

# *Christian's* **Expositor** Journal

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## **CHANGE, IN THE NAME OF LOVE**

*Greg Gay*

We adapt ourselves to the environment around us in many ways. Some of these changes neither help nor harm our relationship with God. For example, as the seasons change from warm to cold and cold to warm, we can change our clothing to adapt, and as long as we maintain proper modesty, we are neither better nor worse spiritually for the change.

Other changes, however, are not so harmless. For example, what is allowed in the area of entertainment, such as on television, has changed subtly over the years. Scenes and words once banned from any shows are now used frequently. A music award show recently made only brief headlines when two women kissed during a performance. What once would have shocked the country for months and ended careers in disgrace is now scarcely noticed. Obviously, if we adapt the values increasingly displayed in entertainment, we will not grow closer to God.

It is also obvious that the religious world in general has changed much through the years, sadly growing further and further away from God.

I have an old denominational creed book that explains their music was to be a **cappella**, without instrumental accompaniment. Some years ago, when I shared that book with some friends of that denomination, they were amazed. Somewhere the denomination's belief and practice changed.

One religious body recently voted to accept leaders who openly and deliberately practice the very sin that destroyed Sodom. The decision to accept such sin did not happen suddenly with the vote; rather, movement toward that change has been happening gradually over many years.

Many religions, once strict in what they believe, today practice open fellowship regarding salvation. People are welcomed with open arms no matter what churches they have attended and no matter what they did to be saved. Many religions practice open fellowship regarding worship. Just about any form or frequency of worship is acceptable.

I have heard people talk about looking for a church—not a church that is right, but one that fits them and has the features they think a church should have. One would think they are looking for an automobile. What people usually mean by “looking for a church” is that they are looking for a place that is acceptable to them. Whether or not they are acceptable to the church is not their concern because they presume to be automatically accepted once they select that church. The church’s name, its terms of salvation, and its pattern of worship are of little or no consequence. It seems that in today’s religious environment, feelings and personal choice are much more important than any facts from God’s Word.

Dare we say all these ideas in religions have had no effect on the Lord’s church?

The Bible helps us understand that we will likely be tempted to look around to see what others are doing and to follow their path.

Long ago Israel looked around them at other nations and desired a king. The people expressed their desire to the prophet Samuel:

And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them (1 Sam. 8:5-7, KJV unless noted otherwise).

God allowed them their desire to their own destruction.

Since it is possible to start out with truth and end up with error, how can we avoid making the same mistakes as Israel of old and the same mistakes as the false religions that abound around us?

Throughout the years, well-meaning brethren in our fellowship have started down paths that have led them and others astray from the truths of God’s

Word regarding salvation and worship. Those paths are usually taken in the name of love. In the name of love, fellowship is extended. In the name of love, how to be saved does not have to be quite so strict. In the name of love, other expressions of worship can be acceptable. In the name of love, the roles of men and women do not have to be so clearly defined. In the name of love, we can all unite.

Such reasoning results from a misunderstanding of the biblical concept of love. To illustrate, let us look at some of the writings of the Apostle John.

At the end of his life, John the Apostle was known as the Apostle of Love. His last writings are filled with wonderful words about love; yet, he shows no tolerance for error. First, notice John's words of love and affirmation:

- And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full (1 Jn. 1:4).
- And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life (1 Jn. 2:25).
- Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not (1 Jn. 3:1).
- For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another (1 Jn. 3:11).
- Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth (1 Jn. 3:16-18).
- Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God (1 Jn. 4:7).
- No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us (1 Jn. 4:12).

- Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us (1 Jn. 4:15-19).

These are wonderful positive words!

Next, notice John's words of strictness and prohibition:

- If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 Jn. 1:8-10).
- He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 Jn. 2:4).
- Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (1 Jn. 2:15-16).
- Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also (1 Jn. 2:22-23).
- He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of

God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8).

- Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world (1 Jn. 4:1).

These words are emphatic! John calls people liars, and tells them they are associated with the devil, and advocates testing people to make sure they are not false prophets. But how can someone who preaches such wonderful words of love possibly call someone a liar and say someone is of the devil? Evidently, the Holy Spirit thought it necessary for John to write those words.

How do we reconcile these two concepts of love and strictness? Let John answer:

- But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 Jn. 1:7).
- And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.
- He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him (1 Jn. 2:3-5).
- And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him (1 Jn. 2:28-29).
- Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous (1 Jn. 3:6-7).
- Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And

this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us (1 Jn. 3:21-24).

- By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 Jn. 5:2-5).

The biblical love that John the Apostle wrote about is not a concept that demands acceptance of anything and everything that anyone wants to do in the name of religion. Biblical love is conditional upon obedience to God. God wants us to develop both love and obedience at the same time. We must love the brotherhood deeply and passionately yet stay within the strict boundaries of the truths of God's Word. When teachers and preachers start feeding congregations a steady diet of love without the accompanying balance of obedience or a steady diet of obedience without the accompanying balance of love, error is usually soon to follow.

In this issue of the **Christian's Expositor** we hope to have a balance of encouraging works we can do as well as warnings of things to avoid.

Hopefully we are wise enough to prepare for marriage and to look diligently at how we are to be in our homes. Hopefully we will avoid doctrinal error in the area of baptism as two articles warn. And, hopefully we will allow God's Word, in all its simplicity and clarity, to be our absolute guide in all that we do. As Solomon wrote: "...meddle not with them that are given to change" (Prov. 24:21).

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## **THE ORDINANCE OF BAPTISM**

*Brett Hickey*

Sausage, bacon and eggs for breakfast sounds like a great way to start a Saturday. Then, after mowing the lawn, you could reward yourself with a catfish lunch. These acts, which we would not think twice about today, would make the Jew under the Old Covenant guilty of four sins. Working on the Sabbath (Saturday) was a sin punishable by death (Ex. 31:15), while bacon, sausage and catfish violated the Old Testament food ordinances (Lev. 11). How could these be all right for God's people today but sinful back then? There has been a change in the law (Heb. 7:12). Thankfully, these and many more ordinances were "abolished" or "blotted out" when Jesus died on the cross (Eph.2:14; Col.2:14—KJV unless otherwise noted).

The question arises, though, does the blotting out of some ordinances render all biblical ordinances and commands ineffective? Some have reached this erroneous conclusion and proceeded to alter or accept changes to the New Testament ordinances. There are two approaches one may take to New Testament ordinances: simply leave them as one found them or twist and tweak them to satisfy the cultural preferences of the day. The latter approach is more flexible and more palatable to the public, but the Holy Spirit's words point to the first approach. The Apostle Paul stresses the importance of upholding the ordinances of Christ and the apostles in 1 Corinthians 11:2: "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as (just as—NKJV) I delivered them to you" (KJV).

What did Paul have in mind by "the ordinances?" Some scholars accurately conclude that Paul referred to the body of New Testament teachings, while others consider the term more restrictive. Nevertheless, scholars agree

that the word for “ordinances,” even when used in the strictest sense, includes at least the Lord’s Supper and baptism.

Unfortunately, religious confusion abounds today, forcing the truth-seeker to find the proverbial “needle in a haystack.” One such area of confusion is baptism, despite its pivotal place in the Christian system. Human preferences and misunderstanding have produced and sustained changes to this ordinance. The only way to bring resolution from the conflicting ideas about baptism is to scrutinize them in light of God’s Word.

### **Baptism of Fire**

Some people zealously promote the baptism of fire as an ordinance or tradition to be cherished today. The context of Matthew 3:10-12 shows this is incorrect. “Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” John confirms that we should not promote the baptism of fire when he speaks of those at the judgment day who are “cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:12-15). The baptism of fire should not be promoted because it is a form of punishment.

### **Triune Immersion**

Since baptism is to be “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” some demand that the subject for baptism be dipped or sprinkled three times—one time for each member of the Godhead. But, Romans 6:3-5, presents an obvious problem to this belief. Here, baptism is pictured as a reenactment of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. Triune immersion would picture Jesus dying and being resurrected three times, but Jesus died only once, was buried only once and was resurrected only once. Paul confirms that triune baptism is unscriptural in Ephesians 4:5 when he writes that there is only one immersion or baptism.

### **Wet or Dry?**

Other Bible-believing people insist that Holy Spirit baptism is sufficient for salvation and that water baptism is unnecessary. They reference the experience

of the apostles in Acts 2:1-4 and Cornelius in Acts 10-11. At first glance, there appears to be some merit to this idea, but a closer look shows these events to be unique cases, designed to fulfill the prophecy of Joel 2:28: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh." The prophecy was fulfilled, not in all Jews and all Gentiles of the day but on the apostles who were Jews (Acts 2) and Cornelius' family and friends who were Gentiles (Acts 10-11).

The Bible clearly teaches that water baptism is demanded for the believer. The New Testament evidence is decisive. When taken at face value, Jesus' exchange with Nicodemus is unmistakable: "...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

William Wall in *The History of Infant Baptism* notes how widely this view has been held through the ages:

There is not any one Christian writer of any antiquity in any language but what understands it of baptism. And if it be not so understood, it is difficult to give an account how a person is born of water, any more than born of wood. (v.1, 92)

All the ancient Christians (without the exception of one man) do understand that rule of our Saviour, John 3:5...of baptism....I believe Calvin was the first that ever denied this place to mean baptism. He gives another interpretation, which he confesses to be new. (v.I, 443)

Phillip Schaff adds,

[I]t seems impossible to disconnect water from baptism. Calvin's interpretation arose from doctrinal opposition to the Roman Catholic over-valuation of the sacrament, which must be guarded against in another way (**Lange's Commentary**, v. III, footnote 127).

The necessity of water baptism is not based on John 3:5 alone. Consider the conversion of the Ethiopian in Acts 8. Luke records, they came to a certain water: 'See, here is water: what doth hinder me to be baptized?'... they went down into the water both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of water..." The Holy Spirit floods this account with water!

If the element of baptism was other than water, Peter never knew it. Concerning Cornelius and his company, Peter asked his Jewish brethren in Acts 10:47, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?" Peter again connected water to baptism in 1 Peter 3:20-21.

The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

### **Sprinkling**

Sprinkling is commonly offered as an alternative to immersion. The practice of sprinkling in place of immersion has existed for a long time, but it does not go back to the days of the apostles. In the context of salvation, the Holy Spirit repeatedly bypassed the Greek word **rhantizo** (which is translated "sprinkling" in other Scriptures) in favor of **baptizo**—to dip, plunge or immerse.

Immersion is the only mode that corresponds to all the biblical details. Of the two alternatives, only immersion requires the "much water" demanded by John 3:23 and the burial pictured according to Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12. Nicodemus' interview with Jesus further isolates immersion as the initial practice. Jesus said that a man must be "born of water." The word "born" literally means "to bring forth," but there can be no "bringing forth" in sprinkling.

Complete confirmation of immersion being the mode of baptism is found in the earliest religious writings since the first century. Barnabus, Irenaeus, the anonymous author of the Shepherd of Hermas, Justin Martyr and Tertullian all lived before A.D. 200 and mention immersion as the apostolic tradition. In addition to a score of encyclopedias and dozens of historians that verify their testimony, prominent denominational scholars that practiced sprinkling concede that the original practice was immersion: Roman Catholic Alzog; Anglican Bingham; Lutherans Neander and Mosheim; Congregationalist Fisher; and Presbyterian Schaff. While these scholars still defended sprinkling, their honest admissions, combined with the scriptural requirement to keep the ordinance just as it was delivered, are sufficient to reject sprinkling.

### **Optional Baptism**

Some have ridiculed the idea that baptism is essential to salvation. They suggest baptism is merely an option that pictures the salvation already attained and that qualifies the subject for denominational membership. No departure from the biblical ordinance is refuted more clearly and more often than is this one. In Acts 2:38-47, we find that when 3,000 souls were added to the church by baptism and they received forgiveness and were added to the church simultaneously.

A host of passages point with unanimity to the purpose of the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5.

- To put on Christ** For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal.3:27).
- To enter the kingdom of God** ...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:5).
- To be saved** He who believes and is baptized will be saved (Mk. 16:16). He saved us, through the washing of regeneration (Tit. 3:5). [Baptism] now saves us (1 Pet.3:21).
- For remission of sins** Repent, and...be baptized... for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
- To wash away sins** Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins (Acts 22:16).

With the clear, continuous message of the Holy Spirit, how could one be satisfied with any other baptism? If one were to preserve the one baptism taught in the Scriptures, he must insist that no alternatives be accepted. One must submit to a single immersion in water for the forgiveness of his sins.

### **What If I Was Baptized Differently?**

Many people are pleased to discover the truth regarding baptism even though it proves that their baptism was unscriptural. Unfortunately, many of these honest people believe it is sufficient to educate others about true baptism without themselves ever being baptized according to the tradition of Jesus and the apostles. They believe that since they did all they knew to do at the time of their baptism, they fulfilled the command to be baptized. Are they correct?

The Apostle Paul found a group of people in this situation in Acts 19:1-6. They did all they knew to do, but they knew only of John's baptism. When they realized the baptism they received did not satisfy the teachings on baptism by the apostles, they gladly submitted to Paul's teaching and were scripturally baptized. Why should it be any different today? Make your calling and election sure!

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## **THE FAMILY: PARADISE OR THORNS AND THISTLES?**

*Greg Gay*

The crowning finish of God's creation was when He made man and woman, Adam and Eve. What an amazing and wonderful God who in His own image "...formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). God used Adam's rib to create Eve and presented her to Adam as his wife. We are told in celebration that after the woman was created, "Behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31, KJV unless otherwise noted). After creation there was a time of closeness between God and Adam and Eve. No doubt the first family looked forward to God's visits with them in their home, the Garden of Eden, their paradise. Sadly, the condition of all of God's creation being "very good" did not last.

Instead of living "happily ever after," Adam and Eve sinned. First, Satan tempted Eve and she tragically fell by partaking of the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Shortly after, Adam also sinned when he chose to take the forbidden fruit from Eve (Gen. 2:6).

When Adam and Eve decided to sin, their lives changed drastically. They went from having clear consciences, free from the stain of sin and looking forward to communication with God, to shamefully hiding behind trees to avoid Him because of the guilt of their sin (Gen. 3:8).

One consequence of their sin was that they had to leave the Garden of Eden to fend for themselves in a world filled with thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:18, 23).

Soon Adam and Eve started having children. When the first two children grew up, instead of everyone peacefully and happily serving God, more prob-

lems developed. Cain killed his brother in a jealous rage, angry that Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God while his own was not. Cain, the murderer, left the area, marked by God for his crime (Gen. 4:16).

Such is the early history of mankind, the early history of the first husband and wife, and the early history of the first two children. This is not a pretty picture. It does sound like a good start for the family does it?

God, however, wants for us to learn from their mistakes so that we do not repeat them today. Paul writes, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Sadly, the same wrong patterns of decision making and rebellion against God by members of the first family continue even to this day.

### **God's Perfect Pattern For The Home**

Contrast the tragedies of the first family with God's beautiful New Testament pattern for the home.

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband (Eph. 5:21-33).

God's message is that the relationship between husband and wife is to be a reflection of the relationship that exists between Christ and the church. Just as the church is to be "holy and without blemish," so are we to be in our relationships as husbands and wives. What a huge responsibility for a man and woman, two painfully human creatures, to have to reflect the greatness of the relationship between Christ and the church!

How can we grow and develop into people who follow God in purity and holiness as He desires? "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Thess. 4:7). Look again at the verses from Ephesians quoted above. In order for the relationship between Christ and the church to be what it should be, there has to be submission, love, reverence (translated "respect" in many other translations), and sacrifice. All of these actions are expressed through service. We see Jesus serving the church in love through His sacrifice. In return, the church is to be respectfully obedient and loving, serving Him in return.

It should make sense that these same characteristics of sacrifice, submission, love and respect must be seen in Christian homes. The husband is to love and sacrifice himself for his wife, being submissive to God in his assigned role of leading the home. Likewise, the wife is to submit to her husband in her assigned role and is to treat her husband lovingly and with great respect as they work together to make their home one that God can bless.

Since we believe the Word of God and since God has spoken about the relationships we are to have in our marriages, why are so many homes in trouble? Why are so many people miserable within the walls they call home?

### **Will Bible Reading Solve All Family Problems?**

Many times well-meaning brethren simply advise troubled couples to read their Bibles. After all, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is certainly true that the Bible contains the solutions to all of life's problems, including all relationship problems. And it is also true that reading the Bible is commendable and necessary. The Bereans were commended because they "searched the scriptures daily" (Acts 17:10-11). But, reading alone cannot bring peace to a troubled home. If just reading a Bible could bring perfect relationships with God and others, then every college pro-

fessor around the world who teaches a Bible course would be a member of the Lord's church, the Church of Christ, and in our fellowship. Since that is not the case, we must conclude that merely reading the Bible is not sufficient.

James writes,

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (1:22-25).

In addition to reading God's Word habitually, we must put its commands, examples, and inferences into practice in our lives in what we think, say, and do.

### **How Do We Treat One Another in Our Homes?**

Have you ever observed that some Christians who act civilized, polite and gracious toward others can somehow think it is acceptable to treat their spouses as though they are their worst enemies in the world? It is as though they think it is permissible for all of God's laws for civility to be suspended just because they are interacting with their spouses.

Such actions are contrary to biblical teachings about relationships. The same principles that govern a Christian's behavior toward others are to govern the behavior between Christian husbands and wives.

### **Rules For Living In Christ**

In the book of Colossians, Paul addresses how we should live our Christian lives. He writes,

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory (Col. 3:1-4).

To be “risen with Christ” refers to our obedience to the gospel in faith, repentance, confession and baptism. In our baptism we go through a likeness of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and in that way we are risen with Him. After our initial obedience to the gospel, we are to adapt heavenly values and cast aside the values of this life that lead to wrong. We are to consider ourselves dead to the things of this world as we turn our energy toward righteousness in anticipation of the coming of Christ.

At the end of the same chapter, Paul addresses family relationships with the following commands:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged (Col. 3:18-21).

We can easily see how these truths, spoken at both the beginning and end of the chapter, apply to all Christians. Just as the latter verses of the chapter apply to our families, so do the beginning verses. Let us now look at some of the middle verses of the same chapter with this truth in mind.

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him....Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful (Col. 3: 5-15).

### **The Bad List—Things To Leave Behind**

Notice Paul says we should leave some things behind when we serve God (the words in parentheses are from other translations): fornication (immorality), uncleanness (impurity), inordinate affection (lust, passion), evil concupiscence (evil desire), covetousness (greed), anger, wrath (rage), malice, blasphemy (slander), filthy communication (abusive speech, filthy speech), and lying.

### **The Good List—Things To Do Again And Again**

Similarly, we should acquire and maintain certain characteristics when we serve God. These attributes include the following (the words in parentheses are from other translations): bowels of mercies (a heart of compassion), kindness, humbleness of mind (humility), meekness (gentleness), longsuffering (patience), forbearing (bearing with one another), forgiving one another as Christ forgave us, charity (love), peace and thankfulness.

Certainly the instruction in the verses cited are appropriate for relationships between brethren, but notice how appropriate they are for correct family relationships.

The Revised Standard Version translates Colossians 3:14, “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

Love can bind everything together in perfect harmony. The decision to love motivates us to gladly and voluntarily work hard to help each other be who we ought to be in serving God. Should not this same harmony be our goal in our marriages?

I have observed through the years that troubled families do not have problems because they are filling their relationships with the things in the good list. Rather, they have problems because they are practicing the things on the bad list.

Obviously, for a troubled home to change, all need to stop doing the things on the bad list and start doing the things on the good list! In other words, they need to stop doing those things that lead to relationship “messes” and start practicing the “nesses”—kindness, humbleness, gentleness, forgiveness, thankfulness, etc.— that lead to righteousness.

I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holi-

ness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:19-23).

### **Who Goes First?**

In order for a troubled relationship to change, someone has to be willing to be the first to change. Since the man is in the leadership role as commanded by God, he should always be the first to lead the way to a greater relationship with his spouse and with God. Such action is following the example of Christ who “first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19).

The beautiful words of 1 Corinthians 13 on charity, or love, can help us.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

The New American Standard Version translates these verses as follows:

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor. 13:4-7, NASB).

These words describe how love is to be observed in the lives of all Christians. Now let us apply them to our family relationships. Please read the words again, only this time put your own name in the place of “charity.” This should describe the way we interact with all others. For me the passages would read, “Greg is patient, Greg is kind; Greg is not jealous, etc.” That insertion makes those verses become very personal and humbling. Go ahead. Try it with your name.

Next, read these words putting in the name of your spouse as the object of your action. Again, for me the passages would read, “Greg is patient with Cassie, Greg is kind to Cassie, Greg is not jealous of Cassie, etc.” It can also be helpful to put your children’s names in the passages as a way to check your relationship with them.

If those words cannot be read sincerely and truthfully with our name and our spouse’s or children’s names inserted, then it should be obvious we need to change our thoughts and behaviors.

Long ago the first family had to leave the Garden of Eden with all of its blessing including a tree called the “tree of life.” We read of that tree again at the end of the Bible. John wrote the church at Ephesus, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7).

Heavenly paradise awaits the faithful after this life is over. In the meantime, the closest we can get to paradise on earth is in our homes. It is up to us. We can work hard to be Christ-like in our lives and look forward to that heavenly paradise, or we can fill our homes with the thorns and thistles of sin and live miserable lives now and in eternity. It is our choice.

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1).

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## **PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE: THE CASE FOR PREMARITAL COUNSELING**

*Ryan Connor*

Each year many people fall in love and marry. A date is set for the wedding. A place is chosen for the special event. Plans are made for the ceremony. Decisions are made about colors, fabrics, flowers, candles, music, photography, and a list of other items. Finally, the day comes, and the guests are seated. The processional commences. As the bride and groom make their vows, “. . . to love, hold and cherish till death do us part,” a sense of hope, joy, and great expectation fills the air. The vows are sealed with prayer and are celebrated with a kiss. The recessional takes the bride and groom off to begin their marriage with what is so appropriately called “a honeymoon.”

Three years, three months, or sometimes three weeks later, many of these happily married couples realize the honeymoon is over. The fantasy has faded away only to leave a bitter tasting reality. In a recent book, written by Cele C. Otnes and Elizabeth H. Pleck bearing the title **Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding** the authors consider the increasing costs of lavish wedding ceremonies as a telling mirror to contemporary culture. For years, ministers who officiate at weddings have said that people spend more time preparing for the wedding than for the marriage. Perhaps we are exchanging the blessings of marriage for Cinderella dreams.

### **Marriage: A Blessing**

The Bible speaks of marriage in glowing terms. In Genesis 2:18-24 we have the divine record of the first marriage on earth:

And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said:

"This is now bone of my bones  
And flesh of my flesh;  
She shall be called Woman,  
Because she was taken out of Man."

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Gen. 2:18-24, NKJV unless noted otherwise).

Jesus Christ our Lord honors marriage as well. He said,

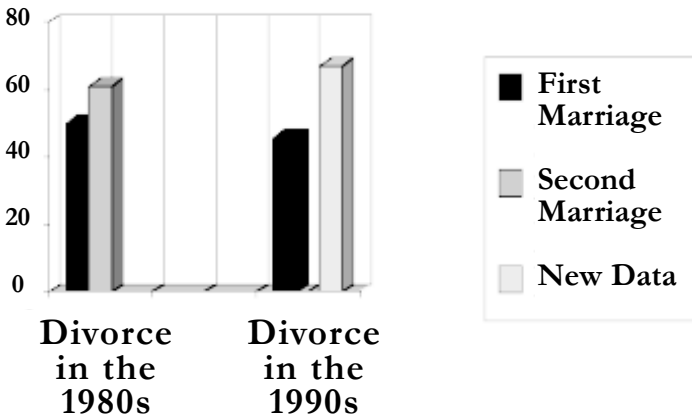
Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mt. 19:4-6).

The Hebrew writer said, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled" (Heb. 13:4) The same Scripture is rendered in Today's English Version, "Marriage is to be honored by all, and husbands and wives must be faithful to each other." The writer of wisdom wrote, "He who finds a wife finds a good

thing, and obtains favor from the LORD” (Prov. 18:22) and “Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies” (Prov. 31:10). Clearly, the Bible shows that God intends for marriage to be a blessing.

The design of marriage in Scripture is threefold. First, marriage is intended for procreation. God told Adam and Eve, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). Second, marriage is intended for companionship. God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Gen. 2:18, 20). Third, marriage is intended for pleasure (See Song of Solomon; Heb. 13:4, quoted earlier). The blessings of marriage are abundant. When the writer of wisdom described his awe of God’s created order, he included marriage, saying,

There are three things which are too wonderful for me,  
Four which I do not understand:  
The way of an eagle in the sky,  
The way of a serpent on a rock,  
The way of a ship in the middle of the sea,  
*And the way of a man with a maid* (Prov. 30:18-19, NASB, emphasis mine).



From B. Carter & M. McGoldrick, p. 373. “New Data” from J. Gottman, p. 16.

Does the present condition of marriage in the United States fit the beautiful picture presented in Scripture? The emphasis many people place upon the wedding ceremony seems to anticipate marriage as a blessing. A recent study even stated that ninety-three percent of Americans rate “having a happy marriage” as one of their most important objectives in life, and more than seventy percent believe that marriage involves a life-long commitment that should only be ended under extreme circumstances (Waite & Gallagher as cited in Carroll & Doherty, p. 105). Nevertheless, fifty percent of first marriages and sixty onepercent of second marriages end in divorce. Sadly, the state of marriage today does not match the design of marriage spoken of in the Bible.

### **Divorce**

Divorce has devastating effects. According to Michelle Weiner-Davis, a clinical social worker and popular marriage therapist and writer, something is changing about divorce in our society. She commented,

I believe that people are beginning to realize how devastating divorce is—emotionally, financially and spiritually—for everyone involved. With enough time under our belts to have observed the results of rampant divorce, we are beginning to recognize the price we have paid for the freedom of disposable marriages (p. 27).

This author calls attention to the perception many people apparently have of marriage. We think in terms of “disposable” marriages. Why prepare for marriage? “If this marriage does not work out, then I can get a divorce and try again,” many say to themselves. But for Christians, this response will not do! God still hates divorce (Mal. 2:16). Christians may not get a divorce for just any reason (Mt. 5:35; 19:6-9; 1 Cor. 7:10-16). Marriage is honorable among all (Heb. 13:4).

### **Societal Awareness**

Secular researchers are coming to the same conclusions that ministers and other church leaders have held for many years: people need to prepare better for marriage. Social policy in the United States is beginning to address the

troublesome state of marriage. President Bush's welfare policy includes strong support for strengthening marriages. According to a CNN.com report posted February 27, 2002, "His proposal includes \$300 million for programs that promote marriage." Eligible programs include marriage enrichment and premarital counseling and education.

God's way once again proves to be the best way. Instead of throwing marriage away, people are beginning to see the importance of protecting and promoting marriage. One study observed,

The current state of marriage in the United States is troublesome, because a growing body of research shows that successful marriages promote mental, physical, and family health, whereas conflicted and unstable marriages undermine well-being and incur large social and financial costs for communities (Carroll & Doherty, p. 105).

The world is beginning to recognize the need to prepare for marriage. Christian men and women planning to marry need to recognize the importance of getting it right the first time, that their marriage is not disposable, and that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

### **Premarital Counseling**

Preparing for marriage is really about developing a realistic set of expectations for marriage. Its concept underlies the instruction for older women to teach the younger women (Tit. 2:3-5). The counseling process is often facilitated by a premarital counselor—often parents, grandparents, ministers, or other church leaders. The essential qualification of any premarital counselor is experience in a successful marriage. Beyond this key qualification, specialized knowledge (i.e. what the Bible teaches about marriage) and a degree of objectivity and impartiality may also be important characteristics of a premarital counselor. For example, future in-laws do not always provide objective and impartial advice. A trusted third party, on the other hand, may help a couple prepare for managing relationships with in-laws.

The history of premarital counseling and education in the United States began among religious institutions. In 1992 H. Norman Wright

said, "Twenty-five years ago the concept of marital preparation and individual premarital counseling was in its infancy" (p. 21). Adding the eleven years that have since elapsed, we are now in the 36th year of premarital counseling and education development. This is not to say that no such thing as premarital education or counseling existed before the organized movements of the late 60's. Parents, grandparents, ministers, and other community leaders have performed some kind of premarital counseling and education throughout the centuries. Abraham may have offered the first bit of premarital counseling when he told his servant, "...you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac" (Gen. 24:4).

In our part of the world, the days of arranged marriage ended long ago. While parents might not choose a spouse for their son or daughter, the next best thing is to provide some kind of premarital counseling and education. Traditional sources of premarital counseling and education continue to be useful, but in view of the greater challenges marriage must overcome in our present situation, premarital prevention programs at the individual and congregational levels are appropriate. For Christians, the natural support system is the church. Therefore, congregations must be prepared to do more than provide a building and a minister for the wedding ceremony. The church must provide education and counseling for Christian men and women who are preparing for marriage.

Premarital prevention programs may be delivered in different formats. First, at the individual level the form of delivery is typically premarital couple counseling (i.e. a series of conjoint counseling sessions with a minister or counselor). Second, if there are a number of couples planning to marry at one time, premarital counseling and education may be provided in a group format. Third, premarital education and enrichment programs may be provided either in groups or congregational assemblies (i.e. special services devoted to educating Christians with biblical teaching on marriage and family life).

The difference between counseling and education is sometimes blurred. A simple definition of counseling may help clear up the differences. Counseling is helping people "manage specific problems, prevent difficulties, and accelerate development" (Vacc & Loesch as cited in Capuzzi & Gross, p. 333). Education does not require gathering specific information from persons about their problems, difficulties, or development. Education is simply pro-

viding people with information that applies to a given population (e.g. couples planning to marry).

According to the Scriptures, we are to help others by providing a careful balance of teaching and encouragement. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, saying, "...we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28). Preaching, warning, and teaching are the methods employed by ministers of the gospel to help Christians mature in Christ. Jay Adams is noted for his confrontational approach to counseling where he "nouthetically confronts" people who are sinning by living disorderly or shirking their responsibilities. The Greek word translated "warning" in Colossians 1:28 is **nouthetountes**. **The New Analytical Greek Lexicon** defines **noutheteo** as "to put in mind; to admonish, warn" (Perschbacher, p. 286). Adams argues for the central place of nouthetic confrontation in Christian counseling.

Adams counters much of the humanistic and naturalistic tendencies in secular psychology and counseling by insisting that people take responsibility for their sins and turn to the guidance of biblical teachings. Nevertheless, he fails to balance nouthetic confrontation with other methods of helping Christians manage specific problems, difficulties, and developmental issues. Larry Crabb notes that Paul does instruct the church to nouthetically confront those in sin, but "...he also instructed them to comfort people who were despondent or fainthearted" (p. 147). Crabb continues,

The Greek word for comfort is **paramutheo** and literally means to "speak close." It was used to describe an emotional expression of support and love without a hint of confrontational rebuke. To harshly confront a fainthearted person not only would be cruel but also positively harmful. Paul also advised them to hold strongly onto those who were weak. The thought seems to be that some people need to borrow from another's strength on occasion. Other encouragements to bear each other's burdens support the idea that a local body of believers is to be an interdependent fellowship including confrontation, supportive encouragement, strong assistance, and likely a host of other behaviors. Counseling then includes far more than confrontation and sometimes may not include confrontation at all (p. 147).

Another factor that Adams seems to leave out of his counseling paradigm is the broad field of resources Paul relies upon in preaching, warning, and teaching. Paul says that we preach, "...warning every man and teaching every man *in all wisdom*" (Col. 1:28—emphasis mine). Wisdom is gained from the revelation of God's Word. For the Christian, God's Word is the ultimate source of authority in all matters. Nevertheless, wisdom is also gained by attending to the created order and nature of the universe, including the created order and nature of human behavior. The Book of Proverbs focuses on this aspect of wisdom. Apparently, wisdom about life may be gained by careful observation and meditation upon the fixed order and patterns of the natural and social world (Prov. 3:19-20; 8:22-36; 24:30-34; cf. Jer. 18:18; 31:35-36; 33:25; Ezek. 7:26).

Christian ministers, teachers and other church leaders who provide premarital counseling or any form of counsel to other Christians must realize the wisdom of employing various methods of preaching, warning, teaching, and encouraging in counseling. And while the Scriptures are the ultimate resource and authority for competent counsel, other resources may be useful when employed effectively and appropriately within a biblical framework. For example, active listening is a basic counseling skill that anyone who provides counseling should learn. The skills involved in active listening are consistent with biblical teaching. James said, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak" (Jas. 1:19). Active listening skills wonderfully apply this biblical principle.

Another example of utilizing practical resources to apply biblical principles is found in anger management skills or methods of conflict resolution. The Apostle Paul wrote, " 'Be angry, and do not sin': do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:26-27). Anger management methods often help people channel their anger into constructive and positive outlets, instead of destructive and negative outlets. Essentially, following a good anger management program will help people follow the Apostle's teaching.

The available resources for premarital counseling are so numerous that it would be impossible to conduct an exhaustive review in one presentation. A significant review of the effectiveness of premarital prevention programs may be found in the April 2003 issue of **Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies**

(Carroll & Doherty). The study revealed that “the average participant in a premarital program tends to experience about a 30% increase in measures of outcome success” (p. 105). This research is highly significant, especially in the face of a fifty to sixty percent divorce rate. This means that the average person who participates in some form of premarital counseling and education is more likely to experience a successful marriage than the majority of people who do not receive premarital counseling. This study also shows that premarital prevention programs that address conflict negotiation are found more consistently effective than other programs. Another consistent factor of effective premarital prevention programs is varied delivery formats (i.e. group, individual, weekend retreats, etc.).

An old saying says, “It doesn’t really matter what you do; as long as you work at it, it will work for you.” In a sense, this old saying applies to premarital counseling and education. Couples will gain something by going through most premarital prevention programs, regardless of the structure, delivery format, or methods employed. The content of premarital counseling and education is more important, however. As we noted from the current research, conflict negotiation is essential to a consistently effective premarital prevention program. H. Norman Wright mentions a number of issues that are important content areas for premarital counseling and education. He says,

Building a good marriage means a person must take time to redefine roles, beliefs, and behaviors and negotiate the differences with his/her partner. Money, time, power, family traditions, friends, vocations, and use of space in the home are just a few of the issues that need to be negotiated (p. 12).

Other important content areas include commitment, communication, understanding gender differences, and so on. Recent research shows that people in happy marriages will have the following seven characteristics:

- Healthy expectations of marriage
- A realistic concept of love
- A positive attitude and outlook toward life
- The ability to communicate their feelings

- An understanding and acceptance of their gender differences
- The ability to make decisions and settle arguments
- A common spiritual foundation and goal

Since people in happy marriages tend to exhibit characteristics that fall into these seven general content areas, it follows that effective premarital prevention programs cover these areas as well (Parrott & Parrott).

### **Marriage Myths**

Many couples enter marriage with unrealistic expectations based upon what Parrott & Parrott call “marriage myths.” For this reason, many couples go through a period of disillusionment. In Old Testament times, a newly married couple received a full year of vacation to adjust to married life (See Deut. 24:5) unlike most modern married couples who take very little time to adjust to marriage—another indication of our culture’s failure to appreciate marriage.

One especially troublesome and prevalent marriage myth is the idea that marriage will make two incomplete persons whole. Someone will say, “My spouse will complete me.” One of the divine purposes in marriage is companionship (Gen. 2:18, 20), and healthy relationships are effective for personal growth (See Prov. 27:17), but no human relationship, not even the marriage relationship, can make a person whole or complete. Only in Christ Jesus are we made whole (Jn. 5:6).

A second common marriage myth is the idea that everything good in a relationship will only get better. This marriage myth ignores the “for better or worse” part of the traditional marriage vow. A couple entering marriage with this kind of thinking expects marriage to be easy, not requiring patience, forbearance, and hard work.

A third common marriage myth is the idea that everything bad in a person’s life disappears after he or she is married. This myth is perfectly expressed in the children’s fable about Cinderella. Many people who have little self-worth get married expecting to feel better about themselves, but whatever was missing before marriage is often still missing after marriage. Often, a person operating under this particular marriage myth takes on the personality of the other spouse. His interests, his priorities, his values become her

interests, her priorities, her values. This kind of over-accommodation eventually wears thin, and the lack of true emotional intimacy (i.e. companionship) is revealed.

A fourth common marriage myth is the idea that everyone expects the same things in marriage. Someone will say, “My fiancé wants the same things that I want.” Willard F. Harley, who developed an entire system of counseling couples based upon years of experience, concluded that in healthy marriages, couples met each other’s most important emotional needs. But marital problems often occur because we think that our spouses have the same needs as we do—they do not. Harley identifies the top ten emotional needs for men and women. The top five for men and the top five for women do not match, however. Therefore, Harley’s system of marriage counseling involves identifying each spouse’s most important emotional needs and teaching each spouse how to meet the other’s needs.

**Top Five Emotional Needs  
For Men**

Sexual Fulfillment  
Recreational Companionship  
Physical Attractiveness  
Domestic Support  
Admiration

**Top Five Emotional Needs  
For Women**

Affection  
Conversation  
Honesty and Openness  
Financial Support  
Family Commitment

Preparing for marriage should involve a process of debunking these and other marriage myths. Gaining a realistic set of expectations for marriage is the goal of premarital counseling. For example, a realistic and biblical understanding of love is needed in marriage. Love may be defined in several ways: romantic feelings, sexuality, friendship, meeting needs, or a self-sacrificial action for the good of another (See 1 Cor. 13:1-8). Vine’s **Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words** offers this explanation,

Again, to “love” (phileo) life, from an undue desire to preserve it, forgetful of the real object of living, meets with the Lord’s reproof, John 12:25. On the contrary, to “love” life (agapao) as used in 1 Peter 3:10, is to consult the true interests of living. Here the word phileo would be quite inappropriate.

Couples preparing to marry also need to understand gender differences. Moses stated, “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27). The Apostle Peter wrote, “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7). Recognizing that men and women have different needs, process thoughts and emotions differently, and are given different roles to fulfill in marriage is essential to marital preparation. The apostle’s teaching is clear: men and women are equal, but different.

### **Communication Skills**

Helping couples learn communication skills is another part of marital preparation. According to John Gottman, communicating and negotiating conflict without criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stone-walling will avoid marital distress and increase the strength of the marriage. Using an “I” statement in communication is also helpful. An “I” statement non-judgmentally communicates one’s feeling about something another has done. For example, instead of saying, “You don’t appreciate anything I do for you,” a wife might say to her husband, “I feel unappreciated when you are late for dinner.” This simple technique tends to prevent angry outbursts and defensiveness in marital communication.

Marriage is a major transition in the life-cycle (Carter & McGoldrick). Preparing for this transition includes developing a shared vision—a shared set of goals—and providing support for each other. Issues often discussed by couples preparing for marriage are the desired number of children, parenting concerns, an acceptable standard of living, money management and division of labor, relationships with in-laws, roles and family rules. The couple preparing for marriage should work out a financial budget and a parenting plan, including the number of children and expectations regarding child discipline. All of these issues and any others that are important to the particular couple preparing for marriage may be discussed and thoroughly planned out to create a shared vision for marriage based upon wise counsel and biblical teaching.

### Attitude

Perhaps, the most important part of marital preparation is developing an optimistic attitude and outlook. Unfortunately, we cannot prepare for every problem and bump along the way. Yet, the Scripture says, "And whoever trusts in the LORD, happy is he" (Prov. 16:20). God designed marriage as a blessing to men and women. Select a mate who will help you in life: a mate who will help you be a Christian, a mate who will help you be a faithful husband or wife, a mate who will help you be a faithful father or mother. Be the kind of person who will help your mate be a Christian, a husband or wife, a father or mother. Then, seek out wise counsel. And finally, trust in God, and enjoy the blessings of marriage.

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## **THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

*Matt Trent*

A promise is an important event in a relationship. It presents an opportunity to learn about the trustworthiness of another. A broken promise is devastating and makes doubt a part of the relationship. On the other hand, a promise kept is wonderful because both parties grow closer as they grow in trust.

In Matthew 16:18-19 Jesus made some promises to His disciples. He promised them that He was going to build a church that could not be destroyed. He also promised Peter that He would give him the keys of the kingdom. If these promises were not kept, the disciples would be devastated.

Jesus kept His promises, however. We read of the fulfillment of these promises in the book of Acts. Specifically, we read of Peter being given the keys to the kingdom on two separate occasions. The first time Peter opened the door was in Acts 2 when the gospel was first preached to the Jews. The second time Peter opened the door was in Acts 10 when he first preached the gospel to the Gentiles. Jesus kept his promise to Peter. How did Peter know when to use the keys? Luke makes it clear that Jesus told Peter exactly the right moment to open the door by using the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The primary purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was to indicate the appropriate times for the gospel to be preached to the world.

## **Other Positions**

This position about the purpose of the Holy Spirit does not enjoy unanimous acceptance in the religious world today. The number of alternative positions is amazing. One popular position views the baptism of the Holy Spirit as “a second working of grace.” Howard Winters explains the general position:

According to certain theories (and because they vary I will have to state them in a very general way) forgiveness of sins (salvation or pardon) is a work of grace that removes the guilt of sin. But the total job is not yet done because the love of and desire to sin, along with its stains, are still there. It is possible to remove them, but it takes a second working of grace, a working so great that it separates one from the power and temptation to sin to the extent that he can live above it and without committing it. The Holy Spirit, in a miraculous way (usually called the baptism of the Holy Spirit), comes in and performs directly a second work, overwhelming the human spirit, taking charge of the individual, and removing the love of and desire for evil, thus freeing the soul from all stains of sin—the stains that remain after pardon!”

The problem of this position originates in a misunderstanding of the “double cure.” The phrase “double cure” means that as Christians we are set free from the penalties of sin and from the life of sin by the grace of God. The term “justification” is used to describe our freedom from the penalties of sin while the term “sanctification” is used to describe our freedom from the life of sin. (This concept seems to be the general outline of the first half of the book of Romans. Romans 1-5 teaches that we are justified in Christ, and Romans 6-8 teaches that we are sanctified in Christ.) Do these events occur at different times? Can we be free from the penalty of sin and ruled by sin at the same time? No. This teaching is not found in the New Testament. We cannot be free from the penalty of sin and live under its rule at the same time.

Others view baptism of the Holy Spirit as something that is experienced at the moment of water baptism. According to this view, both baptisms occur at the same time (Jividen, p. 32). Although several “conservative” writers defend this position (Cottrell, p. 94; Boatman, pp. 112-115), a fundamental flaw exists—in Ephesians 4:5 Paul taught that “there is one

baptism.” Baptism in the Holy Spirit and baptism in water are not the same baptism. We can have only one of them today.

Although there are many other positions concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit, these two positions are the positions we are most likely to encounter today. Nevertheless, a clear understanding of the two events recorded in the book of Acts will show that the two occurrences of the baptism of the Holy Spirit were extraordinary events used by God to open the kingdom to the world.

### **Pre-Pentecostal Expectations**

God, in His infinite wisdom, knew exactly when and how to reveal knowledge. We find various clues about the nature of the new age scattered throughout the writings of the Old Testament. In these writings, God gradually defined the role of the Holy Spirit in the new age. The baptism of the Holy Spirit took place only after God had spent many years preparing the world for the gospel.

Beginning with the prophets, God told men to expect that the Spirit of God would be an important part of the New Testament age. For example, in Isaiah 44:3 God promised that He would “pour My Spirit on your descendants.” A more detailed prophecy is found in Joel 2:28-29, later quoted in Peter’s sermon in Acts 2.

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

By God’s direction, the prophets declared that the Spirit would play a new role in the New Testament age. These passages began to define what the people of God should expect in the age to come.

After four hundred years without a word from God, the people finally heard God’s will again, this time spoke of by John the Baptist. Like many of the prophets before him, John taught that the Spirit would be an important part of the New Testament age. In the gospel accounts, John spoke of the Great One to come after him, a Man greater than himself. What great thing

would this Man do? “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Mt 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16).

In John 1:32-33, we learn why John placed such a strong emphasis on the Spirit when speaking of the coming Messiah.

I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.”

John was directed by God to watch for the descent of the Spirit. Whoever the Spirit descended upon was the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. According to the gospel accounts, John saw this descending happen the day Jesus was baptized and consequently knew that Jesus was the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

We must glean two important points from John’s teaching in order to accurately define what they were taught to expect. First, the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the baptism of fire were clearly contrasted with the water baptism John himself practiced. Second, Jesus was the agent who would administer the baptism of the Holy Spirit. As far as John’s teaching was concerned, man’s only role would be to receive what Jesus would give.

Now we must look at the teaching of Jesus. In His teaching we will find God revealing exactly what role the Holy Spirit was to play. First, Jesus taught the apostles about the coming Comforter. The Comforter was known as “the Spirit of truth,” and His job was to guide the apostles “into all truth” (Jn. 14:16-17; 16:13). As a result of the coming of the Spirit of truth, the apostles were going to “bear witness” (Jn. 15:26-27). Until the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, they would not know “all truth” and would be unable to “bear witness” as Jesus expected them to.

The second expectation regarding the Spirit developed in the teaching of Jesus was the expectation of “power.” In Mark 9:1 Jesus promised that some with Him would “see the kingdom of God present with power” before they died. In Luke 24:49 Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem until they were “endued with power from on high.”

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He summarized their pre-Pentecostal expectations. In Acts 1:5 He told the apostles they were not to depart from Jerusalem, “for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” In Acts 1:8 He said, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” By divine design, the apostles were waiting for the baptism of the Holy Spirit at which time they would receive power from God and would be witnesses for Jesus.

### **The Day of Pentecost**

The day of Pentecost took place on Sunday, fifty days after the Passover. Jesus was on the earth for forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). After His ascension, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, just as Jesus had commanded them (Acts 1:14). There were also 120 other disciples with them in Jerusalem (Acts 1:15). The most significant event during this period is the appointment of Matthias as an apostle in place of Judas (Acts 1:26).

One might wonder what would have been on the mind of the apostles as they sat together. Perhaps they thought of Jesus’ resurrection that had occurred seven weeks before. Perhaps they thought of Jesus’ ascension to heaven that had occurred just a few days before. Whatever they thought of would soon be understood in a new light. In Acts 2:1-4, on a Sunday morning in Jerusalem, the calm was disrupted by the power of God.

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The disruption began with a sound from heaven. This sound was like the sound of a powerful wind. Then they saw a sheet of light that broke off into what looked like tongues of fire (Reese, p. 48). These tongues of fire descend-

ed upon the apostles who then began to speak with other tongues (languages). Receiving the ability to speak in tongues meant that the apostles were able to speak in the native languages of their audience (Acts 2:8, 11). These were languages the apostles had been unable to speak before the descent of the Spirit. (For a more detailed study on speaking in tongues see Jimmy Jividen's **Glossolalia: From God or Man?**) This baptism of the Holy Spirit was the power from on high that Jesus had promised the apostles before He went back to heaven.

Some argue that more than just the twelve received this baptism. They point to Acts 1:15 and teach that the 120 disciples must have received the Holy Spirit as well. This argument cannot be true because of these facts:

- Jesus promised the power and the Comforter only to the apostles.
- Only Peter and the eleven offered a defense in Acts 2:14.
- Acts 2:1-4 uses only pronouns. What is the closest corresponding noun? It is found in Acts 1:26 where Matthias was numbered “with the eleven apostles.” Acts 2:1 could logically read, “the apostles were all with one accord in one place.”
- Those who spoke in tongues were all Galileans (Acts 2:7). We know that all of the apostles were from Galilee (Judas, dead at the time of these events, was the only one of the original twelve not from Galilee). It is unlikely that all of the 120 disciples would have been Galileans.
- According to Acts 2:42, the new Christians continued in the “apostles’ doctrine.” If the others also received the Spirit and spoke in tongues, why is the teaching referred to as the “apostles’ doctrine”?
- According to Luke’s record, only the apostles performed miracles until Acts 6:8. Stephen only began doing great miracles after the apostles laid hands on him in Acts 6:6.

These facts indicate that only the apostles received this baptism. The expectations designed by God before Pentecost were fully met by this one event. The apostles were now able to tell all the Jews that Jesus saves. Remember, however, that the prophecy of Joel promised that the Spirit would be poured out on “all flesh” (as quoted by Peter in Acts 2:17). This promise was only partly fulfilled when the sun set on the day of Pentecost.

### **The Case of Cornelius**

In Acts 9, the church had long since spread beyond the borders of Jerusalem. According to Acts 9:31, there were churches throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. Peter was traveling among these churches, strengthening them and performing miracles to confirm the gospel when a message came from Joppa that a Christian woman, full of good works, had died. Peter went to Joppa, raised her from the dead, and stayed in Joppa with Simon the tanner many days (Acts 9:42).

Meanwhile, approximately thirty miles north, in the city of Caesarea, a man named Cornelius was fasting and praying. In a vision, Cornelius received instruction to send to Joppa for Simon Peter (Acts 10:4-6). The next day, while Peter was on the housetop to pray, he fell into a trance and saw heaven open and unclean animals presented to him. The lesson God wanted Peter to learn was “What God has cleansed you must not call common” (Acts 10:15). This vision happened three times (Acts 10:16). As Peter was trying to understand the meaning of the vision, the men from Cornelius knocked at the door. Perfect timing!

This event took place several years after the establishment of the church at Jerusalem. Jerry Cutter explained,

If we assume that Paul was converted about three years after the church was established, and then spent some three years in Arabia and Damascus after his conversion (Gal. 1:17-21), then we have a lapse of six years with no mention being made of the Gentiles. After these six years, Paul returned to Tarsus (Acts 9:30). For the next three or four years he preached in Syria and Cilicia before being brought to Antioch by Barnabas. Claudius Caesar, mentioned in Acts 11:28, ruled from A.D. 41-54. The dearth mentioned in this verse took place about A.D. 44, and about this time Greeks or Gentiles are mentioned as

becoming Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:19-21). Thus, it looks like the church was eight to ten years old before the gospel was preached to uncircumcised Gentiles.

So, about ten years after Pentecost, Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius where he found a very warm welcome. It is clear that Cornelius and his household were happy to welcome a man of God into their home and were anxious to hear what he had to say. Peter's sermon was just getting started when, according to Acts 10:44-48, the following events occurred:

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

Peter's sermon briefly detailed who Jesus was. In support of these claims, Peter appealed to the prophets and to his personal experience. Just as Peter mentioned that anyone who believes in Jesus could have his sins forgiven, he was interrupted by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We will never know how he would have finished this sermon.

According to Luke's record, the Holy Spirit fell upon them and the gift, which was the Holy Spirit, was poured upon them. Just as John had indicated earlier, man did nothing in the baptism of the Holy Spirit except to receive what God gave. With this event, Joel's prophecy was fulfilled. God's Spirit had now been poured out on "all flesh," meaning Jew as well as Gentile.

The result of this baptism at Cornelius' house was the ability to speak in tongues, meaning that they spoke in languages they had never studied before, just as in Acts 2. If Luke had intended to describe a different phenomenon, he would have either used a different word or added commentary to explain the new event. He did neither, so we must conclude the events of Acts 2 and Acts 10 were the same.

Was the household of Cornelius saved without water baptism? Remember that Cornelius was told to send for a man who would tell him what he *must do* (Acts 10:6). Also remember that the *only* thing Peter commanded them to do was to be baptized in water (Acts 10:48). Putting these verses together, how can anyone conclude that water baptism was not mandatory for Cornelius? It was mandatory. Cornelius would have been lost if he rejected water baptism.

Word about Peter's time with the uncircumcised men quickly made its way to Jerusalem. In Acts 11 Peter returned to Jerusalem where he was met with strong opposition. His response is found in Acts 11:15-18:

“And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.”

As soon as Peter reported this event, the opposition was silenced. Their understanding of this event must forever define our understanding of it. According to their response, the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred in the household of Cornelius so that God could reveal that He had opened the door of the kingdom to the Gentiles. This must also be our conclusion as to the purpose of their baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Was the baptism of the Holy Spirit the same on both occasions? Peter said, “God gave them the same gift as He gave us.” According to Thayer, the Greek word translated “same” (“like” in the KJV) means “equal, in quantity or quality” (Thayer, p. 307). In what sense were they the same? In both cases Jesus administered the baptism, the ability to speak in tongues resulted, and God's purpose of having Peter open the door of the kingdom was confirmed. In these three ways, the apostles and the household of Cornelius received the same gift.

The fact that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was God's way of telling Peter to open the door of the kingdom is given more support by Peter in

Acts 15:7-9. Once again, at Jerusalem Peter spoke in defense of the Gentiles by describing what he saw.

Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged [bore witness to<0151>mt] them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

One of God's purposes in the new age was to take down the middle wall of separation and make one nation of all men. Jesus' death broke down the wall and made this possible (Eph. 2:14-18). The baptism of the Holy Spirit, witnessed in the house of Cornelius, gave irrefutable evidence to the first century Jewish mind that this peace was God's will. God had clearly opened the door of His kingdom to all men.

### **Holy Spirit Baptism Today?**

Are men today baptized in the Holy Spirit? In the New Testament we read of seven baptisms:

1. Baptism of Moses under that cloud and in the sea (1 Cor. 10:2)
2. Baptism of Jesus by John (Mt. 3:13-17)
3. Baptism of repentance by John (Mt. 3:2)
4. Baptism of suffering (Mk. 10:39)
5. Baptism with fire (Mt. 3:11)
6. Baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; 11:16)
7. Baptism in the name of Jesus (Mk. 16:16)

As we noted earlier, however, Ephesians 4:5 teaches that there is one baptism. Which baptism was Paul referring to? In order to answer this question we must remember that when Paul first preached in Ephesus, he found a group of people who knew only the baptism of John. Upon learning this, these men were taught by Paul about Jesus Christ. "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5). The church in Ephesus knew that the one baptism was baptism in the name of Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

In Matthew 16:19, Jesus promised to give the keys of the kingdom unto Peter. By using the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Jesus told Peter when to use those keys. In Acts 2, Peter unlocked the door for the Jews. In Acts 10, Peter unlocked the door for the Gentiles. Through both events, Peter opened the doors of the kingdom to all men according to the will of God.

All three members of the Godhead were able to work with men to accomplish great things. H. Leo Boles summarized the harmony in the Godhead when he said, "In every work effected by the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit in common, the power to bring forth proceeds from the Father, the power to arrange from the Son, the power to perfect from the Holy Spirit" (Boles, p. 137). We can see that harmony in this study.

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## **ECUADOR**

*Jonathan Bunner*

It is hard to believe that Marycruz, Sarai, Abraham, and I have been in Ecuador for a year. On December the 10th we celebrated our first anniversary here in Ambato.. Time really does fly!

In a year four families were converted from the “cups” church and three people were baptized. In January brother Segundo Villacis was converted from the cups group and along with him came his radio program. He and his program have been a great help for the work in Ambato. I admire brother Villacis because he is blind yet every morning he does the radio program live from 5 am to 6 am. Besides brother Villacis, brothers Segundo Chiliquinga and Vicente Villafuerte and their families were converted from the cups church.

All three of these men are good teachers and have been an excellent help to me and the work in Ambato. Also in January brother Hernando Motta, who is a full time preacher, was converted from the cups church. Brothers Juan Rodriquez, Mike Criswell, my father, and I met brother Motta in Quito in November of 2002. We studied with him and he took some time to think about what we had studied, and in January made his stand with us. Brother Motta is now starting a new work in Machala, Ecuador.

Here in Ambato we have Bible studies with 33 people. The interesting part is none of these 33 adults are Christians. Of the 33 adults, only 11 have attended worship service at least once. The number of people with whom we have been studying for more than six months is 17. These 33 people come from different religious beliefs, and some do not practice any religion. For

example, we have studies with Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostals, and one Nazarene preacher.

We just finished our first gospel meeting in Ambato. Brother Juan Rodriquez from Mexico did an excellent job preaching God's Word. Brother Juan preached on Friday December the fifth through Sunday the seventh. The meeting was very uplifting to me and all the brethren here in Ambato. We had visitors from the community and a brother from the "cups" church visit us on Saturday. We were very happy that brother Juan, Irma and Amy could come to Ambato. After the gospel meeting, brother Juan stayed in Ambato a few days to help us in our weekly home studies. He was a great help to us in Ambato.

On Thursday, the 11th of December, Juan's family and mine left Ambato for Machala, which is an 8 to 9 hour bus ride. (Machala is 45 minutes from the border with Peru and is the banana capital of the world). That same evening we held a Bible study with three young people who attend a Pentecostal organization. Juan presented an excellent study for them to meditate on. Brother Motta invited other people to a Bible study, but they did not accept his invitation. On Sunday morning our three families worshipped in Machala.

While in Machala we worked hard to get the homepage going once again. Thankfully, Brother Motta's oldest son helped us to get that back online. For several months the homepage was offline, but is back for good.

Please feel free to visit the homepage: **[www.iglesiadecristolatina.com](http://www.iglesiadecristolatina.com)**

Even if you do not speak or understand Spanish, there are several pictures of the work in Ecuador, Peru, Cuba, and Mexico. We are blessed to have several homepages all working together to spread the gospel to a lost world. Thanks to David Risener and many other brethren, the truth is finally reaching places that were neglected before. Two years ago we did not know of any faithful congregations in South America and now there are at least three congregations. Keep up the good work!

We pray that 2004 will bring more lost souls to the truth. Please pray for us in Ecuador and the work all over the world. May God bless you!

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## BOOKNOTES

**The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict.** Josh McDowell. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999.

As a teenager in the California public schools system in the 1970s, my faith was challenged on several fronts by the curriculum that pushed secular humanism, and by teachers and fellow students who had accepted this worldview. Evolution was taught as a fact as certain as the rotundity of the earth. Christianity was portrayed as an anachronism of twentieth century western civilization—it had worn out its usefulness in the sixteenth century. The Bible was held up to contempt as a human work of dubious historicity and antiquated morals.

Thankfully, there were those around me at that time of life who were equipped with the knowledge to help me analyze and understand these attacks on the faith in which I was brought up. One way in which I was helped was I was directed to a number of good books that helped answer the claims of infidelity. One of those books was the original *Evidence That Demands A Verdict* written by Josh McDowell and published in the early 1970s. This compendium of “Christian Evidences” was an eye-opening revelation—there were rock-solid responses to the propaganda of the secular humanists, and there was ample evidence for believing that the Bible is reliable as the Word of God. Subsequently, McDowell went to write *Evidence II*, a book that took a closer look at the claims of “higher criticism,” and several other books in the fields of apologetics, marriage, and youth issues. *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* combines the original two volumes and incorporates a

great deal of additional material from McDowell's other works on Christian evidences and apologetics.

I recommend this book to anyone wanting an introductory text to the field of Christian evidences and apologetics. It covers textual reliability of the Old and New Testaments, presents an excellent defense of the inspiration of Scripture, the Deity and resurrection of Jesus, fulfillment of prophecy, archaeological confirmation of the historicity of Scripture, and critically examines the theories of biblical criticism that dominate modern, liberal biblical scholarship. The work features copious quotations from many significant works that have been published in these areas, giving the reader access to a virtual library of books in one volume.

The only real fault I find with the book, and it is a major flaw, is its inclusion of the "Four Spiritual Laws" in a concluding chapter. This section presents a plan of salvation that is unscriptural. For this reason I have never recommended this book to unbelievers, choosing instead to digest its information and impart it myself to the best of my ability. I would like to commend it, however, to the attention of sound brethren who can digest the wealth of wholesome material that is here, and use it in their teaching and personal evangelism. There is a great need to be better equipped to put up a defense of the truth of the Bible in our public and private teaching, and this book can be a major help in accomplishing that end if brethren will use it wisely. *Smith Bibens*