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# THE Bull Pen REVIEW



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# *Preface: What is the Bull Pen Review?*

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**T**HROUGHOUT HISTORY, WHENEVER reformation has seized the Church, the first mark has usually been a revival of Word-centered worship. The driving element of this has historically been *expository preaching*.

This reformation of preaching has consistently been followed and bolstered by efforts of writing and publication, for the education and edification of the people of God. The audience and circulation runs a wide breadth. Charles Spurgeon published *The Sword and the Trowel*, which focused on engaging pastors and church leaders. More recently, John Piper during his time at Bethlehem Baptist Church would send out a weekly newsletter titled “The Bethlehem Star,” written strictly for his own congregation. Pastors like John Newton were known for a robust ministry of personal correspondence via letters.

And of course, writing for the local church is at the very foundation of our faith: The New Testament is an arrangement of twenty-seven *written* documents, *most* of them letters to specific local churches, all aimed at instruction and edification and equipment of the saints.

Our aim is similar for the Bull Pen Review. We long to strengthen, edify, educate, and inform the congregation God has graciously entrusted to us through the ministry of not only proclamation, but the pen. We aim to continue in this tradition, and enrich the love of Bull Street Baptist Church for Christ Jesus through this bi-monthly periodical.

A word about the layout.

**Culture:** At BSBC, we have six distinctive cultures which the elders hope to see our church treasure and continue to grow in. These articles will explore different topics and answer different questions to help our church grow in these “cultures.”

**Historical Retrieval:** To study history is to practice humility. Whether it’s events, theological developments, or historical figures, we are part of a great tradition, and we want to appreciate the house on which we are building.

**Theology:** The church thrives on a diet of healthy doctrine. Every sermon has to weigh the balance between that doctrine and its application. These articles are a way for us to help the church continue growing in a more systematic understanding of God, his Word, and his world.

**Book Review:** Of the writing of many books there is no end—how much more so when it comes to reading them! (Also, another reason why we’re writing *articles*, and not full books!)

Some books are worth reading; some are not. We hope in these reviews to commend some good resources to you, and suggest how to read others with a careful and critical eye.

**Thought for Food:** More of a devotional thought, based usually on a single passage or pair of Scripture, written for your reflection and spiritual benefit.

**Vice, Virtue, Verse:** A brief definition and description of a vice and a complement virtue, along with a “fighter verse” you can memorize to grow in this area. If you don’t have a plan for memorizing scripture, start here!

**Ask a Pastor:** Do you have a question you’d like answered by all of the pastors, or by one in particular, which might be helpful for the rest of the congregation to hear? Send Pastor Andrew an email with the topic line “Ask a Pastor.” We will answer no matter what—but perhaps you’ll spark a conversation that could benefit others as well!

## CULTURE: EVANGELISM

# *The Motivation for Biblical Evangelism is Grace, Not Guilt*

Taylor Lazenby

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

— Colossians 3:16

**MY MENTOR SIGHED.** It caught my attention—he had just been talking about his church’s upcoming revival. But then he explained: “It seems like my pastor is guiltling people into evangelism.”

His sigh made more sense now. I’ve heard the pitch. Maybe you have too. “Thousands of people perish every day without Christ. What will you do about it?” Or better yet, “*Your neighbor will never know Jesus if you don’t share the gospel with them!*” I have a suspicion that, unfortunately, many Christian leaders use guilt as the primary or only motivation for evangelism. But guilt is poor fuel. I’d like to recommend a better motivation: grace.

### **Survivor’s Guilt**

Survivor’s guilt is an intense, persistent feeling of remorse, shame, or responsibility experienced by individuals who survive a life-threatening, tragic, or catastrophic event. It is often marked by thoughts of “Why me? Why did I survive while they did not? Is their suffering somehow *my* fault?”

If we are not careful, suggesting a loved one will perish in hell unless they do something about it can give Christians a sort of *spiritual* survivor’s guilt. The implication is that the Christian is ultimately responsible for the eternal fate of those around them. This is a dangerous and ultimately unbiblical burden to place on God’s people. It distorts the nature of salvation, subtly replacing the sovereignty of God

with the adequacy of the Christian. The believer begins to feel that failure to evangelize is not merely a missed opportunity, but a moral catastrophe for which they are personally culpable.

Over time, this produces one common response: They become paralyzed by anxiety, so overwhelmed by the weight of eternal responsibility that they do nothing at all.

### **Pharisaical Proselytizing**

Using guilt as a motivator for evangelism also puts an individual back under the law where the gospel has given freedom. Paul writes in Galatians, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (5:1). When guilt is used as a motivator, we should ask whether we are using moral guilt derived from the law as fuel for evangelism.

Consider the Pharisees. Jesus critiqued them, “You travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves” (Matt. 23:15). The Pharisees had religious zeal, but an unrighteous motivation. Their efforts were driven not by love for God or love for neighbor, but by obligation, reputation, and the compulsion of the law. So their evangelistic campaigns resulted not in gospel-loving children of God, but in guilt-fearing spawns of Satan.

Our guilt-driven evangelism replicates the same pattern. When believers share the gospel primarily

to relieve the pressure of a pastor's pointed challenge or to quiet the nagging voice of obligation, they are not sharing from the overflow of the Christian life. Instead, they are sharing from spiritual debt. Borrowing against spiritual debt is a dangerous endeavor, often leaving people spiritually bankrupt.

Perhaps even worse, when guilt is the motivation, the "success" of evangelism gets measured by the wrong standard. On one hand, the bad Proselytizing Pharisee will be tempted to measure success by whether he shared the gospel to get the guilt monkey off his back. On the other hand, the good Proselytizing Pharisee will measure success by how many converts he led in the sinner's prayer. Either way, guilt-motivated evangelism keeps our eyes on ourselves and our performance.

### **Guilt Always Needs A Refill**

Guilt-motivated evangelism has a poor miles-per-gallon rate. In fact, it quickly drains the tank.

Think of it like a car that gets one mile per gallon. You'll be stranded on the side of the road not long after pulling out of the driveway. Likewise, the first time a believer is guilt-tripped into evangelism, there may be enough emotional fuel to produce some action. Perhaps they will endure awkward conversation with a coworker, leave a gospel tract on a table, or nervously invite the waitress to church. But the moment that evangelistic effort is met with indifference, mockery, or rejection, the engine starts to putter. Guilt cannot survive discouragement.

Not only that, but the only way to "refill" the tank is to be guilt-tripped again. But the heart was not made to run on this fuel, so every top-off is increasingly inefficient. To supersede the fear of man, the misplaced fear of God must dig even deeper. It's a vicious cycle.

We have to ask ourselves: When will this guilt-fuel finally run dry? The answer is, probably sooner rather than later. Perhaps this is why the evangelistic fervor of our churches is so shallow. After 150 years of guilt-

motivated evangelism in the United States, the refill station of revival has finally run out of fuel.

### **God's Grace and Evangelism**

The book of Acts shows us a different motivation for evangelism among the early church. After the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the early church grew supernaturally. The Holy Spirit breathed an evangelistic fervor among those who had witnessed the resurrection. But the Holy Spirit never used guilt as a motivator for evangelism among the early church. *Instead, what we find in Acts is a community of people so arrested by the grace of God that speaking the gospel was less a duty they performed and more an overflow they could not contain.*

Consider Peter and John in Acts 4. After being arrested, hauled before the Sanhedrin, and commanded to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, their response reveals everything about their motivation. They did not say, "We must keep preaching because people are dying without Christ, and it is our fault." Instead, they declared, "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

This is not the language of divinely guilt-ridden moral obligation. No. They had seen the risen Lord. They had received the Spirit. The gospel was not a burden they carried. The gospel was not a weight that crushed them as they sought to evangelize in the face of persecution. The gospel was a fire in their bones that they could not extinguish!

This pattern repeats itself in Acts 5. After the apostles were flogged by the council and ordered again to be silent, Luke tells us that they left "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (5:41), and that "every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus" (5:42). Notice what is absent: There is no guilt-ridden pastor standing over them, scraping the bottom of the emotional barrel to keep them motivated. There is only joy! The joy of men who understood that they had received an

*undeserved grace* and could not help but announce it to the world.

Even Paul frames his evangelistic compulsion in terms of grace rather than guilt. In Acts 20, addressing the Ephesian elders, he describes his ministry as “testifying to the gospel of the grace of God” (20:24). Paul’s testimony was rooted in grace, not guilt.

### **Conclusion**

The early church did not evangelize because they were made to feel responsible for the eternal destinies of their neighbors. They evangelized because they had been apprehended by a grace so amazing that silence was simply not an option. Biblical evangelism shows us that grace is the never-ending fuel for evangelism, the engine of true revival, and the motivation for worldwide missions.

And grace is the motivation for biblical evangelism that the church needs to recover today.

# HISTORICAL RETRIEVAL

## *Textures of a Firm Foundation*

Andrew Ballard

**O**NE OF MY favorite hymns is *How Firm a Foundation*. How surprised I was to discover recently that I do not, in fact, know the lyrics! In the *Sing!* Hymnal, and in most versions, you'll find there are five verses. But in John Rippon's original 1787 collection of hymns, there were actually *seven* verses. The second and the sixth (missing from modern renditions) go like this:

**2**  
In every condition, — in sickness, in health,  
In poverty's vale, or abounding in wealth;  
At home and abroad, on the land, on the sea,  
'As thy days may demand, shall thy strength  
ever be.

**6**  
'E'en down to old age, all my people shall prove  
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;  
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,  
Like lambs they shall still in my bosom be  
borne.

Now, when one crafts a hymnal, they serve us as a curator, selecting the golden apples most fitting for the silver platter of our place and time. Choosing the right hymn, the right melody, and even the right version is the pastoral challenge of putting timeless truths into a timely expression. As with preaching and most worthwhile tasks, there are always pieces left over on the cutting room floor. The great enemy of doing *something* is not the desire to do nothing so much as the burden to do *everything*.

But it is always worth asking what is lost when we give up a piece of our tradition. These verses, for example, offer such a rich *texture* to the promises of God. Verse 2 unfolds the idea from verse 1: We flee to

Jesus for refuge, because he has spoken to us a good word (verse 1). What is that word? What is the nature of this refuge?

The answer is in verse 2. Jesus has said to us, "As thy days may demand, shall thy strength ever be." This is the lyrical equivalent of a preacher applying his text to single moms, widowers, teenage boys, and wiggling kids in the pews. The promise is appropriated from Deuteronomy 33:25 (originally given to the tribe of Asher, now "yes" in Christ to the *true* Israel, those united to him by faith): "As your days, so shall your strength be."

This promise will be true for you in every condition.

Are you suffering chronic illness or recovering from a surgery? Christ has promised you strength to persevere in the pain.

Are you healthy and strong in your body and mind? Christ has promised you strength to remain focused on him.

Does debt drain your paycheck, or the cost of living demand your hourly attention? God has promised to give you strength to face the day.

Are your financial prospects stable and looking positive? God has promised strength for you to remain faithful.

Are you at home, while your loved ones are away? Christ has promised you strength to endure.

Are you away, overseas, while your loved ones are at home? Christ has promised you strength to endure.

And then I love verse 6. It seems to be drawn from Isaiah 46. The Lord observes that the gods of Babylon are powerless to help their worshippers; in fact, as the Babylonians go into exile, their gods are a burden on their backs, not a source of provision or protection. Not so with our God. He appeals to his exiled people:

3 Listen to me, O house of Jacob,  
all the remnant of the house of Israel,  
who have been borne by me from  
before your birth,  
carried from the womb;  
4 even to your old age I am he,  
and to gray hairs I will carry you.  
I have made, and I will bear;  
I will carry and will save. (Is 46:3-4)

The hymn puts this in wonderfully textural language for us: “And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,/Like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne.”

This, too, is a fitting word for our congregation. One of my favorite parts of Sunday morning is getting to see and sing to my elderly brothers and sisters. I sit where I do specifically because it gives me the opportunity to sing reminders of God’s faithfulness to the “hoary-haired saints” of our church.

I imagine these beloved brothers and sisters crossing the final river, pushed forward by our voices like a congregational wind in their spiritual sails. I want them to know that when they persevere in worship and faith, they are proving God’s “sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love.” I want them to be utterly convinced that now, after fathering and grandfathering and great-grandfathering generations, even now they are just little lambs carried by the arms of their tender Shepherd. I want them to know that they must finish this final leg of the race, not by gritting their teeth and clenching control, but by worshipping God and resting in his faithful care.

Truly, our God has given us a *firm foundation* for our faith in the promises of Scripture. This foundation is steady and true in all seasons and all stations, at

all ages and in every condition. Let me conclude by sharing the song in its full, original composition, so you can read—and sing!—it as it was originally shared:

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word  
What more can he say than to you he hath said,  
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled !

In every condition,-in sickness, in health,  
In poverty’s vale, or abounding in wealth;  
At home and abroad, on the land, on the sea,  
“As thy days may demand, shall thy strength ever be.

“Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismay’d  
I, I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;  
I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,  
Upheld by my righteous omnipotent hand.

“When through the deep waters I call thee to go,  
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;  
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,  
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

“When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,  
My grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply;  
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design  
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

‘E’en down to old age, all my people shall prove  
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;  
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,  
Like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne.

‘The soul that on Jesus hath lean’d for repose,  
I will not, I will not desert to his foes ;  
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,  
I’ll never, no never, no never forsake.’

# THEOLOGY

## *Sola Gratia*

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.

Taylor Lazenby

**T**HOSE WERE SOME of the first lyrics I remember hearing as a boy. My dad would rock my twin brother and me in his lap, singing the sweet words of Newton's *Amazing Grace* as we drifted off to afternoon naps.

The words of *Amazing Grace* were born from Scripture and from lived experience. John Newton was pressed into the Royal Navy, deserted, flogged, and eventually found himself working the African slave trade. By his own account, he was coarse, profane, and contemptuous of his mother's faith. But in the middle of a terrifying Atlantic storm in March 1748, as his ship was breaking apart around him, Newton cried to God for mercy. He later called it the hour his "great deliverance" began. Decades afterward, now a pastor in the English village of Olney, Newton sat down to write a hymn for his congregation reflecting on that deliverance. He was singing the truth that had rescued him: that wretches are saved by grace, and grace alone.

That phrase, "grace alone," represents the claim that our salvation, from first to last, is the *unmerited gift of God*. Not earned. Not assisted. Not deserved. Freely given.

### **The Human Problem Divine Grace Addresses**

Scripture's diagnosis of the human condition is not flattering. Paul observes that "*None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one*" (Rom. 3:10-12). The mind set on the flesh "is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, *it cannot*" (Rom. 8:7). To the Ephesians, he is even more blunt. Before Christ, we were not merely sick or struggling.

We were "*dead* in the trespasses and sins" in which we once walked (Eph. 2:1).

Sin enslaves us and kills us. Thus, Jesus told the crowds in John 6:44, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." The keyword there is *can*. It is not that sinners *will not* come, though that is also true. It is that sinners *cannot* come. Sin has so thoroughly corrupted our minds, our wills, and our affections that we are both *unable* to turn toward God on our own and *unwilling*. We need something beyond ourselves to break the chains of slavery and change our very desires.

The Reformers called this problem *total depravity*. It's the idea that sin has reached into every part of the human person, leaving no island of righteousness from which we might launch our own rescue.

This is precisely why grace is *alone*. If we were merely weak, grace could be a helpful boost. If we were merely confused, grace could be good instruction. But if we are dead, grace must do what only grace can do: give us spiritual life, raise us from the dead. Paul says exactly this: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. *By grace you have been saved*" (Eph. 2:4-5). The initiative and power are entirely God's.

### **Grace in the Storyline of Scripture**

Two examples from Scripture illuminate both man's inability and unwillingness and God's grace.

First, consider Abraham. Before God called him, Abraham was not seeking *Yahweh*. He was not on a

spiritual journey that happened to lead him to the one true God. In fact, Joshua 24:2 tells us plainly: “Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and *they served other gods.*” Abraham was a pagan, living among pagans, worshiping what pagans worship. He was not looking for God. God came looking for him. And out of sheer grace, God chose this idol-worshiper to become the father of a nation from which the Redeemer of the world would come. Abraham did nothing to earn or deserve that call. God’s grace is the only reason for it.

Second, as the storyline of Scripture continues, we find Abraham’s descendants in a very different place from the one God had promised. They were enslaved in Egypt. For four hundred years, they experienced suffering, slavery, and injustice at the hands of an oppressive regime. And here is the striking thing: Despite their great numbers, the Israelites never attempted to overthrow their captors. They organized no revolt. Weakly, they cried out (Exod. 2:23), and that was all they could do. They were unable to free themselves—and unwilling, it seems, even to try.

So God himself initiated their salvation. He heard their groaning, remembered his covenant with Abraham, and raised up a deliverer in Moses to lead his people out of bondage and into the promised land (Exod. 2:24–25, 3:7–8).

Israel did not negotiate her freedom. She was rescued. Is this not a picture of a far greater oppressor— sin and death? And is the Exodus not a foreshadowing of a greater Exodus to come, one accomplished not by Moses but by Christ himself? Luke seems to think so. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus and spoke of “his departure [literally, *exodus*], which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31).

Paul gathers these gracious threads together in his letter to the Ephesians.

He begins with the problem: “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked”

(2:1). He describes the old life as one lived under the sway of the world, the devil, and our own disordered desires (2:2–3). And then comes the turn that changes everything: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (2:4–5).

Paul leaves no room for human contribution. We were dead; God made us alive. We were enslaved; God set us free. And lest anyone miss the point, he says it as clearly as it can be said: “For *by grace you have been saved* through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (2:8, emphasis mine). That means this grace had *no* contribution from our own works or deeds. It is all grace, and grace alone.

As we read Scripture, we join Newton in exulting in God’s amazing grace.

### **Grace Alone and Its Importance in the Reformation**

Over time, the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages began to erode the sufficiency and efficiency of God’s grace in salvation. While the church never denied grace outright, it layered so many human contributions on top of it that grace was no longer alone. At the same time, the church’s view of humanity was being quietly elevated. Where Scripture spoke of dead sinners in need of resurrection, the medieval system spoke of sick sinners in need of assistance. Grace got you started. Grace helped along the way. But your own works, your own penances, and, in some cases, your own payments filled in what grace supposedly left undone. Grace, in this system, was necessary but never sufficient.

The Reformers drew the battle line at the biblical teaching of *sola gratia*. The disagreement was not over whether grace was real, but whether it was sufficient. Rome said grace is necessary but not enough on its own; human merit and cooperation must complete what grace begins. The Reformers said grace is both necessary and sufficient, that it accomplishes salvation from first to last without any contribution from man.

## Grace Alone and Its Importance Today

In the twenty-first century, the grace of God toward undeserving sinners stands in stark contrast to our secular, therapeutic age. Our culture tells us that we are basically good, that our problems are primarily external, and that the solution to what ails us lies within. We are told to believe in ourselves, to trust our hearts, to unlock our potential. The language of sin, guilt, and moral inability has been replaced by the language of self-care and self-improvement. In such an environment, grace becomes unnecessary. If we are not wretched, we do not need a hymn about it!

But the lie runs through the church as well. Subtle forms of “grace plus” thinking have a way of creeping in (see the church of Galatia!). We sing about grace on Sunday and then spend the rest of the week measuring our standing with God by how our quiet time went, whether we lost our temper, or how much we gave. We treat the Christian life as a kind of spiritual probation, where every failure is evidence that the verdict might still go against us.

That is not the gospel. That is works-based righteousness dressed up in Christian language.

Embracing the gift of salvation by grace alone is one of the most important things a believer can do. John Newton understood this. After a lifetime of sin and a lifetime of grace, he could still write with wonder, “’Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.” He was not boasting in his own faithfulness. He was boasting in his God who lavished him with grace upon grace. Newton is still singing of amazing grace in the presence of a gracious, sovereign God. And when we’ve been there ten thousand years, we will still be singing along!

## BOOK REVIEW

# *Enjoying Jesus's Bible*

Book by Jason DeRouchie  
Review by Andrew Ballard

**D**O YOU ENJOY Jesus's Bible?

Most of us would readily say we *acknowledge* the Old Testament as Scripture. But it can be rather intimidating compared to the New Testament. There are in the Old Testament more authors, more genres, more lists, more names, more places, more contexts, and way, way more *words* than the New Testament. Plus, most of our sermon series come from the New Testament, so we're already more familiar with *those* books. Is the Old Testament really worth my time—let alone something I can *enjoy*?

Yes. Because the books of the Old Testament comprise *Jesus's Bible*. He resisted Satan by living by the *words* of the *Old Testament* (Matt. 4:4). It was the Bible that belonged to Jesus, supported Jesus, and was used by Jesus. But even more importantly, the Old Testament is, just like the New, the Bible that is *about* Jesus. Jesus himself promised that, read as he intended, these books let us see and enjoy him *through* them. But we do need help.

*Enjoying Jesus's Bible* offers exactly that help. It gives you tools to read the Old Testament more carefully and to see how its details fit into Scripture's larger framework. To use DeRouchie's terms, Jesus is the *light* and the *lens* for reading the Old Testament. In this little, accessible book, the author teaches you how to read the Bible the way God intended, how to see Jesus wherever Scripture discloses him, how to enjoy and hope in all God's promises through Christ, and how to live faithfully in relation to God's Law.

We need to read better because we need to live better. My hope is that this book will help you do both.

## THOUGHT FOR FOOD

# *Remember Your Baptism!*

Tim Kurtz

**I**MAGINE YOU'VE JUST lived through the most extraordinary year imaginable. You come from an agricultural world, accustomed to the rhythms of farm life, but suddenly you have become both a sailor and a zoologist. You've spent months inside an enormous box surrounded by every kind of animal. How did you get here? The world had descended into unimaginable wickedness. Humanity's sin had become so pervasive that God sent judgment upon the earth through a flood. Lucky for you, you are in Noah's family.

But just like Noah, you know something important: Although you trust God, you are still a sinner yourself.

Finally, after months upon months of relentless waves, the rocking of the boat ceases. A few avian experiments later, and at last the door opens. Fresh air rushes in. Dry ground stretches before you.

What emotions must Noah and his family have felt stepping off the ark? Surely it was a mix of relief and gratitude—but perhaps also fear. The flood proved that God truly judges sin. Perhaps the question quickly crept into their minds: *What if this happens again?* If sin remains in the world—and in us—what hope is there that history will not simply repeat itself?

God answered those fears with grace. He made a covenant with Noah. Yes, sin still existed. Yes, God remained perfectly holy. But God promised that He would never again destroy the earth through a flood.

Now, God's word is sufficient on its own. His promises are trustworthy because he himself is trustworthy. Yet in his kindness, God often strengthens our faith through visible reminders of his promises. What sign did Noah receive? One that stretched across the heavens. The skies had always declared the glory of

God, but now the rainbow would serve as a covenant sign—a visible assurance of God's covenant mercy.

Throughout Scripture, covenant signs are given to strengthen and assure God's people. We may possess genuine faith and yet still struggle with weakness and doubt. In his grace, God not only makes promises to us but also attaches signs to those promises. Abraham received circumcision as the covenant sign long before the promised son was born. Day after day, Abraham bore on his body a reminder that God would keep his word. The fulfillment of the covenant ultimately depended not upon Abraham's strength, but upon God's faithfulness.

Baptism functions similarly for Christians under the new covenant. It is a covenant sign given by God to strengthen the faith of his people.

Bobby Jamieson highlights a crucial difference between circumcision and baptism:

Circumcision was, in part, a sign of the sanctions which would apply to anyone who disobeyed the covenant: they would be 'cut off' from the people (Gen 17:14). Yet baptism beautifully portrays the truth that Jesus already has been 'cut off out of the land of the living' (Isa 53:8) so that we would have eternal life in him. Christ has already suffered the sanctions to which circumcision pointed; there are none left over for us. Baptism does picture judgment, but it is judgment satisfied, judgement exhausted, judgment we will never taste because Christ drained the cup to the dregs. Circumcision pictures a sanction threatened, baptism a sanction satisfied. (Bobby Jamieson, *Going Public*, 73-74)

That is the glory of baptism. It points us to union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Going under the water dramatizes judgment and death; rising from it portrays new life in Christ. Jesus has already borne the judgment our sins deserved. The wrath has been exhausted in him. Christian, remember your baptism! Just as surely as you were raised up from the water, so too will you one day be raised with Christ to inherit the new heavens and the new earth. And whenever you witness a baptism in our corporate worship, rejoice not only in God's saving work in that brother or sister, but also in the promises God has made to you in Christ.

# VICE, VIRTUE, VERSE

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**E**NVY is a draft of admiration that has been soured by resentment when it should have been fermented by thanksgiving. Envy shines the spotlight of glory on someone else's success or blessing, and hates its neighbor for it. Tilly Dillehay (author of *Seeing Green: Don't Let Envy Color Your Joy*) comments that:

Envy operates in a zero-sum world. Envy believes the lie that God's universe is one of essential scarcity. The envious heart is too small. It can't fathom a God who is limitless in his expressions of pleasure and overflowing love. Our fallen minds truly believe there's not enough of his plenty to go around. (Excerpt from "Why Do They Get What I Want?" on [Desiringgod.org](http://Desiringgod.org))

To be envious is a bad and bitter use of the imagination.

**C**ONTENTMENT knows how to refrain and how to enjoy. To be content is to *refrain* from the sour use of the imagination. But it is also active. Paul says that godliness + contentment = gain<sup>2</sup>. If contentment means gaining something, contentment must mean doing something. It is not some mere state of mind, like the ascetic Buddhist or Catholic monk might have you believe. It is the active enjoyment of what God has given you. Contentment with a meal, then, means a full belly. The mom who is content with her life is not envious; she cannot *be* envious, because she is not thinking about what her neighbor has at all. Rather, she is thinking about what she *does* have—and she is *enjoying* it. Contentment is not the absence of all desire, but the fulfillment of the right desire.

**1 TIMOTHY 6:6–8:** But godliness with contentment is great gain, <sup>7</sup> for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything

out of the world. <sup>8</sup> But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

## ASK A PASTOR

**QUESTION:** *What exactly is “Church-centered missions”?*

**ANSWER:** Church-Centered Missions is a biblical approach to the mission of the church that is built on four pillars: (1) Christianity is church-shaped, (2) The local church is the means and end of missions, (3) Missions works best when churches work together, and (4) Missions is Bible-led.

**First, “Church-Centered Missions” recognizes that Christianity is church-shaped.** When we look at Scripture, we can see Christians are disciples of Jesus who have heard the good news of salvation through the finished work of Christ alone. They have repented of their sins and placed their faith in Christ as their substitute, receiving the forgiveness of sins and the imputed righteousness of Christ (Eph. 2:1–10). The Bible also describes the believer as someone who is *gathered* into the local church upon their profession of faith and who *grows* into maturity within the local church over time.

Church history confirms this. Christianity has endured *through* the establishment and proliferation of local churches who held the gospel message in trust for two thousand years. This underscores the local church as the primary instrument of God’s mission.

**Second, “Church-Centered Missions” understands that the local church is both the means and the ends of mission.** This means *churches* are the Bible’s prescribed missionary method. The consistent missionary pattern in Acts and in Paul’s letters involves proclaiming the word of God, gathering believers into local churches, appointing qualified men as elders, and strengthening those churches over time. As Aaron Menikoff and Harshit Singh have argued,

Missions happens when churches send elders, deacons, and members to plant churches, both locally and internationally. Missions is church planting across significant barriers, which are usually geographic, cultural, or linguistic.<sup>1</sup>

Practically speaking, this means the Great Commission will be fulfilled as healthy churches plant new churches where none yet exist. This also means the most important missionary training doesn’t come from outside the local church (like a seminary or missions agency) but from within one as aspiring missionaries actively participate and grow as committed church members.

**Third, “Church-Centered Missions” believes that missions work best when churches work together.** Throughout the New Testament, we find examples of churches partnering together for gospel advance through cooperation (Acts 11, 13, 15; 3 John 5–8).

On one hand, this is a reminder that no one church can accomplish the Great Commission alone. And that is by design. God’s grace is demonstrated through the cooperation of churches as they humbly admit they need each other. This cooperation strengthens the relational web of churches, built upon the grace of God and the Great Commission.

On the other hand, it means churches must actively seek out partners to obey the Great Commission together. When partnering with other churches for the sake of mission, our Elders prioritize theological, philosophical, and methodological alignment with BSBC. Doing so will ensure that BSBC will partner with churches who share the same convictions as us, leading to churches being planted in the way that we believe churches should be planted according to the Scriptures.

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<sup>1</sup> Aaron Menikoff and Harshit Singh, *Prioritizing Missions in the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2025), xiv.

**Finally, “Church-Centered Missions” is Bible-led.**<sup>2</sup> We believe the Bible is the best missions manual for the church. Many well-intentioned pastors and missionaries have fallen into the trap of pragmatism and number-chasing. However, for gospel faithfulness and fruitfulness, there is no shortcut.<sup>3</sup> The Bible is our sole authority for how the church should do missions. Because of this conviction, we wholeheartedly agree with Menikoff and Singh that “Missions work should therefore be biblically led, shaped, and directed.”<sup>4</sup> The Bible has already given us the ordinary means of grace (preaching, prayer, ordinances, etc.) and the Holy Spirit working in accordance with His word to plant, build, and strengthen local churches. We need nothing more or less than what He has already given to accomplish His mission.

Affectionately,

Pastor Taylor

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<sup>2</sup> The Bible is the Word of God, and is inspired by the Spirit. So to say that something is “Bible-led” is (if we understand what we are saying) synonymous with it being *Spirit-led*.

<sup>3</sup> See Matt Rhodes, *No Shortcut to Success: A Manifesto for Modern Missions* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Menikoff and Singh, *Prioritizing Missions in the Church*, xv.

## GRATITUDE



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