

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 25, Number 3

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SIGN OF A
FRACTURED
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May-June 2016

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The United Kingdom shocked the Western world with its vote in favor of a British exit (Brexit) from the European Union (EU). Though predicted to tank if Brexit succeeded, world financial markets rebounded quickly, and other EU nations are pondering a similar cutting of ties with the EU. Mostly, though, Brexit has revealed just how divided this world has become.

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Leadership and Covenants

Part Four

A leader is a person who goes in advance of and acts as an influence on others. Forcing others is not implied in the term. In contrast, the term implies that the leader is to be a guide through verbal instruction and an influence through being an example. This subject is important to those of us whom God has called because His Word clearly shows that Israel's and Judah's failures as nations formed to represent Him were largely caused by a dearth of good shepherding, pointing directly to the quality of leadership. God highlights their failures by calling their leaders foolish and irresponsible shepherds.

A Subject Critical to Our Lives

We need to understand why the subject of leadership is vital so that we can understand what we are involved in through our calling. We all want to be well-prepared for His Kingdom, so learning God's standards of leadership is essential because of what lies in our future. Revelation 5:9-10 alludes to this need in our future:

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

The issue in the vision of Revelation 5 is finding

One who is qualified to open a certain scroll that contains a listing of events that will occur beyond the present time, both before and after Christ's return. The issue is resolved because Christ, the Lamb, is qualified to open it because of what He has already accomplished. He is our Redeemer and thus qualified. His qualification sets an example for us to follow in our Christian lives.

Verse 10 concerns us most. It helps to know that the term "kings and priests" is better translated as "kingdom of priests," as numerous modern translations render it. Christ has appointed the redeemed (verse 9) as a kingdom of priests to serve our God and to bear a measure of rulership ("we shall reign on the earth"). They are appointed to a responsibility by Christ because they, like Him, have been prepared to render these services in God's behalf.

Beyond the priestly functions, rulership is clearly in view for the redeemed. Christ will appoint only those already prepared for these positions. Both rulership and priestly functions contain shepherding responsibilities. A priest is an individual especially consecrated to the service of a deity as a mediator between the deity and his worshippers.

Note two passages of Scripture that confirm what we are being prepared for:

- You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own

special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (I Peter 2:5, 9)

- They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. (Revelation 14:3-4)

Both of these future positions help us focus on what we are to do within our calling now before the events of Revelation 5 and 14 occur. We must prepare to lead in the Kingdom of God. The world's approach to salvation focuses almost exclusively on being saved by confessing Jesus Christ as Savior. As important as that is, it pays little attention to any other purpose and responsibility attached to it.

Jesus Is Our Example

However, this period prior to our ultimate admission into the Kingdom of God has a major purpose: to be prepared to continue serving God at a remarkably higher level of responsibility after Christ returns. We are being created into Jesus Christ's image, and leadership is what God is looking for in us. He does not need to see us leading vast numbers of people, but He wants to see leadership in spiritual growth as we overcome our carnal natures. How? We are to be living sacrifices, deliberately choosing to allow ourselves to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ through obediently following His way of life. If we lead others in this life, it is primarily by example, as we are not forcing God's way on others.

The covenants God made with mankind are important to our preparations for the future. Without a broad understanding of what is required of us in our relationship with God, found in the covenants, we cannot possibly be a leader in His Kingdom. We will be teaching the very things we are now learning through following God's way.

At the beginning of this series, we saw how much more frequently the forms of "follow" appear compared to those of "lead." The Bible teaches that to be a righteous leader a person must first be a serious follower. Interestingly, many modern translations render the word "follow" as "pursue" because it emphasizes the vigor with which following is to be done.

Here are four New Testament examples of the Bible's teaching on following:

- Matthew 4:19-20: "Then [Jesus] said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. They

immediately left their nets and followed Him.'"

- Matthew 19:21: "Jesus said to him, 'If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me.'"

- II Thessalonians 3:7-8: "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you."

- I Corinthians 11:1: "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ."

Jesus says His doctrine was not His own, but He spoke what He received from His Father (John 12:49). Was Jesus a leader? Certainly! John 7:14-17 says of Him:

Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. And the Jews marveled, saying, "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?" Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority."

Jesus so faithfully followed the Father's teaching that He never deviated even one time! The result is that in all of earth's history there has never been a better leader in how to live life.

When we add to this that the purpose of our calling is to be prepared to rule—or lead—others under Jesus Christ, the need for following His guidance becomes plain. His covenants spell out in overview what we must faithfully follow according to His will. The fruit of that activity will be leadership in His way because of our experiences in following it.

The Covenants, a Necessary Part

Where do we now stand in regard to our personal knowledge of God's way and His leadership requirements? The apostle Paul vividly describes our present state in I Corinthians 1:26-29:

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the

things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

This humbling description reveals why leadership development is necessary for us. Our need is great! God does not call people who have already developed leadership in His way and possess all the qualities He desires in His Family. Instead, He calls those with potential, gifts them with the raw materials they need, and then creates them into what He desires, working in and through them with their cooperation.

Recall that Peter wrote that we are “being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood.” We are raw material, as it were, being formed into what our Creator God desires that we become individually and that His Family becomes collectively. His work has been proceeding since Adam and Eve; nothing has changed in what He began from the foundation of the world. He is following sound building principles to produce the qualities of leadership He desires in His children.

So, why do we need a good understanding of the many covenants that appear in Scripture? Because they are foundational to His purpose in that they provide us with overall direction.

The book of Deuteronomy is organized and written in the form of an ancient covenant. If the Israelites had ever lost their way spiritually, Deuteronomy could have been studied and its principles applied, and they would once again have been back on track toward completing their purpose. The book touches on virtually every subject needed for salvation, though it does not go into fine detail.

This, in general form, is what covenants do: They provide guidance. Each covenant is a teaching vehicle that reveals in broad strokes God’s purposes for us. Each covenant is linked to the others to provide a clearer picture to prepare us to understand what God expects of us. In them, we see, not only His purposes, but His judgments as well, allowing us to learn how He thinks.

Covenants are unifying instruments, but they unify only if they are faithfully adhered to by all the parties involved. God, whom the Scriptures affirm cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; I Samuel 15:29), is the faithful God. Our faithfulness, on the other hand, remains to be shown. The covenants provide us with a great deal of a Christian’s worldview. Without them, we wander in a spiritual wilderness without a cloud for shade or a constant light to guide.

General Information on Covenants

Three legal documents that play large roles throughout people’s lives all begin with the letter *c*: covenants, contracts, and compacts. All three, as stand-alone terms, have distinctive differences in application, but in one broad sense they all have essentially the same meaning. All three are used to indicate a legal document that draws disparate parties together in a relationship, unifying them in an agreement to accomplish a purpose.

In general practice, though, it has been common in English-speaking nations to separate their usage more specifically to three different kinds of agreements. *Compact* tends to be

used for political pacts, *contract* for business agreements, and *covenant* for concords that involve the solemnity of God, either implied or directly named within them.

We enter into none of them on a daily basis, but they touch virtually everyone’s life at one time or another. “Compact” is the least used of the three terms, as it generally used among nations. When we buy a house, we enter into a contract with a bank, and the same holds true when we buy an automobile or anything else that we pay for through credit. Marriage involves the making of a covenant, making it perhaps the best understood of the three.

Each of these, whatever it is called, is just an agreement between two or more parties. They all define the terms of a relationship and list specific responsibilities. In simple terminology, they all say that party A agrees to do such and such, and that party B agrees to do this and that within the framework of the agreement. Also among the terms are stipulated penalties to be imposed if a party fails to carry through on what he has pledged to do.

In general, a covenant made with God is no different than other formal agreements, but the fact that it is made *with God* makes a huge difference in its importance to life.

Who knows how many such agreements are entered into every single day? But despite the multiple billions of people born since Adam and Eve, relatively few have actually entered into a covenant with the true God. Some demographers estimate that as many as seventy billion people have lived on earth. But even if one billion have made a formal covenant with God, involving both Old and New Covenants combined, that would still be just over one percent of all who have lived.

The biblical covenants of God are generally ignored—even by many of those who make them! However, despite this general neglect, they are important parts of our relationship with Him, and we must show our leadership, not just by generally knowing of them, but also by having a good understanding of what they delineate as our responsibilities to Him and our fellow man. Because God is involved in them, we must believe and make good use of His covenants by faith. Some level of faith is also involved in the business contracts we enter and the political compacts nations make, but these approach nowhere near to the level of a covenant with God.

The Covenants Apply to All

We can grasp the foundational seriousness of a covenant with God by briefly reviewing how far-reaching God’s sovereignty is over all, as His Word states. God, unlike mankind, is omnipresent:

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:12-13)

God is fully aware of what is occurring in His creation. Not only that, He is also all-powerful and prepared to act should He determine the need to do so.

There is absolutely no way to avoid the seriousness of this issue, for God has determined to relate to His children first through calling them and giving them His Spirit, then by leading them to understand more deeply His requirements, as given in His Book. Of course, these communications from Him include the covenants. Every person involved in God's creative processes has access to the same terms, but each to his own level. "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

Paul writes in Romans 1:18-20:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

This means that, to some level, even the uncalled and unconverted are answerable to Him for the conduct of their lives. This truth is important. God has given life and breath to all, and He upholds all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). Thus, creation and God's sustaining oversight of His creation tie everybody to Him even before conversion.

In addition, God has given all a measure of conscience, as we see in Romans 2:11-16:

For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

Mankind, then, even before an individual's calling and conversion, is equipped with some basic knowledge and guidance regarding right and wrong. But most conclusive of all is Romans 1:18-20, where God confirms that all humanity, including the unconverted, are to some degree "without excuse." Thus, He warns that, despite His being out of sight, we must be aware that, though merciful, He is watching and exercising His authority.

Theologian Cornelius Van Til perceptively observed:

There is not a place in all the universe where man can go and say, "This is my private realm." No button he can press and say, "Here I step outside God's jurisdiction." There is not a square inch in God's creation over which Christ is not Sovereign, that He cannot say, "This is mine."

Colossians 1:16-17 confirms this about Him:

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

Those He calls especially owe Him their loyalty. He has greatly gifted us to better enable us to keep our pledge to Him. In practical application, this means that we must bear witness of our gifting by the way we live our lives.

A Legal Bond

A covenant makes a relationship between parties much closer and tighter in that it defines the relationship. However, a biblical covenant generally gives broad perspectives rather than narrow details. Other portions of the Bible explain the details.

A covenant is a legal bond between God and us. We must never forget that He is the Sovereign Ruler of a Kingdom to whom we have pledged our loyalty. That this bond is "legal" helps us to take it more seriously. A "bond" is something that holds separate things together, joining those things as one in a relationship.

A weld is a bond joining separate metal objects into one. Glue bonds individual wooden parts into one piece. Colossians 3:14 provides us an example of a spiritual bond: "But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection." Love is not the only ingredient that holds a marriage together, but it plays a major role in making two people as one. Even as love is a bond in marriage, it is also a major ingredient in the covenants of God.

In our relationship with Him, faith in God's love for us, in His faithfulness to provide as He says, and in the legality of the covenants are all bonding agents of considerable spiritual importance. God's purpose for His people is to bring us all into oneness with Him, which Jesus confirms in John 17:20-23:

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may

(continued on page 12)

What is Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?

*“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men,
but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.”*

—Matthew 12:31

In Isaiah 58:8-9, God says, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” The Bible provides a consistent record of this fact, but from the Book’s beginning to its end, we see mankind at odds with his Creator. No matter the topic, human beings have developed a contrary viewpoint—and the confidence that they are right.

Perhaps no other group of people epitomizes this contrariness as do the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, on whom He pronounces “woe” *eight times* in one chapter (Matthew 23)! As bad as that was, though, Jesus had an earlier interaction with the Pharisees that caused the Son of God to utter some of the most sobering words in the entire Bible. In Matthew 12:31-32, He warns about crossing a line that cannot be uncrossed:

Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

This transgression is commonly called “the unpardonable sin,” something so grave that it will not be forgiven, either in the present age or in the next one, even though God is normally eager to forgive. We may not be in immediate danger of committing this sin, yet the lesson contains principles that can always be applied.

Understanding Blasphemy

Blasphemy is not talked about much these days, since our culture cares little about the things of God. The word “blasphemy” comes from two roots that together mean “injurious speaking.” Granted, speaking (or writing) that causes injury is quite

Ready Answer

What Is Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?

common these days, but blasphemy belongs in a separate category because it has God or something sacred as its target. Thus, *blasphemy* is “a dishonoring of God or sacred things,” whether done deliberately or not.

Jesus’ words in Matthew 12 are a strong enough warning by themselves, but the parallel account in Mark 3:29 makes the consequences of this even more plain: “He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit *never* has forgiveness, but is subject to *eternal condemnation*” (emphasis added).

The wider context of these verses helps us to understand this stark warning, beginning in Matthew 12:22 with Christ healing a demon-possessed blind-mute. Because of the Pharisees’ hard hearts, they would not accept that this had been done through the power of the Holy Spirit, so they tried to diminish this work of God by claiming it was performed by the power of Satan.

While Christ’s teaching on this occasion continues all the way to verse 45, for our purposes, we will summarize only through verse 37. In verse 33, He says to evaluate based on the fruit that is produced. The Pharisees should have been able to see the supremely positive fruit that He was producing, and at the same time, He was pointing out that the fruit they were producing was rotten. In verses 34-35, their speaking evil against the power of God reflected the evil in their own hearts. While the Pharisees belittled the miracle that had just taken place, Jesus says in verse 36 that even idle or careless words must be accounted for in the Day of Judgment. Verse 37 warns that our words will either justify us or condemn us, putting the Pharisees on thin ice.

Notice, though, that He does not state directly that these Pharisees had committed the unpardonable sin. They *did* commit blasphemy serious enough to evoke a thunderous warning, but it appears that Jesus may have made some allowance for the Pharisees because, in His taking on the form of a bondservant (Philippians 2:7), they were confused about who He was. His true identity as the Son of God had not been revealed to them (as it had been to the disciples; Matthew 16:16-17), so He declared that they could be forgiven the blasphemous things they said about Him. He did not mean that blasphemy or other sins are no big deal, but rather that it is possible for those things to be forgiven upon repentance, in contrast to a transgression that cannot be forgiven at all.

Remember, the Pharisees triggered this warning by attributing the outworking of God to the Lord of Flies (Beelzebub). It included a rejection of God’s nature, power, and activity. The conversation between Christ and Nicodemus shows that some of the Pharisees would acknowledge that Jesus was a Teacher sent by God (John 3:1-2). Yet, Matthew 12:14 states that these Pharisees were plotting against Him, so they had malicious intent.

Even so, a measure of ignorance remained. Paul says in I Corinthians 2:8 that if the rulers of the age—which would include the Pharisees—had full comprehension, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. Despite their atti-

tudes approaching the point where they would be unable to repent, their lack of full comprehension of who they were opposing meant that repentance could still be possible once their eyes are opened. Due to their ignorance, they were not guilty of conscious rejection of the Spirit of the Most High God.

Qualifying the Unpardonable Sin

If this were all we had, we might conclude that all it takes is a slip of the tongue, and we are metaphorical toast. But the book of Hebrews provides further instruction:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned. (Hebrews 6:4-8)

This shows that the unpardonable sin is not easily committed. Notice the qualifications: A person must have had spiritual enlightenment. He must have tasted the heavenly gift, which could refer to God’s forgiveness or the overall grace that comes from a relationship with God. He must have actually received God’s Spirit and experienced the goodness of God’s Word and God’s gifting. Finally, he must have genuinely repented.

These attributes are all part of the same spiritual condition: being “in Christ.” John 15:6 describes this same condition—and the results of falling from it: “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”

If such a person—who is abiding in Christ—falls away, J.B. Phillips’ paraphrase reads, “. . . it proves impossible to make them repent as they did at first. For they are re-crucifying the Son of God . . . and by their conduct exposing [H]im to shame and contempt.”

What does it mean to “fall away”? The word in Hebrews 6:6 is not the normal Greek word for “apostasy.” It is used only in this place, so it cannot be compared with other usages. Greek lexicons indicate it means “to become lost; to fall; to turn aside; to be at fault; to forsake; or to go astray.” One says it means “to abandon a former relationship or association.”

We can grasp what “falling away” means in general, but we do not have specifics, such as degree and duration. Each of us has “turned aside” or “gone astray” at points, yet it has been possible for us to repent. The Bible provides the example of King David and others who, at times,

seemed to give more evidence of spiritual death than spiritual life. Perhaps we know someone who took a long detour in their Christian lives that certainly appeared to be “falling away,” but God brought him or her to repentance.

Clearly, some ambiguity exists here, a hopeful thing, as it indicates that God retains to Himself the judgment of where the line is. We do not need the specifics to understand the principle.

Sinning Willfully

The author of Hebrews gives us another clue a few chapters later:

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:26-29)

The key phrase here is “sin willfully.” The author is describing an overall mindset rather than a single action. Many times when we sin, we have a willingness to sin because we give in out of weakness and do what we know is wrong. But *willful* sin occurs when a person expresses deliberate and sustained opposition to God and His law, and his heart has hardened enough that he defiantly refuses to repent. In this regard, the unpardonable sin is not a specific sin. Rather, it could be *any* sin that is committed with a heart that is against God and that refuses to soften.

The Bible shows a number of sins against the Holy Spirit that still fall short of willful blasphemy. Ephesians 4:20 speaks of “grieving” the Holy Spirit. Acts 7:51 mentions “resisting” the Holy Spirit. I Thessalonians 5:19 warns against “quenching” the Spirit. All of these show some opposition to the outworking, the power, and the fundamental nature of God.

But blaspheming the Holy Spirit ratchets up this opposition to the point that the things of God are deliberately despised and denigrated after receiving knowledge of the truth. It has the effect of trampling the very Creator underfoot and belittling the holy covenant of which He is the Mediator. Repentance is impossible because self-confidence (as opposed to faith in God) has hardened into an arrogant and insolent refusal to recognize God's pre-eminence. The rejection of God becomes so complete that the very idea of repentance becomes ludicrous. By rejecting the Spirit of grace and the forgiveness it allows, the blasphemer has nothing with which to pay for his sins, except his own life.

It has been observed that this condition can come about in a couple of ways:

One is through deliberate choice. In this regard, among

the biggest dangers to our walk with God is resentment and bitterness because these emotions can poison the mind to such a degree that we can simply stop caring about God and His way. The object or circumstance of resentment begins to take up more of our view—more of our thoughts—than God Himself, and our inclination toward His will becomes overthrown in the internal rage.

A second way is through spiritual neglect, the path these Hebrews were treading. Through neglect, God's truth slips away over time, and the things of Satan's world begin to fill the void. The result is such spiritual weakness that what truly matters is no longer a part of the reasoning process. God's law becomes unimportant, and Christ's sacrifice becomes irrelevant, like distant memories with no immediate value.

Condemning the Brethren

Even if we are nowhere near this condition, we need to consider another aspect of these principles. Recall that what evoked Christ's ominous warning was the Pharisees' attribution of God's work, by His Spirit, to an unclean (demonic) source. In principle, we may be guilty of something similar if we are so set in our opinions that we are unwilling to acknowledge the activity of God in His other children.

The scattering of the church seems to have encouraged a change in perception from the one extreme of believing that everyone associated with the church is converted to the other extreme of suspecting that everyone who is not just like us must be unconverted. Truly, there is a fine line here, since we are required to evaluate fruit and discern what is of God and what is not. With all of the scriptural warnings about false teaching, teachers, and even brethren, we understand the necessity to compare words and deeds with the Word of God and to reject what is not of Him. We dare not underestimate the risk of deception.

On the other hand, though, another grave danger lurks in concluding that someone is unconverted because of some failing we observe in him or her. It may be that we are correct in our judgment, and our words will justify rather than condemn us. Yet, consider for a moment what is at stake if we speak idle words and misjudge this matter: It means we are attributing the work of God in that person's life—the faith, the overcoming, any good fruit—to something other than God. We may not be able to see all that He has done, but we are deciding it is nothing!

Can we grasp what transpires when we do such a thing? We are casting aspersions on the priceless Sacrifice substituted for that person. We are declaring the holy covenant that God made with that person to be null and void. We are insulting the Spirit of grace in that person's life. Is it really worth risking that sort of evil speaking against something that is sacred?—against a beloved child of the Most High God?

Consider Paul's early experience with the church (see Acts 9). He did horrible things to holy people, and he did it with a clear conscience because he was sure he was right. He thought he was serving God by opposing the heretics—

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The Goodness and Severity of God

“I assume that those who cling to old beliefs will be able to whisper their thoughts in the recesses of their homes, but if they repeat those views in public, they will risk being labeled as bigots and treated as such by governments, employers, and schools.”

Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito
Dissenting Opinion, *Obergefell vs Hodges*

PART ONE

Sadly and tellingly, no frontline legal firm took a stand against same-sex marriage during arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court on April 28, 2015, when oral arguments were heard in the matter of *Obergefell v. Hodges*. In fact, there was a notable dearth of *amicus curiae* briefs filed by top-rated legal firms on behalf of states' rights, in spite of the fact that more *amicus* briefs were filed with the Court in this case than any in history, 148 in all.¹

It is sad in view of the fact that the legal profession has a strong tradition, resting on its liberal underpinnings, of providing succor to the “underdog.” After all, does not everyone know how often Perry Mason represented poor defendants, usually against all odds? In the related interests of elevating the arguments to the highest levels and serving justice, well-known attorneys often take the time to support underdog cases. Such support ranges from the filing of *amicus* briefs to actual *pro bono* representation. But, no such advocacy—or at least very little—was manifest with *Obergefell*.

It is telling because this atypical lack of high-level support exposes a coward's hypocrisy on the part of the liberally-oriented legal profession. It found the issue “too hot to handle.” So entrenched were the advocates of gay-marriage at the highest levels that even the most well-established underdog protector was unwilling to come to the fore. Were these intellectuals cowed by a zeitgeist?

Obergefell is a klaxon-call sounding clear and present

danger to the heart of American life. Yes, some warriors with pencil-thin arms and pot-metal swords rose to fight, but individuals of the stature of David's Thirty Mighty Men were not among them. The lack of response provides no better illustration of the rot that has set in, the pandemic sapping the American psyche. Well dissents Justice Samuel Alito when he concludes that the Court's majority decision, though sincere, is cause for “concern, not comfort.” Yet, even he seems blindsided regarding the depth of the threat: His use of the term “irremediable corruption” in fact speaks more fittingly of the maggot-infested abscess of America's morality than to what he termed “our legal culture's conception of constitutional interpretation.”

We stand at the cusp of the Republic's oblivion. True Christians recognize that their most fitting response is to sigh and cry over the sins of the nation's people, following the instruction God offers through His prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 9. But there is more: Now is the time to do more than mourn that which is great and about to become late.

Herein is a plea to rejoice that God's goodness is about to appear in full bloom—and that in the very heart of darkness.

DESTRUCTION AND RESTORATION TOGETHER

Isaiah 30:25-26 calls our attention to an important principle, a tenet that doubtlessly springs from the

merism that lies at the core of God's very nature. As if to emphasize the value of the message, God repeats the principle, using different images, in these successive verses.

And on every lofty mountain and every high hill there will be brooks running with water, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. Moreover, the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the LORD binds up the brokenness of His people, and heals the wounds inflicted by His blow. (*English Standard Version, ESV*)

That principle is just this: *On the heels of destruction will be the forces of restoration.* Notice carefully the word *when*, and the term, *in the day*, both repeated in these verses. We are left with the real sense that the forces of destruction and construction will appear virtually simultaneously. Maybe not fully concomitant but surely close. The two verses merit closer consideration.

In verse 25, God sends running water on the very day when He brings to nothing the high towers. We learn about these two highly dissimilar incidents—the fall of the towers and the coming of the water—in virtually the same breath. This gives us the impression that God will mercifully begin the healing process soon after the destruction, almost concurrent with it.

Let us look into the imagery a bit. The running water could refer to the Holy Spirit or to information, specifically, the knowledge of God that will eventually cover the earth, as Isaiah declares at Isaiah 11:9: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

Isaiah 41:17-18, 20 echo this thought. In verse 18, God promises He will bring water to barren hills while, in verse 20, He links that water, at least generally, to knowledge about Him:

I will respond by making the hard, brown hills sparkle with streams of fresh water and causing valleys to come alive with springs. I will see that gentle pools wait on the desert floor for the weary traveler, and great fountains bubble up from dry ground. . . . They'll see all this and understand. They'll ponder together and come to know that it is the power of the Eternal One that produced this. They will know that the Holy One of Israel created it. (*The Voice*)

Returning to Isaiah 30:25, we understand that the high towers could refer to military fortifications. In our context today, they could just as suitably denote institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, or even the United Nations—anything which people rely on as a bastion of strength and a source of protection. As so often is the case, the prophet Isaiah supplies his own commentary. In Isaiah 2:12, 15-17, he defines the tower as anything that represents the pride of mankind. Verse 12 establishes the context as the Day of the Lord, the same timeframe referenced in Isaiah 30 with the time, “in the day.”

For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low; . . . against every high tower, and against every fortified wall; against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft. And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. (*ESV*)

Returning to Isaiah 30:25 once more, we understand that the mountains could refer to governments, as in Daniel 2, and “every high hill” could refer to false religious practices, as in I Kings 14:22-24:

Judah was openly wicked before GOD, making Him very angry. They set new records in sin, surpassing anything their ancestors had done. They built Asherah sex-and-religion shrines [“high places,” King James Version (KJV)] and set up sacred stones all over the place—on hills, under trees, wherever you looked. Worse, they had male sacred prostitutes, polluting the country outrageously—all the stuff that GOD had gotten rid of when He brought Israel into the land. (*The Message*)

In fact, the term “every high hill” appears six other times in the Old Testament, each time referring to the practice of false religion.² A similar term, with about the same meaning, “high places” appears no less than ninety times in the Old Testament.

The bottom line regarding Isaiah 30:25 is this: God brings flowing water on barren hilltops at about the same time that He brings to naught mankind's oppressive governments (mountains) and his false religions (high hills).

Turning our attention to Isaiah 30:26, we see much the same thought, dressed in entirely different imagery. In this verse, God says the sun's light, and presumably its heat, will be seven times greater than normal and that the moon will shine as brightly as the sun normally does. That would be quite destructive.

Notice, though, all that takes place *when* He “binds up the brokenness of His people, and heals the wounds inflicted by His blow.” So again, the act of restoration, stated here with the terms “binds up” and “heals,” is closely linked with the act of destruction. The two acts may not occur fully simultaneously, but they appear to be extremely closely connected in time.

FOUNDATIONAL CORRECTION

Before considering these unlikely soul mates, an important point needs to be clarified. This linkage of destruction with construction typifies the Day of the Lord, *not* the Tribulation per se. The Tribulation will be a time of Satan's *unmitigated* wrath, not God's *measured* anger during what we believe to be a year-long period which closes the 3½ years of the Tribulation. Therefore, the confluence of destruction and restoration does not characterize the Tribulation. Revelation 12:12 describes Satan's attitude, one which is completely *divergent* from God's:

Prophecy Watch

The Goodness and Severity of God

Therefore, rejoice, O Heavens, and all you who live in the Heavens! But alas for the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you in great fury, knowing that his time is short! (J.B. Phillips' New Testament)

Satan will do nothing restorative during the Tribulation, of that we may all be sure!³ But the Day of the Lord is a different story.

Isaiah 30 brought out another dichotomy that bears investigation. This is the contrast, or distinction, between *destruction and rejoicing*. Its appearance in Isaiah 30 suggests it echoes the dichotomy of destruction and restoration alluded to in verses 25-26. These two dichotomies, destruction-restoration and destruction-rejoicing, appear to be historically and conceptually coupled. Notice Isaiah 30:32 in the *Lexham English Bible*: "And every stroke of the staff of foundation that Yahweh lays will be on it [in context, on Assyria, . . .] with timbrels and lyres, and He will fight against it with battles of brandishing."

Somebody will be making music in the midst of this destructive warfare!

The *Lexham* translation is one of the few that handles this passage adequately. The Hebrew word for the noun "foundation" is a *hapax legomenon*—it appears nowhere else in the Old Testament. However, it is related to another word also translated "foundation" in reference to Solomon's Temple in II Chronicles 8:16, and to yet a third word translated "foundation" in reference to the Millennial Temple in Ezekiel 41:8. The root also appears in Isaiah 28:16: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation."⁴

So, an accurate paraphrase of Isaiah 30:32 might read: "And every stroke of His *foundational* rod that the LORD brings down. . . ." Ironically, the rod of correction is foundational. This is something every good parent understands. The parent's ultimate objective in using corrective punishment is in fact not to hurt but to build—build character. In Hebrews 12:10 (ESV), Paul informs us that the punishments God sends are "for our good, that we may share His holiness."

Ready Answer

What Is Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?

(continued from page 9)

until that same God knocked him flat and told him that he was persecuting his own Maker. Decades after the fact, he was still lamenting his violence and contrariness toward people in whom the Holy Spirit dwelled. So terrible were his actions in his own sight that he did not even consider himself worthy to be called an apostle (I Corinthians 15:9). What he did was similar to what the Pharisees did in Matthew 12—he misjudged the activity of the Holy Spirit. But he also acted in ignorance, so he repented when God allowed him to see.

In this vein, the blows He ultimately delivers to the Babylonish system on the Day of the Lord will lay the *groundwork* for a better civilization; His destruction of the environment and of the infrastructure, of mankind's governments and his perverse religious systems, will permit the creation of far superior counterparts—and that in short order. The old has to go before the new can come. In this sense, these blows are an affirmation of God's commitment to building a new structure. We can be encouraged that His every blow is aimed at producing, ultimately, a new and better world.

While it does not strictly cause restoration, God's "staff of foundation" or His "staff of discipline," as some translations render it, is curative, even creative. Just as a paddle may not actually cause or create good character in a child, properly used, it can certainly become an *agent* in character development. Likewise, God's sagaciously administered discipline in His Day will facilitate restoration. This is why destruction is so closely associated with restoration; this is why the correction of the Day of the Lord is attended with rejoicing. Better things are coming soon.

Part Two will dig more deeply into the partnership of destruction and restoration when God's hand is at work to create and bring about His glorious purposes.

—Charles F. Whitaker

Endnotes

¹ The second highest number of *amicus* briefs were filed relative to the Court's consideration of *Obamacare*, 136.

² The term in Hebrew for "high hill" is *gaboah gib'ah* (*Strong's* 1364 and 1389). The KJV uses the term "every high hill" seven times: I Kings 14:23; II Kings 17:10; Isaiah 30:25; Jeremiah 2:20; Ezekiel 6:13; 20:28; 34:6. In apparently all cases, the term is used pejoratively, referring to apostasy and false religion, most specifically, idolatry.

³ Revelation 12:12 may imply that those who live in the heavens, which includes, on a spiritual level, the saints (see Colossians 1:13; Ephesians 2:6; etc.), are to rejoice. More "earthbound" individuals, those living on "the sea and the earth," will not be rejoicing, except briefly, at the time of the death of the Two Witnesses (Revelation 11:10).

⁴ The word is *mûsadâ*, (*Strong's* 4145), related to *mûsad* (*Strong's* 4143).

As Isaiah 58 says, God's thoughts are so much higher than ours. It is when we start thinking too highly of our own thoughts that we begin grieving, resisting, or even quenching the Spirit of God. God gives us these strong warnings because it is possible for us to ascend above the heights of the clouds in our own thoughts, and to arrive at the point where the mind, power, and nature of God become unrecognizable and objects of scorn. Jesus' warning should prompt us to evaluate our actions and words to ensure that we are not in any way opposing the Spirit of God.

—David C. Grabbe

(continued from page 6)

believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

The covenants comprehensively cover all of life. God designed a plan to satisfy His creative pleasure, and at the same time, to bring Him glory and enable Him to safely share Himself with others in peace. This is one reason why nothing regarding His purpose for mankind is done away. His purpose is serious business. To be prepared to be a kingdom of priests, we need as much of His way from His Word that we can cram into our minds and character. He knew before He began that we would sin because He already had experienced it with the angels. They had sinned even though they were far superior to us in creation, besides the fact that they could literally see Him. He also planned from the beginning for our redemption, as shown in the first or second covenant depending upon how they are separated and counted.

We need to designate a few basic rules regarding biblical covenants before going any further.

As we read the Bible, we should not expect it to announce, "This is a covenant, so pay attention." Naming a section of Scripture a "covenant" is a conclusion reached because God is clearly speaking and establishing a package of rules of conduct within a relationship. In biblical covenants God is always seen as absolute Sovereign of His creation and its purpose. All biblical covenants are initiated by God, and He determines their purposes, terms, and penalties.

Their terms are non-negotiable. God's negotiating a covenant's terms with us would be similar to our entering a contract with an infant. We are alive, and that is the extent of our ability to add to a covenant's needs and value pertaining to God's purpose. We simply lack knowledge and understanding, and our ever-present carnality makes us singularly unqualified. Even after we are called and converted, we have extremely little understanding about what God is doing with us.

A few covenants, actually dictated by God, are termed "universal" by scholars because they apply directly to all of mankind, not just to the called ones. In fact, we are better off saying these covenants are imposed whether men witnessed them or not.

We should never forget that God is never unjust in what He assigns mankind, as His purpose is to create and save. He is not attempting to make things difficult. Whatever requirements the covenants contain are necessary for our overall education in God's way of life. Remember, too, God's written Word contains the terms so each person does not have to literally hear the details. They can always be read. In fact, for our good and God's glory, they must

be read frequently and meditated upon.

We will call the covenants by the names scholars have given them. When we finish with each covenant, its main features will be summarized. Sometimes, the covenants will be expounded fairly extensively due to the settings in which the terms are given and because particular points demand it. We will find that some of the terms are quite obvious, and also that, at first glance, some of the covenants do not even appear to be covenants.

"And God Blessed Them"

As we begin to examine the first covenant, note and consider parallels between it—one that focuses on the physical creation and the beginnings of God's relationship with mankind—and the spiritual creation that follows later in God's revelation of Himself and His purpose for it. In Revelation 13:8, Christ is referred to as the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." God was prepared for mankind's redemption from that time forward, so He has had the same purpose from the beginning. Considering these parallels will add immeasurably to our grasp and appreciation of God and His awesome purpose for us.

The first covenant is called the Edenic Covenant. It is universal in scope, applying to all mankind whether converted or unconverted. Yet, recall the principle that "to whom much is given, from him much will be required." We who have been converted have been given a great deal, and more is required of us because God has given us gifts denied the unconverted.

The scriptures below, which we will refer to from time to time, are not given in any particular order, but just in the order that they appear in the Bible:

- Genesis 1:1-2: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."
- Genesis 1:22: "And God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.'"
- Genesis 1:26-28: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

- Genesis 2:15-17: “Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”

This covenant begins by listing its blessings. God speaks directly to Adam and Eve, but since all humans came from them, this covenant is addressed broadly to the entire human race. The overall picture shown in this universal covenant is that the entire creation—the earth itself with all that is on it, humanity, and the life given us—is a multitude of gifts from God. The key to understanding this is the phrase, “and God blessed them” (Genesis 1:22). Both the Hebrew term and the English translation of “blessed” indicate the same sense: “to do good for,” “to favor,” “to endow,” “to bestow prosperity or happiness,” and even “to honor and exalt.”

The Bible begins with the fact that, because of what God has done, we exist; we live and have being; we think, plan, build, and look to the future. We did not give ourselves even one of these necessary gifts. This is where our relationship with God must begin, where we must start in our thinking about ourselves. These realities, if taken to heart honestly and seriously, are major factors regarding our place in life.

Though not stated directly anywhere in Genesis 1 through 3, this is a truth gathered from the entire context of this covenant combined with understanding from elsewhere in God’s Word. These realities set a pattern for our entire relationship with God, showing immediately that it is His grace, His gifting, that provides us with the means for success within His purpose all the way to salvation itself. What we see here is a foundational forerunner, a physical parallel to the spiritual creation to come later.

The covenant’s emphasis is on His purpose. The earth itself is a major teaching device, and receiving it brings responsibilities whether one is converted or not. The most critical question is “How will we use what we learn from the creation to enhance life?” Caring for the creation requires work, as does spiritual salvation. So, earth is also given to us for our use within the parameters of His creative purposes.

In this respect, it is similar to the gifts of the Spirit listed in I Corinthians 12, where Paul writes that God “distribut[es] to each one individually as He wills” (verse 11). However, our carnal natures, unless wisely and strongly controlled, drive us to use our gifts self-centeredly rather than cooperatively for the profit of all.

Seven Major Principles

Perhaps most important, the Edenic Covenant introduces the sovereign Creator God Himself. In the first five verses of Genesis 1, He stands alone, drawing our focus to what

He wants us to learn first about Him. He presents Himself as standing at the beginning of all things; He precedes everything. In all the other covenants, this pattern holds true: Each covenant focuses on the sovereign Creator God.

A second major point of focus for our thinking about God is that this covenant reveals that He is orderly. Every step in the creation week is taken in a scientifically logical progression. First, God must provide light so that what follows can live and grow. Then He makes the firmament, an atmosphere for creatures to breathe and live in, etc. This establishes that the creation and His purposes are not at all haphazard; randomness is not part of His nature. His orderliness establishes the principle that God is purposeful and has a plan that He is following step by step.

A third idea this covenant illustrates is that in the beginning everything is morally perfect like Him. No sin is present.

A fourth point we can infer from it is that no aspect of the creation is to be worshipped. Everything God made and gifted to us is inferior to the One who made all things. Only the Creator is to be worshipped.

Fifth, God charges mankind, beginning with Adam and Eve, with populating and subduing the earth. “Subdue” does not indicate mankind is to have an adversarial relationship with earth. The Hebrew term can have that sense, but when used in a peaceful context, as here, it is to be understood differently. It is illogical to conclude that, after giving us this beautiful gift, God wants us to proceed to beat it into submission.

In this case, *subdue* indicates “harness its potential” and “use its resources beneficially.” Humanity is not to allow it simply to go “wild.” This command includes such things as cultivating its fields and mining its mineral riches. We should harvest its trees in a constructive manner to build homes and make furniture. It includes domesticating its animals and exercising dominion over them without abusing them. Men are not to rape the earth but to manage through work what has been given. A major principle here is that mankind is created in God’s image and is to rule in God’s behalf as His servant and as He would. In other words, man is to follow God’s pattern. There is of course more to being in His likeness, but ruling is part of mankind’s likeness to God.

A sixth element this covenant establishes is that birth alone places a person into a stewardship responsibility. Each individual is to treat God’s wonderful gifts with loving care, as shown by the manner in which God created them.

Finally, man is to enjoy the foods produced in the Garden. To be continued.

In Christian love,



Brexit, Part Two: Exposing the Divide

As is common for major news events, we find no shortage of “experts” offering their in-depth analysis and opinion about the United Kingdom’s (UK) Brexit vote. Conflicting arguments and forecasts seeking to define and characterize what has happened and what will happen as a result of the groundbreaking referendum abound from all angles and political persuasions. While agreement is rare among the punditry, we can postulate on one common and dominant theme: division.

In fact, to the casual observer, it would appear that consensus is impossible. The world, it seems, is simply dividing against itself—demographic by demographic—and Brexit provides us the proof.

That is to say, those counted among the rich versus poor, male versus female, conservative versus liberal, old versus young, atheist versus believer, hetero versus homo, capitalist versus socialist, or nationalist versus globalist all find themselves further divided and subdivided into an endless number of discordant interest groups, each saying something about Brexit and its impact on worldwide political and socioeconomic trends. This is especially the case in the context of the greater debate between the old world order versus the new.

But first, let us briefly look at what can be agreed on—the easily observable and measurable after-effects.

UK Prime Minister David Cameron has resigned and been replaced by fellow Conservative party member, Theresa May, who has pledged to follow the mandate to lead the country back to fully independent statehood.

The much-anticipated economic disaster never materialized, though world markets were troubled for the two days immediately following the vote. However, by the third business day, the losses began to reverse and most markets are up well beyond where they had been prior to the referendum. The British pound fell and remains down against most other currencies, but many believe the devaluation was inevitable, regardless of the vote. According to government figures, unemployment in the UK has remained stable, actually dropping a small fraction.

Of greater concern, both existential and functional, is the immediate future of the European Union (EU). No less than eight of the remaining 27 countries are considering similar exit referendums, including such stalwarts as France and Italy. Concurrently, Germany is leading a movement to strengthen the EU with calls for greater central power and even for the establishment of a bona fide military force. But further exposing the growing divide, German Chancellor Angela Merkel is under enormous political pressure at home to soften her extreme pro-immigration stance, while the rest of Europe is forced to ponder the frightening ramifications of a strong military led by Germany. Merkel and the EU find

their political futures entwined and very much in doubt.

The United States, as de facto head of NATO and a significant trading partner of the UK and the EU, is watching closely, injecting its influence where it can. Nothing less than the future of the international balance of power—economically and militarily—is at stake, especially now that Russia and China are aggressively challenging the hegemony of the West’s traditional power structures.

Meanwhile, the same observers who considered the Brexit vote as a proxy pitting the old world order versus the new, also see the Trump-Clinton U.S. presidential contest in a similar light. Trump has referred to himself as “Mr. Brexit,” while calling for the dismantling of NATO and the renegotiation of long-standing economic treaties, while Clinton was in the “remain” camp while calling for maintaining the status quo and a strengthened NATO alliance.

British politician and journalist, David Howell, opined recently that much of the analysis of the Brexit divide was superficial, that the UK would have preferred to remain in a more relaxed Europe—a less authoritative but modernized EU—but that was never a choice. Rather than the demographic divides, he believes what was really at play is the greater debate between a world of universal connectivity of all peoples and nations—made possible by the digital revolution—and those longing for more personal sovereignty, privacy, and even separation. In his article, “Just how divided is Britain?” he explains:

A kind of schizophrenia is entering the political debate in many countries, weakening governments and bombarding authorities with contradictory demands for more and less control at the same time, filling minds with unease. . . . So this is the real division—between a fractured world and togetherness, between fragmenting disruption and unifying stability, between wanting to break away and wanting to belong, between the pull of global reality and the instinct to turn inward to smaller communities.

Looking ahead to the near term, we can likely expect a growing divide between the combatants of the old and the new world orders as long as Satan, who desires man’s destruction, is allowed to rule over the earth. He is, after all, only too aware of our Savior’s words from Luke 11:17 (ESV), “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.”

—Joseph Baity

Would Jesus Christ Vote?

Part Three

Speaking of taxes in Matthew 22:21, Jesus taught His disciples to “render . . . to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,” enjoining His disciples to pay them. This teaching parallels the general principle that Christians are to be subject to the governments of this world (Romans 13:1) yet to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29). In doing so, we are to be good citizens appreciating the privileges and opportunities extended to us. We are to submit to the nation’s laws and regulations as long as they do not conflict with the commands of God. If they do, we must be willing to submit to their penalties.

Above all, Christians must follow Christ’s teaching and example. Jesus neither attempted to reform human government nor use political means to forge a better world. Rather, He preached the doctrine of a radically different world to come, calling His followers out of this present evil world and to allegiance to His coming Kingdom.

Jesus told Pilate that His Kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36)—that is, of this age or present time. This is Satan’s world, and Christ came, not to reform Satan or improve his handiwork, but to save His followers from Satan and his system. A Christian is a citizen of the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 2:19), and since that Kingdom is not yet set up on earth, our citizenship is now reserved in heaven (I Peter 1:4). This fact means that Christians are to be separate from the world and its social, political, economic, and religious affiliations (II Corinthians 6:14, 17). We live by God’s laws and give Him our sole allegiance, since we cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).



1. How does an ambassador cooperate with the laws of another country? II Corinthians 5:17-20.

COMMENT: Though they live in a foreign nation, ambassadors take no part of their host nation’s political or military institutions, yet the ambassador is expected to adhere to the laws of the foreign land. An American ambassador to China knows well that his host government is seriously opposed to his own. He does not serve the Chinese government, enter into its politics, try to eradicate the evils of its system, vote in its elections, join its army, or advocate for its causes. Yet he subjects himself to Chinese laws that concern him while there, endeavoring to behave in a way that will best represent the interests of the U.S. government.

In the same way, Christian’s are ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. We are called to become part of a totally different society, and while living in this world, we must represent God and abide by His laws and standards, which supersede those of men when they conflict. Like the worldly ambassador, a Christian should not involve himself in the affairs of an opposing government but must abide by its rules as best he can. He must live as a citizen of heaven and an ambassador for Jesus Christ first and foremost.

2. What if a Christian voted for the wrong candidate? Daniel 2:20-21.

COMMENT: If God sets up the leaders of nations and removes them according to His will (Job 12:16-25), why would Christians presume to take such matters into their own hands and vote for this or that candidate? Even among ourselves, church members disagree on which political party, candidate, or leader should be in power.

Jesus teaches, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against

itself will not stand” (Matthew 12:25). God’s house should not be divided (I Corinthians 1:11-13), yet if we were to vote for a candidate who loses, we would have voted against God’s will. If a professing Christian is trying to vote a man into office, and God is diligently working to install another man, then the Christian’s vote is working against God.

3. What, then, would Jesus do in a time of political election? John 17:16.

COMMENT: Jesus would not take part. He would warn true Christians, “Come out of her [this world], My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18:1-4). Jesus calls Christians out of the ways of this world, including its political systems.

Just as Jesus did, we are expected to provide a true witness of God’s way of life. We are to support what God is doing on earth so that the good news of Christ’s return to establish God’s Kingdom is proclaimed. Our focus needs to be on God’s plan and His gift of salvation and eternal life so that we and all those He has called are prepared to participate in God’s government on earth when it is established (Daniel 7:18, 22; Revelation 2:26-27; 5:10).

An ambassador of Christ is not to involve himself in the politics of this present evil world. Human governments, corrupted by the god of this world (II Corinthians 4:4), are doomed to be replaced by the benevolent rule of the Kingdom of God. Though we are in the world, we are not of it. Our mission—as advance emissaries of His Kingdom—is to give a true witness of God’s way of life (Proverbs 14:25; Isaiah 43:10-12; Matthew 5:13-16; Acts 1:8; Revelation 20:4) and to warn the world of its predicament and present danger, proclaiming to all nations the good news of the Kingdom of God.

—Martin G. Collins