

# *The Keys Of The Kingdom*

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**If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.**

# **The Second Work of Grace Doctrine of John Wesley**

**Daniel Denham**

Parrish, Florida

John Wesley (1703-1791) was, undoubtedly, the most influential theologian of the 18th century. While Wesley was a lifelong Anglican, he is often spoken of as the founder of the Methodist Church. This denomination based much of its teaching on that of John Wesley along with his brother Charles Wesley, who is more renowned for his hymnody, and revivalist George Whitefield. The thinker of the trio was John Wesley, who was both a prolific writer and an eloquent, passionate speaker.

Wesley established what became known as the Wesleyan Tradition which promoted the piety and perfectionism movements within both Anglicanism and Methodism. These twin notions have also trickled down through the Methodist Church of the 19th century into the various Holiness, Pentecostal, and Charismatic movements of the 20th and 21st centuries, including the current 3rd Wave Movement so prominent in America and Europe today.

Wesley's teaching, sadly, has even affected some of our own brethren, as in the case of one Mac Deaver, as we shall see in a separate study of Deaver's direct help heresy. At the present, we are concerned with Wesley's specific teaching of "the second work of grace," which phrase encapsulates his concept of sanctification tying it generally to the work of the Holy Spirit and specifically to the baptism of the Spirit. An understanding of the origin of this doctrine and its early development is greatly needed among the brethren today. Many are making the same blunders in their thinking (or lack thereof) as John Wesley and his disciples have made.

## **THE DOCTRINE OF THE SECOND WORK OF GRACE DEVISED**

John Wesley, as noted, was a lifelong Anglican, a member of the Church of England. Yet he underwent a religious experience that altered his perception of both human nature and Bible teaching. On April 25, 1735, he was urged by his father, who lay dying, to seek a real spiritual relationship with God. Upon that advice, in his subsequent trip to the American colonies with his brother, Charles,

Wesley came across a group of Moravian missionaries, while on the way to Georgia. Among this number was a bishop of that denomination, one Peter Bohler. Wesley and he became good friends. Wesley was impressed with what he believed to be the spirituality of the missionaries. (Abraham 2005:5-6). His work in Savannah, however, did not progress well, however. Wesley seems to have had a severe bent of mind as to personal discipline, which did not go over well with his parishioners. He returned to England discouraged and despondent. (2005:6-7). But he never forgot about the zeal and enthusiasm he had seen in the Moravians.

By 1738 Wesley had come more fully under the influence of Bohler with whom, as the latter was now in England, Wesley instituted a religious society called the Fetter Lane Society. Bohler stressed to Wesley that religious experiences were important and that one could “feel” the love and power of God internally. He also emphasized the need for a feeling of certainty of forgiveness of sins and of the fact of victory over sin here and now. (2005:8). This internal witness that was supposedly manifested in the heart of the believer was ascribed to the working of the Holy Spirit within. Here then was the start of the heart-patting society! Religious experience would become a form of “evidence” in itself.

Bohler eventually went off into Universalism. Wesley, however, had still been adversely affected by Bohler’s theories on religious experience and salvation. At a meeting at Aldersgate Street in London, on May 24, 1738, which Wesley reluctantly attended, he had an experience in the services in which his “heart was strangely warmed.” Wesley wrote of the experience:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. (Outler 1964:66).

At this point, Wesley was off and running. He studied the Moravians in Germany for a while, even though they refused to accept the genuineness of his “experience” or fellowship him as a true believer. The mysticism of the Moravians and others intrigued him. He especially became attached to works stressing religious experience as evidence and as a basis for piety. Thomas

a’Kempis, William Law, and Richard Baxter provided books stressing some of these new found interests of Wesley in a theological setting. But more outlandish mystics would come to influence him even beyond that of A’Kempis, Law, and Baxter. These simply made the emotionalism seem more respectable for “high church” folk.

The concept of sudden, immediate (i.e. without means) change by the working of the Holy Spirit on the basis of faith alone caught his imagination. This concept, which was prevalent in both the respective systems of Calvinism and Arminianism coupled with the mystical spiritualism of these influences, shaped his own view of man and God. Total depravity necessitated in his mind this direct, immediate change, while the love of God, in his thinking, just as certainly necessitated the assurance to be felt in the subsequent sanctification of the believer. But a fuller understanding of his reasoning is in order here. Let us then consider...

### **THE DOCTRINE OF THE SECOND WORK OF GRACE DELINEATED**

The doctrine of the Second Work of Grace, as noted, is tied directly to Wesley’s teachings on sanctification. Wesley, influenced himself by the teaching of Martin Luther, came to believe and teach the false doctrine of salvation by faith alone. But unlike the Lutherans and Calvinists he separated the doctrines of justification and sanctification so as to affirm that the former was the first work of grace, while the latter was the second work.

Further, he equated the new birth with the former – justification, but the second work of grace he applied specifically to the experience of Holy Spirit baptism and the in-filling of the Spirit thereby in the life of the Christian. Justification was viewed as the beginning point or entrance into sanctification in the sense that it made the Christian the proper object then of Spirit baptism and the subsequent “witness of the Spirit.” Thus, the order, according to Wesley, is (1) justification by faith only followed by (2) sanctification beginning through the act of Holy Spirit baptism. This sanctification was also viewed by Wesley as an ongoing process entailing the development ultimately of perfection in the Christian so as to be able even to “live above sin.” (Wesley 2003:68-74).

This idea especially was center-piece in the even more extreme branches of the Holiness Movement arising out of Methodism in the later 19th and early 20th centuries. The doctrine of *perfectionism* became a basic tenet of many Pentecostal and Holiness churches.

It should be noted that Wesley was often not clear on his exact position, as his theology seems to have been in a state of constant flux. At times he appears more Calvinistic, while at other points in his thinking Arminian. The latter became the most common view in his later writings, for which Wesleyanism is often referred to as part of the Arminian tradition. The difference centered over whether Spirit baptism in Wesley's teaching *occurred at* and also even occasioned the new birth *or* was reserved for those *already regenerated but in need of help* in living the Christian life. (Turner). It is this latter view that came to predominate in his thinking over time, even though he still vacillated on certain particulars.

The ambiguity at times in his own writings has led some Wesleyans to question whether Wesley really taught a second work of grace as distinct from justification. For example, Methodist scholar Mack B. Stokes wrote some years ago:

We believe in Christian perfection. As we have seen, *conversion* is the doorway through which we enter into Christian life. And, once in the house of God, we rejoice in the *assurance* that we belong to the Father. But in the nature of the spiritual life we are to move from room to room and story to story...Some tell us that just as the new birth comes as the *first* work of grace, Christian perfection, or sanctification, comes as the *second* definite work of grace. There is a first story in the house of God; and there is a second story. But others say that we should not limit the house of God to these two stories. Controversies on this topic have gone far into many a night. And much remains to be said. John Wesley has been rightly claimed as a witness on both sides. He *believed* in Christian perfection as a second work of grace because of the testimony of others. And, in my opinion, he knew the experience in his own heart. But, as far as I can tell, he never clearly and unambiguously *professed* it. (1955-56:69).

It will be observed that Stokes did admit that Wesley definitely believed the doctrine, even if his teaching was some what confused or imprecise in teaching it.

At length, Wesley equated the baptism of the Spirit with a second blessing or work of God after justification had occurred. In this, he adopted the idea of the Spirit's presence in the saint as a "check" against sin. (McGonigle 1973:68ff.). But relative to sanctification itself, Wesley offered a new twist to the work of the Spirit beyond that of even the Calvinists and the Arminians. Whereas both of these groups saw sanctification as occurring at the same time and in the same divine act as justification, Wesley came to view sanctification as a separate operation that began in some way at the same *general* time as justification but entailed a *distinct operation* of the Spirit in addition to that of salvation. He also viewed sanctification as both an act and a subsequent ongoing process.

Calvinism, following the teaching of John Calvin, and Arminianism, which is based on the teaching of Jacob Arminius, both affirmed in their classical forms that sanctification occurred fully and completely at the same time as justification and through the same act of Spirit baptism. The difference between these two systems lay in the timing of the commencement of the action in regard to reception of the word of God, i.e. the message of salvation. The former held that the act occurred without cause or condition upon the heart of the sinner, who had been unconditionally elected to receive it. The Word was only a proximate cause in salvation, according to Calvinism. In fact, many Calvinists totally dismissed it as essential at all. The latter view of Arminianism held that the potential was present for anyone to receive it, even though an "illumination" of the word of God by the Spirit was initially necessary to do so. In this the dispute centered thus on both election and free will.

The Calvinists affirmed unconditional election with no genuine free will. Man was only "free" in the sense that his morally depraved nature caused him to "choose" always to do evil, according to it. Arminianism, however, asserted conditional election with a kind of impaired free will. Man needed some "help" from God to activate the access to the ability to respond. Hence, the doctrine of illumination or enlightenment of the Scriptures was a central part of the teaching of the Arminians in contrast with the Calvinists. Wesley, following the Arminian assumptions on free will, went further, however, relative to sanctification. M.J. Sawyer explains:

In the theology of John Wesley one finds a new direction, distinct both from Reformed and classic Arminianism. Wesley built his understanding of the nature of man solidly upon the Reformed position of original sin, and the subsequent necessity of divine grace for salvation. Here however

he departed company with the reformers and injected the doctrine of prevenient grace (all men have received of the Holy Spirit the ability to respond to God) into his understanding of the doctrine of salvation. Wesley rejected the Reformed concept of election, opting instead for the Arminian concept of conditional election. Thus he joined the Reformed doctrine of the total sinfulness of the individual and the primacy of grace with the Arminian stress on human freedom, with its subsequent moral obligations. But his doctrine of Sanctification was not traditional Arminianism. Wesley was also heavily influenced by the mystics. (Wesleyan and Keswick).

Sawyer, quoting from J.I. Packer, shows that the roots of Wesley's new twist on sanctification as a second work of grace actually came from the teaching of patristic mystics, Macarius the Egyptian and Ephraem Syrus, whose contribution to Wesley was the concept of *perfectionism*. Prof. Sawyer then states:

Wesley asserted the primacy of justification, and the assurance the believer could have based upon the righteousness of Christ. However, his Arminian view of election creeps into his view of final salvation. He views the process of Sanctification as one of making the individual worthy of salvation. This process is a work of God, but it is also a work of man. At this point a synergism appears. At one point he explicitly states that good works are a condition of final justification which he regards as necessary for final salvation. (Wesleyan and Keswick).

There is seemingly then a double or even triple-mindedness to Wesley's theology, a doctrinal schizophrenia that runs the gamut from the monergism of John Calvin through the limited compliance of Jacob Arminius to the synergism of Wesley, who called himself a Calvinist. Thus, Wesley proclaimed:

God's grace is sufficient for us. All things are possible to those who believe. By a living faith through the Holy Spirit, we put on the Lord Jesus Christ. We put on the whole armor of God and are enabled to glorify Him in all of our words and works. We are then able to bring every thought into captivity and into obedience to God. Total dedication to the will and purpose of God becomes our meat and drink. By grace we have received a faith which makes this dedication possible. We have received a complete new nature, being born of God and filled with the empowering Holy Spirit. (Wesley 2003:167).

The idea of perfection by the Christian permeates Wesley's theology. (Wesley 2003:169-179). The theme became almost an obsession with him. Though Wesley himself did not proclaim the ability of the Christian to obtain absolute sinless perfection by virtue of the Second Blessing, he did affirm that through the direct aid of the Spirit the Christian is enabled to rise above sin and be "perfect in love" to the degree that he "feels no sin." (Carroll 1912: 309).

It is no wonder that those who followed him in succeeding generations would come to claim for themselves a complete and sinless perfection. Others of the tradition are not so boastful. But the second work of grace doctrine came to be a prominent teaching in Wesleyan theology after Wesley. He did lay the foundation on which it rests, and rightly is considered its spiritual parent. He wrote that perfection is "purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God." He also described it as the development of "the mind (that) was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked." (Wesley 1850:172). He also tied it in with the condition of having love for both God and one's neighbor in the fullest sense (1850:175).

The key thing here is that this is impossible, according to Wesleyan thinking, without a direct, immediate operation of the Spirit on the heart of the saint, so as to burn away the sin nature of man brought on by original sin. It is premised then on the false concept of hereditary total depravity and, at the very least, the impaired ability of man to do anything about this supposed condition. The Spirit must then *empower* the person to develop these traits and characteristics, so as to arrive at some measure of perfection. The doctrine implies the inability of the human agent to comply with those passages commanding some measure or kind of "perfection" on his own power in keeping with the instructions of the Scriptures. This work is not thoroughly completed until the coming of Christ according to Wesley. He maintained that the Spirit provided this empowerment as well as "internal evidence of a living faith" (Wesley 2003:215-217).

But Methodist theologian John Miley, one of Methodism's most accomplished scholars, defined the doctrine of the second blessing as taught by Wesley, whom he greatly admired, as follows:

The doctrinal view of the second blessing, as definitely held, consists of two parts, one of which has already been stated, but which may here be restated in connection with the other. The doctrine will thus be presented the more clearly.

Underlying the definite second-blessing view is the doctrine of a common incompleteness of the work of regeneration. Herein the soul is renewed, but not wholly; purified, but not thoroughly. Somewhat of a depravity remains which wars against the new spiritual life; not strong enough to bring that life into bondage to itself, yet strong enough to impose a burden upon the work of its maintenance. Such is the first part. The doctrine in the second part is that the regenerate shall come to the consciousness of this incompleteness, and to a deep sense of the need of a fullness of the spiritual life; that these experiences shall be analogous to those which preceded the attainment of regeneration, and be just as deep and thorough. The fullness of sanctification shall be instantly attained on the condition of faith, just as justification is attained; and there shall be a new experience of a great and gracious change, and just as consciously such as the experience in regeneration.

That Mr. Wesley held and taught such views there can be no doubt; though we think it would be wrong to him to say that he allowed no instances of entire sanctification except in this definite mode. We see no perplexity for faith in the possibility of such an instant subjective purification. Through the divine agency the soul may be as quickly cleansed as the leper, as quickly purified in whole as in part. We admit an instant partial sanctification in regeneration, and therefore may admit the possibility of an instant entire sanctification. (1989:368-369).

Thus, Miley, who was as conversant with Wesley's works as any man of his generation, understood Wesley's view of sanctification to entail a direct, immediate operation of God in sanctification in addition to that direct operation already ascribed in regeneration by most Protestant theologians from Luther onward, including Wesley.

But what saith the Scriptures? What does the Bible actually teach relative to this second blessing or second work of grace doctrine?

## **THE DOCTRINE OF THE SECOND WORK OF GRACE DEFEATED**

While the Scriptures do speak of our going "on to perfection" (Heb. 6:1) and of being "perfect as" God the Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48), they do not teach the Wesleyan doctrine of perfectionism.

(1) The doctrine of Total Depravity upon which it rests is false. Children are portrayed in the Scriptures in their innocence as examples of the kind of character to be possessed by believers (Matt. 19:14). The Scriptures, thus, expressly teach that the guilt of sin (not to mention sin itself) is not inherited (Ezek. 18:20). Sin by definition is a violation of God's law (1 John 3:4). What sin does a little baby at the very point of conception – as a single-celled entity – commit simply by being conceived? The very idea is ludicrous. Imagine a single-celled baby being already as depraved as the devil, as mean as he can ever get or ever become, just by being conceived in his mother's womb!

(2) While emotions are important and are essential parts of human personality, emotions are to be governed and tempered by reason. The Scriptures are addressed to man's moral faculties in such a way as to "persuade" (2 Cor. 5:10-11) men to freely obey (Heb. 5:8-9; Rev. 22:14). Yes, the emotions may play a role in responding, but it is the intellect guided by the reasoned arguments of Holy writ that are designed to compel one to come to Christ (John 6:44-45). Why was Cornelius commanded to send for the apostle Peter? Was it not to hear words whereby he and his household could be told what they must do and be saved? (cf. Acts 10:6, 33; 11:13-14). Zeal, for example, is important, but it must be zeal that is "according to knowledge" of God's Word (Rom. 10:1-3). It is after compliance with God's Word that we read of the Ethiopian eunuch going on his way "rejoicing" (Acts 8:39).

(3) The doctrine of salvation by faith only is also false (John 2:24, 26). We are saved by faith that works by love (Gal. 5:6). Obedience is essential to salvation (Heb. 5:8-9; Matt. 7:21; Rev. 22:14; 1 John 5:3).

(4) The Scriptures nowhere teach the idea of feelings being our guide in religion or some inward experience being the source of evidence. The evidence that one knows God is in his obedience to God's will (1 John 4:3-4). The Holy Spirit does indeed bear witness with our spirit's that we are God's children, but that is not done through some better felt than told mystical way (Rom. 8:16). If one is led by the Spirit, then he is a child of God (Rom. 8:14), but this is not done in any direct, immediate way. It is done through the means of God's inspired Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Those of whom these things are spoken in Romans 8 are those who are (A) in Christ, which means they had to have been baptized in water to enter into Christ to become children of God (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:26-29), and (B) are walking after the Spirit in that they are obedient to "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which has made us free from the law of sin and death" (Rom.

8:1-2). Walking after the Spirit and walking in the Spirit refer to walking in keeping with the teaching of the Spirit, i.e. walking in keeping with New Testament doctrine. As we walk in the light, we have fellowship with God, as well as one another, and we have the cleansing blood of Christ being applied (1 John 1:4-7). Also, it should be noted that the text affirms that the Holy Spirit witnesses (testifies) **with** our spirits, not **to** our spirits, that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16).

(5) One is sanctified at the point one obeys the Gospel of Christ in being baptized in water and thus washed or cleansed of sin (Eph. 5:26). Cleansing and sanctification occur at the same instance. We are sanctified through the truth, which is God's Word, and not by a direct, immediate operation of the Holy Spirit (John 17:17).

(6) Holy Spirit baptism has ceased and thus is not involved in sanctification. There is but one baptism in vogue today (Eph. 4:5), and that is water baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38-39; 22:16), as it was to last until the end of the world (Matt. 28:19). Further, as Holy Spirit baptism involved miraculous power (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:49), and as the miraculous has ceased (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Jam. 1:25; Jude 3), then it must be the case that Holy Spirit baptism has ceased.

(7) There is no record whatever of the kind of experience(s) claimed by Wesley and his followers. The Scriptures are totally void of such examples. If there is no Biblical evidence for it, then it cannot be of faith (Rom. 10:17). If it is not of faith, then it does not please God (Heb. 11:6). Christians are to be people who "walk by faith..." (2 Cor. 5:7).

## **CONCLUSION**

The teaching of John Wesley has had a profound affect upon many people in the religious world, including some who are members of the Lord's church. We need to be aware of this influence – where it comes from, what it entails, and how to counter it.

We have looked at the subject of Wesley's Second Work of Grace Doctrine (1) Devised, (2) Delineated, and (3) Defeated. We must always be for the truth and against error. "Through Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore, I hate every false way" (Psa. 119:104). It will be noted that this was written by David just before describing the Word of God as our lamp and our light in guiding us

through life (Psa. 119:105). Rather than awaiting some inward “illumination,” we need to turn on the light of God’s Word in our study (Psa. 119:130). That is the only safe and truly secure way to have assurance of those things we must believe, be, and do.

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# The First Principles (Part 5)

## *Sin*

**Jim Miller**

Gray, Maine

last month we concluded our examination of *the message*. This month, let's look at *sin*, which is that which separates man from God. We are not going to go all the way back to Adam and Eve; we all know how sin got started. We also know, from the Scriptures, that all have sinned from that time forward. There has only been One to ever live without committing any sin, and that was Christ Jesus, our Lord.

### **Sin: Missing The Mark.**

Some consider sin to be a violation of society's ethics, or a violation of one's personal ethics, or even the violation of the rules of one's parents. Although sin may encompass one or more of those aspects, it is the violation of the word of God. John wrote, "*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law*" (1 Jn. 3:4).<sup>1</sup> Notice, also, that the violation of one's conscience is sin (Rom. 14:23; Jas. 4:17), because that, also, violates God's word, which demands that we maintain a pure conscience.

A most horrible fate awaits those who do not obey the Gospel of Christ. The only true way to escape an eternity in hell is to learn what is expected of us to be forgiven of the sins that so easily beset us. So I want us to understand sin, so we may properly deal with it, and avoid meeting an everlasting fate of damnation.

The Scriptures are full of encouragement. This is meant to help us serve God and live as He would have us to live. We are promised grand and marvelous rewards for remaining faithful to the end. However, just as often in God's word, we are warned of the consequences for disobedience, which is sin. God paints a terrifying picture of what happens to those who are lost in sin. This picture shows suffering and anguish throughout eternity. Just read Luke's account of the rich man and Lazarus, recorded in Luke 16:19:

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

*There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.*

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy that the love of material wealth causes one to sin. He wrote in First Timothy 6:6-10 of the dangers of riches, saying, "*The love of money is the root of all evil.*" The world in which we live measures one's success by the material possessions he can attain, and one's prominence by how much effort they give to its accumulation. Such an attitude pressures others to do the same, and they are lured into thinking that obtaining material possessions must come first in their life. This means putting God and his work behind obtaining material possessions. God tells us that if we have food and raiment we should be content (1 Tim. 6:8). How often has the love of obtaining more material possessions caused one to love God less, failing to put Him first (Mt. 6:33), thus falling into sin.

We sin because we lack love for God. Jesus said in John 14:15, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*" He also said He came to do the will of His Father, so that whatever He commands or reveals to us, we must do. The revealed will of God becomes the law for us to follow and obey. If we truly love someone, we will do all we possibly can to please that individual. If we love the Lord with all our soul, mind and strength, we will obey whatever he says. If he tells us not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to lie, etc., then we will diligently strive to obey God. We will try to keep ourselves out of situations that would tempt us to sin. A lack of supreme love for God in our lives can cause us to sin.

In the third chapter of Romans, beginning with verse ten, several terrible things are quoted from Psalms as happening because, he says, "*There is no fear of God before their eyes*" (v. 18). The word "*fear*," as used in the Bible, usually has one of two meanings. Sometimes it is used in the sense of reverence, while other times it is used to mean the dread of an action that one may possibly suffer. Both cases are true concerning why we sin. Many sin, today, because they have no respect for God and his word, which is the Bible. They lack respect, for they are unwilling to let Him guide their lives. Their lack of respect for his word may be seen in their open disobedience against that which they know God commands. Others fail to fear because of the teaching of humanists, designed to promote atheist philosophy. These have no fear of any "*everlasting punishment*" of God following death, and on the day of judgment. With such fears removed, the flood gate is open for people to live as they please, destroying any barriers that might prevent one from seeking to live according to the flesh – a life of sin.

A child learns early that if he is not immediately punished for an act, he may continue to repeat it. Not until later in life does he learn that not all punishment is immediate. When we get caught up in a life of sin, we often revert to the childish reasoning that, since God didn't punish me immediately, there will be no punishment at all! In Ecclesiastes 8:11-13, we read the warning, "*Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked.*" In the New Testament, the Lord tried to correct this type of reasoning through the pen of Peter in First Peter 3:3-18. He says that the longsuffering of God is salvation (v. 18), not slackness (v. 9). God will punish all unforgiven sin in the day of judgment, and that punishment is eternal separation from God in hell.

Since God told us why people sin, let us strive to avoid those attitudes and actions that would lead us into a life of sin. Rather, let us strive to obey His commands, so that we may lead to a life of righteousness, and a reward of joy in heaven in the hereafter. "*Fear God And keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil*" (Ecc. 12:13-14).

# Biblical Exegesis (Part 2)

**Robert Alexander**

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Last month's article concerned itself with the following points: 1) The necessity for proper exegesis of God's word in light of the mandate to preach God's word; 2) The fact that God's word can be understood; 3) The mandate to properly "handle aright" God's word; 4) The need to give Biblical answers for Biblical questions according to First Peter 3:15. This month we will define what we mean by "Biblical exegesis," and then note the difference between hermeneutics and exegesis.

## The Definition of Exegesis

To better understand that with which we are dealing, let us define some pertinent terms.

**Bible.** The term "Bible" is from the Greek "biblos" which referred to the outer coat of the papyrus reed of Egypt around the 11th century before Christ. The plural of "biblos" is "biblia," and by the second century A.D., this latter word began to describe the divine writings. The English word "Bible," referring to the divine writings, is derived from the Old French word "biblia," which derived its name from the Latin derivative of the same spelling with its ending being Anglicized. The significance of both terms is that "biblos" is singular, and thus denotes one book, whereas "biblia" is plural, denoting multiple books. We might say that within the one "biblos" (book) there are 66 "biblia" (books).

**Biblical.** A term that simply refers to the things pertaining to Holy Writ.

**Exegesis.** This word itself is derived from the Greek words "ek," meaning "out," and "egeisthas," meaning to, "guide or lead." The etymology of the word suggests that to "exegete" is to "guide or lead one out of something."

**Biblical Exegesis.** Exegesis of the Bible is simply the process of taking out of the text what the text is intending to say. It is "*the act of critically interpreting a text in an attempt to 'draw the meaning' out of the text.*"<sup>1</sup> Further, it is "*the*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/36/what-is-the-difference-between-exegesis-and-hermeneutics>

*process of understanding and interpreting a text. The analysis and explanation of a text, usually with reference to detailed, scientific (critical) interpretation.”<sup>2</sup>*

Some of the areas of Biblical exegesis with which we deal are as follows:

1. Grammar (e.g., Who is that “wills” in First Corinthians 12:11?)
2. Terminology (e.g., What does “Under the Sun” mean in the book of Ecclesiastes?)
3. Identification (e.g., From what Old Testament Scripture is Christ quoting in His temptation in the wilderness recorded in Matthew 4?)

Exegesis involves the most careful and respectful handling of God’s word as is possible. Handling God’s word is a very serious endeavor, and it takes possessing the right attitude and effort in order to accomplish the task. Thus, it is a responsibility that a diligent student of God’s word cannot take lightly. Understanding better what we mean when we speak of “Biblical exegesis,” we must next consider the questions:

1. Is there any difference between hermeneutics and exegesis?
2. What is the difference?

The answer is “Yes, there is a difference.” Exegesis, as has been pointed out, is the process of drawing the meaning of a text out, whereas hermeneutics is the “*science and art of Biblical interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system; and it is an art because the application of the rules is by skill; and not by mechanical imitation.*”<sup>3</sup> Hermeneutics states the principals and laws governing proper interpretation of the Scriptures, and as an art exemplifies their use, or shows their application. The difference comes down to the fact that hermeneutics is the field of study concerned with the “HOW” of interpreting God’s word, whereas exegesis is the actual interpretation of God’s word by drawing the meaning out from the text. Man has a responsibility to properly exegete the Scriptures, and in so doing, use proper hermeneutical methods in interpreting the Scriptures. A failure to do so results in the committing of *eisegesis*.

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2 Taken from a handout I received during the Hermeneutics class taught by Jared Knoll at the Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies in Pensacola, Florida in 2004.

3 Ramm, Bernard Protestant Biblical Interpretation pg. 1 Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI Fourth Printing: 2003

## The Perversion of Exegesis

Whereas exegesis seeks to draw out the true meaning of a text, *eisegesis* seeks to bring into the text a meaning that is not in the text. In other words, *eisegesis* may be defined as “*reading into the text meaning that one wants to get out of it.*”<sup>4</sup> *Eisegesis* is the root cause as to why false doctrine abounds. *Eisegesis* results when men refuse to simply accept what God’s word actually teaches and when men fail to “*handle aright the word of truth*” (2 Tim. 2:15 - ASV), and as a result, when men fail in this regard, they are wresting the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16).

The word “wrest” in the text is from the Greek word “*strebloo*,” and is defined as “*to twist, turn awry, to torture, metaphorically, to pervert, of one who wrests or tortures language in a false sense.*”<sup>5</sup> Certainly, this definition fits all who would dare *esiegete* the text rather than perform actual exegesis. *Eisegesis* occurs under the following circumstances:

1. **When men remove a passage from its proper context.** One example of men using *eisegesis* to “wrest” can often be found concerning John 15:1ff, when the claim is made that Christ is the vine, and denominations are the branches. A proper study of the context reveals that Christ is speaking to individuals—His disciples. Thus, those who are IN Christ, according to the Scriptural teaching of the N.T., are the branches. Christ is the vine; His followers (not denominations), are the branches.
2. **When men deconstruct texts to suit their ideas.** John 3:16 is an example of such deconstruction of passages, then used to teach “pet doctrines.” The denominational world perverts this precious passage by claiming that Jesus taught salvation by “faith alone.” The overall context of the N.T., and in particular, the gospel accounts, nowhere teach that one is saved by “faith alone” (cf. Christ’s words in Mt 7:21; Lk. 6:46; Jn. 8:24; Lk. 13:3, 5; Mt. 10:32, 33; Mk. 16:16; Jn. 3:3-5).
3. **When men attempt to change the Scriptures to suit the times.** It is often said that the word of God is out of date and that man needs something new, something modern, something relevant. God’s word, however, is relevant for all times because of its purpose (Rom. 1:16). To tamper with God’s word is to violate God’s will (Pr. 30:6; Rev. 22:18, 19).

4 Payes, Jovan The Folly of Eisegesis <http://livingstoncoc.wordpress.com/2012/03/03/the-folly-of-eisegesis/> Accessed October 8th, 2014

5 Thayer, Joseph H. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament electronic edition, e-Sword

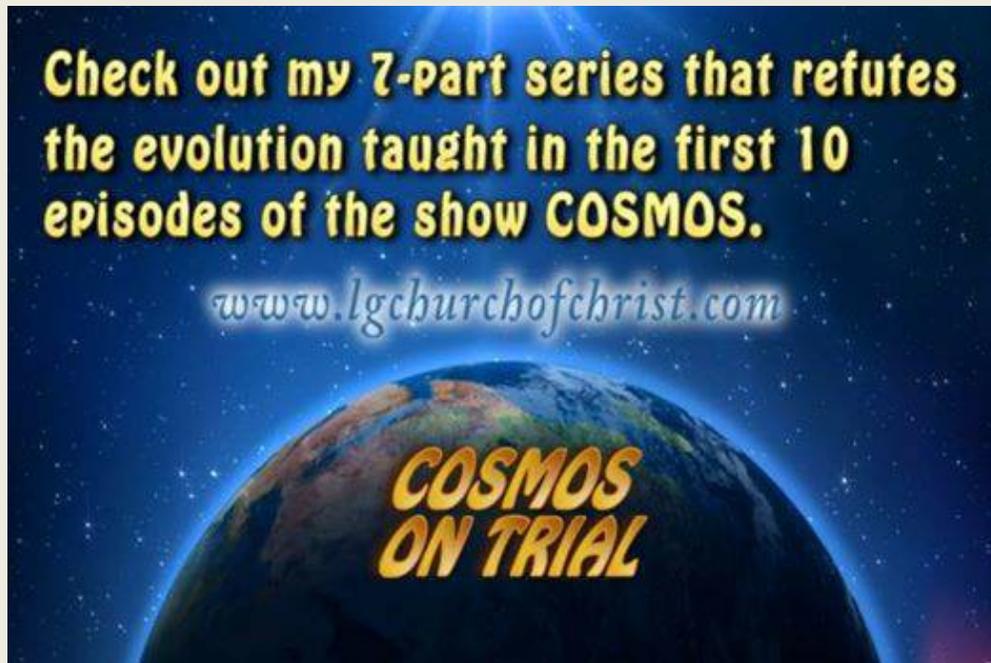
The fruit of *eisegesis* is false doctrine, and the result of believing, obeying and teaching false doctrine is destruction (1 Pet. 3:16). Having defined what we mean by exegesis and how it differs from hermeneutics, and the seriousness of committing *eisegesis*, next month we will turn our attention to how we may properly engage in Biblical exegesis.

## LG Ministry

LG Ministry is a new video production work that is overseen by the elders of the Lone Grove Church of Christ. Cougan Collins is the speaker/producer of this work. We already have over 100 full sermons and 60 devotionals to offer at this time. They can be seen online at <http://www.lgchurchofchrist.com/videos.html> or you can catch them on GBN on Fridays at 5:30 pm. central and M - F 12:30 pm.

Here you will find video lessons from the Bible by Cougan Collins.

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# The Dangers of Realized Eschatology: A Recent Perversion (Part 5)

**Eric Farrior**

Freeport, Florida

## Introduction and an Opening Word<sup>1</sup>

A fairly recent doctrine advocated by false teachers such as Max King and Don Preston is the doctrine of Realized Eschatology. Eschatology is the study of final things, thus “realized eschatology” means the belief that all final things have been realized, or come to pass. It saddens me to think that once faithful brethren have fallen into this error.

This lesson is designed to inform and combat such error. This lesson is not designed for good brethren who affirm the early date for the writing of the book of Revelation. Brethren such as Foy Wallace, Bill Cline and Franklin Camp held the early date view of Revelation, yet they never advocated what full Preterists teach. Nor is this lesson designed for good brethren who view that some or most of the N.T. Scriptures have been fulfilled. Nay, this is for the extreme belief that ALL has been fulfilled.

## Implications of This Doctrine

They affirm that ALL prophecies and passages dealing with future events have been fulfilled; I wonder how they deal with Joel 2:32 (cf. Acts 2:21) – was that also fulfilled in A.D. 70, and not applicable today? If so, who is saved, and how? Thus, at least some of them claim that they are enjoying the reward of this verse: *“Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you”* (Mt. 5:12).<sup>2</sup> If they are enjoying their reward in heaven, the “world to come,” then this reward is eternal. Notice the following:

Notice what was asked of Jesus: *“And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* (Lk. 18:18).

<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: Due to space limitations, the editors have broken the original manuscript into multiple parts, to be continued monthly until completed. It should be noted, in order to maintain consistency, the editors will reprint the introductory material (Introduction and an Opening Word) prior to each new monthly segment.

<sup>2</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Notice where the treasure would be: *“Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me”* (Lk. 18:22). The treasure in heaven was eternal life! *“Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting”* (Lk. 18:30). Therefore, those that teach that they presently enjoy the “heavenly reward” of Matthew 5:12 imply that they have already attained eternal life, in heaven, which cannot be lost! Folks, this is the denominational false doctrine of *once saved, always saved*, which is contrary to Biblical teaching (Gal. 5:4; 1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 2-3)!

If all things have been fulfilled, then there is no teaching on hell past 70 A.D. *“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Mt. 25:41). *“And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched”* (Mk. 9:47-48). If they affirm an eternal hell, what Scripture teaches it AFTER A.D. 70? Some brethren do not presently affirm this, but it is an implication of the teaching! If EVERY passage of Scripture has been fulfilled, then NONE are yet future, including those that teach eternal hell! If not, why not? *“And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him”* (Lk. 12:4-5 [cf. 2 Thes. 1:7-9]). Was this fulfilled in A.D. 70?

They imply that there is no authority today, since they believe that First Corinthians 15:23-24 has already been fulfilled. *“But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power”* (1 Cor. 15:23-24). Don't miss a fact regarding the resurrection, which is that Christ was the “firstfruits,” and afterwards those at His coming. In a chapter with clear emphasis on the PHYSICAL body being raised, why weren't the graves emptied in A.D. 70? Do they realize that they affirm that Jesus has no authority RIGHT NOW? They imply that there is either no physical death, or no spiritual death, *“For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death”* (1 Cor. 15:25-26). Now, brethren, which of these two deaths no longer exist? Don't let anyone affirming

this view slide on that point! If ALL has been fulfilled, then death is destroyed – but, which death has been destroyed? If physical death was done away in A.D. 70, then no one told our loved ones who passed away! If spiritual death was done away in A.D. 70, then there is no sin, and Universalism is true! Can we not see the dangers of such a belief?

I know that several of the men who affirm this that are married, though I'm not sure why! The teaching that they advocate implies that there is no marriage after A.D. 70. *“And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection”* (Lk. 20:34-36).

As a logical consequence to their error, they claim that the destruction of the material world is not taught in Scripture; thus, they affirm an eternal earth (as do the *Jehovah's Witnesses*)! Regarding the suffering and temporary nature of it, and all physical things, Paul said this: *“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal”* (2 Cor. 4:18). Is the earth seen? If so, then it is temporal! *“And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail”* (Heb. 1:10-12). He is the Creator of the heavens and earth, and will remain, but His creation will “perish,” the contrast between eternal and temporal!

## **Conclusion**

Any doctrine that implies a false doctrine is, itself, a false doctrine! The fallacy of Realized Eschatology explicitly and implicitly teaches false doctrines, therefore it should be rejected and opposed by faithful brethren! *“Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them”* (Eph. 5:10-11).

# When You are Discouraged (Part 2)

**Logan Summers**

Midland, Texas

Given enough time, absolutely every person will experience discouragement in his life. Heartbreak and suffering can so devastate us that we do not know where to go or what to do. In part one of this series, we looked at two actions to help us handle discouragement: 1) prayer, and 2) focusing on truth. These are not “quick fix” solutions, but they are actions that will help us “bear up” under the loads we have to carry. In this part of the lesson, we will consider three more actions for handling discouragement.

## Worship

Prayer, a part of worship, has already been mentioned, but we cannot underestimate the help that every part of true worship to God can bring us. For example:

1. When we give, we are giving to the glory of God, and our funds may be used to help others who are suffering, hurt, or in need of the gospel (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7-8)! Even in our own hard times, we are the most blessed people on earth because we have salvation. Praise God for it!
2. When we partake in the Lord’s Supper, we remember the suffering that Christ endured for us (Mt. 26:26-28). With this, each person is reminded that suffering comes not only to himself, but also that even God has suffered, and so much more, carrying the weight of sin of the entire world on his shoulders (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 2:2). Do not stop there in our thinking and worshiping of God in the Lord’s Supper though! Unfortunately some people, out of a love of truth, no doubt (perhaps through a misunderstanding), have limited this feast to focusing solely on the suffering and death of Christ. Consider carefully, however, the words of Paul in First Corinthians 11:26: “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.*”<sup>1</sup> We are proclaiming the Lord’s death till He comes. Even if one wants to say the focus is mainly on the death of Jesus, the fact that Paul even mentions that Christ is coming back shows that the Lord’s Supper is not solely about His

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

death. Even Christ pointed this out in Matthew 26:29, when He spoke about drinking the fruit of the vine anew with them in His Father's kingdom! Yes, we remember the death of Christ in the Lord's Supper, and the terrible suffering He endured for our sake (Heb. 12:2), but we cannot forget that we serve a living God, and proclaim His death on that cross until He comes again to bring us home (1 Thes. 4:17)!

3. When we preach, or hear and digest a sermon, focusing on God's Word when it is being taught, we can be encouraged. So many Scriptures, and countless sermons, have been preached to encourage those who are discouraged. Thank God for Psalm 23, Psalm 84:11, and passages like these!
4. Finally, our singing can bring encouragement as we worship God with our voices. Songs such as "It is well with my soul," and "This world is not my home," are easy to sing when life is good and all is well, but when life hits, and discouragement sinks in, these songs take on a whole new level of importance to the sufferer. How great it is to be blessed to praise God in truth and spirit (Jn. 4:24), to be edified in song as we bow before our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, and look to Him for our source of comfort.

## **Surround Yourself with Strong Christians**

One old hymn says, *"We're part of a family that has been born again; sometimes we laugh together, and sometimes we cry. Sometimes we share together, each others heartaches and sighs."* Frankly, there are some weak brethren who do not need to know the suffering that we go through, because they, too, will become discouraged (or worse), or will seek to exploit our pain for their own selfish gain. At times, however, we all need a Barnabas and a Paul in our life to encourage us and build us up again. This writer cannot begin to tell you how some faithful, strong, children of God have blessed, encouraged, and helped him during times of discouragement (I pray the same for all who read this.) Indeed, numerous Scriptures attest to this truth, such as Exodus 17:12; Second Corinthians 1:3-5; Galatians 6:2, and others. When we surround ourselves with strong Christians, we can be strengthened and encouraged. They can share our heartache so that we are reminded that we are not alone. Thank God for godly men and women in our lives who are sons and daughters of encouragement!

## **Keep Your Eyes set on the Goal**

Every tactic, plan, scheme, plot, and attack that Satan can use to distract and discourage you, he will throw at you. The devil will not go easy on you. He won't forget about you. His entire goal is to take you away from God, because he hates you. *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet. 5:8). One of the most powerful schemes Satan has in his arsenal is discouragement. What we must remember, however, is that we must never lose sight of the goal. Christians are strangers in this world, pilgrims on a journey headed toward Heaven. The worst thing that one can experience on earth cannot even be considered in comparison to the glories of heaven (Rom. 8:18). It has been recognized that for the child of God who is suffering, there are only three possible outcomes:

1. Turning away from God;
2. Overcoming the suffering and growing closer to God;
3. Dying and being with God (cf. Phil. 1:21).

Keeping this in mind will give us the proper outlook, and help us manage our discouragement. The paradise that Christ is preparing for us will be worth so much more than anything we have to endure on earth!

## **Conclusion**

What a wonderful God we have! Even in the midst of suffering He has given us so many avenues with which to endure! Prayer, truth, worship, our Christian family, and the blessings of heaven help so much those who are struggling with discouragement. It is my prayer that all who read this will be built up and helped when experiencing discouragement.

# Why is an Example Binding?

**Scott D. Crawford**

Clay, Alabama

Do you remember the first time your child walked around the house in your shoes? Clomp! Clomp! Clomp! Or, have you ever seen the picture of a little boy and girl dressed up like mom and dad? The little boy has on a suit too large and is wearing a hat too big; the little girl with pearls hanging around her neck and holding an oversize purse and gloves. These mental images make us smile because when our children dress and act like us we understand that it is a desire to be like us; they want to be like us because they love us. Those children, all new and fresh in the world, look to adults as their pattern; in essence, we become the image of what they desire to be and to do in this life. This is important because of two questions that have arisen during the past couple of weeks, which had to do with Biblical example concerning the Lord's Supper:

1. Why can't we take the Lord's Supper any day of the week?
2. Why can't we take the Lord's Supper as part of a larger meal?

In truth, there are no verses in the Scriptures that tell us: "Thou shalt only take the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week," or "Thou shalt not take the Lord's Supper as part of a larger meal." Yet, in most congregations of the Lord's church, it has been the practice to observe the feast on the first day of the week, and not as part of a banquet; both reasons why point back to example, which shows, also, why examples are bindings.

First, it should be noticed that an example must be given from a source that has the authority to bind an obligation upon us<sup>1</sup>. This may seem like a simple truth, but in reality this truth is often overlooked by many when seeking Biblical authority for or against a teaching or practice. In a practical sense, this means we don't look to examples of teaching or practice that occur in the Old Testament as normative for Christians today. The practice of Job or Abraham offering physical sacrifices does not apply to us; fasting under the Law of Moses no longer has authority; both the Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations no longer have authority for Christians (cf. Eph. 2:14, 15; Col. 2:14; Heb. 9:15-17). This is why we look to the Bible, and specifically the New Testament, as our

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<sup>1</sup> Trevor Bowen, "Examples and the Pattern," In Search of Truth (2014).  
<<http://www.insearchoftruth.org/articles/examples.html>> (October 7, 2014).

pattern. That is why Stone and Campbell went “*into the Bible to find out what the New Testament taught and dictated as practices*”<sup>2</sup> because they were looking for restoration and not reformation. We look to the actions of Christ and the apostles as the authoritative pattern for our teaching and practice, because “*we MUST be absolutely diligent in walking in the footsteps of the Master (1 Pet. 2:21).*”<sup>3</sup>

Second, when we look to the Scriptures for authoritative examples, we must also carefully examine what we think is normative from what is considered as circumstantial. Take for example the setting for the institution of the Lord’s Supper, which occurred during the Passover meal (Matt. 26:17ff). Then, according to the Scriptures, the next time observe Christians taking the Lord’s Supper along with a meal is in the first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:17-22), but at this point Paul is condemning them for their abuse of that special time together. Looking at Paul’s comments, the feast in which those Corinthians were participating had become a time of favoritism and separation in which one remained hungry while another became drunk. Paul could have given them detailed instructions about how to observe the meal, but instead directed their thoughts back to the central theme of the original setting: the bread and the cup – the proclamation of the Lord’s death (1 Cor. 11:23-26). The fact that a meal was being eaten before, during, or after the Lord’s Supper is only a circumstance of that time and culture and should not be taken as a normative example. In other words, the meal that they were eating, although a wonderful time for fellowship among the church, is not as important as the commemoration of the Lord’s death and sacrifice. “*Do this in memory of Me.*”

Finally, any doctrine or practice performed by the first century church, as recorded in the Holy Scriptures, which the inspired apostles allowed to continue can, in the absence of a direct command, be considered an approved example for Christians of all time and place. As Milligan notes in *The Scheme of Redemption*, the apostles were appointed – among other things – to reveal the essential truths and principles that accompany redemption, and to enact the necessary laws and ordinances of the kingdom<sup>4</sup>. This was necessary because in the absence of a single written document by which all may appeal as a standard, the inspired apostles and writers of the Bible acted as a direct means of addressing areas of

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2 Adron Doran, *Restoring New Testament Christianity*, (Nashville: 21st Century Christian, 1997), 31.

3 Goebel Music, *Behold the Pattern*, (Colleyville: Goebel Music Pub., 1991), 67.

4 Robert Milligan, *The Scheme of Redemption*, first published in 1868 (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Reprint Library, 2001), 295.

teaching and practice that God saw as either appropriate to encourage or extinguish. This is why we take the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week:

1. We know the early disciples came together at that time (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2);
2. We know that when they came together they took the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:18).

Since these actions were not condemned by the inspired apostles or those miraculously gifted, we look to them as normative for our practice. Of course, this brings up a point of caution. Although it was obligatory for the early disciples to conform to those that were inspired and confirmed by miracles, *“it is sinful for men today to claim to do such.”*<sup>5</sup>

When we discuss example as part of the command, example, and necessary inference model to find authority, we are typically looking at those actions performed by the early church to see how those actions apply for current use. We do not seek to apply examples to our teaching and practice that fall outside the instructions for Christians from the New Testament. We must be diligent to apply only the necessary components of an example, while leaving the circumstantial elements to the realm of opinion, not obligation. We should consider those actions performed by the early church under the direction of the inspired and miraculously gifted of the New Testament as applicable to our teaching and practice, if those actions were not in some way condemned or extinguished. *“More than simply a ‘hermeneutic,’ our formulation of ‘command, example, and necessary inference’ is a rejection of human creeds and a commitment to the authority of God and His divine revelation.”*<sup>6</sup>

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5 Thomas Warren, *When Is a Bible Example Binding?* (Ramer: National Christian Press, 1975), 147.

6 F. LaGard Smith, *The Cultural Church*, (Nashville: 20th Century Christian, 1992), 35.

# What is the Gift of the Holy Spirit (Part 3)

**Doug Post**

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In the previous segments of our study, we began with an analysis of the context of Acts 2. We continue our analysis from where we left off.

## **CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF ACTS 2 (Continued).**

*19 I will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. 20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. 21 And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.<sup>1</sup>*

Much speculation concerning verses 19-20 have occurred over the centuries: some see this section as language describing Judgment Day, but that does not seem reasonable for two reasons. First, Jesus said there are no signs and warnings of His return, which would immediately usher in the Judgment (Mt. 24:36-44). Second, according to the sequencing of events, even within the passage itself, there will be folk “[calling] on the name of the Lord” (v.21). The phrase “calls on the name of the Lord” neither implies people yelling and screaming for God to save them, nor does it imply praying for one’s salvation, as in the popular and false “Sinner’s Prayer,” which is taught by many denominations today. Rather, the “[calling] on the name of the Lord” is an expression of obedience, which, in the New Testament, is connected to baptism. We note that in the very same context, in which Joel is speaking of salvation, Peter offers the Jews the only way to be saved, “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). Of course, Jesus declared the very same thing, saying that all who believe and are baptized will be saved (Mk. 16:16). To obey the Lord by being baptized is how one calls on the name of the Lord. In fact, the Holy Spirit, Himself, connects the expression “calling on the name of the Lord” with baptism: “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). No one is going to be baptized, or “call on the name of the Lord,” on the Judgment Day. Therefore, verse 19-20 are not discussing the final Judgment day to come.

One plausible explanation of verses 19-20, and the “great and awesome day of the Lord,” is that it is figurative language referring to the day of Pentecost, on

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

which day Peter provides the offer of salvation to the Jews. While Pentecost was certainly a great and notable day, it still falls short because the means of salvation, as provided by Peter (Acts 2:38), which was offered as a result of the people crying out, *“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37). In other words, Peter had finished preaching until the people inquired about what they should do to be saved. Peter had not addressed salvation in his sermon. It was only when the question was asked did Peter reply. Moreover, the “eschatological” language of various signs and events of the passage do not seem to fit. So, what are verses 19-20 describing? We certainly know that the language is prophetic language of judgment, but what kind of judgment? It is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Jewish system. – not to the Judgment Day or to the Day of Pentecost. Just prior to His death, Jesus told the disciples of the destruction of Jerusalem (read Matthew 24, 25; Mark 13; and Luke 21). The disciples then made request, *“Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?”* (Mt. 24:1-3). Jesus proceeded by referring to the coming of the Roman army, as foretold by Daniel, and of the terrible days which should accompany the invasion (Mt. 24:15-29). Accompanying and following this should be the national ruin and the complete break-up and collapse of the Jewish system. This the Jews should have understood by His use of prophetic language in the statement which followed, *“But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven...coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”* (Mt. 24:29,30; cf. Mk. 13:26).

In describing the destruction of Egypt, Isaiah had said, “Jehovah rideth upon a swift cloud, and cometh unto Egypt” (Isa. 19:1). Here we see that Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Joel all used the expressions of “thick clouds,” the darkening of the stars, sun, moon, and the shaking of the heavens to describe judgments by war (Isa. 13:10; Jer. 4:20,23; Eze. 32:7, 8; Joel 2:10; 3:15). Christ's coming on the cloud, and the shaking of the heavenly bodies, was simply prophetic, end time, language of judgment of war by the hand of God, and of national collapse.

This is confirmed by the fact that all these things should come to pass in that generation (Mt. 24:34; Mk. 13:30; Lk. 21:32). According to Jesus, “These are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled” (Lk. 21:22). This would include Joel 2 (also Isaiah 61:1,2; 63:4, to which the reader is referred with the request that he turn to these and read them). In the midst of

such a prediction Jesus adds, “But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh” (Lk. 21:28). The beginning of the end of the Jewish order was to the Christians what the destruction of Babylon, Assyria, etc., had been to God's people of old. Therefore, the “*great and awesome day of the Lord*” (2:20) was the “*days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled,*” which Jesus prophesied of (Lk. 21:22). It was the day of complete collapse and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

*22 Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.*

At this point in his sermon, Peter begins speaking about the Christ. He informs the gathered crowd that Jesus was “attested” or “proven to be” (literally, “shown forth”; demonstrated to be, declared to be, presented as, made known as, confirmed to be, certified as) by the miracles, wonders and signs He performed. We would do well to note that if this were not the case, surely someone from the crowd would have stood up and voiced his objection. Perhaps someone, from the thousands gathered that day, would have come forth and denied that Jesus performed miracles, wonders, and signs. It certainly would have been the most opportune time to do so. Instead, not one person, not even a Pharisee, came forward to express his objection, or rejection, of the words of Peter. No one in this throng of people would even attempt to call the miracles of Jesus fake, or declare Jesus to be a fraud. Why? Because the Jews understood the following principle very well: “*You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him*” (Jn. 3:2).

This also demonstrates that when a miracle was performed in the Bible (a Bible miracle) not one soul ever doubted or challenged the veracity of said miracle. Miracles were seen and immediately believed, which is far different than the phony things touted and passed off today as miracles. A Bible miracle could never be denied. We find no Bible miracles today because Bible miracles have ceased (1 Cor.13:8-13; Eph. 4:8-15; Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4). We need to keep miracles, wonders, and signs where they belong – in the first century. They served their design and purpose, which was for confirming the Word of God preached (Mk. 16:20; Heb.2:3-4). When the revelation of the Will of God had

come to an end, then the supernatural confirmation, involving miracles, wonders, and signs also came to an end. It is axiomatic that when the faith (the gospel) had been fully revealed, then it would have been fully confirmed. How do I know? Because the revelation of God's Will was automatically accompanied with miracles for confirmation (Mk. 16:20). Anyone asserting that modern day miracles exist are either ignorant, or lying, or both, because the revelation of God's Will was completed and confirmed in the first century.

Peter also shows that the crucifixion of the Christ was part of the eternal plan of God (Eph. 3:8-10). The Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) planned the scheme of human redemption, in eternity, long before the foundation of the world and the universe. It was "predetermined" by God that the Son of God would be the One who would be sent to die on the cross for the sins of the world. God's foreknowledge, or His knowing beforehand, knew how, when, where, and why Christ would be Crucified, and by whom. However, in knowing this, He did not intervene or alter man's will. Both the Jews and the Romans were the ones who carried out the crucifixion of the Christ, by their own volition and desires. Here we see the providence of God at work, as opposed to the miraculous. God does not have to be confined in working His Will through miracles. He can certainly work His will through providence. Miracles, wonders, and signs were all immediately visible, identifiable, recognizable, and unquestionable. However, that is not the case with providence. The supernatural working of God through providence cannot be detected, witnessed, recognized, or identified. In fact, providence can be questioned, meaning, one may not know if what occurred was God working through providence, or simply circumstantial. Regarding God's providential working, Paul simply said "perhaps" (Philemon 15).

We'll pick up here next month, when we will continue to examine the Scriptures concerning the Gift of the Holy Spirit.



The image is a screenshot of a website banner. At the top, the text "Churches of Christ.com" is displayed in a white serif font on a dark blue background. Below this, a navigation bar contains the links "Home", "Work of the Spring Congregation", "Recommended Links", and "Contact Us". A secondary navigation bar lists "Sermons", "Articles", "Debates", "Spring CFTF Lectures", and "World Wide Gospel Preaching". The main content area features the title "Contending FOR THE Faith" in a red, stylized font. Below the title, it reads "2014 Spring Contending For The Faith Lectures" and "WHAT MUST A CHRISTIAN DO TO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO CHRIST?". The dates "February 19—February 23, 2014" and the name "David P. Brown, Lectureship Director" are also present. At the bottom of the banner, a blue button with white text says "Click Here Watch The Lectures".

# Phoebe: A “Deaconess”? (Part 2)

**Tim Bench**

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## Introduction and an Opening Word<sup>1</sup>

The character, identity, and role of “Phoebe” from the Book of Romans has for many years spawned a plethora of discussions on an array of topics; these typically center around the role(s) that Phoebe, and women in general, filled in the first century church and, subsequently, the roles women are to fill in today’s church, as well. Discussions regarding Phoebe are often specifically centered around the moniker “deaconess,” assigned to her in Romans 16:1 in several translations of the Bible (multiple other translations use differing wording than “deaconess”).

The purpose of this brief study is to analyze specifics on what the New Testament tells us that the role of women within churches is to be; thus, we will attempt to ascertain whether or not “deaconess” is an accurate descriptor for Phoebe. Broader questions for discussion might include the following:

1. Are women allowed, as per New Testament instruction, to hold leadership roles within the modern church (i.e. a “deacon-level role)?
2. Was Phoebe a female “deacon” in the first century church?
3. Has this term garnered support over the past few years as more and more denominations have allowed women to acquire leadership roles in churches?
4. Where does the term “deaconess” even come from, and is it Biblical?

Scholars, theologians, church historians, and the like are often divided on this issue. Some hold the position that “deaconesses” are authorized in the New Testament, while others argue that it is questionable, and still others suggest that there is no authority in the New Testament for deaconesses. Acceptance of the role of “deaconess” often serves as the basis for an ever-expanding list of “acceptable” roles for women in modern churches; if a woman can serve as a “deaconess,” after all, what would prevent her from serving as an elder, or even

<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: Due to space limitations, the editors have broken the original manuscript into multiple parts, to be continued monthly until completed. It should be noted, in order to maintain consistency, the editors will reprint the introductory material (Introduction and an Opening Word) prior to each new monthly segment.

preacher?

As with all things, the scriptures are sufficient to address these questions and to instruct us in righteousness, so that we might be “*furnished completely unto every good work*”<sup>1</sup> (2 Tim. 3:16-17). A calm and deliberate study of the Bible on this, or any other issue, will also allow us to avoid all-too-common modern vitriol when discussing gender-based topics, such as those which argue that “restrictions on women serving in the church were only cultural for the times,” or “restrictions on women in churches are just sexist and legalistic.”

### **The Issue of Servanthood.**

The primary passage which has spawned the debate on the role of Phoebe is Romans 16:1

*“I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea.”*

The Revised Standard Version reads:

*“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea.”*

Readers should instantly see the wording differences. In addition to the King James, which uses the term “servant,” other translations, such as the American Standard Version, English Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, New King James Version, and the New International Version likewise use “servant” (translations which utilize “deaconess” include the Revised Standard Version, among others). The Greek “diakonos” (διάκονος) is the word from which “servant” is derived:

Strong’s Greek Concordance (1249), “a waiter, servant; then of any one who performs any service, an administrator.”

According to various other Greek Lexicons, the word “diakonos” appears 29 times in the New Testament, and is translated “deacon” three times, “minister” seven times, “servant” ten times, and “servants” (plural) nine times. Romans 16:1, therefore, would be the lone example in the N.T. of “diakonos” being interpreted as “deaconess.” Another widely-accepted academic example of the

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

word “servant” (not “deaconess”) being used is found in *Vine’s Greek New Testament Dictionary*, which states that “diakonos” is translated “servant” or “servants” in Matthew 22:13; 23:11; Mark 9:35; John 2:5, 9; 12:26; and, Romans 16:1.

Paul uses this term for himself as a servant “of Christ” in Second Corinthians 11:23 and First Timothy 4:6, and “of the church” in Colossians 1:24-25. Paul, therefore, like Phoebe, was indeed a “servant” of the early church. Paul was never specified as a “deacon,” yet used “diakonos” to describe himself, which seems to prove, in and of itself, that the term was intended to mean “servant.”

Here is what we definitively know of Phoebe’s contribution: Paul assigned Phoebe a great and important task. It is almost certain that Phoebe delivered Paul’s letter in person to the church at Rome, a responsibility of considerable magnitude. Phoebe was obviously trusted, dependable, and valued in her efforts, a “servant” in her home church at Cenchrea, and probably also in the mother church at Corinth. Whether or not Phoebe held some “official” title, Paul commended her as a highly-proven servant of Christ and implored the church at Rome to receive her. Phoebe was entrusted with carrying this letter to the church at Rome, no small task, and was to be received in a worthy manner. Paul’s speaking of Phoebe as a “helper” (*prostatis*), may also indicate that Phoebe was a woman of considerable wealth, as the term was commonly used to signify a wealthy person who financially supported a cause. Phoebe, therefore, was no ordinary “helper,” but seemingly one of high esteem, reputation, and integrity – likely a businesswoman of considerable wealth.

“*Prostasis*,” it should be noted, does not necessitate oversight of others, a pillar of the “deaconess,” or “female deacon” argument. If so, then Phoebe would have exercised authority over the apostle Paul, yet she had only been his “helper.” Likewise, the fact that the saints were encouraged to “assist” Phoebe neither implies, nor insinuates, her authority over them. The Greek word “*paristerni*” meant to “come to the aid of, help, stand by.” When this term appeared in Second Timothy 4:17, Paul was certainly NOT stating that he exercised any form of authority over Jesus Christ; this would be the unavoidable linguistic result of those who claim that Phoebe held “authority” over those who assisted her.

Examples abound of “diakonos” usage in the New Testament, predominantly to indicate “servants” or “ministers.” The “servants” at the marriage feast in John 2:5, 9; Paul and Apollos, as “ministers” in First Corinthians 3:5; Tychicus, the

“faithful minister” of Ephesians 6:21; Epaphras, the “dear fellow servant” of Colossians 1:7; Timothy, the “minister of God” in First Thessalonians 3:2; the “minister” of Romans 13:4, the false “ministers” of Second Corinthians 11:15, and the “minister,” Jesus Christ, Himself, of Romans 15:8. These are all translations of diakonos. “Deaconess” appears one time, and one time only.

Join us again next month, when we will continue to examine the Scriptures in order to determine the truth about Pheobe, a faithful servant of the Lord.

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