

G R A C E

... it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace ... Hebrews 13:9

Issue 161 October, 2009

Studies in Galatians—Part Twenty-Nine

John G. Reisinger

Throughout his letter to the Galatians, Paul forcefully asserted his authority as an apostle of Christ. He systematically and clearly laid out the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He both refuted and condemned the Judaizers who, by seeking to place the Galatian Christians under the Mosaic law, denied the gospel of sovereign grace. At the close of chapter 5, Paul wrote that living by the Spirit ought to produce walking by the Spirit. In the opening verses of chapter 6, he described some specifics of walking in the Spirit: gently restoring those who stray, bearing one another's burdens, and shouldering individual responsibilities (vv. 1-5). As Paul nears the end of his letter, he continues to exhort his readers to walk by the Spirit, providing practical details about bearing each other's burdens.

Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Gal. 6:6-10, NIV)

The relationship Paul describes between teachers and learners is one practical way in

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WHAT CAN GOD DO?

Steve West

It is difficult to read the Bible and come to the conclusion that the Bible presents God as being limited in his power. In the Scriptures, God is simply not depicted as a being who cannot do certain tasks or accomplish his plans. His arm is not too short; his strength does not fail or falter; nobody can resist his might or conquer his designs. He is called the Almighty God. As quoted in my last article, with God all things are possible.

So how can there be a debate concerning the power of God? Well, like with many debates, the playing field is not really level. The evangelical Christian accepts the teaching of the Word of God in this area (as in all others) as the final authority, while the non-Christian or non-evangelical

Christian has no compunction about submitting the teachings of Scripture to the bar of their reason. Note that I did not say 'the bar of reason.' Ultimately, the bar of reason is God's reason. Submitting propositions to the bar of God's reason, the true standard of reason, is one thing; submitting truth claims to the bar of our reason is another. Also, sadly, it must be admitted that many individuals who claim to be 'evangelical' are no longer bringing all of their judgments to the final authority of Scripture. The word evangelical is still perhaps the most helpful title to describe a certain segment of the church, but the word is becoming increasingly hazy and ambiguous, and thus can create misunderstanding and confusion.

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which Christians bear each other's burdens. Learning about Christ is necessary in order to imitate him. Therefore, ignorance about Christ is a burden that those who teach about Christ alleviate. But teaching about Christ creates other burdens: specifically, time management. Those who spend time in study cannot use that time to earn money to provide for their own needs. Therefore, those who are taught lift that burden when they share what they can earn with those who teach them. Each group (the learners and the teachers) has particular needs that the other group is particularly suited to meet.

This relationship between those who learn and those who teach can be difficult to discuss. On the one hand, the Christian ministry is a calling and not a vocation. It is hard to imagine the clergy forming a union and having their union representatives negotiate, among other things, a salary. What would we think of an individual who was called to serve as a missionary comparing health programs or retirement benefits of various foreign mission boards as a means to determine where the Lord wanted him to serve? On the other hand, who could fault a pastoral candidate for deciding against serving a church that believed, "God will keep the pastor humble and we will keep him poor"?

The potential exists for both groups to shirk their responsibility

to bear each other's burdens. The teacher could abuse it by being lazy and not studying, which would result in shallow sermons that would not lift the burden of needing to know more about Christ from those entrusted to his care. Conversely, he could spend all his time in his study and thus remain unaware of the particulars of his congregation's ignorance of Christ. In such a case, he would not know the needs of his congregation and would not be able to minister to those needs. The members of the congregation would remain burdened. A pastor has no direct supervisors to whom he is accountable for his time and work. John Stott, in his commentary on Galatians, addresses this problem:

Is there any safeguard against this possible abuse? I think we may find one in 1 Timothy 5:17: 'Elders who do well as leaders should be reckoned worthy of a double stipend, in particular those who labor at preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, "A threshing ox shall not be muzzled"; and besides, "the workman earns his pay"' (NEB). It is not particularly flattering, perhaps, to find the preacher likened to an ox! But he is also called a 'workman' or labouring man. The Greek word is strong and indicates that he 'toils' at the Word with all his might and main, seeking to understand and apply it. Perhaps preaching is at a low ebb in the church today because we shirk the hard work involved. But if the minister throws himself into his ministry with the energy of a labouring man, and sows good seed in the minds and hearts of the congregation, then he may expect to 'reap' a material livelihood.¹

A true gospel-ministry is not at all an easy task. Those who fulfill its responsibility earn whatever they receive just as surely as if they had labored manually. Paul likens a pastor's work of caring for a flock to the work of both a shepherd and a mother.

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¹ John R. W. Stott, BST: *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way* (Leicester, England: IVP, 1988), 168.

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NAAMAN THE LEPER—Part II

Dr. Philip W. McMillin

In Psalm 119:18 the Psalmist prays to the Lord with these words: “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from your law.”¹ In this instance, the word law refers to the whole of Scripture, it is therefore a prayer each of us should offer up whenever we pick up this blessed book, even the Bible. Anyone who is literate can read this book but those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God, and it is ‘the letter from home’ to them. Strangers and pilgrims in the earth, who are traveling to the city whose builder and maker is God, grow weary and worn and their longings can only be satisfied by news from home. There is an evil spirit in this world of ours, but Paul tells us of another world and another spirit: “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor 2:12).

It was that Spirit who led Abel to Zion, who now leads us and who will lead the last of earth’s weary pilgrims home.

I hope we can see some of the wonders of the sovereign mercy of the triune God in our study of God’s dealings with Naaman the leper.

How desperately we poor sinners need to see again our poor helpless condition, the power of the Almighty, to see ourselves as the creature before God our creator, and to see the only solution to all our troubles.

There are terrible diseases to which this flesh is prone and for which the world has no help. We are all involved in the business of carrying one another to the graveyard. We stand

1 All Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version*, unless noted otherwise.

at the grave of loved ones and as the writer of old says:

*For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt.
I am mourning;
Astonishment has taken hold of me.*

*Is there no balm in Gilead,
Is there no physician there?
Why then is there no recovery
For the health of the daughter of my people? Jer 8:21-22.*

We are mortal, we have an appointment with death and after that the judgment. One day we shall hear hoof beats on our street and the pale horse, whose name is Death and Hades, will stop at our door and our brief day in the sun will end.

Hope for mankind can be found only in the books of God’s decrees, and I hope that in our little study of God’s bountiful grace in the life of Naaman we will be renewed in our faith.

In 2 Kings 5:1 we read: “Now Naaman, commander of the army of the King of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty of man of valor, but a leper.”

Let’s unpack this verse. Observe please:

First his name: *Naaman*. This man’s name came from word roots which mean; loveliness or pleasantness. I think when he was born he was most unlike the one who would become his Lord and God.

The prophet Isaiah tells us of the Messiah in whom Naaman came to believe.

*For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,
And as a root out of dry ground.*

*He has no form or comeliness;
And when we see Him,
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.*

*He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him (Isa 53:2-3).*

Solomon’s portrait of Christ is a travesty. He was no half effeminate, beautiful, sad faced idol. God did not make him tall and handsome and loved of all. It was only when he began to speak that a startled world took notice of him; “...No man ever spoke like this Man!” John 7:46.

Naaman was pleasantness, loveliness in human form. A king’s companion, only the great Ben-hadad mighty King of Syria, stood above him. He could speak one word and great generals fell into disgrace. He could motion with his hand and deposed kings would die. In all the world, only Ben-hadad was more powerful. Ben-hadad’s name just meant “Son of Hadad”; Naaman’s meant “pleasantness, loveliness.” I think every maiden’s heart in Syria was set upon this man; every young man wished to be like Naaman. He was success personified in Syria.

Second, Naaman was a *great man*. Here is another thing about Naaman, which many of us might covet. He had a reputation; the world around him knew who he was.

Why is it that from the smallest nomadic tribe, to the greatest nation on earth, politics of some sort is at the forefront of nearly everything? Intrigue is in both hut and palace.

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A person who seriously cares for the souls of others experiences deep spiritual struggles, emotional pain, and distress. This is hard work.

Paul, in more than one letter, makes it clear that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14). Paul deliberately gave up this right and earned his living by making tents, but in none of his writings does he suggest that this should be the practice of every preacher. Paul faced a cultural situation that made it expedient for him to forgo his right to financial support. In the first-century Greco-Roman world, Sophists earned a living by teaching men how to argue either side of a question. Effective persuasive public-speaking (rhetoric) was a highly-prized skill in this culture, and the Sophists provided training in this art. The problem (from a Christian viewpoint) lay, however, in their beliefs about truth. The Sophists were skeptics who believed that there was no way to prove whether truth existed or not. Even if it did exist, there was no way to know if it corresponded to a person's perception of it. Therefore, the question of the truth of a matter was irrelevant: the ability to argue well was what was desirable. Paul, by refusing to accept payment for his teaching, distanced himself from the Sophists. If he had accepted what was his due (financial support from those who learned from him), he might have undermined the truth claims in his teaching by seeming to be no different than the Sophists: in it for the money.

Teachers are not the only group that has the potential to fail in this particular burden-bearing relationship. No learners have the right to neglect their responsibility to bear the financial burdens that those who teach must of necessity bear. Paul writes that *the Lord* has commanded this (1 Cor. 9:14). Learners could abuse their responsibility less overtly, however,

by trying to control what a teacher says. Such a congregation might feel that since it pays the teacher, it has the right to tell him what to teach: "Whoever pays the piper must be allowed to call the tune." It is sinful for a congregation to use financial pressure to control a teacher's message and it is also sinful for him to yield to such tactics. However, if a minister has a wife and children to support, he faces the particular temptation to tickle the ears of his congregation. A congregation has no right to put such a temptation in the path of a pastor. He has a responsibility to provide for his family's financial needs. These competing relationship demands pose a dilemma for a tender conscience. If he meets his congregation's true needs against their wishes, he fails in his familial duties. If he concedes to his congregation's unbiblical demands, he provides for his family at the expense of his biblical responsibility to his congregation. In the long run, a congregation will suffer as much from a minister yielding to such a temptation, as will the minister himself.

In most of the churches with whom I am familiar, the congregations faithfully fulfill their responsibility to bear the financial burdens of their teachers. Those who are eager to learn more about Christ respond well to those who teach the truth about Christ. If there is any problem at all in these churches, it is that the congregation loves its pastor too much! Often, in my personal experience, I felt I was paid more than I was worth.

Once, when I was a candidate for the pastorate of a church, the congregation raised the subject of my salary before we had come to any decision about whether or not they were going to call me and whether or not I would accept. I suggested that we should settle those matters first. I said I did not think salary amount should be a factor in my decision. If they offered me a very generous salary, I might be

influenced to accept, even if I had reservations. If they offered me too little, I might be influenced not to accept when other things seemed to indicate I should come. I told them I trusted them to do what was right. I found out later (after I accepted the call) that they changed their budget and added hospital insurance to my salary.

In verse 7, Paul illustrates the nature of teacher/learner burden-bearing by applying an agriculture metaphor: a person reaps what he or she sows. This principle, established by God in Genesis 8:22, applies equally to learners and teachers. *As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.* Both groups have to make a choice. They may sow to the flesh (acting selfishly by refusing to bear each other's burdens) or they may sow to the Spirit. The first sowing results in a harvest of fleshly corruption; the second in a harvest of Spiritual life. Paul uses the same metaphor in one of his letters to the Corinthians as he points to the reciprocal nature of the teacher/learner relationship:

If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? (1 Cor. 9:11, 12a, NIV)

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul likens those who learn to a garden and those who teach to those who tend the garden. Some teachers plant, others water. If we can extend that metaphor a bit, we can say that teachers also pull weeds. A successful harvest depends on the kind of seeds sown, the right amount of water applied during the growing season, and careful weeding.²

² In the same letter, Paul also likens the learners to a temple and the teachers to the builders of that temple. Some teachers use gold, silver and precious stones; others use wood, hay and stubble. In the day

What Is the Gospel and How Do We Communicate This in Evangelism?

By Robert S. Bonser

The question that has been proposed is, “What is the Gospel and how do we communicate this in evangelism?” Really, we have two questions and, I must add, each has been explored in depth over the history of the church. With that in mind, what I hope to attempt in this article is to focus on the central theme of the Gospel in a simple overview (I do “simple” very well). Hopefully this will guide our study on this subject in such a way that we will be able to focus on what is vital to this subject.

It has been said that the gospel is shallow enough for a child to wade in, yet deep enough for an elephant to drown in. The truths are very simple to put forth; a holy and righteous God has deemed to forgive rebellious sinners. R.C. Sproul puts it beautifully, “We are saved from God, by God.” I would add to this that we have been saved from God, by God, for God. However, once we start to look at the details we see the overwhelming nature of this simple truth. We start to look at words like *holiness and grace, justice and mercy, sin and righteousness*. When we do, there is a realization as to the glorious nature of our God and what He has done to save us. We are like boys that were restricted to the shallow end of the pool but now coming of age, we wish to go deeper—fearful at the prospect, but wanting to explore the depths. You see, once God opens our eyes to see these precious truths, we come to realize that our God is so great that we will spend an eternity always learning of Him. However, we do not have that much space and time in this article!

D. A. Carson has commented that,

“the church in the western world is going through a time of remarkable fragmentation. This fragmentation extends to our understanding of the gospel.” Even the largest sector of this fragmentation is really not bringing anything new to those that have moved away from the core of Christian orthodoxy over the years. It’s always the same idea of seeing the gospel as a set of moral rules to live by. We use to call this “moralism,” but in the modern world of what guises as Christianity, it is better known as the message of “personal transformation.” This is the “gospel” of “becoming the better you” (Osteen) achieved through kinder and gentler laws or principals to live by. As T. D. Jakes, Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, and Joyce Meyer explain it, we are really good people, we just need some instruction.

Dr. Michael Horton makes a great assessment of this teaching with his critique of Osteen’s book *Your Best Life Now: Seven Steps to Living at your Full Potential*. Dr. Horton notes how Osteen tells people that,

“God is a buddy or partner who exists primarily to make sure we are happy.” “Don’t sit back passively,” he warns, but with a gentle pleading suggests that the only reason we need to follow his advice is because it’s useful for getting what we want. God is a buddy or partner who exists primarily to make sure we are happy. “You do your part, and God will do his part.”¹ “Sure we have our faults,” he says, but “the good news is, God loves us anyway.”² Instead of accepting God’s just verdict on our own righteousness and fleeing

1 Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: Seven Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (New York, Warner Books, 2004) 41-42.
2 Ibid., 57.

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to Christ for justification, Osteen counsels readers simply to reject guilt and condemnation.³ Yet it is hard to do that successfully when God’s favor and blessing on my life depend entirely on how well I can put his commands to work. “If you will simply obey his commands, He will change things in your favor.”⁴ That’s all: “...simply obey his commands.”⁵

This is the message of “God-loves-you-anyway.” Which begs the question, why do we need Christ? Why do we need a savior bleeding and dying on the cross? Where is the need of a mediator when we can mediate with our own lives? We simply need good advice so that we might live up to the potential we all have for good. In fact, in this message of self-fulfillment even the New Covenant command to LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND,⁶ and, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF’ (Matthew 22:34-40)⁶ becomes advice for seekers of personal empowerment. Yet, Paul calls this a “different gospel” which is no gospel at all (Gal. 1:6b, 7a).

3 Ibid., 66

4 Ibid., 119

5 <http://www.whitehorseinn.org/osteen-art01.htm>

6 All Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible, Updated Edition*, unless noted otherwise.

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Let us unpack this metaphor to see how it applies to the responsibilities of teachers.

(1) Someone must sow if there is to be a harvest

(2) What is sown determines what is harvested

(3) God has promised that a harvest is certain if there is a sowing

Notice that the *nature* of the harvest is determined by the kind of seed that is sown. We cannot harvest wheat where we planted corn. Tomatoes plants will never yield potatoes. The same principle applies in behavior and morals. Teachers who do not “plant Christ” cannot expect to see Christ-like qualities in their congregations.

Not only does the seed determine the *nature* of the harvest, it also determines the *quality* of the harvest. Inferior seed will produce an inferior crop just as superior seed will yield a superior harvest. The best of ground cannot compensate for a poor quality of seed. Teachers can plant an inferior Christ by failing to present a full Scriptural account of Christ. Teachers who choose to present only certain qualities of Christ while neglecting to teach about other qualities will produce congregations who fail to embody all the Christian virtues.

Lastly, the *quantity* of the harvest is also determined at the planting time. If we sow sparingly we will have a sparse harvest. There is no plentiful harvest without a generous sowing. Teachers sow generously by modeling Christ to their congregations as well as by formally teaching about him.³

when God judges each teacher’s labor, the verdict will depend on the kind of building material used. The great lesson for teachers in Galatians 6 and 1 Corinthians 3 is to be faithful to the truth as found in God’s book.

3 Paul also applied this particular aspect (generous sowing) to financial giving in

John Stott integrates these three points about the harvest thusly,

... [I]f a farmer wants a bumper harvest of a particular corn, then he must not only sow the right seed, but good seed and that plentifully. Only if he does this can he expect a good crop.⁴

Paul prefaces his remarks about reaping and sowing with a clear warning, “*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked.*” You can no more fool God than you can fool the ground in your garden. You may foolishly believe that your tomatoes plants will yield potatoes, but you will be sorely disappointed every time. This principle applies beyond the burden-bearing relationship between teachers and learners: it extends to every kind of sowing and reaping. You may sow the world, believing that the world and the things of it will yield satisfaction and meaning, but your expectations will prove futile at the time of harvest or judgment. You may believe that if you give your heart, efforts, and resources to the world and its goals, you will receive a harvest of satisfaction, but you will be mocked when harvest time comes. You cannot deny God’s principle of sowing and reaping in any area. To think or act as if you are exempt from God’s fixed law is to blind yourself to reality. John Stott explains why Paul links this principle to the command “do not be deceived:”

The possibility of being deceived is mentioned several times in the New Testament. Jesus said the devil was liar and the father of lies, and He cautioned His disciples against being led astray (John 8:44; Mark 13:5, 6, 22). John warns us in his Second Epistle that ‘many deceivers have gone out into the world’ (2 John 7. Cf. 1 John 2:18-27;

2 Corinthians 9:6, 7a, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give...”

4 Stott, *Galatians*, 165-66.

4:1-6). Paul begs us in his Letter to the Ephesians: ‘Let no one deceive you with empty words’ (Eph. 5:6. Cf. 1 Cor. 6:9; 2 Thes. 2:3). Already in Galatians he has asked ‘who has bewitched’ his readers (3:1) and spoken of the person who ‘deceives himself’ (6:3).

Many people are deceived concerning this inexorable law of seed-time and harvest. They sow their seeds thoughtlessly, nonchalantly, and blind themselves to the fact that the seeds they sow will inevitably produce a corresponding harvest. Or they sow seed of one kind and expect to reap a harvest of another. They imagine that somehow they can get away with it. But this is impossible. So Paul adds: *God is not mocked.* The Greek verb here (*muktērizō*) is striking. It is derived from the word for a nose and means literally to ‘turn up the nose at’ somebody and so to ‘sneer at’ or ‘treat with contempt’. From this it can signify to ‘fool’ (NEB) or to ‘outwit’ (Arndt-Gingrich). What the apostle is saying is that men may fool themselves, but they cannot fool God. They may think that they can escape this law of seed-time and harvest, but they cannot. They may go on sowing their seeds and closing their eyes to the consequences, but one day God Himself will bring in the harvest.⁵

A joyous life with a sense of true meaning and worthwhile fulfillment does not happen by chance. It is the product of right thinking and right acting. Biblical joy and security are no more the fruit of chance than are tomatoes and potatoes the fruit of carrot seeds. A life filled with meaning, purpose, and spiritual satisfaction does not “just happen” any more than a garden filled with tasty vegetables “just happens.” In both cases, someone made a deliberate choice of seeds to sow that would guarantee the desired harvest.

In verse 8, Paul continues to encourage mutual burden-bearing by providing a specific example of the

⁵ Ibid., 166-67.

Even in the most primitive peoples there is a chief of sorts, one who eats first, sits in the only shade, always has someone to carry his share of any load, and who usually decides what will be done when there is any difference of opinion. And almost always, jealousy lurks in some heart, and back of a friendly smile is a wish to bring down the great man and take his place. The language may be only a squealing and clicking of tongues, but somewhere in it is intrigue, the expression of desire to be great, to be held in reputation by others. Naaman had what others only desire.

Jewish tradition from before Josephus tells us that in the war with Ahab, Naaman was the archer who is said to have drawn a bow at a venture (loosed an arrow without aiming), and that that arrow is the one that killed Ahab the wicked King of Israel, and that that is the reason our verse tells us "...by him the Lord had given victory to Syria" 2 Kings 5:1.

We can't prove that but for some reason, this man Naaman had a reputation of greatness with his Master, King Ben-hadad. General Clare Chenault, leader of the Flying Tiger Fighter Squadron, had a great reputation in war. He personally led his men into dogfights, he personally shot down many enemies and never turned away from a fight. His men respected him, other generals respected him, his country respected him and his presi-

dent respected and decorated him. He was a great man before all. He lived and died with a reputation no one could besmirch.

Our man Naaman was a stalwart and a handsome man and his deeds of bravery followed him home. In Ben-hadad's court he came and went like the first prince of the land. He had won his position by deeds, not intrigue and treachery.

Third, he was *honorable*. Other translations say he was accepted and he was acceptable or he was highly respected. The more we learn of this man, the more we seem to be in need of men such as this today.

Naaman was a man accepted and acceptable, the Amplified Bible states. A man can be accepted in a sense, because no one dares to oppose him. But when he is really acceptable, that means he is good in the peoples' eyes, he is respected because his character deserves respect. He leads by example.

History tells us of many powerful rulers. Alexander the Great overcame a world when not yet 30, but died a drunkard. Attila the Hun was dreaded everywhere, but was a rapist, murderer, child killer and torturer. Hitler almost overthrew democracy, but he was a sadist and a mad man.

Those men could rule, but were they acceptable; were they held in high respect; were they honorable

before their master? No; far from it. They were despicable, despised and hated.

This man's countenance, his bearing, his personality was loveliness, pleasantness; it was worthy of honor. If you have a King James Bible, look in the center reference. He was gracious, lifted up, or accepted in countenance.

Paul said that for a man with merely righteous standards one would not die. But He said for a good man, or an honorable, pleasant man, one might dare to die. Naaman was such a man.

Of David, 1 Samuel 16:12 states: So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!" Samuel has run down the list of Jesse's sons and found none pleasing to God. So David was sent for among the flocks. David was fair of eyes. He did not have a proud, insolent look. He was brave enough to beard the lion and bear, but humble enough to shrink from being king. God called him a man after His own heart.

Naaman was such a man, worthy of his honor among men, yet gracious.

Fourth: He was honorable *because*. In all that God does, we must never forget Nebuchdnezzar's words,

All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;

McMillin—Continued on page 16

Omnipotence:

Omnipotence may build a thousand planets, and fill them with treasures; Omnipotence may crush mountains into dust, and cause all the seas to evaporate, and destroy the stars, but Omnipotence cannot do one unloving thing toward a believer. Oh! Rest assured, Christian, a harsh act, an unloving action from God toward one of His own people is quite impossible. He is just as kind to you when he throws you into prison as when he takes you into a palace; He is as good to you when He sends famine into your house as when He fills your cupboards with plenty. The only question is, "Are you His child?" If so, He has rebuked you in affection, and there is love in His discipline.

C.H. Spurgeon

Reisinger—Continued from page 6

sowing/reaping principle

The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (NIV)

Earlier in the letter, Paul explained that the freedom to which the Galatian Christians had been called was not the freedom to indulge in selfishness. Freedom from the Mosaic law was not to result in self-promotion, segregation, or superiority, but in love. Love is the goal of the Christian community: living by the Spirit is the means to that end. Paul, in verse 8, reminds his readers of this truth by repeating the key contrast he established in 5:16: *desires of the flesh/desires of the Spirit*. Within the immediate context of 6:6, Paul's warning is to learners who will sow to the flesh if they fail to share material goods with those who teach them. The result of such a selfish action is corruption—they will remain ignorant of Christ and will not become more like him. Paul contrasts this condition with eternal life, which, according to Jesus himself, is to know him and thus to know God (John 17:3 – *“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”* [ESV]). The universal nature of the sowing/reaping principle, however, allows a much broader application of sowing to the flesh and sowing to the Spirit. Paul's warning/encouragement extends beyond the burden-bearing relationship of learners and teachers into all of life. John Stott explains that Paul uses the sowing/reaping principle to move from the particular to the general:

... [Paul] reverts to the theme of the flesh and the Spirit which he has treated at some length in Galatians 5:16-25. There in Galatians 5 the Christian's life is likened to a battleground, and the flesh and the Spirit are two combatants at war with each other upon it. But here in Galatians 6 the Christian's life is

likened a country estate, and the flesh and the Spirit are two fields in which we may sow seed. Further, the harvest we reap depends on *where* and on *what* we sow.

This is vitally important and a much neglected principle of holiness. We are not the helpless victims of our nature, temperament and environment. On the contrary, what we become largely depends on how we behave; our character is shaped by our conduct. According to Galatians 5 the Christian's duty is to 'walk by the Spirit', according to Galatians 6 to 'sow to the Spirit'. Thus the Holy Spirit is likened both to the path along which we walk (Gal. 5) and to the field in which we sow (Gal. 6). How can we expect to reap the *fruit* of the Spirit if we do not sow in the *field* of the Spirit. The old adage is true: 'Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.' This is good, biblical teaching.⁶

Paul has specifically mentioned the burden-bearing relationship between teachers and learners. He identified one way in which those groups sow to the Spirit (sharing of material goods). We have considered ways in which both groups might sow to the flesh within that relationship. What are other ways, outside the learner/teacher relationship, that Christians might sow to the flesh or to the spirit? Paul warns that sowing to the flesh leads to corruption. Anything that in any way encourages us to coddle or pander to our flesh or sinful nature is sowing in the wrong field and will lead to a harvest of destruction. We are to crucify the flesh; we are not to pity it or pamper it. We are to sow to the Spirit by following the Word of the Spirit or the Scriptures. The moral seeds we thusly sow (either fleshly or spiritual) are thoughts and values: the harvest is deeds of the same nature. John Stott provides some specific ways we might sow to the flesh:

Every time we allow our mind to harbor a grudge, nurse a grievance,

⁶ Ibid., 168-69. Italics in the original.

entertain an impure fantasy, or wallow in self-pity, we are sowing to the flesh.⁷

We sow to the flesh by keeping company with people whose lives are marked by self-centeredness. This might include people who profess to follow Christ as well as those who have no interest in the gospel. Self-centered people, by their very nature, will have values that do not conform to the gospel. Whether consciously or unconsciously, these people's lives will constantly urge us to adopt values and perform actions contrary to the gospel. By making self-centered people our companions and role-models, we ask to be tempted into areas of thinking and acting where we do not belong and which are difficult to resist. It should not surprise us then, when we become selfish, considering ourselves better than others, and making our wants and needs paramount.

Sowing to the Spirit involves setting the mind on what the Spirit desires (Rom. 8:5) and being led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 22-23). It includes walking by the Spirit, which manifests itself in humility, encouragement to holiness, and esteeming each other (Gal. 5:25-26). Just as sowing to the flesh involves thoughts and deeds, so sowing to the Spirit involves the life of the mind. Sowing to the Spirit means that we make deliberate choices about the kinds of books we read (especially THE Book), the places of entertainment we frequent, and the kind of company we choose, including our faithful fellowship with Christians at worship and prayer services. A life that imitates Christ is an intentional *harvest*. It is not an accident. The question is this; "How much do we want to look like Christ? How much do we want our lives to be a harvest of holiness?"

Life is not static. We constantly grow one way or the other. We grow

⁷ Ibid., 170.

Bonser—Continued from page 5

In but a couple of paragraphs I have attempted to paint with a broad brush the troubling situation which we find ourselves in when it comes to our question “What is the gospel?” Our foundation is to evaluate our understanding in accordance to God’s Word alone (Ps. 119:105; 2 Tim 3:16ff). So let us jump into our topic.

I. We Have Been Saved From God

The first point here encompasses several important aspects of the gospel and is a good starting point for our question. First, implied in the statement is the fact that man is in need of saving. Our culture is so terribly narcissistic that it fails to grasp this reality. The message of the Gospel must bring this reality to the forefront. Yes, most would say they are not perfect and some may even say they “sin.” But this is not the view of scripture. Scripture shatters the very being of man, destroying any view of self-righteousness.

The problem that the Gospel addresses is that we fail to understand who God is and we also fail to understand who we are. When Isaiah encountered God, it was not a friendly heavenly grandfather that he found but a holy and righteous God that revealed the depth of his sin. “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5). Even John fell on his face as if he was dead when he saw the resurrected Lord of Glory (Rev. 1:17a) “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man.” John had a sense of complete awe and fear at the sight of the Lord. This is even all the more amazing when we consider that this John was the one that laid his head on Christ’s chest as they ate (John 13:23). Now I do not know about you, but when I eat, I have to have a good two-foot

radius around me to feel comfortable. I love my family, but there is no way I want them laying on me while I am eating. You see, there was an intimacy here between John and Christ; so much so that he reclined on Christ as he ate. Yet, when he saw Him, he “fell at His feet as a dead man.” John saw the revealed glory of the One he loved and crumbled to the ground.

The first point then is that the Gospel must deal honestly with man’s guilt and sin before God. As long as we are content with our performance the severity of our sin will never become an issue. There is no fear of God where there is no genuine understanding of sin.

Second, we see that the cause of our distress is the enmity man has with God. It is not just that sin has man miserable and in a desperate plight. It is that sin violates the God of holiness who has made us. I marvel at how many “religions” recognize the need that man has, yet fail to see this in relationship to a holy Creator.

R.C. Sproul talks about this at length in his book, *Saved from What?* Dr. Sproul relates a story about when he was a professor at Conwell school of Theology.

“I was alone, minding my own business. Suddenly, apparently out of nowhere, a person appeared in front of me, blocking my forward progress. He looked at me in the eye and asked directly, “Are you saved?”

I wasn’t quite sure how to respond to this intrusion. I uttered in response the first words that came into my mind: “Saved from what?” What I was thinking, but had the grace not to say, was, “I’m certainly not saved from strangers buttonholing me and asking me questions like yours.” But when I said, “Saved from what?” I think the man who stopped me that day was as surprised by my question as I had been by his. He began to stammer and stutter. Obviously he wasn’t quite sure

how to respond.”⁷

In exploring the question, “What is the gospel?” Dr. Sproul brings to the table an important aspect of that question; namely just what is it we are “saved from.” Most of those claiming to be Christian will readily use this terminology. However, I fear most have neither the idea of the meaning nor implications of their own words. This is supported by a survey that *Modern Reformation* did at the annual booksellers’ convention. Interviewing 100 people, they found that only one out of the one hundred gave a satisfactory definition of the gospel. Those queried were not a random group of people off the street. These people claimed to be Christian and even representing major book companies.⁸ The real problem is that they have never genuinely grappled with God and, in so doing, come to realize their own lack of conformity to his holiness.

Our first point brings out this reality, the holiness and righteousness of God and the sin of man. To be sure, there are many other details we could consider at this point, but the essential thing that must be communicated in the Gospel is man’s sin against their righteous Creator. This need is something that has been totally lost in our culture. People do not see their need for atonement because they do not know who they are before God. They do not feel the need to escape the judgment of God because they do not feel the weight of their own sin before God. They know neither God nor themselves.

II. We Have Been Saved From God, By God

⁷ R.C. Sproul, *Saved From What* (Wheaton, IL, Crossway Books, 2002) 14, 15

⁸ For an interesting view of the convention see the article by Rich Phillips at, <http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2007/07/christian-booksellers-association.php>

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The Old Testament Scriptures are intelligible only when understood as predicting and prefiguring Christ.

Charles Hodge

Bonser—Continued from page 9

Although this part of this article may seem to be peripheral, it is actually vital to our question. With this point, we clarify just who does the saving and the means employed.

Dr. Sproul gives this wonderful summary, "... the grand paradox or supreme irony of the Christian faith is that we are saved both by God and from God. The God of perfect holiness, who demands satisfaction for His justice and who will not wink at sin, has from all eternity decreed that He Himself should provide salvation to those very people who, by their sin, are exposed to His wrath and judgment."⁹

Who Does the Saving?

The Gospel is the act of God saving sinners who could not save themselves; a sovereign act of grace. It is fascinating that scripture talks about this in such a matter-of-fact way. When it describes man, it is as "dead in sin" and "helpless." In addition, when we read of God acting, it is an act of intervention. Perhaps that word *intervention* is not even strong enough to convey what scripture says. We might think of intervention as helping a little old lady across the street or helping someone change a flat tire. But God's work of intervention is an act of creation from nothing (*ex nihilo*). He gives life when there is only death. He does not just help little old ladies across the street; he gives dead little old ladies life then walks them across the street. This is good news!

I wish we had more time to camp on this because it is so important to see that the good news is so wonderfully good, because the bad news is so terribly bad. It seems to me that just this simple framework can evaluate whether we are hearing the authentic Gospel message or not. It is certainly not good news to tell me that God has come to tell me to try harder, do

better and not give up. If the message really is that deep down inside you are not all that bad, then the answer is, indeed, to try harder. However, precisely because the news is so terrible, we are dead, that the Gospel is so good "But God" has intervened.

The Bible uses these two words, which simplify the whole question of who does the saving, "*but God*." "You were dead ... But God" (Eph. 2:4). I would encourage us to always remember these two words when we proclaim the Gospel—*But God*. Paul uses them in Ephesians 2 when he shows the contrast to what Paul had said before, that man is dead in his sin (vv.1-3), and what God has done to remedy that hopeless condition. "But God" has intervened to save us, to give us life. Dear reader, this is the Gospel, when we were dead, God "made us alive together with Christ." As Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has said, "These two words, in and of themselves, in a sense contain the whole of the Gospel."¹⁰

Simply put, the Gospel tells us what God has done. It is the explanation of God's intervention in human history. It is obvious then, especially from Eph. 2:4, that it is entirely outside of ourselves, because it has to be outside of ourselves—we are dead ... But God! This truth is glorious, utterly amazing. Is it any wonder that Paul, in the opening of his letter to the church at Ephesus, as he talked about God choosing us that he uses the phrase "to the praise of his glory" three times (1:6, 12, 14)? And then closes out the introduction by praying that believers may "know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" (1:18b,19a).

By What Means Does God Save?

10 Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1972) 59

If we look at the Bible as a whole, it is very clear that the central theme in the preaching and teaching is the Cross. God saves his people by this means. When we talk about the Cross, we need to use some terminology which many people are unfamiliar with. This matter of *words* is very important. Words help us to clarify just what we believe—they express the nuances of very critical matters. Our struggle in clarifying the gospel to most people today is that personal feelings carry more significance than facts. As a result people are blown about by "every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming" (Eph. 4:14). What really anchors people is the solid word of God.¹¹

1) We need to explain what is meant by **atonement**. The word *atonement* is one of the few theological terms that derive basically from Anglo-Saxon. It means 'a making at one', and points to a process of bringing those who are estranged into a unity. If we have explained our first point well, then the need for atonement will follow. The New Bible Dictionary explains, "It is clear that in the OT it was recognized that death was the penalty for sin (Ezk. 18:20), but that God graciously permitted the death of a sacrificial victim to substitute for the death of the sinner. So clear is the connection that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews can sum it up by saying 'without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins' (Heb. 9:22)."¹²

2) We will need to explain the **sacrificial** language of the Bible:

- This sacrifice establishes the New Covenant relationship of

¹¹ I wish we could spend more time looking at the details of these words, but due to space restrictions I'll simply mention those that are vital to our topic and give reference from bible dictionaries.

¹² *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England, Inter-Varsity Press, 1962) 104

the believer with God (Mark 14:24; cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-25).

- Christ was the sacrifice for our sins (Rom. 4:25; cf. Is. 53:4; Gal. 2:20). This is so very important to clarify due to the fact that many see the death of Christ as merely an example of the ultimate sacrifice of love. On the cross Christ was not merely an example but actually “bore our sins” (1 Peter 2:24; cf. Is. 53:4, 5).
- Christ’s sacrifice was for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28; Rom 5:9).
- So we see the whole substitutionary nature of the sacrifice (Is. 53; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; cf. Rom. 3:21-26).

3) The word **redemption** is important to clarify. The Easton Bible Dictionary explains redemption as “the purchase back of something that had been lost, by the payment of a ransom. The Greek word so rendered is *apolutrosis*, a word occurring nine times in Scripture, and always with the idea of a ransom or price paid, i.e., redemption by a *lutron* (see Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). There are instances in the LXX. Version of the Old Testament of the use of *lutron* in man’s relation to man (Lev. 19:20; 25:51; Ex. 21:30; Num. 35:31, 32; Isa. 45:13; Prov. 6:35), and in the same sense of man’s relation to God (Num. 3:49; 18:15).”¹³

4) We will want to explain the word **justification**. Again, I quote the Easton Bible Dictionary, “a forensic term, opposed to condemnation. As regards its nature, it is the judicial act of God, by which he pardons all the sins of those who believe in Christ, and accounts, accepts, and treats them as righteous in the eye of the law, i.e., as conformed to all its demands. In addition to the pardon (q.v.) of sin, justification declares that all the claims

of the law are satisfied in respect of the justified. It is the act of a judge and not of a sovereign. The law is not relaxed or set aside, but is declared to be fulfilled in the strictest sense; and so the person justified is declared to be entitled to all the advantages and rewards arising from perfect obedience to the law (Rom. 5:1–10).”¹⁴ Of course, we will want to clarify imputation as well as the active and passive fulfillment of the law by Christ.

Now, all of these terms are very important for us to understand as they unfold the surpassing riches of God’s saving work in Christ. Yet, there is so much here it can seem to be overwhelming. We can feel like the child who attempts to catch a sip of water from an open fire hydrant. Amidst all of these important terms we must see the preciousness of what God has done; he has saved people that stand before him rightly condemned and helpless to save themselves.

III. We Have Been Saved From God, By God, For God

I must end with exploring our last point; that is that we have been saved “for God.” This is an important point for us to consider when we talk about the Gospel for the very reason that it expresses the purpose in what God has done in Christ. At the end of it all, the Gospel is to the praise of the glory of God.

The whole of the Gospel is, in the first place, about God. We, as a people, have turned so inward that we cannot see that there is anything worthy of our attention if it does not focus on us, on me. Therefore, God has become stripped of his awe-inspiring nature and made into a heavenly grandfather who looks at his creation, provides what he can and smiles when his children try really hard. When we hear of the good news, we are more likely to be told how I can be a better person and how God is there to give

me a hand. God is there to cheer us on and feels sad when we fail. In fact, we now hear more about how God feels than how God acts. A. W. Pink brings this home:

“The ‘god’ of this twentieth century no more resembles the Supreme Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle the glory of the midday sun. The ‘god’ who is now talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday School, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called Bible Conferences is the figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality. The heathen outside of the pale of Christendom form ‘gods’ out of wood and stone, while the millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a ‘god’ out of their own carnal mind. In reality, they are but atheists, for there is no other possible alternative between an absolutely supreme God, and no God at all. A ‘god’ whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to Deity, and so far from being a fit object of worship, merits naught but contempt.”¹⁵

Sad to say, the contempt we now see in those around us is for a sovereign God. This is because man has taken center stage in this drama of human life. Man is the god of his own little theater and the God of glory has become the audience; He applauds, He weeps, He may even give some suggestions to help us improve but the focus is on us, always us. How tragic will be that day when the play has ended. Man will not hear the applause and accolades of God or angels for which he has lived. The theater will be empty, his costume stripped away and his self-centered life laid bare.

The terrible tragedy is that many who claim the title *Christian* believe

Bonser—Continued on page 17

15 Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1988) 28, 29

¹³ *Easton Bible Dictionary*, Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996, 664

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 4271

Reisingner—Continued from page 8

better or worse. Life is like a field. Every field produces a harvest of some sort. Even unplanted and uncultivated fields produce a harvest. In those fields, weeds predominate. If we do not sow to the Spirit, the weed called the flesh will take over. The flesh will always “lust against the Spirit” (Gal. 5:17). We do not have to teach and train the flesh to love sin and self. A harvest of shame follows “doing nothing,” simply because doing nothing is really actively doing something—it is sowing to the flesh! John Stott points out that growing toward holiness (becoming more like Christ) has both a negative and a positive aspect:

Therefore, if we want to reap a harvest of holiness, our duty is twofold. First we must avoid sowing to the flesh, and secondly we must keep sowing to the Spirit. We must ruthlessly eliminate the first and concentrate time and energies on the second. It is another way of saying (as in Gal. 5) that we must ‘crucify the flesh’ and ‘walk by the Spirit’. There is no other way of growing in holiness.⁸

In verses 9, 10, Paul equates sowing to Spirit with doing good:

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

⁸ Ibid., 171.

By employing a metaphor with universal applicability (the sowing/reaping metaphor), Paul moves his readers from an “in-house” responsibility (bear one another’s burdens) to a responsibility that has universal applicability (it encompasses all people): do good to all (sow spiritual seed among everyone). Christians have no excuse to act selfishly toward those who are outside the faith. I know some Christians who will not in any way help nonbelievers. They are the first to help a Christian who has suffered a tragedy. They will provide food, clothing, and shelter for a brother or sister whose house has burned, but they feel no compulsion to help an unbeliever in a similar situation. This attitude is contrary to Paul’s teaching. We do not sow half our field with loving seed and half with selfish seed. Our life, whether we are in the company of fellow believers or in the company of those who do not believe, is to be marked in its entirety by love. The double-duty we have to do good among believers does not negate the responsibility we have to love all of God’s image-bearers.

Paul does not specifically define “doing good” here, nor does he describe the harvest that follows. We can surmise from his placing it in the context of sowing and reaping that the harvest is the fruit of the Spirit, which he has described in some detail in 5:22 and 23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

gentleness, and self-control. We know from the principle just stated that if we wish to harvest this fruit, we must sow its seed. So it would seem that doing good, according to Paul in this passage, is to spread love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This is the harvest we will reap, whether as a confirmed way of life for ourselves (a settled disposition to do good) or as attitude those around us show toward us. Either way, the results are not likely to be immediate, hence Paul’s encouragement not to give up. We cannot use the remaining self-centeredness that we see in our own lives discourage us to the point that we stop trying to be other-centered. We cannot let the self-centeredness that we see in others prevent us from acting selflessly toward them.

It is all too easy today to justify not doing good in our broader community (the community comprising believers and non-believers). It sometimes seems as if we not only are *not* seeing a harvest of love, joy, peace and the like from those outside the faith, but we are also seeing those very qualities under attack when demonstrated by Christians. In fact, Christians often stand accused of exhibiting the opposite qualities. Our love is called hate. Our joy is called dourness. Our self-control is called repression. Our peace is called smugness. There may indeed be some who claim to follow to Christ who deserve

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Eph 2:1-10, ESV

such censure, but it is difficult to persevere in genuine love, joy, peace, and the like when we all stand accused of being hypocrites. Nor is this the only reason we may feel discouraged. The nation our forefathers shed their blood to give us—a nation with freedom of religion enshrined as one its basic rights—is also under attack. Do not misunderstand me: I am not at all interested in the church endorsing a political party or candidate. I am interested in encouraging believers to let their convictions be known. I think that doing good certainly includes doing all we can to stop the downhill slide of our culture. It may be, however, that our cultural malaise is God's judgment. If he has turned our country over to judgment (and the evidence for that seems to be mounting every day), then all our efforts to stop that slide will fail. We cannot outwit God's sovereign purposes. However, we cannot see what God's sovereign purpose has ordained, therefore, we do good and keep on doing good in spite of the outcome.

John Stott sums up the ways in which Paul applies the principle of sowing and reaping in this section of Galatians:

We have considered the three spheres of the Christian life to which Paul applies his inexorable principle that 'whatever a man sows, that he will also reap'. In the first, the seed is *God's Word*, sown by teachers in the minds and hearts of the congregation. In the second, the seed is *our own thoughts and deeds*, sown in the field of the flesh or the Spirit. In the third, the seed is *good works*, sown in the lives of other people in the community.

And in each case, although the seed and the soil are different, seed-time is followed by harvest. The teacher who sows God's Word will reap his living; it is God's purpose that he should. The sinner who sows to the flesh will reap corruption. The believer who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life, an ever-deepening communion with God. The Christian philanthropist who sows

good works in the community will reap a crop in the lives of those he serves and a reward for himself in eternity.

In none of these spheres can God be mocked. In each the same principle invariably operates. And since we cannot fool God, we are fools if we try to fool ourselves! We must neither ignore nor resist this law, but accept it and co-operate with it. We must have the good sense to allow it to govern our lives. 'Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.' We must expect to reap what we sow. Therefore, if we want to reap a good harvest, we must sow, and keep sowing, good seed. Then, in due

time, we shall reap.⁹

Whether or not we see the harvest in our own individual lives, in the life of the church, or in the life of the larger community, our duty is to keep on doing good. In due season, we will reap. Paul does not tell us when "due season" is; he simply tells that it exists and it will reveal the good harvest. In the light of this certainty, we continue to do good. We continue to sow spiritual seed. We continue to love and to imitate Christ. Ω

⁹ Ibid., 172-73.

I asked the Lord, that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know;
And seek more earnestly His face.

Twas He who taught me thus to pray,
And He, I trust has answered prayer;
But it has been in such a way,
As almost drove me to despair!

I hoped that in some favored hour,
At once He'd answer my request;
And by His love's constraining power,
Subdue my sins—and give me rest!

Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part!

Yes more, with His own hand He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe!
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds—and laid me low!

"Lord, why is this!" I trembling cried,
"Will you pursue your worm to death?"
"This is the way," the Lord replied,
"I answer prayer for grace and faith."

"These inward trials I employ,
From self and pride to set you free;
And break your schemes of earthly joy,
That you may seek your all in Me!"

John Newton

McMillin—Continued from page 7

He does according to His will in the army of heaven

And among the inhabitants of the earth.

No one can restrain His hand

Or say to Him, "What have You done?" Dan 4:35

Later, God would judge Syria severely for being His own sword to punish idolatrous Israel, but Naaman's great reputation and honor were because God had chosen him to give Syria the victory over Israel. If he did kill Ahab as Jewish history claims; if he destroyed Jehovah's great enemy, doesn't it show the goodness of God upon Naaman, in this way to promote him to honor in his country? He, who owed his all to God, received great gifts from God's own hand. How far are the ways of God's providence past our finding out? The Bible tells us that God raises up over the kingdoms of the earth the basest of men. That, my friends, is providence! Great among men, Naaman was a tool in God's hand.

But when God brings great victories and honorable character and goodness to the fore, that is providence too. Naaman was honored greatly because, "by Him, the Lord gave victory to Syria."

Fifth: Mighty in *valour*. It used to be the custom in many countries, including our own, that in war a man could purchase the position of an officer in the army or navy.

At one time, in Prussia and England, it was the usual way for men to become officers. In both our Revolutionary War and the Civil War, commissions were sold, or given, primarily to the rich and prominent.

Some of those men were great warriors, but many a coward headed a company or a battalion. If Britain hadn't appointed so many military leaders who were either stupid or cowardly, we almost surely would

have lost our war for independence.

History does not call a fearless but stupid man a man of valor. Webster states that valor includes wisdom and integrity. We learned earlier that Naaman was honorable and acceptable. He was no fool. He was wise and his decisions were made in the honesty, integrity and trustworthiness of his person.

Who wouldn't love a man like Naaman: handsome, good in reputation, trustworthy in character, respected and honorable before God and full of valor. He was the type of general to come out of our armies and be elected president as several have been. Here was a man among men, one to sit in the first place at the conference table of a country's business.

Sixth *But, but*. It has been said that "a good plan will always succeed until the butts happen." Thomas Brooks wrote a book on afflictions in providence and he titled it *The Crook in the Lot*. There are storms in every sea, landslides on every mountain, loose stones in every trail and quicksand in every swamp.

We may have the whole world for our oyster and yet find death in the pot. Our barns may bulge with our soul's desires but God may say ... "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you ..." Luke 12:20.

Naaman had it all; "but he was a leper." Leprosy was the most dreaded of all diseases in Bible days. It is caused by a germ *mycobacterium leprae*, and is related to tuberculosis.

The Jews said it signified a "smiting from heaven." It was looked upon as judgment from God. To Miriam it was. To Gehazi, Elisha's servant, it was.

It could already be in the infant of a leprous mother. The child could appear as pretty and blooming and healthy at birth as any baby. Later leprosy might begin as little specks in the

eyelids and the palms and then spread over the body. Scales, swelling, open sores appeared next; slowly it ate into deeper tissues, muscles, joints and bones. Fingers, hands, feet fell off. The nerves were involved, sensation was lost and lepers burned themselves or cut themselves and didn't know it. They were past feeling. It spared nothing; eyes, ears, tongue, the heart and lungs were often involved until death appeared to be an angel of mercy.

Banished from all human society, cast out of the tabernacle, having no priest to offer for them; they were thought to be without God and without hope.

Sin is the leprosy of the soul. It is hereditary, contagious, ever increasing, has no cure by human means, brings shame and disgrace. It separates between man and God, it deforms souls, renders the sufferer unclean to God. It causes a life of sorrow, brings agony in death but worst of all, it brings an eternal torment, the second death.

We look at infants and often think of how cute and innocent they appear. Already the infant is beginning its journey of death. Already the blush is fading, the putrefaction begins, and the soul is dying. The only cure is God's healing touch.

How like Naaman the sinner is. He brags, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing" — and [does] not know that [he is] wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (Rev 3:17). Saying he sees, he sees not; saying he hears, he hears not; he cannot feel; he does not know his beauty is eaten away.

Naaman had it all: But, he was a leper.

To be continued. Ω

Bonser—Continued from page 13

this gospel really is all about them; it's the ultimate self-improvement program. After all, as I heard one TV preacher proclaim, "If God is for us, who can be against us." We have come a long way from the Westminster catechism that explains the chief purpose of man is too "Glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

We need to realize that contained in this idea that we have been saved "for God," is the very direction of our lives—God-ward. We are not our own, but God's. The transformation from death to life brings about a new direction because of a new heart. The old heart was entirely focused inward, while the new heart is outward; "... and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (2 Cor. 5:15), "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). It is now the love of God that moves our very being. And this is the point where so many that claim to be Christian show how utterly lost they are. As John Piper puts it,

People need to be shocked with the reality that they won't make it to heaven if they don't love the Giver more than the gift. The heaven that they think will make them happy without him won't be the heaven they go to one day, because they'll never make it. They'll be in hell.

We all need to be shocked. The Bible uses the threat of judgment to get our attention. We aren't saved by being afraid of hell, but we are shaken out of our idolatries to consider the alternative, namely Christ.

Once you shock someone you might explain to them that the reason they love the ideas of rejoining their relatives, having all of their aches and pains taken away, no more mental

stress, endless pleasures of the body, etc.—the reason these are all such powerful desires is that they have experienced them all, tasted them, and they all feel good. But if these things are desired more than Jesus, then that person probably hasn't tasted deep fellowship with him.¹⁶

At the center-stage of all of creation is God. We can evaluate whether what we hear is the Gospel or not depending on where it places God in the whole picture of things. We are part of an incredible story that has been unfolding since creation. This story is about the God who made us for Himself, to glorify Him and enjoy Him. It is about our own rebellion and the way we have turned away from God in sin and rebellion. In addition, it is how God chose to reveal His attributes of grace and mercy to sinful men so that all creation would glorify Him. This is what Peter was talking about when he said:

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Why were the angels longing to look? What caught their attention? Some have completely misunderstood the focus of this passage. It was not the birth of Christ itself that the angels were taken by. It was the gospel! The unfolding plan of redemption has taken captive the angelic beings because it reveals things about God that they never saw prior to the creation and

fall of man. They knew of God's justice and holiness. They saw so many of His attributes and lived in light of them. Yet, here in the salvation of sinful man they were taken by the grace and mercy of God. They longed to look into the gospel because it reveals more of the God that they adore and worship. It reveals the glory of God!

We looked briefly at Paul's greeting to the church at Ephesus and how he focused his attention on the gospel. There, as he explains how God has chosen us (1:4) and predestined us to adoption (1:5) and according to His purpose (1:11) he tells us that the end all and be all of this work of sovereign grace was for God's glory;

- We were predestined "to the praise of the glory of His grace which He freely bestowed on us..." (v. 6)
- He predestined us according to His purpose so that we would be "to the praise of His glory." (v.12)
- We were sealed in the Holy Spirit, "to the praise of His glory" (v.14)

As Piper titled his book, so we see here "God is the Gospel."

After Peter explained how the angels longed to look at the Gospel, he followed it with these words of warning, "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"(vs. 13). It's a fitting way to end this article on "What Is the Gospel." Let us all be sure to keep our minds prepared for action and fix our hope completely on the grace that has been brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Ω

¹⁶ John Piper http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/AskPastorJohn/By-Topic/10/2520_How_can_we_help_others_love_God_more_than_his_gifts/

West—Continued from page 1

In reading discussions about God’s omnipotence, it becomes apparent that many philosophers and theologians do not see how the concept of unlimited power is coherent. To cite one rather famous example, there is the paradox of the stone. Often, even average people who know nothing of the Bible, theology, or philosophy will be able to repeat this conundrum. It runs along these lines: “Can God make a rock so big that he cannot lift it?” The alleged problem comes in when we are asked to weigh the possible answers to the question. If we say that no, God cannot make a rock so big he cannot lift it, then we have revealed that there is something that God cannot do—and thus we have limited his power. If we say that yes, God can make a rock so big that he cannot lift it, we have admitted that God cannot lift a rock he is capable of making—and thus we have limited his power. Either way, it seems that we end up with a God who cannot do something, and is therefore not omnipotent.

There have been a variety of answers to this riddle. Frequently, one begins by pointing out that in the biblical revelation there are things we are told that God cannot do—but this is part of his perfection. For example, God cannot sin. He cannot lie. He cannot cease to be God, or become unholy. God cannot do things which deny his nature, or the rationality of his own mind. So God cannot do

something analytically contradictory, like making a round shape that is a perfect square, or making $1 + 1 = 7$. These are not real tasks, though; they are pseudo-tasks, because they are logically impossible. Now, a minority of Christians will argue that God can in fact do that which is logically contradictory, but most do not, because logic and rationality are part of God’s nature, and are reflected in his creation.

A more focused response to the paradox of the stone comes from C. Wade Savage. He notes that there is a confusion in the phrasing of the paradox, and then analyzes what it means to be a perfect rock maker and a perfect rock lifter. He says that to be a perfect rock maker you need to be able to make any rock of any size. God can do this. He says that to be a perfect rock lifter you need to be able to lift a rock of any size. God can do this. It is simply mistaken to think that a perfect rock maker needs to be able to make a rock that a perfect rock lifter cannot lift. So God is unlimited in his rock making ability, and unlimited in his rock lifting ability. He is an omnipotent rock maker and an omnipotent rock lifter.

This is a better response than another one which is very common amongst ‘Christian’ philosophers. Many today are advocating that God is currently omnipotent, but has the potential to lose his omnipotence.

They argue that God could make a rock so big he could not lift it. He therefore has the power to make such a rock, and as such is currently omnipotent. If he did make such a rock, however, he would at that time cease to be omnipotent. Here the position is that God’s omnipotence is a current attribute, but it has the potential of being lost. Now, such philosophers often assure us that God won’t actually do anything to forfeit his omnipotence, nevertheless the possibility remains.

The discussion about God’s power can get downright silly. It is claimed that since God does not have a body, he cannot ride a bike. Since a human being has the power to ride a bike, and God does not, we can do things that God cannot do. If that is the case, then surely God is not omnipotent! Now, clearly we would argue that God can balance a bike, move the pedals, and steer it wherever he wants it to go. In fact, he could direct it up Mount Everest, or across the ocean, or to the moon. Frankly, one has to wonder how serious professional philosophers are, and if this is just a joke rather than a serious argument. It is absurd to argue that God is not omnipotent because he does not have a body, and that not riding a bike gives him less power than an embodied human.

Atheists try to reject the teachings of Scripture because they do not want God to exist. This we understand. But why would ostensibly Christian

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thinkers reject a doctrine like God's omnipotence? Well, as will be seen in more detail in my next article, there are many people who hold so strongly to the freewill of human beings that they will redefine God's attributes in order to uphold libertarian freewill. In other words, they deny that God can interfere with people's decisions; human will is something which God does not have the power to direct.

In this forum I will forego citing biblical texts which teach that God's will does direct human wills, and that God's will turns human hearts and changes human minds. For now it will suffice to make an observation concerning the methodology of those who argue in such a way. They begin with an inference from the Bible, or a philosophical definition of freewill, and then modify every biblical teaching to agree with their understanding

of 'freedom.'

For example, they will say that to be free, we need to be able to choose any path or do anything humanly possible without God determining in the slightest what path we will choose. While I would argue that this is simply not biblically accurate (or even philosophically coherent), what happens next is the crucial move. Freewill is held up so high, that nothing which even seems to conflict with it is allowed to stand—even if it's the nature of God himself. Is God omnipotent? Not if it conflicts with freewill! And since such thinkers often do believe that God's omnipotence does conflict with freewill, they jettison omnipotence, instead of redefining their concept of freewill.

Let it be said again. Man's freewill is an inference based on notions of

'responsibility' and 'freedom.' It is, at a minimum, nowhere directly taught in Scripture. God's omnipotence, his unlimited power, is clearly taught in Scripture. We must never subvert the Bible's direct and explicit teaching to our inferences. Our inferences need to be brought into accord with the Bible's clear teaching, not the other way around. As Bible believing Christians we must maintain with reverence and joy that God is completely, perfectly, and gloriously powerful. Riddles and mental games aside, the doctrine of omnipotence is both intellectually coherent and fully biblical. And we only need to understand the latter to accept it wholeheartedly and without reserve. Ω

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When We Complain about the Weather!

Arthur Pink, "The Sovereignty of God"

He spreads snow like wool; He scatters frost like ashes; He throws His hailstones like crumbs. Who can withstand His cold? He unleashes His winds, and the waters flow. Psalm 147:15-18

What a declaration is this! The changes of the elements are beneath God's sovereign control. It is God who withholds the rain—and it is God who gives the rain ... when He wills, where He wills, as He wills, and on whom He wills!

"I also withheld the rain from you while there were still three months until harvest. I sent rain on one city—but no rain on another. One field received rain while a field with no rain withered. I struck you with blight and mildew; the locust devoured your many gardens and vineyards, your fig trees and olive trees! I sent plagues like those of Egypt; I killed your young men with the sword ... says the Lord." Amos 4:7-10

The breath of God produces ice, and the broad waters become frozen. He loads the clouds with moisture; He scatters His lightning through them. At His direction they swirl around over the face of the whole earth to do whatever He commands them. He brings the clouds to punish men—or to water His earth and show His love." Job 37:10-13

Truly, then, God governs the elements!

Earth and wind, fire and rain, hail and snow, stormy winds and angry seas all obey His omnipotent word and fulfill His sovereign pleasure! Therefore, when we complain about the weather, we are, in reality, murmuring against God!

Let His Word speak once more: "The Lord does whatever He pleases throughout all heaven and earth, and on the seas and in their depths. He causes the clouds to rise over the earth. He sends the lightning with the rain, and releases the wind from His storehouses." Psalm 135:6-7

"All things are in the hands of God, have Him for their Author, and are directed and governed by Him to such ends as are most suitable to His wise providence. Whoever complains of the weather—complains of the God who ordains the weather!"

William Law

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