

Psm. 11:3

Baptists For Liberty

Prov. 29:2

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Galatians 5:1

NEWS LETTER

Issue #33

November/December 2015

“The Blank Page”

by Bro. Jeff Short

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?” ~ Luke 14:28

The blank page is meant to have the blankness taken away. I love paper and pencils and pens. Maybe love is a strong word. I genuinely enjoy them. I’ve worked with all sorts of paper: plain bond, vellum, and mylar film. I once got to work with a set of drawings from the 50’s that were inked onto linen, which the old timers called cheesecloth. It had an almost waxy feel that reminded me of a liquid-impervious tablecloth you might find draped over a sad and wobbly two-seater at a cheap spaghetti house.

(con. page 4)

“A Quiet Example”

by Bro. Todd Bryant

“...that you also aspire 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

Zeal...outspokenness...loud proclamations...boldness. These are all characteristics that we often think about when we consider what it means to be a faithful believer these days. As I log into social media, I am often bombarded with believers who seem to believe it’s their duty to lead a loud, outspoken life – to get into everybody else’s business. This seems to be what is perceived to be “properly walking toward those who are outside”. However, our text verse says something altogether different. (con. page)

“But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world? For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just. What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;” Romans 3:5-9

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Good Intentions

“The road to Hell is paved with good intentions”

According to Wikipedia: “One meaning of the phrase is that individuals may have the intention to undertake good actions but nevertheless fail to take action. This inaction may be due to procrastination, laziness or other subversive vice. As such, the saying is an admonishment that a good intention is meaningless unless followed through.” That puts me in mind of something James wrote, “*Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.*” (James 2:18)

Another meaning is: “-wrongdoings or evil actions are often masked by good intentions, or even that good intentions, when acted upon, may have unforeseen bad consequences.”

A saying I think that relates to this is “**the ends justify the means.**” Does God receive glory as long as our intentions are good? What consequences will our intentions reap?

“Proper Biblical Foundation”

by Bro. Todd Bryant



“But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” (Mat 7:26-27)

Nothing is more important in the construction of a house than its foundation. All other things can be built well. But, if the foundation is faulty, the house will not stand. The same is true for a church. We, as a body of Christ, must have the proper foundation. I fear we live in a time when many are at least giving the impression that they have the wrong foundation.

Let me preface the main thought of this article by saying it is possible to have that which is good in itself misused as a foundation. For instance, solid trusses are important in the construction of a home. The roof will not hold up if the trusses are not solid. However, they cannot be used as a foundation for the home. They are in and of themselves good and useful. But, they are not beneficial when used in any other way than their proper purpose. The same is true with Biblical doctrine. For example, it is important to use unleavened bread in the Lord’s Supper. However, this is not the foundational principle of the Lord’s church.

The Bible seems plain enough regarding what the only foundation for the Lord’s church is. “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 3:11). The Apostle Paul was inspired to tell the saints at Corinth the importance of having the proper foundation. Just a few verses earlier, he wrote, “...you are God’s field, you are God’s building.” (I Cor. 3:9). He is stressing the importance of building up our faith. Nonetheless, we cannot build up on the wrong foundation and expect to be faithful or fruitful.

Jesus Christ is the sole foundation of His church. We need to make sure that our primary message is “Christ crucified” (I Cor. 1:23). It seems that oftentimes our people are “gung ho” to make sure that folks know we believe in predestination. But, how often do we share the Gospel of Jesus Christ? We are so quick to tell people that our church believes in the doctrine of election. But, do we ever explain that we preach that salvation is through Christ

alone? The main thrust of many is that God doesn’t love everybody. But, how many times do we share that Jesus is the friend of sinners? I oftentimes wonder if we have lost the proper foundation.

When Paul first came to the people of Corinth on his missionary journey, what message did he bring to them? He said, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (I Cor. 2:1, 2). Paul’s number one objective in missionary work was to share the Gospel of Christ. He reiterates this later in this same epistle. “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (I Cor. 15:1-4). The first message that Paul preached when he met a new person was the Gospel. Surely, this is a great example for us.

I’ll be the first to say that pastors need to be preaching the whole counsel of God. It’s important that a pastor feeds his flock by speaking on a variety of subjects. He needs to supply a healthy diet to the souls that he’s been called to oversee. However, the foundation for all good preaching is the Gospel of Christ. Paul said, “...woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (I Cor. 9:16). If we are going to leave a doctrine out, it cannot be the Gospel. If we are going to go to seed on anything, it must ever be Christ. The message of the cross must always be the center of all we say and do.

The church in Ephesus had a lot going for her. She had worked. She had labored. She had tried those that claimed to be apostles and had determined that they were impostors. It sounds like she had everything going in the right direction until the Lord says these dreadful words, “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent” (Rev. 2:4,5). This church was a working church. They had not fainted out of weariness. But, they had forgotten Christ!! How in the world does this happen in one of the Lord’s churches? Yet, it happened a few decades after the Lord Himself established the first church at Jerusalem. Is there any doubt, there are churches that have replaced the preaching of the Gospel with something else today?

Every doctrine is founded on Christ. All things were made “through Him” (Jhn 1:2). We were chosen “in Him” (Eph. 1:4).

We were redeemed by Him (Col 1:14). We were effectually drawn to Him (John 6:37). We are preserved in Him (Jud. 1:1). We are looking for His return (Tit. 2:13). The list goes on and on. The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is about Him. The subject of the Holy Scriptures is Jesus Christ. May we ever look for that message in all that we say and do.

It seems to be more and more common that our preachers speak on nothing more than TULIP. Oh, many may start at a different text each week. However, the end result is the same. Is it really a surprise that many of our churches are losing any understanding of church truth and other vital doctrines? But even more importantly, are we leaving the message of Christ out? Are we falling into the same trap as the church in Ephesus?

Have we forgotten the Great Commission? Jesus said, "...Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15). The order of the Commission is plain. We are to preach the Gospel, baptize the converts and then teach them proper doctrine (Mat. 28:18-20). When we rearrange this order, we do not follow God's instruction. When we change God's ordained way, we get off track. We cannot improve on God's design of missionary work.

Let's look at two examples of New Testament missionaries. When the Lord instructed Philip to go into Gaza, what message did he take? When he found the Eunuch reading the 53rd chapter of the prophet Isaiah, what did he say? When asked by the Eunuch, "...of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" (Acts 8:34), how does Philip respond? God's Word tells us, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:35). Surely Philip understood many of the truths of God's Word that we all cherish. Yet, he also understood the need of preaching the Gospel to the lost. When Paul and Silas were asked by the Philippian jailor, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30), how did they respond? Did they begin an hour and a half treatise on the doctrines of grace? Did they explain to the man how he couldn't be saved? Did they, as some have supposed to have said, tell them man, "Nothing at all!"? They certainly did not. In harmony with other examples in God's Word, "...they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.'" (Acts 16:31). These men understood that our foundational message must ever be the message of Christ crucified.

Is our confidence in election or in Christ? Now, let me make this plain, I believe the doctrine of election as much as anybody. I treasure it. I preach it! But, my confidence is in Christ. Paul said, "...I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day." (1 Tim. 1:12). Paul's confidence was in Christ alone. Our faith is

only as good as its object. The only Biblical object of faith is Jesus Christ. We are never bidden to trust in election to be saved. Our trust must ever be in the Christ of the Gospel (Eph. 1:12-13).

If you are asked what you believe, what is your first answer? If you are asked what your church stands for, what is your first answer? In years past, I would have quickly spouted off, "why, we believe in the doctrine of election." And, that is true. We do believe and preach the doctrines of grace. We love the doctrines of grace. However, this is not the foundational principle of the Lord's church. These blessed truths magnify that One that is surely the foundation. Perhaps our response to that question should be, "We believe that the only way into fellowship with God is through the finished work of Jesus Christ and that alone."

Is it possible to have a true message and emphasize it so much that it replaces the Gospel as the proper foundation? I fear it is not only possible, but also probable. If this is correct, what is the problem with that? Perhaps our greatest fear should be that many are trusting in election for salvation but are not trusting in Christ. If this is so, are these saved? Perhaps this question is harsh. But, it's important. Again, our faith is only as good as its object. Election is not to be the object of our faith. If we are pointing people to election for salvation, we are pointing them to the wrong place. You will search far and wide to find a Biblical missionary that pointed the lost to election.

A church that has replaced the preaching of the Gospel with election will produce several problems. As we have said, the greatest of these may be members that have been deceived into thinking election is the proper object of faith. But, the problems don't stop there. In churches where TULIP is the only message ever preached, the members have no knowledge of other important subjects such as church truth, discipline, the Lord's Supper, baptism, practical Christianity and many others. The list is endless. Also, Spirit convicted seekers are confused. They know they trust Christ but live in fear that they were not chosen. To these, Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mat. 11:28). There are no strings attached here. If a person is burdened over their sins by the convicting power of the Spirit, they are bidden to come to Christ. Again, He is the only proper Biblical foundation.

Let us ever examine ourselves. Let us ever examine our churches. Let us make sure that we have not laid any foundation other than Jesus Christ. All Biblical truths have their place. But, all are founded on the doctrine of Christ. He alone is "altogether lovely" (Song Of Solomon 5:16).

"...to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (Eph. 3:21).

"The Blank Page"

by Bro. Jeff Short



(continued from the cover page)

I've worked with woodcase pencils, plastic lead holders, and mechanical pencils. In my earlier days I preferred thin and sleek, but in my later days with gout, carpal tunnel, and such, I prefer a thick grip and enough heft that I don't get hand cramps from using it. I've used various graphite and plastic leads and inks.

I've used technical pens for inking drawings, cheap Bic's for everything from writing to firing spitwads. I've used a number of different fountain pens for, gasp, writing by hand. Good paper, a good pen, and good ink has a way of inspiring you to write something good.

Oh, what could be . . .

I haven't done it for a long time, but I always loved taping down a fresh sheet of vellum, squaring up the drafting machine, considering what that sheet of paper would be in a few hours or a few days, depending on what needed drawn. I enjoyed taking a good mechanical pencil with downward pressure and a slight twist along a straightedge as most of the lead left a line and a little of it crumbled along the edge. No worries, a quick whisk with a horse hair brush and all was right.

I've been around the sun enough times to be able to reflect on some things that are past. Unfortunately, I've found many things have already slipped beyond recall. So while I love good paper, pens, and pencils, what I really love is the possibility that these bring. Some are intimidated by a blank page but it's full of wonderful possibilities. These implements represent a great potential.

Potential: it's what could be. The sky really is the limit. It could be anything, everything, or nothing. If you can imagine it, you can imagine it. I don't think I'm alone. We love potential. We rejoice in it. We brag about it. We celebrate possibility more than reality. Not a few sheets have betrayed the vision of my mind and ended up in a crumpled ball and banked off the wall into a metal can.

If we think wisely about this, might the dreamy potential be hindering us from actually doing something? Solomon advises us wisely, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof" ([Ecclesiastes 7:8](#)). The beginning of a thing is the potential phase. It is the dreaming and planning phase where we are swept away with possibilities.

If we linger too long in the possibilities of what might be, we end up not knowing what is ([Proverbs 14:23](#)). The end of a thing is something. Something has been made, written, drawn, painted, produced. It has tangible existence and no longer abides only in the talk of the lips.

But what if what's made is lesser than the dream imagined? The thought daunts us. We take solace in the vision because it's

perfect. It's just the way we want. The reality is almost certain to disappoint. Yet here, if I may stretch Solomon's meaning a little, "a living dog is better than a dead lion" ([Ecclesiastes 9:4](#)).

Oh, what might have been . . .

Solomon teaches us repeatedly that it is our portion in this life to enjoy the fruits of our labors ([Ecclesiastes 3:22](#); [5:18-19](#); [9:9](#)). Fruits of labor are the results of work, not the results of talk ([Proverbs 14:23](#)). To enjoy the fruit we have to do the work. So Solomon admonishes us, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" ([Ecclesiastes 9:10](#)).

Paper and ink and lead are called consumables, because they exist for that purpose. They are meant to be used up. The paper should be marked on. The pen should run dry and the pencil should end as a nub. They are serving their purpose that way. Our life is also consumable. It's meant to be used up. Celebrating possibilities can keep you from celebrating realities, which is far better, and as with pen and paper there comes a time when it is too late.



NEWS

NOTICE: The inclusion of quotes or link to an article is NOT an explicit agreement with all the views expressed there in.

If you are reading a printed copy of this newsletter you will find all the links listed here in the PDF version on our website, <http://baptistsforliberty.weebly.com>

Civil Liberties



Dec. 2nd “[Judge Jails Former Pastor For Jury Nullification Education](#)” by Michael Lotfi for truthinmedia.com

Quote: Former pastor Keith Wood, 39, was arrested last week for handing out fliers that informed passerby about the practice of [jury nullification](#) on the sidewalk in front of the Mecosta County courthouse.

Wood was distributing fliers from the Fully Informed Jury Association. “*I’m a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus said ‘the truth will set you free’ and I want people to know the truth,*” said Wood regarding why he decided to hand out the fliers entitled [What Rights Do You Have as a Juror That the Judge Won’t Tell You About?](#) “*If you don’t use your rights, you lose them,*” Wood said. [Read the full story here.](#)

Dec. 12th “[Freelance Journalist’s Efforts May Bring Down Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel](#)” by Bob Adelman at The New American

“More than a million people have seen the dashcam video of Chicago Police Officer Jason Van Dyke gunning down Laquan McDonald on the night of October 20, 2014. But for the efforts of a freelance journalist no one would have seen it — ever.

When Brandon Smith, a Chicago freelance journalist, learned that 15 requests to release the video had been denied by Mayor

Emanuel’s administration, he filed suit on August 5 to force its release. Two days later Smith explained why:

On Wednesday, I filed suit against the Chicago Police Department because of its refusal to release the police car dashboard camera video that shows an officer fatally shooting Laquan McDonald on the city’s southwest side last fall. The 17-year-old was shot 16 times, according to an autopsy conducted by the Cook County Medical Examiner’s Office.

On the night of the shooting, October 20, police received a report of a man breaking into vehicles in the Archer Heights neighborhood. Responding officers allege McDonald was carrying a knife he was using to stab tires, that the teen posed “a very serious threat,” that they ordered McDonald to drop the knife, and that he reacted by lunging at the officers.

The rest, it is said, is history. After reviewing Smith’s lawsuit, Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan wrote a letter to the Chicago Police Department (CPD), stating that they could no longer withhold the video from the public and that their claims that its release would “interfere” with an ongoing investigation were “unsubstantiated.” Emanuel’s administration asked for a stay, which was denied by Cook County Judge Franklin Valderrama. The judge then ordered the city to release the video no later than November 25.” [Whole article here](#)

Dec. 30th “[The Year in Blame Shifting](#)” *How to dodge responsibility, whether you’re a cop or the president* by Jacob Sullum at Reason.com

“On Monday, when he [announced](#) that a grand jury had declined to indict two Cleveland police officers in the 2014 shooting death of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Timothy McGinty said enhanced video of the incident showed the boy was drawing what looked like a gun from his waistband. Although the object was actually an Airsoft pellet pistol, McGinty said, Timothy Loehmann, the officer who killed Tamir within two seconds of arriving at the scene, had no way of knowing that.

Even if we accept this account, it does not explain why Frank Garmback, Loehmann’s partner, drove right up to someone he believed was a dangerous gunman, leaving Loehmann just a few feet from Tamir with no cover and no room for error. By ignoring the [reckless approach](#) that led to Tamir’s death, McGinty managed to absolve the cops while implicitly blaming the boy for accidentally scaring Loehmann.

That exoneration by misdirection rounded out a year of audacious blame shifting. Some other highlights:” Read his review of 2015 biggest cases of [shifting the blame here.](#)

The Continued Gun Debate

Dec. 3rd [“Fact Check: 355 Mass Shootings So Far in 2015?”](#)

by Barry Donegan for TruthInMedia.com

“Mass Shooting Tracker’s definition of a mass shooting as any gun violence event in which 4 people including the shooter are injured would include gang shootouts, robberies and drug deals gone wrong, suicide-by-cop incidents in which bystanders were inadvertently injured by police, and other incidents that deviate drastically from the Columbine and Sandy Hook type events that most Americans think of when talking about a mass shooting.

Mass Shooting Tracker included in its list of 2013 mass shootings a relatively harmless incident involving no serious injuries in which two boys aged 11 and 12 allegedly shot four people with BB guns.” [read it here](#)

Dec. 4th [“Second Amendment ‘Terrorists’”](#)

by Rod Dreher The American Conservative

“It never seems to pierce the bubble of these liberal ideologues that the NRA is so powerful because it represents a popular cause. [Over half of all Americans oppose stricter gun control laws.](#) I don’t belong to the NRA, and I have no objection in principle to a *limited* tightening of gun restrictions, but my opinion is not the majority opinion. More importantly, I don’t have strong feelings about the issue, while pro-Second Amendment people tend to have *very* intense feelings about it. I’m never going to vote for or against a candidate on Second Amendment issues, but I know plenty of people who would, and do. They are my friends and neighbors, and I do not believe them to be terrorists.

I get that the editors of the *Daily News*, and many others, do consider them to be terrorists. What this designation is going to do is to make them dig in even harder, convinced that the Democratic Party and the liberal media would come take their guns away if they had the chance. It cannot be comfortable for Wayne LaPierre to see himself likened to mass murderers on the front page of a major American newspaper. But the *Daily News* has just made his job significantly easier.”

Dec. 12th [“Two College Presidents: Two Different Views of Concealed Carry on Campus”](#) by Steve Byas for The New American

“President Barack Obama and others on the Left have stridently pushed for more gun control laws — the usual knee-jerk liberal response that the establishment media never tires of trumpeting every time a mass shooting occurs.

But there is another school of thought — advocated by (among others) President Jerry Falwell, Jr. of Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. Addressing the university’s students this

past week, Falwell announced a new policy: The students would be allowed to bring concealed weapons into their dorms. No longer would the college, founded by Falwell’s famous Southern Baptist minister father, be a “gun-free zone.” The younger Falwell even encouraged students, faculty, and staff to obtain permits to carry concealed weapons, boldly predicting that this would counter any campus shootings.”

and

“Andrew Goddard, a gun control advocate whose son was wounded during the 2007 mass shooting at Virginia Tech (another gun-free zone), dismissed Van Cleave’s views as “fantasy.” And so, apparently, would David Bioren - the president of Oklahoma University, whose views on how to protect his university from a would-be mass murderer are very different from those of Liberty University President Jerry Falwell.” please read the [full article here](#)



Origins of meme unknown.

Dec. 30th [“Why Didn’t Open Carry Apply To Tamir Rice?”](#)

by Sabha About at TruthInMedia.com

-“Whereas earlier this week, a 66-year-old white woman in Connecticut stood outside a police station pointing a BB gun at officers shouting “Boom boom boom” and “Shoot me!” is alive and unharmed.

The woman, Elaine Rothenberg, pointed the gun at civilians asking if they were police. She also blocked an employee-only doorway where police enter and exit to get to their police cruisers and stood with the gun raised in a shooting stance attempting instigate the officers. Rothenberg eventually threw the gun and was arrested. Why was she given due process and Rice was not? Connecticut is also an open carry state, but has even stricter gun laws than Ohio. Why was Loehmann able to shoot and kill a 12 year old right on the spot while Rothenberg was given her due

process? Never mind that Loehmann resigned from a previous police department just as he was about to be fired for incompetence with firearms and repeatedly displaying emotional disturbances.” Read the full article by clicking [here](#)

“A Quiet Example”

by Bro. Todd Bryant

(Continued from the cover page)

Believers must “aspire to lead a quiet life”. Have we forgotten that Jesus was “gentle and lowly in heart”(Matthew 11:29)? Certainly, there was a time for Jesus to stand up. However, those times were calculated and proper. They were not random events that weren’t thought through. And get this – they were generally aimed at the religious of the day! Sinners Jesus reached out to. Sinners Jesus loved. This angered the religious right of Jesus’ day and it angers the same group today.

We are told again in **1 Timothy 2:2** that we are to seek to “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” Quiet? Peaceable? These seem opposite of what we envision a believer’s life to be these days. Are not the most outspoken fanatics the most faithful? Aren’t we weak when we seek to “lead a quiet and peaceable life”? Not at all. Actually, when we seek to do that, we are living a Christ-like life.

But didn’t the apostles turn the world upside down (**Acts 17:6**)? Yes...that, they did. The way they sought to do that, however, may surprise you. They were, perhaps, living under the most wicked government to date. As if Nero’s lifestyle wasn’t enough, the Roman Coliseum was often used as a feeding bowl for all kinds of animals with Christians as the main course. So, what did the apostles do that was labeled as “turning the world upside down”?

Judging by today, one would think Paul and Silas became political activists. One may assume that they spent their time in the Roman judicial system trying to fight for the rights of believers. One might even think they spent their time trying to unseat Caesar and have him replaced by somebody saved under their ministry. However, that is entirely incorrect. That’s not at all what they did. They surely turned the world upside down. But, their interest was not political in nature. Paul and Silas spent their time spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Only the Gospel (when empowered by the Spirit – **1 Thessalonians 1:4-5**) can truly change lives.

When standing before Pilate, Jesus told Pilate that His servants weren’t fighting for the things of this world because His kingdom

isn’t of this world (**John 18:36**). One must surely wonder when this changed. Lord, help us to get back to the Commission – reaching the lost with the Good News that You have died for sinners!

Terrorism Reports

Nov. 27th [“Gunman Opens Fire Near Planned Parenthood Clinic In Colorado Springs”](#) TruthInMedia.com

“At least four police officers and four civilians were injured when the suspect opened fire. Several people inside the Planned Parenthood office were seen rushing from the building after being extracted. Officers were also heard on police radio discussing tactical maneuvers in order to take the suspect out with sniper fire.

It is still unclear whether the gunman, described as a man with a beard and glasses who is wearing a trenchcoat, targeted Planned Parenthood. Some witnesses reported hearing shots fired earlier in the day near a Chase Bank located about a quarter-mile away from Planned Parenthood. Others said that shots were fired from outside.” [Read full story here](#)

Dec. 3rd [“San Bernardino Shootings: What We Know, One Day After”](#) by NPR

“After a mass shooting, a police chase and a shootout, a violent day in San Bernardino, Calif., ended in the death of two suspects, authorities say.

Syed Farook, 28, and Tashfeen Malik, 27, were responsible for the Wednesday morning attack that killed at least 14 people and injured 21, according to San Bernardino Police Chief Jarrod Burguan. After initial concerns that there could have been a third shooter, police are now confident there were only two.” Read their full report [here](#).

Dec. 7th [“The Challenge of Lone Wolf Terrorism”](#) by Philip Jenkins The American Conservative

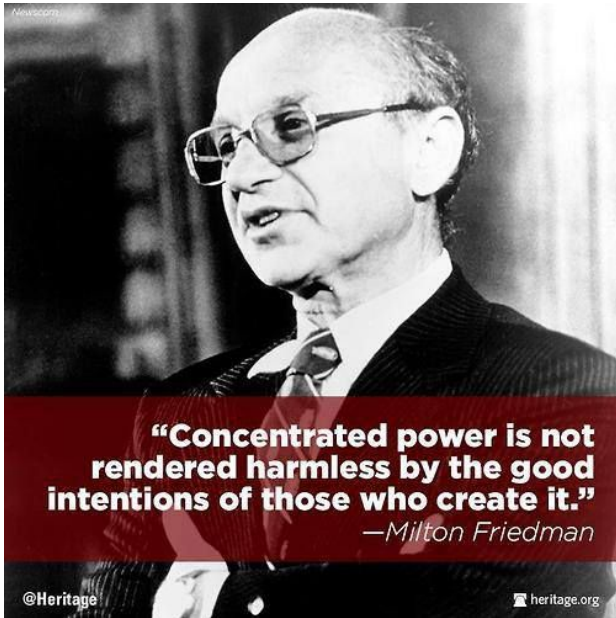
“Do not for a second think that by using the term “resistance,” I am justifying these disgusting crimes, or comparing them to guerrilla resistance movements. Rather, I am using a well known technical term, albeit [one with a very odd history](#).

Amazingly, the story goes back to the U.S. ultra-Right in the 1980s. Far Rightists and neo-Nazis tried to organize guerrilla campaigns against the U.S. government, which caused some damage but soon collapsed ignominiously. The problem was the federal agencies had these movements thoroughly penetrated, so that every time someone planned an attack, it was immediately

discovered by means of either electronic or human intelligence. The groups were thoroughly penetrated by informers.

The collapse of that endeavor led to some serious rethinking by the movement's intellectual leaders. Extremist theorists now evolved a shrewd if desperate strategy of "leaderless resistance," based on what they called the "Phantom Cell or individual action." If even the tightest of cell systems could be penetrated by federal agents, why have a hierarchical structure at all? Why have a chain of command? Why not simply move to a *non*-structure, in which individual groups circulate propaganda, manuals and broad suggestions for activities, which can be taken up or adapted according to need by particular groups or even individuals?"

Read the full [piece here](#)



Dec. 27th ["Closing Schools Over Terrorist Threats Creates New Problems"](#) by Steve Chapman of Reason.com

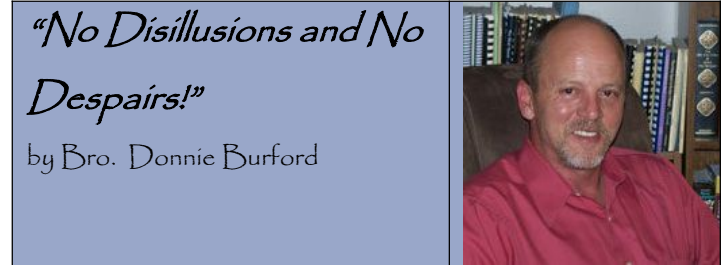
"If I were a lazy terrorist with no guns, bombs or desire for martyrdom, I'd be keeping up a steady stream of bloodcurdling forecasts to the school authorities in Los Angeles—and every other major city in America.

Well, maybe not New York. The people in charge there, after getting the same threat, read it, deleted it and proceeded with the business of educating kids.

Los Angeles, however, decided to take no chances, forcing 640,000 kids to stay home. It was an understandable choice. "I was not going to let something happen on my watch," said Superintendent Ramon Cortines the next day. "My priority yesterday was our children, our staff and our property."

New York City police commissioner William Bratton took a different view. "I think it was a significant overreaction," he said,

and Mayor Bill de Blasio dismissed the email as "outlandish." They were willing to act on their best judgment and put their careers on the line rather than surrender to efforts to create mass panic and disruption." [Full story here](#)



I have no confidence in mankind, knowing that the messes we are in are all the result of men/women, past and present creating them and I have no expectation the future will be any different.

I have no confidence in Conservative or Liberal agendas, with their vain promises, Purposes and hopes. They have been making them for centuries now and here we are!

I gain no ultimate assurance in building walls, or increasing military might to safe guard and preserve our well being and freedoms.

I have no hope in Science stopping the inevitable of my physical demise, remembering they haven't even cured the common cold.

In fact I have a ever increasing lack of general optimism in Churches, preachers and professed Christians becoming more of what they should be towards one another, let alone towards others, and even more specifically towards Christ. This seems especially true in seeing so little of the foundational principals and truth revealed by Him being fostered and adhered to by most! (Love One another!)

I even have well founded reason(S) to doubt in myself of ever becoming all I know I should or even want to be in this life!

And Yet I have more Hope than I have ever had for my assurance today, tomorrow and forever is in The Lord!

If you have disillusion and Despairs about life and the World or even yourself, It is because you are Hoping and trusting in the wrong things and persons!

Psalm 42:11; *"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."*

Pro 10:28; *"The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish."*

Mark 11:22; “*And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.*”

Romans 15:13; “*Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.*”

Hebrews 13:5-6; “*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*”

U.S. 2016 Elections & Candidates

Nov. 23rd [“Has Hillary Learned Nothing From Iraq?”](#) by Scott McConnell The American Conservative

“Last week Hillary spoke at the Council of Foreign Relations. She gave a [denser and more detailed speech](#) than what Republicans typically give, and clearly is knowledgeable. But some of those listening closely [were troubled](#), with good reason. Building to her theme that the United States should take stronger measures against the Syria’s anti-Islamist Assad government, Clinton said:

“In September I laid out a comprehensive plan to counter Iranian influence across the region and its support for terrorist proxies such as Hezbollah and Hamas. We cannot view Iran and ISIS as separate challenges. Regional politics are too interwoven. Raising the confidence of our Arab partners and raising the costs to Iran for bad behavior will contribute to a more effective fight against ISIS.

And as we work out a broader regional approach, we should of course be closely consulting with Israel, our strongest ally in the Middle East.”

In other words, not six days after ISIS slaughtered 130 people in Paris; a few more after it brought down a Russian airliner over Egypt and blew up a Hezbollah neighborhood in Beirut, Hillary Clinton is calling for tougher measures against... wait for it... ISIS’s *enemies* in the Mideast. Is it time to ask, with Hillary Clinton leading the Democratic field, who needs Doug Feith and Paul Wolfowitz?”

Dec. 10th [“Why Bernie Sanders Shouldn’t Call Baltimore ‘Third World’”](#) by Matthew Loftus The American Conservative

“Politicians should be commended for spending time in neighborhoods where poverty is having obvious effects. I recognize that 20 minutes is a reasonable amount of time for a

man who is running for president to visit an area that had voter turnout in the single digits, and I do not begrudge Bernie Sanders that he did not see the Clean Green Block Award winner. Doing so certainly would have made the narrative that day more complicated, which is exactly the point—there is only so much that a president can do for any one particular neighborhood or even a certain set of neighborhoods with similar characteristics.

The impulse to lump all poor communities together with “Third World” discourse also makes it easier to assume that they have monolithic opinions (which often conveniently agree with whoever is invoking “the voice of the community”). If you talk to people in Sandtown about how to address the issues facing their community, they will almost invariably mention the same sorts of things that have made Bernie popular on the campaign trail, including more generous government funding for jobs and housing. But they will also usually bring up the urgent need for cultural or spiritual renewal, a stronger sense of fatherhood, and greater personal responsibility as part of fighting poverty.

This mixture of discourse from approaches typically dividing left and right is by no means universal, either, which is why talking about particular places with such universal language is so dangerous: it constrains the political imagination to suppose that the right set of fixes in Washington will bring flourishing to Sandtown and Muskogee alike. While some of Senator Sanders’ plans have the potential to help poor people across the country (such as greater support for worker-owned cooperatives), others could hurt the poor with a blundering colonial instinct to help, overzealous in its confidence that it has seen Sandtown and now knows what Sandtown needs.” Read [Complete article!](#)

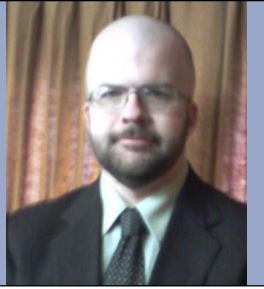
Dec. 28th [“Anti-Virus Pioneer John McAfee Enters Libertarian Party Presidential Race”](#) by Brian Doherty Reason.com

“[John McAfee](#) is the 70-year-old founder of the antivirus software firm that bears his name (though he has not been actively involved with it since 1994, and the company was [bought by Intel in 2010](#)). He’s also a colorful world adventurer who has been candid about his extreme exploits in everything from drug use (and sales) to private home antibiotic-tech experimentation.

He is also seeking the presidential nomination of the Libertarian Party (L.P.), he announced last week [via an exclusive story in USA Today](#). (His edgy life in Belize, which ended when he fled the country under suspicion that he was involved in the shooting death of a neighbor, was chronicled in vivid detail in an epic [2012 Wired magazine profile](#).)” Read the whole article [here](#)

"Sowing Discord Among Brethren"

by Bro. David M. Green



"These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." (Proverbs 6:16-19).

What strong language we find here in God's Word! These things are abomination to God! The word abomination is something we do not hear preached about very often. But, very simply, this word means **"Extreme hatred; detestation."** When we think of an abomination to God, we most often think of the sin of sodomy, but we seldom think of God's people ever doing something that would be an abomination. However, God's people can be guilty of any of these things listed in this passage. And, one of the most common of these is the one about sowing discord among the brethren.

Baptists are very good at telling stories and spreading tales among the brethren! What a sad commentary it is to know that it is the bad stories and the false tales that get spread the fastest. And with the telephone and internet, some brethren have gotten really quick with it. Why, most of us have cellular phones we can use *anywhere* and email with *high-speed* internet! We can hear a new story in one minute and the next minute have it sent to the four corners of the world, without ever stopping to think about it or to find out if it is true!

"Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD." (Leviticus 19:16).

A direct commandment from God says not to be a talebearer! Some may argue that this law no longer applies, but I ask you, since when? Folks, this was a serious sin in the Old Testament and it is still a serious sin today!

"Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly." (Proverbs 26:20-22).

This passage ought to be on the wall of every church building. It could certainly be placed on the tomb of many a church that is no longer in existence. Many a church split could have been avoided if talebearing was avoided!

The words of a talebearer are as wounds! These tales are usually false, but they may actually be true. If something is not needful, if

it is not true, if it is not helpful, if it will cause someone else to get hurt, then it ought not to be told.

"For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies." (2 Thessalonians 3:11).

A busybody is very similar to a talebearer. They like to meddle in other people's business. They will spread tales and gossip all over. The Thessalonian church had members who were guilty of these sins and many in our churches are guilty of this as well. No church member is immune. I have heard pastors telling stories about missionaries, church members gossiping about their pastor, etc. And the sad part of it is, some people would rather climb a tree and get out on a limb to hear (or tell) a lie than to just stand on the ground to hear the truth.

"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." (1 Peter 4:14-16).

If you suffer as a Christian, that is a good thing. But if you suffer because of sowing discord, or being a talebearer, or a busybody then you have absolutely nowhere to stand. You ought to be ashamed of yourself! May God help us to avoid the awful abomination of sowing discord among the brethren!

The Economy

Nov. 9th ["Iran sets its sights on Armenia"](#) by Alireza Ramezani Al-monitor, Iran Pulse


"Iran and Armenia have already signed agreements that could keep their ties close for years. For instance, Armenia is providing Iran with electricity in exchange for natural gas imports. The swap is set to continue for the next 15 years, with the electricity generated from [power plants built by Iranian engineers](#) on the Armenian side of the border. Under the 2007 gas pipeline contract, Armenia [generates and sends to Iran three kilowatt-hours per cubic meter of natural gas](#). When this contract expires, Iran will get paid for its natural gas exports, and Armenia will be free to use the generated electricity entirely for domestic consumption. It should be noted that Armenia's political disputes with [Azerbaijan](#) and [Turkey](#) have left it with Georgia and Iran as the best options for meeting its energy needs.

Jahangiri's recent visit was mainly aimed at reviving Iranian projects suspended due to sanctions and a shortage of financing. The delayed projects include a high voltage transmission line, connecting the Armenian power grid with that of Georgia and a third [transmission line between Iran and Armenia](#) worth around \$120 million. The latter is set to come on stream in 2018,

increasing the [transmission capacity from Armenia to Iran](#) from 300 to 1,000 megawatts. Among other matters raised by Jahangiri during his visit was an ongoing project to connect Iran's rail network to that of Armenia, a plan that would provide Armenia with access to the southern Persian Gulf states through the [International North-South Transport Corridor](#)."Full article [here](#)

Dec. 10th "[Major Study Shows U.S. Middle Class No Longer a Majority](#)" by Warren Mass at The New American

"The U.S. middle class, which for more than four decades comprised the majority of Americans, has declined to the point where it makes up slightly less than 50 percent of the U.S. adult population. These findings were reported in a new Pew Research Center analysis of government data released to the public on December 9." Read the rest [here](#)

<p><i>"Past The Point Of No Return"</i> by Bro. Curtis Pugh</p>	
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To no degree whatsoever does the Bible support the idea that either the United States or Christians have replaced Israel. The promises made to Israel cannot be claimed by others. Israel was God's national earthly people. Christians are a spiritual people. Israel was God's Old Testament visible kingdom. The Lord's congregations are the executive branch of the present unseen phase of Christ's kingdom. (Christ's congregations each also have Christ-given limited judicial power in addition to each one's executive power, but none have any legislative power since Christ is to be each church's Head and Lawgiver. Thus churches are to carry out those things prescribed in the Bible. They are to **"judge them that are within,"** (1 Corinthians 5:12), but have no power whatsoever to make laws and rules.) Israel was blessed with land and prosperity while Christians are blessed with **"...all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,"** (Ephesians 1:3).

While godly-living Israel was promised prosperity, often the children of God are like Gaius. This man Gaius was a godly-living follower of Christ to whom John wrote his third letter. But he was not prosperous. Old John in his letter to him commended his godliness and personally wished for him that he might prosper financially just as he was prospering spiritually, saying, **"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest**

prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth," (3 John 1:2). This verse does not teach that all godly-living people will prosper. In fact it proves the very opposite! John's personal wish was that Gaius prosper in the natural realm just as he was prospering in the spiritual realm. So then, it is possible for a Christian to be prospering spiritually while lacking much in the natural or financial realm. Paul experienced poverty at times for he wrote, **"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need,"** (Philippians 4:11-12). Paul knew what it meant to **"suffer need."** The Bible evidence is against the prosperity preachers of our day! Our point is that while American Christians in many instances have prospered, what Bible evidence do we have that this will continue? If the U.S. as a nation is indeed ripe for judgment, who says that the Christian citizens of this nation shall escape suffering? There is no guarantee of that and history is replete with examples of suffering saints.

While we want to be clear on the difference between the place in God's plan held by Israel and that of Christianity, God's dealings with Israel have been recorded for each us. Paul wrote of the Old Testament Scriptures in Romans 15:4 saying: **"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."** The adage is this: "The New is in the Old contained and the Old is by the New explained." Both the Old Testament and the New are for God's children today although the Old is not to them. In the above verse, Paul said the Old Testament was "for our learning" not to us. There is a difference in something being "for" a person and something being "to" them. We may learn much about our grandfather and his dealings by his last will and testament although it was "to" our parents and did not include us, his yet unborn grandchildren – if such an illustration is helpful.

Three times the phrase **"the hope of Israel"** appears in our King James Bibles. In this article we want to examine the context of the first instance of this phrase. This preacher would think that the translators should have used a capital letter so that the phrase reads, **"the Hope of Israel,"** but they did not. Immediately when seeing this phrase we notice the definite article is used: "the" is used, not "a" as if there was more than one Hope for Israel. There is only one such Hope. Once a professed Brother asked this preacher if there was any hope of a future for Israel outside of Christ. Seldom is my mind quick enough to give good on-the-spot answers, but I believe God enabled me to answer him wisely and correctly. My words were, "There is no hope of a future for any man outside of Christ." And so Israel shall be brought to recognize and worship Jesus as their Messiah through suffering the terrible tribulation prophesied. Peter, speaking of the Lord Jesus, the Anointed, said, **"Neither is there salvation in**

any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved,” (Acts 4:12). This is true for both Jews and Gentiles! (To my Brothers and Sisters in Christ I would say, please do not think this preacher is becoming an imitator of the Jews, a Messianic Jew or anything like that because I used the word “Anointed” in the place of Messiah or Christ. The word transliterated “Christ” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word transliterated “Messiah” and both mean the “Anointed” or the “Anointed One” - the only Deliverer and Hope of men whether Jews or Gentiles, but specifically stated to be the Hope of Israel.)

There are lessons for us in these three usages of the phrase **“the hope of Israel,”** but space forbids examining more than one here. The first usage of this phrase is found in Jeremiah 14:8 where it is written: **“O the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?”** A traveler passing through a strange country cared little for the people or country he traversed. Come near-nightfall he might seek hospitality in a private dwelling or an inn. Or he might turn aside, go off the road and pitch his tent so as to have a place to lodge for the night. He was, after all, just passing through as he traveled to his intended destination. His interest lay in another place, not in the country he traversed.

Jeremiah refers to Jehovah as both **“the hope of Israel”** and **“the savior thereof”** - that is of Israel. But he portrays God as disinterested in Israel. Just as Jesus in Matthew 6:47 made as if He would pass by His disciples in the little ship, so Jeremiah pictures God as not caring about Israel. We ask, why does the prophet present God to us in this way? The context, always of greatest importance, makes clear Jeremiah's portrayal: hear it: **“Thus saith the LORD unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the LORD doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins. Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence,”** (Jeremiah 14:10-12). And so God, because of the unfaithfulness of Israel, is pictured as a wayfaring man, a stranger, a pilgrim just passing through taking no fatherly interest in Israel.

Notice in this quotation first of all God speaks of the sins of Israel. Loving to wander from God and His law, they have not refrained to do whatever pleased them. Does not God's assessment of ancient Israel bring the U.S.A. immediately to mind? Is there not a definite parallel between what Israel had done and what is going on in the U.S. at this very moment? While we make no claim to the U.S. being God's people or His land, we are mindful that God spoke specifically of the Gentile nations when He said, **“The**

wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God,” (Psalm 9:17). Whether Jews or Gentiles, God chastens His people (see Hebrews 12:6ff and Revelation 3:19). But God does not ignore the sins of either Jews or Gentiles. In Isaiah 60:12 we are told: **“For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted.”** God holds nations and the individuals that compose them responsible for their sins.

The second thing of note is that the point of no return had passed. There is sometimes a point in airplane travel when more than half the fuel has been burned and because of this it is impossible to return to the plane's place of origin. It is impossible to go back regardless of what may be ahead. So our text says that God, **“will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins.”** So it is that we ask the question: has the U.S. passed the point of no return? Is it possible to go back - to return to those days when at least in public God was honored? Is it possible to go back to the time when God and the Bible were honored in public schools and when prayer was offered in the name of Jesus Christ? Is it possible to go back to a time when decency in conduct, modesty in dress, cleanliness of speech, honesty in business, etc. were expected as the norm? Do the words of Scripture in Psalm 11:3, **“If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?”** find proper application to the present situation in the U.S.? Have the foundations in the U.S. been so destroyed as to make useless the efforts of the righteous to restore the nation?

Next in our text from Jeremiah chapter fourteen we note these crushing words: **“Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.”** They had passed the point of no return! God forbade the prophet praying for the good of Israel! Even the prayers, sacrifices, fasting - all the religious efforts of the people were in vain. Nothing would be accomplished by even sincere worshipers toward averting the judgment of God upon Israel. Has that time come for the U.S.? Should we Baptists be praying for God to bless America with good? Is praying such prayers according to His will or is it not? Can we, with biblical assurance, pray other than to ask God that His will be done? **“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him,”** (1 John 5:14-15). Do we pray for God's blessing upon the U.S. with confidence that we are asking according to His will? When we pray thus do we know that He hears us? And do we have assurance that **“we have the petitions that we desired of him”**? I trow not! Can we pray other than **“Revive us again”**? Can we say more than **“may God have mercy upon us all”**?

And next we are told how God judges nations. **“I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.”** The words **“consume them”** speak of total and final destruction. Wars, starvation and disease: these are tools in God's hands. Is one or more of these tools in God's hand for the U.S.? We have long asked the question: “Why is the United States not mentioned in prophecy?” Other nations are mentioned, some by name. But the U.S. is not mentioned! It seems clear that these United States will play no important role in end-time events. Either she will be destroyed as a nation or reduced to such a weak, third-world status as to have no impact upon end-time events. Are you spiritually ready for this?

Unpopular words, these! So it was in the days of Jeremiah! In fact the next words after our text are these: **“Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place. Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart,”** (Jeremiah 14:13-14). Let the liberals, the leftists, the Joel Osteens and the other false prophets say what they will! We live in dangerous days! We may be living in the final days of the United States. We certainly live in the days prophesied by Paul: **“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away,”** (2 Timothy 3:1-5). Dangerous days for the saints! Dangerous days for the Lord's congregations!

Shall Christ's bride and her maidens escape the tribulation – that time of **“Jacob's trouble”**? This preacher is convinced that the next prophesied event is the catching away or rapture of the saints. He is convinced that the Lord's saints of this church-age will be caught away before that terrible time of tribulation that is to **“...come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”** (Revelation 3:10). (One commentator says “them that dwell upon the earth” should be understood as referring to their character “those who are of earth, earthy” rather than just their dwelling place.) This preacher is also convinced that we are in that time called by our Lord **“the beginning of sorrows,”** (Matthew 24:8). But what Scripture do we have that equates a possible destruction of the United States with the tribulation period? The tribulation period has to do with Israel. It is as stated, the time of **“Jacob's trouble,”** (Jeremiah 30:7). We ask in all seriousness, could it not be that God may judge America with **“the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence”** prior to

the tribulation period? Why do we Americans think we are safe just because Christ is going to return for His bride and her guests prior to the tribulation period? While other nations have been judged for their sins, do we have a right to think that God will withhold judgment upon America until after Christ has come back in the air? Do we not, as a nation, deserve such a judgment? It has often been repeated that **“If God does not judge America He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.”** He judged them and our nation's sins in number and magnitude exceeded theirs! Can we think ourselves as a nation not in the same wicked condition as was Israel in the days of Jeremiah? Let us not be presumptuous. Let us not have wicked self-confidence in America's greatness either former or present.

Rather should we not walk humbly before our God? Should we not occupy until Jesus comes or calls us home? Shall we then hear Him say **“...Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord,”** (Matthew 25:21). Remember Paul's words: **“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not,”** (Galatians 6:9). And then, glory of glories, we shall be with Him who is **“the Hope of Israel”** and shall cast our crowns at His feet, saying **“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created,”** (Revelation 4:11). As the old Baptists sang, **“Broken hearts, and humble walkers, These are dear in Jesus' eyes.”** Cast off presumption! May God give us grace to be “humble walkers,” **“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things,”** (Philippians 3:18-19). Selah!

World Politics

Nov. 4th **[“Iranian olive branch offers diplomatic paradigm shift”](#)** by Hassan Ahmadian published at Al-Monitor, Iran Pulse

“It has been five years since the Arab Spring began roiling the Middle East and North Africa. During this time, conflict pitting Saudi Arabia and Qatar against Iran and its regional allies in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq reached unprecedented levels of disaster. To deal with the situation, Iran has welcomed the idea of a **[dialogue with its Arab neighbors](#)**, as proposed by Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani during the September UN General Assembly meeting. Indeed, during a regional tour after Iran concluded the **[nuclear agreement](#)** with six world powers in July, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif made the same proposal, in addition to **[cooperating on counterterrorism](#)** as well as **[nuclear and security-related issues](#)**. Since Qatar was among the

stops on Zarif's tour, Iran's welcoming of the Qatari proposal was to be expected. Why, however, does Iran at this particular point want to engage with the other countries confronting it?" [Read more.](#)

Nov. 10th "How Egyptian revolutionaries rocked the vote"
by George Mikhail, Al-Monitor, Egypt Pulse.

"One year into its foundation in 2014, the Nation's Future Party ranked second in the first round of [Egypt's parliamentary elections](#) on Oct. 18 and 19. Mohamed Badran, the party's founder, is 24 years old, making him the youngest head of party in Egypt. Al-Monitor interviewed Badran and asked him about the most important laws that the party will introduce in parliament and the reasons behind the success of his party." [Read more](#)

"Why Iran and Russia aren't as closely aligned on Syria as you might think" by Saheb Sadeghi, Al-Monitor, Iran Pulse

"In broad terms, Iran and Russia have embarked on the same path and entered a new phase of the geopolitical game in Syria. A major power, Russia is trying to redefine its role in the world, as evidenced by its actions in Ukraine and Syria. After 40 years, Moscow has returned to the Middle East to prove that today's world is different — and multipolar. Iran's strategy also revolves around redefining its geopolitical role. Iran's game in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and even Yemen shouldn't be considered only from an ideological point of view, but rather as the Islamic Republic seeking what can be defined as living space.

In the short run, both Iran and Russia will attempt to preserve Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's position, help him maintain the territory his government now controls and retake territories that the Syrian army has recently lost. There is also the consideration of Russia seeking to test its new weapons and air force. In sum, the obvious aim is to weaken the position of Assad's opponents in Syria as much as possible, and this short-term objective will ensure the current Iranian-Russian unity.

Yet despite this unity, Moscow and Tehran have serious differences over the future of Syria." [Full story at this link](#)

"Why was Hamas interested in the Turkish elections?" by Adnan Abu Amer for Al-monitor, Palestine Pulse

"Despite its preoccupation with the [ongoing intifada](#) in the Palestinian territories, Hamas has dedicated a great deal of its time to follow up on the [Turkish elections](#) of Nov. 1, during which the Justice and Development Party (AKP) [achieved a victory](#) of 49.41%, allowing it to form a single-party government."

And "Izzat al-Rishq, member of Hamas' political bureau who resides in Doha, told Al-Monitor, "The AKP's victory in Turkey represents a victory for Palestine, Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque, and is a gift from the Turkish people to Palestine and to all the just causes around the world. Hamas congratulates the president, the government, the Turks and Turkish parties on completing their democratic and civilized choice with integrity and transparency, and blessed be the country's well-established justice."

Two important observations are noteworthy when it comes to reading how Hamas dealt with the Turkish elections and the AKP's victory. The first is that the movement's leaders were the first among the world leaders to contact Erdogan and Davutoglu to congratulate them, even before the official final results were announced. Hamas must have been certain that the AKP would win the elections, based on the preliminary vote counts that started on the night of the first election day.

The second observation is that Hamas was the only Palestinian faction to congratulate Turkey. No other Palestinian faction issued a statement to congratulate the AKP, which indicates that these factions are convinced that what binds Hamas and Turkey is a special alliance that may not apply to them. However, Palestinian President [Mahmoud Abbas](#) congratulated his Turkish counterpart on Nov. 2." The Whole article can be read [here](#)

Nov. 13th "Poland's Election Crushes Left, Roils EU and Climate Alarmists" by Alex Newman for The New American

"Final results, announced about two weeks ago, showed Law and Justice, known by its acronym PiS in Polish, crushed its opposition. For the first time since 1989, one party secured an absolute majority in Parliament, with Law and Justice winning 37.6 percent of the vote and 235 out of 460 seats, or 51 percent, in the lower house of Parliament known as the Sejm. The party also secured a strong majority in the Senate, where PiS holds 61 out of 100 seats. In second place came the socially conservative but pro-EU Civic Platform (PO), now deposed from power, with 24 percent of the vote. Three smaller fellow conservative parties also secured seats in Parliament.

What exactly the electoral victory for Law and Justice means for the EU and ambitions among "eurocrats" for ever greater power remains unclear. While the party tempered its past "euro-skepticism" ahead of the election, it also made clear that Poland would not be joining the controversial single euro currency anytime soon — probably for generations — and certainly not without a referendum to secure the public's consent. Law and Justice has also been outspoken in opposing a federal EU regime, something that [top EU bosses have been demanding](#)

[openly for years, despite decades of earlier denials.](#)” Please read the full article [here](#)

Nov. 30th [“Russia Bans George Soros’ Open Society Institute, Calls It National Security Threat”](#) By Barry Donegan for Truthinmedia.com

“Under the Law on Undesirable Foreign Organizations, which passed in June of this year, Russia’s Prosecutor General has the power to declare certain international organizations undesirable. Once such a declaration has been made, Russia’s Justice Ministry will freeze the organization in question’s locally-held assets, prohibit the distribution of its promotional materials, and close down its office space. Russian citizens who work with a banned organization could face fines or prison time.” [read it](#)

Dec. 29th [“Top 10 Foreign Affairs Stories of 2015 That Will Matter in 2016”](#) *What you need to know about the year’s biggest international hotspots, revolutions, and brewing conflicts.* By Anthony L. Fisher published at Reason.com

1. **January: Charlie Hebdo Massacre**
2. **March: Netanyahu’s Speech to Congress Makes Support for Israel a Partisan Issue**
3. **March: Japan Stands Up to China Over Disputed Territory**
4. **July: Iran Nuclear Agreement Reached**
5. **August: Russia Puts Boots on the Ground in Syria**
6. **September: Drowned Syrian Boy Makes World Notice Refugee Crisis**
7. **October: Canada’s New Prime Minister Calls for Legalization of Marijuana**
8. **November: France’s 9/11**
9. **November: Myanmar Holds First National Election After 50 Years of Military Rule**
10. **December: Venezuela’s Socialists Get Trounced in Anyone-But-Them Vote**

Read the article at this [link](#) for details on these stories and why they matter.

Science, Culture & Arts

Nov. 17th [“Empathy, Quantified”](#)
by Gracy Olmstead at The American Conservative

“There seem to be two especially popular ways to “connect online” in the wake of a catastrophe or disaster of the sort we’re seeing in Paris: the first is to show solidarity, through a #Kony2012 or #BringBackOurGirls hashtag, for instance. As I’ve [written before](#) for Acculturated, online social media campaigns generally make us feel good about ourselves, without

forcing us beyond our spheres of comfort. Despite the collective voice our hashtag battles or profile pictures can amass, there is little practical worth in a tweet or a filter. This isn’t to condemn people’s efforts to show solidarity in this way—it is just to make sure that we don’t mistake such sympathy for real *empathy*: which I would argue is something that, when genuine, registers deeper and longer-lasting implications. “Empathy quantified” is not, I would argue, actual empathy.

The second way people “connect online” in response to catastrophe or disaster is to, unfortunately (yet inevitably), connect over controversy.” Read the whole article by clicking [here](#)

Nov. 24th [“Fighting Terrorism With Transcendence”](#)
by Gracy Olmstead The American Conservative

“While the fears and doubts expressed by many American Christians over the Syrian refugee crisis are understandable, I think they are often symptomatic of this refocusing on the temporal and rational, rather than the eternal and spiritual. On Friday, I [argued](#) for *The Week* that Christians should be encouraging the U.S. government to admit refugees. This argument could have focused on presenting a rational, data-driven discussion of the costs and benefits: whether refugees will pose a risk to national security, whether we have the means to both screen and house them properly, etc. And there are some [excellent resources](#) on this subject, giving [intelligent arguments](#) for why the risks are much lower than most Americans think.

But instead, I tried to focus primarily on biblical and ethical arguments for Christians to consider—primarily because of the argument Dreher and Douthat are making. We religious people in the West are far too quick to secularize our conversations, focusing on the material and not the spiritual. We focus on the societal, political, and personal implications: on the worries of this life. And in so doing, we sell our religion cheap. We cut the heart out of it, and only strengthen the Islamic State’s cause. We show that we are not as devout as they—that we offer no equal (or superior) path of devotion to follow. We offer only the comforts of this world, and in the process, cut off the lost and alone from both the temporal *and* supernatural comforts they are craving.”
Read full article [here](#)

Dec. 8th [“Homeschooling Offers Hope”](#) by John Larabell for The New American

“Modern homeschooling began as somewhat of a countercultural movement. During the ’60s and ’70s, educational reformers and authors began questioning the methods and results of the government school system. Pioneers in the modern homeschool movement included John Holt and Raymond Moore. Holt was a

professional educator from Massachusetts who began to seriously criticize the public education system in the 1960s with the publication of his book *How Children Fail*. He broke with the established public education system in 1977 when he felt that true reform was impossible. Holt died in 1985, but his ideas of “unschooling,” or education without any formal structure or coursework, are still very popular, especially in the northeastern region of the United States.

Raymond Moore and his wife, Dorothy, wrote many books on homeschooling and put it “on the map” in 1972 when their articles appeared in *Readers Digest* and *Harpers Magazine*. Also, an interview by the Focus on the Family radio show introduced the idea of homeschooling to the national Christian community.

In the 1980s, Christian families became part of a large second wave of homeschooling, joining earlier homeschoolers and boosting the numbers to record highs.” [Read the rest Here](#)

[Dec. 11th “BBC Censors Skepticism of Human-caused Climate Change”](#) by Steve Byas The New American

“The censoring of a program which had run on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) illustrates what lengths the proponents of the anthropogenic (man-made) global warming theory will go to advance their viewpoint.

Quentin Letts (shown) recently wrote an article for the U.K.'s *Daily Mail* about the incident, in which he explained that his “What’s The Point Of...?” series on BBC was a “chatty, personal look” at certain British institutions such as the Tate Gallery or the National Trust, giving their pros and cons.

Though the half-hour show is intended to be “absurdly comical” at times, his program entitled “What’s The Point of the MET Office?” — in which Letts examined the history of weather-forecasting in Britain — was considered no laughing matter by the devotees of the widely debunked theory of man-made global climate change.” Read the [rest here](#)

[“How to Fix College Admissions”](#) by Samuel Goldman for The American Conservative


“The Supreme Court heard [Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin](#) again yesterday. Since the arguments were much the same as the first time, it’s hard to predict what the justices will do. The paradox, essentially, is that the Court has said universities have a constitutionally permissible interest in enrolling a racially diverse class, but prohibited them from using numerical quotas. So they have to design admissions policies that *just happen* to produce the desired level of diversity, which cannot actually be defined without violating the 14th Amendment.

The problem with this strategy is not that it lets in vast numbers of unqualified students. It is that universities’ commitment to maintaining a specific demographic balance without applying quotas encourages opacity, and even downright dishonesty, in the admissions process.

You might say: universities simply should be prohibited from pursuing racial diversity. The thing is, they’re going to do it anyway, using [indirect means](#) if necessary.” [Read this article here](#)

[Dec. 29th “Never mind Rhodes – it’s the cult of the victim that must fall”](#) by Brendan O’Neill of Spiked-online.com

“Rhodes Must Fall, the [gang of spoilt Oxford brats](#) who want a statue of the colonialist Cecil Rhodes removed from Oriel College, is being chalked up as another outburst of campus craziness. The media are having a field day mocking the hypocrisies and idiocies of the Rhodes-fearing students, one of whom is a Rhodes scholar — so he’ll take Rhodes’ cash but doesn’t want to look at his likeness — and all of whom describe walking past the statue as ‘an act of violence’. At the end of a year in which students have complained that doing yoga is ‘cultural appropriation’ and reading *The Great Gatsby* can trigger PTSD, Rhodes Must Fall is being viewed as the latest loopy pursuit of bookish youth who inhabit a different moral universe to the rest of us.” [Read the whole article](#)

<p><i>“Wise Men From The East”</i> by Bro. Milburn Cockrell (1941-2002) (This article first published The Baptist Examiner - 12/22/1979)</p>	
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Very shortly the religious world will be twisting and turning Matthew's account of the visit of the Magi. To prevent our being confused by their misrepresentations, it behooves us to acquaint ourselves anew with the facts actually disclosed in the book of Matthew.

WHEN DID THEY COME?

When Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea, a star appeared to the wise men of the East, announcing Christ's birth (Matthew 2:2). The star did not lead them to Jerusalem. There is nothing in the Scriptures to indicate that these men went immediately, or soon, to seek the holy infant Jesus.

Most Christians believe that the visit of the wise men occurred the same day Christ was born, but this cannot be proven from the

Scriptures. Luke tells us that after the birth and circumcision of the Holy Child, "When they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth" (Luke 2:39). From Matthew we see that immediately after the visit of the Magi, "when they had departed," Joseph was warned by an angel to take the child and his mother and flee into Egypt (Matthew 2:13). The wise men visited Christ at his home in Nazareth when he was about two years old. Matthew tells us: "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men" (Matthew 2:16).

Thus it seems the wise men had seen the star two years before they arrived in Jerusalem.

All details in the Scriptures lend weight to this. The shepherds in Luke found the Saviour as "a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes" (Luke 2:12). The Magi worshipped him as a "young child with Mary his mother" (Matthew 2:11). The shepherds found him lying in a manger; the wise men found him in a house.

Our King James Version is responsible for some of the present confusion in this connection. Matthew 2:1 reads: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem." But this is not a correct translation of the Greek text. Other versions prove this. "And Jesus having been born in Bethlehem of Judea ... " (AMERICAN BIBLE UNION). "Now after the birth of Jesus ... " (Weymouth). "After the birth of Jesus ... " (TWENTIETH CENTURY).

HOW MANY WISE MEN?

The Bible does not say that there were three wise men. We know from the Biblical record there were at least two, for Matthew says "wise men". There may have been three or a thousand. To assume there were three because of the threefold gift is entirely baseless. Doubtless there were more than three, or at least they were with an entourage of scores or hundreds, for it was unsafe for a small group to travel a long distance over desert wastes which were infested with bandits. The wealth of these men as indicated in their gifts to Christ suggest that they were able to hire a large caravan to travel with them for protection.

Others have assumed they were kings from some Old Testament texts (Psalms 68:30, 32; 72:10; Isaiah 49:7, 5-3). The Scriptures do not say that they were kings in spite of what tradition may say. If the Old Testament texts aforementioned referred to the Magi, Matthew would have told us by quoting and so stating. His silence is proof these texts had no reference to the wise men from the East.

WHERE WERE THEY FROM?

The indefinite expression, "from the East," indicates that the writer knew only that they came from a country east of Palestine. But whether from Persia, Arabia or Mesopotamia is uncertain. The frankincense and myrrh were found chiefly in Arabia, if their gifts to Christ mean anything.

WHO WERE THEY?

Matthew tells us they were "wise men" and we can see from their knowledge of Christ's kinship that they were wise men indeed, yea, wiser than the priests and elders in Jerusalem who did not know that a king had been born. However "wise men" is from the original word "major" from which comes our word "magician." While magician now has a bad meaning to us today, it did not to Matthew when he wrote. Matthew meant by the word that they were philosophers, priests or astronomers. They were the learned class who cultivated astrology and kindred sciences.

Of the Magi Dr. Schaff remarks: "The Saviour was not without a witness among the heathen. Wise men from the East - i.e., Persian Magi, of the Zend region in which the idea of a Zoziash, or redeemer, was clearly known - guided miraculously by a star or meteor created for the purpose, came and sought out the Saviour to pay him homage" (SMITH BIBLE DICTIONARY Volume II, page 1349, Hackett's ed.)

These Magi were held in high esteem by the Persian court. They were advisers to the kings and often followed the camps in wars to give counsel.

WHAT BROUGHT THEM?

The Magi arrived in Jerusalem inquiring, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him." Matthew 2:2)

How did they know about the birth of Christ by the appearance of a star? Probably by the prophecy of Balaam which reads: "There shall come a Star out of Jacob and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17). Concerning Balaam's prophecy the Jewish rabbis wrote in their Talmud: "When the Messiah shall be revealed there shall rise up in the East a star flaming with six colors" (R. Frey, Messiah page 137). Even the Jews today believe a star will appear as a sign of the Messiah's advent.

WHY DID THEY COME?

The Magi came to see the King of the Jews and to worship him. The people of the East never approached the presence of kings without presents in their hands. These men gave Christ gifts because he was the King of the Jews. They did not exchange or trade gifts among themselves. They gave Christ gifts. They did not do this on Christ's birthday as I have already shown. There is no suggestion here for the exchanging of gifts among one another at Christmas time.

The gold which the wise men gave to Christ enabled his parents

to make the flight to Egypt. Joseph and Mary were poor and probably without this gold they could not have gone to Egypt to escape from Herod.

“Christmas Grace”

by Sis. Joanna Works

*“Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him. As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.
I Corinthians 8:1-3*

Growing up my family didn't celebrate Christmas, yet I do have one Christmas story to tell. This article was originally typed up a few years back due to a discussion on Facebook between myself and a few friends on the topic of the reasons to abstain from Christmas and the liberty to participate in the festivities. The above verses were part of the discussion that gave me a lot of food for thought.

After reading those words in the scriptures *“Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.”* I felt quite convicted thinking back on my own Christmas story. I hope this little story may profit my brothers & sisters in Christ, weather you celebrate Christmas or not.

There was once a very puffed up young christian girl who never had a Christmas. In deed she never wanted to have one. Being only one month short of 13 years of age I had been saved for about a year or so at the time but been a preachers kid all my life. My parents had both celebrated Christmas with their families when they where young and had told us, their own kids, a few of those memories. However, they never celebrated Christmas since becoming Baptists because they had been taught about the history of Christmas and convicted to abstain from it.

I gritted my teeth when ever someone would say “Merry Christmas,” to me in public. This was, for me any way, an improvement from the way I responded as a lost child who knew the evil truth about this unholy day. I'll admit I was proud of my background, I was proud that I was smarter (in my way of thinking) then the clerks at the grocery store. I knew something that they didn't and was more then ready to tell any one! No apologies if you didn't like it, that was your problem!

This particular December before my 13th birthday my family was having financial problems. My little brother had just turned one year old on the 14th, Dad had graduated from the Art institute of Seattle the December before Tom was born, and had only recently been hired at a small company. To some people this might have seam like a sob story, no money for Christmas presents, but we where grateful that God was providing our needs.

My Dad had joined our local Fire Department as a volunteer Chaplain about a year before this Christmas. He had gotten to know quite a few of the people on the Department at the time, and they had gotten to know him, at least well enough to know we weren't doing to good in the financial department. Yet some how dad hadn't managed to tell them we didn't celebrate Christmas or why.

I think it was the 24th, though I remember for sure it was a Tuesday because dad was at the fire station for drill that night. Mom, my two sister, and little brother and myself where home not doing much of any thing when someone knocked on our door. It was some time between 9 o'clock and 10. Pitch black outside except for the little bit of light on the porch. I answered the door wondering who it might be, it was really strange for someone to knock on our door that late at night.

Standing on our porch was a young man that looked familiar but I wasn't certain who he was. He asked if this was Chaplain Works' home, I answered yes, though I was completely stupefied about what was going on. He ran off of the porch into the blackness of the night before I could ask who he was, this freaked me out as a dozen questions came to my mind, had dad been hurt at drill?

Mom and my older sister had come into the living room to see who was at the door and I told them what had happened. I told them and we waited on pins & needles for the young man to return. He was actually a boy just a few years older then me as it turned out, and his father, a firefighter that dad had become friends with, came back to our porch caring large boxes. The boy's box was of dry food stuff and he asked mom where he could put it. The firefighter's box was full of wrapped presents.

Christmas presents.

My younger sister and brother had come into the living room at some point. All of us where shocked and didn't know what to say. Mom showed the boy the kitchen and told him he could set it down any where. My brother saw the wrapped gifts and thought it was his birthday again. He was more then happy to unwrap all of them just as soon as they where set down in his reach.

Quickly I grabbed him up to keep him from touching any thing. Our visitors stepped out side with out a word, none that I recall any way. We looked at mom and things like; “Did you know about this,” “What are we suppose to do,” “Someone should call them back to take this away,” came tumbling out of our mouths.

We thought they where leaving, but when we poked our heads out the door we could see the flashing lights of a fire engine that had pulled up closer into our drive way, and the guys where coming back toward us with more boxes! We must have really been in a state of shock not to have heard the fire engine pull up, big trucks are loud.

As these well meaning men came back into our house to finish their deliveries I started to open my mouth to say something quite rude and unkind. Knowing my disposition mom sent me a very sharp look, the kind of look that no mater how angry, indignant or import you might feel shuts you up. Completely dumbfounded and at a lost of what to do I let go of my brother and sat down to watch mom talk to the fire fighter and thank him and his son for what they'd done.

What they've done, what they've done! They had brought Christmas into our home. Our Christmas free, no pagan tree, twinkly lights, or stockings, anit-Santa Claus free home. Didn't she want to keep it that way? While I was wrestling with my sense of pride and feelings of guilt for holding a gift wrapped in Christmas paper with a very Christmasy label that bared my very own name on it, mom looked like she was about to cry. She didn't tell me to hush up or confirm any of my emotions, but simply said, “be gracious.”

That took the hot air right out of me. “Be gracious.” I would have understood better at that moment if she'd said be grateful or it's the thought that counts. After all thoughts like should I be grateful or horrified, where crossing my mind, but grace, what did that have to do with any thing?

During those years of stomping my feet in the store and telling the clerk, “ba humbug, Christmas is a pagan holiday,” when ever they would dare wish me a merry Christmas, dad would tell me that the clerk was just trying to be nice and I should be more polite, but I don't ever remember grace coming into this particular equation before. Don't miss understand, dad and mom had taught us kids what grace meant. I understood that grace was giving an unearned gift and mercy was with holding a deserved punishment. In my mind, at the time, however these two wonderful, beloved, words where only synonymous with God's love and plan of salvation for this wicked world. Sure we're suppose to love others, be good to them, and forgive when people do us wrong but how are we suppose to be gracious?

And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. I thought I knew almost every thing! Apparently I was wrong.

The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. Ecclesiastes 10:12

A person never wants to think of themselves as the fools that Proverbs warn about, or that the Apostle Paul describes in Romans 1:22; *Professing themselves to be wise, they become fools.* If it wasn't for mom giving me that look I would have very easily shown how foolish I could be at that moment.

At first I was determined not to open the presents, it would be wrong excepting a 'pagan' gift, wouldn't it? Christmas is about idolatry, so even though the gift was being offered to me not unto an idol in my mind I felt as guilty as though I was partaking in idolatry. A dear sister in Christ brought up this verse in our discussion “*Little Children keep, yourselves from idols*” I John 5:21 this and similar scriptures were the ones weighing on my mind at the time rather then *As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.* This wasn't just offensive to me as a young christian, but as an arrogant teenager who thought she had a life time of Landmark teachings in her. I was puffed up with pride rather then having grace.

Be gracious mom had said. I John 3 teaches us that we know we love God when we love one another. These people who came out to our home to deliver this good thing to us where showing love for a family they hardly even knew. Sure I am a Landmark Sovereign Grace Missionary Baptists, but what doth it profit me if I have not Charity? *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.* I Corinthians 13:2 This man and his son where christian people, even though they weren't Baptists and even though they celebrated Christmas, they where expressing the kind of love that we're suppose to have one for another, the kind of love that bring honor and glory to God our savior.

In the passage of scripture that a certain brother pointed to in order to give his view of Christmas V.S. No-christmas, it talks about the conscience of believers and how we are to always bear in mind that our actions don't cause a brother or sister to stumble, this is because we're to act out of charity, love toward them and what may or may not be acceptable to their conscience.

The kind of graciousness that my mom was teaching me, and in deed God continues to show me, as best as I can describe it right now is that of Romans 12:3, *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself*

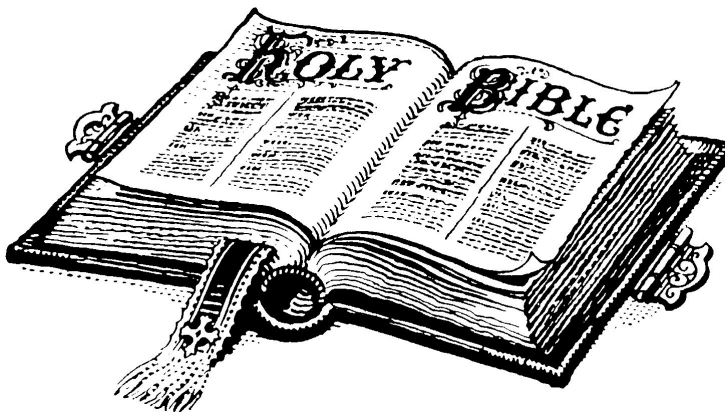
*more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly,
according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*

I shouldn't have thought of myself, because I didn't celebrate Christmas (or for any other reason), better than those who were working a work of grace unto me, and not just myself but my family as well! We didn't deserve to have them spend their own money on food and presents for us, but they did. They took the time to pick out the present thinking of each of us as they wrapped them and labeled them even though they hardly knew us. It was a very teachable moment in my life, and humbling.

It is still a struggle to live a godly life with the balance between keeping God's commandments out of love with out becoming Pharisaical, and being gracious with out abusing liberty (Matthew 15, Mathew 23, & Romans 10:2-4, Romans 6:1-2, I Corinthians 8:9, Corinthians 10:27-33 & Galatians 5:13-14) but when I think back to the year 'We kind of sort of accidentally had a Christmas' it reminds me to check my pride and turn toward God for grace.

My family still doesn't celebrate Christmas, I still feel very strongly that I need not take part in it, however there is nothing wrong with letting others be blessed by doing a work of grace unto me either.

If God can use people's evil hearts to work His good purpose, for example when Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, then surely He can and has used man's good intentions to help His children as well.



by Charles Spurgeon

Chapel, Southwark.

"When Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house."—Luke 19:5.

Notwithstanding our firm belief that you are in the main well instructed in the doctrines of the everlasting gospel, we are continually reminded in our conversation with young converts, how absolutely necessary it is to repeat our former lessons, and repeatedly assert and prove over and over again those doctrines which lie at the basis of our holy religion. Our friends, therefore, who have many years ago been taught the great doctrine of effectual calling, will believe that whilst I preach very simply this morning, the sermon is intended for those who are young in the fear of the Lord, that they may better understand this great starting point of God in the heart, the effectual calling of men by the Holy Spirit. I shall use the case of Zaccheus as a great illustration of the doctrine of effectual calling. You will remember the story. Zaccheus had a curiosity to see the wonderful man Jesus Christ, who was turning the world upside down, and causing an immense excitement in the minds of men. We sometimes find fault with curiosity, and say it is sinful to come to the house of God from that motive; I am not quite sure that we should hazard such an assertion. The motive is not sinful, though certainly it is not virtuous; yet it has often been proved that curiosity is one of the best allies of grace. Zaccheus, moved by this motive, desired to see Christ; but there were two obstacles in the way: first, there was such a crowd of people that he could not get near the Saviour; and again, he was so exceedingly short in stature that there was no hope of his reaching over people's heads to catch a glimpse of him. What did he do? He did as the boys were doing—for the boys of old times were no doubt just like the boys of the present age, and were perched up in the boughs of the tree to look at Jesus as he passed along. Elderly man though he is, Zaccheus jumps up, and there he sits among the children. The boys are too much afraid of that stern old publican, whom their fathers dreaded, to push him down or cause him any inconvenience. See him there. With what anxiety he is peeping down to see which is Christ—for the Saviour had no pompous distinction; no beadle is walking before him with a silver mace; he did not hold a golden crozier in his hand: he had no pontifical dress; in fact, he was just dressed like those around him. He had a coat like that of a common peasant, made of one piece from top to bottom; and Zaccheus could scarcely distinguish him. However, before he has caught a sight of Christ, Christ has fixed his eye upon him, and standing under the tree, he looks up, and says, "Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house." Down comes Zaccheus; Christ goes to his house; Zaccheus becomes Christ's follower, and enters into the kingdom of heaven.

1. Now, first, effectual calling is a very *gracious* truth. You may guess this from the fact that Zaccheus was a character whom we should suppose the last to be saved. He belonged to a bad city—Jericho—a city which had been cursed, and no one would suspect

Historical Marker:
"Effectual Calling"

A Sermon (No. 73)
Delivered on Sabbath
Morning, March 30,
1856,
At New Park Street

that any one would come out of Jericho to be saved. It was near Jericho that the man fell among thieves; we trust Zaccheus had no hand in it; but there are some who, while they are publicans, can be thieves also. We might as well expect converts from St. Giles's, or the lowest parts of London, from the worst and vilest dens of infamy, as from Jericho in those days. Ah! my brethren, it matters not where you come from; you may come from one of the dirtiest streets, one of the worst back slums in London but if effectual grace call you, it is an effectual call, which knoweth no distinction of place. Zaccheus also was of an exceedingly bad trade, and probably cheated the people in order to enrich himself. Indeed, when Christ went into his house, there was an universal murmur that he had gone to be a guest with a man that was a sinner. But, my brethren, grace knows no distinction; it is no respecter of persons, but God calleth whom he wills, and he called this worst of publicans, in the worst of cities, from the worst of trades. Besides, Zaccheus was one who was the least likely to be saved because he was rich. It is true, rich and poor are welcome; no one has the least excuse for despair because of his condition; yet it is a fact that "not many great men," after the flesh, "not many mighty," are called, but "God hath chosen the poor of this world—rich in faith." But grace knows no distinction here. The *rich* Zaccheus is called from the tree; down he comes, and he is saved. I have thought it one of the greatest instances of God's condescension that he can look *down* on man; but I will tell you there was a greater condescension than that, when Christ looked *up* to see Zaccheus. For God to look down on his creatures—that is mercy; but for Christ so to humble himself that he has to look up to one of his own creatures, that becomes mercy indeed. Ah! many of you have climbed up the tree of your own good works, and perched yourselves in the branches of your holy actions, and are trusting in the free will of the poor creature, or resting in some worldly maxim; nevertheless, Christ looks up even to proud sinners, and calls them down. "Come down," says he, "to-day I must abide in thy house." Had Zaccheus been a humble-minded man, sitting by the wayside, or at the feet of Christ, we should then have admired Christ's mercy; but here he is lifted up, and Christ looks up to him, and bids him come down.

2. Next it was a *personal* call. There were boys in the tree as well as Zaccheus but there was no mistake about the person who was called. It was, "*Zaccheus*, make haste and come down." There are other calls mentioned in Scripture. It is said, especially, "Many are called, but few are chosen." Now that is not the effectual call which is intended by the apostle, when he said, "Whom he called, them he also justified." That is a general call which many men, yea, all men reject, unless there come after it the personal, particular call, which makes us Christians. You will bear me witness that it was a personal call that brought you to the Saviour. It was some sermon which led you to feel that *you* were, no doubt, the person intended. The text, perhaps, was "Thou, God, seest me;" and the minister laid particular stress on the word "me," so that you thought God's eye was fixed upon *you*; and ere the sermon was concluded, you thought you saw God open the books to condemn *you*, and your heart whispered, "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord." You might have been perched in the window, or stood packed in the aisle; but you had a solemn conviction that the sermon was preached to *you*, and not to other people. God does not call his

people in shoals, but in units. "Jesus saith unto her, *Mary*; and she turned and said unto him, Rabboni, which is to say, Master." Jesus seeth Peter and John fishing by the lake, and he saith unto them, "Follow me." He seeth Matthew sitting at the table at the receipt of custom, and he saith unto him, "Arise, and follow me," and Matthew did so. When the Holy Ghost comes home to a man, God's arrow goes into his heart: it does not graze his helmet, or make some little mark upon his armour, but it penetrates between the joints of the harness, entering the marrow of the soul. Have you felt, dear friends, that personal call? Do you remember when a voice said, "Arise, he calleth thee." Can you look back to some time when you said, "*My Lord, my God?*" when you knew the Spirit was striving with *you*, and you said, Lord, *I* come to thee, for I know that thou callest *me*." I might call the whole of you throughout eternity, but if God call one, there will be more effect through his personal call of one than my general call of multitudes.

3. Thirdly, it is a *hastening* call. "*Zaccheus*, make *haste*." The sinner, when he is called by the ordinary ministry, replies, "To-morrow." He hears a telling sermon, and he said, "I will turn to God by-and-bye." The tears roll down his cheek, but they are wiped away. Some goodness appears, but like the cloud of the morning it is dissipated by the sun of temptation. He says, "I solemnly vow from this time to be a reformed man. After I have once more indulged in my darling sin, I will renounce my lusts, and decide for God." Ah! that is only a minister's call, and is good for nothing. Hell, they say, is paved with good intentions. These good intentions are begotten by general calls. The road to perdition is laid all over with branches of trees whereon men are sitting, for they often pull down branches from the trees but they do not come down themselves. The straw laid down before a sick man's door causes the wheels to roll more noiselessly. So there be some who strew their path with promises of repentance, and so go more easily and noiselessly down to perdition. But God's call is not a call for to-morrow. "*To-day* if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts: as in the provocation, when your fathers tempted me." God's grace always comes with despatch; and if thou art drawn by God, thou wilt run after God, and not be talking about delays. To-morrow—it is not written in the almanack of time. To-morrow—it is in Satan's calendar, and nowhere else. To-morrow—it is a rock whitened by the bones of mariners who have been wrecked upon it; it is the wrecker's light gleaming on the shore, luring poor ships to destruction. To-morrow—it is the idiot's cup which he fableth to lie at the foot of the rainbow, but which none hath ever found. To-morrow—it is the floating island of Loch Lomond, which none hath ever seen. To-morrow—it is a dream. To-morrow—it is a delusion. To-morrow, ay, to-morrow you may lift up your eyes in hell, being in torments. Yonder clock saith "to-day;" everything crieth "to-day;" and the Holy Ghost is in union with these things, and saith, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Sinners, are you inclined now to seek the Saviour? are you breathing a prayer now? are you saying, "Now or never! I must be saved now?" If you are, then I hope it is an effectual call, for Christ, when he giveth an effectual call, says, "*Zaccheus*, make haste."

4. Next, it is a *humbling* call. "*Zaccheus*, make haste and *come*

down." Many a time hath a minister called men to repentance with a call which has made them proud, exalted them in their own esteem, and led them to say, "I can turn to God when I like; I can do so without the influence of the Holy Ghost." They have been called to *go up* and not to *come down*. God always humbles a sinner. Can I not remember when Gold told me to come down? One of the first steps I had to take was to go right down from my good works; and oh! what a fall was that! I have pulled you down from your good works, and now I will pull you down from your self-sufficiency." Well, I had another fall, and I felt sure I had gained the bottom, but Christ said "Come down!" and he made me come down till I fell on some point at which I felt I was yet salvable. "Down, sir! come down, yet." And down I came until I had to let go every bough of the tree of my hopes in despair: and then I said, "I can do nothing; I am ruined." The waters were wrapped round my head, and I was shut out from the light of day, and thought myself a stranger from the commonwealth of Israel. "Come down lower yet, sir! thou hast too much pride to be saved. Then I was brought down to see my corruption, my wickedness, my filthiness. "Come down," says God, when he means to save. Now, proud sinners, it is of no use for you to be proud, to stick yourselves up in the trees; Christ will have you down. Oh, thou that dwellest with the eagle on the craggy rock, thou shalt come down from thy elevation; thou shalt fall by grace, or thou shalt fall with a vengeance one day. He "hath cast down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek."

5. Next, it is an *affectionate* call. "To-day I must abide in *thy house*." You can easily conceive how the faces of the multitude change! They thought Christ to be the holiest and best of men, and were ready to make him a king. But he says, "To-day I must abide in thy house." There was one poor Jew who had been inside Zaccheus's house; he had "been on the carpet," as they say in country villages when they are taken before the justice, and he recollected what sort of house it was; he remembered how he was taken in there, and his conceptions of it were something like what a fly would have of a spider's den after he had once escaped. There was another who had been distrained of nearly all his property; and the idea he had of walking in there was like walking into the den of lions. "What!" said they, "Is this holy man going into such a den as that, where we poor wretches have been robbed and ill-treated. It was bad enough for Christ to speak to him up in the tree, but the idea of going into his house!" They all murmured at his going to be "a guest with a man who was a sinner." Well, I know what some of his disciples thought: they thought it very imprudent; it might injure his character, and he might offend the people. They thought he might have gone to see this man night, like Nicodemus, and give him an audience when nobody saw him; but publicly to acknowledge such a man was the most imprudent act he could commit. But why did Christ do as he did? Because he would give Zaccheus an *affectionate* call. "I will not come and stand at thy threshold, or look in at thy window, but I will come into thine house—the same house where the cries of widows have come into thine ears, and thou hast disregarded them; I will come into thy parlour, where the weeping of the orphan have never moved thy compassion; I will come there, where thou, like a ravenous lion hast devoured thy prey; I will come there, where thou hast blackened thine house, and made it infamous; I will come into the place where cries have risen to high heaven, wrung from the lips of those whom thou hast oppressed; I will come into thy house and give thee a blessing." Oh! what affection there was

in that! Poor sinner, my Master is a very affectionate Master. He will come into your house. What kind of a house have you got? A house that you have made miserable with your drunkenness—a house that you have defiled with your impurity—a house you have defiled with your cursing and swearing—a house where you are carrying on an ill-trade that you would be glad to get rid of. Christ say, "I will come into thine house." And I know some houses now that once were dens of sin, where Christ comes every morning; the husband and wife who once could quarrel and fight, bend their knees together in prayer. Some of my hearers can scarce come for an hour to their meals but they must have a word of prayer and reading of the Scriptures. Christ comes to them. Where the walls were plastered up with the lascivious song and idle picture, there is a Christian almanack in one place, there is a Bible on the chest of drawers; and though it is only one room they live in, if an angel should come in, and God should say, "What hast thou seen in that house?" he would say, "I have seen good furniture, for there is a Bible there; here and there a religious book; the filthy pictures are pulled down and burned; there are no cards in the man's cupboard now; Christ has come into his house." Oh! what a blessing that we have our household God as well as the Romans! Our God is a household God. He comes to live with his people; he loves the tents of Jacob. Now, poor ragmuffin sinner, thou who livest in the filthiest den in London, if such an one be here, Jesus saith to thee, "Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for to-day *I must abide in thy house*."

6. Again, it was not only an affectionate call, but it was an *abiding* call. "To-day I must *abide* at thy house." A common call is like this: "To-day I shall walk in at thy house at one door, and out at the other." The common call which is given by the gospel to all men is a call which operates upon them for a time, and then it is all over; but the saving call is an abiding call. When Christ speaks, he does not say, "Make haste, Zaccheus, and come down, for I am just coming to look in;" but "I must *abide* in thy house; I am coming to sit down to eat and drink with thee; I am coming to have a meal with thee; to-day I must abide in thy house." "Ah!" says one, "you cannot tell how many times I have been impressed, sir, I have often had a series of solemn convictions, and I thought I really was saved, but it all died away; like a dream, when one awaketh, all hath vanished that he dreamed, so was it with me." Ah! but poor soul, do not despair. Dost thou feel the strivings of Almighty grace within thine heart bidding thee repent to-day? If thou dost, it will be an abiding call. If it is Jesus at work in thy soul, he will come and tarry in thine heart, and consecrate thee for his own for ever. He says, "I will come and dwell with thee, and that for ever. I will come and say,

Here I will make my settled rest,
No more will go and come;
No more a stranger or a guest,
But master of this home."

"Oh!" say you, "that is what I want; I wan an *abiding* call, something that will last; I do not want a religion that will wash out, but a fast-colour religion." Well, that is the kind of call Christ gives. His ministers cannot give it; but when Christ speaks, he speaks with power, and says, "Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must *abide* at thy house."

7. There is one thing, however, I cannot forget, and that is that it

was a *necessary* call. Just read it over again. "Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I *must* abide at thy house." It was not a thing that he might do, or might not do; but it was a necessary call. The salvation of a sinner is as much a matter of necessity with God as the fulfilment of his covenant that the rain shall no more drown the world. The salvation of every blood-bought child of God is a necessary thing for three reasons; it is necessary because it is God's purpose; it is necessary because it is Christ's purchase; it is necessary because it is God's promise. It is necessary that the child of God should be saved. Some divines think it is very wrong to lay a stress on the word "must," especially in that passage where it is said "he must needs go through Samaria." "Why," they say, "he must needs go through Samaria, because there was no other way he could go, and therefore he was forced to go that way." Yes, gentlemen, we reply, no doubt; but then there might have been another way. Providence made it so that he must needs go through Samaria, and that Samaria should like in the route he had chosen. So that we have you any way. "He must needs go through Samaria." Providence directed man to build Samaria directly in the road, and grace constrained the Saviour to move in that direction. It was not "Come down, Zaccheus, because I *may* abide at thy house," but "I *must*." The Saviour felt a strong necessity. Just as much a necessity as there is that man should die, as stern a necessity as there is that the sun should give us light by day and the moon by night, just so much a necessity is there that every blood-bought child of God shall be saved. "To-day I must abide at thy house." And oh! when the Lord comes to this, that he must and he will, what a thing it is with the poor sinner then! At other times we ask, "Shall I let him in at all? there is a stranger at the door; he is knocking now; he has knocked before; shall I let him in?" But this time it is, "I *must* abide at thy house." There was no knocking at the door, but smash went the door into atoms! and in he walked: "I must, I shall, I will; I care not for your protesting your vileness, your unbelief; I must, I will; I must abide in thy house." "Ah!" says one, "I do not believe God would ever make me to believe as you believe, or become a Christian at all." Ah! but if he shall but say, "To-day I must abide at thy house," there will be no resistance in you. There are some of you who would scorn the very idea of being a canting methodist; "What, sir! do you suppose I would ever turn one of your religious people?" No, my friend, I don't *suppose* it; I *know* it for a certainty. If God says "I must," there is no standing against it. Let him say "must," and it must be.

I will just tell you an anecdote proving this. "A father was about sending his son to college; but as he knew the influence to which he would be exposed, he was not without a deep and anxious solicitude for the spiritual and eternal welfare of his favourite child. Fearing lest the principles of Christian faith, which he had endeavoured to instil into his mind, would be rudely assailed, but trusting in the efficacy of that word which is quick and powerful, he purchased, unknown to his son, an elegant copy of the Bible, and deposited it at the bottom of his trunk. The young man entered upon his college career. The restraints of a pious education were soon broken off, and he proceeded from speculation to doubts, and from doubts to a denial of the reality of religion. After having become, in his own estimation, wiser than his father, he discovered one day, while rummaging his trunk, with great surprise and indignation, the sacred deposit. He took it out, and while deliberating on the manner in which he should

treat it, he determined that he would use it as waste paper, on which to wipe his razor while shaving. Accordingly, every time he went to shave, he tore a leaf or two of the holy book, and thus used it till nearly half the volume was destroyed. But while he was committing this outrage upon the sacred book, a text now and then met his eye, and was carried like a barbed arrow to his heart. At length, he heard a sermon, which discovered to him his own character, and his exposure to the wrath of God, and riveted upon his mind the impression which he has received from the last torn leaf of the blessed, yet insulted volume. Had worlds been at his disposal, he would freely have given them all, could they have availed, in enabling him to undo what he had done. At length he found forgiveness at the foot of the cross. The torn leaves of that sacred volume brought healing to his soul; for they led him to repose on the mercy of God, which is sufficient for the chief of sinners." I tell you there is not a reprobate walking the streets and defiling the air with his blasphemies, there is not a creature abandoned so as to be well-nigh as bad as Satan himself, if he is a child of life, who is not within the reach of mercy. And if God says, "To-day I *must* abide in thy house," he then assuredly will. Do you feel, my dear hearer, just now, something in your mind which seems to say you have held out against the gospel a long while, but to-day you can hold out no longer? Do you feel that a strong hand has got hold of you, and do you hear a voice saying, "Sinner, I must abide in thy house; you have often scorned me, you have often laughed at me, you have often spit in the face of mercy, often blasphemed me, but sinner, I must abide in thy house; you banged the door yesterday in the missionary's face, you burned the tract, you laughed at the minister, you have cursed God's house, you have violated the Sabbath; but, sinner, I must abide in thy house, and I will!" "What, Lord!" you say, "abide in my house! why it is covered all over with iniquity. Abide in my house! why there is not a chair or a table but would cry out against me. Abide in my house! why the joists and beams and flooring would all rise up and tell thee that I am not worthy to kiss the hem of thy garment. What, Lord! abide in my house!" "Yes," says he, "I *must*; there is a strong necessity; my powerful love constrains me, and whether thou wilt let me or no, I am determined to make thee willing, and thou shalt let me in." Does not this surprise you, that Christ not only asks you to come to him, but invites himself to your table, and what is more, when you would put him away, kindly says, "I must, I will come in." Only think of Christ going after a sinner, crying after a sinner, beginning a sinner to let him save him; and that is just what Jesus does to his chosen ones. The sinner runs away from him, but free-grace pursues him, and says, "Sinner, come to Christ;" and if our hearts be shut up, Christ puts his hand in at the door, and if we do not rise, but repulse him coldly, he says, "I must, I will come in;" he weeps over us till his tears win us; he cries after us till his cries prevail; and at last in his own well determined hour he enters into our heart, and there he dwells. "I must abide in thy house," said Jesus.

8. And now, lastly, this call was an *effectual* one, for we see the fruits it brought forth. Open was Zaccheus's door; spread was his table; generous was his heart; washed were his hands; unburdened was his conscience; joyful was his soul. "Here, Lord," says he, "the half of my goods I give to the poor; I dare say I have robbed them of half my property—and now I restore it." "And if I have taken anything from any one by false accusation, I

will restore it to him fourfold."—away goes another portion of his property. Ah! Zaccheus, you will go to be to-night a great deal poorer than when you got up this morning—but infinitely richer, too—poor, very poor, in this world's goods, compared with what thou wert when thou first didst climb that sycamore tree; but richer—infinitely richer—in heavenly treasure. Sinner, we shall know whether God calls you by this: if he calls, it will be an effectual call—not a call which you hear and then forget but one which produces good works. If God hath called thee this morning, down will go that drunken cup, up will go thy prayers; if God hath called thee this morning, there will not be *one* shutter up to-day in your shop, but *all*, and you will have a notice stuck up, "This house is closed on the Sabbath day, and will not again on that day, be opened." To-morrow, there will be such-and-such worldly amusement, but if God hath called you, you will not go. And if you have robbed anybody (and who knows but I may have a thief here?) If God call you, there will be a restoration of what you have stolen? you will give up all that you have, so that you will follow God with all your heart. We do not believe a man to be converted unless he doth renounce the error of his ways; unless, practically, he is brought to know that Christ himself is master of his conscience, and his law is his delight. "Zaccheus, make haste and come down, I must abide at thy house." And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. "And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forso much as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Now, one or two lessons. *A lesson to the proud.* Come down, proud hearts, come down! Mercy runneth in valleys, but it goeth not to the mountain top. Come down, come down, lofty spirit! The lofty city, he layeth it low even to the ground, and then he buildeth it up. Again, *a lesson to thee, poor despairing soul:* I am glad to see thee in God's house this morning; it is a good sign. I care not what you came for. You heard there was a strange kind of man that preached here, perhaps. Never mind about that. You are all quite as strange as he is. It is necessary that there should be strange men to gather in other strange men. Now, I have a mass of people here; and if I might use a figure, I should compare you to a great heap of ashes, mingled with which are a few steel filings. Now, my sermon if it be attended with divine grace, will be a sort of magnet: it will not attract any of the ashes—they will keep just where they are—but it will draw out the steel filings. I have got a Zaccheus there; there is a Mary up there, a John down there, a Sarah, or a William, or a Thomas, there—God's chosen ones—they are steel filings in the congregation of ashes, and my gospel, the gospel of the blessed God, like a great magnet, draws them out of the heap. There they come, there they come. Why? because there was a magnetic power between the gospel and their hearts. AH! poor sinner, come to Jesus, believe his love, trust his mercy. If thou hast a desire to come, if thou art forcing thy way through the ashes to get to Christ, then it is because Christ is calling thee. Oh! all of you who know yourselves to be sinners—every man, woman, and child of you—yea, ye little children (for God has given me some of you to be my wages), do you feel yourselves sinners? then believe on Jesus and be saved. You have come here from curiosity, many of you. Oh! that you might be met with and saved. I am distressed for you lest you should sink into hell-fire.

Oh! listen to Christ while he speaks to you. Christ says, "*Come down*," this morning. Go home and humble yourselves in the sight of God: go and confess your iniquities that you have sinned against him; go home and tell him that you are a wretch, undone without his sovereign grace; and then look to him, for rest assured he has first looked to you. You say, "Sir, oh! I am willing enough to be saved, but I am afraid he is not willing." Stay! stay! no more of that! Do you know that is part blasphemy—not quite. If you were not ignorant, I would tell you that it was part blasphemy. You cannot look to Christ before he has looked to you. If you are willing to be saved, he gave you that will. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and be baptized, and thou shalt be saved. I trust the Holy Spirit is calling you. Young man up there, young man in the window, make haste! come down! Old man, sitting in these pews, come down. Merchant in yonder aisle, make haste. Matron and youth, not knowing Christ, oh, may he look at you. Old grandmother, hear the gracious call; and thou, young lad, Christ may be looking at thee—I trust he is—and saying to thee, "Make haste, and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house."

Devotion: Acts 21:13

by Bro. Jeff Short

**Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?
for I am ready not to be bound only,
but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.
~ Acts 21:13**

Paul had set his face to go to Jerusalem. He had spent much time receiving an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem and was determined to deliver it personally. He hoped to relieve some of the afflictions of the church and to show the generosity and gratitude of the Gentile churches, which, he hoped, would go a long way in easing the strained relations between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. This task could have been taken care of by one of his fellow laborers, a point obvious to most of those that had contact with Paul. In our text, the disciples at Caesarea, along with his traveling companions, have sought to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem himself, and Paul makes his response to their plea.

Paul says, "**What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?**" The disciples were persistent and sought to persuade Paul to leave his present course. Paul questions why they would seek to weaken his resolve. Why would they want to hinder him from finishing the course that has been marked out for him? He could understand their sorrow; no doubt, he had some sorrow himself. However, he does not understand why they would try to overrule the leadership of the Spirit. Let us consider this verse and receive instruction.

The Holy Spirit gave a revelation concerning Paul's trip to Jerusalem on at least three different occasions. Once in Miletus the revelation was given to Paul himself, "**And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost**

witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me” ([Acts 20:22-23](#)). The second revelation came to the disciples in Tyre, who spoke to Paul **“through the Spirit”** ([Acts 21:4](#)) concerning his visit to Jerusalem. The third revelation came to the prophet Agabus and he related it to all those that were at Caesarea, **“And when he was come unto us, he took Paul’s girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles”** ([Acts 21:11](#)).

We are not given the content of the revelation in the second instance. We are told that the disciples acted on the revelation of the Spirit. However, we have every reason to believe that it was consistent with the other two. These three instances were essentially the same revelation. We have the same message, but at least two different interpretations.

The disciples at Tyre reacted in much the same way the disciples at Caesarea did when they heard the message. Of the disciples at Tyre, it is said, **“And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem”** ([Acts 21:4](#)). Of the disciples in Caesarea, we are told, **“And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem”** ([Acts 21:12](#)). They heard the same message and interpreted it in the same way, although those at Caesarea were more fervent in their persuasion responding to the dramatic presentation of Agabus. These parties all agreed, after hearing the message that Paul should not go to Jerusalem.

Several different factors had an affect on the groups. Their intentions were good and sincere. They had a great love for Paul and wanted him to continue to be with them. The Ephesian elders at Miletus experienced the same emotions when Paul departed from them, **“Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more”** ([Acts 20:38](#)). They were concerned for Paul’s safety and well-being.

Still yet, the Holy Spirit never said that Paul should not go. Why were they so insistent that Paul was wrong? What the Spirit did reveal was that the way was extremely difficult and fraught with hardships. They believed that it was too hard and Paul would be risking his life. Like many Christians, upon understanding that the way was difficult and would involve personal sacrifice, they assumed that that meant he should not go.

Paul received the revelation from the Spirit and understood the same things concerning the hardships attending that course. However, he reacted very differently. Instead of being discouraged, he was resolute and convinced that this was the course marked for him by God. **“And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there”** ([Acts 20:22](#)). Acknowledging the great difficulty, Paul said, **“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”** ([Acts 20:24](#)).

Paul knew that the task was hard and he said, **“But none of these things move me.”** Paul sought to explain, **“For I am ready not**

to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” Paul confessed the way would be difficult. He admitted that he did not know what all would happen. He acknowledged that it will probably not end well. Despite all these things, Paul was determined to go, believing it to be the will of God.

Long ago, Paul had resigned his own will, ambitions, and agenda in order to become the bond-slave of Jesus Christ. The Apostle that told others, **“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s”** ([1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#)) was willing himself to be a living sacrifice.

In the end the disciples showed wisdom in conceding to Paul, **“And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done”** ([Acts 21:14](#)). They thought Paul was making a mistake. They feared that he would fail, so they tried to prevent him from venturing on the enterprise. However, when they saw Paul’s determination, they ceased trying to persuade him and left it to the will of God.

Their intentions were good and they did what they did out of love and concern for Paul. However, on closer inspection, we find an evil in what they did. Peter had once sought to persuade Jesus not to go, and the Lord rebuked him calling him Satan. In essence, these well-meaning disciples were actually seeking to hinder the will of God and persuade another Christian not to follow his calling and were really being selfish. Let us be as Paul willing to go and to do whatever God bids us do and let us never put a stumbling block in the way of one who is seeking to do the same.

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