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Be Ready to Answer (1 Pet. 3:15)!

Caleb Colley

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15).

The apostle Peter instructed first-century Christians to be prepared to give an answer (an “apologetic” or defense) to everyone who asks a reason for the hope that is grounded in Jesus (1 Pet. 3:15). Similarly, Paul saw as an integral part of his mission to defend the gospel (Phil. 1:16). Because God has commanded our defense of the faith, we know that we are capable of doing it (1 Cor. 10:13). In this lesson, we will discuss the biblical mandate for Christian apologetics.

The Biblical Mandate for Christian Apologetics

We must do all according to the doctrine of Christ as revealed in the New Testament (2 John 9; Col. 3:17; 1 Cor. 4:6). The New Testament authorizes a variety of methods of defending Christianity. “Walking by faith and not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7) does not mean believing that for which we have no solid evidence but rather believing historical events that we did not personally witness but for which we have reliable testimony (Rom. 10:17).

The Contemporary Urgency of Apologetics

While inner, subjective confidence in the Lord Jesus is critical (e.g., 2 Corinthians 1:9), we cannot rely on our personal experience with Christianity to convince skeptics. Christians need to be prepared to give publicly available reasons for trusting the Bible as reliable testimony. Just as we should not believe other religious texts that make the claim to be divinely inspired, we should not expect people to believe the Bible simply because the Bible claims to be inspired. If Christians lack adequate preparation they will be (at best) unable to convince the unbelievers, and (at worst) led astray themselves!

Apologetics Methods and Tools

Learning Christian evidences begins at home (Eph. 6:4; Tit. 2:3-5). Thoughtful parents can encourage sincere questions on the part of their children, and provide them with arguments and evidence from very early ages. This starts with simple questions, posed either by the parents or the children: How do we know ... ?

In the congregational context, apologetics should be a substantial part of the Bible teaching program. Christian apologetics especially should come from the pulpit. Every time a teacher, preacher, elder, or other leader in the local church gives publicly available reasons for belief in God and his word, he builds confidence in the minds of the members that Christianity is rationally defensible, and prepares them to make the defense as the Lord gives opportunity (cf. Acts 25:16). Tools for providing a defense for Christianity are more readily available today than ever before.

For Further Study

- What is the role of arguments and evidence in helping people come to Christ?
- Why is biblical literacy critical to Christian apologetics?
- What are some of the most frequent objections to Christianity in contemporary society?
- Who are some biblical characters who provided an excellent apologetic? How did they go about it?
- What are some concrete steps you can take to prepare yourself to give and answer, and to help others in your sphere of influence to be prepared?

There is a God!

Caleb Colley

The apostle Peter instructed first-century Christians to be prepared to give an answer (an “apologetic” or defense) to everyone who asks a reason for the hope that is grounded in Jesus (1 Pet. 3:15). Similarly, Paul saw as an integral part of his mission to defend the gospel (Phil. 1:16). Because God has commanded our defense of the faith, we know that we are capable of doing it (1 Cor. 10:13). Furthermore, our experience in the natural world is well suited to provide the bases for arguments in favor of God’s existence (Rom. 1:20-21). It will help us in our discussions with skeptics (and as we encourage believers) to have memorized some basic arguments, and to understand evidence supporting these arguments.

Here are the arguments we will review:

A cosmological argument

- Everything that exists has an explanation for its existence.
- If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God.
- The universe exists.
- Therefore, God is the explanation of the existence of the universe.

A moral argument

- If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties are not real.
- Objective moral values and duties are real.
- Therefore, God exists.

A teleological argument

- Anything that exhibits design had a designer.
- If the universe exhibits design, God was its Designer.
- The universe exhibits design.
- Therefore, God was the Designer of the universe.

A argument from the resurrection of Jesus

- If Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead, then the God Whom Jesus preached raised Him.
- Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead.
- The God Whom Jesus preached raised Him from the dead.

In making each of these arguments, we will provide arguments to support the claims that make up the premises. These arguments are taken from both biblical and extra-biblical sources, providing publicly available reasons that should convince rational people who are unrestrained by anti-supernatural bias.

For Further Study

- Which of these four arguments do you believe will be most effective in discussions with skeptics? Why?
- The Bible teaches that the Universe had a beginning (Gen. 1:1). But suppose we grant, just for the sake of argument, that the Universe is past-eternal. Is it still possible to provide a convincing argument for God's existence? How might this be done?
- Why have historians abandoned the alternative, naturalistic explanations for the facts surrounding the resurrection of Jesus from the dead?
- Describe three of your favorite examples of design in the Universe. How do your examples provide evidence for the divine Designer? Does irreducible complexity factor in these examples?
- What is the difference between a contingent state of affairs and a necessary state of affairs?

Why Christianity Makes Sense

Kevin Cauley

The Christian worldview makes sense in contrast to polytheism, atheism, and all other worldviews. The book of Colossians makes this clear by contrasting Christ and the philosophies of men. In 1:15-20 Paul avers six fundamental truths about Christ Jesus.

There is One Creator (Col. 1:15-16).

The Universe did not come from nothing as atheism holds, and unlike eastern pantheism, the relationship of God to the world is not one of identity, but of Creator and creature (Gen. 1:1, Isa. 45:18). In the Christian worldview, Jesus is central to the creation and is also the Creator (John 1:1-2, Heb. 1:1-2).

Mankind Has Purpose (Col. 1:16).

God created all things for His good pleasure (Heb. 2:10, Phil. 2:13). This implies kindly intent on His part. The world and mankind has a purpose (Gen. 1:27-28, Matt. 22:37-40). This means that man's efforts to create his own purposes fail (Jer. 10:23, 17:9).

The Creator Made a Real and Good World (Col. 1:17).

God created it, upholds it, and sustains it (Heb. 1:3, Jer. 10:12). The world is not an illusion nor is it just a self-organized collection of particles. This means that the world is good for the purposes that He created it (Gen. 1:31, Acts 14:17, 17:27-28).

He Desires the Unity of Mankind (Col. 1:18).

God made all humans in His image (Gen. 1:27), and they are equal in value to one another (Acts 17:26, Acts 10:34-35). God has not made humanity in different classes or castes. Man has divided man. God calls all people back to unity and equality in the body of Christ, the church (Gal. 3:26-29, Eph. 1:22-23).

He Reveals Himself in Jesus (Col. 1:19).

God is Spirit (John 4:24), He is unseen, and much of Him is unknown (1 Tim. 6:16). Only Jesus can reveal Him as He wants to be known (John 1:18). Jesus was a real person who lived in a real time and place (Gal. 4:4-5). Jesus is also God in the flesh (John 1:1-2, Heb. 1:3).

He Saves by His Grace (Col. 1:20).

Mankind cannot merit salvation; he can only merit condemnation (Jer. 10:23, Isa. 59:1-2, Rom. 10:1-2). God sent Jesus to pay the price and deliver humanity from God's just and righteous punishment of sin (Rom. 5:9). Salvation must be by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-16), and Jesus is the savior (Heb. 1:3).

For Further Study

- Why is it important that the universe have a Creator?
- What false philosophy asserts that there is no meaning and purpose in life?
- What happens when mankind creates his own purposes?
- How does the Bible affirm the reality and goodness of the world?

- Without God, what does science based on materialism reduce the world to?
- What is the purpose of the church in relationship to mankind?
- Who was Jesus and why is it important that He informs us about God?
- What is a system of merit and how does it contrast with Christianity?
- How is Christianity unique in its system of salvation?
- How is Jesus involved in every point of this outline?

A Strong Christian Woman

Rebekah Colley

The world wants women to believe that strength is shown by fighting against that which “enslaves” us, such as morals, children, service, and the home. Biblical strength, however, comes not from our own merit, power, or talent, but through the humble giving of our lives to the Creator. Women, specifically, find strength in God through the intrinsic worth given through creation, their roles in their homes and the church, and their attitude of submission to the cross of Christ.

Strength comes from the intrinsic worth given at Creation

- Women, alongside men, carry the distinct honor of carrying the image of God. We are superior to all other living things on Earth, and have into a unique relationship to God (cf. Gen. 1:26-28; Acts 17:24-28).
- Women were glorified at Creation by completing both creation and mankind (Gen. 2:15-21).

Strength comes from fulfilling our role of cultivation in our homes and the church

- The role of physically cultivating a home is a difficult and honorable task that requires strength (Pro. 31:10-29).
- The physical cultivation of a household is a conduit for women to perform the most noble of all jobs—the spiritual development of those within their homes (cf. Pro. 31:26; Tit. 2:3-5).
- The church is the household of God, and through the church all women can be spiritual cultivators regardless of marital or parental status (cf. Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 5:1-2).

Strength comes from our attitude of submission to the cross of Christ.

- The cross teaches us the glory of submission. Jesus modeled the submission that he requires (Phil. 2:3-10).
- Submitting to the cross gives purpose and redemption to all areas of our life (cf. 1 Cor. 12:14-20; Rev. 21:5).

For Further Study

- God needs nothing, and we need everything (Acts 17:24-28). Discuss how this humble reliance is not degrading, but rather is the foundation for biblical self-esteem.
- Perhaps the greatest task of spiritual homemaking is teaching and encouraging our families to abhor what is evil and cling to what is good (Rom. 12:9). What does this look like in the lives of women throughout all walks of life?
- What are some practical ways in which women can cultivate spirituality within the church?
- Discuss Jesus’ submission to the Father as our model of submission in the home and the church.
- The Lord’s view of strength is different from the world’s view. Consider ways to conform our minds to God’s way of thinking and resist falling prey to the world’s viewpoint.

His Word is True!

Adam Orr

Be impressed with the way the Son of God viewed the Bible! The Adversary used each tool in his toolbox to bring about the ruination of heaven's plan for man's salvation. Appealing to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, the devil wanted nothing more than for Jesus to sin. Be impressed with the way the Son of God viewed the Bible! Jesus responded with the same expression three times, "It is written..." As followers of God and those who love Jesus, we must have the same love, admiration and trust in the pages of the Bible to supply us with every need in life.

However, we thank God that He has never demanded that we follow anything blindly, but has always encouraged us to view the evidence. While it is important and very telling to see that Jesus trusted the Bible to be God's word, what other evidences has God supplied to ensure we can trust the Bible to be His word? When we begin to compile and view the evidence, what we find is the Bible is undeniably from God and contains supernatural characteristics that no other book on our planet can boast.

We can trust the Bible because God has provided an abundance of evidence.

When we consider the Bible is not a single book, but is a library within itself, several internal evidences are found to show it is a book written by men, but authored by the Divine. The Bible is 66 books with 1,189 chapters and a total of 31,102 verses! And though it was written by about 40 different men over a period of roughly 1,500 years there is seen a perfect theme (God's plan for man's salvation), written in perfect unity and without any consequential contradiction! Comparing the words of the Bible to nature and the expanse of the world around us will show the Bible writers knew what the world of science would not know, in some cases, for millennia. However, beyond the amazing unity and miraculous knowledge of the universe in which we live, one of the greatest proofs for the Bible being from God is seen in prophecies made and then fulfilled. God has given us a mountain of internal and external evidence to prove we can trust the Bible to be Divine!

The Bible supplies all the needs of mankind still today.

Only from the Bible do we find satisfactory answers to the three greatest questions weighing on the hearts of men today. Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? If the Bible had never been written, we are left to our own devices and opinions for answering these questions. In supplying answers to these questions, the Bible gives us all we need for everyday living. How can I experience and know true happiness and joy? What should my goals in life look like? Who should I marry or have the deepest relationships and friendships with in this life? Many people are looking in all the wrong places to find answers to problems in life. God has richly supplied us with all we need to face the problems in our lives in His word, the Bible!

For Your Further Study

- List and research three areas of internal evidence that prove the Bible is true. Internal evidence is evidence from within the Bible. Consider for example the theme of the Bible, the unity of the Bible, etc.
- List and research prophecies made and fulfilled in the Bible and consider how this is evidence for the Bible being of supernatural origin.
- List and research external evidence that prove the Bible is true. External evidence is evidence outside of what the Bible says that prove it to be true. Consider for example the indestructibility of the Bible. Can you find times in history that men have tried, without success, to destroy the Bible?
- What are the three biggest questions that we as human beings can ask?
- How does the Bible help us to answer these three questions and by extension, to help us with any problems we may face in this life?

Convicted Congregations

Clay Bond

The church of our Lord is made up of individuals who have obeyed the gospel. These individuals make up the local congregation in any given area. Each congregation is autonomous, but each congregation has the same underlining purpose as they strive to be the New Testament church. Without question it takes congregational conviction to carry out this Divine mission to be separate from the world, but impactful.

Congregational conviction can be a powerful force within a community. Congregational conviction refers to the belief and commitment that members have to the Lord and to the mission the Lord has given His people.

Benefits to Congregational Conviction:

- Unity And Fellowship
 - Ephesians 4:1-4
 - Romans 15:6
- Spiritual Growth
 - Colossians 1:9-10
 - 2 Peter 1:5-7
- An Atmosphere For Worship
 - John 4:23-24
 - Psalm 122:1
- Mission Minded People
 - Matthew 28:18-20
 - Proverbs 11:30

Challenges to Congregational Conviction

- False Doctrine
 - Matthew 7:15
- Laziness
 - Revelation 3:14-22
 - Haggai 1:4
- Worldliness
 - Romans 12:1-2
 - James 4:1-4
- Problems
 - Philippians 2:14
 - Philippians 4:1-2

Further Study:

Things what will ensure Congregational Conviction:

- Strong Leadership
 - 1 Timothy 3
- Strong Preaching

- 2 Timothy 4:2
- Strong Membership
 - 2 Thessalonians 1:3
- Strong Bible Classes
 - Titus 2:3

When congregation conviction is present amazing things will happen. Pettiness and squabbles and infighting will cease as members strive for a unified goal.

Rightly Dividing the Word

Anita Genduso

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

Why is it so very important for women to study the Word of God? If we want to have a godly influence on those around us, then we must know God’s will for our lives. How will we best protect our own faith during the trials and challenges of life? (Rom. 10:17) How do we become the godly help meet for our husbands? (Gen. 2:18; Eph. 5; Col.3; 1 Tim. 3; 1 Pet. 3) How do we raise our children to love God first and foremost? (Eph. 6) Older woman, what do we teach the younger women? (Tit. 2) How do we prepare to teach Bible classes? (Phil. 4:8-9) How are we going to share the gospel with those we meet along the way? (Matt. 28:18-20; John 21) The key to being a positive influence in all these areas begins by personally investing in the study of God’s word. (1 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Let’s explore in a very practical way how to rightly divide the word of truth. “Rightly dividing” is the idea of a cut with a single, straight stroke, describing keen accuracy. It is the same Greek word used in Hebrews 4:12 to describe the Word of God as “sharper than any two-edged sword,” again denoting accuracy.

So, how do we go about this process of studying God’s Word accurately? Here are some suggestions:

- Resolve to learn God’s Word. Get started TODAY. Bible Study is the most important habit we will ever develop or improve. Second Timothy 2:15 reminds us that we must give our best effort if we are to receive our God’s approval. “Study” indicates a diligent, earnest effort. “Workman” reminds us that there is a job we must do, again pointing to deliberate energy invested. Resolve to get started!
- Organize for success. Be deliberate in setting up a place and non-negotiable time for routine study. Having study tools ready and organized will set us up for success!
- Choose what to Study. Select a text, topic, character, parallel accounts, or even a sound prepared study. Use Daily Bible Reading, Sermons, and Bible classes as a place to begin a deeper study.
- Make it Challenging. Don’t be afraid to tackle a challenging book or topic. Evaluate personal study habits and decide how to stretch and grow into a more effective student of the word.
- Read the entire text/book several times. Read from multiple translations. The flow of the text and the full intended picture will become evident. Note areas to study further.

- Establish the Context. Read the paragraphs surrounding the text. Read the chapters before and after. Read the whole book or section being studied. Consider the book's place in the over-arching redemptive story of the Bible.
- Write it down. Keep a notebook and favorite pen or pencil at the ready.
- Slow Down. Notice the key words and phrases, themes, people, and places. Make a note of them and look them up. Pay attention to lists, connections, contrasts, and cross references. Use a Bible dictionary to define words. Use a Concordance to see where else a word is similarly used.
- Make note of Lessons Learned. The goal is to settle God's Word in our hearts and apply what we have studied. Then we are ready to share what we have learned.
- Keep it Simple! Begin where you are! Make one change in improving your Bible study habits. Consider a prepared study that will get you started and focused on studying God's Word.

For Further Study

- Read through Proverbs 31:10-31. Look up and define the word "virtuous." Notice all the people that the virtuous woman influenced in a positive way. Write the list in your notebook, along with the godly influence portrayed.
- Buy two copies of "The Read Peace" by Evelyn Bonner. (One to keep and one to share.) Complete this study of Encouragement and encourage another sister as well.
- Read Titus 2:3-5. Write down these verses. Look up the qualities listed that an older woman should teach the younger women. Define any unfamiliar terms. Choose an item in this list you need to focus on and develop. Notice the connective term "likewise."

Rightly Dividing the Word (2)

Kathy Scott

There are many resources available to aid in Bible study. It is important to remember that all the aids and resources we will examine are no substitute for the Bible itself. No matter what topic or book of the Bible we might study, we should always go first to the Bible and read the book or every item about the topic from God's word. The resources are only an aid to enhance our study and possibly give us some insight that others have shared.

- Where do I start to study? If you have ever asked that question, you will understand that we should have a plan for our study of the Bible. Choosing a subject often depends on the purpose you have in mind. Is it for a devotional you have with family or with others in a class setting? Will you be presenting a lesson or a series of lessons for a ladies class or perhaps a ladies day event? What about having an evangelism study with a prospect? These are the types of lessons that require planning and preparation.
- The personal study you do will be enriched if you again first study the Bible and all that it says on your topic. You can also benefit from using more than one version of the Bible to compare translations. Depending on which version you prefer, you might want to use another English translation to clarify a passage.
- The King James Version is still a popular version to study. The New King James Version is close to the KJV with the exception that it replaces some of the Old English words with more contemporary terms. The English Standard Version is a newer edition that you may find useful as well. I recommend avoiding the New International Version because it is not a word-for-word translation and contains elements of denominational error. Another popular translation is the American Standard Version.

Among the resources available commentaries are good to explore. In our brotherhood the Denton/Schertz Lectures are among the best. In today's electronic age it is good to know that the entire series of lectures is available on a thumb drive (USB drive) and is available from Azimuth Media in CD rom format or digital download as well.

- All of the Denton/Schertz Lectures from the beginning are available from Azimuth Media, including volumes that are no longer in print. There are commentaries by members of the Lord's church on every book in the Bible in this series. You will find verse by verse studies of every book and also discussions on difficult passages in the Bible.
- Lectureship books from other brotherhood congregations include Shenandoah Lectures available from Sain Publications in Pulaski, Tennessee.
- The Southwest Lectures are a source close to home since we have the privilege of being in the congregation that supported them.
- The Fort Worth Lectures series is another valuable resource. These are also available from Azimuth Media.
- The Lubbock Lectures hosted by the Southside Church of Christ is another series of books to consider. The lectures are archived at www.oabs.org.

Resources such as a good Bible dictionary and a concordance are very helpful. When you need to read several passages about a certain subject, a concordance can be an efficient guide to find them. Strong's concordance is exhaustive, meaning that every term used can be located in it. Your Bible likely has a smaller concordance in the back which can be useful. Another type of volume that is good to consider is Nave's Topical Bible, which lists subjects alphabetically and points to each instance where the subject is mentioned.

- One example of a thorough Bible dictionary is Zondervan's Illustrated Bible Dictionary. It has over 7,200 entries on topics such as archaeological findings, maps, and illustrations. It is a rich source of information.
- Halley's Bible Handbook is a very good source of information with maps and photographs and illustrations. It has content on how we got the Bible and many suggestions on how to study.
- You can also benefit from a good Bible Atlas. One that is recommended is Baker's Bible Atlas by Charles F. Pfeiffer published by Baker Book House Company. The Bible is based upon real people and places so it is always good to know and show where the events of the Bible took place. With maps and text to give background on Bible history, this atlas can bring additional insight into the lives of Bible people and where they lived.

Online resources are very useful and varied. When you have questions about doctrine one excellent source is [Christian Courier.com](http://ChristianCourier.com). There are many articles available on the website and may be printed at home. It was started by brother Wayne Jackson, and is now managed by his son Jason.

- Christian Courier also has a monthly publication you may consider subscribing to, and you will find informative articles on various topics each month.
- Other online sources can be found at [Apologetics Press.org](http://ApologeticsPress.org). Their main interest is in the area of Christian evidences, but they also have other materials such as magazines, Reason and Revelation, and a magazine for young people, Discover. The website contains many video lessons on a variety of subjects, and can be very useful evangelism tools.
- Another online source is World Video Bible School. This website has video lessons that are for all ages and is another good source of evangelism tools. You will find their lessons very informative and faith-building.
- You may also consider Online Academy of Biblical Studies or oabs.org. This is an online school and a source of lectures from brotherhood congregations. For example you can find the recent Lubbock Lectures at their site.
- Another source online is Tullstar. This is a ministry that has recorded lectureships and other events for many years. They have many excellent materials in their archives for you to explore.

This really is an introduction to sources you can use in Bible study, and certainly not an all-inclusive list. As mentioned before, these are aids in Bible study and are not meant to substitute for reading and meditating on the Bible itself. Always take what materials you use and be sure to examine them for scriptural accuracy. The Bible is inspired, but later writings and these resources are not.

Convicted Leadership

Doyle Brooks

Convicted Leadership is but a decision in the moment for some or a lifetime away for others. The need for leadership in all aspects of life is a must. Without leadership there is a lack of direction and care leaving low to no success in the endeavor. God has a plan for needed leadership that He has shared in His word. He calls for men to be convicted leaders of self, their family, and the church. Where do we as individuals find ourselves in this call? We can allow a little pressure of serving self to divert a lifetime of Godly leadership. What stands in our way? Are we God's men or not?

We must first decide in ourselves that we are going to be God's man. Many deceive themselves into thinking they have made that decision but what their actions or inactions show is a different picture.

Moses had the same reservations in trusting God concerning his capabilities (Ex. 3:11-4:14). Moses' excuses angered God. Do our excuses and inactions anger God? What do we show God when we know what needs to be done and don't act or lead? A lack of trust in Him? A lack of love for His plan? A lack of discipleship (John 8:31)?

Do we have the same excuses as Moses when it comes to God's work and expectations? Why? If scripture gives us all that is needed (2 Tim 3:16-17) to be a "man of God", why do many not seek to have God's will followed? How can we have success in our Christian walk, our homes, and the church if we do not follow or uphold God's will? Convicted Leadership must start with you and me as individuals (Eph. 6:4, Acts 20:28).

Defining our Terms:

- Conviction: Convinced of correct ways (God's). Such that drive a person to move forward with their path focused/fortified based on these "correct ways".
- Convicted Leadership: Convinced that God's ways are true/best and move with determination to see His ways upheld and practiced. Serving others on God's behalf.
- Faith: Conviction guided by God through His word.

Consider the leadership of the Godhead: vision/planning before creation, active, patient, consistent, clear lines of communication, self-sacrificing, forgiving, offering love and adoption to all who are faithful, and just. What great examples of leadership!

Considering God's character, are you a help or hinderance to yourself, your family, & God's family (1 Pet. 2:21, Heb. 13:7)?

- Are you overbearing (Self-centered – enjoying the power over others)?
- Are you indifferent (Self-centered – not concerned with God or others)?
- Are you weak (Self-centered - not wanting to bother self with difficult situations)?
- OR Are you scripturally grounded, respectful to God while helping/guiding self, your family, and His family (Selfless – seeking God's way for best of all)?
- Are you patient, seeking to understand and help (Selfless – patiently seeking their best)?

- Are you focused on achieving the best outcome (Selfless – striving for best outcome)?

When will we adjust our responses to God and say “I will...” to our maker, sustainer, and Father? For if we will plant and water, He will give the increase (1 Cor. 3:7).

For Further Study

- If God so loved the world that He gave His son, to what extent should we push ourselves to help with His plan (2 Tim 3:16-17, Eph. 1:9-12)?
- What does “Fight” mean in 1 Tim 6:2-12?
- Can we be like Moses and go lead even if we made excuses before (Ex 4:18-20)?
- What are some of the temptations Satan presents to the convicted leader?

Women who make Disciples

Erin Moore

In the twenty-eighth chapter of the book of Matthew, Christians are commanded to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” This is a command for both men and women, young and old, who are part of Christ’s body.

Women who make disciples understand soul-winning’s urgency

- Making disciples requires concern for where others will spend eternity (Pro. 11:30; Jas. 5:19-20)
- Making disciples is self-less (Phil. 2:1-11)
- Making disciples has the potential to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6)
- Making disciples is commanded (Matt. 28:19-20)

Women who make disciples see soul-winning as a lifestyle, not just part of their life

- Be certain about your own soul, first (Heb. 5:12-14, Heb. 10:19-23)
- Be prayerful about soul-winning (Rom. 10:1)
- Be confident in your ability to “soul-win”:
 - The Lord would not give us a task that we could not accomplish (Matt. 28:19-20)
 - Even the “small” things can bring glory to God and have an impact on others (Matt. 25:40)
 - The seed is the word of God, not my talents or skills (Luke 8:11). The Gospel is God’s power, not my eloquent words of perfect Bible knowledge (Luke 8:11; Rom. 1:16)
- Be conscientious about your conduct and its impact on soul-winning:
 - “When they see your respectful and pure conduct...” (1 Pet. 3:2, 2:12)
 - “For out of the heart comes...” (Matt. 15:19)
 - “I have stored up Your word in my heart...” (Ps.119:11)
 - “Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works...” (Tit. 2:7)
 - “...set the believers an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, purity...” (1 Tim. 4:12)

Women who make disciples take inventory of their sphere of influence

- Make disciples in your home. Don’t overlook the importance of the great commission among those with whom we spend the most time (Deu. 11:19, 2 Tim. 1:5)
- Make disciples in your unique sphere of influence (Matt. 5:13-16, Acts 9:36)
- (Continue to) Make disciples within the church body (Heb.10:24-25, Eph. 4:15-16)
- Make disciples, abroad. Foreign Missions aren’t “just for men,” either. (Acts 18:18-19)

Women who make disciples...make disciples of Christ, not themselves

- They emphasize the Lordship of Jesus (Gal. 2:20)
- They eliminate a desire to follow anyone but Christ (1 Cor. 1:10-17)
- They encourage unity among Christian sisters (Phil. 4:2-3)

For Further Study

- Reflect on how you are currently involved in striving to make disciples.
- What are some practical ways that you can fulfill the command to make disciples?
- Choose one or two practical, tangible ways to begin striving to be more evangelistic in your home, community, workplace, social media, or church body. Spend time praying about these efforts.
- Take an honest look at your life. What are some changes that you need to make in order to “show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works”? Pray and plan to make these changes.

I Know My Redeemer Lives!

Jim Lloyd

"I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death" (Rev. 1:18).

A very attractive element of Christianity relates to its roots in history. Many of the world religions rest merely on the proverbs of a "wise" man. Some are even built entirely on what an individual claims God told them to say and do. Christianity however is not based on human wisdom, nor is it based on hearsay. The resurrection of Jesus is a hardened fact of history. There is evidence. There are countless witnesses. Christianity stands on solid ground because it stands on the greatest event in human history. The resurrection of Jesus!

5 Reasons I Believe:

- Jesus' own testimony. He spoke openly about his death and resurrection (Matt. 12:40, 17:22-23, 26:59-64, 27:62-64). Some allege that after Jesus' death, His followers made up the story of the resurrection as a plan B. Since they believed plan A was for Jesus to physically take the throne as King, but He died instead, they needed a back-up plan. But the fact is, Jesus always said His death and resurrection was plan A. The enemy was never Rome. He came to defeat the "last enemy".....death!
- The empty tomb. If you believe in the existence of an all-powerful God, then the resurrection isn't problematic for you. However, if you throw God out, you are left with naturalism, and you cannot accept any of the miracles of the Bible. There can be no virgin birth, no walking on water, no feeding of the thousands, and certainly no resurrection. The evidence does not matter if one is predisposed to believe what they want to believe. The problem with Christianity is not that God left us without evidence. The problem is man's refusal to accept obvious truths (read Romans 1).
- The witnesses. The large number of witnesses, many of whom are named in the New Testament, is important. But equally important is the deafening silence from the opposition. Where are the naysayers from the first century? Where are the dissenters? The fact that evil men had to resort to murdering Christians to shut their mouths is meaningful.
- The disciple's transformation. The conversion of Saul is important evidence in support of the resurrection of Jesus. Why would a devout hater of Christians become a Christian himself "over night?" The answer – because he saw the resurrected Lord!
- A growing and thriving church. Peter said it best, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, but we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we were eye-witnesses of His majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16). Perhaps you've seen the momentum of people who get excited over something that isn't even true. Eventually time wins out and that momentum dies. Christianity is still thriving today. Why? Because Jesus still rules and reigns over His church (Acts 2:32-36, Eph. 1:22-23).

For Further Study:

- What does it take to convince you that something is true, or that an event you did not personally witness actually happened? What is your standard of proof? The death and

resurrection of Jesus did not happen in a dark alley somewhere. As Paul said to Agrippa, “this thing was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:26).

- Jesus predicted His own death and resurrection....a rather foolish thing to do if one is trying to start a “movement” knowing they cannot fulfill such a claim. Read Luke 9:22, 9:44-45, 18:31-34, 24:6-8, 24:44-49 and note both the multiple times Jesus tells the disciples He must die and rise, but also the multiple times Luke tells us the disciples did not understand.
- Colossians 2:12 tells Jesus was raised by the power of God. Paul’s reason for saying this is to remind Christians that it is the same power of God that raised us up out of the waters of baptism. Are you living the resurrected life?

I Know Whom I Have Believed!

Eric L. Owens

In his second epistle to Timothy Paul urges Timothy to be faithful and live up to the calling of the Lord. One of the ways that Paul does that, is by assuring Timothy that he is personally convinced of the life they are living. Paul wants Timothy to fight the good fight of faith and finish the fight victoriously, like he will (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Paul uses multiple lines of thought to encourage Timothy.

- Paul's charge: Paul is an apostle (one sent by Christ Jesus) and Timothy is his son in the gospel (1:1-2).
- Paul reminds Timothy of their closeness in service to the Lord. He also reminds him of their work and tears (1:3-4).
- Paul reminds Timothy of the faithful family he has and the rearing he received from his mother and grandmother (1:5-6).
- Paul reminds Timothy of God's blessing (1:7).
- Paul exhorts Timothy participate in the fight for the Lord (1:8).
- Paul reminds Timothy of God's call (1:9).
- Paul reminds Timothy of Christ victory (1:10).
- Paul reminds Timothy of his calling from the Lord (1:11).
- Paul exhorts Timothy based on his own personal conviction (1:12).

Paul's point is made in verse 12

- For this reason - Christ, the gospel, the resurrection.
- I suffer these things - I am willing to suffer all things.
- I am not ashamed - I have boldness and confidence, not shame or timidity.
- For I know whom I have believed - certainty, truth, knowledge of Him.
- I am convinced - persuaded, sure, firm, fixed, convicted.
- That He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him - faith in his power to protect my soul, and take me safely home to heaven.
- Until that day - until the day that I die (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Conclusion

- Paul has and will continue to live faithfully in service to the Lord.
- He has committed his soul to the keeping of the Lord.
- Because the Lord rose from the dead, Paul knows he will rise from the dead.
- Paul is an eyewitness to the resurrected Christ.
- Paul has personally taught Timothy, he is his son in the faith.
- Whether through persecution or life's circumstances, Timothy is struggling.
- Paul assures Timothy by many proofs and reminders.
- Chief is Paul's own conviction, life, service and even impending death in service to the Lord.
- He does not want Timothy to give up on the only hope of eternal life with God and that is a faithful life lived for Jesus Christ.
- Paul loved Timothy but he was effectively telling him, I'm going to heaven with or without you my son.

For Further Study

- How should we encourage others to remain faithful or reenter the fight?
- Can our faithful lives be used as an example and encouragement for others?
- Paul used other things to try to encourage Timothy. How would they help?
 - Timothy's own responsibility (1:13-14)
 - False teachers (1:15)
 - Other faithful people (1:16-18)
- What does being a soldier imply about suffering (2:1-4; 3:12)?
- How can the Scriptures be used to encourage one to faithfulness (3:15-17)?
- Timothy would eventually have to make a decision for faithful living, as we all must with that in mind explain (4:1-8).
 - Paul's charge for Timothy to preach (4:1-2)
 - Paul's warning about people and their reactions (4:3-4)
 - Paul's exhortation for Timothy to be faithful (4:5)
 - Paul's assurance of his victory and all who are faithful (4:6-8).

When we struggle, when we are faced with death. May we all say and live for ourselves and the encouragement of others, what Paul said to Timothy.

"For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day"
(2 Tim. 1:12).

Living in a Post-Truth World

Jordan Moore

How can we stand for the truth in a post-truth world? How can we prove that truth is knowable? What practical suggestions can be given to help bring people to a knowledge and love of the truth?

We must be able to Define the Concept of Truth (John 18:38)

• What truth is NOT:

- NEVER determined by the human mind (Acts 17:16-21)
- NEVER determined by the human heart or pragmatism (Jer. 17:9-10; Matt. 15:19)
- NEVER determined by the majority or greatest good (Matt. 27:22-23)
- NEVER determined by coherence with other philosophies or beliefs (Rom. 1:22-26)

• What truth IS:

- ONLY determined by that which corresponds with reality; to know what objectively IS
- IS dependent on a reference point (not the same idea as truth being relative)
- IS never changing or contradictory, and is independent of our perceptions (Ps. 100:5; 117:2)
- IS rooted in an ultimate mind - to say what is wrong, you must know what's right. To know what is right there must be a standard of right. What is true is what God says (Deu. 32:4; Ps. 119:160).

We must be able to Defend the Reality of Truth (Acts 26:25)

- **A Reality to Grasp** - Living in a world that does not recognize truth is untenable, so get motivated!
- **A Mindset to Recognize** - people don't want there to be truth because it requires morality and accountability; when people fight against truth, they practice an exercise in futility (Acts 26:14)
- **A Concept to Know** - A "silver bullet" to keep in your pocket: "Law of Non-Contradiction." States that opposite ideas cannot both be true at the same time (i.e. the earth is round vs the earth is not round)
- **A Tactic to Employ** - Turn any false statement/allegation about the absence of or fluidity of truth on itself (i.e. when someone says, "there's no objective truth," simply ask, "is that objectively true?")
- **A Quality to Encourage and Exemplify** - An honest heart to accept the truth.
 - Ask the skeptic: "If Christianity is true, would you become a Christian?"
 - We, also, must recognize the fact that if Christianity is NOT true and Christ didn't rise from the dead, then we must reject it (1 Cor. 15:14-15). Don't buy it just because you like it - only buy it if it's true!
 - "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important." - C.S. Lewis

We must especially Know THE Ultimate Truth (John 14:6).

- **Know the Truth's Identity:** Jesus Christ (John 1:14, 17; 14:6)

- Before we can defend truth, we must know truth ourselves. One may argue that looks like knowing the scriptures backwards and forwards. While true, a more complete layer must be added to that.
- **Consider:**
 - Like a computer program is dependent on its author, so too is truth dependent on its Author.
 - God is the Author, and is therefore, the origin of truth. Without God, your version of reality is just as arguable as my version of reality. With the ultimate Programmer, what He says is the reality.
 - For us to know truth, he must reveal it to us. Jesus is the revelation of truth.
 - Everything makes sense in light of Jesus. Without His frame of reference, we have no hope, no purpose, no reason for living. He has revealed the most important and most critical truth: God created you, you exist for His glory, eternity is coming, so submit to His authority (Mk 12:28-34)
- **Know the Truth's teachings (John 17:17; 6:68)** – When we see Jesus as the ultimate truth, the modern-day ethics of sexuality and identity (or any other dogma) will take a backseat.
- **Know the Truth's character (Matt. 11:29; Luke 9:56; 2 Cor. 10:1; Phil. 2:7-8)** - The truth is not just rules to follow, but a heart, a mindset, and attitude to develop. Jesus was meek, humble, selfless, etc.

We must consistently Live Out the Truth (3 John 1:4).

- **Live Out Truth's Teachings (Matt. 23:4)** - The Pharisees often bound traditions on others but would not abide by those traditions, themselves. Do we do the same with truth? Yes, truth is bound – but are we undermining truth by teaching it and yet not living it, ourselves?
- **Live Out Truth's Character (Hos. 6:6; Pro. 21:3; Matt. 9:13)** - “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” This doesn’t mean that sacrifice and obedience to the truth are unimportant. But, if I follow every command and obey every crossing of the ‘t’ and dotting of the ‘i,’ yet do it without the proper attitude and character, then I am not living in truth.
- **Live Out Truth's Message (Ps. 119:43)** - Truth's message is a message of hope, not of despair! As Carl Garner used to say, “some Christians live their life as if they'd been weaned on a sour pickle!”

We must faithfully Teach the Truth – Some final thoughts and questions for personal reflection:

- **Teach the Truth with Eternity in View (Pro. 11:30)** – Am I trying to win an argument, or a soul?
- **Teach the Truth with Boldness (Phil. 1:14)** – Sadly, many religious individuals are giving in to the whims of the culture. What areas of the truth am I already, or might I be prone to compromising?
- **Teach the Truth with Humility (Acts 18:24-28)** – Is it even in the realm of possibility that I am not aligned with the truth? Am I humble enough to be taken aside to have the way of God more accurately taught to me, if the situation was warranted?
- **Teach the Truth with Integrity (2 Pet. 3:16-18)** – Do I ever stop to ask, “does the verse really mean what I’m saying it means?” Do I apply the same logic that I use to defeat false doctrines to the doctrines to which I already hold?

- **Teach the Truth in Love (Eph. 4:15)** – Though the word of God is a sword (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12), it sometimes seems that the truth is used as a battle axe to make as many enemies as possible – instead of being used to win others to the Lord. At times, it's almost as if this mindset is justified with Paul's words, "Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth (Gal. 4:16)? Am I guilty of this?"
- **Teach the Truth with Balance (Acts 20:27)** – Are there certain topics or doctrines that are pets of mine? Are there other topics or doctrines that I shy away from or avoid because of controversy?

What God Has Joined Together

Kerry Clark

You are certainly aware of the fact that divorce is prevalent in our society. Even though in recent years it has been reported that divorce numbers have dropped in America, what is often conveniently left out of the statistics is the fact that some states have stopped keeping track of the number of divorces that occur in their respective states. This should remind us of something that Mark Twain wrote many years ago, "Figures don't lie; but liars figure." The truth is that divorce is far too common in our country.

I found this quote quite interesting:

In modern life, of course, the reasons for divorce go well beyond adultery, and rapid remarriage is common. Many "churches" have privately abandoned the Bible's teaching on divorce. American law has pushed them along. For many years, divorce was a tort--legally possible only if one party to the marriage contract had violated it. Ronald Reagan, as governor of California, signed a no-fault divorce bill in 1970, and within 15 years every state in the union had a similar law. The cultural conversation shifted away from marriage's mutual obligations--codified in law--and toward personal fulfillment.

Key Principles and Scriptures:

- **God's Law for Marriage.** In the beginning, God created one male and one female (Gen. 2:15-25). God's plan was and is for one man to marry one woman and death was to be the only thing which severed this bond (Rom. 7:1-3).
- **Marriage is Permanent.** We live in a society where it seems that everything is disposable. Sadly, this attitude has been adopted by many concerning marriage as well. Beginning with the first marriage in Genesis 2 and continuing throughout every age, God has demanded that marriage is a covenant between a man, a woman, and God which is to last a lifetime (Rom. 7:1-3). Jesus affirmed this repeatedly (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18). The apostles, following the teachings of their Master Jesus, reiterated what He taught (Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7). The Bible is crystal clear that God's ideal will for humans is that one man should marry one woman and that they should remain married until death severs that sacred bond.
- **God Hates Divorce.** This fact is clearly taught in Malachi 2:14-17,

"Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife

of his youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously. Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?"

God hates divorce and this is seen in the safeguards He has placed protecting marriage (Matt. 19:3-9). The disciples were so shocked by the stringent laws Jesus placed upon marriage and divorce that they felt it was better not to marry (Matt. 19:10-12).

- **Fornication is the Only Reason for Divorce.** The Greek word that Jesus used, which is translated fornication, means, "...sexual intercourse...it stands for, or includes adultery..." Divorce, then, is acceptable to God only when one spouse has committed fornication against his/her spouse (Matt. 5:32; 19:9).
- **The High Cost of Divorce.** It is an indisputable fact that divorce is devastating. It is devastating to the husband, the wife, the children, and the nation and more importantly to the church. In reality, only God truly knows the damage that divorce has done to His children.
 - How often have we seen a man who has faithfully preached the truth on marriage, divorce, and remarriage change his teaching because one of his loved ones has divorced and remarried against God's will? How many congregations of the Lord's church have we seen split because men are simply unwilling to abide by God's marriage law? How many men have we seen leave the church because they wanted a divorce that was contrary to the teachings of the Bible? Sadly, how many women have we seen do the same thing? The high cost of divorce is devastating the Lord's church and so many times we sit idly by and watch it happen.
 - Also, it does not take a trained counselor or psychiatrist to see the damage that has been done to children by divorce. The number of American children whose parents divorce is truly staggering. The number of children from broken homes was 12 out of 100 in 1958; now it is difficult to find the number of broken homes in America. Children from divorced parents often have a much harder time in school, they tend to be more aggressive, especially the males. This reminds me of an incident in Pilanesberg National Park in South Africa. Young male elephants from other parks were culled out and given to the Pilanesberg National Park. These young male elephants were released without any older males being present. Park rangers began finding dead rhinos in the park in the mid 90's. No one knew who the culprits were until they figured out that it was these young male elephants. When six forty-year-old male elephants was introduced to the park, the young males settled down. Sadly, we see similar situations among the youth of America. Statistics show that many children of divorce grow up without a father. It has been suggested that most children of divorce end up losing all their ties with their father.

Protecting Your Marriage. Here are a few ideas that will help protect your marriage from divorce.

- Never consider divorce as an option. God's plan is for you to stay married for life (Gen. 2:18-24). God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16). Therefore, the prudent person will not consider divorce as an option unless it is the final and only option.
- Learn to forgive (Col. 3:13). Being unforgiving should never happen among God's people. We, of all people, should understand the joy of forgiveness (Matt. 6:15). Continually bringing up past mistakes will not help us solve present problems.
- Don't be overly critical (Pro. 19:11). It is very easy for us to fall into the trap of being a finding fault (1 Cor. 13:5). Resist this urge. If we counted our blessings instead of keeping track of someone else's supposed faults, how much better off would we, and the world, be?
- Learn to communicate (Jas. 1:19). It has been said that a lack of communication is one of the primary reasons for divorce. We need to learn to listen to what our mate is saying, not plotting our next come-back (Pro. 18:13).
- Don't compare your mate to someone else (2 Cor. 10:7-12). An elder's wife once cautioned a group of young married men to never compare your wife's cooking to your mother's. I have found that to be extremely good advice!
- Pray for your marriage (Phil. 4:6). Pray to God to help you be a better spouse. Thank God for the qualities you see in your spouse. When you sin, then "fess up" and ask God to forgive you for your short comings.
- Center your marriage on the Bible (Ps. 119:105). It is so easy for us in our fast-paced society to forget God. We need to focus our attention and our lives upon God and His Will (Matt. 6:33).

Conclusion

God's plan for man concerning marriage is simple and wonderful. God does not want us to not be alone (Gen. 2:18), but He wants us to find a loving spouse and to spend the rest of our life here on this earth in marital bliss. Someone has said that our marriage can be a foretaste of heaven, or it can be a foretaste of hell! Obviously, God wants us to have a foretaste of heaven here on earth in our marriage.

God hates divorce because He alone fully understands all the misery that it brings upon His children. We should do everything we can to insulate our homes from this scourge of society.

For Further Study

- What is God's Law for marriage and where is it found in the Bible?
- How long does God expect a marriage to last?
- What safeguards has God put in place to protect marriage?
- Why does God hate divorce?
- How can we protect our marriages from divorce?

A Prepared Heart (Dan. 1:8)

Tyler Bush

Everything important takes preparation. Whether it be work, projects, marriage, raising children, salvation or living the Christian life; it helps to know what is needed in order to be successful and to see it through (Luke 14:25-33). Daniel and his situation in Daniel chapter 1 provides an excellent reflection of our situation today. What can we learn from a decisive young man who was intentional about not compromising in the face of a compromised world?

Daniel Was In A Worldly Situation – v1-7

Just as Daniel was not only a citizen of Israel but also a foreigner captive in Babylon, so likewise we are citizens of Heaven sojourning as foreigners in this world. How can we keep from conforming to this world?

Daniel Prepared His Heart – v8

Just as Daniel prepared his heart to not defile himself with the temptations and lifestyle of Babylon, so likewise we must prepare ourselves to not give in to what the world is offering. To prepare one's heart is to make an intentional and decisive choice to hold to God's will and not compromise when the temptation is presented to us. This is a decision that takes place before the battle begins, not during, lest we be overcome.

God Was With Daniel – v9

The greatest confidence we can have in this world is that God is with us. But God's presence and approval will only rest on us if we, like Daniel, choose God first (Jas. 4:7-10).

The World Thinks They Know Best – v10

The chief of eunuchs' loyalty was to the king of Babylon. He was motivated by fear. He also thought Daniel was wrong. Likewise, people today are not serving the King of kings, but have put falsehood on the throne. Many people are motivated by fear of not fitting in, rejection, or lack of inclusion. Many are convinced God's way is the wrong way. Let us remember where our loyalty lies; let us not be afraid; let us hold to truth.

Daniel Navigated Situations Wisely – v11-14

People today have bought into emotionalism. They believe what they feel, and feel without restraint. Navigating people's emotions can be rough waters. Some are given to insanity, but some are misinformed. In a world where such behavior is becoming increasingly more common, there is an urgency for us to keep a cool head, be sensible, and walk circumspectly. Our hope is that souls will be saved.

God's Way Is Always Right – v15,16

Despite what the king, or the eunuch, or the world may think, God's way is better.

God Exalts Those Who Serve Him – v17-21

Daniel humbly clung to God's way, so God exalted him. All of God's servants can expect such from our fair and righteous God.

For Further Study

- What kind of ungodliness might we encounter in the world?
- Can you think of other practical ways to "prepare your heart?"
- Can you think of other Bible examples who "prepared their heart?"
- When the moment comes, what are some sensible ways to handle insensible woke culture?

He Made them Male and Female

John Haffner

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27). Despite the Bible’s clear teaching, contrary doctrines pervade many sectors of our society. We must realize that Christians do struggle with questions relating to gender. It is required that you would be equipped to affirm the truth. What’s more, even if the church didn’t experience issues relating to this topic, the world certainly does. Since we make it our aim to evangelize effectively, we must be prepared to respond to the issue of transgenderism with the same clarity, compassion, and wisdom with which we address any topic.

Understanding Terminology

- Transgender – of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity differs from the sex the person was identified as having at birth.
- Gender Dysphoria – a distressed state arising from conflict between a person's gender identity and the sex the person was identified as having at birth.
- Transition (Def 3) – a process by which a transgender or nonbinary person comes to live in accordance with their gender identity through changes to their appearance and presentation often with the aid of medical procedures and therapies. (From the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary)

According to the National Institute of Health, it is estimated that 1.4 million Americans and 25 million people worldwide identify as transgender and that 0.6% of Americans experience gender dysphoria. It is a real problem in which the biological realities of a person’s body do not match the gender they feel they are or should be. This sense of unease or dissatisfaction may be intense and can lead to anxiety, depression, or even suicide. To ease such a person’s suffering, “gender affirmation services” are sometimes used to transition the person’s body to match their own sense of gender more closely. These services can be either surgical or nonsurgical, including hormone therapy, genital reconstruction, facial plastic surgery, speech therapy, psychiatric services, etc.

Uncovering Truth:

- The Bible teaches that gender is a creation of God (Gen. 1:26-27; Matt. 19:4).
- The Bible teaches that gender is established prior to birth (Luke 1:36).
- The Bible teaches that rebellion against God’s order and design is sinful (Rom. 1:18-32).

Utilizing Training:

- We are trained to speak the truth, not to accommodate error (Eph. 4:15, 25)
- We are trained to value all people, not to hate them (1 Pet. 2:17).
- We are trained to point to Jesus, not to create a barrier (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

For Further Study

- What sources are currently influencing Americans to view gender as nonbinary and/or fluid? List several examples.

- Does the responsibility of teaching young people about gender rest with parents, church leadership, schools, or a combination of these? Discuss your reasoning.
- What does God require of a person who has been living in sin? What would be required of a person who wants to repent of presenting themselves as a different gender?
- Suppose you heard a member of the Lord's church say, "I think transgender people are disgusting!" How would you respond to their statement? What scriptures should help us form our view of a person struggling with their gender identity?
- Suppose you heard a member of the Lord's church say, "I don't see anything wrong with calling someone by their preferred pronouns." How would you respond? What scriptures should help us form our responses to a person struggling with their gender identity?
- Why is it better to state God's teaching on gender rather than our personal feelings or opinions on the matter? How can a discussion on gender lead to a discussion on the existence of God and/or the inspiration of the Bible?
- Read Matthew 9:9-13 and 2 Peter 3:9. What is God's desire concerning every man and woman? Would I be aligned with His view if I refuse to associate with transgender people? How could I demonstrate that I do not wish them to perish?

Convicted Families

Carl McCann

Sadly, the home is in danger. For far too long the Devil has successfully caused the deterioration of God's divinely established institution (Gen. 2:18ff; Matt. 19:1-10). Outwardly, we see rampant divorce between parents, nefarious neglect of time, and pandemic pain in the faces of children so horribly affected by the erosion of the family unit. It is sobering to stop and think of how many families we know whose lives have been torn apart by the Devil. The apostle Paul correctly warned in 2 Corinthians 2:11, "lest Satan take advantage of us; for we are ignorant of his devices." What can we do to protect our homes? How can we help those who are suffering because the Devil has been successful in destroying their home?

Educate

Parents must educate themselves. The moral climate of America is vastly different from a decade ago. Humanism (the belief that humans are to be the only standard by which all things are to be judged) and all of its dangerous tenants are the driving force in our current culture. God has been dethroned and man has become his own god (Rom. 1:18ff). This ideology invades our lives through so many avenues (TV, music, internet, companions, etc), it behooves us to educate ourselves and our children as to its many dangers (cf. Pro. 14:12; Deu. 6:4-9; Eph. 6:4).

Dedicate

Parents must truly dedicate themselves to God and the work Christians are called upon to do. At this juncture I would like to consider a word – capitulate! Generally this word which means "to cease resistance," is used negatively; however, can we not use it positively? How about we as parents, the leaders of our families totally capitulate to God (Josh. 24:15). Children are very intuitive and they pick up on way more than we want to give them credit for! Are we sending a mixed message? Is obeying God truly the focus of our lives (Matt. 6:33; Heb. 10:25; Col. 3:1-4; Phil. 1:21; 3:13-14)? May God help us to follow Jesus' command, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Matt. 22:36-37).

Celebrate

Godly homes are a tremendous blessing. A familiar phrase says, "As the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live." To which we would add and "so goes the church." While society may downplay or reject the biblical pattern of the family, we should rejoice and thank God for our families (Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-4:1; Heb. 13:4). The Psalmist reminds us, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; ..." (Ps. 127:1). Praise God for homes, where God is truly honored by parents and children, for it is a "foretaste of glory divine."

For Further Study

- Consider passages such as Gen. 1:27-28; Mal. 2:16; Matt. 19:3-10; 1 Pet. 3:7; Rom. 1:26-30.
- Consider how Satan might seek to "take advantage" of us today. Can families who are convicted that God's way is right, dare to be ignorant of Satan?
- In what ways can your family improve in its devotion to God and its stance against compromise?
- Even though you were raised in a godly home (and blessed because of it), what are some things you would not want in your home?

- Think of godly couples who have set tremendous examples for you and your family? What traits of godliness stand out most? Are you imitating/practicing these things in your family?

Faith and Fire (Dan. 3)

Jeff Whatley

“Challenges, Choices, and Consequences.” The sooner we really focus on the meaning of these three words and how they relate to each other, the better!

Life is full of challenges, and with them, choices must be made. The results of those decisions are called consequences. But for many people the word “consequence(s)” seems to always mean punishment. However, the consequences we receive are often relative to the choices we make. As to say, “Bad Choices = Bad Consequences” and, “Good Choices = Good Consequences.” Notice again the word, “often,” because in this upside-down world steeped in selfishness and sin; also riddled with chance and chaos, sometimes a person’s “Bad Choice,” may appear to be rewarded, and another’s “Good Choice,” seems to be punished. Most of us have heard the saying, “No good deed goes unpunished.” However, it is only true at times in this earthly experience; for with God, it is NOT so! God is constant, consistent, and clear when dealing with choices and their consequences. With God, as I’ve heard before, “It is always good to do good, it is never bad to do good.” Just as, “It’s always bad to do bad, and it’s never good to do bad.”

Sometimes the challenges we face can climax into a full-blown crisis! And for these three young men we will be looking at in this lesson the consequences were life or death... or so it seemed.

Challenge becomes a CRISIS (3:1-15)

- Chapter 3 begins with Nebuchadnezzar (Neb.), the king of Babylon, making a 90’ statue of gold. V.1
- King gathers all his officials (includes Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego) for the image dedication. V.2
- CHALLENGE: King’s edict - everyone must fall down and worship the image when the music plays. V.5
- Whoever does not bow down and worship will be immediately cast into a furnace of blazing fire. V.6
- CRISIS - Some Chaldeans come forward and accuse the Jews. Vs. 8-12
- Accusers – jealous or angry of the Jews ability (Dan. 1:20) or their office (Dan.2:49; 3:12)
- King in a rage calls for the 3 young men; offers them a 2nd chance to bow down and worship the image.
- They must worship this object or else be cast in the fiery furnace. Vs. 13-15 (What would we do?)
- NOTE: End of King’s question v.15, “And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”
- King Nebuchadnezzar ends with a rhetorical question?
- Basically saying, “There is no god who can save you from what I can do to you!”
- Nebuchadnezzar is setting himself up as supreme. (Prideful people often try to intimidate)

Choice – Displayed True Faith (3:16-18)

- Amazing Answer - "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter."
- "This matter" – Refers to king's threat "who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?"
- They have no need to answer him, because they are following God commands (Exodus 20:3-5).
- The Apostles have the same response in Acts 5:29 "We must obey God rather than men."
- But they do answer as to fully reject Nebuchadnezzar's claim that no god could save them.
- TRUE FAITH is FIRM, Steadfast & Sure! "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king." V.17
- V.18 - But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."
- They have complete confidence, "Our GOD is Able to Deliver Us!" and they will worship Him alone.
- God will be given the glory in any circumstance and any outcome.
- Glorified in preserving – our life (being delivered out of the fire); or
- Glorified in persevering – in death (dying in Faith through the fire).
- TRUE FAITH is not confidence in a certain outcome, but confidence in a sovereign God.

Consequence – Delivered Through the Fire (3:19-25)

- Furnace 7X hotter; so hot that the guards who threw S-M-A into the furnace were burned up. Vs.19-22
- There is 4 men walking around in the blazing fire and a 4th person is "like the Son of God."* Vs.23-25
- The point is that God cares and is there to deliver His people.
- God brings His people through the fire.
- God Is Able to deliver us through fiery challenges. (God uses fiery trials to test {prove} us!)
- (cf. 1 Pet. 4:12; Deu. 4:20; Isa. 48:10)

Conclusion – The Goal of Fiery Trials is Achieved – GOD IS GLORIFIED! Vs.26-30

- Nebuchadnezzar near the mouth of the fire, calls S-M-A, "Servants of the Most High God" V.26
- S-M-A they are not harmed at all (Not their body, hair, clothes, or even the smell of fire)! V.27
- Nebuchadnezzar praises the true and living God, acknowledges the Angel, God had sent to deliver His servants that trusted in HIM, in humility admits they have frustrated his word, and they should not serve nor worship any god except their own GOD! V.28
- King issues a decree that no one can speak against their God, or offenders will be cut into pieces, and their house be destroyed because there is "no other God who can deliver like this." V.29
- Then the king promotes Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego (courage & honor are respected).
- These young men set the ultimate example of courage and commitment to GOD (cf. 1 Tim. 4:12).
- Their faith and focus were on GOD and Glorifying HIM ONLY!
- Just as the Apostle Paul's boldly declared, Christ must be exalted in my body rather by life or by death, and "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil. 1:20-21).
- We too must give our lives to GOD and never deny HIS name so that HE is glorified in all things.

For Further Study:

Define 2 Terms, Study Scripture, Questions to Answer, and PLEASE Discuss with Others.

- Briefly Define 2 = (Dictionary & Biblical Definition) of following terms: (Discuss any differences).
 - Pride, Pressure (Intimidation), Trials, Conviction, Courage, and Honor.
- Study Scripture = Please look up the following Scripture references.
 - Deu. 4:20; Isa. 48:10; 1 Pet. 4:12; 1 Tim. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:12; Rom. 1:16,17; 6:23; 12:1,2
- Questions to Answer: (Situations* = challenges and/or trials)
 - Imagine how intense and intimidating the situation* in Daniel 3 would be!
 - What would we be your thinking and feelings?
 - What would your choice be if placed in the same situation?
- Imagine or think about other intimidating situations* we have faced or may have to face.
 - What choices do we have when pressured or intimidated to deny Christ?
- Discussion: "TRUE FAITH is not confidence in a certain outcome, but confidence in a sovereign God."
 - Our faith is in God, not in what we want God to do in any situation* (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7-10)
 - Faith is not that we may know the outcome or receive the results we may want in this life.
 - But TRUE FAITH is that we know the outcome belongs to God.
 - TRUE FAITH = TRUST & OBEY, regardless of the FIRE we may face or the outcome in this life!
 - TRUE FAITH = Serving the MOST HIGH GOD, who offers the Crown of Life! Rev. 2:10
 - Do you believe these statements on TRUE FAITH?
 - If not, please explain?
 - If so, will YOU be willing to let it show?
 - What does letting your FAITH show look like?

Raising a Convicted Generation

Ronnie Scherffius

Introduction

- It is difficult to find more than three faithful generations in the Scriptures
- More than any other book of the Bible, the book of Judges is an inspired record of the compromise and confusion among God's people that results from a failure to teach every new generation the truth of God's Word.
- Nevertheless, the book of Judges is as much about the God of Israel as it is about the nation.
- Let's consider some keys to raising a convicted generation.

Key Terms

- Raising
 - Raise: "to lift upright, set upright; build; to make higher"
 - There is a difference between "raising up" and "growing up."
 - When one "raises up" something or someone, there is intention and purpose behind it.
- Convicted
 - Convicted: "convinced by arguments."
 - Conviction: originating from a Latin term meaning "to conquer," thus the mental state of being fully persuaded. (cf. Luke 16:31; Acts 18:4)
 - How is this accomplished? (Acts 17:2-3)
- Raising a convicted generation, with regard to spiritual things, has to do with purposely building up and fully convincing that generation to strive to be of a higher and more noble quality.

Key Verse

- "And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel." (Judges 2:10)
- To "know not" has to do with ignorance, i.e., "a lack of knowledge" (cf. Hos. 4:6).
 - There was a lack of knowledge of the Lord.
 - There was a lack of knowledge of the Lord's good work done for them.
- To "know not" the Lord also has to do with "a lack of respect" (cf. Ex. 1:8; 2:25).
- Ignorance of God, in any generation, results in a lack of understanding, leads to foolish and sinful practices and results in rejection by God.
- How does this happen? How can this be avoided? What is the key to raising a convicted generation?
- Raising a convicted generation requires a proper knowledge and understanding of God.

The God Of Israel (Judges 2:1-3).

- The God of Israel was a God of Grace (Judges 2:1).
- The God of Israel was a God of Expectations (Judges 2:2).
- The God of Israel was a God of Faithfulness (Judges 2:1a, 3).

For Further Study

- Why is it important that each generation in the church is convicted to serving the Lord? (cf. Judges 17:6)
- What is the prerequisite to gaining knowledge and spiritual wisdom? (cf. Pro.. 1:7)
- Every generation should have a full understanding of God. What three characteristics of God did Israel, in the time of the Judges, fail to understand?
- What are the three keys to understanding God's grace?
- In what way has God made His expectations known to us today?
- Why is God's faithfulness important to raising up a convicted generation?

Predictable Righteousness

Danlee Queen

C.S Lewis once said “Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching.” Perhaps a notable definition concerning integrity but notice the level of consistency Lewis mentions. One who is deemed as having integrity with others must be the same when alone. It should be predictable. Daniel is someone we certainly can attribute as being consistent in his character. In fact, his enemies predicted his morality and principles and knew how righteous he was. Take note of several aspects of Daniel’s integrity and his predictable righteousness from Daniel 6.

True Integrity Begins With the Heart

Prior to the adversity he faced, Daniel had prepared his heart to follow after God no matter what. This led him to have the conviction to fully trust in God, which developed integrity, in the midst of difficulty. As Christians, we must be intentional in developing godly character that produces true integrity (Dan. 1:8; 1 Pet. 1:17).

True Integrity is Noticed by Others

The narrative in Daniel 6 features two reactions concerning Daniel’s integrity that need to be mentioned:

- A Negative Reaction (v.4)- “...sought to find some charge against Daniel...”
- A Positive Reaction (v.3)- “...the king intended to appoint over the whole realm...”

Daniel had demonstrated an “extraordinary spirit” (Dan. 6:3). As Christians, our conduct is noticed by others, especially godly conduct. Clinging to our faith and focusing on godly character builds true integrity that is seen and distinct (Matt. 5:14-16; 1 Tim. 4:15).

True Integrity is Tested

Because of his integrity, Daniel had some things easier than others. Darius had considered giving Daniel reign over the entire region. However, because of his distinct character, Daniel’s integrity was tested by his adversaries who were envious. They realized that all they could try to do was attack his faith head on (Dan. 6:5-6). As Christians, our faith and character will be tested to see if it is truly genuine or not. This improves our godly character just as it did for Daniel in several occasions (Rom. 5:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:7).

For Further Study

- Consider Daniel’s encouraging example of prayer. Now, consider an honest look at your prayer life: Has it been present and consistent? Has it been lacking (Phil. 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:17-18; 1 Pet. 5:7)?
- Is your life filled with intention? Ponder and study these verses about being intentional and consistent in godliness like Daniel was (1 Pet. 1:13-17; Eph. 5:15-16; 1 Tim. 4:11-12).
- Consider who you can influence in your personal life by living with godly integrity and how you can be a better influence for them (Matt. 5:14-16).

- To help with intentional living and developing predictable and godly integrity, focus on the character of God, find and look for verses that describe who God is and meditate daily on His character (Jas. 1:17-18).

The Best Way to Live!

Trent Kennedy

The world calls us to pleasure, to wealth, to convenience, and to temporary satisfaction. The world tells us to be happy. However, many of the things that we are told bring us pleasure and happiness are actually destroying us from the inside out. Consider what the world calls us to do with our eyes, our hands, and our bodies. Notice that with each of these sins, the world admits they are bad, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, promotes them.

Our Eyes: Pornography

The world says very little out loud about “hardcore” pornography. It is an unspoken cancer in minds, families, churches, and anywhere and everywhere it is found. However, it has generally been accepted as something that people do now or a danger of the internet or better than adultery or some other such nonsense. There has been a movement to empower “content creators” who create pornography. This is where something like OnlyFans can create huge revenues for some people. This used to be called “adult entertainment,” but we generally acknowledge that this content makes its way to children as well. In my work with young people across three continents, I have seen the reach and danger of pornography.

When it comes to other forms of pornography, people need to look no further than their smartphone and favorite social medium. Our world rewards influencers who do not wear clothes or dress like they are selling their bodies to the first bidder (cf. Pro. 7:10). Videos, reels, and TikToks allow people various platforms to promote the pleasures of the flesh. We know it is bad for us, but we often fall victim to the temptation and ease of pornography in our society. Firsthand accounts of the corrupting nature of pornography can be seen everywhere. Young boys have their minds and attitudes toward sex and toward women forever altered because of porn. Marriages struggle because of porn. Sexual violence increases because of porn. Some in the world have begun to speak out about the dangers of pornography, but those voices are few and quiet. Others promote, like, favorite, share, and pay to keep all kinds of pornography accessible. And, the access gets easier every day.

The Bible does not speak to pornography in the way that we talk about the subject today. Internet (or social media or television) pornography is a relatively new problem. However, wandering eyes, a lustful mind, and an unsatisfied heart are not new at all. Thousands of years ago, righteous Job knew that he needed to keep his eyes off of women who were not his wife (Job 31:1). The Bible student readily remembers David whose downfall with Bathsheba began with an ill-advised look (2 Sam. 11:2). Watching his neighbor’s wife bathe (cf. Ex. 20:17) excited something in his heart, in his mind, which he wanted satisfied immediately. As king of Israel, David could have her that very night. We know the “rest of the story” as this only began the darkest times in David’s life and reign.

The Bible speaks to the power of the eyes and their direct connection to sexual desire (SOS. 4:1-5). When these powerful instruments are used incorrectly in viewing inappropriate material, then sin is committed (Matt. 5:27-32). This is not a harmless evil or a victimless crime. Choosing to view pornography causes people to take what God intended to be seen

and done in the marriage bed and cheapens it to the screen. This is unholy and ungodly. While pornography has eternal consequences, it also is a corrupted way to live. It is fake, staged, generated, altered, and edited. It is not real and the real thing is better (cf. Pro. 5:18-19).

God offers us a life free from the temptation, consultation, and eventual addiction to pornography. Like Job, we can covenant with our eyes. Unlike David, we can mind our steps (both in life and online) to make sure they are not going where they should not go. We can avert our eyes and get away from the temptation like Joseph. There will always be a way of escape from such temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). This is a better way because it keeps us from the addiction and subsequent loss of time and money to pornography. Staying away from porn is healthier for us now (that is in the moment) and is much healthier for our minds and emotions over the long term. Avoiding or eliminating pornography makes us better spouses, better parents, and better people.

Our Mouths: Beverage Alcohol

The world makes a big deal about alcohol. Parents celebrate introducing their children to it. People clamor about turning twenty-one and buying it legally. Parties are organized around cocktails and such. It is often passed as a gift between friends. It has become a symbol of masculinity for the misguided world. However, the world's directions about alcohol are confused and confusing. There are warning labels on bottles, laws about consumption, and countless stories of alcohol ruining people's lives. We seem to know it is bad for us but want it anyway. The Bible is clear. God would have our minds free from intoxicants of all kinds (1 Pet. 1:13). We do not need to forget our sorrows or have cloudy judgment (cf. Pro. 31:5-7). God even forbids the process of becoming drunk (i.e. drinking alcohol) (Eph. 5:19) because God knows that alcohol is a deceptive friend (cf. Pro. 20:1).

The Bible has a lot to say about beverage alcohol, and it is not good. Strangely, the world agrees with the conclusions of the Scriptures, but the world labels what the Bible calls evil as good. Consider Proverbs 23:32-35. The Bible describes the poisonous nature of alcohol: "At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder," (Pro. 23:32). "Thou shalt be as he that lithe down in the midst of the sea, or the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not hurt; They have beaten me, and I felt it not," (Pro. 23:34-35). And the world agrees! The Bible describes the effects of alcohol as it impairs the mind of man: "Thine eyes shall behold strange things, and thy heart shall utter perverse things," (Pro. 23:33). And the world agrees! The Bible describes the addictive properties of alcohol: "When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again," (Pro. 23:35). And the world agrees!

It is no wonder that God, through the wise man, would give this command: "Look not thou upon wine when it is red, when it sparkleth in the cup, when it goeth down smoothly," (Pro. 23:31). The Bible says not even to look at it. The world disagrees and says eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die. This attitude will be judged (Ecc. 12:13-14). The better way to live is with the fullness of your mental faculties, without the poison of drugs or alcohol, and without the long-term pitfalls of alcohol use. This is what the Bible calls "sober."

Our Bodies: Fornication

Fornication, found in our New Testaments as a translation of the Greek word *porneia*, describes any sexual sin where the act of sex is committed. Thus, while pornography is a sin of the heart and mind, fornication carries through with those thoughts and involves the body as well. The NKJV translates this word “sexual immorality” which is better understood but often misapplied to sins where sex is not directly involved. We might describe fornication as sexual intercourse where the individuals involved are not married to one another (here, marriage would be defined as between a man and woman per Matthew 19:4-6).

Fornication might be the only sin in our society that is glamorized more than alcohol consumption. Turn on your favorite show and see if there are any sexual relationships between people who are not married. Sometimes, these affairs are called “casual” or “one night stands” or some other nonsense. Where the content is not explicit, it is suggestive. The innuendos are countless. However, the entertainment industry does not have a monopoly on fornication. Some high schools offer condoms at prom. College students are encouraged to explore their sexuality. Young professionals are told to sow their wild oats. Even married people are told that “true love” might not be with your spouse. All of this promotes fornication.

But, once again, the world is confused and confusing. We know about STDs and the dangers of sex outside of marriage. We know that teenagers are not emotionally equipped for a deep, intimate relationship. Generally, we still blush at adultery, even if only briefly these days, when a spouse steps outside of their marriage vows and ruins a family.

The Bible is neither confused nor confusing on these matters. The principle of Leviticus 18:24-25 was that the world (the land of Canaan) was full of sexual immorality, all manners of fornication. Yet, the Israelites were explicitly told to avoid those behaviors. Godly wisdom says adultery is dumb and that the act of adultery is cancerous and corrupting (Pro. 6:32). The dangers of one-night stands and finding an embrace in a “stranger” are clear (Pro. 5:20), and it is forbidden (1 Cor. 6:18). Joseph serves as a good reminder of how to deal with the temptation of fornication: run (Gen. 39:12). Proverbs 7:10-23 describes the temptation to commit fornication, and the outcome is clear: “as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as one in the fetters to the correction of a fool; till an arrow strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life,” (vs. 22-23). The outcome of such an interaction is harmful both now and eternally.

God has created humans as sexual beings (cf. Gen. 4:1, Matt. 22:30). Humans are biologically, mentally, and emotionally sexual beings. Instead of fornication, God intended (and still intends!) for men and women to meet those sexual desires in His designed place: marriage. Sex outside of marriage is sinful and dangerous. It corrupts your mind and is emotionally damaging. However, when sex is enjoyed in the safety of marriage, it is authorized (1 Cor. 7:3-4) and encouraged (SOS. 5:1). God’s design then is for one man and one woman to be committed to one another for life. In this relationship, the couple enjoys the life and love that God has designated for them. Among the many blessings of marriage is the opportunity to have life-long sexual fulfillment. Through this, the husband and wife love and respect one another (Eph. 5:22-33) and grow to know each other better (cf. 1 Pet. 3:7). This should be a wonderful joy (Ecc. 9:9).

The best way to live is God's way. When the sexual relationship is done God's way, a couple remains abstinent until marriage. Thus, there is no danger of STD or unwanted pregnancy. Further, the couple does not become emotionally attached through the intimacy of sex before marriage. Then, when the male and female are married, they are encouraged and expected to love, learn, and grow together in their sexual relationship. Here, there is no embarrassment or shame because of former sexual partners or the lack thereof. This will begin a life-long commitment to one another that is accentuated by a healthy sexual relationship. Monogamy is safe, but it is also fulfilling (cf. Pro. 5:19). This is holy, and it is healthy.

There is a better way

God calls us to holiness (1 Pet. 1:15). This call reaches our computer screens, office workrooms, and kitchen tables. It reaches the marriage bed and our individual preparations for being married. While many of the world's conveniences and even pleasures are not sinful, there are those things that the world tells us to do that God simply says "no" to. In these matters, the answer is abstinence. The Christian cannot engage in things that God calls sinful. God does not want our eyes full of explicit images or our hearts full of lust (1 Thess. 5:4). God has commanded us not to look at alcohol (Pro. 23:31) nor to begin the process of becoming drunk (Eph. 5:19). God condemns sex outside of marriage (Eph. 5:3).

Sin corrupts the soul. Always and without fail. Beyond those eternal consequences, some sins are particularly harmful to the body and the mind. They destroy relationships and cause financial ruin. They divide homes and lead to untimely death. When we look at these sins, it is not hard to see why God calls us to holiness. The best way is God's way.

There are many things that the world calls good, but the Bible calls evil. That should not surprise us as the world is in conflict with God (Jas. 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). When God gives the "red light" to any behavior, it does not matter if the world says "go" or "proceed with caution" or anything else. God's world is the ultimate and final authority (John 12:48; 2 Cor. 5:10). The world is full of lies (cf. John 8:44). However when we examine many things which the world calls "good," we see that even the world admits to their corrupting influence. Even in the brief consideration of fornication, beverage alcohol, and pornography, we would note that the world acknowledges their faults and advertises them anyway. God would have us to lead different lives, holy lives, better lives. God's way is the best way now, and it is not worthy to be compared to the glory that awaits us in Heaven.

Here is the better way: sanctification (1 Thess. 4:1-7). Our hearts, minds, and bodies remain pure or clean. Our immortal souls are not endangered, and our mortal bodies do not face the decay that comes with these sins. What does sanctification look like? The answer, as found in Scripture, is sobriety and sexual faithfulness. We can have confidence that sobriety and sexual faithfulness are the best way to live on this earth and will keep us on the road to eternal glory. When it comes to the ways of the world, Christians should be convicted that God's way is the best way to live!

For Further Study:

- Read 1 Samuel 1:12-16. How did Hannah and Eli characterize an association with beverage alcohol?

- Read these passages and notice the commonality: 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8; Titus 2:2; 1 Peter 1:13, 5:8. How should Christians be described?
- Consider these Biblical examples of alcohol consumption:
 - Noah – Genesis 9:21
 - Lot – Genesis 19:30-36
 - King Ahasureus – Esther 1:7-12
 - Stagger – Job 12:25, Psalm 107:27, Isaiah 19:14
 - False Prophets Who Condone – Micah 2:11
 - Evil Servant – Matthew 24:48-51
 - Works of Darkness – 1 Thessalonians 5:7
 - What conclusions might you draw from these examples?
- What does sobriety mean? If you were to ask an addict, “What does sobriety mean,” how do you think they would answer? How can this understanding help us see what God expects our association with addictive, intoxicating substances to be?
- Read 1 Timothy 5:1-2 (cf. Romans 13:7; 1 Peter 2:17). How can respecting those around us keep us from viewing pornography?
- Read these passages: Proverbs 5:18-20; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5; Hebrews 13:4. How does God’s plan for a fulfilled sexual relationship in marriage differ from the world’s ideas?
- How can you make a covenant with your eyes (Job 31:1)?
- Read 2 Samuel 11:1-5. How did the visual impact of Uriah’s wife affect David? How long should he have looked upon the body of his naked neighbor (cf. Matthew 5:27-30)?
- Read Acts 15:20, 29 and notice the relationship between “fornication” (sexual immorality) and “abstain.” Then, read 1 Corinthians 6:18 and 1 Thessalonians 4:3 and notice the command “flee.” Finally, consider Colossians 3:5 (cf. Ephesians 5:3) and notice the command “put to death.” When you reflect on these passages, what should the Christians association with sexual immorality be? How does Romans 1:32 apply to sexual immorality?
- List out the ways in which these specific sins can have long-term consequences on this side of eternity: pornography, alcohol consumption, and sexual immorality.

Some uninspired resources for you study:

On the Topic of Pornography

- Every Man’s Battle by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker (There are many more in this series for men and women - check them out!)
- Sexual Purity by Tony Evans. This little booklet does not lend itself to understanding the depth of Scripture, but it seeks to motivate readers to keep themselves pure sexually.
- The Truth about Moral Issues by Don Blackwell. There is a book and video produced by WVBS. There is a chapter/section on pornography and drinking alcohol.

On the Topic of Beverage Alcohol:

- The Bible and Strong Drink by W.D. Jeffcoat
- Beverage Alcohol by Louis Rushmore. Especially consider chapters 2-5.

On the Topic of Fornication:

- Sexual Anarchy by Dave Miller
- Intended for Pleasure by Ed and Gaye Wheat. This book is for married couples. It makes the Biblical case for a fulfilling sexual relationship in marriage.

Let the Redeemed Say So!

Andy Baker

“The Lord has brought us safely home!” This cry and others like it were heard in Israel as the captives came home from being seventy years in exile in Babylon. Psalm 107 is one of those psalms that compels the singer, the listener, and the reader to contemplate the goodness of God, but even more to declare the goodness of God as first-hand beneficiaries of His kindness towards His people. Psalm 107 does this by painting four pictures of people in deep distress, showing their cry to God, and then God’s deliverance. As a reader reads this psalm, this question is paramount: “Who was I before the Lord rescued me????!!”

Four Portraits of People in Distress

- Portrait #1 – Starving Wanderers in the Wilderness (107:4-7)
- Portrait #2 – Condemned Prisoners in the Dungeon (107:10-12)
- Portrait #3 – Terminally Ill Patients in the Hospital (107:17-18)
- Portrait #4 – Helpless Sailors in the Tempest (107:23-27)

Consider that Psalm 107 presents to us

- A Song Featuring God’s Merciful Heart (107:1, 8, 15, 21, 31, 43)
- A Song Featuring God’s Deliverance of the Helpless (107:2, 6, 13, 19, 28)
- A Song Featuring God’s Exaltation of the Humble (107:7, 14, 20, 29)
- A Song Featuring God’s Providence over All (107:33-43)

Noteworthy Principles of Psalm 107

- There is no place, no time, and no difficulty God’s mercy cannot overcome.
- God specializes in salvation, but also in bringing blessings beyond imagination.
- Men always ought to be aware and remember that “This is My Father’s World.”
- There is a direct relationship between depth of distress and depth of wondrous praise.
- The redeemed should always be the greatest champions of the lovingkindness of God.
- The righteous redeemed become evangelistic by the nature of their deliverance.

For Further Study

- Have you ever told someone what type of person you were before you became a Christian and the positive difference Jesus made in your life?
- Some people in describing where they were before deliverance sound proud to be a prodigal as if their life before deliverance was “so much fun!” How does Psalm 107 focus a person’s mind and heart in a healthy way?
- Have you ever (metaphorically or literally) wandered in the wilderness, slumped in a prison cell, lost hope in a hospital bed, or been at your wit’s end on the sea?
- How do each of those portraits of Psalm 107 show a different facet of the beauty of God’s deliverance? What feelings/thoughts go through the heads of each of the people in these portraits? How are they alike? How are they different?
- Does your life as a redeemed one of God compel you to tell of His greatness to others? Why or why not?

Be Strong and of Good Courage!

Cliff Goodwin

“He who kneels before God, can stand before anyone.” So much of life comes down to priority and perspective. Priority pertains to what comes first—what is most important in my life? Priorities should then mold and shape perspective. Perspective answers the question of how do I view people, things, events and even circumstances. A Christian’s priority is always God and His will. Putting God first involves the adopting of God’s perspective and God’s values.

When priorities and perspectives are right, being strong and courageous comes much easier. Joshua had quite a difficult task before him, but Yahweh admonished him to “Be strong and of a good courage...” (Josh. 1:6). God does not command of man, that which is impossible for him to do. Joshua was able to perform that which the LORD commanded, and so are God’s children today. The following considerations can be helpful in our being strong and courageous.

The God Above Me

A good working definition of faith may be remembered as “taking God at His Word and acting accordingly.” God is of such a nature that He cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Our strength and courage lie not in our own abilities or power. They are grounded in our God Who has promised never to leave or forsake us (Josh. 1:5; Heb. 13:5-6).

Joshua was assured that the LORD would be with him, even as He had been with Moses (Josh. 1:5). God had proven Himself trustworthy and reliable in the exodus and in the wilderness, and He would still be so during the conquest and division of Canaan (Josh. 1:6). The same God is reliable in our lives today!

The Word Inside Me

The challenge of faith is met by the Word of God. God’s Word is living and active (Heb. 4:12), and it is capable of producing and nurturing faith in the honest and good heart (Rom. 10:17; cf. Luke 8:15). For this reason, the child of God is to store up the Word of God in his heart (Ps. 119:11; cf. Col. 3:16).

Joshua was pointed to the Law of Moses by God Himself (Josh. 1:7-8). He was to interact with the Law, both inwardly and outwardly. Inwardly, Joshua was to meditate on God’s Word. He was to consider and ponder the statutes, commandments and judgments of God. Outwardly, God’s Word was to be ever on his lips. This would include the discussing of God’s Word with others, as well as reading aloud and memorizing the Word for himself.

The Choice Before Me

Created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), every human being is a free moral agent. This means that man has both the power and capacity to choose between right and wrong. Man must choose whether to obey or disobey God. The command to be strong and courageous is found in one form or another in both testaments (cf. 1 Cor. 16:13; Eph. 6:10; 2 Tim. 2:1). One must remember that what God commands, man is able to perform. Therefore, such instances are not matters of ability so much as matters of choice. Joshua would have to choose to be

strong and courageous, even when it might have been easier or more convenient to be otherwise.

For Further Study

- Discuss how priorities serve to shape and mold one's perspective.
- How had God demonstrated His reliability to Joshua? How do we KNOW that God is reliable still today?
- Read and discuss Isaiah 51:7. How does one's truly knowing righteousness affect the way that he reacts to criticism and persecution?
- Discuss the importance of group, or corporate, Bible study. What are some benefits that naturally come from studying with others of like faith?
- Consider this statement: "Strength is a choice." Discuss its veracity as well as some potential limitations.

Help Thou Mine Unbelief!

Cliff Goodwin

“The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,” (Matt. 26:41). “All men have feet of clay.” Statements such as these point out the weakness and fallibility of mankind. In fact, even those who seem the most devoted and faithful to Christ can stumble in an unexpected moment of weakness.

Faith is a precious thing. As with all precious things, it must be guarded. There will likely be times in all of our lives in which we will struggle with our faith. Perhaps not with faith as a whole, but at least with some particular point of faith. Let us consider the case of the desperate father from Mark 9, in hopes that we can better equip ourselves to guard and nurture our own faith.

The Account under Consideration:

Quite a stir was raised, when the disciples of Jesus had been unable to cast out an evil spirit (Mark 9:14-16). The pitiable victim was the son of a desperate father, and this son had endured the miseries of demonic possession since his childhood (Mark 9:17, 21). Modern versions indicate that the young man suffered many torturous effects including, but not limited to, convulsions, the inability to speak, seizure-like rigidity, as well as being thrown into nearby water and fire (Mark 9:17-18, 22).

The father is evidently the first to speak up, responding to our Lord’s query (Mark 9:16-17). One can only imagine the emotional rollercoaster this father has been on. Perhaps he was hopeful at first, when the disciples of Jesus set out to exorcise the demon and deliver his son. Any hope, however, would then have been crushed when the disciples failed in their attempt. But now Jesus comes on the scene—the Master Himself. Is hope renewed, now that Jesus is here?

Possible Threats to Faith:

Trials of life can sometime undermine our faith, if permitted to do so. This danger is intensified if the trials are particularly severe and/or of long duration. Both of these qualities were present in the account under consideration. Also, prior failure can be a hindrance to present faith. Christ’s disciples had already failed to cast out the evil spirit (Mark 9:18, 28). The father then says to Jesus, “If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us” (Mark 9:22).

Faith is undermined when we choose to walk by sight (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7). Sight focuses on the externals around us, the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Faith insists on looking beyond the external circumstances. Instead of focusing on the severity of his son’s case, the father needed to focus to the greatest of Jesus as Lord. Instead of remembering the failure of the disciples, he needed to consider the unblemished record of the Christ. God and His Word are CONSTANT, regardless of external circumstances! Another way of saying this: no matter what happens in my life, it does not change God’s Word or His power.

How Do I Respond?

When one's faith is attacked and weakened, it is critical for the individual to acknowledge this has happened. Denial has never served to remedy any problem. The father under consideration acknowledged the weakness of his faith, when he pleaded, "Help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). The failure of the disciples had not driven him away from Jesus, but rather had drawn him to Jesus. He is seemingly the first to speak up within the crowd.

Faith is only healed, nurtured and strengthened by drawing closer to Jesus through His Word and in association with His people. God's Word has the answers—not for satisfying our personal desires and curiosities, but for all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3; cf. Deu. 29:29). Digging deeper into God's Word, with an honest and submissive heart, will strengthen our faith over time. Drawing nearer to God's faithful people will fill our lives with those who are fighting similar battles—those to whom we can relate and in whom we can confide.

For Further Study:

- What kinds of trials can be especially damaging to one's faith, if permitted?
- Discuss how the failures and shortcomings of others—especially leaders—can undermine one's faith. What must be remembered in such instances?
- What does it mean to "walk by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7)? How is "walking by faith" different?
- When one's faith grows weak, the tendency is for that individual to pull back from Jesus, the Bible, the church, etc. Discuss why this is the exact opposite of what that person needs.
- Does true faith mean that you have ALL the answers? Does it mean that you have the answers you need, and you trust in the wisdom and righteousness of God for everything else?

The Armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18)

Cliff Goodwin

Ephesians 6:10 is a verse containing both a command and an assurance. The command is to be strong, or rather, “be strengthened.” The assurance is that the source of this necessary strength is the Lord and His might. How wonderful to know that God provides our strength, and that, even in our weakness, His strength surpasses our greatest needs (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9-10)!

His strength is vital to us in our struggle—the spiritual onslaught brought against us through the methods (i.e. wiles) of the devil (Eph. 6:11-12). Our adversary is powerful, and the struggle is real, but victory can be ours as we stand in the strength of the Lord (Eph. 6:13). The strength afforded by the Lord is described in terms of the “whole armor of God.”

Loins Girt about with Truth

Often in the first century world, one’s clothes were gathered up and held together by a sash or belt around the body. In this way the flowing garments were “out of the way,” and one could be unimpeded in his movements and activities. Knowledge of the truth is what “holds us together” mentally and spiritually as the children of God (cf. John 17:17).

Breastplate of Righteousness

Righteousness is a two-sided coin. On one hand, it denotes “right living,” or doing that which accords with God’s standard of righteousness (cf. Psa. 119:172). On the other hand, righteousness can be used to denote God’s plan, or system, of righteousness—the means whereby man can stand justified before his God (cf. Rom. 3:21-22; 10:3). Having such standing before God is as important and protective as a breastplate over one’s heart!

Feet Shod with the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace

The marching orders for every Christian read, “Go and preach!” (Mark 16:15). We are equipped with the best news in the world, and we must stand prepared to spread and teach this Gospel at all times. It is the only message that saves, effecting peace between God and men (Rom. 1:16).

Shield of Faith

Faith is the knowledge and conviction of things unseen—based on the revelation of God’s Word (cf. Heb. 11:1; Rom. 10:17). Satan will hurl countless “untruths” our way; deception has always been one of his oldest tactics (Gen. 3:4; 2 Cor. 11:3). Our faith in God and in His Word is able to deflect all the fiery darts of the evil one. Faith is the victory (1 John 5:4)!

Helmet of Salvation

Along with the breastplate, the helmet protects a most critical part of the body. The fact that God has SAVED us cannot be overemphasized! We have been delivered from the dominion of darkness and have been transplanted in the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13). We are no longer slaves of Satan and sin (Rom. 6:12-17).

Sword of the Spirit

The power to vanquish error and prick human hearts lies with the Holy Spirit of God. These tasks are not accomplished in some immediate, miraculous fashion, however. His effective instrument, His sword, is the Word of God. As Christians wield the sword of the Spirit, we are able to overcome the gainsayers and false teachers (cf. Titus 1:9); we are able to prick the hearts of the honest (Acts 2:36-37). The Word of God is our all-sufficient weapon (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

For Further Study:

- Discuss how each of the above items relates to the Word of God directly or indirectly, or is somehow connected to the Word of God.
- Consider and discuss the “wiles (methods) of the devil” as observed in Satan’s treatment of Job (Job 1–2).
- The ancient Greek concept of truth was closely connected to reality, or actuality. Discuss certain areas in which God’s Word arms us with truth; that is, spiritual reality concerning the way things really are (e.g. sin, salvation, eternity, etc.).
- How does the shield of faith protect us via the decisions we make by faith?
- Discuss the imagery employed in describing the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit. What parallels or comparisons might be noted between the Word and a literal sword?