always

(continued from page 12)

7:14). This method of healing the land applies equally to healing the church today.

How do we access the power from God to humble ourselves? How do we overcome? How do we avoid the attitude of “I can do this myself”? Luke 21:36 has the answer—striving to pray at all times. It brings God onto the battlefield that is our mind, putting Him at the front of every skirmish we fight. For where He fights as our weapon, there can be only success against our enemies.

Praying always or at all times is an overlooked key to overcoming all of our enemies—Satan, the world, and our human nature. It may be more accurate to say that, while it is the most vital key to overcoming, it is also the most underused. Many overlook the impor-

tance of prayer as the *primary* tool we have been given to accomplish “job one”—overcoming. We may be depending too much on our will rather than on the power of our great God. Luke 21:36 emphasizes the importance of careful attention to overcoming and praying always, the latter needed to build the faith needed to accomplish the former.

By striving to pray always, we will be able to look to God with confidence and repeat Psalm 55:18: “I am attacked from all sides, but **you will** rescue me unharmed by the battle” (CEV, emphasis ours).

Now that we have identified praying always as a primary tool for overcoming, why does it work? That will be the subject of Part Four.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

—Pat Higgins

personal *The Christian Fight*

(continued from page 6)

insignificant and of no account. He does this so that no human will glory in His presence. On this, a German commentator, Johann Albrecht Bengel, clarifies, “We have permission to glory, not before God, but in God.”

The term “in Christ Jesus” (I Corinthians 1:30) indicates that we are in an intimate relationship with Him. Paul then details—through the terms “wisdom,” “righteousness,” “sanctification,” and “redemption”—that God, using our believing, humble, submissive cooperation, will be responsible for all things accomplished in and through us. Some modern commentators believe that, because “wise” and “wisdom” appear so many times earlier in this chapter, the terms “righteousness,” “sanctification,” and “redemption” should be in parentheses because Paul intends them to define what he means by true wisdom in this context.

God, then, is pleased to save those who believe and to do a mighty work in them. This set Abel apart from, as far as we know, every other person living on earth at that time. What he did by faith pictures what everyone who receives salvation must also do to begin his walk toward the Kingdom of God. Everyone must be called of God; believe enough of His Word to know that he is a sinner who needs the blood of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his sins; repent, that is, undergo a change of mind toward God; and be justified, made legally righteous by having Jesus Christ’s righteousness imputed to him. This enables a relationship with God to begin, and sanctification unto glorification can proceed.

The Relationship Process

This sets the stage for instruction on the faith of Enoch, who walked with God by faith:

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had taken him; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:5-6)

The fact that Paul states Enoch walked *with* God suggests a relationship had been established between them. Enoch had thus already experienced what Abel’s example teaches. Enoch’s experience takes us to the next logical step in a faithful person’s movement toward glorification. In his arrangement of examples of faith, Paul is emphasizing, not chronological, but experiential order, that is, faith as experienced in practical life. In a true life of faith, walking with God follows justification.

“Walk” and “walking” are the Bible’s most frequently used metaphors for two related concepts. Depending upon the translation, they are used almost three

hundred times to indicate interaction with another and making progress toward a destination. Somewhat related but used to a lesser extent, “walk” or “walking” indicates the passage of time as a person continues in a chosen direction of life and lifestyle. For example:

- **Psalm 1:1:** “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly.”
- **Proverbs 4:14:** “Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil.”
- **Daniel 4:37:** “And those who walk in pride He is able to abase.”
- **Micah 6:8:** “And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”
- **Psalm 119:45:** “And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts.”

Scores of similar descriptions are scattered throughout the Bible. They provide a composite picture of the wide variety of the facets of the godly person’s and the evil person’s manners of life. Since Amos 3:3 shows that two cannot walk together unless they agree, a person walking with God illustrates that the two are in agreement. This does not mean the person is perfect, but it does imply God’s acceptance of him at that stage of his life.

Before going forward, we should clarify the statements regarding Enoch being translated (as in the KJV and other translations) because the world generally interprets this to mean that Enoch was taken to heaven. That is simply untrue, as it contradicts other scriptures. For instance, Hebrews 9:27 states, “And it is appointed for men to die once.” In context, this is showing Christ’s commonality with mankind: Even as it is appointed for men to die once because of sin, so the perfect Christ died once as a sacrifice in mankind’s behalf to pay for sin. If what the world says about Enoch’s translation is true, Enoch did not die, creating a contradiction in Scripture.

Jesus makes an authoritative declaration regarding what happens after death in John 3:13, “No one has ascended to heaven but He that came down from heaven,” meaning Himself. Who would know better than Jesus? “No one” certainly includes Enoch. Peter declares in Acts 2:29-34 that one as great as David has not risen to heaven either, but is still in the grave.

Hebrews 11:32 lists several other significant people of faith who served God with zeal. The section concludes, “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (verses 39-40). These and many more unnamed saints are awaiting the resurrection of the dead and glorification in God’s Kingdom. This also applies to Enoch.

The term *taken away* (NKJV) or *translated* (KJV)

personal *The Christian Fight*

in Hebrews 11:5 simply means “transferred.” Enoch was transferred or conveyed from one place on earth to another to escape violence aimed against him. In this other earthly place, he died like all men.

We experience a spiritual form of this, as Colossians 1:13 shows: “He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and conveyed (*translated*, KJV) us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” Because we are justified and therefore reconciled to God through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, our true spiritual citizenship is now transferred to the Kingdom of God. The implication of this is that with this transfer comes the obligation to live and walk representing the Kingdom of God’s way of life. Enoch’s walk by faith tells us that he set aside his own carnal preferences and will, bowing in obedience before God’s will and submitting his life to God’s desires for him. Enoch did so by faith, which is why he pleased God.

Jude 14-16 adds a factor that needs consideration:

Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” These are murmurers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.

Abel was a keeper of sheep and suffered a violent death. Enoch, however, was a preacher and undoubtedly walked to the beat of a different drummer than those around him. As a preacher, he probably gave messages that made others feel ill at ease with him, and it appears that this put him in danger of a violent death, precipitating his miraculous transfer to a safer place.

This brief report of Enoch’s significant life for our spiritual instruction and well-being reveals that it is not sufficient for us to have judicially passed from spiritual death to life because our sins are forgiven. In order to please God as Enoch did in the use of his faith, we must move beyond justification to actual, practical application in our daily conduct. Abel’s example shows faith operating in regard to justification, which is good, but he died soon afterward, not having much opportunity to demonstrate his faith. Enoch’s life represents a person proceeding to devote his entire life to living by faith. His example carries us into the sanctification stage leading to glorification. It is this that pleases God. Enoch’s life became a living example of the commands and exhortations contained in Colossians 3:1-5, 8-10, 12-17:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those

things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry. . . . But now you must also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie one to another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. . . . Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

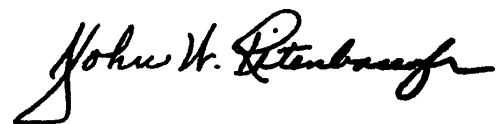
We should now be able to see why Hebrews 11 is one of the strongest witnesses in the entire Bible against the “no works” lie. As important as justification is, it is another thing altogether to carry faith into a lifelong practice. Enoch literally lived a life based in faith.

If we consider Enoch’s example in a spiritual sense, a truth central to walking with God in humility appears. Even as Enoch’s physical translation from one geographical area to another was supernatural, so also was his spiritual translation from a carnal, earthly person to a God/Christ/Kingdom of God-centered person supernatural. The Bible shows that a person’s heart is the source of his motivations. For one’s heart to function by faith, it must be entirely based in what God alone makes possible through His calling.

Living by faith is what pleases God, but we can only have that faith and the motivations that produce a life that pleases God when He supernaturally does what He does.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

In Christian love,



The “Exceptional” 2007 Drought

The American Southeast should not look as it does. Rows of cypress trees lining the streets are dead and brown. Lawns, which should be a brilliant green, are dry and withered. Streams, ponds, and lakes are all down several feet from their normal water levels. The clear, blue sky, once so beautiful in forecasting a bright, sunny day, has become unwelcome all across the parched South, from Alabama and Tennessee, through Georgia, to North and South Carolina. Parts of all five of these states are experiencing what the U.S. Drought Monitor calls a D4 or “exceptional” drought.

The Drought Monitor’s producers—a partnership of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Weather Service’s Climate Prediction Center, the National Climatic Data Center, and the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska Lincoln—describe D4 drought conditions as “exceptional and widespread crop/pasture losses; shortages of water in reservoirs, streams, and wells creating water emergencies.” It is the most intense category of drought—expected only once every one hundred years—and obviously the most difficult from which to recover. A “normal” amount of rainfall in subsequent years will not refill reservoirs and water tables to pre-drought levels.

Northern Georgia lies in the center of the exceptional drought area. In late August, 70 of the state’s 159 counties were under the exceptional condition, and with continued hot and dry weather, additional counties are expected to be added to the list. According to the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences:

Soil moisture is near the 1st percentile across most of west and north Georgia. At this level, we would expect the soil to be moister in 99 of 100 years. Most streams across west and north Georgia are at or near record low flows for late August. The Chattooga River in the northeast mountains is approaching an all-time record low flow. The stream gage data for the Chattooga goes back 67 years.

In the next few months, “the best hope”—the University’s term—for relief from the dire drought is from tropical weather systems, that is, tropical storms or hurricanes. Absent such an event or two, the outlook for the fall and winter is grim. In addition, long-range forecasts predict a drier, warmer winter for the U.S. Southeast.

Lake Lanier, the main reservoir for the city of Atlanta and its five million area residents, has received national media attention, both for its record low levels and the fact that it also supplies water to northern Florida, where certain endangered mussel species and sturgeon face a heightened threat due to the water scarcity. By law, Georgia must release 3.2 billion gallons of water per day downstream to fill Florida’s hydroelectric needs as well as to preserve its wildlife.

Georgia Governor Sonny Purdue argues that, since water

supplies have slipped under the three-month threshold, water outflows from Georgia need to be reduced, and Florida counties should place businesses and residents under water restrictions. The well-being of people, he declares, should take precedence over endangered fish. His point becomes even weightier, if, as it is expected, the director of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, Carol Couch, recommends tightened water restrictions for the Atlanta area, which may include mandatory cutbacks on commercial and industrial users. If they are implemented, these water restrictions would be the most severe in the history of U.S. metropolitan areas.

Biblically, drought has long been seen as a sign of God’s displeasure with His people. Both of the “blessing and cursing” chapters (Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28) include drought among the curses for disobedience. For example, God says in Leviticus 26:18-20:

And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. . . . I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit. (See Deuteronomy 28:23-24.)

Amos 4:6-8 illustrates God’s use of drought—and the resulting famine—as a prod to induce repentance, a method of persuasion that Israel rarely heeded:

“Also I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places; yet you have not returned to Me,” says the LORD. “I also withheld rain from you, when there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered . . . yet you have not returned to Me,” says the LORD.

In this modern, scientific age, we tend to consider droughts like the current one to be merely extremes of the meteorological cycle. Yet, God is sovereign over His creation, and He is still at work among the descendants of His people Israel. With its extensive exposure to Christian principles, the modern nations of Israel should know what God expects of them in their conduct, but America, Britain, Canada, Australia, and the other Israelite countries have increasingly ignored God and His way. As a result, their cultures have become secular, greedy, and self-indulgent.

It should be no wonder, then, that such a broad swath of the United States is experiencing this exceptional drought. Will the citizens of America’s Bible Belt return to God? If not, what worse disasters can be expected in the future?

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Healing a Leper (Part Three)

In performing the healing of the leper, “Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed’” (Mark 1:41). In this miracle, we receive a glimpse of how cleansing works to prepare us for salvation. The physical cleansing of the leper resulted from God’s grace, power, and faithful word. Similarly, spiritual cleansing of sins and flaws results directly from God’s grace, power, and word, preparing us spiritually for His work in us. We see Christ’s love and mercy in cleansing the leper in the words “compassion,” revealing his tenderness of heart, and “touched,” showing His power near at hand.



1. Does Christ show compassion to just anyone? Mark 1:41.

COMMENT: Christ moved with compassion on behalf of a person who, from the world’s viewpoint, was repulsive and undesirable, totally unappealing in any situation. Jesus did not cleanse him because he was nice-looking or wealthy. Similarly, God does not choose to call us into His church due to our good works, beauty, or money; in us is nothing spiritually appealing. Spiritually, we are like the leper was physically—repulsive and undesirable in terms of holiness. We can thank God that His grace “brings salvation” (Titus 2:11) and “by grace we are saved” (Ephesians 2:8). God does not call us to salvation because of what we are but because of what He is. According to His mercy, God decides on whom to have compassion (Psalm 86:15; Romans 9:15-16).

2. Why is Jesus not defiled in touching the leper? How does His touching of him show God’s power in the healing? Matthew 8:3; Mark 1:41; Luke 5:13.

COMMENT: Under the Old Covenant, touching the unclean defiled a person (Leviticus 5:3), but Christ showed that under the New Covenant, this was not so. Instead, evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies are what defile a person (Matthew 15:18-20). Jesus never did any of these evil acts, and contrary to what the Jews thought about touching a leper, He could never be defiled. However, when we view His touching the leper as a defiling act according to the Old Covenant, it reveals a realistic picture of the distinction between man and God. God put the filthy sins of the world on Christ so that we may be cleansed and forgiven. Christ “who knew no sin [took sin on Himself] that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Corinthians 5:21).

God’s power to intervene is apparent in this healing, as the cleansing of the leprosy occurred immediately, instantaneously, upon touching him. If the healing had taken a prolonged time, the world would have had an opportunity to deny that Christ had healed the leper. They would likely have claimed that the natural healing process of the body made him well. Following Jesus’ example, the apostles also laid hands on the sick, by which the power of God’s Holy Spirit healed them (see Acts 10:38; I Corinthians 12:9).

3. How is the Word of God important to cleansing? Matthew 8:3; Mark 1:41-42; Luke 5:13.

COMMENT: God’s Word is obvious in this miracle. If something requires cleansing, “the washing of water by the

word” must be actively present (Ephesians 5:26). God does not work apart from His Word. From the creation of the world to the present, the place of God’s Word in His work has been essential: “In the beginning was the Word [the One who became Jesus Christ], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1-3). In addition, the phrase “God said” is found ten times in the creation account (Genesis 1).

The Bible is God’s written Word, as the Father had the Word (Jesus Christ, the Spokesman) inspire and reveal it. Many professing Christian churches have pushed Scripture to the back burner, into irrelevance, taking an a la carte spiritual meal from it as if they have the authority to choose which doctrines to swallow and which to refuse. If the true church is to do a work for God, it must be established and built on God’s Word rather than on tradition.

4. Why does Christ command the healed leper to say nothing? Matthew 8:4; Mark 1:43-45; Luke 5:14-15.

COMMENT: Mark says Christ strictly warned the healed leper: “Say nothing to anyone.” He was to show himself to the priest and offer the proscribed gift as a witness of what Jesus had done. By showing himself to the priest, the healed leper fulfilled the requirement of the law as to his fitness to return to social life (Leviticus 13:17). As far as we know, this was the first case of an Israelite leper being cleansed since the instructions given nearly 1,500 years before (Leviticus 13:34). The appearance of a cleansed leper at the altar with his gift in his hand testified that God had come to His people and totally satisfied priestly requirements and ordinances.

Yet, this man allowed his zeal to overrule good judgment and obedience to his Healer’s command. In fact, his self-absorption in broadcasting his healing seriously impeded Christ’s work. Due to the leper’s spreading of his news, large numbers of lepers in the region pursued Jesus relentlessly for healing. Thus, “Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction” (Mark 1:45; Luke 5:15-16). However, it was not His purpose to heal all of Israel then but to reveal the Father and His relationship with Him. Being sensational does not mean we make a better testimony for Christ. Rather, this incident illustrates that, generally, the obedient person whom only a few know about makes the better-quality witness.

—Martin G. Collins