

**NEVER: LEAVE  
THE LORD**

**Thirtieth Annual  
Truth In Love  
Lectureship**

**Jonathan Burns, Editor and Director**

**Hosted by the  
East Hill Church of Christ**



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# Introduction

**G**od has always directed His people by His Word and has used His Word to communicate to mankind. The Lord in his marvelous wisdom revealed His will to direct us, correct us, and inspire us to look for a “city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). There is no doubt to the Bible Student that God is concerned about our eternity (John 3:16-17, 1 Peter 1:18-20).

Unfortunately, there is one who is trying to distract, deceive, destroy, and disrupt our lives in Christ. We are told to be sober and vigilant against our adversary the devil (1 Peter 5:8). This adversary uses some very simple tricks to allow our minds to wander from the Holy Scriptures. His main goal is to get us to Leave the Lord in just the smallest areas. He just needs us to give up one small law of God and live in the lifestyle of sin (1 John 3:4).

Thankfully, mankind has a choice. We can serve God or follow after the riches of this world (Matthew 6:24). Thankfully we have the opportunity to choose to follow after the “kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33). May it never be said of God’s People that they Left The Lord.

A very large Thank You is in order to Joe Christopher. Joe in a large way developed the theme and the lesson titles for this the 30<sup>th</sup> Edition of Truth In Love. Joe serves as one of the Elders at East Hill and is a great friend of this lectureship Director.

May we dedicate our lives, our families, and our congregations to: “Never: Leave The Lord.”

Jonathan Burns  
Editor and Director

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## Dedication

**O**n August 31, 2014 I stepped into the pulpit of the East Hill Church of Christ to deliver my first sermon as the new minister. I am extremely blessed to have a loving wife who has been by my side for now almost nine years. I would not have it any other way. Now some years later we have two children, a dog, a cat, and a family that is bigger than we could have ever imagined. For Myself, Kelley, Charlie, and Colson it has been our privilege to worship, study, and live with a group of people who desire to go to Heaven.

This 30<sup>th</sup> edition of the Truth In Love Lectureship book is dedicated to the people of the East Hill Church of Christ. A work such as Truth In Love does not exist for 30 years without a group of people standing behind the work. Truth In Love is a work! Not only does it take work to make this spiritual feast exist but it takes work to support, encourage, continue, and help make everything happen.

Paul the apostle gave a strong commendation to the church of Christ at Thessalonica: “For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing” (1 Thessalonians 1:8). The same can be said about the congregation that meets at 509 East Madison Street, Pulaski, Tennessee. Truth In Love has been a symbol of the Truth that must be proclaimed. May we continue to support good works and spread the Good News.

Jonathan Burns  
Editor and Director

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# NEVER LEAVE THE LORD

## Chapter 1

### NEVER CHOOSE PRIDE

*Billy Bland*

**T**he theme of this Lectureship is “**Never Leave The Lord.**” Just as many side roads lead off the main road, there are many ways to leave the Lord. James wrote, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10). John stated, “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. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15–17). Some may not be so easily led away by the lust of the flesh or the lust of the eyes, but may succumb to the sin of “the pride of life.” It is possible to leave the Lord by giving in to all three of the avenues listed by John or he may leave the Lord by just one of these listed by John. The child of God must do as the apostle Paul. He said, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

The topic discussed in this section is “**Never Choose Pride.**” In the long ago the wise man wrote, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud” (Proverbs 16:18–19). History is replete with examples of those who became lifted up with pride and fell. Thomas Adam declared, “Pride thrust Nebuchadnezzar out of men’s society, Saul out of his kingdom, Adam out of paradise, Haman out of court, and Lucifer out of heaven.’ It is no wonder, then, that Augustine named pride as the greatest of all sins, pointing out that when man is proud he exalts himself and displaces God” (Winkler, 46).

The word “pride” can be used in two ways:

(1) The good sense. In this sense, pride is synonymous with self-respect and personal dignity. Such is admirable and necessary. (Matthew 22:39; Romans 12:2; 1 Timothy 4:12). We must avoid self-contempt. Thus, let us never reason, “I’m a nobody.” He who has no self-respect demands no respect from others. Yet, God wants us to demand respect of others. (Acts 2:47).

(2) The bad sense. In this sense, pride is synonymous with self-esteem, self-importance, arrogance and all such similar vices. This is the pride that Webster defines as, “the quality or state of being proud: as inordinate self-esteem: conceit.” Let us make sure that the pride that we possess is the kind that keeps the chin and head up and not the nose! (Ibid).

### **ABILITY TO CHOOSE**

Man can choose the way he will live as well as the disposition he possesses as he goes through life. Sometimes people “excuse” their sins of disposition by saying “that’s just the way I am.” This is sometimes stated by one who has been obnoxious and rude to others and rather than repenting of his behavior and apologizing to the one offended, he simply excuses his sin by saying “that is just the way I am.” It may be true that such is the way he is, but he needs to change. God does not excuse sin by our saying, “that is just the way we are.” One may fail to appreciate the fact has he has a choice. God has not unconditionally predestinated certain individuals to be prideful and others to be humble.

After Adam and Eve were created of God and placed in Eden the Bible records, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17). Adam and Eve had a choice. The serpent came and tempted Eve. Satan cast doubt in the Word of God in the mind of Eve. The Bible says, “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Genesis 3:6). Because Adam and Eve chose to sin, they lost their state of innocence and were cast out of the garden of Eden.

Moses told Israel they could choose. “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). Likewise, Joshua later said, “And if it seem evil unto you

to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). These are just a few of the many times the Word of God shows us that man can choose. God not only knows what we choose but why we choose it. He knows our hearts and understands our thoughts. The Psalmist said, “O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off” (Psalm 139:1-2). When choosing an apostle to take the place of Judas, the Bible says, “And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen” (Acts 1:24). Consequently, God not only sees our actions but He understands our thoughts and knows our hearts. He knows whether we are poor in spirit or lifted with pride. Just as with any other sin, we must work on overcoming the sin of pride.

### **THE SIN OF PRIDE**

Among the sins that God hates is “**a proud look.**” Solomon stated, “These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:16-19). God not only hates the sin of a proud look (“haughty eyes” ASV), but inspiration says it is an **abomination to God**. The word translated “abomination” means a “detestable thing, loathsome thing, abomination” (Kohlenberger/Mounce). Solomon wrote, “Every one that is **proud in heart** is an

**abomination to the Lord:** though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished” (Proverbs 16:5). And, “The Lord will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow” (Proverbs 15:25). There are many examples of pride’s devastating effects.

**EVE:** “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Genesis 3:6). Among the devil’s enticement to Eve was that the tree was “to be desired to make one wise,” she partook of the forbidden fruit, along with her husband, Adam, and they fell.

**CAIN:** Cain was angry that God accepted his brother Abel’s offering and did not accept his. God even tried to reason with Cain that if he did well he would be accepted. God also warned Cain that sin lay at the door. Rather than humbling himself, repenting of offering a sacrifice not accepted, he killed his brother and then lied unto God.

**SAUL:** When Saul was little in his own sight he was selected of God to be king over Israel. Unfortunately, he allowed pride to enter into his heart and did things according to his own will, rebelled against God Who had selected him, and promoted him to be king. On an occasion when the Philistines were gathered to fight against Israel, Saul waited for Samuel to come to Gilgal to make a sacrifice unto God. When Samuel did not come in the appointed time, Saul took matters into his own hands and offered a sacrifice. Saul was not authorized by God to offer the sacrifice. Samuel confronts Saul regarding this matter. The Bible says: “And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou

camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the Lord: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering” (1 Samuel 13:11–12). Notice that Saul “forced” himself to perform this sacrifice. Rather than heeding to God’s standard regarding who was to offer sacrifices, he forced himself in a disobedient act. “And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee” (1 Samuel 13:13–14). On another occasion, King Saul decided to take matters into his own hands again. The Word of God states, “Samuel also said unto Saul, The Lord sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass” (1 Samuel 15:1–3). God gave explicit statements regarding what to do to the Amalekites (see Deuteronomy 25:17-19 for the background to this). Saul did not do as commanded by the Lord. “And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people



with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly” (1 Samuel 15:7–9). Saul attempted to say he had obeyed the voice of the Lord. “And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?” (1 Samuel 15:13–14). Saul tried to defend his actions, but he was reprovved for his disobedience. “And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king” (1 Samuel 15:22–23). Saul stated he repented for what he had done and how he had feared the people and listened to their voice. However, Saul’s pride was not finished yet. “After David slew Goliath, the women chanted to each other in song, ‘Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands’ (1 Samuel 18:7)... While it may have been inadvisable for the women to draw such a comparison, David had nothing to do with them saying it... Nevertheless, Saul was very wroth and “eyed David from that day forward” (1 Samuel 18:9).” (Clarke, np). Ultimately King Saul would take his own life rather than be killed by the Philistines.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** Nebuchadnezzar was king over Babylon. Babylon was a world empire that came into existence in about 612BC and fell to the Medo-Persians in

about 539BC. One of king Nebuchadnezzar's problems was that he was lifted in pride and thought he himself had built Babylon and became a person who failed to realize that God rules in the affairs of men. "At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" (Daniel 4:29–30). Daniel then writes:

“While the word was in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws” (Daniel 4:31–33).

Nebuchadnezzar's pride caused him to fall. However, King Nebuchadnezzar learned his lesson.

“And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine

understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase” (Daniel 4:34–37).

**JAMES AND JOHN:** The disciples of our Lord have not escaped falling prey to pride. Two of the apostles came to Jesus requesting prominent positions. “And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory” (Mark 10:35–37). Matthew records that their mother was involved in this request. Jesus explained they did not know what they were asking. “But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask:

can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? And be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared” (Mark 10:38–40). This prideful request created trouble among the other apostles. “And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John” (Mark 10:41). Pride can disrupt the harmony of the church today. We are reminded that not all divisions in the body of Christ are the results of faulty interpretations of the Scriptures. Pride, arrogance, and selfishness are not always corrected by a correct hermeneutic. Jesus explains how to be great in His kingdom.

“But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42–45).

**DIOTREPHESES:** To be called a Diotrephe is not a compliment. John the apostle exposed the arrogance of Diotrephe. “I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephe, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us

not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church” (3 John 1:9–10).

**OBSERVATIONS FOR TODAY:** As we study the historical problems related to pride, let us also remember that we can be afflicted with the same sin today. How is pride manifested today?

J. Noel Merideth in the May 5, 1966 issue of the Gospel Advocate suggested the following forms of pride: ... (1) Spiritual pride. The Scribes were guilty of pride in this form (Mk. 12:38,39), as was the Pharisee. (Lk. 18:10-14). Spiritual pride causes one to trust his own virtues rather than the grace of God and the blood of Christ. (Eph. 2:8-10). (2) Intellectual pride. (I Cor. 8: 1-2)... (3) Pride of material things. This pride causes one to trust in his material possessions, talking of me, my and mine, while forgetting that all material blessings flow from God. (I Chron. 29: 12; Jas. 1: 17) ... (4) Social pride. This pride will manifest itself in class, racial and caste arrogance. This is the pride that will cause one to refuse to, or with reluctance, sit by a person who is poor, inexpensively dressed, or who has a menial occupation. (Jas. 2:1-9) (Winkler, 49).

### **OVERCOMING PRIDE**

David said, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11). Jesus applied the Word of God when tempted by Satan. Each time He was tempted, He replied, “it is written” (Matthew 4:1-11). Consequently, if we are to overcome the sin of pride, we must know and apply what God has said about pride and humility. God’s word says, “The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility” (Proverbs 15:33). Along this same line, the Bible says, “A man’s pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit” (Proverbs 29:23).

Moving to the New Testament, one reads that Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Paul instructed:

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:5–11).

James wrote, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:10). Peter said, “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:5–6).

Wendel Winkler gave the following admonition to aid us in overcoming pride. He wrote:

(1) We must come to possess, the attitude of God toward pride (Proverbs 6:16-19). (2) Love will cure pride (I Corinthians 13:4). (3) We must remember that we are but men (Psalm 9:20). (4) We must never forget that we have no sufficiency in and of ourselves; rather, our sufficiency is of God (John 5:30; II Corinthians 3:5). (5) We must avoid thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Romans 12:3; Galations 6:3). (6) We must walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). (7) We must remember that we are debtors, since all we have has obtained through the grace of God and the help of others (I Corinthians 4:7; 15: 10; Deuteronomy 8: 11-20). (8) We must come to glory only in the cross of Christ (Galations G:14). (9) We must crucify self (Galations 2:20). “I” is the middle letter in both pride and sin (50).

### **CONCLUSION**

Let us remember the devastating effects of pride. Also,

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let us remember the virtue of humility. Jesus said, “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:4). Paul wrote, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-3). In answer to Solomon’s prayer, God said, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Let us never choose pride. “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3).



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Never Choose Pride

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# NEVER LEAVE THE LORD

## Chapter 2

### NEVER CHOOSE HATE

*John DeBerry, Jr.*

Cain stood above his brother Abel's lifeless body. He had done it, he had taken matters into his own hands and killed him. How he hated his brother, how he loathed the sight of his smug, angelic, obedient face. God had accepted his brother Abel and had rejected him. It was not fair, not right, and not just. "What's the big deal?", Cain thought. All they were doing was burning up stuff on an altar. Burning up stuff God didn't even need, stuff that he could have used, stuff he had worked hard to cultivate, raise, and harvest. Now God says it's not good enough, while heaping praise on His boy, Abel. How he hated Abel and the very sight of him seemed to bring anger and wrath from deep in his soul. His hostility grew each day, his vehement loathing seemed to grip every fiber of his being. It had all come to a head. His hatred was becoming unbearable, his disgust overpowering, and his wrath was overflowing. Cain could no longer endure such adverse contradiction from his brother and unjust rejection from God. Were it not for Abel, he would have God's favor; it was all Abel's fault that God rebuked him. "I would be less than a man, if I continue to endure this", Cain thought. "Abel

must be removed for he and he alone is the source of all my pain and misery.”

This paraphrased account of the murder of Abel, son of Adam and Eve, by his brother Cain, takes a glance at the destructive nature and course of hate. A hate so strong, so gripping, that it discards all restraint, reason, and decorum. Hate that arrogantly resists the calming, reassuring voice of God. Hate so depraved and demonic that it takes the life of a close relative, hides his body, and lies about the crime. Cain became the poster child for the destructive effects of unbridled hate and a sobering example of why we should never choose hate.

### **HATE**

Hate, verb, feeling of intense and passionate dislike for someone or something. Intense hostility, anger, disgust, wrath, loathing. Hate is extreme enmity, aversion. To abhor or detest.

By its very definition, it is obvious that hate is extremely destructive wherever it is exhibited and expressed. Society, as God planned it, cannot be achieved where hate is allowed to prevail. Since the beginning of time, hate has caused confusion, mayhem, and bloodshed on God’s good earth. When Paul wrote Titus, concerning Christian behavior and Christian ethics, he prominently included hatred on that list of mind sets which undermine Christian character. “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Titus 3:3). According to Paul, this list of negative attitudes fail to demonstrate “regeneration and good works”, versus five through seven. Paul, by his own experience, knew that choosing to hate was the gateway to ungodly behavior.

### **PAUL UNDERSTOOD HATE**

The aging apostle was very aware of the havoc that he personally had caused prior to his conversion. He was also aware that he did it because of hate. As Saul of Tarsus, he hated Jesus of Nazareth, and all who followed Him with an intense and murderous hatred. Paul knew, from his own shameful behavior, that hate has no place among God's people. As a matter of fact, we are introduced to Saul of Tarsus at one of the most heinous and despicable acts of hatred exhibited in the New Testament, the stoning of Stephen. Recorded in Acts chapter seven, an enraged and merciless group of Jesus-hating hypocrites, surrounded the young preacher and wrongly condemned him to execution. They screamed, bit, and assaulted him. When they removed their outer garments, they laid them down at the feet of Saul (Acts 7:58). According to the Scripture, his zeal as a persecutor of Jesus of Nazareth was clearly fueled by intense hatred. Not only had he consented to Stephen's martyrdom, he scattered the church with great persecution (Acts 8:1). When the remorseful apostle stood before King Agrippa, he gives the sad sad commentary of the effects of hate and denial. "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities" (Acts 26:9-11).

When Paul warned Timothy against false doctrine and its effect, he could not help but recall his own experience. He knew that his behavior was the result of hatred that blinded

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him to the truth about Jesus and His church. “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Timothy 1:12-13). Paul was a good man; God who can see the heart knew this. So imagine Paul’s heartbreak when he recalled how savage he had been against his brethren. One cannot help but believe that Paul was terrified to see the effects of hate and sin in the church. When he wrote Timothy, he was explicit - “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Timothy 3:1-5). Paul knew what hate did to him, and exhorted the church not to choose hate.

### **HATE IS UNREASONABLE**

Upon close examination of the actions of both Saul of Tarsus and Cain, son of Adam, it becomes evident that to choose hate is unfair and unreasonable. Cain hated his brother and killed him. He took the life of another human being to satisfy his own personal bias, desires, and grudges. The scripture gives the account; “And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him” (Genesis 4:8). This premeditated murder was totally unreasonable and unnecessary. God, Himself, did all possible to assure Cain

that He was fair, unbiased, and would reward him for doing well; “And the Lord said unto Cain, why art thou wroth? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?” (Genesis 4:6-7). With God Himself as your counselor, God Himself as your personal guide, how can it be reasonable to hate? Cain’s hate was unfair and unwarranted.

On similar note, Saul of Tarsus was filled with hate that was totally unreasonable. On the Damascus Road, when he met Christ, Jesus asked a question that convicted Saul of blind hatred; “And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (Acts 9:4-5). Saul was filled with a rebellious hatred of Jesus, a hatred that should not have been so dominating in a man as learned as he was. Jesus was basically saying that Saul should have known better and thus, would have done better if he were not filled with hatred and prejudice (Acts 9:1-5). As a matter of fact, upon examination of Saul’s credentials, he above all others should have recognized and accepted Jesus as the Messiah. In the Philippian letter, Paul espouses this point: “Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee”(Philippians 3:5.). Paul wanted the brethren at Philippi to know that his education, pedigree, and achievements had failed to make him a faithful, enlightened person. Instead, arrogance, self-righteousness, and envy had blinded his faith and kindled hatred. In retrospect, Paul declared that it was all rubbish and did not make him an obedient servant of God, but an enslaved

servant of hate. Saul of Tarsus chose hate and Paul the Apostle regretted it for the rest of his life.

### **HATE IS DARKNESS**

The record shows that hate reveals the worst in us and exposes a darkness of the soul. The fact is God, who made all creatures, made man in His own image. Man, therefore, with an inner man, a soul, indicates that God designed man to act with conscience and discretion, and not like beast (Genesis 3:6-7). The beasts of the field were created without the benefit of a conscience, therefore they have a beastly nature or instinct. That instinctive motivation is used without regret or moralistic mercy shown toward an enemy or prey. Man, on the other hand, is given reason, intelligence, and then given law, God's law. Within that law, God commands man to act above the beast of the field; He commands man to do no harm. We are actually taught by our Lord Jesus to treat others as we wish to be treated (Matthew 7:12). From an obscure hill where Jesus sat to deliver His longest recorded discourse, Jesus teaches that we should never choose hate, even if it is warranted. Jesus rebukes the ancient rules that breed hate, wrath, and retribution; "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also." In that same context, Jesus taught His disciples to "Love thy enemy, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you" (Matthew 5:44). If I am to be a light in the world, Matthew 5:14, I cannot descend into beastly darkness, even when I, myself, am hated.

Paul had received God's mercy; he had escaped the



darkness of hate. Still, he knew that envy, jealousy, wrath and hatred were brewing in the Lord's church. When he wrote the brethren in the Galatian region, he encouraged them to live by faith and remain liberated from worldly thoughts and behaviors; "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1). Internal division and disagreement, fueled by the Judaizing teachers, were kindling personal animosities and hatred. Paul knew that if they did not get these emotions under control they would harm one another as well as the church; "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (Galatians 5:15).

I have no doubt that Paul's mind revisited that day when they unmercifully attacked, bit, and stoned Stephen. Paul did not want the brethren to become slaves of hate as he once was. He encouraged them to "walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). Then along with and equal to sins like adultery, uncleanness, idolatry, witchcraft, contentions, seditions, and heresies, Paul included jealousies, wrath, and hate (Galatians 5:19-20). According to Paul's teachings, the person who chooses to hate is not living like one who desires to go to heaven (Galatians 5:21).

We must all have the discipline to escape the shackles of hate. It is to be trapped in darkness. According to John, one who obeys God, dwells in the light; "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 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 John 1:5-

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7). To choose hate is to choose darkness; “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him” (1 John 2:9-10).

### **GOD AND HATE DON'T MIX**

There is nothing God appreciates less than hypocrisy. Therefore, all that is directed toward Him must be genuine and sincere or it is rejected. Cain's rejection is proof of God's expectation of our best efforts from true reverence and awe. This principle is clearly expressed when we discuss hate. Make no mistake about it, God refuses to accept any expressions of love for Him while we express hatred for our brother. To God, it is the very epitome of false love, because God is love and He has taught us to love without condition. As a matter of fact, God taught us to love by loving us first (1 John 4:19). On that note, John is very direct and stern to express God's distain for hypocrisy; “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:20-21). Clearly, a demonstration of love toward our brethren, even the unlovable, is a demonstration of love toward God; “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one

another” (1 John 4:7-11). The very nature of God’s character is love. Therefore those who are godly, will not choose hate.

### **LOVE WILL REMOVE HATE**

All through the scripture we are presented with the contrast between love and hate. The mercy and grace of God is a divine example of unconditional love. God had every right to show His wrath against man; He hates sin (Proverbs 6:16-19, Psalm 11:5) but His love saves us. Paul said it well speaking to the brethren at Rome; “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). That said, Paul declares that it was love that withheld the wrath of God that was deserved; “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 5:9).

Returning to the Lord’s sermon on the mountain, Jesus reveals the difference between those who have removed hate from their character; “For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:46-48). Again, Paul taught the church at Rome to “Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men” (Romans 12:17). According to Paul, the influence of love will remove the influence of hate; “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:19-21). If we are overcome by good, we

do not choose hate.

### **REFUSING TO CHOOSE HATE IS EVIDENCE OF CONVERSION**

Think about it, what is the greatest evidence that we have become “Christ-like”? To love, even in the face of hate. Jesus warned the disciples that they would be hated. But He reminded them that they hated Him first and they must handle it following His example; “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me” (John 15:18-21). Remember, from the cross Jesus prayed for those that hated Him (Luke 23:34).

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, let us revisit the love chapter, these words, written by one once renowned for hate, and do as he did: never choose hate. “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. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

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# NEVER LEAVE THE LORD

## Chapter 3 NEVER DO EVIL

*Mark Posey*

**M**any never have the privilege of hearing a Gospel sermon; they cross into eternity without hope having never been exposed to Christ and His power to save. However, those fortunate enough to hear, read the Bible and have their questions answered, the subject of salvation is vitally important. The importance of salvation will never be truly appreciated until one realizes the universal need for salvation. We are incapable of saving ourselves apart from Jesus. As much as we may try, we are without hope of salvation if outside Jesus. However, the realization of the need for salvation is an incomplete understanding of this majestic subject. As important as the universal need for salvation is, the universal offer of salvation is of equal importance. Both the need and offer of salvation should motivate us to never do evil.

How wonderful it would be if all who become Christians would remain “faithful until death” (Revelation 2:10); however, many who “have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” are “again entangled therein, and overcome.”

Peter concludes, “the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (2 Peter 2:20). This passage demonstrates the necessity of faithfulness and the decisive reality that one can fall. Resisting evil is paramount for faithful Christian living! Paul said, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” Therefore, let us consider the importance of always resisting that which is evil.

### **DISCUSSION**

Monkeys in Japanese mythology occupy a unique position; a position of idiomatic expression. A saying such as: “Hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil,” is a pictorial maxim/saying (i.e., a general truth) armed with practical counsel. Often this maxim is depicted by three monkeys. They are Mizaru, covering his eyes, who SEES NO EVIL; Kikazaru, covering his ears, who HEARS NO EVIL; and Iwazaru, covering his mouth, who SPEAKS NO EVIL. Cast in ancient paganism, these aphorisms afford hands-on guidelines in dealing with that which is evil, corrupt or inappropriate. This saying stresses resisting evil in all its forms. I.e., don’t listen to gossip, slander or evil communication; refrain from spreading gossip, slander or evil communication and upon seeing evil being done do not support or encourage it – look the other way! Therefore, how can we overcome evil by doing good?

### **HEAR NO EVIL**

First, HEAR NO EVIL! The reason Christians must guard their ears is because Satan keeps many in bondage by flooding their ears with evil communication. The “counsel of the ungodly” (Psalm 1:1) has been the downfall of many. Many scriptures stress the importance of countering evil by

hearing that which is Holy - the word of God (e.g., Matthew 13:9; John 10:3; Acts 2:22, 37; 10:33; Romans 10:17; Hebrews 2:1). Extreme caution should be exercised in relationship to the following when it comes to hearing the word.

First, take heed **WHAT** you hear. Notice Mark 4:24, “Take heed what ye hear.” Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Be selective and select only that which is from God.

Second, take heed **HOW** you hear. Notice Luke 8:18, “Take heed therefore how ye hear.” We should exemplify the attitude of Cornelius in Acts 10 (Acts 10:33, “Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.”). He had the right attitude in receiving the word; so should we!

Third, take heed **WHOM** you hear. Notice Matthew 17:5. Jesus took Peter, James & John to a high mountain and was transfigured before them. His face began to shine like the sun and his clothing as white as light. Moses and Elijah appeared talking with him; two of the great fathers of faithfulness. Peter spoke saying, “Lord it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” A bright cloud overshadowed them and a voice coming from it said: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (v.5).

Just as the servant is quick to hear his master’s voice and the mother to hear her baby’s smallest cry, so the Christian should be quick to hear what God has to say (James 1:19) in order never do evil!

### **SPEAK NO EVIL**

Second, **SPEAK NO EVIL!** Repentance and confession are closely linked and occupy an important place in the Bible and Christianity. The person who wants to become a Christian cannot take the step of being baptized into Christ until repentance has moved them to desire to be separated from sin (i.e., evil) and spend their days in the service of the King (Acts 2:38). Also the erring child of God must repent of errors if he wants God's approval (Acts 8:22). Those who fail to obey God's command to repent will be lost forever (Luke 13:3, 5). Therefore, what do we need to know about repentance?

First, notice the meaning of repentance. The basic meaning of "repent" is "a change of heart and mind" or "conversion." Jesus gives a beautiful example of repentance in Matthew 21:28-29. The son that refuses to work changes his mind and works, but the opponents of Jesus refuse to do so when they hear his call. The difference is regret and remorse felt by the son (i.e. those who genuinely repent) that caused his heart and mind. This passage clearly shows that a change of life is brought about by repentance. Furthermore, in the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), the son "came to himself" (v.17) and resolved to seek restitution with his father; a beautiful picture of repentance and godly sorrow. Thus, repentance is turning your life around, redirecting life away from sin and toward God. Repentance has been explained thusly, "Repentance is a change of mind, leading to a change of heart, leading to a change of action, leading to a change of life." It is getting the consent of your heart to cease doing wrong and start doing right. It leads to a complete change of life (2 Corinthians 5:17; 3:18; Romans 12:2). The poet wrote: True repentance leaves the sin that we had loved



before, with firm resolve to turn from it and yield to it no more (Anonymous). Repentance says, “I’m sorry,” but also shows, “I’m through.”

Second, notice the motivations for repentance. The importance of repentance is confirmed in that which moves us to change. Consider the following motivating factors found within scripture:

**Goodness of God:** Paul questioned the Romans thusly, “despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). A serious consideration of God’s goodness toward us in both the temporal and spiritual realms will certainly cause us to reflect upon the “mercies of God” in Romans 12:1. God’s effort to save us from our sins and to keep us saved so that He might bestow upon us everlasting blessings should show us our own unworthiness and lead us to leave our sins behind. Oh, how good God has been to us when we had no goodness requiring His mercy!

**Godly Sorrow:** While it is true that God’s gracious benefits ought to arouse us to turn from our wickedness, it is also true that godly sorrow, as discussed by Paul in 2 Corinthians 7:10, is another feature causing us to turn from sin. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” God’s goodness is the Divine factor that causes us to think of His grace and mercy to the extent that we are genuinely saddened at the thought of our own failures. Godly sorrow is the opposite of the sorrow of the world, a sorrow prompted by worldly considerations. Godly sorrow, on the other hand, is sorrow motivated when we stop to consider the fact that we have violated the will of God, we have wronged our Maker.

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**Terror of the Lord:** The terror of the Lord, as expressed in the day of judgment, is one of the causes given by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:11 for his solemn efforts to persuade men. 2 Corinthians 5:11 says, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.” The fear of Divine wrath, while not the only motive, is surely one of those used by inspired preachers and writers of the first century to move men and women to awaken their minds in soberness to the doing of God’s will.

**Judgment of God:** Paul’s Mars Hill address spoke of repentance in relationship to Divine judgment. Acts 17:31 says, “Because he [God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man [Jesus] whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” He spoke of the appointed day on which God, through Christ, will judge the world in righteousness, having guaranteed the certainty of judgment by the resurrection of Jesus. Paul’s thought here is but a different way of speaking of the terror of the Lord. Men who honestly consider the judgment will be motivated to repent.

**Longsuffering of God:** Peter confirmed the coming of the Lord’s judgment by saying that God’s longsuffering should not be interpreted to mean that God was slack concerning His promises, but as an indication of His great desire that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”) How glorious is our God, for He is not, as often pictured, anxious to devour His people, but craving our salvation. This very thought ought

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to motivate each of us to repent and bring forth fruits worthy of repentance (Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20).

Let us allow these thoughts to lead us to repent of our sins and lead others to repent of theirs.

Thirdly, notice the necessity of repentance. The necessity of repentance is expressed in the phrase “all men everywhere to repent.” No one can afford to ignore this divine command! For centuries, God was patient with man’s sins and ignorance (Acts 3:17; 13:27; 14:16 and Romans 3:25). This does not mean that men were innocent (Romans 1:19-20), but that God held back divine wrath. In due time, God sent a Savior, and “now” He commands all men to repent of their foolish ways. The Savior was killed and then raised from the dead, and one day, He will return to judge the world. The proof of the judgment is found in the resurrection. Thus, why is repentance important? Consider the following:

Repentance is a command from God. Acts 17:30 says, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.” We must be like the nation of Israel in Exodus 19:7,8. Moses brought the stipulations of the Covenant to Israel (Exodus 19:7 says, “And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him.”) and they accepted the Covenant (Exodus 19:8 says, “And all the people answered together, and said, all that the Lord hath spoken we will do.”). God’s commands should never be taken lightly.

Without repentance we will perish. Jesus said in Luke 13:3,5, “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

We are living in evil times. Luke 11:32 says, “The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation

and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here.” Ephesians 5:16 says, “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

Repentance has been preached among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Luke 24:46,47 says, “Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

There is a point from which it is “impossible to renew them again unto repentance” (Hebrews 6:4-6). Once a person has passed the point of no return there remains no more sacrifice for sins (Hebrews 10:26, 27, 31). One of the scariest scriptures in the entire Bible is 2 Peter 2:14. Peter is giving a description of false teachers and says, “...having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin...” Another very scary scripture is Ephesians 4:17-19 (esp. v. 19), “...who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness...” When a Christian “crucifies to themselves the Son of God afresh, and puts him to an open shame” (6:6), it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance (6:6). They are past redemption’s point. Only through change can they once again be united with Christ.

The students of an old and beloved teacher asked him when they should repent of their sins. He answered, “You should repent of all your sins one day before you die!” “But we do not know when we will die,” said the students. To which the old teacher replied, “Then repent today!” Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “behold, now is the day of salvation.” May God bless us with strength as we strive never to speak evil and repent when we do!

### **SEE NO EVIL**

Third, SEE NO EVIL! The instruction of Paul is clear: “We walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). Rather than seeking worldly pleasures, Christians must pursue that which contains eternal reality; thus, the Christian focuses on that which is rooted in faith! The definition of faith can be found in Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The word “substance” is from the Greek word *hypostasis*. It means, “foundation, undergirding or title-deed.” Faith is the foundation upon which we build our spiritual lives. Therefore, our faith must be built on Jesus; all else will result in devastation and destruction.

Paul speaks of foundational faith and the resulting joy it brings in Philippians 1:25, “And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith.” There is joy when true faith rests upon the foundation of Jesus. Furthermore, Paul divided the faith that produced such great joy into at least three related categories. Notice Philippians 1:21 says, “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

First, “the joy of faith” is produced by a PERSONAL faith. Paul said, “FOR TO ME to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Early in life our faith might rest in our parents, preacher, Bible teacher or friends, there comes a time in life when we must transition from “milk” to “meat.” For example: Timothy had two outstanding teachers: Eunice, his mother and Lois, his grandmother. Both were concerned about the spiritual development of their son and grandson. They shared with Timothy the Holy Scriptures while he was very young (2 Timothy 3:15); however, there came a time when Timothy’s faith became his own and developed beyond that of his loving

teachers. Paul commended Timothy for his personal faith in 2 Timothy 1:5, “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.” The importance of a personal faith is verified by the words of 1 Peter 3:15, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” The only way we can “give an answer to every man” is if we have a personal faith.

Second, “the joy of faith” is perpetuated by a PURPOSEFUL faith. Paul said, “For to me to LIVE IS CHRIST and to die is gain.” There is no substitute for the right purpose in life: one either has the correct or incorrect purpose for living. Paul had identified the right purpose for life - Christ. In 2 Timothy 4:6-8, Paul surveyed his life and determined his purpose at that point was correct. He said, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course and I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me in that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” He first looked at the present condition of his life and determined that he was ready to depart. Next, Paul looked at his past and determined, while not perfect by any means, he was satisfied. He said, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” Paul had persecuted the Church of our Lord (Acts 8:3; 1 Timothy 1:13); however, on the Damascus road he came face to face with the risen Savior (Acts 9:4). Saul the persecutor became Paul the preacher (Acts 9:20). He changed his purpose in life from wrong to right. From that day forward, he lived

for Christ. Finally, Paul looked ahead in confidence and saw a crown awaiting. He said, “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. The “crown” is also mentioned in James 1:12; 1 Corinthians 9:25 and Revelation 2:10. Paul knew that the best was yet to come and so he pressed on for that great and glorious day (Philippians 3:14).

Third, “the joy of faith” is personified by a PROFITABLE faith. Paul said, “For to me to live is Christ and to DIE IS GAIN.” The word “gain” is a financial word and refers to profit. Paul had nothing to lose by departing this life, but rather, he had all to gain. To leave this world meant entering the next world; heaven. More than anything else in life, Paul wanted to go to heaven. He knew that in heaven he would be with the one he had lived for on earth; it meant going and being with Jesus. He said in Philippians 1:23-24, “for I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.” Therefore, faith is the foundation upon which we build our spiritual life as we live here on earth while earnestly desiring to go to heaven. It is the means by which we can resist evil!

### **CONCLUSION**

The patriarch Job was confronted with many difficulties, trials and tribulation, but he never did evil. Notice Job 1:22, “In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.” Job was a shining example of one that remained faithful to God regardless of the difficulties of life. It can be truly spoken of Job: “hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil!” May we do the same!

Never Do Evil

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# NEVER LEAVE THE LORD

## Chapter 4

### NEVER BE SATISFIED

*Adam Evans*

**T**he foundational principles of a biblical paradigm are summed up in one phrase: love God and love your neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). As we endeavor to discover the areas of life in which we should “never be satisfied,” let us remember that all these areas impact both our relationship with God and with mankind (Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27). The purpose of our creation was not so everyone could be satisfied here on earth, unlike the modern-day “prosperity gospel,” which highlights temporal delights. The true gospel offers eternal life for those who will take up their cross daily and follow the Savior (Luke 9:23). Satan has convinced some to be satisfied with lack of spiritual growth. Others he has lulled to sleep in a cocoon of mediocrity, or worse yet, apathy, where they have lost the ability to be touched by anything spiritual. Then there are those Satan has made comfortable in their bubble, living with a lack of dedication. Let it never be said of us that we are satisfied with those things. Let us never be satisfied with lack of spiritual growth, mediocrity, apathy, or a lack of dedication.

**LET US NEVER BE SATISFIED WITH  
A LACK OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

The word “satisfied” implies completion. It is the idea that we are done or finished with something and pleased with the results. If we have arrived at a “spiritual satisfaction” in our journey, we will stop trying to improve. Either I am perfect or I have given up. The truth of the matter is, I cannot yet say I am satisfied. None of us have arrived or finished our course. We are in-progress, in pursuit of the Heavenly goal. “I press toward the mark (goal-NKJV) for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). This pictures the pursuit of a hunter aggressively chasing his game (Helps Word-Studies). If we ever fail to move forward with effort, “earnestly endeavoring to acquire,” we are failing to pursue the goal and will fail to receive the prize (Thayer, online).

What drives us? What motivates us? What do we crave? The ingrate craves material things, but is never satisfied (Ecclesiastes 5:10). Jesus warns, “beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). One who covets believes there is something in life which can give more than God can offer. It is believing the fleshly carnal world can satisfy us more than Creator God or His blessings and provisions. Covetousness wants more and more, like a treadmill which never stops (Ephesians 5:5; Hebrews 13:5). The lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are never satisfied. They are a bottomless abyss of lustful desires and cravings. Satan is never satisfied with our rejection of his devices. Satan is never satisfied with our faithfulness to God.

Greed is another one of Satan’s devices that can never be satisfied. We often sing, “I’m satisfied with just a cottage below, a little silver, and a little gold.” However, we really

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want a three-car garage, a padded savings account, and a hefty retirement account and are not satisfied until we have it. What chokes out the word of God and causes it to be unfruitful? "... the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things..." (Mark 4:19). This is why covetousness must be put far away from us (Colossians 3:5).

Christians' earthly aspirations are very different indeed. We seek the face of God and His commandments. We seek how we might please Him. Our spiritual walk with God drives our life. We are to be content, but never satisfied, in our spiritual journey. Often Christians are planted but do not continue to strengthen their footing. Instead of digging roots deeper into the Word for a stronger faith, they settle for shallow roots and an unsettled faith (Colossians 1:23). We must not simply seek information alone, but must take that information and move toward transformation (Romans 12:1-2). We must use that knowledge to change our life and actions. We must arise out of the pew, where we often gather information, and move into action every day for Christ. We need to move from knowing to doing. We must be motivated to evaluate and put into action. Knowledge leads to conviction, and conviction leads to action and transformation, which involves change. We must not expect more from everyone except ourselves. We often expect more from leadership, more from elders, more from deacons, more from the preacher, and yet expect no more from ourselves.

**LET US NEVER BE SATISFIED  
WITH MEDIOCRITY**

Not only must we never be satisfied with a lack of spiritual growth, we must never be satisfied with mediocrity. Mediocrity or mediocre means "halfway up the mountain,"

or “the middle of a rugged mountain” (Wiktionary: Mediocre, online). People travel from all over the world to trek up the colossal Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa and “the highest single free-standing mountain in the world” (Wikipedia: Mount Kilimanjaro). To make it there, you must journey for days just to reach the base of the mountain. Then you begin an ascent of 16,100 feet. Can you imagine a person paying for permits, porters, and gear only to climb halfway up the mountain, shrug their shoulders, and say, “Meh, I am satisfied not reaching the summit.” Most who climb push themselves to make it to the top. If someone turns back, it is not because of apathy. Rather, it is due to sickness or injury. A mediocre person is not high or low, not hot or cold, not to one extreme or the other, but happy in the middle (Revelation 3:16-19). We should run our race, not lollygag along. We run to win (1 Corinthians 9:24). This is not a casual pursuit, but a pressing on or laboring toward. Purpose drives us to the finish line.

“Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free” (Ephesians 6:5-8).

God wants our best. “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11). The ASV

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uses “diligence” in place of “business.” God’s Word (GW) paraphrase says, “Don’t be lazy in showing your devotion. Use your energy to serve the Lord.” The NIV says, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” The Greek word *zēō* “figuratively means to show great zeal; be ardently passionate.” It is “literally ‘boiling’ with interest or desire.” It means “to be deeply committed to something, with the implication of accompanying desire,” “to be earnest, to set one’s heart on, to be completely intent upon” (Helps Word-Studies: Strong’s G2204). God wants us to be on fire with zeal for His kingdom. We need to be like those who “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). God calls his people to action. However, “if you do not care then you do not act.” The book of Acts is full of “ACTion” (The Expository Files, online). Those living materialistic lives say, “Religion in moderation is key.”

“For the most part, mainline churches in modern America are actually aiming for the middle ground. They want enough religion to be respectable, but to not so much that they are viewed as zealots. Parents tell their children that they shouldn’t be atheists, but, at the same time, they tell them not to take this religious thing too far. Lukewarm religion is actually the goal” (Kruger, online).

Have we let the world turn the church upside down (Acts 17:6)? Do we look and act more like Laodicea than Berea (Acts 17:10-11)? Have we left our first love like Ephesus (Revelation 2:4)?

**LET US NEVER BE SATISFIED  
WITH APATHY**

We must never be satisfied with a lack of spiritual growth, with mediocrity, or apathy in life and kingdom work. Apathy is a “lack of feeling or emotion,” a “lack of interest or concern; indifference,” “Not effecting the senses or feelings, numbness (beyond feeling) seared with a hot iron.” Apathy produces “a lack of responsiveness to something that might normally excite interest or emotion” (Merriam-Webster: Apathy, online).

Have we come to a point in time where we have let our conscience be so dulled that we no longer care about our relationship with God or other people living around us? Paul writes to Timothy about such a time: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith... having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:1-2). The word “seared” is “literally referring to branding a person with a red-hot iron which sears the flesh and deadens (numbs) the nerves. After this, the person no longer feels obvious impulses (pleasure or pain).” We derive our English word “cauterized” from this Greek word. It figuratively references that “which destroys the spiritual nerve-endings” (Helps Word-Studies. Strong’s G2743, online).

Have we lost our ability to feel regarding those who are lost and headed to a Devil’s Hell? Are we sitting by idly, enjoying our lives while our neighbors are dying lost every day? Some feel like their ticket has been punched because they have showered, shaved, and showed up. Have you convinced yourself that filling your place on the padded pew is the one thing guarantees your entry into the pearly gates? Where did we get the idea that taking up our cross daily is fulfilled in the

weekly hour of worship? Does checking off the five acts of worship during one or two hours fulfill our Christianity for the week? We have bought in to the idea that we can clock-in and clock-out of our Christianity and leave it at the door. Our faith should expand beyond the recesses of our house of worship. The building alone should not contain our faith and action (Micah 6:6-8). Faithfully worshipping God is a requirement of walking in the light (1 John 1:6-10), yet it is only the baseline or foundation on which our action in Christ should abound. If a person forsakes attendance at spiritual assemblies, this could indicate spiritual apathy. When Christians fail to take advantage their Shepherd's feeding, they soon starve from spiritual malnutrition. If we loved our Lord more, we would see the blessing of worshipping God. Love "motivates us to worship, to gather, to celebrate, to learn, to serve and to invite others into that same joy" (Christianity Today, Vaters, online). Yet that love is not contained in a one-hour worship service to meet a weekly quota. There is more to being "in Christ" than the worship assembly.

Living in Christ reflects a changed life. A great contrast to this lifestyle is found in the Gentiles of the first century. They bought into the life of sin, worldliness, and ungodly living.

"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work

all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ" (Ephesians 4:17-20).

These Gentiles are described as "being past feeling," they had "become callous" (ESV), "having ceased to feel" (YLT), "having lost all sensitivity" (NIV), due to spiritual apathy. Strong defines *apēlgēkotes* as, "I cease to feel [my] pain," "am past feeling," "cease to care," "become callous," or "reckless" (Strong's Concordance: G1377, online). Thayer defines it, "to become callous, insensible to pain, apathetic: so those who have become insensible to truth and honor and shame." (Thayer's Greek Lexicon: G524). Having emotion, sympathy, or empathy goes against the grain of apathy. Without apathy, a person is attentive, aware, sensitive, fervent, passionate, zealous, warm, and concerned. However, the apathetic are cold, halfhearted, aloof, detached, unconcerned, complacent, nonchalant, and lethargic. (Merriam-Webster Thesaurus: Apathy, online). Would any of these descriptions fit any of us today?

What would the prophet Jeremiah say if he observed the church today? Would he lament, "Is it nothing to you, you who pass by?" (Lamentations 1:12). As he sees the falling numbers of souls who have the truth and stand against error, would he simply pass by? Jeremiah was troubled by the state of then-current affairs and the response of the Jews to the demise of their nation. So much so that he wept tears. I wonder how concerned we are today over the demise of biblical Christianity. Has the lack of passion or zeal for God and the kingdom caused us to shed tears? How many tears have we personally shed over a lost friend, neighbor, relative, or even those we do not know? Have we let our hearts become calloused and unfeeling? Have we been lured by Satan to



forget the plight of others and only focus on ourselves?

“A body of believers focused solely on the needs and preferences of those inside their building will be doomed to mediocrity. It is too easy to become caught up in the insignificant and forget the mission of the church. Mediocrity says, ‘It’s all about me.’ It is vital that leaders move the church to look beyond the walls of their buildings. A great ministry is one that seeks out the hurting and needy. A great ministry is one that becomes the hands and feet of Christ in the community. A great ministry proclaims the gospel in word and deed” (Shrombalken, online).

Where is our concern? Where are our tears? We are in a battle with Satan. Over the years we have battled apostasy, and we have battled anarchy. Today we are battling apathy (Harris, online). Some may say, “Who cares?” Others vent, “We don’t want to be bothered.” Psalm 37 teaches us to “Trust,” “Delight,” and “Commit” (3-5). We suffer from a lack of commitment to the Lord’s way. Psalm 37:5 uses the word commit, which means to “roll away” like a stone (Brown-Driver-Briggs, H1556, online). The passage then has the meaning of rolling away our own will to give way for the Lord’s will. We are to give to the Lord the right-of-way, the precedence, the priority. This is where true commitment starts. We yield our loyalty to Christ instead of self (Galatians 2:20). Our allegiance belongs to the Lord. When congregations lose sight of their spiritual purpose of caring for the souls of others (soul winning), they become nothing but spiritual social clubs.

Let us “remember” who we serve, “repent” before it is too late, and “renew” our dedication to our King (GotQuestions.org).

### **THE REMEDY**

What is the remedy? We must hunger and thirst for righteousness. During the long dry season in Africa the ground is parched. For months the land sits dry without any refreshment from above, longing for the first sign of nourishment, desiring a season of refreshing. Those who live in these parts know the blessing that only water can provide. Unfortunately, on many occasions there is no water for miles. The struggle is very real. Just as the land thirsts for water, so the human body needs for it as well. Thirst does not just go away on its own. It must be addressed. The need to quench our thirst drives us to act. “As the hart (deer NKJV) panteth (longs for) after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalm 42:1-2). The Psalmist has a burning desire to have communion with God and worship Him. His thirst did not drive him to worldly pursuits, materialistic pleasures, or desires of the flesh. That was not the direction of his thirst or longing. His thirst drove him to Jehovah God. It appears he had been driven away from the presence of God in the tabernacle and his desire was to return, be close to God, and worship Him.

Hunger and thirst directly impact our actions. They move and motivate us to respond and seek a remedy. If we will to go out of our way to satisfy physical hunger or thirst, we certainly should be willing to do the same to draw closer to God. If we are unwilling to seek a remedy, it affects our health. “Blessed are they which do hunger and

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thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). Jesus uses this basic human instinct to teach a spiritual lesson (Robertson 41). He uses “the hunger of the man who is starving for food, and the thirst of the man who will die unless he drinks” (Barclay 99-100). Hunger and thirst are both durative present tense participles. This means that “this hungering and thirsting continues, and in fact, increases in the very act of being satisfied” (Lenski 189). It expresses a “continuing, constantly-felt longing” (Fowler 215) or “intense longing after righteousness” (Morris 99). He speaks of a “passionate concern for the right” (Morris 99). “A full man feels no need to eat or drink (Luke 6:25)” (Fowler 215). However, “we are blessed because our hunger and our thirst continue” (Lenski 189). If for whatever reason we cease to hunger and thirst for righteousness, “Jesus could no longer pronounce us blessed because he could no longer satisfy us” (Lenski 189).

We are not suggesting we can create our own righteousness without Christ or His blood. Rather, we point to a passionate pursuit of God’s will through Jesus Christ. True “blessedness comes to the man who, in spite of failures and failings, still clutches to him the passionate love of the highest” (Barclay 100). Where is our “passionate hunger and thirst for goodness, for holiness”? (Robertson 41). This seems to have some correlation to Matthew 6:1, which mentions our acts of right doing, connecting the righteousness in this passage with “ethical conduct” (Hendriksen 274). This righteousness “is that which comes by ‘doing righteousness’ (I John 3:7),” just as “John the immerser’s parents had (Luke 1:6)... It is the righteousness that is from God, based upon ‘the faith’ (Philippians 3:9)” (Littrell 35). “...for all thy commandments are righteousness” (Psalm 119:172). “Jesus found sustenance

in doing the will of the Father (John 4:34)” (Woodward 40). This righteousness for which we hunger and thirst must “be the object of intense desire, earnest yearning, and relentless pursuit” (Hendriksen 274). One who hungers or thirsts has a need and recognizes it. However, spiritually hungry or thirsty people often fail to see themselves in need of anything. To seek God’s face, a person must realize their true desperate need for God (Nolland 203).

“Righteousness” in the Greek is in the “direct accusative” case and not in the normal “partitive genitive.” When the verbs “hungering” and “thirsting” “take the accusative... the meaning is that the hunger and thirst is for the whole thing,” not just a part. William Barclay translates it this way, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for the whole of righteousness, for complete righteousness” (Barclay 101). This desire “is a want of righteousness before God, the righteousness that comes from the forgiveness of sins” (Johnson 35). God wants us to have “right-living” (Kinnard 68). We must earnestly desire to be right with God. We express our love for God with a faith that works through love (1 John 4:19; 5:3; Galatians 5:6; John 14:15) (McClish 77). Hunger “implies desperation” and our real need for God (Kinnard 68). “How many there are who manifest no hunger and thirst after the things of God” (Coffman 53). Satan wants to destroy our “eagerness of the soul” to seek truth (Coffman 53). We must have “a deep longing after goodness, godliness, and the qualities that belong to heaven, and not after wealth, honor, or worldly fame” (Boles 123). “If we really want to know God’s will, we will (John 7:17). If we really want to do God’s will, we will (John 8:31-32)” (Elkins 198). There is coming a day when we will no longer hunger or thirst. “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; ... For the Lamb which is

in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Revelation 7:16-17). However, until that day, let us never be satisfied.

### **CONCLUSION**

Satan has convinced some to be satisfied with lack of spiritual growth. Others he has lulled to sleep in a cocoon of mediocrity. He has even led some to apathy, where they have lost the ability to be touched by anything spiritual. Then there are those Satan has made comfortable in their bubble, living with a lack of dedication. Let it never be said of us that we are satisfied with those things. Let us be salt and light, a city set on a hill. May we show others what it really means to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Let us ignite a renewed passion and zeal for the King and Kingdom work. May we hunger and thirst for the things of God again. “O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him” (Psalm 34:8).

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**I**t is this writer’s honor to appear on the 2020 Truth in Love lectureship on NEVER: Leave the Lord. Sadly, this is a much needed study today as Christians wander back into the world, as Peter wrote long ago, “But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:22). While the great concern of the lectureship is wandering away, and while that is such a sad theme; the particular subject of this lesson is a happy one: “Never Destroyed.” That is such an encouraging thought. Yes, one can leave; however, if he will never leave the Lord, he can never be destroyed.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

When one is converted, he, individually, is saved (for example, Acts 22:16 concerns the remission of Paul’s--and only Paul’s--sins, note “wash away thy [emphasis -DFC] sins”); at the same time, he is added to the rest of the saved (Acts 2:47); accordingly, the subject “Never Destroyed” can actually be viewed from two standpoints: the first, that the

Christian--who is an individual member of that body--cannot be destroyed; and, the second, that the Lord's church--which is His corporate body--cannot be destroyed.

**THE PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE: THE CHRISTIAN WHO CAN NEVER BE DESTROYED**

The one who faithfully responds to the Lord's invitation and who subsequently faithfully serves the Lord, is promised eternal life! To Christians, John wrote, "Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life" (1 John 2:24,25). To Christians, Peter wrote, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:2-4). To Christians, James wrote, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12) and "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" (James 2:5). Paul told those who had been God's covenant people under the former system but who could be added to the Lord's church, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts

2:39). When God promises something--and man meets any conditions; that promise is assured! Paul told Titus that God "cannot lie" so there was reason to "hope of eternal life" which God had "promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2). The promise of the Lord's return is the specific subject of 2 Peter 3:9, but any promise of God would be of the same nature--the promise will be fulfilled!

With that promise in mind, know, first, that the Christian cannot be removed from the Lord's surrounding protection. The frequent picture in the Old Testament for a child of God's being protected by Him is that of one surrounding or shielding another. David used the image of mountains surrounding an immovable mountain in Psalm 125:1,2; he wrote, "They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever." Moses painted a similar picture in Deuteronomy 33:27 writing, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them." David wrote, "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Psalm 34:7). That latter passage may be pictured in the reader's mind as an army protecting those who are with her. That certainly is the idea of Psalm 61:3: "For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy." On an even more personal level David could write, "For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield" (Psalm 5:12) and "The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him" (Psalm 28:7) and "The LORD is

my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. ... As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him” (Psalm 18:2,30). Solomon similarly penned, “He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly” (Proverbs 2:7).

With that promise in mind, know, second, that the Christian cannot be separated from God. Paul wrote:

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:33-39).

These are Christians, the elect, whom God has justified, for whom Christ has died and intercedes--no power is strong enough to remove them from that salvation. Not any

physical nor any metaphysical--even spiritual--power [as a side note, one may consider that were that possible, Satan would have exercised the power to have stolen God's beloved servant Job].

With that promise in mind, know, third, that the Christian cannot be taken out of the Lord's hand. A passage which some have misused, but which is very poignant and encouraging in this study is John 10:27-29. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." It should be noted that Jesus did not say that a man could not leave the safety of God's hand! Indeed, he could. Acts 13:46 reveals that is exactly what the whole nation of the Jews did: "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." It is simply not within the ability of God to save the one who will not be saved--that is, whose will it is to be lost. Consider Jesus frustrated words over God's formerly holy city: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37). Yes, man can be lost; however, no outside force can remove the man who would be saved from that salvation! The Hebrews writer in speaking of the ability of Jesus rightly said, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

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**THE CORPORATE PERSPECTIVE: THE CHURCH  
WHICH CAN NEVER BE DESTROYED**

Foundational to this point is an appreciation that the Lord's church and the Lord's kingdom are the same thing. When John and Jesus were in their earthly periods of ministry, the kingdom was near time-wise (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7). Contrary to what the premillennialist would assert, the kingdom was in existence in the first century (note the language of Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28; Romans 14:17). So, the kingdom had to have been established shortly after the earthly ministry of the Lord. Daniel 2 and 7, rightly applied to the establishment of the Lord's church in the days of the Roman Empire, demonstrate that the kingdom was established at the very same time, and, therefore, is the same institution. Jesus Who is Head of the church (Ephesians 5:23) is King of the kingdom (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14)--He has been since the establishment of that one institution.

From the standpoint of the church, the corporate body cannot be destroyed. Jesus promised that very thing in Matthew 16:18, telling Peter, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The "gates of hell," more correctly the "gates of hades" or of "death." The idea of the gate pictures where an army amasses its troops to march out against an enemy. The army of death shall not prevail against the church! Note the peculiar nature of that promise from this perspective: Everything of men dies. There is no institution created by men--from an ungodly home to a business to a church to a kingdom--which shall stand the test of time. Gamaliel showed that he knew this truism, for he told the Jews who wanted to persecute the Lord's way, "Refrain from these men [the apostles who were preaching again in

the temple though they miraculously had just been freed from prison by “the angel of the Lord” (Acts 5:18-21)], and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:” (Acts 5:38); conversely, he also understood, “But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God” (Acts 5:39). Death will compass and overwhelm and destroy every human institution! Over the church of the Lord, however, the armies of death shall not prevail!

Prophecy had long taught the same message. Micah recorded concerning the future state of the church, “In that day, saith the LORD, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever” (Micah 4:6,7). It is interesting that the providential care of the Lord for this saved people reminds of the protection for the saved person. The same thought is seen in Zechariah 2:5: “For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her” and Isaiah 4:5, “And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence.” Also interesting is the proximity of the Lord to his congregations: “And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle” (Revelation 1:12,13).

No such safety exists for human institutions; no having the Lord in their midst--this is especially evident

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on the national level. Prophecy and her fulfillment show that human-originated Babylon was destroyed by Cyrus, human-originated Medo-Persia was destroyed by Alexander, human-originated Greece was destroyed by division, and that human-originated Rome was destroyed by time. To be more accurate, all ultimately were destroyed by God. David wrote, “The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect” (Psalm 33:10). John affirmed regarding Rome, “And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath” (Revelation 16:19). Every other kingdom ever to have been has already been or will be destroyed. Paul wrote, “Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:” (1 Corinthians 2:6). John relayed, “And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

Of the kingdom of Christ, though Daniel 2:44 affirms, “And in the days of these kings [Rome-DFC] shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.” Likewise, Daniel 7:13,14, affirms, “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is

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an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”

Great voices, royal and angelic, have given testimony to the same point. David said, “Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations” (Psalm 145:13). Nebuchadnezzar conceded, “How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation. ... And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation:” (Daniel 4:3,34). Darius also conceded, “I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end” (Daniel 6:26). The angel Gabriel told Mary concerning her son, “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:32,33).

David rightly penned, “The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance” (Psalm 33:11,12). So often ones will point to a nation of this world, like the writer’s sincerely beloved United States of America, and try to apply this passage to it. As great as she may be, though, she was founded by men and one day will fall. “The

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nation whose God is the Lord” is the church which shall never fall, which shall never be destroyed.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study has shown that on both the individual and corporate levels, those who are God’s will never be destroyed. Accordingly, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28,29).

# NEVER LEAVE THE LORD

## Chapter 6

### NEVER TAKE LIFE FOR GRANTED

*Mike Hixon*

**L**ife is a precious gift from God. As members of the human family, we have been made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27). David, a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), affirmed that the human family has been "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). We are indeed the crown of God's creation.

Too often, we tend to take for granted the manifold blessings of our Creator, including life (James 1:17). Far too many people take life for granted and assume time is on their side. Only the Lord knows how many people are in eternity that lived under the premise time was on their side. In this lesson, we want to explore the assigned subject, "Never Take Life For Granted."

#### **THE TRUTH ABOUT LIFE**

One of the hard cold facts of life is death. Since man's fall in the Garden of Eden, death has stalked the human family. The phrase "and he died" is a divine commentary on the mortality of mankind (Genesis 5:5, 8, 11, 14). The great patriarch Job summed up life in these words, "Man who is

born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; He flees like a shadow and does not continue” (Job 14:1). Moses in the book of Psalms contrasted the eternal nature of God to the brevity of man on planet earth. He wrote, “The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10). In another Psalm, the inspired penman said, “Remember how short my time is” (Psalm 89:47a). He went on to ask this powerful question, “What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave” (Psalm 89:48)? In light of the limited time we have on earth, it is not surprising to hear Moses admonish readers of all ages with these words, “So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:10).

Yes, death is a factual reality that cannot be denied, but it is encouraging to know that Jesus has destroyed “him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14). As a result of the Lord’s resurrection from the dead, we have hope beyond the grave (I Corinthians 15:12-19). Jesus Himself said to Martha following the loss of her brother Lazarus, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26a). On earth, we reside in the land of the dying, but in eternity we will live in the land of the living. As a result of our obedience to the gospel, we have “an inheritance” that is described as “incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven” (I Peter 1:4). We live as Paul said, “in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Titus 1:2). The hope that we have is grounded in confident assurance that

God will keep His word and fulfill His promises. No wonder Paul, in the face of death, could write Timothy and speak of his service in the kingdom, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (I Timothy 4:7). Now note the confident assurance of Paul in view of death, “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved his appearing” (II Timothy 4:8). No wavering or wondering in the mind of Paul about his future, just absolute confidence in the promises of God.

One thing we might point out is that many people are terrified of death. The Hebrew writer speaks of those “who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:15). Although fear might be a common foe we wrestle with concerning death, it is comforting to know that we have the assurance of the Lord’s presence in death. David in the beautiful Shepherd’s Psalm affirmed, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me” (Psalm 23:4a). Remember, God keeps His promises (Titus 1:2), and one day we will be ushered into that glorious city of the redeemed for evermore (Revelation 21:1-7).

### **THE THREAT TO LIFE**

The brevity and insecurities of life are before us daily. On January 26, 2020, the world was stunned by the news that former NBA All-Star and world champion Kobe Bryant was killed in a horrific helicopter crash along with his 13 year old daughter and seven other people. Bryant was a 5 time NBA champion and 2 time NBA Finals MVP. After a 20 year career in the NBA, he retired and began writing another chapter in

his life as an author, businessman, Oscar winner, etc. His net worth was reported to be somewhere between \$500 to \$770 million dollars. And now after 41 years of life, all of that has been left behind. Paul was right when he said, “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (I Timothy 6:7). Since we came into the world with nothing and we will leave this world with nothing, it ought to be a sobering reminder of what is really important in life. On one occasion, Jesus warned His listeners about the danger of greed or covetousness and told the parable of a rich farmer who was blessed with a booming business. Because things were going so well, he had outgrown his barns and needed greater storage capacity. His plan was to pull down his existing barns and “build greater” (Luke 12:18), and then enjoy the fruits of his labor. You can almost hear him calculating in his mind, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 12:19). According to Jesus, there was an unforeseen problem. In all of the rich man’s plans and calculations for the future, he forgot about the possibility of death. Consider now the Lord’s assessment of this man’s life, He said, “You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided. So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:20)? How foolish it is to pour our heart and soul into the things of this world and neglect the spiritual treasures of life. The old cliché is true, “You can’t take it with you.”

The frailties and insecurities of life necessitate avoiding the traps of material and monetary pursuits to the exclusion of spiritual things. The apostle Paul warned, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in

destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (I Timothy 6:9-10). Jesus told the story of a rich man who lived a self-centered luxurious life of comfort and ease (Luke 16:19-21). He neglected living a God-centered life and death intervened (Luke 16:22b). Possibly because of his wealth he felt insulated from the insecurities of life and lived as if time were on his side. Sadly, once he stepped out into eternity it was too late to make things right (Luke 16:23-26). Jesus was right when He said, “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul” (Matthew 16:26)? If we take life for granted and gain the world and lose our soul, then according to Jesus, we made a terrible transaction with eternal consequences.

### **THE THRUST OF LIFE**

In order to appreciate our time on earth, we must understand the purpose of life. Centuries ago Solomon placed life under a microscope and concluded life is not about power (Ecclesiastes 1:12), popularity (Ecclesiastes 1:16), possessions (Ecclesiastes 2:4-8), or pleasure (Ecclesiastes 2:10). As a matter of fact, he had all of this and more. Regarding the accumulation of material goods, he conceded, “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver, Nor he who loves abundance, with increase” (Ecclesiastes 5:10). All he is saying is the more you have in life the more you want. And with respect to his accomplishments and acquisitions in life, surely we would conclude he was happy with where he was in life. Here is his assessment, “Therefore I hated life” (Ecclesiastes 2:17a). Think about it, Solomon had everything

a person could ever want in life, but he wasn't happy or satisfied. He was living what we call in this country "the American Dream." Most people, if polled, would say life is grand if they have power, fame, money, an endless array of material possessions, and pleasure. However, such is not always the case. Solomon wasn't happy and multitudes today aren't happy with their lot in life either. Proverbially, they have everything, but have nothing.

After careful analysis, Solomon brought his intense study of life to a conclusion. He cautions us to remember our Creator in youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1). The reason for this admonition is because as we grow older habits form that are sometimes difficult to give up. He then reminds us of the brevity of life and the gradual deterioration of the human body (Ecclesiastes 12:2-5). Solomon again admonishes us to remember our Creator, this time before death intervenes (Ecclesiastes 12:7). At death, the body returns to the dust of the earth, but the spirit returns to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7). It is at this juncture that he provides us with the summation of what life is all about. Consider carefully his simple, yet profound analysis, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). In essence, this is our divine purpose. And note why, "For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether it is good or whether it is evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). According to Solomon, God will hold us responsible for how we conduct our affairs in life. We cannot afford to miss the genuine purpose of life.

Jesus can offer us everything we need to fulfill our purpose in life. He said on one occasion, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"

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(John 10:10b). Jesus offers the best life or abundant life because it is the blessed life. In Him, we have everything necessary to bring us happiness, satisfaction, and contentment. The benefits we enjoy in Christ begin with pardon from sin and unrighteousness. Through obedience to the gospel, our sins are washed away by the cleansing blood of Christ (Acts 22:16; Ephesians 1:7). We no longer have to bear the stain of sin any longer because the Hebrew writer said on behalf of God, “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more” (Hebrews 8:12). Having been pardoned by God the Bible says we also enjoy peace with God. Paul wrote, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1-2). As members of the body of Christ, we have peace with God and bask in the peace of God. In his letter to the saints in Philippi, Paul counseled, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). Another blessing associated with the Christian life is the privilege of praying to God. It is almost incomprehensible that we can approach the throne of our Father in heaven and He will give us His undivided attention 24/7. The apostle Peter wrote these assuring words with reference to prayer, “For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And his ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil” (I Peter 3:12). The power of prayer in the life of a believer is summed up in the words of James, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16b).

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Another rich blessing in Christ is the constant presence of God in our daily lives. The Hebrew writer said on behalf of the Lord, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5b). It is incredibly encouraging to know that wherever we go in life or whatever circumstance we might face, God is there with us. One final blessing we might add is the promise by God of a home in heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3). In the beautiful city called heaven we will be free from the heartaches and sorrows common to life on planet earth. The aged apostle John said, “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no death, nor sorrow, nor crying, and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4). In the golden city, we will live forever in the presence of God and with the faithful people of God.

### **CONCLUSION**

In our fast paced daily grind sometimes we forget the most elementary things, like how quickly life passes and that there are no guarantees for tomorrow. Daily Bible study and meditation reminds us of the transitory nature of life and that we should never take life for granted. We ought to live as if every day were our last day.

# NEVER LEAVE THE LORD

## Chapter 7

### NEVER CHOOSE BEING LOST

*B.J. Clarke*

**F**reedom of choice - it has such a nice ring to it! In the secular realm, we are free to make choices every day. We choose which candidates we will vote for, which college we want to attend, and which career we wish to pursue. With dozens of restaurants in our community, we may dine at the restaurant of our choice. We are under no obligation to eat at the same restaurant where our friends and neighbors eat. In fact, the commercial slogan of one popular fast-food establishment promises us that we can have it our way!

But what about the spiritual realm? Do we have freedom of choice in matters pertaining to our salvation? Furthermore, are all choices equally valid when it comes to salvation? If we do have the right to make spiritual choices, does this grant us permission to make wrong choices without consequence? Is it possible that our choices will cause us to be lost? If so, would anyone ever make the deliberate choice to be lost? If so, why would anyone choose to be lost?

#### **IS MAN CAPABLE OF CHOOSING?**

The concept of free moral agency suggests that God

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has created man with the capacity to exercise volition, i.e., make choices. God did not create man as a programmed robot. Rather, God placed good and evil before man and permitted man to choose whether to pursue good, and its reward, or evil and its attendant consequences. In Deuteronomy 30:19, God, through Moses, said to Israel, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: **therefore choose life**, that both thou and thy seed may live” (emp. mine throughout, BJC).

Some years later, Joshua, the successor of Moses, also spoke to Israel, “Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, **choose you this day whom ye will serve**; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:14-15).

Both of these passages make it abundantly clear that God has created man with the ability to choose which direction he wants to travel. This raises an important question: since God has given man the ability to choose, would God allow man to choose to be lost? Will God hold us eternally accountable for our choices?

### **IS MAN CAPABLE OF CHOOSING TO BE LOST?**

The Universalists would answer this question with a resounding “No!” because their doctrine affirms that everyone who has ever lived on the face of the earth will be saved automatically. Interestingly, the doctrine of Calvinism also

advocates a form of automatic salvation, although it does not argue for universal salvation. On the contrary, Calvinism teaches that only a limited group, called “the elect,” will be saved. Moreover, the Calvinist teaches that the atonement of Jesus was limited only to those who were lucky enough to have been predestined for salvation. According to the doctrine, man does not get to choose whether he will be lost or saved. God has, allegedly, already decided who will be saved, and who will be lost, and there is absolutely nothing you can do to change your status. Calvinism asserts that, if God elected you to be saved, the Holy Spirit will operate upon your heart so powerfully that you will not be able to resist choosing to be saved. On the other hand, if you have not been chosen by God for salvation, you are simply out of luck. According to Calvinism, there is nothing you can do to be saved; there is no choice you can make to be saved if God did not will for you to be saved.

The Scriptures emphatically refute both Universalism and Calvinism. Jesus tasted death for every man (Hebrews 2:9), but not all men will be saved (Matthew 25:46). He desires that all men be saved (1 Timothy 2:4, 6), and that none should perish (2 Peter 3:9). However, Jesus clearly taught: “broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and **many there be which go in there at**: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and **few there be that find it**” (Matthew 7:13-14). If the majority are lost, then, obviously, Universalism is untrue.

But are the majority lost because God willed them to be, or because they chose to be lost? Calvinism concedes that many will be lost, but argues that man’s choice has nothing to do with this fact. The Scriptures speak loud and clear to the contrary. Consider some general and specific cases of men

and women, choosing to live contrary to the will of God, in spite of the consequences.

### OLD TESTAMENT CASES

In general, the author of Proverbs spoke of those who “hated knowledge, and **did not choose the fear of the Lord**” (Proverbs 1:29). Sadly, there are specific examples of this throughout the Old Testament.

**1. Adam and Eve.** When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He expressly prohibited them from partaking of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:15-16). He also educated them clearly about the consequences of making the choice to partake: “in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). Adam and Eve could not say they were unaware of what would happen if they chose to disobey God’s directive. Nevertheless, Adam and Eve chose to disobey this Divine decree, and were penalized for making the wrong choice. God did not program Adam and Eve as robots who had no choice but to follow the dictates of their programmer. Rather, God permitted them to choose whether they would heed the Divine instructions (and thereby glorify God and enjoy fellowship with God), or rebel against the will of God by partaking of the forbidden fruit. Tragically, Adam and Eve decided to exalt their will above God’s will and, as a result, were severed from fellowship with God. Their right to choose did not give them a right to be wrong.

**2. The Children of Israel.** The passage cited earlier, from Deuteronomy 30:19, is couched in the context of a discussion of whether to follow idol gods or Jehovah God. It is clear that God permitted the Israelites to exercise their free moral agency in deciding between worshipping Him alone or

worshipping idols. It was their choice, but they would have to bear the consequences of their decision. If they worshipped Him it would mean life and blessing. If they worshipped idols it would mean death and cursing.

Shortly before his death, Joshua set the same choice before the Israelites. He told them that they could choose to follow in the footsteps of their ancestors and serve idol gods, or they could serve the Lord. As for Joshua, he had already made the choice to lead his household to serve the Lord (Joshua 24:14-15). Inspired, no doubt by Joshua's decisive leadership, the people responded:

“God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods; For the LORD our God, he it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed: And the LORD drave out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: therefore will we also serve the LORD; for he is our God” (Joshua 24:16-18).

Apparently, Joshua recognized that, although the words sounded so good, the Israelites thought that they could choose to “have their cake and eat it too” by serving God and idols at the same time. He explained to them that God is a jealous God and will not allow man to serve two masters. Moreover, he told them, “**If ye forsake the LORD**, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume

you, after that he hath done you good” (Joshua 24:20). The people responded emphatically, “Nay; but we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:21). Consider carefully Joshua’s next statement:

“And Joshua said unto the people, **Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him.** And they said, We are witnesses. Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel (Joshua 24:22-23).

Upon hearing these words “the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey” (Joshua 24:24).

Tragically, the children of Israel did not maintain their commitment to choose God above idols. In 1 Kings 18, we read of the contest at Mount Carmel between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. In this passage Elijah “came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). It is absolutely clear that Elijah expected the people to make a choice; it is also clear that he expected them to make the right choice! Unlike the people to whom Joshua spoke, who immediately answered Joshua’s challenge, the people to whom Elijah spoke “answered him not a word” (1 Kings 18:22). After God’s decisive display that “The Lord, he is the God” (1 Kings 18:39), those who chose to follow Baal suffered the consequences of their choice (1 Kings 18:40).

Once again, the commitment of the people to choose Jehovah did not last. The prophets were constantly confronting



the people about their choices. In Isaiah 65:12, God said to His backsliding people, “when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and **did choose that wherein I delighted not.**” The next chapter contains a similar description of the wicked: “they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations...they did evil before mine eyes, and **chose that in which I delighted not**” (Isaiah 66:3-4).

God, through Ezekiel, pleaded with His people to alter their conduct:

“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, everyone according to his ways, saith the Lord God. **Repent and turn** yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. **Cast away** from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and **make you a new heart** and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: **wherefore turn yourselves**, and live ye” (Ezekiel 18:30-32).

Look at the spotlighted phrases in the text above. Every one of them emphasizes man’s personal responsibility in determining whether he lives or dies, spiritually speaking. Man can make the choice to repent. Man can choose to turn from his transgressions. Man is capable of casting away all of his transgressions. Man can reshape his own heart to be more receptive to God’s will. Man can make the choice of turn himself to what is right, so that he might live!

### NEW TESTAMENT CASES

The New Testament echoes the same theme. There were entire groups who refused to choose to follow Christ and His teaching. Although Jesus came unto His own people, the Jews, “**his own received him not**” (John 1:11). The majority of the nation of Israel did not choose Jesus Christ. When Jesus sent forth the apostles to preach, He knew that not everyone would choose to heed their message. Hence, He told them, “And whosoever shall **not receive you** nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet” (Matthew 10:14). In His own ministry, Jesus “began to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because **they repented not**” (Matthew 11:20). The cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, by and large, chose not to embrace the teaching and miracles which Christ did in their presence (Matthew 11:21-24). In His own hometown of Nazareth, Jesus received a chilly reception (Mark 6:1-6) and an angry one; they tried to throw Him off a cliff! (Luke 4:16-30). A certain village of the Samaritans “**did not receive him**” either (Luke 9:52-53).

In a well-known text, Jesus said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and **ye would not**” (Matthew 23:37). To the Jews that sought to kill Him, Jesus said, “And **ye will not come to me**, that ye might have life” (John 5:40). Note that Jesus did not say they were incapable of coming to Him. Rather, He said they would not exercise their will to come to Him. When multitudes chose not to follow Him anymore (John 6:66), Jesus said unto the twelve, “**Will ye also go away?**” (John 6:67). His question implies that His own disciples were

capable of choosing to walk away from Him and the eternal life He offered them. Peter understood that choosing to walk away from Jesus would have eternal ramifications, for he responded, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the **words of eternal life**” (John 6:68). Thus, to choose to walk away from Jesus was/is equivalent to choosing to be lost, because He is the only one who has the words of eternal life! It is no wonder then that John 7:17 emphasizes, “**If any man will do his will**, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” The last chapter in the Bible strikes the same note: “And the Spirit and the bride say, **Come**. And let him that heareth say, **Come**. And let him that is athirst **come**. And **whosoever will**, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

God will not force salvation upon those who refuse it. Man is away from God, and He can choose to stay in his sins. If he chooses to remain in sins, he is choosing to be lost because “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), and the second death is the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8).

In view of the greatness of Jesus, and the severity of punishment for not following Him, we cannot help but ask, “How could people listen to the greatest preacher in the world and not be converted by His teaching? Why did some believe and some not? Why did so many of the unconverted remain unconverted, even after listening to Jesus and the apostles? Why did they choose to be lost?”

### **WHY WOULD ANYONE CHOOSE TO BE LOST?**

The same Scriptures, that reveal the cases of men choosing not to follow Jesus, also reveal the causes for not

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choosing to follow the Savior.

**1. Because of heart problems.** We are not speaking of the physical blood pump here. We are speaking of the spiritual heart or mind of man. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus made it clear that some people's hearts are like hard, packed-down soil—wayside soil. When the seed of the kingdom, which is the Word of God (Luke 8:11) is sown upon this type of soil, "then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). Mark's account says that "Satan cometh immediately" to take away the word that was sown in their hearts (Mark 4:15).

Jesus explained to His disciples that some of His hearers fit the description of Isaiah's prophecy, which saith, "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, **and should be converted**, and I should heal them" (Matthew 13:14-15). Interestingly, Paul cited this same prophecy in describing the unbelieving Jews in Rome, who heard his message and rejected it (Acts 28:25-27). Jesus also quoted another prophecy of Isaiah and applied to the Pharisees: "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:8). Conversion occurs when we obey "from the heart" the doctrine of Christ (Romans 6:17).

**2. Because of pride.** Some are too proud to admit that they need to follow Jesus, for this would require them to admit they are lost and need to be saved. The Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14 was so wrapped up in his own goodness that he did not stop to recognize his weaknesses. The Pharisees were so

proud of their knowledge of the law, and their own goodness, that they were blind to their real condition (John 9:41). Envy is a child of a proud heart and envy is most certainly the thing which kept the elders, chief priests, scribes and Pharisees from choosing to become disciples of Jesus Christ (Matthew 27:18; Acts 13:44-45).

**3. Because of riches.** Who can forget the rich young ruler as one of the classic examples someone who chose not to follow Jesus and be saved? He had so many good things going for him, but when the Lord instructed him to sell his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor, “he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions” (Matthew 19:22). This prompted Jesus to say, “that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven...it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:23-24). Many of the Pharisees rejected Jesus because they had covetous hearts (Luke 16:14). Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). Indeed, many do not choose the Master because they are mastered by money!

**4. Because of peer pressure.** Some of the Jews internally believed that Jesus was the Christ, but they would not confess this openly “lest they should be put out of the synagogue. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42-43). Others choose not to follow Jesus, because to do so would mean that they would fall out of favor with their family members (Matthew 10:34-39). Some are ashamed to believe in Jesus and His Word because of the potential criticism they may receive from their peers.

**5. Because people want to live like they want**

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**to live.** Felix was accustomed to living like he wanted to live. So, when Paul started preaching about “righteousness, temperance, [and] judgment to come” (Acts 24:25), that was more than Felix wanted to hear. Felix knew that Paul was right in his preaching; that is why Felix trembled. But Felix also knew that he did not want to give up those things, which he loved doing, that were unrighteous. He did not want to practice self-control. He wanted to live for self rather than for God! Consequently, he made a deliberate choice not to be saved! Some do not like to retain God in their knowledge because they do not desire to live by His rules (Romans 1:28-32). Jesus commands us to deny self, take up the cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23). We must be willing to lose our own wants and desires in this life and forsake all that we have in order to follow the Master (Luke 14:26-33).

**6. Because of false teaching.** Sadly, many who think they have chosen to follow Jesus do not really know Him, and, sadly, He does not know them either. If you don’t believe this, read Matthew 7:21-23, where people, who called Him Lord, and did many wonderful works in His name, are told by Him, “I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity.” Many are blindly following blind leaders (Matthew 15:13-14). Only the truth can make us free! Believing a lie will damn our souls (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

**7. Because of procrastination.** Many, who have not yet chosen to be saved, plan to obey the Gospel someday. In their minds, they do not consider themselves to have chosen to be lost. They foolishly assume that they will have plenty of time to make preparations. They foolishly believe that tomorrow is the day of salvation. Of course, the parable of the wise and foolish virgins shows the folly of such thinking (Matthew 25:1-13). Today is the day of salvation; tomorrow

may be too late (2 Corinthians 6:2; 2 Peter 3:9).

### **WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF CHOOSING TO BE LOST?**

Having examined the cases and causes of those who chose not to follow the Savior, we conclude by investigating the consequences of this choice. There are several, but they are all equal to the same thing.

- 1. We will not enter the kingdom of heaven** (Matthew 18:3).
- 2. We will die in our sins** (John 8:24).
- 3. We will not be saved** (Luke 8:12; Acts 4:12).
- 4. We will not come to the Father and live with Him** (John 14:6).
- 5. We will not receive everlasting life** (Acts 13:46).
- 6. We will experience the flaming fire of the Lord's vengeance** (2 Thessalonians 1:8; Revelation 21:8).
- 7. We will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power** (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Matt. 7:13-14).

### **CONCLUSION**

Man is a creature of choice, for God made him that way. However, because our choices will determine our eternal destiny, we must be meticulously careful in making the right choice. Your Savior bled and died for you! Never choose to be lost! Hell is horrible and Heaven is beautiful! Never, never, never, choose being lost!

Never Choose Being Lost

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# NEVER LEAVE THE LORD

## Chapter 8

### NEVER CHOOSE DEATH

*Robert Taylor, Jr.*

**M**ay is always beautiful in Pulaski. So is the continuing lectureship here at East Hill - a good, great and grand congregation. My deep gratitude is expressed to Jonathan, the elders and a special group of committed saints of the Most High God.

My assigned topic deals with death. Death takes different forms in the Bible. It may refer to physical death in one passage and to spiritual death in another passage. The context will determine the meaning.

#### **SOME DEFINITIONS**

The basic meaning of death is separation. That is true in all usages of this term. Physical death is a separation of the soul, or spirit, and the body. James 2:26 alludes to this concept. When spirit and body are united, there is life. When spirit and body are separated, the body is dead, but the soul continues to live. This is what we commonly think when we hear this term used. Unless Jesus returns during our life, we will not miss this penalty that has come to countless people. Hebrews 9:27 informs us that we all have an appointment with

death. We have no choice about meeting this appointment. Genesis 5 has a lengthy list of longevity with some living nine hundred years or more. Yet there is an expression that occurs repeatedly.... “and he died.” If time lingers on for just a few more years, this expression will be written about you and me. It is a most sobering sentiment.

There is a usage of this word, death, that is descriptive of men, women and responsible youth who are dead in sin. This type of death means that they are separated from God and all things pure, holy, true and right. We see an example of this when the wonderful father in the pearl of the parables, Luke 15:11-32, welcomed home his repentant prodigal son after he returned from his sinful living in a distant country. The forgiving father said that had been dead, but was now alive and he had been lost but is now found. He was referring to his son’s return from spiritual death. This is also what Paul meant when he spoke of the pleasure loving widow who was dead while she lived (1 Timothy 5:6). This sounds like a contradiction, but it is not. She was alive physically, but dead spiritually. Paul made another reference to this in Ephesians 2:1ff that previous to their conversion, the Ephesians had been dead in their sins, but now they were alive to Christ. Again, there is no contradiction. Rather, it is a marked contrast between past and present. A death in sins is a oneway ticket to eternal Gehenna. Men cannot nullify hell regardless of how much they may seek to do so.

### **THE REALITY OF HELL**

Infidels denounce it, but it remains real. Pleasure lovers do not have Gehenna on their agenda, but it is there regardless of their daring denials. Some time ago, Ted Turner said that heaven is a boring place and who wants to go to a boring

realm. Daringly and defiantly, he said he looked forward to going to hell. If we had the power to interview those now in Hadean torment, we would not find one single person who would agree with Turner, the scoffer. There will be no laughter, joy or pleasure in Satan's Gehenna. If Turner could go to hell for just one second, never again would he speak of hellish happiness.

Everlasting punishment has no joys to bestow. If there is no punishment beyond death, why did Ezekiel ask of his peers as to why will you die O house of Israel (Ezekiel 18:31). The prophet of the Chaldean nation was not concerned with physical death. He knew they and he would meet this sure appointment (Hebrews 9:27). It is true that Ezekiel came before the book of Hebrews was penned, but those in the Old Testament knew of nature's final call. The death we should not choose is the everlasting separation from the timeless Trinity and all of the heavenly inhabitants.

### **WHAT WILL HELL BE LIKE**

Old Testament saints know of its character. The patriarchs knew it would be a deep punishment that never ceased. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psalm 9:17). Proper punishment follows those who live wicked lives.

In Daniel 12:2, this prophet depicted two eternal destinations-everlasting life and everlasting contempt. Hence, it will be everlasting and never ending. It is described as a fiery realm. In his Judean ministry, John the Baptist affirmed that some of his audience would receive the baptism of fire (Matthew 3:11). The subsequent verse portrays hell as the place where its inhabitants would be burned as chaff with an unquenchable fire. (Matthew 3:12) It is reported by

Biblical scholars that Gehenna as hell is used twelve times in Holy Writ. Jesus used it eleven of those times. How did he depict this destruction? Like John, He pictured it as fiery. He depicted it as a “furnace of fire” (Matthew 13:42). In the Olivet discourse, He used “everlasting fire” (Matthew 25:41). Matthew 13:42 says there will be “wailing and gnashing of teeth.” Everlasting fire produces such. The Timeless Trinity, one of whom was Jesus, prepared hell for Satan and his ilk. Men should never choose such an undesirable realm for an eternity, yet the masses of men, women and responsible youth are traveling at breakneck speed toward this deadly destination. How sad! Yet it is true nevertheless.

The apostles accepted it as real. Paul knew of hell and both spoke and wrote of it. He stressed it in the sermon he preached to a sensual couple, Felix and Drusilla (Acts 24). One of his major points was of the judgement to come. This includes all of the horrors of eternal Gehenna. Peter, in 2 Peter 2:3 wrote about fiery hell. He warned his readers by reminding them of what happened to angels who left their first habitation for the crowded realm of rebellion and sure place of punishment, hellish punishment. He wrote of such to the Corinthians, to the Ephesians in chapter 5 and to the Romans in chapter 6. A preacher once wrote that he never preached on hell anymore because he could not think of any who ought to go there. He would fill heaven with the refuse of society, the rouges of all time, serial murders, mass killers such as Lenin and Stalin of Russia, Hitler of Germany and Mussolini of Italy, the leaders of communist China. He would include all who defied God all their lives and those dying in sin. If a person can live and die in Christ, and he can, also he can die out of Christ as countless billions have.

John the apostle wrote of destruction or damnation in

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John 5:28-29. Just as there will be a resurrection of the just, so there will be a resurrection of the damned. A past pope was described as believing more strongly in Hell than any of his peers, yet he never mentions it to his subjects. I wrote an article for one of our papers that was titled, "The Silent Spot in the Pope's Theology!" Yet, he thought he was Christ's vicar on earth. It was not the silent spot with the very one he claimed was the first pope, Peter. Peter dared not be silent on what his Lord Jesus Christ said!

### **THE POPULATION OF HELL**

Paul said that the unrighteous, fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind (homosexuality), thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers and extortioners are not heaven bound (1 Cor 6:9-10). Another list of hell-bound people is depicted by Paul in Ephesians 5:3-5. This list is composed of fornication, the unclean, covetous, filthiness, foolish talkers, jesting, whoremongers and covetous people who are idolaters.

The apostle John supplies another list of the hell-bound in Revelation 21:8. John's list includes the fearful, abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars. The late and lamented E.R. Harper said near the end of his life that if he had one more sermon to preach, his text would be Revelation 21:8. Here is sobering wisdom. What a great soldier of Christ he was. I counted him as a dear friend and beloved brother in Christ. He turned masses of men and women to the saving Christ. He lived a faithful and fruitful life. He made the world a better place to live. We all should do this.

### **SOME SOBERING QUESTIONS**

1) Can you envision Jesus saying, “Though I believe in hell more strongly than anyone, yet I never mention it in my preaching or my teaching. It is the silent spot in my theology.”

2) Can you envision John the Baptist saying to the masses who came to hear him, “Though I believe very strongly in hell, I never warn people about it. It is the silent spot in my theology.”

3) Can you envision Jesus as he sent the twelve on the limited commission saying to those gospel preachers, “I send you forth as firm believers in hell, but I forbid any reference to hell on your part. It is to be the silent spot in your theology.”

4) In his last meeting with the faithful eleven on the Mount of Olives in Acts 1:8, can you envision Jesus saying, “I want you men to preach in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world, but I forbid any reference to hell. It is to be the silent spot of your theology.”

5) Can you envision Luke’s penning the book of Acts and making no mention of hell or eternal damnation? If there be no life beyond this one, why did Peter in Acts 8 tell of the danger that Simon of Samaria faced? If Simon had refused to do what Peter demanded, would he be hell bound, not heaven bound? What about all the ones in Acts who spurned salvation as offered and died outside Christ. If there be life beyond death, how will they fare in Hades and at the judgement? Will they be on the right

hand or the left hand?

6) The “come” and “depart” heard on that equal heaven and hell. The former will be heard with happiness, while the latter will be heard with horror and dread.

7) Can you envision Paul’s penning the fourteen epistles he wrote, if Hebrews be his, and eternal punishment be the silent spot in his theology? Such silence is absent from Romans through Hebrews. Not a single one of the eight writers of the New Testament made everlasting punishment the silent spot in their theology. Johns would not close Revelation without a graphic warning of punishment subsequent to death with no reference to sure punishment awaiting the rebellious and disobedient.

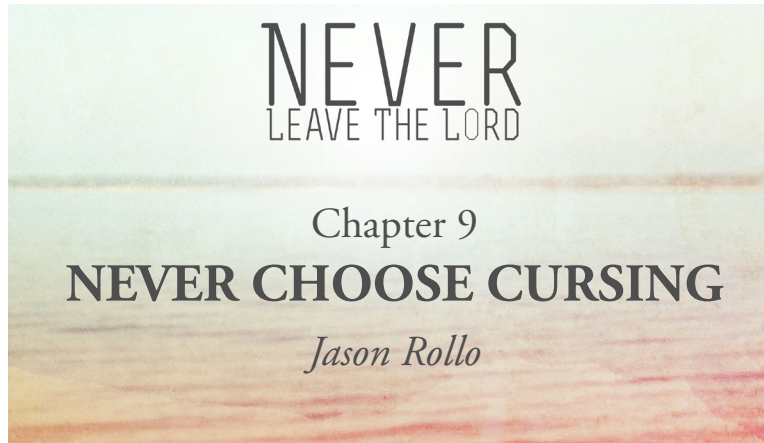
### **CONCLUSION**

Sufficient evidence has been set forth as to why we should not choose death over life here and hell over heaven in the next life. Let us heed this sobering wisdom. At death in Christ and throughout eternity we will be glad we did.

Never Choose Death

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**C**ursing—what is cursing? According to Wilson, in the Old Testament, the term “curse” means various things, including, “to swear, to adjure; to bind oneself to another person by an oath.” It can mean, “to curse, mostly as to the effect; but also to wish or speak evil of anyone.” Further, “to kneel; to invoke God; to invoke blessings or evil...it sometime means to blaspheme, as well as to speak well of;” but, also, it can refer to “a devoted thing; that which is separated or appointed to destruction” Likewise, “to note or mark with dishonor or ignominy.” Additionally, “to curse, perhaps to pierce with words.” Moreover, “to be light; to esteem lightly...to utter violent reproaches, to imprecate evil.” (105). Concerning the word “curse, The Wycliffe Bible Dictionary states, “The several Hebrew and Greek words for curse denote the expression of a wish or prayer that evil might befall another. This idea found a wide variety of uses in Israel’s life and was universally known among her neighbors.” This same reference work continues, “The terms of a contract or treaty were protected by curses or imprecations directed at any future violator of the agreement. Similar security measures

are found in royal inscriptions where curses were pronounced upon anyone who might alter or destroy in inscription.” Adding to this point, the same source notes, “Curses were also directed against murderers (Genesis 4:11-12), as well as against enemies who in the future might harm one (II Samuel 18:32) or who were presently harming one (Jeremiah 12:3). Indeed, wherever protective and punitive measures were lacking or inadequate, curses were employed.” Referencing this topic and connecting it with God, the source continues, “Cursing when applied to God, is an anthropomorphic term expressing divine displeasure or vindictive justice (e.g., Genesis 3:14-19; 5:29; 12:3). The natural antithesis of all such curses is blessing.” (410). Thus, in short, the idea of cursing has to do with punishment (particularly as related and connected with the concept of God), and by clear implication is also connected with its alternative, namely blessing. Thus, these two paths—cursing (condemnation) or blessing (salvation) will serve as the two main points within this brief manuscript. Within these two main topics, we will address some of the various ways cursing was used (the appropriate uses, but also the inappropriate uses). First, however, it seems needful to address the “choice” aspect found within man (as loving allowed by God).

### **THE CHOICE IS YOURS—TWO PATHS**

Through the inspired pen of Moses, God tells His people, “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse. A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God... And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you...” (Deuteronomy 11:26-28). In vivid fashion, God commands the people to stand upon mount Gerizim (to

bless) and mount Ebal (to curse) reminding them of the cursing and blessing promised them, depending on their obedience or disobedience (Deuteronomy 27:11ff; Joshua 8:33). Leviticus 26 is another plain chapter showing these two clear paths! In the New Testament, the two paths (cursing or blessing) are again clearly revealed. Romans 6:16-18 and Matthew 7:13-14 make this truth abundantly obvious. Yes, under both testaments, the message is understandable: Obedience to God brings blessing (salvation), whereas disobedience to God brings cursing (condemnation). Listen to the language again from Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 28:1 reads, “And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all His commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all of these blessings shall come on thee....” Yet, only a few verses later, Deuteronomy 28:15 declares, “But if shall come to pass, if thou will not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and over take thee.” Special note should be taken regarding terms like, “if, do, all, commandments, blessings, but, and curses.” Words have meanings and God has always expected humanity to understand and obey HIS words (Genesis 3:4, Matthew 24:35, John. 12:48). Truly, Jehovah does not look lightly upon rebellion and disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:20; 1 Samuel 15:20-23)! Truly, as the title of this assignment reflects, we would do well to NEVER forget the lessons of “the blessing and the curse” (Deuteronomy 30:1). As noted in Deuteronomy 30:19, God puts it this way, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore

choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.” Again, this same concept, even using the same type of language is also taught in the New Testament (cf., Hebrews 6:8, Galatians 3:13, Revelation 22:3).

### **THE PATH OF CURSING—DEATH (CONDEMNATION)**

Adam and Eve sinned and felt the curse of their disobedience (Genesis 3:9-24). Likewise, those of Noah’s day (all but 8 souls, 1 Peter 3:20) felt this curse (Genesis 7:21-23, 8:21). Like Noah’s family, faithful Abraham would avoid the curse of God through his obedient faith (Genesis 12:3 with 22:18, 26:5, Romans 4:1f, Hebrews 11:8f, James 2:21f). As Proverbs 3:33 notes, “The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just” (cf., also Judges 9:57, 2 Kings 22:19 and Nehemiah 10:29).

Also, as it relates to our topic, one should perhaps take the time to read and study the numerous times the term “curse” is used in relation to Balak and Balaam (cf., Numbers 22:6, 11-12, 17; 23:7-8, 11, 13, 25, 27; 24:10; Deuteronomy 23:4-5; Joshua 24:9-10; Nehemiah 13:2). This study should also include reading and studying Numbers 31:16 and Micah 6:5, along with various New Testament passages (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11, Revelation 2:14). Important lessons will be learned from such a study! Lessons about how God is ultimately in control, how false teachers encourage much sin and love money, how God will not overlook sin, and many other such lessons.

Further, it should be understood that the prophets (especially Isaiah and Jeremiah) have a number of references to the concept of cursing (Isaiah 24:6, 34:5, 43:28 (cf., with 65:15); Jeremiah 24:9, 25:18, 26:6, 29:18, 22, 42:18, 44:8, 12, 40:13; Lamentation 3:65; Daniel 9:11; Zechariah 5:3,

8:13; Malachi 2:2, 3:9, 4:6). Although each passage and context would need to be specifically studied, perhaps, Daniel 9:11 will suffice as a brief summary, “Yea, all Israel have transgressed Thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey Thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against Him.” Clearly, the path of cursing is connected with disobedience to God’s law and is the path that leads to death and condemnation.

In view of the above reality, men and women should consider their chosen path with eternity in mind (Hebrews 9:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Matthew 25:46). More specifically, and as it relates to this topic, each person should not take lightly the use of their mind, their mouth and their manner. In other words, as it relates to one’s chosen path—i.e., the path of cursing (death) or the path of blessing (life)—each person should CHOOSE WISELY how they use their mind, their mouth and their manner. In short, how one lives (lifestyle) has much to do with the path of cursing or the path of blessing (Galatians 5:16ff; 1 Peter 4:1ff; Colossians 3:1ff; 1 Corinthians 6:9ff; Romans 1:16ff). Please Consider:

**Your Mind (The Real You):**

The inspired apostle Peter, in 1 Peter 1:13, instructs, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you as the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Matthew 22:37 tells us that we must love God with all our heart, soul and mind. Philippians 4:8 teaches us to “think on these things,” after listing several positive items (i.e., things that are true, honest, pure, lovely, etc.). In Mark 7:14-23, Jesus connects such teachings about the mind/heart with what is within a man (cf., 2 Corinthians 4:16). Yes, without question, this “inward man” is the same

as “the hidden man of the heart” (1 Peter 3:4). Jesus, in Luke 11:39 references this as “your inward part.” Each person, at conception is given the gift of life (Hebrews 12:9). Humans have a mind, an inward man, a hidden man of the heart, an inward part, namely an immortal soul/spirit (cf., terms as used in various contexts), and thus human beings are not the same as animals (Philippians 1:21-23; Luke 16:19ff, 23:43; Ecclesiastes 12:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). After all we are permitted eat animals (1 Timothy 4:4-5)! At death, a person’s spirit (soul, mind, heart, inward man)—i.e., the real you, will separate from his or her body (James 2:26). In other words, the body will die or sleep (cf., Daniel 12:2), but such is not true of the spirit/soul. Sleep, in the Bible is never used of man’s spirit/soul (inward man), but only of the body. No, not at all. Read Luke 16:19-31 and realize that the righteous dead (the blessed) and the unrighteous dead (the cursed) will go two separate ways—one to paradise or Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:23, 23:43) and the other to torment (Luke 16:23-24; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 7). After the Day of Judgment will come Heaven and/or Hell (Gehenna), as noted in many passages (John 14:1f, 1 Peter 1:3-4, Colossians 1:5, Matthew 10:28, 25:41, 46; Mark 9:43f, James 3:6, Etc.).

The point is this: Each person has but one mind/life (one soul) and will spend eternity in one of two locations, as determined by one of two paths that he or she chooses to follow. One path leads to cursing (death and condemnation) and the other path leads to blessing (life and salvation). The wise person will value their soul and will choose life (Matthew 16:26)!

**Your Mouth (Tongue):**

Cursing, as noted in the introduction, can be used in several ways. One of these ways involves the misuse of

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the tongue. Consider Psalm 10:7. Speaking of the wicked/prideful (cf., vs. 4), this passage reads, “His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity.” In a similar fashion, Psalm 59:12 says, “for the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips let them even be taken in pride: and for cursing and lying which they speak.” It is interesting that in these verses, cursing is associated with terms like “deceit, fraud, mischief, vanity and lying.” Psalm 109:17-18 describes it thusly, “As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garment, so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones” (cf., Proverbs 29:24; 2 Samuel 16:9-12).

We also see our topic addressed several times in the New Testament, as well (James 3:9-10; Matthew 26:74; Mark 14:71). In fact, James 3:10 plainly states, “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.” The cursing of the tongue will bring cursing from God. It is extremely important that Christians realize the absolute danger of misusing one’s tongue. Sins like: 1) Lying (including false teaching), 2) Cussing or Dirty talking (including jesting, bad jokes and euphemisms), 3) Gossip/Slander 4) Blasphemy, and the like, are condemned (Ephesians 4:29, 5:4; Colossians 3:8-9; Matthew 12:36; Revelation 21:8). Further, we must equally strive to not fail to use our tongue for good (cf., encouraging others, praising God in prayer, singing, evangelizing, etc.), including speaking up for truth (Ephesians 4:15-16; 5:19-20; Colossians 3:16; Acts 8:35a; Jude 3). We should carefully consider the use/misuse of our tongue (Proverbs 12:18-19, 15:4, 17:20, 18:21, 21:23, 26:28, 31:26).

**Your Manner (Conduct):**

One's manner (or conduct) will certainly determine whether a person is cursed or blessed by God (John 5:28-29). To read the Bible is to understand this truth (Deuteronomy 11:26-28; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Matthew 7:21ff; Romans 6:16-18; Hebrews 5:9). Certainly, without Christ and His saving blood, no person can be saved (Romans 5:8-9; 1 John 2:1-2; John 3:16; Philippians 2:5-12). All people of accountable age must obey the gospel, thereby accessing the saving blood of Jesus, if they are to be saved (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Romans 10:13-17; Acts 2:38, 20:28, 22:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). This truth is undeniable. Yet, Christ's sacrifice does not negate the necessity of man's obedience. No, not at all. In fact, the love of God and sacrifice of Jesus forever demand our faith and obedience (Luke 6:46; Hebrews 5:9; Ephesians 2:8-9). This truth includes obeying God in becoming a Christian and it also involves remaining faithful to Him (Acts 2:40; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 1:6ff; 2 Peter 2:20-22; Luke 9:62). Connecting this concept of one's manner (or obedience) with this particular study on cursing, let us consider three quick Old Testament examples. The first is found in Numbers chapter 5. The second is found in Joshua chapter 6. The third is found in Judges chapter 5. Numbers chapter 5 is a fascinating chapter and speaks of "bitter water that causeth the curse." This chapter deals with a husband's jealousy and his suspicions of his wife's possible infidelity, and deals with how such is to be handled. Clearly, a study of this chapter shows that one's manner (or actions) directly affects his or her ability to be blessed/cursed by God. In equally vivid fashion, Joshua chapter 6 deals with the sin of Achan and the taking of the accursed (or dedicated thing) that resulted in the curse upon Israel, until such "sin in the



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camp” was purged (Joshua 6:18-19, 7:11-15, 25-26). The third example is equally interesting, especially when connected with the concept just studied in Joshua chapter 6, namely that sin must not be overlooked (i.e., that it must be dealt with). Judges 5:23 is within the context of the song of Deborah. It reads, “Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.” This “curse” (condemnation) was announced by none other than “the angel of the Lord.” What was this curse—yeah, this bitter curse—uttered about? The verse makes it clear. This curse/condemnation was against those of Meroz because “they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.” In other words, when the time came for fighting, these individuals DID NOT SHOW UP (cf., Numbers 32:6; Obadiah 11; Jude 3; Romans 16:16-18). This lesson is one that many of my brethren have forgotten. We are not involved in a physical war, but we are certainly involved in spiritual warfare and the souls of men and women hang in the balance (Ephesians 6:10ff; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Those who never mark and avoid falsehood are choosing cursing by their cowardice and we should never choose cursing. While it is true that some abuse verses like Romans 16:16-18 and “make anyone and everyone” a target, without regard to reason and research (cf., 1 Corinthians 13:7), it is equally true that far too many hide their eyes when it comes to “dealing with sin in the camp” (Revelation 2:20-22). Jesus stood for the truth (Matthew 23:1ff; Revelation 2:14ff). Paul stood for the truth (Acts 13:6-12; Galatians 2:11ff; 1 Timothy 1:18-20, 4:1-6; 2 Timothy 1:15, 2:15-18, 4:1-5, 14). We must do the same (Jude 3; 1 Peter 3:15; Philippians 1:7, 17; Psalm 119:104)!

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Preachers worth their salt will deal with specifics (cf., preaching on the sin of modern dancing, as condemned by lasciviousness, preaching against social drinking and other works of the flesh, preaching against children's church or singing during the Lord's Supper or other innovations of men against pure worship, preaching on kindness, etc.). Yes, preachers must be "balanced" and preach/teach "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:20, 27), and this includes specifically dealing with the easy subjects, as well as not forsaking the more difficult topics. Proper elderships must demand it! The souls of men and women hang in the balance.

**The Path of Cursing (Condemnation):**

As we have seen, the Bible reveals a good bit about curses and cursing. Even among men, the concept of receiving a curse from another was considered a serious thing, often bringing fear (1 Kings. 2:8; Genesis 27:12-13). Satan thought Job would curse God (Job 1:11; 2:5). Likewise, even Job's struggling wife encouraged the same sinful option (Job 2:9). Yet, the faithful Job was not one given to cursing (Job 31:30). And although Job went too far in his questioning of God (and was thus rebuked by the Lord Himself, Job 38:1ff), Job did not curse God and "the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" (Job 42:12). In Exodus 22:28 the Israelites were not allowed to curse their rulers. Likewise, they were not permitted to "curse the deaf" (Leviticus 19:14). Proverbs 27:14 even notes, "He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him." Regarding treatment of the poor, Proverbs 28:27 tells us, "He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse." Proverbs 30:10 advises, "Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty." The next verse, Proverbs

30:11 says, “There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.” Concerning the imperfections of humanity, the wise man Solomon penned, “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others” (Ecclesiastes 7:20-22). Solomon also offered this advice, “Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter” (Ecclesiastes 10:20).

In the New Testament, we also find various references connected with the subject of cursing. For instance, a band of rebel Jews sought to murder Paul and “bound themselves under a curse” (Acts 23:12, 14). In Matthew 5:44, Jesus speaks of loving one’s enemies and blessing them “that curse you” (cf., Luke 6:28; Romans 12:14; also, Jeremiah 15:10; Psalm 62:4; 109:28). As noted earlier, James 3:9-12 speaks of the tongue and of blessing and cursing. Yet, among all of these important references, certainly the “curse” mentioned in Galatians 3:10 and Galatians 3:13 should not be overlooked. In one of the most amazing chapters in all of the Bible, Galatians 3:13, quoting from Deuteronomy, reminds us, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” Because of Christ, we are allowed to obey the Gospel and get INTO Christ (through baptism) and be saved by His blood (Galatians 3:8, 13-16, 26-29)! Yes, because of King Jesus we are able to overcome cursing and choose the path of blessing (life/salvation)! “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15; Hebrews 2:9; 2 Corinthians 8:9;

John 11:25-26).

### **THE PATH OF BLESSING—LIFE (SALVATION)**

In contrast to the path of cursing or death, God wants mankind to seek and choose blessing or life (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 2:25). God does not have joy or pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:32). Yet, most individuals will not choose God's desired path, but will instead choose cursing and condemnation (Matthew 7:13-14). The reason for this situation is understood in one simple concept—free will. In short, God (because He is love, 1 John 4:8, 16) made humanity with free-will (Genesis 1:26-27; Matthew 11:28; Revelation 3:20), and with this free-will comes the ability for individuals to choose blessing or cursing. While it is true that all accountable people sin (Romans 3:23) thereby bringing spiritual death (Romans 6:23), it is equally true that all accountable people should choose life and come back to God via the terms He has so plainly laid out (John 10:10, 12:31-32; 1 John 2:25; Acts 20:32; Hebrews 5:9).

#### **The Biblical Heart (Choice Revisited):**

The mind (i.e., the soul/spirit, heart, inward man, real you) referenced earlier is the same as the Biblical heart. This heart (the inward part of man, not the blood-pump) can be understood by looking at four things, namely: 1) Free-Will (Romans 6:16-18; Hebrews 4:12; Dan. 1:8, 10:12; 2 Chronicles 12:14; Hebrews 3:8), 2) Intellect (Mark 2:6, 8; Matthew 9:4; 1 Corinthians 10:12; Luke 2:19, 51; Proverbs 23:7), 3) Conscience (John 8:9; Romans 2:15; 1 Corinthians 8:12; 1 Peter 3:21; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Timothy 1:5, 19, 3:9, 4:2; Acts 23:1) and 4) Emotion (Isaiah 65:14; Mark 3:5; Acts 21:13; Proverbs 15:13; Judges 16:25a, 18:20a, 19:5b; Ruth 3:7; 1 Samuel 1:8, 2:1, 4:13). The key thing to remember

when studying the inward man/Biblical heart, is this: You have choice! Will you choose cursing (death/condemnation) or will you choose blessing (life/salvation)? Each person has (and will make) a choice! Oh, how men need to study this concept with verses like Hebrews 4:12, Ephesians 6:17 and Psalm 119:11.

**Having A Pure Heart:**

Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” In other words, it is very possible to trick/deceive oneself, and sadly this is exactly what most people do, as they live worldly and/or involve themselves with false religion. God, while not wanting free-willed individuals to believe a lie, will allow them that privilege (Romans 1:24-26; 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12; Ephesians 4:18-19). Thus, the key is for a person to cultivate their own soil and develop a pure heart within themselves (Luke 8:15; Matthew 5:8). This self-development is only possible if a person chooses to be honest and allow the pure seed of God’s Word (Luke 8:11) into their soil/heart. Pure hearts do not accept denominationalism, worldly living, family beliefs over God’s way, or any other such thing to get in the way of securing God’s blessings.

**Obedience—The Key:**

As discussed earlier, the key to securing God’s blessings, involves obedience. Yet, the key to obedience is seen in having a contrite/broken heart (Psalm 34:18; 51:17). Acts 13:22 quotes the Old Testament and thus God, saying, “I have found David...a man after mine own heart which shall fulfill all My will.” Notice, David was not “a man after God’s own heart” because of his sin, but because he was willing to do God’s Will (and this, of course, would include repenting of his sin, when he was guilty – Psalm 32:1ff; 51:1ff). Abraham was

called a friend of God (James 2:23), yet it was his obedience that defined him (Genesis 12:1ff; 22:18; 26:5). It is impossible to dissect a pure heart from obedience, just as it is impossible to disassociate obedience from God's blessing (salvation) and disobedience from God's cursing (condemnation).

**The Path of Blessing (Salvation):**

God did not create mankind so that no one would be saved. Jesus did not die on the cross so that no one would go to Heaven. No, a thousand times, "NO!" Rather, God created mankind and Jesus died that terrible death on the cruel cross in order to offer salvation to all of mankind and so that people would have the choice to be saved and to go to Heaven (John 3:16, 10:10, 12:31-32; Luke 19:10). Jesus built His church (Matthew 16:13ff; Acts 2). He shed His blood for that church (Acts 20:28). God has given all men the ability to choose salvation and be added to that church (the church of Christ, Romans 16:16) thereby being saved by the precious blood of Christ (Ephesians 5:23-27, 32). We would that all of humanity would realize these truths and obey the Gospel and be saved (Romans 1:16-18, 10:13-17, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; 1 Peter 4:17). God only has one way. He will only bless one way. Let us always choose His way (Matthew 7:13ff).

**CONCLUSION**

We do not have to choose cursing. 1 Peter 3:9 says of Christians, "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing." Yes, we, as the Lord's church are truly blessed. The "blessing of Abraham" came upon us through Christ. That is, Jesus came (as promised) through Abraham and offered salvation to all (Genesis 12:3; Acts 13:23; Galatians 4:14), and those who obey God's plan

of salvation are IN Christ (Galatians 3:27-29). Thus, we should NEVER CHOOSE CURSING, but instead embrace God's truth in every way and thereby enjoy God's full slate of blessings. The blessing of being able to live the Christian life (2 Peter 1:3). The blessing of being able to be IN Christ (Romans 6:3-4; 2 Timothy 2:1, 10). The blessing of being able to die with full assurance and hope, being IN the Lord (Hebrews 10:22; 1 Thessalonians 4:13; Revelation 14:13). The world will choose cursing and will inherit cursing. Put another way, the world will sew to the wind and will reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7). They will sew to the flesh and reap corruption, but we will sew to the Spirit and reap life everlasting (Galatians 6:7-9). Deuteronomy 30:19 summarizes the plea well. God says, "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live." Never Choose Cursing!

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# NEVER LEAVE THE LORD

## Chapter 10

### NEVER CHOOSE RESENTMENT

*Neal Pollard*

In Colossians 3, Paul deals with the Christian's relationship with himself and his relationship with other Christians. He will follow that up by examining this in light of the Christian's relationship to God, letting the peace of God rule our hearts (15), letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly (16), and doing all in the name of the Lord (17). The New Testament repeatedly conditions one's right relationship with God upon his or her right relationship with others.

The thought begins with the relationship a Christian has with himself (12). Paul deals with who we are. We are "elect of God." He leaves the undoubtable impression that we are so special to God. Like the Colossians, every true, New Testament Christian has been buried with Christ in baptism (2:12) to walk in newness of life. He invites sinners like us to be a part of His family. As has been said, "The elect are the 'whosoever wills' and the non-elect are the 'whosoever won'ts.'" We know all about ourselves, our struggles and weaknesses, but God still chose us. Such should cause us to feel the need to adequately represent him.

He also deals with what we are. We are "holy and

beloved.” Beloved deals with how God feels about us and regards us. This is a powerful incentive. It means to esteem and indicates a direction of the will and finding one’s joy in something or someone. We are the object of the love and God is the One who finds joy in us. I don’t want to dampen that joy or disappoint the God who takes His delight with me. Holy is the idea of being set apart so that we are not common, ordinary folks. We are not perfect, but we should be spiritual leaders in the community in terms of morality, ethics, and general behavior. If I see my exalted position and high expectation God has for me, I will act that part. God has put us in a very special place. That’s a lot of responsibility. How does it look to God when His chosen saints choose to hold a grudge and not forgive? When I see myself through God’s eyes, I see the important position He put me in. That will help me to sort through petty feelings, immature thinking, vendettas, bitter resentment, and similar reactions and respond in a way that reflects my exalted position.

Paul then deals with how we are to be, speaking of our hearts, wherein are found our deepest desires, intentions, and feelings. Within me will be found mercy--a compassion that is sensitive to others’ feelings, kindness--providing acts beneficial to others, humbleness of mind--properly estimating ourselves as small, meekness--not harsh in our dealings with others, and long-suffering--emotional calm in the face of provocation without complaint or irritation. These are to be deeply rooted feelings within us that begins with how we are inside, but impacts others, too. Jesus taught that what comes out of the mouth first lives in the heart (Matthew 12:34).

Then, Paul turns to the Christian’s relationship with others (13-14). If we have put on the right kind of heart, it will spill into our interactions with one another. Think about

how God has treated us and how that ought to be reflected in how we treat each other. Putting on the right kind of heart, we will forbear one another. This is not a news flash, but in the realm of interpersonal dynamics, we have to deal with difficult people. It may be a clash of personalities, people who are emotionally or spiritually struggling, or even a significant case of mutual misunderstanding.

Paul had expressed the idea that forbearing one another is a matter of the heart, to be careful not to harbor and feed feelings of resentment, impatience, and antagonism toward a fellow-Christian. Christ essentially says to nip that in the bud, whether it's our fault (Matthew 5:23) or theirs (Matthew 18:15).

Putting on the right kind of heart, we will forgive one another. Notice the clear connection between this and the previous admonition. How we feel about each other is directly connected to how we treat one another. Paul says we should be willing to forgive even if we have occasion to find fault. If we are bent on discovering people's weaknesses, we'll succeed every time. But Paul says to train your heart to focus on compassion rather than the complaint. Gratitude should drive our desire to forgive each other, as we regularly consider all that God has forgiven us for. The parable of the two debtors drives this point home (Matthew 18). A slave owes his master the equivalent of 200,000 years of labor. This was more than 33 times the amount Herod's son received as annual tribute payments, and they lived lavishly! It was absolutely impossible to repay! Yet, Jesus tells us that the incredible happens and this man is forgiven this enormous debt. What does he do in response? The slave finds someone who owes him a hundred denarii and physically assaults him, imprisons him, and refuses to forgive him. What was that?

Short-sighted? Hard-hearted? Heavy-handed? In the end, it was costly—he was tortured until he could repay the debt. In other words, he suffered eternal punishment. What have you and I done to each other that would be worth sacrificing eternal salvation? Jesus ends that parable in Matthew 18:35, urging us to forgive our brother from the heart. That’s what Paul is saying here, too! I want to go to heaven, and that’s going to take God’s grace and forgiveness. I got the benefit of grace when I obeyed the gospel, but I still need it every day. I continue to sin and fall short of His glory (Romans 3:23). As I look back on my decades as a Christian, I have done some pretty bad things. I need His grace covering those sins. But when I have been hurt, wronged, or violated, how do I respond? Am I gracious or do I punish, make overbearing stipulations, or keep a record?

What activates these qualities is love (14), which leads to unity. He says “above all these things.” This may suggest the idea that love should be behind them all, but it’s certainly a superior quality to have with each other because it’s the glue for unity. It’s love that will activate those qualities that should be in our hearts, and it’s what powers bearing with and forgiving each other.

### **PINPOINTING THE PROBLEM**

Having observed these background ideas, let us consider how to apply these principles to a word that is not found in the New Testament but is a concept thoroughly dealt with. Perhaps of all places where we see the idea of “resentment” discussed, none is more convicting than a single word found among the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. It is the word “hatred” (also translated “hatred,” NKJ, “enmities,” NASB and ESV). The word is found nine times

in the New Testament, from the Greek word “echthrai,” and its general meaning is “enmity, hostility, hatred, both as an inner disposition and objective opposition (Romans 8:7); plural, of hostile feelings and acts animosities, hostilities, discord, feuds (Galatians 5:20)(Friberg & Miller 183). Lightfoot suggests that “enmity’s” (“hatred’s”) place in the list is part of “a principle of order” listed “in an ascending scale” (211), meaning that a failure to control this work leads to the greater breaches of loving behavior of “strife,” “jealousy,” “disputes,” “dissensions,” “factions,” and “envying.” Hostile feelings, unchecked and not repaired, lead ultimately to ungodly behavior toward others that can even cause division. Another adds that it is “a general term referring to hostility or unneighborly acts of any kind or form” (Arichea & Nida 138).

How does resentment arise and how might we fall prey to it?

**Resentments arise by holding a grudge.** In fact, it can be very difficult to know when you cross the line from the one to the other. When you harbor feelings of resentment toward someone from an offense real or imagined, it will eventually grow into hostile feelings and possibly hostile acts. The Old Law warns against bearing a grudge and even makes it antonymous with love (Leviticus 19:18). The Lord tells us what to do when we have a problem with a brother or sister (Matthew 18:15ff). If we do not follow this, who are we listening to?

**Resentments arise through prejudice.** Prejudice occurs on much more than the basis of the color of one’s skin or ethnicity. Prejudice is another more than a preformed opinion, one formed without all the facts but instead through

“insufficient knowledge, irrational feelings, or inaccurate stereotypes” (Encarta Dictionary np). How often, based on how we think, feel, or believe another to be, do we work ourselves up against another and allow resentment to rule our hearts?

**Resentments arise when the mind is set on the flesh (Romans 8:7).** Paul is contrasting the Old Law with the gospel of Christ in this context, but he reveals a compelling principle. When we fail to live spiritual lives, but instead make our decisions driven by our passions and fleshly inclinations, we open ourselves up to works like resentment. Incidentally, this same bent will lead one further and further down the road of those ensuing works of Galatians five. Notice that this hostility is pointed toward God and His law (cf. James 4:4), but it will impact our demeanor and attitude in all relationships. This resentment plays out “in the flesh” (Romans 8:8), the very activities and attitudes Paul focuses upon in Galatians 5:19-21.

None of us are immune from resentment. We can strengthen ourselves against such especially through the “antidote” of love in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Love actively seeks and strives for others’ good. If we sincerely give our hearts to loving others, our brethren or the lost, we will have a harder time harboring hostility, hatred, or resentment for them. Maybe if we take the time to know others better and try to get insight into their circumstances, struggles, and challenges, it will temper our feelings toward them. It will certainly demonstrate that we are led by the Spirit and not by the flesh (Galatians 5:24-26)!

We have heard stories in the news and online about victims heroically forgiving their violators, but it’s more usual to hear of anger, resentment, bitterness, and hatred. There are

so many different areas of life where we may struggle with resentment and unwillingness to forgive. Commonly, this happens with spouses who are sexually unfaithful, people we trust who swindle or cheat us, a friend who betrays us with gossip or revealing a secret, a parent who physically abused us, someone who sexually abused us, or a church family who we feel let us down.

### **PRACTICAL PROPOSALS**

What makes ceasing to choose resentment such a struggle? It could be the repeat offender. It could be seeming insincerity. It could be how much what they did hurts. It could be wounded pride. It could be that they don't seem to care what they did. Here are some closing, practical ways that we can implement to keep us from ever choosing resentment.

**Pray about it.** You will have to pray about your heart and your spiritual strength. You will also need to pray for the object of your resentment. It's amazing how impactful this can be (cf. Matthew 5:44). Because you do not know what may be going on in their life, your faithful prayer for them may bring benefits you could not have anticipated that results in the saving or preservation of a soul.

**Actively work on the matter.** It is amazing what can be cleared up when we stop presuming and assuming what someone may be feeling, thinking, or believing. There is no substitute for simply approaching one with whom we have a grievance or by whom we have been offended, taking the appropriate measures (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:24-26). Out of love for the offender, do everything you can to resolve the matter or at least the part of the matter you can control.

**Be sure that you are in the right.** How often do we

see Proverbs 21:2 play out, that “every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD pondereth the hearts.” In other words, He weighs the motives. We can be so blind to our faults and even our guilt. How often do we feel resentment toward someone when, if we thoughtfully examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5), we see the part we played in creating the problem. It may be that, after a fair, open consideration, we find that we are an innocent victim, but too often we do not even thoughtfully weigh the matter.

**Be inclined to let things go.** In the sermon on the mount, Jesus deals with how we interact with our enemies. He says,

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and



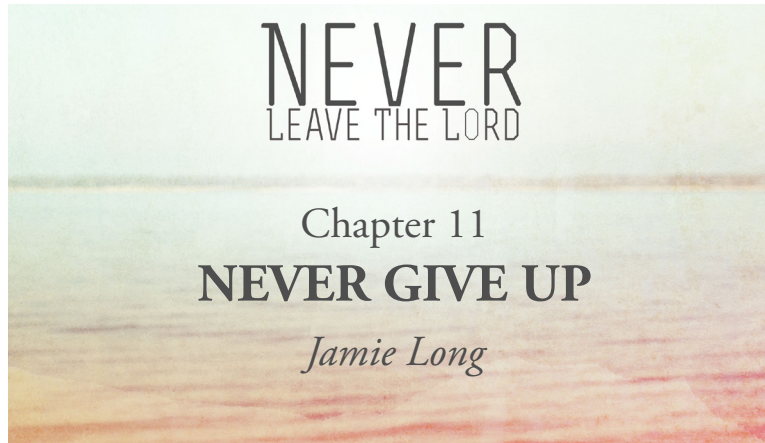
on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:38-48).

Notice the remedies Jesus offers for when we are oppressed by enemies. Do not resist an evil person. Turn the other cheek. Give more to your enemies than they try to take away. Love them. Pray for them. These responses cause us to imitate our perfect heavenly Father. Is this challenging? To the core! But, is it necessary? Apparently! James, who frequently reflects the teaching of his half-brother in this very sermon, adds, “Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned...” (5:9). Literally, he is saying, “Don’t groan and complain against them!” The word carries with it the idea of an intense, excessive manner. How easily resentment grows in a heart like that! The better we can become at not harboring and holding on to slights and offenses, the better we can obey these important commands that have our eternal destiny in view.

It is not easy to practice these principles, but the payoff is noticeable. By choosing not to choose resentment, we make room for peace and contentment. We are more ready to forgive. Others can see Christ, the one most entitled to be resentful but who never chose to exercise it, living in us.

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I want to thank Brother Jonathan Burns, the elders and the church at East Hill for allowing me the opportunity to be a part of this great lectureship. I remember as a student of the Memphis School of Preaching having the opportunity to come and sit at the feet of the capable speakers at this lectureship many years ago. I count it an honor and privilege to be here along side these great preachers and teachers of God’s word this year.

The subject, “Never Give Up”, is one that is of great value. This is the basic message that God has tried to help his children understand since the creation. It is clearly seen in the successful lives of men and women, in both the Old and New Testaments. Having faith in God means a complete trust in him which implies a never give up attitude. This is seen in the lives of those in Hebrews 11:1-16:

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by

the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him

as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”

These examples provide great encouragement to anyone who is facing difficulties in life never to give up.

#### **THE REALITY**

Approximately three years ago, I was diagnosed with End Stage Liver Disease (ESLD). After a lengthy battle, which included various tests and treatments, I underwent liver transplant surgery on April 14, 2018. This, of course, was something that I never anticipated having to face in my life here on earth. This journey has been nothing less than amazing. From being at a point when being so sick makes you think as if you just can't continue living this way any longer, to now realizing, that if you keep your faith in God, family and friends, nothing is impossible. While admitting it was a roller coaster ride of emotions, there are things that I now understand, different than ever before, that would not be

if this had not happened.

Have you ever heard or been told the words, “I’m sorry, but there’s nothing more that can be done?” Certainly, no one wants to hear these words and no doctor wants to say them. However, sometimes these words can’t be avoided. But is this true? It is at this time when one needs to realize that there is something or someone that can provide needed assurance and hope, even when the Doctors say nothing else can be done from a physical and/or medical standpoint. It is true that in the course of many illnesses, a cure ceases to be an option. However, no hope of a sure cure does not mean no hope at all. It certainly does not mean there is nothing more that can be done. When you receive the information that your illness or disease is serious, how can you have hope when it seems hopeless? How can you keep your faith and never give up?

You can be the most intelligent or organized person in the world but hearing distressing news about your health condition makes it hard to keep things straight. It then becomes hard to ask the right questions and easy to misunderstand the answers. Once you’ve learned about your diagnosis, PRAY. The most important thing is always remembering to pray to the Father and creator of all things because He knows and understands, “Casting all your care upon him; because he careth for you” (I Peter 5:7). However, you will have to share the news with others. For many people, this is the hardest part but one of the most necessary things to do. You should not try to go through this alone. Some people feel better when they tell everyone. Others like to keep it as private as they can. But even for those who are very private, be sure that those upon whom you most rely in your life are included in the circle of those who know what’s going on and what you’re feeling.

Personally, I did not really do this but now I wish I had.

Furthermore, no matter who you tell, be sure to also tell them what you need. If you don't direct them in how you want them to help you, they'll still help in whatever way they can but that might not be what you need. Don't expect people to guess. These things will help you handle the fears and anxiety associated with a life-threatening illness. Do your best to know what to expect (as far as that's possible). Anxiety is often related to the unknown.

Also, keep a list of questions to ask your doctor. For example: What symptoms should I expect and what are you going to do to treat them? If I'm going to have pain, how will I manage it? Remember all questions are important and deserve an answer. There are many things we should know when we are facing difficult health problems concerning the physical aspects, but we should realize that spiritual things are the source of true strength and hope. This is what will make a true difference in having a never give up attitude.

### **WEATHERING THE STORM**

Dealing with a life-threatening illness can be understood much in the way a meteorologist would try to prepare people for the threat of an upcoming storm. The warning that the storm is approaching, the storm itself, and then the aftermath or recovery of the storm is very important concerning the overall outcome of the situation.

### **THE STORM WARNING**

There are those who, when a severe storm warning is issued, neglect the potential danger that the storm will affect them. As a result, they run the risk of losing their lives because of such neglect. In like manner, they are those who run the

same risk because they do not heed the proper instructions given to them by the medical professionals concerning their health. The warning signs need to be taken seriously because most of the time serious health issues are something a person has never faced before. We must then rely on those (such as Doctors, nurses, or someone who has faced the same issue) who are familiar and are experienced with the same condition.

In my personal situation (ESLD), researching, asking questions, and learning the progression was significant. As in any dangerous weather situation, the warning signs need to be recognized and taken seriously. There is the watch, and then the warning when the situation needs to be taken seriously.

Chronic liver disease results in more than 1,000,000 doctor visits and more than 300,000 hospitalizations per year in the United States. More than 27,000 people annually progress to ESLD, liver failure, or death on an annual basis. There are many symptoms of ESLD which include: malnutrition, muscle wasting, ascites (fluid build-up in the abdomen), esophageal variceal hemorrhage (bursting of blood vessels, fatigue, depression, kidney failure, etc.). Despite improvements in treatment, the quality of life diminishes as this disease progresses. Whether your liver is infected with a virus, injured by chemicals, or under attack from your own immune system, the basic danger is the same – that your liver will become so damaged that it can no longer work to keep you alive. Non-Alcoholic Steatohepatitis (NASH) - the silent killer and Fatty Liver Disease (caused by obesity/diabetes) are also other illnesses of the liver that cause basically the same symptoms. Hepatocellular Carcinoma is another liver disease with which many must deal. This is a cancer that starts in your liver. It's different from "secondary" liver cancers, which have spread to the liver from other organs but can be very serious



to your body.

### **THE STORM**

Dealing with storms is something with which everyone has had to face at some point, whether it be a storm from nature or difficulties in life such as one's health, death of a loved one or even temptations from Satan. What is the main objective in these situations? Is it simply a desire for peace? Maybe so. It is the case that those who have had to live with health problems and illnesses for a period of time, will come to a point in which they know something must take place to have peace. Maybe it's a major surgical procedure or even that you feel that the time for life on earth needs to come to an end.

In either situation, in order to have peace, is to have hope. To have hope means that you must have the saving faith that is revealed to us in God's word. Such is revealed through the inspired writer to the church at Rome:

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous

man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:1-8).

Our Lord was “delivered” (on the cross) because we were in an offensive position in the sight of God because of sin but was resurrected from the grave so we could be justified by faith (Romans 4:25). As a result, as stated in the above passage, we can have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

Realizing what God has done for us so that we can be reconciled unto him through the gospel is the main reason anyone should be motivated to never give up. Not only this but understanding that he has allowed us to gain the technology to advance to the level that it has today, such as endowing man with knowledge to research in the medical field to do things like transplant an organ from one person to another. To God be the glory!

### **THE AFTERMATH**

Recovering from a serious illness or surgery is much like the rebuilding of a house or an area that has been hit by a storm. There are so many things to consider like, what’s involved in the recovery, how long will it take and how much help is needed? Will there be a full recovery or are there things with which you will have to live with the rest of your life (medications or rehab)? Whatever it might be, you must remember it’s all a part of the healing process. A great scripture to consider is Psalm 23.

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

David had a never give up attitude and showed no “fear” because he said, “Thou art with me.” Whatever your “valley” may be, God will be with you if you have been justified by faith (Romans 5:1) and are “walking in the light as he is in the light” (1 John 1:7).

The apostle Paul had to deal with some “aftermath” in his life at one time. He had a thorn in the flesh about which he prayed to God.

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made

perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

From this passage of Scripture, Paul reveals at least two important points about suffering as a Christian which helps one to develop a never give up attitude. First, God's grace doesn't exclude suffering. Second, a Christian's strength is made perfect through suffering.

The apostle Peter also relates this idea in his first epistle: "By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand" (1 Peter 5:12). The brethren to whom Peter is writing are suffering greatly but he encourages them to "greatly rejoice" (1 Peter 1:6-7). They are encouraged to "be glad also with exceeding joy" and "not be ashamed" (1 Peter 4:13, 16). Ultimately, he states, suffering as a Christian will "make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Peter 5:10).

### CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the greatest example for a Christian concerning having a never give up attitude would be the example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Also, we understand that He is the greatest example because He is the perfect example as stated in the book of

Hebrews: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus faced difficulties daily during his public ministry on earth. He never gave up. His focus was, “...to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:34).

No matter what difficulty we might face in life, with Jesus as our example, God’s grace and our unwavering faith (James 1:6), we can have complete confidence that we can overcome the world whether it be a spiritual or physical adversity (1 John 5:4). A poem by Charlie Remiggio Adiquatly exhibits how we might be able to “Never Give Up”:

**NEVER GIVE UP**

Never give up Never lose hope.  
Always have faith, It allows you to cope.  
Trying times will pass, As they always do.  
Just have patience, Your dreams will come true.  
So put on a smile, You’ll live through your pain,  
Know it will pass, And strength you will gain.

Never Give Up

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NEVER  
LEAVE THE LORD

Chapter 12

**NEVER GET DISTRACTED**

*Derrick Coble*

**E**very day each person sets out with a plan in his or her mind. That plan might include tasks to accomplish at work, a list of chores for the day, preparing for a big event, or even just taking some time to relax with family. Plans often sound simple, and maybe they are, but how many times do people come to the end of the day and think, “What have I done today?” or “I know I’ve been busy, but I didn’t finish anything that I planned!” In moments like this, the problem generally is distraction. To be distracted is to “have one’s thoughts or attention drawn away” (“Distracted”). There are plenty of ways to be drawn away from tasks on a daily basis: smartphones/smartwatches, emails, text messages, social media, browsing, phone calls, other people, and even our own thoughts. These are just a few of the distractions one can face even before getting home from work! With all these distractions (and more), life can definitely be overwhelming from time to time. In fact, one will find it difficult to accomplish everything on his list without the proper focus on those day-to-day goals.

Perhaps that’s why in detailing his spiritual goal of

Heaven, the apostle Paul made it clear that there was “one thing” on which he focused: “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13,14). Just as it is easy to be distracted from earthly goals, it is equally easy to be distracted from the heavenly goal. The apostle Paul knew those distractions well. Whether it was being beaten, imprisoned, suffering sleepless nights, hunger, danger from the Jews and Gentiles, and in cold and nakedness, he knew that Satan was the great distractor (2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:25-27). He told the Thessalonians that he would have come again to them but Satan “hindered” him (1 Thessalonians 2:18). The term, “hindered” (enkopto) indicates, “to use strong measures in causing someone not to do something; to prevent” (Louw). Satan is the enemy of every Christian and seeks to hinder each one in various means through worldly distractions. He might use certain people to draw one’s attention away from God, causing distraction (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). He might change the truth into a lie in order to distract someone (John 8:44). He might even distract by keeping the Gospel hidden and blinding the minds of the lost (2 Corinthians 4:4). His ultimate goal is to distract each Christian by the lusts of the world causing one to be held captive to sin all over again (2 Timothy 2:26; 1 John 2:15-17). That is why vigilance is the key to overcoming temptation and resisting Him (1 Peter 5:8). Vigilance involves “being in constant readiness,” being on the alert with eyes wide open (Arndt). By being constantly on guard and watching for the great distractor, every child of God will surely do better at maintaining focus on Heaven. Remember, Jesus said there are only two paths from which a person can choose: one narrow and one wide. Many choose



the wide path being distracted by the promise of an easy way into Heaven. Yet, the narrow way is the only path which leads to life (Matthew 7:13,14). Never get distracted!

### **JESUS' STORY OF DISTRACTION**

Because there is only one path for salvation, Jesus wanted everyone to understand the seriousness of maintaining faithfulness and the real possibility of becoming distracted and falling prey to worldly lusts. He illustrated this perfectly in a familiar parable dealing with various types of soil (Luke 8:5-8, 11-15). The story details a sower who widely broadcast the seed causing it to land in four different soils (wayside, rocky, thorny, and good). The seed cast by the wayside was eaten by birds, the seed on the rock withered away, the seed among the thorns was choked, and the seed on the good ground brought forth fruit. So that the parable is not misunderstood, Jesus reveals that the seed is the Word of God (Luke 8:11) and the soils are the hearts of men (Luke 8:12-15). Obviously, the good soil is the most desirable, representing a person who is honest and willing to keep the Word in His heart (Romans 12:17; Psalm 119:11). The wayside heart is one who never receives the Word (because the Devil takes it away), while the stony heart represents one who is not grounded enough to withstand temptation (cf. James 1:21; Ephesians 3:17). Interestingly, it's the thorny soil which represents a heart that is distracted.

It is important to notice that the seed which fell among thorns represents a person who does hear and accept the Word, but their heart has not been fully prepared to keep it without distraction. James Meadows remarked, "The heart represented by the thorny ground is a divided heart with mixed emotions . . . This one even bears fruit, which is suggested by the fact

that “it becometh unfruitful” (Mark 4:19) and “bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14) (59). As thorns will rob the soil of water and nutrients, so worldly thorns rob the heart of spiritual blessings.

As cited earlier, distraction involves drawing one’s thoughts or attention away from something. Jesus says that these thorns will suffocate the heart by a threefold distraction: cares, riches, and pleasures of this life (Luke 8:14). First, “cares” denote any anxiety or worry (Arndt). It is literally a “dividing or distracting of the mind” (Bullinger). These are the same cares that Peter encourages all Christians to relinquish and cast upon God (1 Peter 5:7). Second, Jesus mentions riches. Riches are often associated with covetousness in the Scriptures which should never even be named among those who are saints (Luke 12:15-21; Ephesians 5:3-5). Matthew’s account mentions how deceitful riches can be (Matthew 13:22). The danger is that rich men could “fall into temptation and a snare” while learning to trust in their riches, which are, at best “uncertain” (1 Timothy 6:9,17). Finally, Jesus mentions the “pleasures of this life” or, as Mark puts it, “the lusts of other things” (Luke 8:14; Mark 4:19). According to Bullinger, these pleasures include “what is directed towards any thing, desire which attaches itself to or upon its object. It is used exclusively of sinful desire” (A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament). No doubt, with all three of these distractions one cannot help but think about all that is contained in the world: “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). None of these are of the Father, but only of the world (which is passing away) (1 John 2:17). Jesus has clearly shown that distractions and conflicts of this world can hinder the growth of a Christian. The result is: “Daily routines

overcrowd and materialistic pursuits distract believers, choking out God's Word so that it yields nothing" (Barton 203). Even though some Christians try to have it both ways, Jesus said that it was impossible to serve Him and the things of the world (Matthew 6:24). Never get distracted!

### **IMPORTANT EXAMPLES OF DISTRACTION**

Although each follower of God understands the importance of maintaining focus upon Him, no one is exempt from being distracted by sin and worldly temptations. Paul said, "**For all have sinned**, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23; emphasis DC). Peter wrote concerning Christians in particular, "if we say **that we have no sin**, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8; emphasis DC). It is just as true in the times past as it is now that Satan (the tempter; 1 Thessalonians 3:5) is lurking - hoping that man will be drawn away from God by his own lust (James 1:14). In fact, it's those very same "thorns" of distraction which Jesus mentioned that have continually caused problems for the people of God.

#### ***Distracted by Cares***

The cares of this life often have a way of crowding out God causing us to focus on what can be seen rather than on what is unseen. This brings undue stress and anxiety into our lives since God has promised to provide for His people (Matthew 6:25-34). A prime example of this is the nation of Israel. There were numerous times the nation as a whole became distracted by physical cares. In fact, their anxieties began very quickly. Just three days after witnessing the great power of God bringing them safely out of Egyptian captivity through the Red Sea and overthrowing the Egyptians, they were distracted (Exodus 14:13-30). It began as they worried

about what they would drink (Exodus 15:22-25). Then, less than sixty days later, they were anxious about having no food. They said to Moses and Aaron, “ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Exodus 16:3). After God provided for them water and food; ultimately, they worried about water again (Exodus 17:1-3), then food again (Numbers 11:1-6). Every day they were making more progress to the Promised Land, but daily “cares” were distracting them from seeing the God of Heaven who loved them and was providing for them each step of the way. Even when spies were sent into the land, the majority of them said, “We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we” (Numbers 13:31). This led all the congregation into greater anxiety saying, “And wherefore hath the LORD brought us into this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey?” (Numbers 14:3).

Failing to trust that God will do what He says He will do, is a distraction that affects our faith. God promised Israel the land of Canaan as He has promised Heaven to us (Exodus 13:5; 1 John 2:25). Faith will give us the victory in the end (1 John 5:4); yet we cannot allow the cares of this life to hinder our progress: “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

***Distracted by Riches***

The apostle Paul aptly stated, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10). Jesus also said “a rich man shall hardly enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:23). Riches pose a real danger to our souls because they can lead to pride (Ezekiel 28:5), forgetting God (Deuteronomy

8:13,14), denying God (Proverbs 30:8,9), and rejecting Christ (Matthew 19:22) (Torrey, 224). Riches have been a thorn to distract many including: Achan (Joshua 7), Gehazi (2 Kings 5), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) and the church at Laodicea (Revelation 3:17). Perhaps, the most notable saint to be distracted by riches was Judas.

Judas was specifically chosen by Christ as one of His apostles (Matthew 10:4). He was among the twelve having heard the parable of the soils, and one of the men who asked Jesus about the meaning of the parable as the thorn of riches grew in his heart (Mark 4:10). In time, Jesus revealed that Judas was a “devil” as he had set himself up against Christ with a mindset of betrayal (John 6:70,71). Slowly, the distraction of riches was soon revealed as he protested upon Mary’s anointing of Jesus’ feet saying, “Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?” (John 12:5). John then reveals the true reason for Judas’ outburst, “This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief” (John 12:6). Of this situation D.A. Carson has observed, “Because he was the treasurer of the apostolic band, the keeper of the money bag, probably he hoped such gifts as the nard could in future be turned into cash, to which he could then help himself” (429). Having already been distracted by the money for which he was responsible, it is no surprise that through his materialistic mindset and greed, Judas would be interested in gaining more money through betraying Jesus (Matthew 26:14-16). If an apostle of Jesus could be distracted by riches to the point of betraying the Lord, surely every Christian today needs to be on guard against the same: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26).

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***Distracted by Pleasures of this Life***

The pleasures of this life would seem to include any type of worldly pleasure that could be put before God. It is truly the “lusts of other things” (Mark 4:19). These lusts are not limited to sexual desire, but a “general sense of longing” (Vincent 182). It has also been suggested that this phrase indicates “superfluity” or “excess” showing a “constant desire for more” (France 206). Overemphasizing any pleasure ultimately leads to idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Moses chose to deny such pleasures in Egypt (Hebrews 11:25), while Demas failed in this area “having loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10). Fleshly lusts definitely cause a great distraction for every Christian as they often wage “war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11).

One man who knew this well was Solomon. Looking back on his life through the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon recalled all the earthly pleasures that he pursued in searching for the meaning of life (Ecclesiastes 2).

He is not unlike the rest of us in his desire to experience the pleasures of life. The motivation behind Solomon is one of personal gratification. Nothing of the loving, philanthropic nature of concern colors his activities. It is indeed misanthropy. His self-centered desire is a matter of record. He states, “I said to myself, Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself” (Kidwell 44).

Solomon tried to please himself with houses and vineyards (Ecclesiastes 2:4; 1 Kings 7:2-8; 9:24; 10:17; 1 Chronicles 27:27,28), gardens and orchards (Ecclesiastes

2:5; 2 Kings 25:4), pools, slaves, flocks, silver/gold, and even singers (Ecclesiastes 2:6-8; 1 Kings 9:20-22; 4:22,23; 2 Chronicles 9:13-21). He also was distracted by the “delight of the sons of man” (Ecclesiastes 2:8b) which is believed to be a veiled reference to his sexual enjoyment with his hundreds of wives/concubines (1 Kings 11:3) (Kidwell 52). Solomon enjoyed every possible pleasure of life he could; yet, in the end he realized there was no profit to any of it (Ecclesiastes 2:11). Every Christian would do well to learn from the mistakes of the past guarding ourselves from the temptation to love pleasures more than we love God (2 Timothy 3:4).

#### **THE OUTCOME OF DISTRACTION**

For the people of Israel, the distractions of anxious cares, caused them to be discouraged (Numbers 21:4). This discouragement resulted in speaking against God and God taking vengeance through fiery serpents (Numbers 21:6,7). In the case of Solomon, the distraction of many pleasures ended in deep despair (Ecclesiastes 2:20). Finally, Judas’ life (being distracted by riches) ended in miserable destruction. Paul’s inspired statement rings true: “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in **destruction and perdition**” (1 Timothy 6:9; emphasis DC). Jesus even called Judas the “son of perdition” noting that he was lost (John 17:12). His sin of betrayal (motivated by greed) caused him to fall from grace and “go to his own place” (Acts 1:25; Hebrews 3:12).

All in all, being distracted never ends well. Distracted driving ends in a wreck. Distracted cooking ends in a burnt supper. Distracted examinations end in failing. Distracted Christianity ends in eternal death. Jesus indicated this in His parable by the seed (the Word of Life; Philippians 2:16)

being choked by the thorns (Luke 8:14). Maintaining our focus on the path of righteousness should be our primary concern. Proverbs 4:25-27 urges: “Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.” In the New Testament, the same idea is present: “Walk circumspectly” (Ephesians 5:15), “follow his [Jesus’] steps” (1 Peter 2:21), “walk as he [Jesus] walked” (1 John 2:6), “walk in love” (Ephesians 5:2). The point is if we are “drawn away” (distracted) by sin, it ultimately ends in death (James 1:14,15). Learn from the examples of the past. Never get distracted!



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# NEVER LEAVE THE LORD

## Chapter 13

### NEVER CHOOSE THE WORLD

*Sam Willcut*

I am a child of the 80's, so this question is quite relevant to my generation: "How much would you have to spend in a video arcade before you decided your habit had become excessive?" Would ten or twenty dollars be enough? What would you think of \$80,000? That is how much Lewis Smith, a 27-year-old jewelry salesman from Iowa once lost. One day, Smith traveled to a shopping mall to conduct business with several stores therein, and he decided to take a break in a video arcade, where he placed his briefcase on the floor to free up his hands for the joysticks of the arcade game. While Smith was devoting himself to gobbling up electric dots, destroying menacing centipedes, and sniping at enemy spacecraft, someone walked off with his briefcase containing \$80,000 worth of jewelry! Can you imagine that? A man lost a fortune in jewels because his attention was distracted by playing video games. Do Christians allow the world with its "games" to distract us and tempt us to lose carelessly our valuable treasure (cf. Matthew 6:19-21)? Surely every Christian is not misguided into making money, watching television and pursuing worldly hobbies that allow the thief

(Satan) to rob us of our heavenly prize, or do we find ourselves tempted to choose the world?

In 1678, John Bunyan wrote what many consider to be one of the greatest pieces of theological fiction every written, which is his classic, “The Pilgrim’s Progress.” It is a remarkable work of literature that is a complete allegory of a child of God’s journey from this world to heaven. The title character, “Christian,” leaves his hometown, the “City of Destruction” (which is a reference to this world), and journeys to the “Celestial City” (which is a reference to Heaven), and stops along the way include the city “Vanity Fair,” where Christian is tempted by everything sold there daily that caters to one’s senses and desires. Indeed, the fable is a remarkable and accurate portrayal of the fact that Christians are never to choose the world, although John Bunyan was merely mimicking the divine principles taught centuries earlier in the word of God.

Whenever we refer to “the world,” we are referring to the total of all the influences of our environment that tend to wean us away from God and to destroy our spirituality. Satan is the controller and practitioner of such, and he uses the flesh in an appeal through the world to destroy us. Without a doubt, worldliness is one of the greatest dangers to Christianity in modern times. Because of such, elders, preachers, Bible school teachers, parents and all Christians should be stalwart in not only warning against the dangers of this great temptation, but in defending the precious church of our Lord against its manifestations and ultimate end. Not only is worldliness a preeminent temptation to teenagers, but it is even a great temptation to those of us who are adults as well—we are inclined to allow the world to mold our values and warp our priorities, resulting in a deadly attachment to worldly things.

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With all that the Bible teaches about worldliness, let us succinctly summarize three reasons why we should never choose the world.

### **BECAUSE WORLDLINESS PULLS OUR FOCUS FROM HEAVEN**

Paul wrote his epistle to the Colossians to deal with the problem concerning the philosophies of men, “after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (2:8), and the second chapter of this epistle closes with how they have lived “to the satisfying of the flesh” (2:23). Thus, in Colossians 3:1-2, the apostle Paul proclaimed, “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.” Who are those “risen with Christ”? Ignoring the chapter division, the context takes us back to Colossians 2:12, pointing to those who have been “buried with Him in baptism.” Because we know that baptism connects the death of Christ with our own desire to mortify the old man (Romans 6:3-6), when we are risen with Him, those worldly things are a part of our forgotten past. Our focus is no longer on what we once were, but on what Christ has done for us since (and He who provided such redemptive help). Therefore, our focus is no longer to be drawn down to the things of the world, but our focus is to be lifted up to the things that “are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.”

There are two imperative verbs of interest in this passage. The first is the verb “seek,” which carries with it the idea of aiming at, striving after, and denotes both desire and passion. In other words, the message of Colossians is that Christ is our source of strength when we aim to seek those things that are above. Yet, too many things on earth get in our

way and interfere with our aim. We are striving for a spiritual land (cf. Hebrews 11:10-16) while living and interacting with a sin-saturated world, and the end result is that we are allowing the world and all that it offers to draw our focus away from heavenly things far too often. Ask the average Christian how much he or she studies the Bible daily, and we can see the predicament. This world has a way of drawing our focus downward - we are more preoccupied with gazing on Netflix, Hulu and Disney Plus than we are focusing upward on Heaven and the one who is currently residing there “on the right hand of God” (cf. Matthew 26:63-64; Ephesians 1:19-20)! Yet, Paul says that such will not happen haphazardly; there must be intentional seeking. Speaking of such, we consider what the Hebrews writer wrote concerning this very thing: “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). The verb “looking” is defined by Thayer as “to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something [else]” (90). It is an interesting compound verb wherein the root word is “to see,” accompanied with an attached prefix indicating “away from.” Thus, Robertson states that it literally means, “looking away to Jesus” after glancing at the cloud of witnesses (583). Our focus and gaze is to center on Him above!

The second imperative in our text is to “set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” The verb “seek” has to do with our aim and our goals, but this second verb “set” has to do with our mind, for the expression “set your affection” is in reference to our mind (cf. Philippians 2:5). Our mind—our very thoughts—are to be “on things above, not on things on the earth.” We may have been punished in school

for daydreaming, but in the grand scheme of life, Almighty God wants us to daydream about heavenly things as much as possible! Indeed, it is extremely important where our thoughts lie (cf. Proverbs 23:7; Matthew 6:21). Even as Christians, it is so very easy for us to allow the world to monopolize our mind and daily thoughts, and when such happens, it greatly weakens us! We cannot gain divine strength and at the same time allow worldly things to dominate our thoughts. In fact, Paul uses the word “mind” or “thinking” (or some derivative) twelve times in his epistle to the Philippians. Thus, it needs to be our determination. Set your mind on things above, because if we do not do so, worldly things will control us.

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus explains that the thorny soil represents when “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22). In Mark’s account, he also includes “the lusts of other things entering in” (Mark 4:19), and Luke also mentions the “pleasures of life” (Luke 8:14). Add this all up—the care of this world, deceitfulness of riches, lusts of other things and pleasures of life all have the consequence of taking our focus off of Jesus Christ and heavenly things, and the end result is a life, once marked by walking after spiritual things, becoming choked and dying with its loss of proper focus. Far too many Christians are in danger of doing just this! No wonder that Paul declared, “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20). Keep those eyes fixated on Heaven!

**BECAUSE THE BEST OF WORLDLINESS  
IS ONLY TEMPORARY**

Jesus once asked a rhetorical question, “For what

is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world...?” (Matthew 16:26). Pause right there and consider if such were possible. Certainly, attempts at doing so are recorded in the annals of world history, for men ranging from Pharaoh to Nebuchadnezzar to Alexander the Great and many of the Caesars have attempted to “gain the world world.” We have some mighty powerful and wealthy people living in our generation as well—even should a single person gain the whole world in his or her lifetime, what would that matter? Jesus concluded that question with the words, “...and lose his own soul?” Far too many people have attempted to gain the fleeting riches of this world to the loss of their souls, for you see, the appeal of worldliness fails to consider the fact that everything associated with it is only temporary at best. The Roman Empire was once thought to be indestructible, but included in the reasons why it eventually decayed is its mad craze for pleasure (worldliness), according to Edward Gibbon’s classic work, “The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.” In 1923, the president of the largest steel company, Charles Schwab, died a pauper, the president of the largest gas company went insane, the president of the NYSE was released from prison to die at home, the greatest wheat speculator died abroad penniless, the president of the Bank of International Settlement and the Great Bear of Wall Street, Cosabee Rivermore, both died of suicide. In other words, six of the world’s greatest and richest men died just as Jesus said in Matthew 16:26.

Consider that worldly things are temporary, because we cannot take them with us after we die. The late Earl West was the first I ever heard to exclaim, “You will never see a U-Haul trailer hitched to a hearse!” In other words, no matter how much we may accumulate and gain in this life, it is only



temporary, for we cannot carry it with us beyond the grave. The apostle Paul warned us of this when he wrote to Timothy, “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out” (1 Timothy 6:7).

Moreover, consider that worldly things are temporary, because they have a temporary shelf-life. In his remarkable Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preached,

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.”  
(Matthew 6:19-20).

After the apostle John admonishes his readers not to love the world or any of the things that are in the world, he explains, “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever” (1 John 2:15-17). There is an eternal nature to spiritual attitudes and qualities, and there is a temporary nature to everything associated with worldliness. Satan may be able to deceive us by the bright and shiny nature of worldly things (cf. Hebrews 11:24-26), but with open eyes, we should resist all temptation associated with it, understanding that it is all fleeting and temporary!

This temporary nature transitions into a deluded security (cf. Matthew 24:38-39), because we neglect the reality that worldliness and worldly values are only temporary.

**BECAUSE WORLDLINESS CAUSES US  
TO BECOME WORLDLY**

The Bible teaches an important principle: we become like that with which we associate (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:33). No wonder Paul warned us, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2). How may we resist conforming to this world? The answer was in the previous verse—we are to become acceptable “living sacrifices” marked with holiness. For this reason, Paul wrote to the Corinthians and urged them to holy living, because Christianity and the world are polar opposites of each other (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). Far too many Christians are trying to live with one foot in the church and the other foot in the world, but such are only deceiving themselves against the blind reality that they are becoming more and more like the world.

In other words, worldliness has a way of causing us to become just like it. We can certainly see such vividly by the selection of those with whom we associate, for when we prefer and select our associations from those among the people of this world, then we should not wonder why we become worldly in our thoughts, words, and deeds. What was the major problem during the days of Noah? “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). How did that occur? The context shows that humanity had become extremely worldly, and unlike Noah and his family, they had basically conformed to the world. We see it again in the cities Sodom and Gomorrah, prompting God to destroy them in Genesis 19. Nevertheless, the inspired author Peter wrote concerning Abraham’s nephew, Lot, “For that

righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds” because he was “vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked” (2 Peter 2:7-8).

This is why we should be extremely cautious about the “youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22; cf. Titus 2:11-15), for any time that we engage in worldly pleasures and amusements (whether it be profanity, alcohol, gambling, drugs, immodesty, sexual immorality, dancing, divorce for any cause, carousing and such like), the end result is that we will become worldly, and thus, unfit for celestial living. Since Christ’s kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), then we should not be surprised to know that we are not to be worldly either (cf. Galatians 5:19-21). Moreover, James comes right out and states that if we are friends of the world, then we are nothing more than enemies of God (James 4:4), because earlier he had declared that “pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father” includes keeping self “unspotted from the world” (James 1:27; cf. 1 Peter 2:11-12). No wonder we are to “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

The words *de contemptu mundi* may not mean much to you, but if you had lived during the Middle Ages and spoken Latin, then these words would have expressed a common sentiment: a contempt of the world. Many of the lyrics that we find in medieval literature express the contempt of the poet and the people for the world, because they were taught to reject this world and look for a better world. Although many of those who lived in those times were misguided in their religion, at least they did aspire to attain the proper attitude toward the world.

Have you ever pondered exactly what led Demas to forsake Paul (2 Timothy 4:10)? All the apostle says is that he

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“loved this present world.” How many modern-day disciples of Demas do we have in the church today?

### CONCLUSION

I can assure you that this is not a frenzied appeal for a “holier than thou” approach in preaching the word, neither is this an attempt by me to pound the pulpit and gladly send all condemned listeners to hellfire. While I am not attempting to be ugly, unmerciful, and uncouth, I am attempting to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), and to plead with all who will gladly hear that the line between the world and the church must be clearly, sharply, indelibly and distinctly drawn.

The struggle with the world is not new to our generation, for Christians at the end of the second century struggled with worldliness as well. In his book, “Teens in Two Worlds,” Mike Cope quotes the anonymous writer of “The Epistle of Diognetus” as such:

“Yet while living in Greek and barbarian cities according as each obtained his lot and following the local customs both in clothing and in food and in the rest of life, Christians show forth a wonderful confessedly strange character of the constitution of their own citizenship. They dwell in their own fatherlands but as if sojourners in them. They share all things as citizens and suffer all things as strangers. Every foreign country is their fatherland and every fatherland is their foreign country. They marry as all men. They bear children,, but they don’t expose their offspring. They offer free hospitality but guard their purity. Their lot is

cast in the flesh but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their time upon the earth but they have their citizenship in heaven. They obey the appointed laws and they surpass the laws in their own lives” [2-3].

Jesus prayed for us: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:16). We should rejoice, in that earlier Jesus had announced to His apostles, “I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Through Him and His sacrifice on Calvary and His shed blood, we are able to be overcomers of the world as well! The apostle Paul stated concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, “...by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). May that be said of us as well. Never choose the world!

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# NEVER LEAVE THE LORD

## Chapter 14

### NEVER STUMBLE OVER THE PAST

*Jason Rollo*

**P**icture the Judgment Day scene. See it. No one knows the day (Matt. 24:36) and it “will come as a thief in the night” (2 Pet. 3:10). But when it does come, everyone will know that it is the “great day of His wrath” (Rev. 6:17). The sound will be great (2 Pet. 3:10; 1 The. 4:16). The host of angelic beings will be great (Matt. 25:31; 2 The. 1:7). The solemnity of the final sentence toward the just and unjust will be great (Matt. 25:32-33; 2 Cor. 5:10; John 5:28-29). Yes, the Day of Judgment will be a great day, and in many ways an unfathomable day. It will be day of reunion, joy and rejoicing (Matt. 8:11, 25:34-40, 46b; 1 The. 2:19-20). Crowns will be given, mansions obtained and a great victory won (1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 4:8; Jam. 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10, 3:11; John 14:1ff; 1 Cor. 15:54ff; 1 John 5:4; Rev. 15:2). Eternal life will be the reward for the faithful (Matt. 18:8-9; John 4:14, 6:27, 54, 68, 10:10, 28; Acts 3:15, 5:20, 11:18, Rom. 2:7, 5:18, 21, 6:23, 2 Cor. 2:16; Heb. 11:26; Rev. 2:10). God’s dwelling place will finally be home for those who have chosen salvation and obedience (Matt. 5:10-12; 2 Cor. 12:2; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:24; 11:13-16, 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:3-4; Col. 1:5, 23, 27). On the other

hand, there will be an outpouring of God's judicious wrath, fire and eternal punishment, upon the sinner and disobedient (Matt. 25:41-46a; Rom. 1:18ff, 2:5-8, 5:9, 12:19; Col. 3:6; 1 The. 1:10; 2 The. 1:7-9; Heb. 4:3; Rev. 19:15; Matt. 7:13; 2 Pet. 2:1, 4, 17, 3:16; Jude 7; Heb. 10:29; Matt. 3:12, 5:22, 7:19, 13:40, 42, 50, 18:8-9, 25:41, 46; Mark 9:43ff; John 15:6; 2 Pet. 3:7, 12; Jam. 3:6; Rev. 20:14, 21:8, Etc.).

When a person considers—truly considers—the Judgment Day scene, he or she should make sure to **FIX THEIR PAST** and become children of God through the blood of Christ. In other words, in view of the coming Judgment, every right-thinking person will choose to “obey the Gospel” and “be saved” (Rom. 1:16-18; 2 Thes. 1:7-9; Rom. 10:13-17; 1 Pet. 4:17-18; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38-40, 8:12-13, 35ff, Etc.). It is only the blood of Christ that will save (Heb. 9:22, 10:3-4; Eph. 1:7) and thus it is necessary for the lost (sinners) to getting INTO Christ (2 Tim. 2:1, 10; Rom. 8:1). This is only possible by obeying God's plan of salvation (Heb. 5:9), which involves: 1) Hearing God's Word (John 6:45; Rom. 10:17), 2) Believing in Christ (including all that must be believed about Him, including that He was born of a virgin, died on the cross, came forth from the grave, etc., John 8:24; Matt. 1:21-23; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Acts 8:37; Heb. 11:6), 3) Repenting of one's past sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38, 3:19, 17:30), 4) Confessing Christ (Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Tim. 6:12; Acts 8:37) and 5) Being Baptized INTO Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38, 9:6, 22:16; 8:12-13, 35ff; Rom. 6:1ff; Gal. 3:27ff; Mark 16:15-16; 1 Pet. 3:21; Tit. 3:3ff; Eph. 5:25-27; John 3:3-5; Heb. 10:22; Eph. 4:5; Acts 10:47-48; Matt. 28:18-20; Etc.). Once an accountable person has obeyed God's (the Bible's) plan of salvation, he or she has been added to the church (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 20:28). And Jesus only built ONE CHURCH

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(Matt. 16:13ff; Luke 24:44ff; Acts 2:1ff; Rom. 16:16-18; Eph. 1:21-23, 4:4-6, 5:23ff). The saved, those who have obeyed God's plan of salvation and are thus in the Lord's church, 6) must then "walk in the light" and live faithful (1 John 1:7ff; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; Rev 2:10, 3:5). Christianity is about a walk (a way of living). Salvation is found in both one's initial obedience (to the Gospel), as well as in living daily as God dictates (Mark 16:16; Luke 9:23, 62; 1 Cor. 10:12; Col. 1:9-10, 3:1ff). Thankfully, God gives a wonderful law of second pardon for His children when they sin (stumble), and the Bible makes this abundantly clear (Acts 8:13, 22; 1 John 1:7-10; Jude 21, 24-25).

Thus, sinners (those who are still in their alien sins) should obey God's plan, be immersed in water for the remission of sins, and allow the precious blood of Jesus to **FIX THEIR PAST**. Those already IN CHRIST, should strive to grow daily IN THE LORD, repent when they find themselves in sin, and never give up the fight (Luke 13:24; Matt. 6:33; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; 2 Pet. 2:9; 2 Pet. 1:3-11). **In living the Christian life, members of the church of Christ must not "stumble over the past."** In order to do this—to not stumble over the past—it would behoove us to: 1) Remember the past, as well as to 2) Forget the past. While this might seem contradictory, at first glance, our study will reveal, otherwise. Also, by looking at some Biblical case studies and discussing practical application, the point will be made abundantly clear, namely that we should "Never Stumble Over The Past."

### REMEMBERING THE PAST

The importance of "remembering the past" is certainly something that God often speaks about, especially in the book of Deuteronomy (Exo. 13:3, 20:8, 32:13; Deut. 7:18, 8:2, 18,

9:7, 16:3, 12, 24:9, 18, 22, 25:17, 32:7). Likewise, the concept of remembering is often discussed in the New Testament, as well (Luke 17:32; John 15:20a; Acts 20:31, 35; Gal. 2:10; Eph. 2:11; Heb. 13:3, 7; Rev. 2:5; Etc.). As with Deuteronomy, Peter often references this truth (2 Pet. 1:12-13, 3:1), as does Paul (Tit. 3:1; 2 Tim. 1:6; 1 Tim. 4:6). Thus, remembering the past has great benefit. We need to remember the past:

***So We Will Never Go Back:***

Seeing our past from time to time will aid us in realizing that we do not want to go back to a life of sin and sorrow. Sadly, sometimes free people will reflect back on their former bondage (cf., under sin) and remember those former days with incorrect remembrance. For instance, in Numbers 11:5, the rebellious Israelites said, “We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick.” They said, “But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes” (vs. 6). How quickly they had “forgotten” to “remember” correctly! Yet, Moses had reminded them correctly. In Deuteronomy 5:15, he wrote, “And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt...” They had selective memory. Deuteronomy 15:15 says, “And thou shalt remember that thou was a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee” (cf., also, Deut. 24:18). Deuteronomy 16:3 says that they were to eat unleavened bread (even the bread of affliction) during the Feast of Passover because “thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land.” Had they so soon forgotten the immense persecution from the cruel Egyptians (Exo. 1:11-14, 2:23, 3:9)? Apparently so! In fact, the very institution of the Feast of Passover was so that they would not forget but

would remember (Exo. 12:14ff; cf., Deut. 6:12). Likewise, the were to “Remember, and forget not, how [they had provoked] the Lord...God to wrath in the wilderness...[and had been] rebellious against the Lord” (Deut. 9:7). Even, the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles was also about remembering and not forgetting the past (Deut. 16:16; Lev. 23:34, 42-44; Neh. 8:14-17).

In like manner, New Testament Christians should remember the past, so as not to forget the sin and degradation left behind. As God’s children, we should never forget the tragedy of being servants of sin, forever realizing that the fruit of such doing (prior to forgiveness) would certainly result in spiritual death (Rom. 6:18-23). We must never forget the past or else we might end up right back in the same mire of sin (Eph. 2:2; Col. 3:7; 1 Pet. 4:2-3; 1 Cor. 6:11). Truly, remembering the past can be a very healthy and helpful thing. We can learn from our personal past, as well as from the past in general (and this includes the good and the bad times). As Deuteronomy 32:7 notes, “Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations.” Yes, we want to remember the past (including to at least some minor degree the life we came out of/the lifestyle we had forgiven), so as to not return there once more. Certainly, we do not want to reflect back in fondness or even in detail about that “dark time” (Rom. 6:21; Luke 15:13), but a hatred for one’s past sins coupled with a healthy dose of thankfulness and fear (reverence) toward God will go along way in keeping a person on the strait and narrow (Matt. 7:13-14; Col. 3:15).

***So We Will Realize Our Debt:***

Additionally, it is good for one to occasionally remember the past, so that he does not ever forget the unpayable debt he owes to God (Matt. 18:21-35). Paul speaks

of this debt/obligation in Romans. He writes, “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise” (Rom. 1:14). It was this debt (i.e., brought about by his sin/forgiveness) that urged him ever onward in preaching and teaching the Gospel message (1 Tim. 1:11-17; Rom. 1:16-18). Certainly, no person can “earn” salvation and even when we obey (which is a must, Heb. 5:9) we are still unprofitable servants, at best (Luke 17:10). We can never repay the debt we owe to God; such is impossible! It was through God’s grace that we found salvation (Eph. 2:5; Rom. 3:24). However, this does not mean that obedience is not required—for certainly it is, and those who teach otherwise are teaching liberal nonsense (Acts 2:40; Matt. 7:21; Rom. 6:16-18; Heb. 5:9). It is required for men to obey God, in order to access His grace (Rom. 5:1ff, 6:1ff; Heb. 11:1ff). Yet, it does not mean that a forgiven person (a child of God) should forget that they owe God everything (Matt. 16:24), and that without God’s part in offering salvation (by sending Christ, telling us what to do/obey, etc.) mankind would be eternally lost (Heb. 2:9; 2 Cor. 9:15; Rom. 3:24, 6:3-4, Acts 20:32). Yes, we should remember the past (especially our personal past/forgiveness) so that we never forget what we owe our gracious God!

***So We Will Appreciate God’s Sacrifice/Gift:***

To remember one’s forgiven sins, is to reflect upon the cross of Christ, as well as to one’s moment of baptism, wherein one accessed the soul saving blood of the Savior (Eph. 1:7; Gal. 3:27; Acts 2:38; Rev. 1:5-6; Etc.). Yes, truly to recall “being saved” should drive one mentally and emotionally back to the scene of the cross (Isa. 53:1ff; Psa. 22:1ff). Surely, it is not a coincidence that God instituted the Lord’s Supper (which is a memorial or remembrance) for us to partake in each, and every week (1 Cor. 11:23-29; Acts 20:7). How utterly sad

that the denominational world (while never forgetting the weekly collection) often only partakes of the Communion once a month or once a quarter or once a year. Sad, indeed! No, we should never forget that remembering is good. More specifically, remembering the death and sacrifice of Christ is good—very good! As Paul would say in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25, we are to partake of the emblems, “in remembrance of [Him].” The woman mentioned in Matthew 26:13 and the event noted in Joshua 4:7 both involve a memorial, but there is no memorial greater than that which helps us remember the sacrificial death of Jesus, for our sins (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8-9; 1 John 2:1-2). As Titus 2:14 and Galatians 1:4 tell us, respectively, Jesus “gave Himself for us/our sins.” We should always remember and appreciate this great gift (Rom. 5:12-21, 6:23). Thankfully, God has instituted a wonderful way for us to remember (and not forget) this great truth—each (and every) first day of the week.

### **FORGETTING THE PAST**

Although, remembering the past is good and helpful, and as noted above, is necessary and even commanded, we also need to look at the past, in a different way, as well. In other words, we must not only remember the past, but we must (in a different sense) forget the past. Put another way, if we dwell on the past—the wrong way—we will end up stumbling over the past, and perhaps back into sin and despair. Thus, in this sense, we must “Never Stumble Over The Past,” or put another way, we must, “Forget The Past.” It was in this sense that Paul was speaking (through inspiration, of course) when he wrote, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before” (Phil.

3:13). Thus, we must also learn to forget the past:

***Because Of the Beauty of Forgiveness:***

Guilt is a good thing, when properly applied (Acts 2:37, 9:6). It leads the honest and sincere heart to seek God, on God's terms (Acts 16:30ff). But false guilt is not good. In other words, guilt is that mechanism of the conscience (when the conscience is properly educated/the right information (truth) is within the intellect) that prompts a person to respond to truth. In short, proper guilt is the screaming of the hit heart for healing (salvation/forgiveness). Peace, joy and assurance is what comes after the sin is taken care of by/through God's plan (1 John 2:1-2; Acts 8:39, 16:33-34, 18:8; Heb. 10:22; 1 Cor. 6:11).

But false guilt is another thing altogether. False guilt is not a good thing. It will tear a person up internally and cause him or her to be burdened with needless anxiety and consternation. The Devil loves to use false guilt with weak and unstudied Christians. It is good to forget the past when it comes to "forgiven sin." Not once, but twice in Hebrews (quoting the Old Testament) the Hebrew Christians were reminded that God "remembers sin no more" when that sin has been forgiven (Heb. 8:12, 10:17). It would do faithful saints well to remember Psalm 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." Also, Micah 7:18, "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy." Verse 19 continues, "He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." As Psalm 73:1 tells us, "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart," and

by principle this certainly extends to New Testament Israel, His church (Rom. 2:28-29, 9:6-7; Gal. 6:16). As Christians, let us forget the past (i.e., our past with cleansed sins) and trust in God's forgiveness. He does not lie. Yeah, He cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). If you have been baptized INTO Christ for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38), if you are walking in the light and striving to live a faithful life (1 John 1:7ff), then trust Him. Be thankful for forgiveness. Do not let the Devil vex you with false guilt (1 John 3:20, 5:11, 13, 20).

***Because Of The Peace of Being In Christ/In His Church:***

The world does have pleasure (at least some) with sin (Heb. 11:25). But even that only lasts "for a season" (1 John 2:15-17). The latter end of the wicked is not good (Psa. 73:17; Deut. 32:29). Opposite, the life (even if sometimes not good on earth, Matt. 5:10-12; 1 Pet. 1:7; 2 Tim. 3:12) of a saint is the only truly peaceful life (John 10:10; Rom. 5:1, 15:13; Phil. 4:7). Hebrews 9:27 tells us that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." What peace does a non-Christian have when facing death and Judgment? None! Diametrically opposed, however, is the child of God. He faces life AND death with great confidence (Phil. 1:21-23; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; Psa. 23:4). Why is this the case? It is the case because the child of God understands that he or she is in fact, just that—a child of God! While sadly many have embraced falsehood and sinful denominationalism, the truth is that true New Testament Christians (faithful members of the church of Christ) understand what God's plan of salvation is and also what the Lord's church is all about (see earlier sections giving verses on these points). Great peace comes to those who are IN CHRIST (1 John 5:11-13, 20; Rev. 14:13). But it is not so for the wicked (Isa. 48:22, 57:21).

***Because The Victory Is Won (If You Do Not Give Up):***

1 John 2:25 says, “And this is the promise that He promised us, even eternal life.” The same inspired book also declares, “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son” (5:11). Two verses later, we find, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God” (5:13). The faithful Christian’s victory is discussed several times within Holy Writ (1Cor. 15:54ff; 1 John 5:4; Rev. 15:2). The language of the New Testament is exceedingly vivid when it comes to the confidence that we should have IN Christ. Titus 1:2 speaks of this victory/confidence. It reads, “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.” Ephesians 3:9-11 tells us of God’s marvelous plan in revealing the great mystery and how this great scheme/plan involves His church. Men and women are expected and are fully able to become Christians and glorify God as members of the church of Christ (Acts 8:12; Eph. 3:21, 4:12, 5:23-27). How marvelous! As children of God, we should have great confidence and hope, regarding our salvation and our future eternity, but we must not give up (Heb. 3:6, 14, 10:35). We do have hope (Rom. 5:2, 4, 5:5, 8:20, 24, 12:12, 15:4, 13; Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:5, 27; 1 The. 1:3, 4:13ff, 5:8; 2 The. 2:16; Tit. 1:2; Etc.), but again, we must not give up. Any person who thinks or says that a child of God cannot know they are saved or that they walk around in fear of being lost from hour to hour and day to day, must not have read the Bible. 1 Peter 1:3 states, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” A few verses



later, the same penman writes, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:13). We have a reason for our confidence and hope and this hope compels us to live for Christ and not give up the fight (1 Pet. 3:15; 1 John 3:3)!

Certainly, having confidence does not mean that Christians cannot fall away or become unfaithful. Even a casual reading of the book of Hebrews will prove that a faithful child of God has the ability or option of becoming unfaithful, and thus falling away (becoming lost again). Hebrews 3:12 warns Christians, thusly, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” In fact, to study the rest of this exact chapter shows that just as some of the Israelites (God’s people) of old chose to live rebellious and fall away, so the same option (though certainly NOT God’s desire) is available to Christians, as well (cf., Luke 8:13; Jam. 5:19-20; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; 1 Cor. 9:27, 10:12). Yet, our goal and expectation is to remain faithful—to not fall away, and this we are fully able to do. We must strive to never stumble over the past or go back to it, when it comes to sinfulness. We must choose to live faithful!

### CASE STUDIES

The Bible is filled with individuals who serve as helpful examples when it comes to our subject matter (i.e., Never Stumble Over The Past). Briefly, let us look at just a few of these individuals/examples, from both the Old and New Testaments.

#### *Old Testament Case Studies:*

**Adam (and Eve).** Only a few pages into God’s Holy and Inspired Word, we find that Adam and Eve both (at some

point) violated God's clear teaching and thus chose sin, and suffered for it (Gen. 2:17, 3:1-6, 16-24; Rom. 5:12). Later, they would also have to deal with the death of a son through the murderous act of another son (with Cain killing Abel). To say that this first couple had some rough moments (stumbles) connected to their past, would be an understatement. Yet, they did not forsake God and Seth was born and the march toward the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 (redemption through Christ) was well on its way (Gen. 4:25-5:3).

**Abraham (and Sarah).** This couple is listed in the honor roll of faith in Hebrews 11. Abraham is noted numerous times for his great obedience (cf., Gen. 12:1ff, 22:18, 26:5, Etc.). Yet, both Abraham and Sarah had multiple moments of stumbling (Gen. 12:10-20, 20:1ff, 15:1ff, 18:14-15). But they did not let their doubts, struggles and sins keep them from ultimately trusting God. No, they persevered as seeing their desired end (Heb. 11:8-19)!

**Rahab.** The example of Rahab is one worth studying. Her background was a very sinful one, for sure (Josh. 2:1; Jam. 2:25). Rahab was a Gentile and from the city of Jericho, but she showed amazing faith and chose truth over family and was willing to not stumble over her jaded past (Josh. 2:1ff, 6:1ff; Heb. 11:31; Jam. 2:25). Rahab forever serves as a perfect example of how one's past need not be their future. Faithful Rahab did not stumble over the past.

**Samson.** Samson struggled most of his life with right living. To study Judges chapters 13 to 16 is to reveal this truth. Nonetheless, Samson is among those with great faith as listed in Hebrews (11:32). Samson's past involved numerous sins, including lust, womanizing, arrogance, and the like, and he suffered for it in many ways—emotionally and physically. But in the end, Samson (blind and humble) picked God and

destroyed thousands of heathen Philistines in one final act of faith (Judg. 16:28-31). The terrible scars and consequences of Samson's behavior must not be overlooked, but the same is true with the lesson concerning how he did not (in the end) stumble over his past.

**Job.** Job was an amazing man. Evidence shows that he lived during the patriarchal period. He was righteous, faithful and successful (Job 1:1-3). However, thru Satan, and as the entire book of Job reveals, the man Job was attached in almost every way imaginable. He lost his children, his riches, his status, his health, and the list could get more and more vivid with details. His plight was heavy (physically, emotionally, and in every way). In fact, his burden was so terrible that Job wished he had never been born (3:1ff). Satan was the ruthless being behind the torment, as the book reveals. Still, with all of the heartache and tragedy, Job (though struggling at times, for sure) ultimately trusted God and God rewarded Job with even more blessings (42:1ff). If there was ever a man who could have stumbled over the past, certainly Job would have to be among the list of candidates. Throughout the book, Job did not understand that Satan was the actual one causing the problems. However, his trust in God, is evident. He declared, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him: but I will maintain mine own way before Him" (Job 13:15). In other words, Job did not stumble over his past and allow bitterness, pain, sorrow, suffering, grief, blame or any other thing to cause him to forsake God!

**David.** Perhaps King David is the first person many think of when the topic of, "Not Stumbling Over The Past" is introduced, and with good reason. As 2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12 teach us, David fell hard. It was about David that God said, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after

mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will” (Acts 13:22). It was David who trusted in God and faced (and defeated) Goliath (1 Sam. 17:1ff). It was David who showed such great respect time and time again to the wayward and instable King Saul (1 Sam. 18:9-16; Etc.). It was David who loved God immensely and who through inspiration penned most of the beloved Psalms. It was David who was willing to accept his sin and seek God again with great repentance (Psa. 32:1ff; 51:1ff). David’s sin would have lasting consequences, to be sure (cf., the death of the baby, turmoil within his family, et cetera), but he would not allow his sins and stumbling to keep him from loving and serving Jehovah. As a study of David will show, he would not let his past define him. His scars were many and his regrets not a few. Yet, at the end of his historical life the Good Book says, “And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour: and Solomon his son reigned in his stead” (1 Chr. 29:28). We can learn and be encouraged to not stumble over our own past by studying the life of David, the Shepherd boy turned King.

***New Testament Case Studies:***

**Peter.** The New Testament also contain many lessons apropos to our study, and one such study involves Peter. Peter is a central figure in the New Testament and was a part of the inner-circle of Christ (along with James and John), as well as being an Apostle. He is prominent in the peaching found within Acts 2 and Acts 10 that opened the way for both Jews and Gentiles to become New Testament Christians (cf., also, Matt. 16:13-19). To Study Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts is to find Peter, regularly. He penned two of the epistles of the New Testament (1 and 2 Peter). He was also an elder in the Lord’s church and a central person within the work at Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9; 1 Pet. 5:1ff). However, Peter had a

number of slips (stumbles) and he had to learn to overcome them. For instance, it was Peter who once rebuked the Lord and found himself being referenced as Satan based on his impropriety (Matt. 16:23). It was Peter who was famous for telling Jesus he would not deny him, and then finding himself “weeping bitterly” after his failure (Luke 22:62). In Galatians chapter 2, it was Peter who found himself rebuked by Paul for getting caught up in hypocrisy over not eating with Gentiles, even though he knew better (Acts 10:1ff; Gal. 2:11ff). But Peter would not let these sins (mistakes, stumbles) define him. He would rise once and again. His epistles are some of the most quoted and beloved in all of the Bible. Of all people, Peter understood the words he penned in 2 Peter 3:17, “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.” Yet, he also understood the beautiful thoughts found in the next verse, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (3:18).

**Paul.** Perhaps the most well known and hardest worker (outside of Jesus, Himself) found within the New Testament, was the great apostle Paul. In epistles, he penned roughly half of the entire New Testament. His life after becoming a Christian is amazingly stellar and he serves as one of the finest examples of true Christianity found within mortal man (1 Cor. 11:1). Yet, his life prior to becoming a child of God was defined by the same level of zeal, but it was against Christ and the church (Acts 9, 22, 26). Describing his former life as a non-Christian, Paul notes, “Concerning zeal, persecuting the church” (Phil. 3:6). Acts 8:3 says, “As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and hailing men and women committed them to prison.” Again,

he says of his former life that he “was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious” (1 Tim. 1:12). So how did this former persecutor and violent man learn to not stumble over his past? Simply put, he fully embraced Christ and the beautiful gift of salvation and forgiveness (1 Tim. 1:12-17; 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 3:5). Yes, in one sense, he did not fully forget his past and he forever realized his debt owed (Rom. 1:14; 1 Tim. 1:15), but in another sense he fully learned to let the past go and to embrace Jesus in everyway (Phil. 3:1ff; John 10:10; 1 Tim. 1:15; 2 Tim. 1:12). If there was ever a man who loved Jesus and fully appreciated what Jesus had done for him and how that such love meant to let the past go and commit to the future in constant Christian service, that man would certainly be Paul!

**Onesimus.** The book of Philemon is a short book, but very powerful and full of great lessons. In this short book, we learn about a man named “Onesimus” (Phm. 10, 25; cf., also, Col. 4:9). Colossians 4:9 refers to “Onesimus [as] a faithful and beloved brother.” But before Paul wrote these words, Onesimus had been a runaway slave and in other ways unprofitable to his master, Philemon (Phm. 11). Yet, Paul says of Onesimus, “whom I have begotten in my bonds” (Phm. 10). In other words, in some way, while in prison in Rome, Paul had contact with this man and had converted him to Christ. Thus, when Paul wrote Philemon, he told Philemon how that now Onesimus was a Christian. Philemon verse 11-12 reads, “Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is mine own bowels.” Thus, Onesimus was going back to Philemon, not as a mere servant only, but also as a “brother beloved” (Phm. 16). So, as we can see, this short letter involves two men (Onesimus and

Philemon) using the laws of Christ to help them not stumble over the past. Many lessons can be learned from studying this short book, and among them is the great lesson found within our very topic.

**Man/Brethren of 1 Corinthians 5/2 Corinthians 2** In 1 Corinthians chapter 5 and in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 we read about a sinful brother. This sinful man needed church discipline and more specifically the final step of withdrawal (1 Cor. 5:5, 7; cf., 2 The. 3:6). His fornication could not be overlooked (Rev. 3:19). After failing to do God's will for a bit, thankfully, the congregation enacted God's plan and withdrawal was administered (2 Cor. 2:6). Equally as wonderful, this brother repented. Paul told them to "forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow" (2 Cor. 2:7). Clearly, they (the congregation), as well as he (the once wayward brother, returned back thru repentance (and thus forgiven)), had to learn to overcome the past. Put another way, the congregation and the forgiven brother could not stumble over the past. Were there emotional scars and various consequences entangled in this situation? Most assuredly (cf., similar problems with MDR (marriage, divorce and remarriage – wherein one finds himself/herself with the necessity of living single/celebrate throughout life due to such, Matt. 19:9)! Yet, they had to go forward. They had to deal with what had happened including their own neglect for a while and to be thankful for the sinful brothers return (in getting out of his sin). They had to look to the future. Stumbling over the past was not the answer. No, the answer was found in fixing the problem and in going forward and doing God's Will (2 Cor. 2:9-11).

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

As we have noted, this subject in principle and precept is found throughout Holy Writ. The lessons are truly endless, especially when studying the positive and negative examples (case studies) from both testaments. Many more examples could have been given. Yet, practical application should also be applied to us and things that members of the church still struggle with, as such concerns the past. Let us consider:

**Worldliness.** James 4:4 teaches "...that the friendship of the world is enmity with God" and that "whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (cf., 1 John 2:15-17). Sinful and worldly living is condemned in very specific and defined ways throughout the Bible (Gal. 5:19ff; Col. 3:5ff; Rom. 1:18ff; Etc.). Modern day dancing, lusting (cf., using pornography), fornication, social drinking, immodesty, cussing, gambling and many other such sins are condemned in God's Word. Such sin and transgression cannot be ignored. Repentance is demanded (Acts 17:30). Yet, when people become Christians and have such wicked sins forgiven, they must strive to leave the past in the past and live daily the "new life" that is required of them (1 Cor. 6;11; 2 Cor. 5:17).

**False Religion.** Millions, yea billions live daily in false religion (2 Tim. 3:13). Thankfully, countless millions have also left such false doctrines and have become simple New Testament Christians (1 John 4:1; Matt. 7:13-15, 15:12-14). People like Paul (Acts 22:16), Simon (Acts 8:13), numerous Jews, even priests (Acts 6:7), as well as countless thousands from every sort of denomination and false religion available—have been converted. Without question, history shows how droves have left the ir confused and doctrinally wrong families and friends to become as God would have them to be. Liberals who have become sound (Pro. 17:15a).



Antis who have become sound (Pro. 17:15b). Yes, God's Day of Judgment will reveal the countless numbers who had decided to "Never Stumble Over The Past!"

**Marital/Family Problems.** The Bible's teaching on marriage and the home is not hard to understand (Matt. 19:1ff; Eph. 5:23ff; Col. 3:18ff; 1 Cor. 6-7; Etc.). Loving husbands who oversee their families. Godly wives and mothers who lovingly fulfill their roles (1 Tim. 5; Tit. 2). Obedient children who show respect, grow in learning and adhere to discipline (Eph. 6:1ff; Proverbs), including when they are older taking care of aging parents (1 Tim. 5). God's plan is a beautiful plan and covers all areas—with both the old, young and middle aged. It cannot be improved upon! Tragically, many have perverted or disobeyed (in some way) this plan at some point in their past. Either as non-Christians or even as Christians, people have violated God's clear teachings regarding marriage and the home. Psalm 127:1 is often ignored to the peril of those who ignore it. The results are predictable: Broken homes, countless divorces, throngs of worldly kids, battered and hurting spouses, neglected mates, hate, alcohol, drugs, sexual sins, grief, stress, disease, Christians marrying non-Christians and the list could go on and on. First, these sins must be fixed (through Christ). Second, consequences often come, even with forgiveness. Third, once these sins are fixed—through the blood of Christ—the forgiven ones (though often still strapped with certain consequences) must look forward, trust God and embrace the future (not the past). Through Christ there is hope (Tit. 2:11ff).

**The Tongue.** James says, of the tongue, "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity..." (Jam. 3:5-6). Proverbs 12:18

states, “There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.” Proverbs 15:2 notes, “The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.” The problem is this: At one time or another (with the tongue), we have all poured out such foolishness! Like a feather pillow slit open on a windy day, so the innumerable words spoken in hast and hatefulness can never be taken back. Praise God for forgiveness! Sins of the tongue must be remedied, and after that we should do better and work to not return to the past, nor to stumble over it (Matt. 12:36; 1 John 2:1-2).

**Negativity.** What about the sin of negativity, sourness and words and works that denote those who are given to gripe, complain, murmur, et cetera? Perhaps a full study of the Israelites who died in the wilderness (cf., the book of Exodus and Numbers) would help answer that question. Christians should not look like those weaned on sour pickles. The point is made, namely, God does not want humanity or his children to live and stew in negativity. God commands rejoicing (Phil. 3:1, 4:4). We are told that we are to be “rejoicing in hope” (Rom. 12:12a). The problem is that too many (even in the Lord’s church) often choice worry and complaining, instead of embracing joy and blessedness (Matt. 5-6). Negativity in the fashion noted above is sinful (1 Cor. 10:10). Those involved in such things should repent and get right with God—then they should work to rejoice and embrace a positive mindset, as God would have them to do. The things of the past (including bad and negative attitudes) must be left behind. Regardless of the hard times, the future of faithful saints is much too bright to live in negativity (Matt. 5:12; Col. 1:5; 1 Pet. 4:13).

**Lack of Study.** We will all be judged by Christ, using the Bible—i.e., God’s truth (John 12:48; Rom. 2:16;

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Rev. 20:12). The command to study is self-evident, but also plainly taught (1 Tim. 4:13-16; 2 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 5:12ff). Hosea 4:6 and Romans 10:1-3 show the tragedy found when people (especially God's people) do not study. In short, we must study and keep studying. This study cannot and must not be simply an academic exercise but must involve practical application and spiritual growth (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:17-28; Phil. 1:9-10; Col. 1:9-10; Matt. 5:13-16). Those who are studying regularly should (and must) continue this necessary thing until they die. Those who are not studying should start studying immediately and never look back. We cannot change (nor should we stumble over) the past when it comes to studying God's Word, but we can start now to dig deeper and deeper into God's revealed Mind (1 Cor. 1-2). We must not grow discouraged in our study. Without question, God has made clear the simple things (i.e., how to become a true New Testament Christian, the nature and organization and work of His True church, godliness vs. worldliness, et cetera), while at the same time making the Bible so deep that even a life time of study is not enough to exhaust its inspired contents.

**Lack of True Commitment.** Matthew 6:33 tells us to seek God first. We are to deny our self every day in this pursuit (Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23; 1 Cor. 15:31), but the world does not adhere to this precept. In many ways, multiplied scores of brethren also neglect this teaching. Such things as forsaking the assemblies of the congregation (in body and/or in mind), not singing out, not paying attention in the prayers or in the lessons, not working to spiritually grow, not encouraging others, avoiding evangelism and in various other and assorted ways such is seen (Heb. 10:24ff). This situation should not be the case. The good news is this: Those who have not been committed—truly committed—can become so

(2 Tim. 1:6; Phil. 2:20; Acts 15:38; 2 Tim. 4:11). It is possible (and expected) for brethren to do better. What a joy to know that the past does not have to be the past!

### **CONCLUSION**

God will punish sin. The sin problem in a person's life, must be fixed. But God is good and has allowed for such (Rom. 11:22; Rom. 5:1ff). IN CHRIST a person has real forgiveness and true hope (Rom. 8:24, 34, 37). We cannot allow the past to define us. As the inspired pen of Paul noted, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14). Fix your past (according to Christ's plan) and the never stumble over it!

# NEVER LEAVE THE LORD

## Chapter 15

### NEVER NEGLECT YOUR FAMILY

*Sam Willcut*

**J**oe Gibbs, former coach of the Washington Redskins, had a friend named Frank who owned a golden Labrador retriever. One morning, Frank opened his front door and saw his faithful, obedient dog sitting on the doorstep with something in his jaws. As Frank looked more closely, it became more obvious that his dog had his neighbor's pet rabbit, which was dead, in his mouth. Well, Frank was stunned and did not know exactly what to do, so Frank began to think. Finally, he came up with a great idea and knew it would take some time. He gingerly took the rabbit from the Labrador's mouth, brought the dead rabbit into his kitchen and washed the dirt and gunk off. Then, he took it into his bathroom, pulled out a hair dryer and for several minutes, blow-dried the rabbit's hair until it became all fluffy again. Then, late that night, he crawled over his neighbor's fence, slithered through the backyard, came to the rabbit's hutch, put the rabbit in standing up and went back home with a great sigh of relief. Next morning, a wild knock came on his door, and Frank opened the door. To his surprise, he saw his neighbor standing there holding the dead rabbit. His neighbor

was steaming when he said, “Frank, we got a real ‘sickie’ in our neighborhood.” Frank replied, “Really, what happened?” His neighbor said, “Well, you see, my rabbit here died three days ago, and I buried it. Some person dug it up, cleaned it off nice and neat and stuck it back in the hutch. He is a real ‘sickie,’ Frank.”

In the beginning, God created the home, making male and female after His likeness, and encouraging them to multiply by bearing children (Genesis 1:26-28). Yet, as soon as God created the home, the real “sickie” (Satan) soon thereafter went about trying to destroy the home. He found the wife separated from her husband and turned them against each other (Genesis 3:1-12). He found the children apart from their parents and turned the siblings against one another (Genesis 4:1-8). Thus, from the early dawn of the creation of the home, the family unit has been under attack.

Sometimes, the sins are proactive, but the most dangerous of situations is when Satan attacks the home through sheer neglect. Let us notice three areas in which we should never neglect our families.

#### **PARENTS, NEVER NEGLECT YOUR CHILDREN**

Parents, we have some real “sickies” in our world. Every year in America, parents have reported 1.5 million children as missing, lost, stolen, kidnapped, snatched, murdered, abused or sold. Only God knows what else has happened to those 1.5 million children. Yet, the great kidnapper is Satan himself. Satan can snatch children away, even while they are still living in our homes. He can take away their allegiance. He can take away their life. He can even take their souls, and parents who neglect their children are simply allowing Satan to kidnap their children.

Far too often, parents neglect their children by failing

to train and discipline their children. Solomon wrote, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). The word “train” comes from a word that literally means, “to prepare for a contest; to instruct by exercise; to drill; to form to a proper shape; to discipline for use.” One writer rendered this word this way. He talks about how the midwife of the Hebrew parents would take a little Hebrew baby that was born, take her index finger and dip it in olive oil. Then, she would dip it in crushed dates and place it into the mouth of the newborn baby on his palate. When she did that, it would cause the baby to suck, and by this, nurturing this instinct into the child and creating a desire for nourishment by the next instinct to swallow. Therefore, the idea is to create a desire. Parents ought to create in the heart of our children a desire to serve God. We need to create a desire for God in our hearts in the hearts and lives of our children.

What are we doing about that? Are we endeavoring to create in the hearts of our children a desire for God? As our children grow older, will they want God to be a part of their lives? They need to make sure that Jesus is in their lives. Are we creating a desire for Him?

Satan is using a cadre of forces to kidnap our children, and far too many parents are blindly allowing him to do so, whether it be humanism taught in our public schools, paganism practiced in our society, or materialism displayed in our homes.

Therefore, we better wake up and not neglect our children, because the great kidnapper, Satan, is trying to kidnap our children.

Let us consider an illustration of a father who neglected his children. What do we know about Eli? Eli had a very responsible position—actually wearing two hats at one time:

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he was a priest of God who lived and worked in the temple and he was a judge for the people in the community. He not only was a busy man; he was highly respected. Eli “judged Israel forty years” (1 Samuel 4:18). He was a man of faith; his name literally means, “Jehovah is high.” He was a father of two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. According to First Samuel 3:2, Eli was old; at his death in First Samuel 4:15, he was 98 years old. Eli was a man who was spiritually sensitive (1 Samuel 3:8-9). His eyes were open to God, and his ears were tuned to what God would say. He recognized that God was speaking to Samuel. He knew what it meant to be in contact with God. Yes, he was even out of shape (1 Sam. 4:18), but he was a man who was stuck to his job. He was a hard worker, remaining in Shiloh and working for forty years as priest and judge. Some would classify him today as a workaholic, because he stayed so busy.

Often in Bible times, the father’s profession frequently became the profession of his sons. Although Eli’s sons grew up to be priests also, they were very different in character (1 Samuel 2:12-17). They were profane men, unbelieving, rebellious. Although they served as priests, “they knew not the Lord” (1 Samuel 2:12). Notice the contrast of their father being spiritually sensitive. Yet, the sons are simply going through meaningless motions without any reverence to God in their hearts. Their religious responsibilities were just a public ritual for self-gratification. Let us insert a thoughtful question: have we allowed our worship to God to become ritualistic tasks that we perform simply because other people are watching us? If so, we are no better than these young men are. “Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord” (1 Samuel 2:17). Their reputation was notoriously known throughout the land (1 Samuel 2:22-24). Moreover, they did not even care. They continued to live extremely wicked lives.



It seems as if these two sons grew up cynical of spiritual things. Whether we are elders, deacons, preachers or Bible class teachers, we need to be careful that our children do not develop cynicism toward spiritual things, just as Hophni and Phinehas did.

Therefore, from this illustration, we can learn that in God's evaluation, the decisive test of a parent's leadership is not in the realm of his social skills, public relations or managerial abilities. It is how he does at home. Fathers and mothers, how are you doing at home? It does not matter how much money I make for my family. It does not matter how much education I attain. It does not matter how many jobs I have held. What matters is how I am doing at home as a parent to my children. If you succeed in all other areas, but fail as a parent, God says you have failed.

Eli's response to his sons sounds somewhat wimpy. It is as if he said in paraphrase, "Fellas, I have been hearing a few comments about you two. You know what I am hearing is not very good either." That is all he says! Do they listen to him? Of course not, they have grown into cynical adults now. Because Eli lacked authority and neglected to discipline his sons, he failed to command their respect. According to the prophet's words to Eli from God, he seemed to indulge his sons (1 Samuel 2:27-29).

Parents, how may we neglect our children? Let me mention four signs of parental neglect:

- Father and mother were too busy. Just as Eli was so busy as priest and judge, failing to focus on the needs of his family, we may do the same. Where was Eli during their formative years? Was he at home teaching his sons? It is amazing to realize how it could possibly come about that the sons of such a sacred man as Eli had ever become known as the

sons of Belial, knowing not the Lord. Were not the first sounds they heard the praises of God in the sanctuary? Were not the first sights they saw their father in his robes beside the altar with all the tables and bread and sacrifices and incense around him? Yet, in black and white, blood and tears, they were sons of Belial. Notice the difference between Eli and other fathers. Eli never saw his children until bedtime. As the fathers took their inquiring children by the hand to the temple, they taught them about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, the exodus, the wilderness, the conquest and the yearly Passover. Hophni and Phinehas were the only children in all Israel who saw the temple every day, and paid no attention to it. Then all of a sudden, the years vanish away. Our children grow up taller than we are. Eli thought he would one day have time, but it was his lifelong regret that he never had time. As the proverb says, we see Eli shutting the stable door with many tears and sobs and years after the steeds have been stolen. Parents, you had better take care of your family if you do not want your children to become like Eli's sons.

- Father and mother refuse to face the severity of their children's lifestyle. This is certainly Eli (1 Samuel 3:12-13). When are we supposed to start disciplining our children? When they are old enough to understand? When they start school? Eli knew about his sons' sins, and did nothing about it. When he did anything, it was just a pat on the hand.

- Father and mother rationalize the sins of their children. When such occurs, they actually become a part of the problem. If we say, "Well, they are just children," someday they are not going to be children anymore. If we say, "Well, they will grow out of it - it is just a phase they are in," they will not grow out of it if we do not teach them any differently. When we rationalize, thinking, "Everything will be alright," we are becoming a part of the problem.

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• Father and mother fail to respond correctly to the warnings of others. What do you do when someone warns you about members of your family? How do you respond? When a teacher calls, and says, “I am having problems with your child,” how do you respond? Things have greatly changed over the years about this, because far too many teachers have their hands literally tied because parents become angry with the teacher when they warn. How do you respond when a godly member of the church tries to give you a wise lesson in rearing children? Eli had warning after warning about the behavior of his sons, and he refused to respond correctly. Therefore, parents must love the Lord (Matthew 22:37), love His word, and love their children without neglect, taking the time to train and discipline (Ephesians 6:4).

### **CHILDREN, NEVER NEGLECT YOUR PARENTS**

In the backdrop of Christians caring for widows, Paul instructs adult children, “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel” (1 Timothy 5:8). The verb “provide” is from a Greek word that indicates “to be thinking of beforehand,” which extinguishes our concept of neglect. Just as parents care for children in their youth, children are to repay those efforts when their parents require the same type of care later in their lives.

The truth of the matter is that when Paul instructs Christians to provide for “his own house,” then that not only specifies parents, but also includes needy siblings, children, and such like. Thus, the one who refuses to care for any needy family members (especially aged parents) has “denied the faith,” and the consequence of such neglect places one directly into a category worse than “an infidel,” or a non-Christian. Why is that? The presumption made by Paul is that even

the heathen understands how to take care of their own (cf. Matthew 5:46-47)! Thus, here is another example where the sin of omission (neglect) is pointed out by scripture.

An illustration of this is seen in the Pharisees and the scribes when Jesus pointed out their sin in Mark 7:9-13:

“And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honor thy father and thy mother; and, whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: but ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou lightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.”

In the context of the Jewish leaders elevating tradition of equal (or even as some might say, superior) quality with law, Jesus illustrates their hypocrisy and wickedness with a specific gesture on their part to circumvent their need to care for their parents—a basic law within the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:12), which was punishable by death (Exodus 20:17). The term they used is the word “Corban,” which is a transliterated term of the Hebrew word for “gift,” as Mark explains. This gift could either be the contribution into the temple treasury (cf. Matthew 27:6) or a declaration of consecrating a monetary gift for God. They thought that such a declaration would “free” them of their responsibility to care for their aged parents, but

Jesus harshly chastises them for their ridiculous tradition, and concludes with a pointed principle that such is not only immoral, but despicable. Children should never, ever neglect the needs of their aged parents!

### **HUSBAND AND WIFE, NEVER NEGLECT YOUR SPOUSE**

Marriage is an uphill battle. Imagine with me that we are on a crooked, angular, winding, treacherous road on a very high mountaintop. On one side are steep cliffs and on the other side are precipices over which it is quite possible for someone to fall. There are no guardrails along the side of the road, but there are boulders that fall down the mountain and other things that might cause one to wreck while going down the road. At the end of the road at the bottom of the mountain is a very beautiful, very serene, peaceful valley of great happiness. Imagine with me that at the very top of the mountain is a long line of cars, each awaiting their turn to go down the mountainside. However, they can only go down one car at a time. In each of these automobiles, two people seem very happy sitting in the front seat. They are anxious and very excited about the prospects of going down the mountain, and they look like everything in life is wonderful. However, as they start down the road toward the peaceful valley, we are amazed, shocked and appalled at how many find trouble. One out of every three cars ends up in a terrible, awful wreck. Not only are there people sitting in the front seat, but now some are sitting in the back seat that they have picked up along the route. These often get crushed and maimed.

This describes the situation in America of which we call “marriage.” More than one out of every three marriages ends in divorce today. We have the highest divorce rate of any nation on the face of this earth. In a country that contains

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only six percent of the world's population, we have more than half of all divorces that take place in our world. We have seen twice in the history of our world a total disintegration of the family. Once was in 300 BC with the Greek civilization. When they destroyed the family, it was not long until their culture destroyed their civilization. The second time occurred about 600 years later in 300 AD with the Roman civilization. Again, soon after the total disintegration of the family, there was a ruin of the civilization of the Roman culture. No nation can live so long as they destroy their homes. Therefore, the survival for the family really means revival for the family. Survival for the family means the revival of the nation. It means that if the nation is going to survive, then we must revive our homes. What should we do about this? What shall our reaction be? If nearly one out of every two marriages end, ruin or wreck, how should we react? We can do three things.

In First Corinthians 7, Paul warns against a husband and wife neglecting the spouse. Happy, successful marriages do not just happen accidentally, but are dependent upon the only guide and road map for success. Without the Bible, marriages will detour from the highway to happiness to the turnpike to torment.

First, let us notice that Paul says, "...let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2). In this passage, he establishes definite boundaries. In order to be successful, there must be boundaries, which are not to hurt us or hem us in but to help and protect us. Even the smallest boys understand the necessity of boundaries when playing football in the back yard in between this tree and that tree. If we were to watch the TN Volunteers play, and the running back simply ran into the stands because of no boundaries, one can see how someone might get hurt. In like manner, many people are getting hurt

today because they are not playing in God's boundaries by not using God's word as their guidelines. Within the boundaries of which God has given us, of every man having his own wife and every wife having her own husband is something wonderful and glorious. Brothers and sisters, when we take away the rules for what God calls marriage, soon, there will not be anything called marriage anymore. God did not spoil the game, but He created the game (Genesis 2:18-24)!

Next, notice Paul continues, "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband" (1 Corinthians 7:3). This is the difference between true love and false love, and this is one major reason why marriages fail today. Husbands and wives do not understand what the Bible teaches about true, genuine, real love. Basically, Paul says that the husband is to give to his wife and the wife is to give to her husband. That is true love! There are three types of love usually seen in marriage: (1) there is the "if" kind of love—"if you will do this, then I will love you," to which teenagers often fall prey, losing their virginity; (2) there is the "because of" kind of love—"I love you because you are so handsome, so sweet, so beautiful, so rich" and such like, but marriages will never last with this type of love, because all of these external qualities are fleeting; (3) there is the "in spite of" kind of love, which is the right kind of love, for it is a love without conditions (cf. John 3:16; Romans 5:8), and it is exemplified by Christ's love for His bride, the church (Ephesians 5:25-33).

Next, Paul says that the home is to be a place of security from infidelity (1 Corinthians 7:4-5). If husband and wife does what each are to do, and between them exists this tender, warm, physical relationship between them, then their marriage will not break. In the Bible, when a husband

and wife came together for physical relationships, the Hebrews would say that the husband “knew” his wife (cf. Genesis 4:1), because the marriage act of intimacy is a form of communication; it expresses love in a way that words cannot express. Therefore, when we fail to express that type of love, there is a loss of security in the home and marriage. The process of loving each other and caring for each other maintains the vital nature of this security.

Brethren, here is the Biblical secret to marital happiness—never neglecting your spouse, but honestly trying to satisfy the desires of your partner.

An illustration of a failure to do so is seen through Gomer, who left Hosea to fall back into prostitution (Hosea 2:2ff). The entire premise of the minor prophet book of Hosea is to teach him a vivid lesson as to how Israel left God as a wife unfaithfully leaves her husband. How tragic that many marriages have suffered in similar ways! As a perfect husband, God never neglects His bride, although she may be unfaithful. What an illustration for us as husbands and wives, may we never neglect our spouses!

### CONCLUSION

The only thing of value that we may take with us to heaven are the members of our family. God has provided many godly examples in holy writ about those who never neglected their family (Abraham—Genesis 18:19, Joshua - Joshua 24:15, and such like). May we resolve never to neglect our families: (1) parents, do not neglect your children; (2) children, do not neglect your parents; (3) husband and wife, do not neglect your spouse.



# NEVER LEAVE THE LORD

## Chapter 16

### NEVER TEAR DOWN

*Kathy Pollard*

**T**he book of Nehemiah opens with an emotional scene. Having heard the disturbing news about the broken wall and burned gates of Jerusalem, Nehemiah sat down and wept. He mourned for days, fasted, and prayed (Nehemiah 1:3-4). As cupbearer to Artaxerxes, Nehemiah was not allowed to display his emotions. He was supposed to maintain a stoic composure while serving the Babylonian king. That is why he was “very sore afraid” when the king said, “Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of the heart” (2:2). He must have been surprised and relieved when Artaxerxes offered to help him instead of punishing him. Nehemiah got permission to go to Judah, and he immediately encouraged the people, “Come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem.” They responded to his passionate plea by saying, “Let us rise up and build,” and they “strengthened their hands for this good work” (2:17-18). Unfortunately, the very next verse introduces some troublemakers. As soon as Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem heard the news about the rebuilding of the wall, they made it their mission to discourage the work (2:19). Through a series

of scheming attacks, these three men kept Nehemiah on his knees in prayer for protection.

Thankfully we would never attack God's people with such vicious intention, nor would we make it our mission to tear down. But while we cannot imagine ourselves being seen as "adversaries" (4:15) of God's people, I'm afraid there are times when our own attitudes or actions do in fact discourage the work. In the book of Nehemiah, we can easily identify the bad guys. They are hateful and easy to dislike. But I wonder how they viewed themselves? They were men of position and importance. They thought the work of the Jews was in direct rebellion against the king (2:19). They were wrong, but they were acting on their own agenda. Perhaps there are times when we become so agenda-driven that we lose sight of the real mission (Mark 16:15). We can become the ones actually tearing down the good work. How sad when others can easily see the harm we are doing! To make sure we are not guilty of it or blind to it, let's remember how Nehemiah's naysayers behaved.

### **THEY WERE LED BY THEIR EMOTIONS**

When Sanballat heard about the building of the wall, he was "wroth" and "took great indignation" (4:1). When Sanballat, Tobias, and others heard about the good progress being made, they were "very wroth" (4:7) and upset enough to want to do harm (6:2). These men seemed to be reactionary. As soon as they heard something they didn't like, they became furious and were quick to do something about it.

How often have we been guilty of the same thing? Many of our regrets are probably over things we said or did in the "heat of the moment." Emotions like anger, fear, disappointment, jealousy, and even discouragement can lead

us to say or do harmful things if not kept in check. “He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls” (Proverbs 25:28). Walls are for a city’s protection. Without them, a city is vulnerable to attacks. That’s part of the reason why Nehemiah was so distraught when he learned of the condition of the walls of Jerusalem. When we lack self-control, we leave ourselves more vulnerable to the enemy. Satan can use us as his tools and for his purposes when we aren’t thinking clearly. The fruit of the Spirit includes self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). When we do not practice self-control, we are more likely to walk in the flesh, which includes “biting and devouring one another,” anger, and strife (Galatians 5:15-21).

Build up instead. To safeguard against being reactionary, we must remember that the heart cannot always be trusted (Proverbs 28:26; Jeremiah 17:9). If there’s something we disagree with or don’t like, we must first look into the mirror of God’s Word for guidance (James 1:23-25). Then we will give the benefit of the doubt, practice patience, offer compassion, and always, always keep the big picture in mind, which is the building up of the kingdom (Ephesians 4:1-16).

### **THEY TARGETED THE LEADERSHIP**

When Nehemiah first heard about the problem, he chose to do something about it. He was the one who motivated everyone else to rebuild the wall. He rolled up his sleeves and got to work. The troublemakers knew this, and so they began to mock and ridicule him in the presence of others (2:19). Then they sent a message directly to Nehemiah (6:2).

It is easy to be an “arm chair quarterback” in the church. Some are quick to question the leadership when they don’t like a decision that’s been made. They criticize the

elders in conversations with others. Instead of being a part of the solution, they take the wind out of the sails of those who care enough to get their hands dirty and work. We must be very careful to not discourage church leaders. God has put them in that position (Titus 1:5) and commanded us to “esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). Nehemiah ended up feeling despised (4:4). May we never be guilty of causing the same feelings in our own good leaders!

Build up instead. Imagine how much stronger a church can be when her shepherds are encouraged, loved, and supported! We can tell the elders we’re praying for them, that we appreciate their sacrifice and labor of love (1 Timothy 5:17). We can freely offer our own services to help fill the gaps in local work. We can build them up in the presence of others. We can protect them by refusing to listen to harsh criticisms against them (1 Timothy 5:19). We can do our part to create a culture that respects authority in our own congregations. Everyone wins when the leaders are lifted up!

### **THEY USED THEIR WORDS AS WEAPONS**

Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem began mocking Nehemiah and his fellow workers (2:20). Then they mocked all the Jews, calling them “feeble” (4:2). They tried to make the Jews feel inadequate. They tried to make them doubt their ability to build. “Will they fortify themselves? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish which are burned?” (4:2). Tobiah wanted them to feel like their work was worthless. He said, “Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall” (4:3).

Perhaps the quickest way to tear down others is with our words. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue”

(Proverbs 18:21). We can damage our marriages with hurtful words because we know where our spouse's vulnerabilities lie. Whether we truly intended to or not, we can discourage good workers in the kingdom by causing them to question their own abilities. In this age of social media, it's especially easy to wreak havoc. We can harm reputations by labeling others. We can post just enough to cause people to wonder about the soundness of certain individuals. Instead of having a loving conversation in private when there is a differing view or opinion, some have used every opportunity to ridicule a brother in a public manner. Condescension, insults, and sarcasm are used by those who have no problem with discouraging others.

Build up instead. Surely the quickest and easiest way is with life-giving words. We can be more intentional about lacing our speech with grace (Colossians 4:6). We can make sure we only say things that will build others up and "minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29). We can accomplish so much good with sincere words of encouragement.

### **THEY ATTEMPTED TO GET OTHERS ON THEIR SIDE**

When Sanballat mocked the Jews, he "spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria" (4:2). When they later heard of the progress being made, Sanballat and others "conspired all of them together, to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it" (4:8). This got so bad that Nehemiah had to set up round the clock guards while they tried to continue building the wall (4:9). Sanballat knew there was strength in numbers.

We may try to defend, validate, or strengthen our position by looping others in on it. We can create strife in

the Lord's church by complaining to others about a certain brother or leader. We can hurt our own marriages by trying to gain sympathy from best friends or parents when our spouse upsets us. We feel bigger and "righter" when we pull more people over to our side.

Build up instead. God wants His people to promote peace and unity (Ephesians 4:3). If we have a problem with someone, our options are to let it go (Proverbs 19:11) or go to that person in private (Matthew 18:15). We can make sure all of our actions will promote healing in the church body instead of strife.

### **THEY USED FEAR TACTICS**

The fear felt by God's people was visible (4:14). This must have been the method that Sanballat and his gang thought would be most effective. Through some scheming and deception, they hoped fear would lead to discouragement which would paralyze the work. They even accused God's people of things that weren't true concerning their motives and agenda (6:6-7). Nehemiah recognized it for what it was (6:9).

Even the Lord's church has her share of tormentors. Anyone who glories in "beating down" another person with powerful arguments or fierce demeanor, who boasts of their own verbal victories, who uses veiled threats or intimidation has become nothing less than a bully.

Build up instead. The "spirit of fear" does not come from God (2 Timothy 1:7). We can do the same thing Nehemiah did to help God's people get past it. He reminded them to keep their eyes on God instead of the adversaries (4:14, 20). He had the people working side by side while they were building the wall (chapter 3). He spent much time in

prayer on their behalf. If we spend our time and energy doing these same three things, we can be sure that we are being an advocate instead of an adversary.

Perhaps the greatest motivation to never tear down is what ultimately happened in the book of Nehemiah. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem were foiled by God. God “brought their counsel to naught” (4:15). How satisfying to read how the naysayers reacted when the wall was completed! “And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof...they were much cast down in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God” (6:16). The NASV reads, “They lost their confidence.” What happened to their bravado?

God promised to build a kingdom that would never be destroyed, and He did (Daniel 2:44; Matthew 16:18). He is going to protect her from anyone trying to tear her down. God help us see and remove any destructive ways in ourselves.

Never Tear Down

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# NEVER LEAVE THE LORD

## Chapter 17

### NEVER FORGET YOU

*B.J. Rollo*

**O**f all the interesting Bible characters throughout the Bible, the one I most closely identify with is Martha. Martha was a worker who proactively sought out Jesus. She welcomed strangers into her home and served gladly. Martha is only listed in 12 verses, but she has been the center of many ladies' class lessons. Most of my Christian life, the simple phrase "Don't be a Martha" has served as a warning. Martha was guilty of losing what was important in her daily activities. As women, our lives are normally an intersection of many jobs and responsibilities. We have varying commitments to children, husbands, aging parents, volunteer organizations, church obligations, domestic responsibilities, and work. Often, finding a balance between remembering the critical duties and not forgetting to care for ourselves seem to be an impossible task. In Luke 10:38-41, Martha receives a kind rebuke from Jesus: "Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered

about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” Martha fell into the same trap that many of us have fallen into during our own lives. Martha should not be maligned for her fervor and work ethic. She did much good. But just as Martha needed to readjust her priorities, often we must too. Never forgetting yourself is a choice. Each day must begin with accepting responsibility for our own salvation, actively seeking out others to serve rather than serving ourselves, and finally acknowledging that spiritual needs must come before the physical. If we do these things, we will be able to navigate the labyrinth of life.

### **ME FIRST**

If you travel by air frequently, the instructions for using the oxygen mask in an emergency is something that you have heard countless times and can recite from memory. “Should the cabin lose pressure, oxygen masks will drop from the overhead area. Please place the mask over your own mouth and nose before assisting others.” Logically speaking, we realize that we must save ourselves so we can make sure that we are able to save others. As a mother of four, this is a difficult thing to contemplate. Just as ensuring my own mask is functional before I help others, salvation is much the same. We must not forget ourselves. If we do, both souls could be lost in the chaos of life.

The word forget is defined by Merriam-Webster.com as “to fail to remember, inadvertently neglecting to do or

mention something, to put out of one's mind, or to cease to think of or consider." The etymology of the word forget is from the Old English "forgietan" which means to "lose the power of recalling to the mind; fail to remember; neglect inadvertently" ([www.Etymonline.com](http://www.Etymonline.com)), The physical sense of the word would be to "lose one's grip." Forget is a word or idea that often is often used as a battle cry. After the tragic events of September the 11th, America chose the phrase "Never Forget" as a conscious effort to remember the innocent lives that had been taken. Being a native Texan, the phrase "Remember the Alamo" comes to mind. It was used as a rally cry for the Texan Army during our struggle for independence from Mexico. The proud Texans vowed to never forget what happened at the Battle of the Alamo, and eventually won the war, becoming a nation. In Joshua 4, Jehovah commanded the Israelite nation to erect a stone memorial. This was to remind the nation of Israel of how God saved them from Egyptian bondage and gave them a land full of increase. Remembering God involved not forgetting personally what God did for the Israelites. This is extremely similar as a Christian to our call to action. I am responsible for my own salvation. Do not forget!

In Deuteronomy 4:9, the warning is given, "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons." Keeping our soul precedes caring for even our children. Mothers find this difficult at times. We would do anything to save our children, even to our own hurt. Forgetting ourselves is not noble in this sense. David declares, "I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word...I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast

quicken me” (Psalms 119:16, 93). As a king and the ruler of God’s people, he struggled on occasion. He was called a man after God’s own heart; however, because he accepted the responsibility for his own salvation and was contrite after he sinned. Like David, we must seek after Jehovah and accept the responsibility of our own salvation individually. I must put “Me First” when it comes to choices of salvation.

### **ME LAST**

Although Martha struggled to prioritize spiritual things over physical, she did excel at serving others. “Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house” (Luke 10:38). “There they made him a supper; and Martha served” (John 12:2). Her home appears to be the center of much hospitality. This is no doubt because of her desire to be a servant. Occasionally, we can forget ourselves by asking to be served instead of serving. “Don’t be a Martha” has become an excuse to shirk responsibilities for some women. Many congregations have a few overworked women who are leaned on to do every task. These ladies become exhausted and often end up resenting those who do not labor alongside of them. We all know someone who has been responsible for preparing the communion for years. There are “fellowship sisters” at every congregation who do most of the cooking along with being responsible for the preparing and cleaning up all fellowship meals. The overworked Bible class teachers exist in every congregation who have not been into an adult class in several years because they always teach the children. How much do we think these overworked sisters can do before they begin to develop a Martha-like attitude? “But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost

thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me” (Luke 10:40). How often have we left our sisters to “serve alone?” If Mary helped Martha prior to this time, possibly Martha would have been encouraged to choose the better part as Mary did on that occasion. Do we forget to assign responsibility to ourselves and therefore cause others to stumble? In Hebrews 13:16, we are commanded, “to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” When we are willing to serve others and are not neglectful of our responsibilities, God is well pleased with us. I must put “me last” so I do not become guilty of forgetting ourselves as it relates to laboring in the vineyard for Christ.

### **GOD FIRST**

The world today can be so confusing to those of us seeking to live godly lives. Society teaches women that our worth is based on a series of “truths” as the world sees it. One such lie we begin to fall prey to is our worth being determined by the salary we are able to contribute to our families. From a young age, we are pushed to become career women that work long hours to the neglect of our homes and families. Each of these false narratives, when believed by a Christian woman, can erode our true purpose. In these lies, we begin to lose ourselves. Never forgetting ourselves indicates that we must know ourselves, understand God’s will for our lives, and protect our lifestyle so we can be of service to Him.

One of the phrases from the New Testament used by the apostle Paul is “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (I Corinthians 9:22). This verse often taunts me. How can I possibly be what everyone needs, when they need it? Most women have a desire to please

those around us. We want our children and husbands to be happy and well taken care of always. We strive to be the best volunteer in the organization. Each extracurricular event our children participate in must be attended and we must arrive early so we can show our exuberance for them. In this effort to please everyone, just as Martha did, we may hear Jesus say to us, “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42). Martha was not doing anything sinful. She was not engaged in immoral activities. Her mistake was not choosing the better part. Working diligently at everything you do is not sinful. The book of Ecclesiastes teaches, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do [it] with thy might” (Ecclesiastes 9:20). The sin is not in the work; the sin is when anything comes before God. In America, we assume we do not have an issue with idolatry. This is a misconception. Many of us can slip into worshipping our children’s sports, or our jobs (incomes), or even extracurricular events of the body of Christ rather than God if we are not cautious. If we choose to forsake the mid-week bible class for a child’s practice or sporting event, we are worshipping the sport rather than the Savior. If we choose an occupation that causes us to forsake week after week, we are worshipping our job over Jesus. If we choose to forsake Sunday worship to set up the fellowship meal, we are worshipping a potluck over the Potentate. In making these poor choices, we begin to forget ourselves. Warnings in the scriptures such as, “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee” (Revelation 3:3). should cause us to reflect on our choices. The book

of Proverbs is a beautiful book written from a father to a son to encourage faithfulness to God. Many passages were encouragements from a father who made many mistakes. He encourages his son to, “Get wisdom, get understanding: forget [it] not; neither decline from the words of my mouth” (Proverbs 4:5). Solomon knew that forgetting God personally was highly damaging. I must remember to keep “God First” in all of my priorities.

### **GOD WILL LAST**

God is faithful and true to us always. To be with God for an eternity is a most excellent thought. We can know that God will remember us in the end if we labor for him while we can. “For God [is] not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Hebrews 6:10). God promises through his word that he will not forget all the sacrifices we make for Him. He also ensures that He will forget all of our past sins as we choose daily to repent and walk in Christ. “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Hebrews 8:12). No words have ever been more comforting than these! As God forgives us, we must also forgive ourselves. Paul writes, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but [this] one thing [I do], forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before” (Philippians 3:13). In order to spend eternity with God, we must put ourselves first in salvation issues, we must keep ourselves last when serving others, we must keep God first in all of our daily decisions, and in the end, we will be able to spend an eternity with God. If you do these things, you will “NEVER FORGET YOU.”