

7 COMMANDS  
FOR HAPPY  
CHRISTIAN  
KIDS



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CHAD SKOLNY



**TATE PUBLISHING**  
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*7 Commands for Happy Christian Kids*

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To my beautiful wife, Kim, who has labored so hard to  
train up our children in the way they should go.  
We love you.



# Contents

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|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Preface: How We View the World .....           | 9   |
| Careful! Don't Fall in that Tomb.....          | 21  |
| <br>   |     |
| #1. Prepare Your Minds for Action .....        | 29  |
| #2. Don't Sleep During the Harvest.....        | 43  |
| #3. Seek First the Kingdom of God.....         | 59  |
| #4. Count Others Better than Yourself.....     | 67  |
| #5. Be Quick to Listen and Slow to Speak ..... | 81  |
| #6. Bear One Another's Burdens .....           | 95  |
| #7. Rest in Christ.....                        | 103 |
| <br>   |     |
| Notes .....                                    | 121 |



# Preface

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## How We View the World

CAN THE PUBLIC school system teach our children “character education?” Are there values all rational people share that can be instilled at school? Does God always approve of a soft, supportive word to our neighbor? Or should the school system stick to the good old three Rs: reading, writing, and ’rithmetic?

The answer to these questions is rooted in the way we view the world around us. Each of us, whether we know it or not, has a particular world view—either we view the world as the creation of God, or else we view the world atheistically. Within the theistic (God-centered) world view, there is, more particularly a biblical, Christian world view. Many fall into the trap of beginning with a notion of God and then subsequently attempting to deduce or prove the Bible. In fact, it is from the Bible that we learn of God.

The Bible must be our presupposition, our axiom, our infallible starting point.

Then, from the Bible, we learn the three Rs, not reading, writing, and 'rithmetic, but ruin, righteousness, and redemption. We live in a time when the public is convinced that education can save children. We can solve society's woes by educating children. Give them an education, send them to college, and their lives will be all the better for it. And for society's sake, we will teach them character, values, and citizenship along the way. These folks, however, do not understand society's problem. Our problem is sin. Only Christ can save us from sin. In fact, education has the potential to compound the problem. I love the way Charles Spurgeon put it: "It is a sad thing that it should be so; but mental force without moral principle has become an engine of destruction, an instrument of mischief. Of all kinds of villains the educated villain is the most to be dreaded."

Christianity today has totally confused what it means to be ruined. The average believer thinks his Christian walk has to do with avoiding things that will defile him. He loses sight of the fact that he is already defiled. We read in Mark 7:14–23:

When He had called all the multitude to *Himself*,  
He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and under-

stand: There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!" When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, *thus* purifying all foods?" And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

We use the term *ruin* because man was created, in the beginning, by God. Our Christian world view holds God as the creator. And when he finished his work of creation, "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was very good*" (Genesis 1.31). Yet the man Adam, as the head and representative of all mankind, disobeyed God and plunged mankind into sin and ruin (Genesis 3).

It gets worse before it gets better. You are totally depraved, but God demands total perfection; on your own, you are hopeless. Arthur Pink said,

Legal perfection is that complete and constant conformity in desire, thought, word and deed which God requires from us unto His holy and righteous law. This is the perfection which God demands from every creature—a full and flawless obedience, both internal and external, loving Him with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves; and this, not occasionally, but perpetually. This has been God’s demand in every age, and it cannot be lowered. Cursed is everyone who continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them (Galatians 3:10).

The average Christian believes that when he hears or reads the Ten Commandments, when he posts them on his living room wall, they are to be his Christian rulebook, so to speak. But that is never the primary purpose of God’s law. God’s law, on the contrary, reveals to us that we are depraved and that we sin against God every single day. Paul said in Romans 7:7, “I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’”

You see, Paul, before he was converted, attempted to establish his own righteousness. He believed that through outward conformity to rules and regulations, he was obeying the law of God. But when God gave him eyes to see, he realized he had broken every single one of God's laws. He was a man in ruin, just like all of us. When the law said, "Thou shall not covet," Paul realized the spirituality of the law, and he realized that after a life of condemning others as law breakers, lo and behold, that law was talking about Paul. Paul was the idolater; Paul was the murderer, the thief, and the adulterer.

But there is good news. There is ruin, but there is righteousness. The law reminds us every time we read it that we break each commandment every day, our best work is but a filthy rag before God, yet Jesus Christ came into this world and walked in perfect obedience to the law of God, inwardly as well as outwardly. You are ruined, yet God demands perfect obedience to be accepted in his sight. "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it," James said. There is a man who kept it perfectly at every point. Peter said of Jesus Christ, "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

God only accepts perfect righteousness, but there is a righteousness that God will accept; he accepts Christ. You are ruined, Christ is righteous. And that righteousness of Christ counts on behalf of all those he has redeemed. Ah,

yes, the third R, redemption! That perfect righteousness of Christ counts on behalf of all those he has redeemed. When mankind fell into ruin, it was not the end of the story. Peter continues in 1 Peter 2:22–25: “Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Paul, writing to God’s people in Ephesians 1:3–7 said,

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

And here we are, redeemed by Jesus Christ. Made by the sovereign creator, we fell into ruin and were hopeless. Then the Great Shepherd came into the world to establish a perfect righteousness acceptable to God. Moreover, he then took the place of his sheep by taking the punishment that was due to them as he hung on the cross and suffered the wrath of God against sin. Now, though still sinful in ourselves, we stand perfectly justified, covered in the blood of Christ. God sees the blood, he sees us not with our own sins but clothed in Christ's perfect righteousness, and he is pleased for Christ's sake. Rejoice then, and follow Paul's instruction that "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

And from this perspective we view everything that happens in the world. Those with a secular world view ultimately share no values with those in Christ. We don't even view children the same. If we view a student as a random product of evolution, how can we ultimately claim that his life is worth more than a dandelion that sprang up in the schoolyard? Both are random. Moreover, how do we justify spending so much time and tax money on his education when, in the end, he is destined to become nothing more than food for the worms? If, on the other hand, God created the child in his own image, and we teach the child what Christ has done for his people, then we can pursue reading, writing, and 'rithmetic for the glory of God.

Why do we teach our children how to read? It is not ultimately so that they can get an education. It is not first and foremost so that they can get a job someday. We teach them to read, because God has given us a book. And in that book we learn of Ruin, Righteousness, and Redemption. In that book we learn of Christ, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. And how do we boast of the Lord? How do we serve Christ? How do we glorify God and enjoy him forever? We begin by reading his word. The inspired word of God has been recorded for us in a book. Do you want to know Christ? Know the book. Do you want to learn more of Christ? Read the book. Do you want to help others understand the word of God? Parents, do you want to teach your children? You have to read it diligently if you are to teach it to others.

Moreover, glorify God by writing. In 1 Samuel 19, David found himself in a house with Saul's men waiting outside to kill him. David's wife, Saul's daughter, warned him that the king intended to kill him by morning. Do you know what David did that very night as he sat in a house with his life in the balance? He wrote Psalm 59! And in verse 16 he wrote, "But I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress."

David will wake up in the morning, not knowing whether the men will still be outside, if he will have escaped, if he

will be their prisoner, and he will sing of God's steadfast love that very same morning? David knew that God's mercies were new every morning. He knew that in the morning he would still be heir of God's covenant promises, he would still be redeemed, he would still have the pardon of sin, and he would still be an heir of eternal life. So praise him in all things. Praise him when meditating on the three Rs: you were ruined, yet Christ established a righteousness and then redeemed his people. Like David, praise him with your pen. Spurgeon said, "Doubtless, the devil has good reason to hate a pen, for ready writers, by the Holy Spirit's blessing, have done his kingdom much damage."

And for math, the answer remains the same. Glorify God with math. Consider how much math Noah employed in order to build an ark. Consider what the blueprints must have looked like to create such a vessel in accordance with the directions given by God. He had to cut sections of cypress wood to meet the final God-given dimensions: three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high. Add to that a raised roof and upper and lower decks. Noah used math to build an ark.

God gave Noah instructions concerning the animals to board the ark in Genesis 7:2-3: "You shall take with you seven each of every clean animal, a male and his female; two each of animals that *are* unclean, a male and his female; also seven each of birds of the air, male and female, to keep

the species alive on the face of all the earth.” What is this but algebra? Consider seven pairs of every kind of clean animal ( $7[2x]$ ), plus one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate ( $2y$ ), plus seven pairs of every kind of bird ( $7[2z]$ ).

Noah built an ark in obedience to God. Consider another act of building that would have required a lot of mathematical planning. Imagine the blueprints for the Tower of Babel. We read in Genesis 11:1–9,

Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down

and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

We see the first R, *ruin*, again come front and center. In our natural state, we try to be as God. Like those of Babel, we want to make a name for ourselves. We want to be God. Yet if we understand that God provided a righteousness in Jesus Christ to his people, and that Jesus Christ the righteous one redeemed his people on the cross, then let us strive to glorify him in all we do.

The purpose of this work is to look, not specifically at reading or math, but at the school's desire to supplement math and reading with character education, and in particular, the recent phenomenon of Sean Covey's *The 7 Habits of Happy Kids*. My hope is to use the pen to glorify God. We will consider each of the seven habits from the perspective of a biblical world view, looking at particular Bible precepts and considering the work of Christ. We will try to discover Christ in each precept. Lord willing, we hope to find Christ on every page.



# Careful! Don't Fall in that Tomb

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TODAY, MANY SCHOOLS and other student-centered organizations have turned to *The 7 Habits of Happy Kids* as a teaching tool to mold children and structure school buildings. Often, the seven habits come within the larger spectrum of *The Leader in Me*, a book by Stephen R. Covey on how schools and parents can inspire greatness in children.

While it appears that some schools have better organized their daily procedures, and many children have altered the way they behave in certain circumstances, the Christian parent or child must ask if the principles found within these seven habits, as well as the underlying principles of *The Leader in Me*, are in line with our own Christian virtues. Are they useful for Christians? Must the Christian alter the ideas found in the book? What, specifically, are the dangers of *The 7 Habits*?

Jesus Christ said to the teachers of his day, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like white-washed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27). The Pharisees were a sect who believed their outward conformity to rules—some biblical and others they had simply made up as arbitrary impositions—meant that they were righteous individuals.

At that same time in history, it was common to white-wash tombs so that people didn’t fall in when walking near open tombs at sunset. Yet, no matter how clean and white and sparkly one was able to get the outside of that tomb, it was full of death. The Pharisees, no matter how much they tried to maintain an outward conformity to rules, were dead inside. Said Matthew Henry,

While they would seem to be godly, they were neither sober nor righteous. We are really, what we are inwardly. Outward motives may keep the outside clean, while the inside is filthy; but if the heart and spirit be made new, there will be newness of life; here we must begin with ourselves. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was like the ornaments of a grave, or dressing up a dead body, only for show.

All men, by nature, are born as sinners, and we are spiritually dead. Paul speaks of this in his letter to the Ephesians, particularly in verse 2:2–3:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

The reason we are full of sin is that we are spiritually dead. We are totally depraved, and that total depravity affects every aspect of our being. Yes, it even includes our wills; in truth, our wills are spiritually dead. Apart from regeneration by the Holy Spirit, it is impossible one could ever choose for the glory of God. And not only are we ruined, but we are unable to do anything about it. As Paul teaches in Romans 8:6–7: “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.” Our natural minds are not subject to the law of God and they *cannot* be subject

to God's law. We are not only totally depraved, but we are totally unable to do anything about it.

And so we face a dilemma. God demands perfect and unceasing obedience to his perfect standards, yet we are a dead, fallen race. The question faces us: does our ruin, along with our inability to do anything about it, result in total hopelessness? To which we answer, only if we look to ourselves. If we put faith in ourselves, then we are indeed hopeless. From our conception in the womb we have fallen short of God's perfect standard (Psalm 51:5). But if we look to Jesus Christ, who walked in perfect righteousness, who fully took the punishment that was due to sinners, then we have salvation from sin and are spared from hell's fire. For when we died by sin, God declared that we deserved eternal punishment. Certainly, God will punish. God will punish every sin ever committed, either in Christ or in the sinner. As John the Baptist declared in John 3:36: "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

We do not simply need our tombs whitewashed. We certainly do not need to inspire greatness from sinners; in fact, we cannot do that. We need the greatness of Jesus Christ to be reckoned to our account. We need to be covered in his blood and clothed with his righteousness. Then, and only then, can we live out of gratitude and proper motivation for

our behavior, “that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:15).

*The Leader in Me* assumes “that all young people are good, and within each child are gifts to be unleashed.”<sup>1</sup> The apostle Paul, on the other hand, speaking by divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, knew that, “In me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing” (Romans 7:18). David said of himself, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:5). Again David said, “The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies” (Psalm 58:3). And these things are true of your children too. Conceived in sin, going about speaking lies. In their flesh dwells no good thing.

No doubt programs such as *The Leader in Me* may whitewash tombs and teach outward conformity to some set of established norms, but programs can never raise a dead sinner to life. On the other hand, they can further convince a sinner of his own self-righteousness and blur his need for Christ. Once raised from spiritual death to new life in Christ, however, “the love of Christ compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). We know ourselves to be unworthy sinners. We know that, just like Paul, in our flesh dwells no good thing. We know that our only righteousness comes from Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30), and therefore, we bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of

Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Oh, what a difference between those who behave in order to establish their own righteousness as opposed to those who behave out of gratitude for the righteousness of Christ counting on their behalf.

*The 7 Habits of Happy Kids*<sup>2</sup> include:

1. Be proactive (You’re in charge.)
2. Begin with the end in mind (Have a plan.)
3. Put first things first (Work, then play.)
4. Think win-win (Everyone can win.)
5. Seek first to understand then to be understood (Listen before you talk.)
6. Synergize (Together is better.)
7. Sharpen the saw (Balance feels best.)

Those who seek to bring glory to Christ from gratitude immediately have questions. Is together always better? Does the Bible not teach “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14). And, of course, am I really charge? Or is it true even of the birds that “not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father?” (Matthew 10:29). What then do Christians teach our children? Consider seven biblical commands that we may teach our children to serve Christ:

1. Prepare your minds for action (1 Peter 1:13).
2. Don't sleep during the harvest (Proverbs 10:5).
3. Seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33).
4. Count others better than yourself (Philippians 2:3).
5. Be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19).
6. Bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).
7. Rest in Christ (Matthew 11:28).

In fact, we would all do well to consider these seven principles. "And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love" (2 John 1:6 NIV).



# Prepare Your Minds for Action

## 1 Peter 1:13

ON THE MOST practical level, we can teach our children proactivity. We can teach them to stop making excuses, but these things are useless apart from Christ. The apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:13–16 NASB,

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, **YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.**”

Within the context of the passage, Peter says that the Old Testament prophets spoke of the Messiah, who would come to suffer and redeem his people, ushering in not just a temporary deliverance but an eternal salvation. Because of this, prepare your minds for action. We read in the King James Version, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your minds.” John Calvin said,

“It is a similitude taken from an ancient custom; for when they had long garments, they could not make a journey, nor conveniently do any work, without being girded up. Hence these expressions, to gird up one’s-self for a work or an undertaking. He then bids them to remove all impediments, that being set at liberty they might go on to God, for these words mean the same with those of Christ, ‘Let your loins be girded about, and burning lamps in your hands’ (Luke 12:35), except that Peter doubles the metaphor by ascribing loins to the mind. And he intimates that our minds are held entangled by the passing cares of the world and by vain desires, so that they rise not upward to God. Whosoever, then, really wishes to have this hope, let him learn in the first place to disentangle himself from the world, and gird up his mind that it may not turn aside to vain affections.”

We recall that the natural mind is enmity against God. It seeks to serve itself. It loves the things of the world. It must be renewed by God's sovereign grace to believe the gospel. Even then, it must be continually renewed. Paul, speaking to those whom he esteemed as brothers, encouraged them, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

Again, Paul told the Philippians,

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Do you want to renew your mind? Read Paul. And as all the scripture is harmoniously God-breathed, read it all. Spurgeon told a story of a bishop who took two baths every day, no matter what. When asked why this was, he replied, "Because I cannot conveniently do it three times." Spurgeon said, "If those who love the scriptures were asked

why they read the Bible so often, they might honestly reply, 'Because we cannot find time to read it oftener.' The appetite for the Word grows on that which it feeds on."

Do you want character education? Paul said the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica. Why? For they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Character is found in the scriptures, and the scriptures speak of Christ. Therefore just as the Old Testament prophets spoke the word of God and testified that Christ has "in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Hebrews 1:2), we turn to the word the God, the Bible, as the only infallible source of truth by which we may prepare our minds. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever (Isaiah 40:8 *ESV*). We must teach our children the scriptures. To prepare them for action, we must be teaching them the whole counsel of God's word. If the love of Christ compels us, we must know the Christ of the Bible.

God spoke through the prophet Hosea: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee (Hosea 4.6 *KJV*)." We live in a time when many professing Christians are skeptical of Bible study and knowledge. Our God-given intellectual capacity is downplayed as we seek for experiences. This is

incredibly dangerous. Experiences are much like drugs. If we rely on our experiences, we always need something more and something better. Our search for the next experience is like an addict's search for his next high. Meanwhile, as we reject knowledge, God is rejecting us. Paul said of the Jews in his day: "For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Romans 10:2 KJV). Yes, they were zealous, but they lacked knowledge, and because of this, "not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." Christ is our only righteousness! If we are to prepare our minds, we must fill our minds with Christ. Which Christ, we ask? The Christ of the Bible. Study the Bible. In this way, we prepare our minds. As I once heard a minister explain, we make decisions based upon the word of God, and we carry them in our back pockets. Then, when faced with a circumstance, we do not have to make a decision on a moment's notice. Rather, we simply pull the decision from our pocket that we made a long time ago while preparing our minds for action. And yes, typically, parents are the providential tool by which a child learns to prepare his mind.

Even as adults, we may travel and see billboards advertising pornographic shopping and viewing at an upcoming exit. Here is what we know for sure: God said in his seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery." And

Christ has filled our minds with his words in Matthew 5.27–28: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Now, I know it is impossible for me to keep the seventh commandment. Just by seeing the billboard, I’m sure I’ve already broken it. But praise be to God, I am dead to the law and now married to Christ (Romans 7:4), who perfectly fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law on my behalf. Remember the folks who had a zeal without knowledge? Paul said that “not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” I am not ultimately compelled by the seventh commandment, but “the love of Christ compels us.” Not my love for him, for my love for him is far from what it should be. Yet his love for me compels me. As a commandment, I know adultery is opposed to the character of God. Yet Christ perfectly fulfilled the seventh commandment and then died so that his perfection would count on behalf of an adulterer such as I am. Will I really now depart the highway? We do not decide at that moment whether to depart; we simply pull the decision from our back pocket that we made while preparing our minds for action.

Yet, in multiple lifetimes, we could not exhaust God's word and all of its implications. Moreover, we pilgrim through a world of sin while battling the sins of our own flesh, and the preparation of our minds must be revisited over and over again. Thus, Paul tells the believers in Ephesus "that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Ephesians 4:22–23). John Gill suggested this renewing of our minds

designs not the first work of renovation; for these Ephesians had been renewed, and were made new creatures in Christ; but the gradual progress of it; and takes in, if not principally intends, a renewal, or an increase of spiritual light and knowledge, of life and strength, of joy and comfort, and fresh supplies of grace, and a revival of the exercise of grace; and in short, a renewal of spiritual youth, and a restoration of the saints to that state and condition they were in, in times past: and the exhortation to this can only mean, that it becomes saints to be concerned for such revivings and renewings, and to pray for them, as David did, Psalm 51:10 for otherwise, this is as much the work of the Spirit of God, as renovation is at first; and he only who is sent forth, and

renews the face of the earth, year by year, can renew us daily in the Spirit of our minds.

For the duration of our lives in this world, we must always be filling our minds with knowledge and wisdom, seeking for God to renew us and teach us so that we may never tire. We teach our children how to prepare their minds, and we bid them to continue preparing after they have left our homes and become husbands or wives in their own homes. We study the word of God because it is the only infallible source of truth, and as James said, we teach them to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). Having prepared our minds for action, we are now burdened to act. We are called to obedience. Or, as James said, “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was” (James 1:23).

When we look in the mirror, we should see filth. We should see vileness and unpleasantness. That is our natural being. However, when we look at the law of liberty, we see that we have been freed from the condemnation of sin and the guilt that was due to us. Christ walked on earth in perfect obedience to the law of God, and his righteousness counts on behalf of his people, even though they are vile in themselves. Will gratitude then motivate us to act in

obedience to the one who freed us from the damnation we rightly deserved?

Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35). The love of a human, though, is often mistaken as an emotion. Love, however, is not an emotion; it is a volition. This is why God is able to command, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25). Emotions change; God does not command an emotion. God commands us to love, for “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10). Thus, in defining love, we note that it is inextricably tied to obedience. We cannot claim to love our neighbor when we steal from him. We cannot claim to love our wives when we lie to them. We cannot claim to love our boss when we do not work hard for him (Colossians 3:23). And it goes even further. We must not love by refraining from stealing from our neighbor, but we must give him what he lacks. As we read in Luke 6:31 NIV, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” This is action. Don’t just refrain from lying to your wife, share your life with her. Don’t just refrain from cheating your boss on the time card, work extra.

Remember, the love of Christ, his love for us, compels us. And because he first loved us, we love him (1 John

4:19). And if we truly love him and are compelled by his love for us, we will love our neighbor as he has loved us. “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen” (1 John 4:20 NIV). If you love God, prepare your mind for action.

## **The Good Samaritan**

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?”

So he answered and said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’”

And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.”

But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing,

wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"

And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

A prime example of one ready to act was the Jewish half-breed, commonly known as the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. The words Jesus spoke in Matthew 22 are echoed nearly verbatim by a lawyer in Luke 10:27 *esv*. Jesus asked him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" The man answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all

your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” The lawyer, though, immediately tried to limit this great command by asking, “And who is my neighbor?”

Picture it, on a winding road where criminals typically lurk, a Jew is mugged and lies clinging to life. A priest comes along and shows no compassion on his brother in the flesh. Next, a Levite comes upon the injured man, and he goes as far as to cross the street to avoid his brother. Of course the priest and the Levite each knew the word of God, at least on a propositional level; they were not ready to act.

Finally, a man from Samaria comes upon the victim—a Samaritan, one hated by the Jews yet unwilling to ponder, “Who is my neighbor?” Instead he dressed his wounds and alleviated his pain. He took financial responsibility for his wellbeing. In short, he not only knew God’s word, but he acted.

## **Two Sons**

“What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.”

The parable of two sons in Matthew 21:28–32 ESV points out the danger of hypocrisy in failing to act. We may at first fail; we are, after all, sinners. Yet we must repent and turn to action. Such is far better than one who talks the talk yet fails to act. Henry said,

The whole human race are like children whom the Lord has brought up, but they have rebelled against him, only some are more plausible in their disobedience than others. And it often happens, that the daring rebel is brought to repentance and becomes the Lord's servant, while the formalist grows hardened in pride and enmity.

## **Finding Christ**

How do we see Christ in this command to prepare our minds for action? Consider that Jesus Christ was a man of action. We may speak of the covenant of grace, and we glory in the cry of “Grace alone!” but for Christ, the covenant was much, much work. Jesus was not the feminine, bearded-lady type displayed in pictures found in churches today. He was a man of action. Said Jay Adams, Christianity

has a savior who was so much of a man that he died. He did not fear death. In spite of all the hor-

rors of the cross, the physical tortures involved, and the agony of being rejected by God, he set his face toward Jerusalem like flint. On he went to bear the guilt and the penalty and the wrath of God in the stead of his people. Those who put their trust in him find life through his death. He was a man, a man who loved so dearly that he was willing to give his life for his people, for the church that is represented by the Christian wife.<sup>1</sup>

Have you taught your children about such a Christ as that? Christ said, “And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed *one* upon Me,” in Luke 22:29. Literally, Christ said, “As my father *covenanted* to me a kingdom.” You see, from all eternity, God the Father has covenanted with God the Son to give a particular people to the Son. The Son has always covenanted with the Father that he would willingly die for the sins of that people. God the Holy Spirit has always been party to the covenant, that he would be sent to regenerate all those the Father gave to the Son and for whom the Son died. Christ was a man of action. You, too, be Christ-like and prepare your minds for action.

# Don't Sleep During the Harvest

## Proverbs 10:5

THE PUBLIC SCHOOL may teach students to have a plan. We may tell our children to have a good plan before their next undertaking. But from Proverbs, the Book of Wisdom, we find the truth that “he who gathers crops in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a disgraceful son” (Proverbs 10:5). In the summer, the wise son was already looking ahead to the winter; he had the end in mind. When winter came, he had food stored in abundance.

The same lesson is taught in Proverbs 6:8–11 by an ant, that:

stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food  
at harvest.

How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man.

Not only is there an implication to take action, as we reflect on Command Number 1, but there is also wisdom demonstrated on working toward a particular goal. In education, this is sometimes referred to as “Backward Design.” A teacher determines what the students’ final outcome should be, and s/he plans backward from that point.

Yet we must remember any time we speak of wisdom that it is ultimately found in Christ. Those without Christ are without any true wisdom. Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 1:30, “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” With this in mind, Henry Mahan said,

There is nothing left us in which we may glory in his presence. It is not of us but totally from God that we are in Christ and that we have life in Christ. Christ is our ‘wisdom,’ revealing to us the mysteries of godliness and spiritual truth. Christ is our righteousness making us upright, and putting us in right standing with God. Christ is our “sanctification,”

making us pure, holy and unblamable. Christ is our “redemption,” providing our ransom from the curse and condemnation of sin. So then it is written: “He that boasts, rejoices and glories, let him glory only in the Lord!”<sup>1</sup>

Apart from Christ, man is without wisdom, whether he uses a backward design model or not. I remember a time my wife and I awoke on a Saturday morning and went yard sale shopping, as we sometimes like to do. The last house we visited was actually an estate sale. A large, spacious estate sat atop a vast piece of property, and the story of a life was inside.

Literally everything in the house was for sale. A price tag seemed to dawn every tangible item inside, and many of the items were quite expensive. A hand-spun area rug was priced at \$1,200, and an antique grandfather’s clock was also well over \$1,000. The upstairs had so many rooms I had to ask my wife to lead us out as I had become lost.

Still, there was something a bit eerie about watching hordes of people rummage through the life’s possessions of another person. I began to wonder who this person had been and what had happened to him. The home seemed to have been abandoned suddenly. There were cards on a shelf that had been given by loved ones and clothes lining the closets. I could not help but think of the rich fool from Christ’s parable in Luke 12:13–21 *ESV*.

Then one from the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But He said to him, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” And He said to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’

“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Now, of course, not all rich men are fools, and I certainly do not know if the owner of this estate had been such a one. But I do know that before my eyes was the truth that what he had laid up for himself in this world, which was abundant and obviously well planned, was becoming the possession of others.

Christ warned the brothers who argued over an inheritance, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." How badly our children need to hear this today. Even those who claim to be Christians tend to measure themselves by their possessions. They feel prideful when their possessions are greater than their neighbor's, and they feel self-pity and resentment when their neighbor's possessions are more glorious than their own. How pressing is the call for the believer not to rely on an abundance of earthly possessions but on the providential love of the heavenly Father.

Said Calvin,

Christ first guards his followers against covetousness, and next, in order to cure their minds entirely of this disease, he declares, that our life consists not in abundance. These words point out the inward fountain and source, from which flows the mad eagerness for gain. It is because the general belief is that a man is happy in proportion as he possesses much, and that the happiness of life is produced by riches. Hence arise those immoderate desires, which, like a fiery furnace, send forth their flames, and yet cease not to burn within. If we were convinced that riches, and any kind of abun-

dance, are evils of the present life, which the Lord bestows upon us with his own hand, and the use of which is accompanied by his blessing, this single consideration would have a powerful influence in restraining all wicked desires; and this is what believers have come to learn from their own experience. For whence comes it, that they moderate their wishes, and depend on God alone, but because they do not look upon their life as necessarily connected with abundance, or dependent upon it, but rely on the providence of God, who alone upholds us by his power, and supplies us with whatever is necessary?

If we rely on our own wealth, and if gaining riches compels us more than the love of Christ, then Christ does not mince words about our condition. We are fools. Added Calvin,

Hence we may easily conclude that the parable was intended to show, that vain are the deliberations and foolish attempts of those who, trusting to the abundance of their wealth, do not rely on God alone, and are not satisfied with their own share, or prepared for whatever may befall them; and, finally, that such persons will suffer the penalty of their own folly

Or, as Spurgeon described it,

There is a time coming when that extra ten dollars which seems so important now, or that extra ten thousand dollars, or that extra million dollars added to one's estate shall be thought to be of no more value than a single hair. When men come to die, how their business dwarfs to nothing!

Regardless of what the spiritual state of the man may have been in whose house I wandered and whose possessions I purchased, the truth is unavoidable that each of us, should the Lord not first return, will be in the same position. Our souls will be required of us. Our goods will be left behind in this world, becoming the possessions of others—perhaps loved ones, perhaps strangers. We will have gathered in the summer for a winter ultimately preceded by death. But without a question, our riches will, at that moment, do us no good whatsoever as we stand naked, face to face with a God of love and of justice. A minister once pointed out to me that in heaven the streets are lined with gold. “The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass” (Revelation 21:21). Should we even be able to approach the gates of heaven with our riches

of gold, how foolish would we look when asked, “What is the pavement for?”

In a sense, we Saturday morning yard salers had broken in and begun to obtain another man’s possessions. Had we not, the moths and rust would have otherwise destroyed them. So let none of us forget the command of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 6:19–21:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

## **Wise Planning**

The Christian, however, loves Christ and longs to be obedient to him out of gratitude for the gospel of grace. Therefore, we are wise to plan ahead, as long as we heed Wisdom’s warning, “Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established” (Proverbs 16:3 *ESV*). Said Gill, “It is only such a man, a good man, whose steps are ordered by the Lord, to go right on and not turn to the right hand or the left; and to walk safely and surely,

through a variety of troubles and difficulties, to his kingdom and glory.”

“The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps” (Proverbs 16:9 *ESV*). Let our children and students, therefore, make every plan in accordance with Christ and his word, which is the only source of infallible truth, and make sure that every end toward which he works is just, for “the plans of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful” (Proverbs 12:5 *NIV*). With this command in his sight, he can then descend to the smallest particulars in how he plans for test preparation, personal prayer, Bible study, or training to become a wise husband and father.

## **The Gleaners**

We must remember, also, to be merciful to others in the day of the harvest. This brings to mind the law from Leviticus 19:9–10:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather *every* grape of your vineyard; you shall

leave them for the poor and the stranger: I *am* the LORD your God.

When the reaper gathered his harvest, he was to leave a portion to be gleaned by the poor. Gill said,

As the forgotten sheaf, and the olive berries left; these are all supposed to be poor persons, otherwise no doubt there were strangers, and fatherless persons, and widows, in good circumstances; who, as they needed not, so neither would give themselves the trouble, but think it beneath them to go into fields, oliveyards, and vineyards, to gather what was left by the owners. These laws were made in favor of the poor, that mercy and kindness might be showed to them, and that they might have a taste of all the fruits of the earth.

One of the most well-known manifestations of this law is seen in the book of Ruth as the Moabitess said to Naomi,

“Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor.”

And she said to her, “Go, my daughter.” Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the

field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem.

And he said to the reapers, “The Lord be with you!” And they answered, “The Lord bless you.”

Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, “Whose young woman is this?”

And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, “She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.’ So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest.”

Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn.”

Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?”

But Boaz answered her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your hus-

band has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!”

Then she said, “I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants.” (Ruth 2:2–13)

I failed to see the grand truth pictured by gleaning laws until recently. In Isaiah 27, God says of his impending judgment in verses 10 to 12 KJV,

And it shall come to pass in that day

Yet the defenced city shall be desolate, and the habitation forsaken, and left like a wilderness: there shall the calf feed, and there shall he lie down, and consume the branches thereof.

When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off: the women come, and set them on fire: for it is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour.

That the LORD will thresh,  
From the channel of the River to the Brook of  
Egypt;  
And you will be gathered one by one,  
O you children of Israel.

God will destroy the city, leaving it desolate. It will be like a wilderness. The branches are broken and left as kindling as the city burns. We must always remember this very important truth: God's judgment works toward the eternal destruction of the wicked. Yet, his judgment is always mixed with mercy toward his chosen people. God's judgments do not ultimately destroy the elect, but judgment brings them to repentance and causes reformation in their lives. Thus we see when God sends this judgment, he is actually "threshing" (v. 12). The word *thresh* (*chabat*) is used to denote the beating off of a fruit during reaping. This is how olives were reaped from the trees. With a large stick, reapers beat the trees until the olives fell from the branches. Therefore, we read in Deuteronomy 24:20–22:

When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean *it* afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and

the widow. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this thing.

Ultimately, as in Isaiah 27, it is God who reaps. It is God who takes the stick and beats his judgment upon the city. We see in verse 11 that to the unbeliever, he shows no favor. However, when the beating is over and God has threshed judgment, there remains fruit to be gleaned. God always preserves a remnant to himself. And just like the gleaners who went forth and found the stray olives left on a branch or a grape left on the ground, God now goes forth and gleans his remnant one by one.

And you will be gathered one by one,  
O you children of Israel.

So we may take with us this comforting thought. When God sends judgment, whether the temporal judgments of tornadoes and tsunamis or spiritual judgment of the desolation of the instituted churches, he will still mix that judgment with mercy toward his people, leading them to repentance and reformation. He will never fail to spare a remnant. And as the gospel goes forth to all nations, one by one, he will glean the faithful until every last child of God has been converted. For in the end, “Many are the plans

in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails" (Proverbs 19:21 NIV).

## **Finding Christ**

We are reminded that God the Father has covenanted with God the Son to give a particular people to the Son. The Son has always covenanted with the Father that he would willingly die for the sins of that people. This was history's most important plan. Adams said,

God planned his work, then worked his plan. Christ's ministry was carried out according to a schedule. He came "in the fullness of time," spoke of the fact that his "hour had not yet come," and died for sinners—right on schedule. Who are we, creatures made in the image of God, to think that we can get along without planning and scheduling?<sup>2</sup>



# Seek First the Kingdom of God

## Matthew 6:33

WE MAY TELL our children they have to work before they play. In a practical circumstance, a parent may tell a child he has to finish his Saturday morning chores before playing basketball with his friends. A teacher may make him finish his incomplete math assignment before starting recess. We must answer the question, “What needs to be done first?” In his Sermon on the Mount, Christ poses some serious questions. We read some of these in Matthew 6:28–34.

“So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today

is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith?

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble.

Having posed questions that might pry on a person’s mind, such as what one will eat or what one will wear, Christ reminds us to always keep our eye on the most important thing. Seek first the kingdom of God. In life, there are many things that lure our thoughts, devotions, and concerns away from God’s kingdom and to the things of this world. For students, it may be concerns of the social hierarchy, a bad grade, a looming test, peer pressures, or any other thing that causes worldly concerns.

Henry said of the passage,

There is scarcely any sin against which our Lord Jesus more warns his disciples, than disquieting, distracting, distrustful cares about the things of this

life. This often ensnares the poor as much as the love of wealth does the rich. But there is a carefulness about temporal things which is a duty, though we must not carry these lawful cares too far. Take no thought for your life. Not about the length of it; but refer it to God to lengthen or shorten it as he pleases; our times are in his hand, and they are in a good hand. Not about the comforts of this life; but leave it to God to make it bitter or sweet as he pleases. Food and raiment God has promised, therefore we may expect them. Take no thought for the morrow, for the time to come.

## **A Christian Philosophy**

Yes, we must work hard and plan wisely for the future so that we are ready for the harvest, but if we allow concern about the future to take our eyes off Christ, then we have fallen into sin. It is imperative that a child or teacher have a philosophy; it is imperative that a Christian child or Christian teacher have a Christian philosophy. Unfortunately, in nearly all public schools and many Christian schools, there is little more than a hodgepodge of disjointed ideas. They may claim to long for excellence—some have “School of Excellence” banners on the wall—but they lack a clearcut philosophy.

What is the life philosophy of a Christian? Paul said to the Christians in Corinth, “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s. Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 6:20, 10:31 KJV).

## **Man’s Chief End**

Again, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul commanded, “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). On these passages of scripture and passages such as these, we find the truth as the Westminster Divines articulated in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question and Answer No. 1:

Question: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Here is the root of a Christian’s life philosophy. Whether we are teaching, raising our own children, grocery shopping, or driving our cars, our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. With this in mind, consider and evaluate everything you do today and why you do it. God has given us this life that we may glorify him. Gordon Clark said,

The substituting of unrelated aims for a single comprehensive aim in education is both the result and the example of the absence of any ultimate aim for human life as a whole. If the educators had any view of the chief end of man, they would find it easier to locate the proper place of a liberal education. There is only one philosophy that can unify education and life. That philosophy is the philosophy of Christian theism. What is indeed needed is an educational system based on the sovereignty of God, for in such a system man as well as chemistry will be given his proper place, neither too high nor too low.<sup>1</sup>

The prophet Isaiah said, “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation” (Isaiah 12:2). A public school system will never say that. Will you claim Isaiah’s cry as a basis for your life philosophy?

## **Life Is Short**

If we strive to obey Command Number 1, having our minds prepared to act, and such minds know that we always are to be seeking first the kingdom of God, we must realize that our time is short. This can be hard for a child to understand when it seems so much life is ahead

of him. So James asked, “For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14). The psalmist confirms: “You have made my days as handbreadths; and my age is as nothing before you. Certainly every man at his best state *is* but vapor” (Psalm 39:5). Again, Psalm 102:3 states, “For my days are consumed like smoke; and my bones are burned like a hearth.”

Mahan mentions,

You and I know nothing of tomorrow, not even if we will live until then. We cannot foresee what shall befall us tomorrow. Therefore it is stupidity and haughtiness to determine on this course or that without the will of God, in whom we live, move and have our being! ‘What is your life?’ Or, what is the nature of your life? You are but a wisp of vapor, a puff of smoke, a mist that is visible for a little while and then disappears.<sup>2</sup>

So then, “be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15–16 NIV). Living for the kingdom involves using our time carefully and “looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the

throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). In this mindset, Paul, a man of action, was able to say, “I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you” (Philippians 3:14–15).

## **Finding Christ**

Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:34). Gill adds,

For where your treasure is, whether in heaven, or in earth, there will your heart be also: the heart is always set upon the treasure, and as is a man’s treasure, such is his heart, that is, set upon it; if his treasure is only here, and he has not the true riches, his heart is only earthly and carnal; but if his treasure is heavenly, his heart and conversation will be in heaven.

Our treasure must be in the kingdom of heaven; seek first the kingdom. Christ likened, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” Said Henry,

Many slight the gospel, because they look only upon the surface of the field. But all who search the Scriptures, so as in them to find Christ and eternal life, will discover such treasure in this field as makes it unspeakably valuable; they make it their own upon any terms. Though nothing can be given as a price for this salvation, yet much must be given up for the sake of it.

If you have found Christ, give up anything and everything that may come between you and King Jesus.

# Count Others Better than Yourself

## Philippians 2:3

WE MAY TELL our children that everyone can win; there is enough of the pie for everyone to enjoy a slice. Life is a buffet, not a single plate, so there is plenty for everybody. I'm just not sure I can find Christ in that.

Recently, I was pondering the brevity of our lives on earth, as we discussed in the preceding chapter. Reflecting on the lives of my wife and my children, I became a bit somber. Thinking on the command to seek first the kingdom, I turned and asked my wife if, when the Lord calls us home, we will be able to say that we have redeemed our time (Ephesians 5:16)? We continued to discuss it over lunch and concluded that one of the primary things we needed to do, though it be one of the hardest for a sinner to achieve, is to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one

another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). If Christ forgave a wretch such as me, how can I fail to forgive another?

Let us then heed the fourth command as it comes from Paul to the church in Philippi: *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself (Philippians 2:3). The context of the passage proceeds an encouragement from Paul in 1:27–28 to “let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries.”

Such a life worthy of the gospel is patterned after Christ,

who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:6–8)

Oh, the humility of Jesus Christ! It is a daunting thought that we could even begin to be molded to such a pattern of

lowliness, regarding others better than ourselves. “When things are done through strife, it involves quarrelling, contention and dividing into bitter camps. It leads to division,” said Mahan. “This is not the Spirit of Christ. We are not to do things seeking recognition and personal praise; this is empty vainglory. In humility and sincerity, let us regard the other brother as spiritually superior to ourselves. Paul said, ‘I am less than the least of the saints.’ Be ready to give way to the judgment and desires of others as they are in accord with the Scriptures.”<sup>1</sup>

## **Pride**

To count others better than ourselves is no easy task. Within our depraved flesh lies much, much pride. It was the pride of Judah, at least in part, that resulted in her captivity, hunger, and death by sword at the hands of the Babylonians. “Thus says the LORD: Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 13:9 *ESV*).

Our own pride deceives us (Obadiah 1:3). Surely it is true that pride brings destruction (Proverbs 16:18) and that “when pride comes, then comes shame, but with the humble is wisdom” (Proverbs 11:2). In fact, Jesus Christ was the great humble one, and his is true wisdom, so he speaks in

Proverbs 8.13, “Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.”

Pride was the first sin, as Eve contemplated that “when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Pride overcame the creature, deceiving her that she may be as the creator. Her husband, likewise, failed to be Christ-like as the head of his bride, and mankind fell.

The same pride that plunged mankind into sin courses through our veins, for in our flesh dwells no good thing. By grace, however, Paul could say with sincerity, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find” (Romans 7:18). Paul, who had overseen the murder of Christians (Acts 7:58), could now, by the Spirit within him, declare, “I am the very least of all the saints” (Ephesians 3:8). He esteemed others better than himself.

## **Principle**

It is easy to be overtaken by principle. It may be principle that causes a child to argue with his parents or his teacher. It may be principle that causes a parent to argue with his boss. It may be principle that we use as an excuse

to sin, over and over again. Consider, however, that none had more right to act on principle than did Jesus Christ. From the very beginning he was with God and “all things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3).

Moreover,

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:15–20 NIV)

Yet it was this Son of God who was humiliated by, as articulated in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “being

born, and that in a low condition (Luke 2:7), made under the law (Galatians 4:4), undergoing the miseries of this life (Hebrews 2:18), the wrath of God (Matthew 27:46), and the cursed death of the cross (Galatians 3:13); in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time (1 Corinthians 15:3–4).”

Having warned his disciples of his impending death, Jesus told them pointedly, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35). Even Paul repeatedly gave up his apostolic rights for the good of others. He worked and toiled, often for nothing, in order to serve the church. Even sitting in prison, Paul rejoiced that all things (Romans 8:28), including his difficulties and imprisonment, “is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 4:15 *esv*). Paul had earlier told the Corinthians, “For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more” (1 Corinthians 9:19). Again, “Now if we are afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation” (2 Corinthians 1:6).

Oh, to be like our humble Jesus, or even like the sinner Paul, who knowing his own depravity was able to esteem others more significant than himself.

## Partiality

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

James sets before us a principle that we not be prejudiced or have an unholy discrimination toward anyone. We do not deal with others as rich and poor, black and white. We deal with others as either brothers in the Lord or those outside the Lord. Paul had called himself the least of all disciples. If we know our own depravity and place ourselves

rightly on the lowest rung of the ladder, then it is impossible that we could look down on anyone. If, however, in sin, we pretend that we have climbed a few rungs on the ladder, we will immediately look down on all those we believe to be below us.

To hold the faith of Jesus Christ without partiality, we do not judge books by their covers. James uses an illustration of a rich man and poor man coming to church, yet we can ask what distinctions encourage us to be partial. Is it fat and skinny? Attractive and ugly? Learned and unlearned? In verse 5, James points out that our partiality often defies the revealed will of God. It is not universal, but it is typical that God takes those of low esteem in this world, those on whom the world looks with scorn, and he makes them princes. Of course, there will be rich and poor in heaven as well as in hell, but God often chooses the offscouring of the world. “We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things” (1 Corinthians 4:13 *ESV*).

There are, of course, spiritual implications to God’s choosing of the lowly, particularly as seen in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. Henry said, “The poor in spirit are happy. These bring their minds to their condition, when it is a low condition. They are humble and lowly in their own eyes. They see their want, bewail their guilt, and thirst after a Redeemer. The kingdom of grace is of such; the kingdom of glory is for them.”

James asks three rhetorical questions: When you are exploited, is it not the rich who do so? Isn't it the rich who pervert justice? Who most typically openly and publicly blasphemes the name of your God? In other words, we ought not to make distinctions based on anything apart from whether a person professes to be God's friend in Christ or his enemy outside of Christ. And let us never be so foolish as to favor an enemy of our God over a brother in Christ because of worldly riches or other irrelevant factors. Remember what the psalmist discovered of the unbelieving rich when he said, Surely, God,

You set them in slippery places;  
You cast them down to destruction.  
Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment!  
They are utterly consumed with terrors.  
As a dream when one awakes,  
So, Lord, when You awake,  
You shall despise their image.

(Psalm 73.18–20)

## **Haughtiness toward Sinners**

Homosexuality has become a recurring item in the national news. Celebrities and others boast of their sexuality

and their perceived rights, and frenzy ensues. But what part of such stories should be most alarming to the Christian? We know homosexual activity is a grievous sin, as God declares in Leviticus, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination....If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them” (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13). We read the same in the New Testament, as Paul declared in Romans 1:26–27 ESV:

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

God’s people must speak boldly against sin when the world falls into abominations, lest they be judged alongside the world. So God’s word goes forth to all, and a call to repentance goes forth to the practicing homosexual, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral...nor homosexual offenders...will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9–10).

The city of Sodom, one of the most notoriously wicked cities in history, was guilty of the abomination of homosexuality, culminating in an attempted homosexual gang rape in Genesis 19. To this very day, the sin of sodomy bears the city's name. Jude confirms in verse 7 of his letter: "Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire."

The most alarming part of such media stories is not that a homosexual offender has been identified, for they have, after all, existed since the time of Sodom and before. It is interesting that the prophet Ezekiel's description of Sodom's residents did not first mention their homosexual abominations, but instead he pointed to their haughtiness. He declared, "Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it" (Ezekiel 16:49–50 *ESV*).

The most troubling aspect of such stories is the haughtiness displayed by those in our nation, such as to roll their eyes at the word of God and pretend their "informed" and "tolerant" viewpoints on the matter are substantially wiser and more righteous than God's. Such people "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their

own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3). They should heed the warning of the prophet Isaiah: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20). Like Sodom, the people of our country are arrogantly ignoring God’s word and calling good what God calls evil. Proverbs 6 lists seven things that are detestable to the Lord. The first is haughtiness; homosexuality is not mentioned. America’s haughtiness toward God is a detestable abomination.

It brings to light, though, a final warning we must take very seriously, a warning to Christians. When Isaiah declared, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,” he was speaking to those who were supposed to be the people of God. Homosexuality is an emotionally charged issue, and it is easy for heterosexuals who view it as evil to look haughtily on homosexuals and pridefully consider ourselves better or beyond the sin that has enslaved the homosexual. We essentially call ourselves good, when we are, in fact, evil by nature. The true believer knows himself to be totally depraved and totally reliant upon the righteousness of Christ. In his flesh lies no good thing. He knows there is no sin beyond him and no person less deserving of God’s grace than he. This was the attitude of Paul, who declared himself to be the “least of the apostles.”

The hypocrite stands in the presence of God and prays, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.” But the true believer “stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’” Consider the parable in Luke 18:9–14.

John Bradford, the noteworthy reformer and martyr, was imprisoned for his Protestant faith in London, and from his window he could see criminals being led to their execution. Bradford is remembered for his comment in each instance: “There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford.” This must be the primary disposition of the Christian who looks at a neighbor enslaved to homosexuality. The only thing that has kept us from the same sin is the grace of God, wholly unmerited. And so our calling is threefold: we must declare the sinfulness of homosexual behavior to a world that refused to call it evil; we must call practicing homosexuals to bow the knee to Jesus Christ; and we must know that there, but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford and us too.

## **Finding Christ**

The gospel is not the good news that Christ Jesus came into the world to save the less-than-perfect. It is not the

good news that Christ Jesus took away the handful of sins that tripped us up. Rather, the good news is that Christ Jesus came into the world to save those who were utterly dead in sin (Ephesians 2:10). Why could Paul esteem others better than himself? Because he knew that he was the chief of all sinners. We are ruined, but Christ is righteous!

“This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief,” said Paul to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:15. Do you know yourself to be the foremost sinner? Do you know yourself to be totally dead in your sins and trespasses? Do you look at the worst of sinners around you and know, “There but for the grace of God go I?” Have you taught these truths to your children? If you do not fully understand your problem, you will not fully understand the solution. Certainly, you will not esteem others better than yourself.

# Be Quick to Listen and Slow to Speak

## #5

### James 1:19

WE'VE ALL HEARD a parent tell their children to pipe down. Teachers train them to raise their hand and be called on before they speak. "Don't interrupt," we say. The Christian, though, knows that James instructs us, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires" (James 1.19 NIV). For the moment, let us consider what it means to be quick to listen and slow to speak.

If we esteem others better than ourselves, we must be willing to hear them. Said Gill, we are quick to hear

not idle and unprofitable talk, or filthy and corrupt communication; but wholesome advice, good

instructions, and the gracious experiences of the saints, and, above all, the word of God; to the hearing of which men should fly, as doves to their windows; should make haste, and be early in their attendance on it, as well, as constant; and receive it with all readiness, and with a sort of greediness of mind, that their souls may be profited, and God may be glorified. In hearing; when admonitions and reproofs are given, sin is exposed, and vice corrected, and the distinguishing doctrines of grace, are preached; which are apt to fill natural men with wrath, and which must greatly hinder the usefulness of the word.

Consider how often Christ's own words were met with anger, and to the hearers the words bore no value, only condemnation.

He said to them, "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.'" Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah

sent except to Zarephath, *in the region* of Sidon, to a woman *who was* a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”

So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

Listen to what others have to say on a matter, for it may just be that they are right and you are wrong. If so, take their biblically founded points with thanksgiving, so that you may repent of your misunderstandings and mold your life more into conformity with Christ. To react in anger is merely to justify your sin and drive Christ over a cliff.

## **Speak Softly**

Other times, however, we may hear all that a person has to say and realize, with true humility and graciousness, that he is wrong and in need of help and correction. In that case, let Proverbs 15:1–2 speak to you: “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up strife. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge wisely, but the mouth of fools

pours forth foolishness.” Again, the topic returns to humility, and with a soft answer we turn away wrath—or the potential that our hearer would be filled with wrath and attempt to justify himself. By such humility, those whom God has graced with knowledge and wisdom can thereby impart that knowledge and wisdom. For “wrathful man stirs up strife, But *he who is slow to anger allays contention*” (Proverbs 15:4). Share your knowledge gently.

### **Abigail’s Soft Speech**

David, the man after God’s heart, had been wandering in the desert due to King Saul’s desire to have him killed. David sent some of his men to seek food from a wealthy landowner named Nabal. Nabal, whose name means “fool,” did everything foolishly. He spoke quickly, loudly, abruptly, and with a distinct lack of wisdom, refusing to give food to David and his men. He “hurled insults at them” (1 Samuel 12:14). They had been acting as guards for Nabal’s herds and other wealth. Thus, David was furious when Nabal refused to feed his men. David’s plan was to destroy Nabal.

Meanwhile, Nabal’s wife, the godly Abigail, became aware of her husband’s plight, and she acted. On her donkey, armed with food, she intercepted David’s path and acted in humility as she “fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground” (1 Samuel 25:23 *ESV*). She offered to feed the

men and asked that her husband's blame be placed on her. She esteemed the miserable Nabal better than herself.

She turned away David's wrath with her gentleness, saying, "Please forgive the trespass of your servant. For the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord, and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live" (1 Samuel 25:28).

And David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from avenging myself with my own hand! For as surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male." Then David received from her hand what she had brought him. And he said to her, "Go up in peace to your house. See, I have obeyed your voice, and I have granted your petition." (1 Samuel 25:32–35 *ESV*)

## **Men of Few Words**

Often we are anxious to speak, not because we want to justify ourselves, but simply because we have too high an

opinion of ourselves. Failing to consider the speaker better than ourselves, we can't imagine he may say anything that stood on its own, apart from our tweaking, adding to, or correcting its content. Then, scrambling to say something, we speak amiss. Thus the proverb teaches, "When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent" (Proverbs 10:19 ESV).

The prideful man who fails to esteem others better than himself is the one who boasted with words, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men." The prideful man who fails to esteem others better than himself is the one who boasted with words, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." A short time later that man was in hell. No wonder the proverb reads, "Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin" (Proverbs 13:3 ESV).

Mahan said,

The tongue, when moved by anger, envy, jealousy, ambition and like passions, is like a destructive, spreading fire which destroys without partiality or pity. It is like a fire from the heat of it; it is an instrument of wrath that stirs passions like water boiling. It is like a fire in the danger of it, no one in

its path is safe; it can turn a happy home or church into a barren wilderness. It is like a fire in the duration of it; a fire out of control is hard to stop, and words spoken in anger live on and on. This small member can destroy friendships that have stood for years. It can destroy homes and churches that have been happy and content. It can destroy character and reputations, plant suspicion and doubt and turn men from the truth to error.<sup>1</sup>

With that in mind, we read Christ's words in Matthew 12:33–37:

Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by *its* fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

## Slander

Let us remember also that if we choose to be talkative amid gossipers and backbiters, they will likely spew every secret and confidence we have shared. Take the proverb's advice, "A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much" (Proverbs 20:19 NIV).

Again, "A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret" (Proverbs 11:13 NIV). See not only the warning against speaking freely amid gossips, but see the calling to be a trustworthy person as well. Avoid gossip. Avoid slander. Avoid backbiting. I'm always intrigued how many people have pet commands they love to keep and boast of keeping, yet how quickly the same people are to gossip. Let us be slow to speak.

Paul admonished the Thessalonians, "For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies" (2 Thessalonians 3:11). Said Gill, they

are busy bodies; though they work not at all at their own business, yet are very busy in other men's matters, and have the affairs of kingdoms, and cities, and towns, and neighborhoods, and churches, and families, upon their hands; which they thrust themselves into, and intermeddle with, though

they have no business at all with them: these wander from house to house, and curiously inquire into personal and family affairs, are tattlers, full of prate and talk, and, like the Athenians, spend all their time in telling or hearing new things; and they also speak things which they should not; they carry tales from one to another, and privately whisper things to the disadvantage of their fellow creatures and Christians, and backbite and slander them. These are the pests of nations and neighborhoods, the plagues of churches, and the scandal of human nature.

## **Unequally Yoked**

Let us understand, then, when around those who are walking in unbelief, do not be unequally yoked with such a one, even in our conversation. God spoke through the prophet Amos, “For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts. Therefore the prudent keep quiet in such times, for the times are evil.” The prudent keep quiet when surrounded by wickedness, unless, of course, they speak God’s word of warning against wickedness. But they are not to be part of the wicked conversation.

In such times, then, let us pray as David: “Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not let my heart be drawn to what is evil so that I take part in wicked deeds along with those who are evildoers; do not let me eat their delicacies” (Psalm 141:3–4 NIV).

## Piety

Paul instructed Titus to

exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself *to be* a pattern of good works; in doctrine *showing* integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. *Exhort* bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all *things*, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. (Titus 2:6–10)

Today, many young people, and old ones for that matter, are just not serious. The gospel is life-and-death serious. Therefore, our speech should be typified by sobriety. Henry comments,

Young men are apt to be eager and thoughtless, therefore must be earnestly called upon to be sober-minded: there are more young people ruined by pride than by any other sin. Every godly man's endeavor must be to stop the mouths of adversaries. Let thine own conscience answer for thine uprightness. What a glory is it for a Christian, when that mouth which would fain open itself against him, cannot find any evil in him to speak of!

So then, be slow to speak because you are sober. Heed Paul's words: "But shun profane *and* idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness" (2 Timothy 2:16).

## **Quiet Listeners**

Above all, be a quiet listener. Have you ever sat in a Bible study where a person will simply not stop interjecting? This is not to discredit serious thoughts, points, and questions. In fact, if the pulpit were not so guarded amidst excuses of "orderly conduct" and clouds of pastor-worship, many teachers would take their jobs more seriously and give better food for nourishment. Nonetheless, others simply crave opportunities to speak.

I knew such a one. His zeal was sincere and his faith was true, but his behavior was suspect. Rarely could one have a

theological conversation or Bible study with him that he did not ultimately end up out of his chair, pounding his Bible, and drawing strange looks from spectators. However, if you bumped into him a month after one of his tirades, he was likely to tell you quite casually that his opinion had changed on the very topic that led him to bounce off the walls thirty days earlier.

Consider, in Acts 15:12: “Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.” Silent and listening. Likewise, the wise Solomon said,

Walk prudently when you go to the house of God;  
and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacri-  
fice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.  
Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your  
heart utter anything hastily before God. For God  
*is* in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your  
words be few. For a dream comes through much  
activity, And a fool’s voice *is known* by *his* many  
words. (Ecclesiastes 5:1–3)

## Finding Christ

Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You have said so.” But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. (Matthew 27:11–14 *ESV*)

Gill said,

He answered nothing; the things laid to his charge being notoriously false, and known to be so by all the people; and the evidence with which they were supported being so slender, the judge could never receive it; he therefore judged it unnecessary, and not worth a while to return an answer to them: besides, he knew they were bent upon his death, and that, should he set aside these charges, as he easily could, they would invent new ones, and so increase their sin, and their condemnation: but the chief reason of all, of his silence, was, he had the sins of his

people to answer for, and the time of his dying for them was now come, and for which he was ready; and therefore would say nothing to remove these false charges, and retard his death.

# Bear One Another's Burdens

## Galatians 6:2

PERHAPS WE'VE TOLD our children the old adage, "Many hands make light work," as we've encouraged brothers and sisters to work together on a task. The public school may teach that together is better, but we look at every situation from a biblical world view, seeking to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Out of gratitude, the Christian strives to be obedient to Christ. Surely, there is need for the support of brothers and sisters in the matter. Paul instructed the Galatians,

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too

be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load. (Galatians 6:1–5 ESV)

If we have counted a brother better than ourselves, were quick to listen as he shared with us, and are now ready for action, we will help him bear his burden. We need each other.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the

whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. (1 Corinthians 12:12–26 *ESV*)

## **Keeping Each Other Sharp**

“*As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his*” (Proverbs 27:17). By our sober conversation and selectivity of speech, we are to keep one another

sharp. Our speech is that which helps make one another better and wiser, thereby helping equip our brothers to better deal with burdens of this world. As Spurgeon notes, “Hence the usefulness of Christian association, and hence also the evil of sinful company, for one sinner sharpens another to do mischief, just as one saint encourages another to righteousness.”

Of such good works, Paul says, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24). Henry adds,

Believers are to consider how they can be of service to each other, especially stirring up each other to the more vigorous and abundant exercise of love, and the practice of good works. The communion of saints is a great help and privilege, and a means of steadfastness and perseverance. We should observe the coming of times of trial, and be thereby quickened to greater diligence. There is a trying day coming on all men, the day of our death.

Even Jesus, giving his apostles all authority over unclean spirits, sent them forth two by two (Mark 6:7). Armed with power given by Christ, still the disciples were not sent forth alone. Again, when Jesus sent seventy-two ahead of him,

they went two by two. We do well to have each other. Even in our own daily lives, we who are less than the apostles are to be there for each other.

Are you making plans for your family, praying in light of the command to seek first the kingdom of God? With whom have you counseled? Have you sought out wise brothers who have a sufficient knowledge of the scriptures? Or who have had success or failure with similar plans? Remember, “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed” (Proverbs 15:22 ESV).

## **Finding Christ**

Similarly, the author of Hebrews urges us to encourage one another daily. More broadly, he writes,

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” (Hebrews 3:12–15)

Henry said,

Sin has so many ways and colors, that we need more eyes than ours own. Sin appears fair, but is vile; it appears pleasant, but is destructive; it promises much, but performs nothing. The deceitfulness of sin hardens the soul; one sin allowed makes way for another; and every act of sin confirms the habit. Let every one beware of sin.

These words in Hebrews immediately proceed the author's quotation from Psalm 95:

Today, if you will hear His voice: "Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, As *in* the day of trial in the wilderness, When your fathers tested Me; They tried Me, though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with *that* generation, And said, 'It *is* a people who go astray in their hearts, And they do not know My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest."

The audience in the epistle to the Hebrews was a collection of first-generation Christian converts from Judaism. They were the targets of much persecution, and the temptation was always there for them to go back to the ways

of their forefathers. Rather than relying on Christ alone for salvation, they could appease the persecutors around them by returning to the temple worship and the sacrificial system. The writer, throughout the book, is declaring to the Hebrews that Christ is better than anything else. He is better than the angels, better than the Aaronic priesthood, better than Moses, and better than anything.

If the Jewish converts were to harden their hearts now, having proclaimed Christ as savior, they stood to never enter the true rest of Christ, just as their fathers died in the wilderness, not only failing to enter the rest of Canaan, but failing to find rest in eternity. Salvation is found in Christ alone, who says, despite any other difficulty or persecution, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28 ESV). Bear your children’s burdens, encourage them daily, that they may enter Christ’s rest.



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# Rest in Christ

## Matthew 11:28

CHRIST DECLARED, “COME to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28 *ESV*). Oh, how we need rest.

It is important, first, to rest physically. Work tires, and a tired worker quickly becomes an ineffective worker. So God commanded in Exodus 23:12: “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant, and the stranger may be refreshed.” Christ told his disciples to “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.’ For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves” (Mark 6:31–32). And just before his miracle of walking on the water, Jesus

was found sleeping in the back of the boat. “And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep” (Matthew 8:24 ESV).

This notion of rest presupposes, however, that we are hard workers to begin with. The scriptures commend hard work; therefore, remembering the Sabbath rest first encourages us to labor hard at whatever we do. Paul instructs the Ephesians, “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people” (Ephesians 6:7 NIV). Again, he told the believers in Colosse, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one” (Colossians 3:23 ESV). As we declared early on, don’t just refrain from cheating your boss on the time card, work extra. Do unto others as you would have done to you.

Similarly, he had told the Philippians “to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and *that* you may lack nothing” (1 Thessalonians 4:11–12). His advice was not heeded, however, and a problem emerged in Philippi. Essentially, the new Christians had donned white robes and gone off to sit on the mountain awaiting Christ’s return. In doing so, they had neglected other responsibilities, including Paul’s command to work and be independent of other’s benevo-

lence. Paul essentially said, “Okay, don’t feed them. They’ll be down when they get hungry enough.”

But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. 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, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. (2 Thessalonians 3:6–12)

There ought to be shame in laziness. If you will not work, you will not eat. We have already discussed the danger of sleeping during the harvest. Remember, the ant is a

hard worker that stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. Again, we read in Proverbs 19:15: “Laziness casts *one* into a deep sleep, And an idle person will suffer hunger.” Also, “Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty; Open your eyes, *and* you will be satisfied with bread” (Proverbs 20:13).

Resting from our work, however, has significantly more important meaning than resting physically. God commanded,

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8–11 ESV)

And today, there remains a rest for the people of God. The author of Hebrews noted:

For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”; and again in this place: “They

shall not enter My rest.” Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, “Today,” after such a long time, as it has been said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.”

For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. (Hebrews 4:4–10)

We hearken back to the beginning of this book in our explanation that the Jews “being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.” And now Christ says to those who are spiritually tired, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Stop working so hard to establish your own standing before God and rest in Christ. He has done it all, and nothing remains for you to do.

Mahan explained,

Paul begins here to describe this spiritual rest we have in Christ by removing all other rests men-

tioned in scripture. The 'rest' which believers now enjoy in Christ is not the rest of God following the creation of the world. God made the worlds in six days and rested from the works of creation, not the works of providence; for in them he works even now! Another rest is Canaan or typical rest. The unbelieving Jews did not enter into Canaan but turned around and wandered in the wilderness until they died. Joshua did lead a people into Canaan! The type must be fulfilled, and Canaan must be inhabited by the people of God. God set a day when men would by faith enter into this true rest which he promised. It is the gospel dispensation! Today is the day of salvation; now is the accepted time. It is no longer a typical rest, but a possession. The people whom God hath chosen, for whom Christ died, and who believe on him do enter into a spiritual rest. Heaven is but a perfection and a continuation of what he begins in our hearts when he brings us to faith. Christ had a work to do in preaching the gospel and in obtaining the salvation and redemption of his people. This work was given to him and he finished it. He ceased from these works never to do them again, he is seated, having entered his rest, as God ceased from the works of creation when he had finished them. It does no violence to the word to

apply this to the believer who ceases from a works religion and by faith rests in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

## **A Stern Warning**

Within religion, the hardest thing for a human to do is nothing. Our sinful flesh cringes at this great truth: Christianity is always primarily about what Christ has done and never primarily about what we do. “What can I do?” we cry, just as those of old asked Christ, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” That’s it! Salvation is found in Christ alone, who says plainly, “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). In our sin, we cannot accept that Christ’s work is sufficient. We seek any opportunity to add our own work and merit. Christ answers, “Stop working! Rest in the work I have done.”

Are you to seek first the kingdom of heaven? Then beware of doing it by works, for unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. Christ answers, “Stop working! Rest in the work I have done.”

Paul, then Saul, was likewise a Pharisee, “circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of

Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee.” Christ answers, “Stop working! Rest in the work I have done.” Moreover, Paul was “educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God.” Christ answers, “Stop working! Rest in the work I have done.”

Another Pharisee said to God, “I don’t cheat, I don’t sin, and I don’t commit adultery. I’m certainly not like that tax collector!” Christ answers, “Stop working! Rest in the work I have done.”

The father of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, was searching for rest and peace with God. He joined a monastery to save his soul. Christ answers, “Stop working! Rest in the work I have done.” Luther would spend as many as six hours per day confessing his sins to a priest. Christ answers, “Stop working! Rest in the work I have done.” Luther got on his hands and knees and began climbing twenty-eight stone stairs and chanting “Our Father” along the way. Christ answers, “Stop working! Rest in the work I have done.”

It was not until Luther realized that salvation was totally by grace, and grace alone, that he ceased from his works. God’s people, his remnant, are chosen by grace. Said Paul, “And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work” (Romans 11:6).

Then let us remember the rest and stop trying to add our works to salvation. You say, “Yes, but I wear a suit and tie to church, unlike other people.” Christ answers, “Stop working! Rest in the work I have done.”

You say, “Yes, but I go to church twice on Sunday instead of just once.” Christ answers, “Stop working! Rest in the work I have done.”

You say, “Yes, but my neighbor takes out the trash on Sunday evenings and I would never do that.” Christ answers, “Stop working! Rest in the work I have done.”

It is interesting how many people seek to “keep the Sabbath” by gloomily sitting around each Sunday not turning on the television or taking out the trash, yet they are the greatest of Sabbath breakers because they believe deep inside they are more meritorious than the other guy for their work of Sabbath-keeping. Family A criticizes Family B for vacuuming on Sunday, and Family B criticizes Family A for mowing the lawn. Each thinks they are better than the other. Christ answers, “Stop working! Rest in the work I have done.” The minute salvation becomes about what you do, then grace is no longer grace.

## **Finding Christ**

And so, even within this book, we must be careful to realize that we prepare our minds to act, refrain from sleep-

ing during the harvest, seek first the kingdom of God, count others better than ourselves, listen quickly while being slow to speak, and bear one another's burdens out of gratitude for what Christ has done for miserable sinners such as us and never, ever out of a longing for merit. Never out of pride. Never out of self-glory. Never to convince us that we are better than the next sinner. Never apart from resting in Christ's perfect work.

In fact, God will look at your works, and even your best effort will be little more than a filthy rag before him. Even your best work will still be stained with the sin that is in your flesh. Consider Command Number 5, being slow to speak. I once heard a minister say that everybody wants to take the floor, but nobody wants to sweep the floor. I shared this thought with my staff, and some time later when a custodian wasn't readily available, I grabbed a mop and began cleaning a spill on the floor. What was I thinking deep inside? *Look at me, I'm not afraid to clean the floor!*

Pride. Filthy rags. Did you know that even our prayers contain enough sin to condemn us forever? And our only hope will be that, while every command of God we attempted to keep was a failure on our part, Christ's perfect obedience to the Father might count on our behalf. Rest in him.

## A Dirty Cup

Our discourse began by looking at the Pharisees who were like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly but inside are full of dead *men's* bones and all uncleanness. The Pharisees made themselves look good on the outside, but on the inside they were still spiritually dead. They were ruined. But along with ruin comes righteousness and redemption. Only Christ is righteous, and only Christ can redeem. And so we conclude with a final warning from Christ himself, who told the Pharisees again, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also."

Is your cup clean only on the outside? How can you know for sure? Know this first: God is happy with Christ. God has accepted the offering of Christ, and he is pleased. His wrath toward the sin of those in Christ has been appeased. What amazing grace, God is pacified! He said through the prophet Ezekiel, "And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth anymore because of thy shame, when I am

pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezekiel 16:62–63 kjv).

Only those in Christ have such peace with God. Only to those does God say, “I am pacified toward thee, despite all the sins of your flesh.” Those outside of Christ, no matter how much they tried to clean the cup of their own effort, will be cast into hell, because God is not pacified toward their sin. The grand distinction, then, between those in Christ and those outside of Christ is this—the believer strives and works because he is abundantly grateful that God is pacified. Those outside of Christ work in an attempt to pacify God. That is simply not Christianity.

Only the work and sacrifice of Christ can pacify God, and this is so important that the God of justice had to kill his own Son. And Christ, having overcome death and risen to glory, appeased God. This is the heart of the gospel. Paul said,

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as oth-

ers. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ [by grace you have been saved], and raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:1–10)

This rich summary of gospel, penned by Paul through the Holy Spirit, is filled with such instruction, comfort, and declaration of the gospel of grace that it behooves us to consider several points closely. The gospel is the good news to sinners that Jesus Christ, out of a love for those who hated him, died for the sins of his people. By grace, God calls them to life from spiritual death, gives them the gift of faith so that they may repent and have union with Christ, sanctifies them in this present life, holds them in his hands so that they may never escape his grasp, preserves them and prepares them for glory.

First we note that man is spiritually dead. He does not merely have a “sin problem.” He is not neutral. He is not evil. Rather, he is much, much worse. He is spiritually dead. “Who were dead in trespasses and sins.” And, praise God, from this death he raised us to life. “Because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.”

To deny that man’s natural condition is spiritually dead, we begin with a false premise and lose all hope of arriving at the true gospel. So often the unregenerate sinner is pictured as a man drowning in a river. He is helplessly flailing his arms to and fro, screaming for help, and struggling as best he possibly can. Above him is a hand reaching down from heaven to symbolize God offering to save the struggling swimmer if he would only reach out and grab it. For many reasons, this is in no way the true gospel. For now it is sufficient to mention the primary reason at hand: this picture presents man as having some natural ability to fight, to want to be saved, to keep his head above water. This picture paints man as something other than dead. If the picture were accurate, the first correction would need to be that our man in the water is facedown. He is capable of nothing more than the dead man’s float.

Returning to Paul’s synopsis of the good news of the gospel of grace, note secondly that we are saved by grace. The fact that we are saved by grace consequently eliminates the

possibility that we are saved by anything else. This was the question that Luther so longed to frame and answer: are there two ways to be saved? Are there two gospels? Is grace all of God and none of man? Or is man able to contribute in some way? The early Galatian church had fallen into the same trap, as it is our nature to desire a place in our own salvation. Many Galatians had been bewitched by Judaizers convincing them that they had to be circumcised to be saved.

“Yes, Jesus!” they would cry. “But circumcision too!”

“It’s great that you’ve become Christians, now you need to be good Jews by obeying the law to be circumcised!”

Even though these false teachers argued that salvation was in Christ, they inserted one but. “But,” they said, “you must also be circumcised.” And from that we can learn that it takes only one but, and the gospel is no longer the gospel. It takes only one but, and grace is no longer grace. Hence, if the gospel is a gospel of grace, there is not a single but that we can add. The gospel is not grace plus circumcision, grace plus obedience, grace plus baptism, grace plus indulgences. Nor is the gospel grace plus an act of man’s free will. If we claim grace cannot be effective until man, by his free will, condescends to Jesus’s invitation, we are no less guilty than the false teachers who claimed grace is not effective until we are circumcised. And Paul, under the divine inspiration of the Holy Ghost, declared those teachers to be eternally condemned, anathema.

Notice third from the passage in Ephesians that salvation is by grace and through faith. We are not saved because we come to Christ in faith. If we were, faith would be a work by which we merit salvation. The difference between the Christian and the unbeliever would be the Christian's meritorious work of faith.

This is made clear in the Belgic Confession:

However, we do not mean, properly speaking, that it is faith itself that justifies us—for faith is only the instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness. But Jesus Christ is our righteousness in making available to us all his merits and all the holy works he has done for us and in our place. And faith is the instrument that keeps us in communion with him and with all his benefits.

Oh, how guilty Christians have become of preaching salvation by works—the work of faith. We have contorted the order in which benefits of Christ's salvation become ours. If the gospel is truly of grace alone, then logically regeneration must precede faith. Remember, man's depravity is total; he is dead as a doornail. His natural state is enmity with God. He hates his creator. And until we understand the problem, we will never, ever understand the solution. Yet, the problem is even bigger than that. Not only is man

totally depraved, he is totally unable to do anything about it. Thus, we cannot please God, nor do we even want to. We are spiritually dead.

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Again, it is impossible for us to receive anything of God in our state of death. So how is it that man could possibly have faith before God regenerated him to spiritual life? Yet the majority of those today who claim to be the church preach just the opposite, that God regenerates man as a reward for his faith. This is a false gospel.

Christ told Nicodemus that a man must be born again before he can even see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). Therefore, regeneration must precede faith. Christ declared that no one comes to him unless the Father draws them (John 6:44). Therefore, regeneration must precede faith.

If faith were something we could muster on our own before regeneration, then faith would be a meritorious work by which we are rewarded with salvation. The truth is that we are totally depraved, totally unable to do anything about it, and totally unable to produce faith. That is why the gospel must be grace alone. Since mankind’s fall into sin, God requires of us that which we cannot do. If we look to ourselves in any way, whether our free will, our faith, our works, our baptism, then total depravity results in total hope-

lessness. For every sin will be punished by God, either in Christ or in the sinner. But if by grace God imputes to us all Christ's merits, then we are acquitted of our sin and we seek to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Paul said of such that we are created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Similarly, Peter described the believers to whom he addressed his first letter as "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied" (1 Peter 1:2).

We are "elect...unto obedience." But make no mistake, such obedience presupposes grace. We do not work to clean the cup, we work out of gratitude that the God of all grace has saved us apart from works. We don't obey to clean the cup, we obey out of thankfulness that Christ drank the cup of wrath that was rightly due to us. Our Savior said in the garden, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done" (Matthew 26:42 KJV). Hours later he was hanging on a cross. What unfathomable love.

"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

# Notes

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## **Careful! Don't Fall in that Tomb**

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### **#5: Be Quick to Listen and Slow to Speak**

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### **#7: Rest in Christ**

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