Thoughts on the Book of Ecclesiastes –
Part Fifteen
John G. Reisinger

I am deeply indebted to the late Ray Stedman for many of the seed thoughts in this article.

In our last article, we noticed that sorrow sometimes blesses a believer’s walk with God. Of course, the world would totally disagree. Donald Trump and his devotees would laugh in scorn at most of the things we wrote in our last two articles. Their definition of what constitutes success and what is good would be far different from that proposed by the writer of Ecclesiastes. The philosophy of “he who dies with the most toys wins” cannot conceive of sorrow being better than laughter.

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

PRINCIPLES OF UNITY AMONG THE BRETHREN:
Handling Christian Liberty with Maturity—
An Examination of Romans 14–Part 5
David Seefried

Fifth Principle: The position of strength put forth by Paul in verse 14 is the position for which we aim in all Christian growth.

I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Romans 14:14

What is the Goal?

Christian maturity is the aim of all discipleship. In the Great Commission, we find that we are to win the lost, take them through baptism, and then continue teaching them all that Christ has commanded. Intrinsically in these words is the concept of Christian growth. In Ephesians 4:11, we find that pastors-teachers have been given to the church for the training of saints so that they can do the work of the ministry. Paul states in Ephesians 4:13 that this training must continue “until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” He goes on to say, “we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14). We are no longer to be children, but are to become mature adults.

It is important that Christians understand the principle of growth and maturity in order to show that there is...
has an influence (the aroma of the perfume) beyond its owner. The day of a man’s death also has a lasting influence, for afterward his life can be held forth as an example if his name has merited it.

The second proverb, in verse 2, is not much different from what our Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are they that mourn” (Matthew 5:4). There is a mellowing that takes place in affliction and sorrow. To be in the presence of sickness and death has a tendency to bring us into the really crucial issues of life. Likewise the third proverb, in verses 3, 4, teaches that there is a lesson to be gained and a work to be accomplished by sorrow.

Contrariwise, the prattle and laughter of fools (verses 5, 6) is useless, hollow, and bothersome. We, with David, should much more prefer the kind smiting and rebuke of the righteous (Psalm 141:5).

Although we finished chapter 7 in our last article, we did not come to the end of the Seeker’s ongoing argument. Ecclesiastes 8:1 is an example of a poor chapter division. The first verse of chapter 8 belongs with chapter 7. The Seeker brings his argument in chapter 7 to a fitting climax with his description of the value of true, godly wisdom. Previously, he has shown that wisdom is good and enables a person to cope with uncertainty and injustice. He now describes true, godly wisdom and explains what it means to “fear the Lord” in a biblical sense.

First, the wisdom of God, put into practice, will make an individual a very unique person—“Who is like the wise man”? Who indeed? The media, sometimes subtly and other times flagrantly, constantly urges us to mimic the latest fad or fad maker. On the one hand, they promote individuality; we are urged to make a statement and to be different. In the next breath, they espouse conformity: we are pressed to imitate some famous person in our hairstyle, clothing, attitude, conversation, and so forth. Few people realize that if they succeed, they have managed only to become a cheap imitation of another person.

One of the most wonderful things about sovereign grace is that it makes you a new creation. You are never more aware of your unique true self as when you see your self in Christ. His grace will make you different from anyone else as it changes you to become more and more like him. The children of God are not cheap copies of the famous people in this world. Every believer is a spiritual original created by the Holy Spirit. Who indeed is like a child of God? Who is the truly eternally wise person?

Second, the Seeker reminds us that the “godly wisdom which is from above” (James 3:17) opens up the secrets of eternity to a child of God. “Who knows the explanation [true interpretation] of things?” The expected answer to that question is, “The child of God who has been given the Spirit of truth and wisdom knows all he or she needs to know, have, and enjoy.

We will unpack the four characteristics the Seeker uses to describe the person who learns, in a daily practical sense, that true wisdom is a gift of God. This kind of wisdom enables a child of God to walk with God in conscious fellowship and know and experience what it means to “fear the Lord” in a biblical sense.

Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man’s face and changes its hard appearance. (NIV)

This verse is full of intriguing ideas that merit close examination.

The love of God – what a glorious theme upon which to fix our minds! Perhaps an even clearer way to express this glorious theme would be to refer to the God who is love. Indeed, the subject of the infinite love of God is never to be exhausted. Paul expresses this clearly in his prayer for the saints in Ephesus.

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:14-19 NKJV)

My hope and prayer is that my attempt to present what the Scripture reveals about the love of God would help each reader acquire a better understanding of this magnificent doctrine and to be amazed at the love of Christ that passes knowledge. It is not an overstatement to say that many people in our day misunderstand this great truth about our God. Although I have read and studied this doctrine, I do not come to you as one who has all the answers. However, I will faithfully exposit what I have found in the Scripture and present it to you for your perusal, awe, and wonder.

Why is this so difficult a doctrine? There are many reasons; I will suggest just a few.

(1) Most people who believe in God today believe that God is a loving being. Unfortunately, their conception of his love not only does not match what Scripture reveals; sometimes it is contrary to Scripture. Often love is understood as some kind of sentimental, gushy feeling.

(2) Broad disbelief or disregard of the complimentary truths about God adds difficulty to a right understanding of the love of God. We may not separate the biblical, and thus true, view of God’s love from his sovereignty, holiness, justice, wrath, and other attributes. For some people in our culture, the love of God blankets and covers anything else about God that makes them uncomfortable. Our culture promotes love; it is the theme of a multitude of songs. Do you remember the popular song from the sixties, “What the world needs now is love, sweet love”? When was the last time you heard a hit song that says, “What the world needs now is holiness, sweet holiness” or “judgment, sweet justice”?

If you tell someone today that God loves them, they are unlikely to be surprised. “Of course God loves me. He loves everybody. And why shouldn’t he love me? I’m a pretty nice person. I’m sincere.” This kind of thinking prevails in our culture. People seem to have little difficulty with the idea of the love of God, but they do not seem as willing to embrace concepts such as the justice of God, the wrath of God, or other equally emphasized attributes revealed in the Bible.

(3) Our culture promotes tolerance and connects it directly with the idea of being loving. The only thing that some people seem unable to tolerate is intolerance. This widespread attitude makes it difficult for them to accept a clear definition of God’s love that contradicts their presupposition.

(4) Ultimately, the biggest problem that underlies all the others is a failure to take into account all the Bible states on this topic, and the appropriate contexts of each passage. My question is this: Can a person have a biblical view of the love of God if he or she does not consider the entire scriptural account of the character and nature of God?

We cannot deny the reality of suffering that includes such things as world wars, mass starvation, disasters, corruption, injustice, and pain. Against such a backdrop, how do we form a perspective of a God who is both sovereign and loving? Many people ask, “How can God be all powerful AND loving, when we have what we do in the world? If God is sovereign, then how can he be loving? Some conclude that if he is loving, then he must not be sovereign. They reason that God willingly gave up his sovereignty to give human beings a free will or sovereignty over their own lives. This enables them to solve the seeming dilemma and at the same time keep their definition of love intact. (This is the Arminian attempt to solve what they view as a problem.)

Others stumble over the issue and question, “If God is love, why would he send people to hell forever?” The idea of eternal punishment contradicts most people’s definition of love. A similar question is the one that asks, “What kind of love is it that can con-
eternal life.” Someone has said, “Children with faith in Christ on their knees can see further than can philosophers on their tiptoes.”

This is what Paul means in 1 Corinthians 2:14-16.

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment: “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ. (NIV)

A child of God is capable of passing moral judgment on all things. He or she may never earn a PhD, may not be able to spell the phrase “Theory of Relativity,” and may be unaware of the great scientist who first pronounced it. However, any child of God could give Einstein the answers to the ultimate issues of life. We know the answers to, “Who am I, where did I come from, and where I am going?” We know these answers, not because we are smarter than Einstein or anyone else, but only because our teacher is so wise. Actually, our teacher knows everything.

Third, the truly wise person, or child of God, will enjoy his or her relationship with God to the degree that it will literally give a visible joy—Wisdom brightens a man’s face.” The KJV says, “a man’s wisdom maketh his face to shine.” Ray Stedman has made some excellent comments on this phrase.

Grace is what makes the face shine, not grease. Grease is what they put in cosmetics to make the face shine or to take away the shine as the case made be, but it is grace that does it from within; grace makes the face shine because it is joy visibly expressed on the human face.”

That which is inside a man’s heart will ultimately manifest itself in the countenance.

Fourth, experiential knowledge of salvation changes the countenance on a believer’s face because radical conversion changes the disposition of a person. The RSV translates verse 1, “. . . the hardness of his countenance is changed.” The Puritans often said, “Even your dog will realize that something has happened to you when you get converted.”

I never cease to be amazed at watching a hard and cruel individual come under the influence of the Holy Spirit. When God’s spirit applies the gospel of sovereign grace to a sinner’s heart, even the strongest of men will weep like a child as he asks his wife and children to forgive him for past cruelty.

Very few people have ever exceeded John Newton in his life of sin and shame. Newton had a godly mother who taught him Scripture in his childhood. He fell into the worst of company and wound up working on a ship as a slave trader. He barely escaped death on several occasions. At one point, he was the slave of a ship captain’s African slave wife. She kept Newton in chains tied to an old ship anchor. The woman placed his food in the sand and made him crawl and beg like a dog for scraps. She set water just out of his reach; after he would struggle in vain to reach it, she would kick it over. He finally escaped and found his way to the coast where a slave trading ship picked him up. During a vicious storm in which everyone, including Newton, had relinquished hope of life, Newton was converted. He later became one of England’s greatest preachers. He was also a prolific songwriter, known best for his hymn “Amazing Grace.” His hymns often included aspects of his personal testimony, as we see in this excerpt from Hymn 57 of the Olney Hymns, subtitled “Looking at the cross.”

In evil long I took delight, unawed by shame or fear; Till a new object struck my sight, and stopped my wild career.
I saw one hanging on a tree, in agonies and blood;
Who fixed his languid eyes on me, as near his cross I stood.
Sure, never till my latest breath, can I forget that look;
It seemed to charge me with his death, though not a word he spoke.…
A second look he gave, which said, “I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid, I die that thou may’st live.”

Few saints have affected the lives of as many people as John Newton has. However, the whole point of this text of Scripture is to show that regardless of who we are in the eyes of the world or the circumstances in which God’s sovereign providence has placed us, we are still the unique objects of God’s personal love and care. It is wonderful to quote Romans 8:28 and know it is not merely a platitudinous thing to hang on the wall, but a factual, personal promise from our heavenly Father to us as individuals.

Ecclesiastes 8:2 begins a new section. As I studied these verses, I was amazed at how relevant they were to our situation today. The Seeker here deals with government authority and people’s response to it, a controversial issue for us today. I remember when all young men had to register with the government and be prepared to be drafted into the armed services whether they liked it or not. There is talk of reinstating the draft. If it happens, I am sure someone will challenge it in court. We will probably hear again the same chants we heard last time: “Hell no! We won’t go,” from the anti-war

2 Taken from a taped sermon by Ray Stedman, preached at Peninsula Bible Church, Palo Alto, CA, 1982.
CAN AMERICA SUCCEED IN PUTTING GOD ‘INTO THE CLOSET?’
Gen. Clyde F Autio

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts. (Matt 8:34)

And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. (Luke 16:14-15)

Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:5)

What consequences result from consciously trying to shut God out of a culture?

Why would a culture want to remove God from its presence?

The extent of God’s role in American twenty-first century culture is a topic at the core of nearly all political campaigns, court decisions, holiday observances, educational programs, national symbols, church practices, and most other daily activities, both individual and corporate. The noise on both sides of the issue radiates from radio talk shows; television debates; advocacy groups seeking financial, moral, and judicial support; pulpit ministries bent on either making God’s presence more visible or seeking to attract followers who believe they were closed out by traditional churches; political battles over such topics as abortion, evolution, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, and gambling; biased news media; and last, but not finally, hundreds of new books foretelling the rise or fall of the American Empire.

While the battles continue to rage, some people are diligently seeking political support to design the federal courts so that they will throw off the traces and constraints of traditional values. The electorate has a record of not supporting elections, or elected officials, for the purpose of changing those same traditional values. This group maintains that backwoods, fundamentalist, anti-neo-progressive God-followers have hindered attempts to bring about a more enlightened culture. On the other side of the issue, a host of new political action groups remind their followers of the dire consequences of being neutral or passive and urge them to become involved in defending their traditional values. They want to prevent America from sinking into the abyss of moral depravity that characterized the remnants of the Roman Empire. At the dawning of the twenty-first century, America has developed two almost distinct sub-cultures; each waving their score cards in the faces of their political action groups and supporters.

These two distinct sub-cultures are readily evident in every aspect of the overall culture. This evidence can be identified in the political process, the religious spectrum, the nation’s geographical structure, its educational proponents, the media programming, highlighted by news broadcasting, radio programs and entertainment choices. It has become commonplace to use a variety of synonyms to define the two sub-cultures. On one side, terms such as liberal, left-wing, blue, and Democrat function synonymously; on the other side, such opposite terms as conservative, right-wing, red, fundamentalist, and Republican serve as inflammatory representations for the opposition. Two terms used to emphasize the worst of the opposition are ultra left-wing-liberal and ultra right-wing-fundamentalist.

The geographic division has come to the point where a new term, left coast, has replaced the old term of west coast.

While there is considerable overlap in the use of the aforementioned terms within each camp, they are not completely synonymous since not all conservatives are fundamentalists nor are all Democrats pro-choice. There is also no true uniformity in the total spectrum of beliefs on either side. This causes considerable turmoil within the various sub-cultures. Many right-wing conservatives became angry when their majority party, the Republican, allowed an individual who does not carry all of their basic beliefs to preside over a major legislative...
crowd, and the “It’s not wacky to wear khaki,” from the pro-war crowd. If we understand the scope of Scripture, we should not be surprised that the Bible would be so contemporary.

Government can be, and often is, corrupt and cruel. However, according to Paul in Romans 13, government is ordained of God. We must learn how to respond properly to the government. We who live in America and are used to personal rights and liberties find it difficult to understand many parts of the world where people do not enjoy similar privileges. In the early sixties, I visited Saudi Arabia. Women could not appear in public without a head covering and a long dress. A few feminists went downtown wearing shorts and no head covering. In less than fifteen minutes, they were in jail. Their husbands had to bring them full-length bathrobes before they could get out. If they repeated the offense, they were on the next airplane out of the country.

The Seeker sets the advice given in Ecclesiastes 8:2 in the context of authority:

Obey the king’s command, I say, because you took an oath before God.

One mark of godly wisdom is loyalty to God-ordained responsibilities and relationships. The Seeker suggests three reasons why people should obey their government or authority structure. First, they are citizens of that government. That is what is meant by, “because you took an oath.” Every citizen of the United States has taken an oath in one form or another. If you came here as an immigrant and became an American, you took an oath of loyalty to this country. If you were born in America, you have taken an oath every time you have saluted the flag. You said, “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands.” The Seeker’s text urges obedience to the king’s word, or government’s decree, as if it were an oath to God.

Obeying the government’s word may be inconvenient, difficult, and sometimes downright unfair. Still, we must obey it unless we can re-dress it at a hearing or in court. If a zoning law makes it impossible to support things in your home, you may not go ahead and change it. The government may call you for jury duty on the date you planned to go on vacation. Hopefully, they will excuse you, but if you refuse, you will have to reschedule your vacation. Paying taxes when the government uses that money to support things in which you do not believe is indeed a burden. There are times when we would all agree with Will Rogers, when he said, “We ought to be grateful that we don’t get as much government as we’ve paid for!” One pundit said, “Congress is at its best during its recess.”

In verses 3 through 5, the Seeker adds a second reason why we should obey the government.

Do not be in a hurry to leave the king’s presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. Since a king’s word is supreme, who can say to him, “What are you doing?” Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. (NIV)

We are to obey because if we do not, the government has both the authority and power to make us obey. Paul writes, in Romans 13:4, that government “does not bear the sword in vain.” We do not have a king over us in America but we do have a head of state as well as other authority structures that we must obey.

When you read the opening statement of the Constitution and the final paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, you see that we take an oath to honor and obey the government, and that government has the authority to compel us to do so if we refuse.

I remember an instance when I was in boot camp in the Navy. When ordered by a Petty Officer to do something he did not like, a young rebel defiantly said, “You can’t make me do that.” The Petty Officer looked at him for moment, smiled, and said, “Son, you are right. I cannot make you do that, but believe me, I can sure make you wish that you had done it.” So it is with government.

Having said all of the above, we must add a word of caution. Charles Bridges has given us the “balance of truth” in the area of obedience to government.

Yet no earthly sovereign can claim the right of absolute obedience. “The law of the land ought not to be made our standard of moral right and wrong.” (Dan. 3:16-18; 6:10. Acts 4:19; 5:29). The Babylonish confessors and the Apostles of Christ showed themselves to be servants of God by their very act of disobedience to man. The service of man must ever be subordinated to

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trol the world and allow it to suffer the way it suffers?” They think that if God so loved the world, he would not allow pain, sorrow, and death.

Some go so far in their attempt to reconcile a sovereign God with a God that they believe loves everyone equally that they conclude that in the end, God will save everyone. This allows them to retain their definition of love and yet keep God as God.

The problem with all these views is that one cannot find them taught in the Bible. They are human-conceived attempts to reconcile issues such as suffering with a human-developed definition and understanding of love.

Not everyone uses the love passages of Scripture to erase the passages of Scripture that uphold God’s sovereignty and power; some people do the reverse. They declare that God does not love those who are not his own. In fact, they hold to a doctrine that says he has nothing but hatred for them. This, too, is an attempt to reconcile sovereignty and love. This individual says, “There is no problem, because God does not have one iota of love for those he damns."

We want to avoid jumping to hasty conclusions in this study. We want to search the whole counsel of God and take into account all that Scriptures say on this subject. We must do so if we are going to know and worship God as he is in truth. We do not want to approach the inquiry with a preconceived solution to reconcile the attributes of God. As John Reisinger often says, “You don’t have to reconcile friends!” We must submit to what God clearly reveals in his word. We do not want to diminish or explain away what God has revealed about himself. We want to hold all the truth that God tells us, even if we are unable to reconcile fully all things in our finite minds.

The issue of the love of God is further confused because of the many aspects of love to which the Scriptures refer. Trouble begins when we do not recognize the difference. If we lock into one definition and use it everywhere, we will likely come up with one of the previously mentioned solutions. If we define love with a single degree and way of loving, we may be clear in our own minds, but we will have confusion when confronted with all that the Scriptures have to say on the topic.

Let me give you a few examples of the kind of trouble that results from having a locked-in, one-sided definition of a biblical term.

**Grace** – Some people define this as God’s unmerited favor to undeserving sinners. In some places in God’s word, that is a great definition. When it comes to passages that speak of grace demonstrated towards us by God, it is indeed true. However, when we read Luke 2:40, we find that this definition does not work.

> And the Child Jesus grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

Clearly, in this context, the definition of unmerited favor does not fit. The clever acronym “God’s riches at Christ’s expense” will not fit here either. This word, like virtually every other word, does not have a one-size-fits-all definition. One definition does not fit all uses.

**Promise** – In Hebrews, chapter six, we read that Abraham “having patiently waited, obtained the promise.” Yet in Hebrews, chapter eleven, the author refers to the faithful, including Abraham, as, “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised.” Again, in verse thirty-nine of that same chapter, we read, “all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised.” If we understand “the promise” in all these verses to refer to the same promise, we run into a contradiction. However, when we look at the big picture, we recognize that both statements are true. Abraham did receive the promise in the miraculous birth of Isaac, but the ultimate fulfillment of the promise was to be found in Jesus Christ.

**Law** – When we read every passage containing the term law, we begin to see that Scripture uses it in various ways. Sometimes it refers to the Mosaic law covenant, such as in Hebrews 8, where we are told that the law is obsolete. Sometimes it simply refers to commandments of God. In the nineteenth Psalm, we read that the law is perfect and that it converts the soul. Can the law convert someone? It depends on what the word means. In Psalm nineteen, as in some other places, it refers to the word of God. If we read one single, uniform definition of law into the varied passages, we will run into trouble.

**Hate** – The Scripture tells us to hate sin. We are also told to hate our parents and our spouses and our children (Luke 14:26). Does this word have the same definition in both cases? I should hope not.

So it is with the word love; if we conceive of it in our minds in a one-dimensional way, we are bound to err in some way. Perhaps we will have a problem with passages that tell us “God is angry with the wicked everyday” and “the wicked one his soul hates” and thus will not be able to grasp the God who judges...
sinners in wrath. We will have to explain away these verses in the light of our definition of love.

The other alternative is to end up with a God who has absolute hate towards the non-elect: a God who desires only the worst for them. In this case, we will have to explain away many love passages in the light of God’s ultimate judgment.

We do not want to have to explain anything away. We want to hold together all the truths that God tells us; whether or not his ways are higher than our thoughts can take us ... as I assure you they will be!

Canny slogans also complicate our attempt to define words. We saw this already with the word grace. Slogans such as, “God’s love is unconditional,” is one such example. In certain contexts, this is true or at least contains some truth. Such is the case in the love that God shows towards his elect. However, what the Bible teaches about the love of God is far more varied and complex than this slogan indicates. To state to a professing Christian drifting towards sin that God’s love is unconditional may convey the wrong impression. How does that slogan fit verses with qualifying conditions, such as John 14:21 and 23?2

Even when we read verses such as “the Lord loves a cheerful giver,” we see that there is in some sense a conditional aspect of the love that comes from God. Some uses of the term love seem to be conditioned on the object receiving the love. Other uses of the term state that the love is not conditioned on the object receiving the love.

Looking at the Greek word used in a particular verse does not always clarify the definition, either. Consider the word agape. Is agape always some higher, nobler form of love that is less emotional than philia? In 2 Samuel 13, we read that Amnon loves his half sister Tamar; but his love is selfish, sexual, and emotional, and lasts only until he rapes her. The Septuagint uses both Greek words agape and phileo to refer to Amnon’s love. In the Gospel of John, we read that the Father loves the Son. Sometimes the author uses agape in a way that seems to be broad and general and includes the aspect of phileo (even as adultery is included in the more broad term porneia or sexual immorality). When Paul writes that Demas has deserted him, having loved this present evil world, he uses agape, which makes no sense if the word always refers to willful self-denial for the sake of another.

Though words have distinctions and carry meaning in themselves, we cannot latch onto a single rigid definition. Context is crucial. Words are somewhat plastic; they have various shades of meaning. They are more general or specific depending upon context. We note that self-denial cannot equal love in every case, for 1 Corinthians 13 states that even ultimate acts of self denial can be done without love. Therefore, we cannot simply reduce Christian love to an act of the will. So when we hear the slogan, “Love is not a feeling, it is an act of the will,” we do not really have a complete definition of love that fits everywhere in the Bible.

Mere word studies cannot allow us to fathom fully the nature of the love of God. Too often, people look up the meaning of a word in a dictionary or lexicon and consider that definition as the final answer. We must study passages with great respect for their context; with great attention to their place in the unfolding drama of redemption; with recognition of their place in redemptive history as God unveils himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes, the things we see in Scripture may challenge the security of our systematized thinking. God is infinite and transcendent and the best we can do is to scratch the surface. Let us not be surprised that there are Scriptures and truth that will stretch us and go beyond us.

Even our English word love has different degrees, and there are different expressions of love. For example, I can say I love my neighbor. I also love my wife. I love pizza. People talk about “making love.” A small boy can say, “Gotta love me,” meaning you cannot get mad at him. We commonly use the word love in many different ways. A loving person directs different kinds and degrees of love to different people and objects based on relationship. For example, you may hear me say, “I love Cheryl.” Cheryl is my wife, so it is fitting that I love her. You may also hear me say, “I love Beth.” Beth is my neighbor and a dear older sister in the Lord, so it is also fitting that I love her. But it is not the same kind of love in both instances. Nor do I express it in the same manner. The difference is the relationship.

In 1 John 4:8, the apostle writes that God is love. This speaks of God. It has everything to do with God. The text does not tell us how God has chosen to express his character of love in various relationships. It simply tells us about God’s character. God is love, from out of which flows goodness, longsuffering, kindness, and mercy (even as 1 Corinthians 13 describes characteristics of love). God is love. That is his character. God’s relation-

2 “He who loves me will be loved by My Father” and “If anyone loves Me ... My Father will love him.”
committee. Of specific note, the true conservatives became incensed when the Senate majority leader permitted a pro-choice senator, an abhorrent stance to the true conservatives, to hold the esteemed position as Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. This committee passes judgment on all of the president’s judicial nominees, and is where the conservatives’ foes use pro-life as a litmus test for disapproval. Even though the lines appear to be quite clearly drawn, there is little total uniformity and each side readily knows just who is on which side and for what reason.

Those who appear to be the best cultural observers agree that the culture has drastically changed from that which was most evident in the early nineteenth century to what is observed in the beginning of the twenty-first century. A number of cultural measures justify this rationale. These observations are reinforced by criteria that can easily be measured by statistics drawn from physically observable cultural traits such as: out-of-wedlock pregnancies, marriage and divorce rates, abortions, drug usage, crime rates, educational achievements, suicide rates, single-parent families, and other cultural practices with similar measurable attributes. William Bennett published one of the earliest such indexes in 1993. Since that time, both the hostility and the noise level have increased. There is much disagreement over whether our culture has become more or less civil and compassionate. Those on the right maintain that the culture has lost meaning, while the left looks at their pet factors to declare that we are better off because people have more freedom of choice. They do not, however, discuss the consequences that result from practicing those freedoms.

The topic of this article is the closing of God; therefore, it seems practical to evaluate the current cultural status based upon those perspectives that are most relevant to a culture that exhibits biblically-based traits. In general, it would appear at the outset of the twenty-first century that America does appear to be less inclined to honor those teachings that were expounded by the founding fathers some two-hundred and fifty years ago. Almost every facet of contemporary everyday life substantiates the following two prophecies more graphically than did life some fifty-plus years ago. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:1-7:

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. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Peter also picks up the theme of the last days in 2 Peter 3: 3-4:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?

As this article is being written, some four-hundred plus American churches are belying their own professions and denying God’s truth by celebrating Evolution Sunday. Other churches, because of the fear of legalism, have departed so far from teaching God’s law that they have lost the true meaning of God’s grace.

The rising popularity of a me-first syndrome has never been as evident as it is today, whether it be in sports, business, entertainment, politics, or daily life. We see symptoms of this in road rage, where the rager is acting out his belief that he must get his way now; in sports, media, and entertainment personalities who have lost their sense of team play and respect for contracts and promises; in politicians and business leaders who cannot understand that their responsibility is to their constituents and employees and not to the feeding of their own greed; in church leaders who do not feel constrained by biblical teachings or established doctrinal standards; in elected officials who put their own careers ahead of the well-being and safety of the nation; and in the more mundane avenues of life where the partners in marriage do not feel constrained by their vows or by concerns for the care of their offspring. Those who have memories of American life as recently as the early to middle part of the twentieth century can tell stories that contrast the integrity, morality, loyalty, and civility of their early days with that of today.

While sin has always abounded, both the Old Testament and contemporary American life have historical records that demonstrate the correlation between godly conduct and a daily life with fewer pitfalls and a greater willingness to be a Good Samaritan. While Christians should be about the business of honoring God by seeking the lost, there is also much merit to being known by the fruits of our walk as taught by Christ in Matthew 25:35-36:
such a thing as growing up spiritually and that such maturity understands and responds to the things of this world differently than immaturity does. No one is surprised to see a group of children in a sandbox grasping and clinging to their own toys and fighting with other children over their toys. We recognize this behavior as childish. If we happened to see a group of adults acting in a similar manner, we would rightly turn away in disgust. Yet today spiritual retardation is too often allowed and even fostered in some churches.

Words such as growth, maturity, and full-grown must be constantly stated and restated in order to bring Christians to the place where maturity becomes the norm, not the exception. It is sad that in many churches, the level of maturity is so low at times that people are amazed by a mature level of maturity is so low at times it becomes the norm, not the exception. Christians to the place where maturity is stated and restated in order to bring Christians to the place where maturity becomes the norm, not the exception.

Throughout the Gospel accounts of Christ’s life, we find that our Lord himself did not yield to the rules of the Pharisees. The Pharisees held to a position that expressed terrible weakness in approaching the things of God. It has been said by some that the Pharisees represent the Fundamentalists of their day. If that is so, then the Fundamentalists of our day are in a position of weakness. Jesus broke many of the Pharisees’ rules without ever breaking the law of God, a point well worth pondering. Our Lord did not cater to the Pharisees’ weakness, nor did he allow his disciples to get bound up in the strict rules and regulations the Pharisees imposed upon the Jews.

Paul learned from our Lord’s example and from his teaching on this subject. So must we. If we hope to grow up into the fullness of Christ as stated in Ephesians 4, then we must know what this fullness looks like. Nowhere in Romans 14 is there a hint that liberty is to be handled in such a way that the weak remain weak. Would the weak at Rome take offense at the statement of Paul in verse 14? Probably, but if the position of maturity is never stated, then how can we expect believers to grow up?

It is also interesting to note the source and nature of Paul’s position. It did not come from contact with a variety of other people, churches, and situations. Paul’s position came from the Lord. Paul states, “I know,” words that signify a searching out of understanding and a learning from the Lord and his Word. Peter also learned something from the Lord regarding the nature of food (Acts 10:9-16). Many of the convictions held by Christians do not come from the Word of God, but from association with people and churches. We, just as the Pharisees, pass on tradition instead of biblical truth. Shame on us if our convictions result from the teaching of some branch of Christianity, or from some strong leader, and not from the Lord’s Word and example. Can we say that our convictions come straight from the Word of God and from the life of our Lord?

It is in the Mind

If there is nothing unclean about food and holy days, then why do people have such strong convictions about these things? The answer concerns the mind of the weaker Christian. Verse 14 states that “to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.” Paul knew and was persuaded in his mind and heart that nothing was unclean; the weaker brother considers his mind that some things are unclean. As Lenski states:

Only for him who reckons something to be unclean, only for that...
For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

**Jude**

In verse 4 of his epistle, gave a similar warning:

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

**To all observers and commentators,** except those who know God best, America’s war against God seems to be succeeding. Such organizations as the American Civil Liberties Union are open about their contempt for the existence of any factual information or slogans that recognize God. They leave no stone unturned to remove all biblical references about Christmas from the holiday season; to deny Christian religious practices in schools; to permit non-Christian organizations, such as the Boy Scouts, equal rights when they deny homosexuals to exercise leadership privileges within their organization; to remove references to God from pledges, coinage, and mottos; and to defeat any and all laws that deal with the sanctity of life and the rights of the unborn. Further evidence of apparent success can be measured by the increasing willingness of the entertainment industry to represent Christian values, practitioners, and clergy as slightly less than normal, if not worthy of ridicule. Should Christians be surprised that those who hate their God would portray them and their values with such disdain? If they do not like your God, why should they like you? Yes, America is doing all in its power to shove God into the closet. The most recognized leaders of America’s educational systems have stated their desire to reshape the culture and that there is no room for the sharing of Christian virtues with their desired philosophy.

But, wait, is this not the same God who is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and also the God of Joseph, Moses, and Gideon, and last and certainly most importantly, the God of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who defeated death? How can he be defeated? Has he lost his sovereign power to reign over all of his creation? Could it be that those who are putting him into the closet are the spiritual descendents of those who repeatedly tried to live apart from him throughout the four-thousand years of the Old Testament and for the two-thousand years since his Son destroyed the one who had the power of death? Is it possible that this God that they think they are defeating will in actuality turn out to be the victor by having allowed his detractors to condemn themselves?

There are many historical analogies that show the utter foolishness of those who think they can succeed in disregarding the Lord of the universe. God has always had his faithful people, whether it was the one-hundred prophets that Obadiah hid in the caves, or Elijah who...
Our Lord used the phrase, *But I say unto you,* six times in the Sermon on the Mount. The meaning of this phrase as he used it in Matthew 5 is the subject of disagreement among many sincere Christians. Evangelical theologians generally adopt one of two possible interpretations: One, Christ is contrasting his teaching with Moses’ teaching; or two, Christ is giving the true meaning of Moses and contrasting that with the distortions of Moses by the Pharisees. Which of these positions is correct? The answer we accept directly affects our entire system of theology.

This is no ivory tower debate among academics far removed from the life of the church and individual Christians. Its crucial point addresses the identity and content of the final authority over the Christian’s conscience in matters of morality.

The thesis of this book is one of the foundation stones of a theological position called New Covenant Theology. We believe that our Lord is more than a scribe or rabbi who merely interprets Moses; he is a true prophet. He is “that Prophet,” promised as the new lawgiver who would replace Moses (Deut. 18:15-19). In the Sermon on the Mount, the new lawgiver contrasts his teaching, based on the gracious covenant he established, with the teaching of Moses, based on a covenant of law.

As believers living under the New Covenant, we must look to Jesus Christ as the final revelation of God’s character and will, and allow him alone to set the standards that mark the life of the people of God. We must take seriously the Father’s message, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him” (Mark 9:7).

See excerpt on page 20.

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**But I Say Unto You**

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**Dr. Gary D. Long**

The author sees no purpose, benefit, or comfort in a redemption that does not redeem, a propitiation that does not propitiate, a reconciliation that does not reconcile; neither does he have any faith in a hypothetical salvation for hypothetical believers. Rather, he has faith in a redemption which infallibly secures the salvation of each and everyone for whom it was designed, namely, “the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:52), which is such a multitude of sinners declared righteous that no man can number them. God forbid, therefore, “that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14).

Gary D. Long is Executive Director of Sovereign Grace Ministries, Inc. He holds degrees from the University of Missouri (B.S. in Agriculture 1959) and from Dallas Theological Seminary (Th.M. in Systematic Theology, 1969; Th.D. in Historical Theology, 1972). He is a retired U.S. Army Field Artillery Colonel having 22 years of active duty service. His published theological works include *Context*! *Evangelical Views on the Millennium Examined, Biblical Law and Ethics, The Christian Sabbath-Lord’s Day Controversy and The Doctrine of Salvation.*

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For lyrics, sound samples, and further information regarding A Single Passion, please visit www.patrickmoseley.com. The material on this CD has not been endorsed by John Piper and Desiring God Ministries. To learn more about the book, please visit www.desiringgod.org.

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Pillows and blankets are provided, but you must bring your own sheets/linens (or sleeping bag) and towels.

2006 John Bunyan Conference Registration

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Mail to:
John Bunyan Conference
c/o Cornerstone Church of Skippack
PO Box 526
Skippack, PA 19474

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Fax: 610.584.8929
Email: bunyanconf@comcast.net
the supreme claims of the service of God. To God, the oath of allegiance is bound indissolubly. Soul and body are alike the purchase of the Son of God. (Ps. 119:106, with 1 Cor. 6:19, 20.) When therefore man’s command is contrary, we must shew respectful but unflinching determination. “The case”—as a valuable Christian writer determines—“does not admit of argument. The course is distinct and clear. The will of God is the simple and absolute rule. Whatever is not in exact consistency with this is sin. God alone is worthy of homage. His law is the supreme and only guide, from which there is no appeal, and which admits of no rival.” The throne must be for the Great King. The second place would be, as if we cast him out, and “would not have him reign over us.”

Let us look at the specific phrases in the verses.

“Do not be in a hurry to leave the king’s presence.” To leave the king’s presence without his consent was to show disrespect. There is a correct protocol in dealing with government and we are foolish to try to avoid or deny it. Some writers apply this to God as the King of kings. It would then mean, “Do not try to find some place where you can hide from God, for that is impossible.” The Psalmist is quite clear that God’s eye follows you no matter where you flee. You can make your bed in hell, but God is there (Psalm 139:7, 8).

“To stand up for a bad cause” before the king is folly. It is bad enough to sin, or to become involved in a bad cause, but it is surely utter folly to “stand,” or remain in it. The wise thing is to repent of the bad cause and seek forgiveness. Nobody tells the king what he should or should not do; this is especially true when the would-be advisor has done wrong. Surely, no sensible person would try to get the king to side with him or her in a bad cause.

When the king speaks, be quiet because “he will do whatever he pleases. Since a king’s word is supreme, who can say to him, ‘What are you doing?’” It is not wise to question openly the wisdom of the king’s action. Again, some would apply this to our Lord. He speaks with the voice of the greatest of all Kings. It is folly to challenge the words of God. In chapter 12, we will learn about the “words of the Shepherd” that are to be nailed in our consciences. When we question authority, we often do not know all the variables involved. This is true in civil government, just as it is in the kingdom of God. If we could see the big picture, and be willing to see the greater good for the whole community, we might be a little slower to say, “What are you doing?”

“Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure.” We should do all we can to escape further harassment. David said, “My soul is among lions.” Spurgeon, commenting on that phrase said, “If your soul is among lions, it is wise not to pull his whiskers.” It is the height of ignorance to challenge those in authority when you need them to act on a request that you have made of them. There is a time to ask a favor of the king or even to suggest an alternative course of action. The Seeker adds, “the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure” to make such a request. In a world of sin, discretion is often the better part of valor and wisdom.

In verse 6, the Seeker expands the idea of wise timing.

For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a man’s misery weighs heavily upon him.

There is a time to obey an authority even when you do not agree. There is a time to smile and say, “yes, sir or ma’am” to someone incompetent who holds his or her job only because of family connections. Verses 5 and 6 are not teaching that we must compromise any moral convictions. Many sincere people cannot tell the difference between compromise and acting wisely within the accepted protocol. The wise heart will understand the difference. The world is a giant massage parlor and we must learn to navigate in it without going against our conscience before God. One of the first things that true wisdom will teach us is that we must be realists and idealists at the same time. Again, the wise person will know both when and why to act accordingly. We will know when to take a half of loaf instead of contending for the whole loaf and getting nothing. Likewise, we will know when we must plant two feet on the truth and say, “Here I stand. I can do no other, so help me God,” knowing our stance may even mean death.

I am sure your mind went back to chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes as you read the above. The wise person must understand, absorb, and put into practice the lessons of that chapter. There must be a constant reminder of the sovereign providence of God. There is a time to protest and a time to shut up. There is a time to take a stand and a time to say, “We must wait.” In chapter 3, the Seeker spoke of a time for birth and death, for joy and sorrow, war and peace, and here he reminds us that every matter has its time and place. There will be times when we cry, “It is not fair”—and we will right. However, even though it is not fair, it will sometimes have to be endured in patience. We live in a world of sin where evil often triumphs. We must see sin and its awful effects and realize there is no law that can cure the problem. Grace enables us to “keep on keeping on.” Verse 6 is true whether there are good times or bad times. This verse is the Romans 8:28 of the Old Testament—For there is a proper

time and procedure for every matter; yea, even though a man’s misery weighs heavily upon him, meaning even in the worst of times, God still controls both each event and its timing.

The Seeker continues to discuss wisdom in the context of obedience to authority; he uses the metaphors of wind and war to make his point clear.

8:7-8 – Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come? No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death. As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it.

All of life is an unknown. No wizard or wise man can predict the future. This is even truer in times of war. In avoiding a bullet or bomb, you may step on a land mine. No man can defeat or conquer death, but death will conquer all men—“No man has power over the wind [spirit, or life] to contain it.” John Gill has some excellent comments on these verses.

This death a man has not power over to dismiss or retain at pleasure; he cannot keep it one moment longer when it is called for and required by the Father of spirits, the Creator of it; he has not power “to restrain” it, as in a prison, as the word signifies; whence Aben Ezra says, that the spirit or soul in the body is like a prisoner in a prison; but nothing that attends a man in this life, or he is in possession of, can keep the soul in this prison, when the time of its departure is come; not riches, nor honours, nor wisdom and learning, nor strength and youth, nor all the force of medicine; the time is fixed, it is the appointment of God, the bounds set by him cannot be passed, (Ecclesiastes 3:2; Hebrews 9:27; Genesis 47:29; Job 14:5). The Targum is, “no man has power over the spirit of the soul to restrain the soul of life, that it might not cease from the body of man”; and to the same sense Jarchi, “to restrain the spirit in his body, that the angel of death should not take him;”

Neither [hath he] power in the day of death; or “dominion”; death strips a man of all power and authority, the power that the husband has over the wife, or parents over their children, or the master over his servant, or the king over his subjects; death puts down all power and authority: it is an observation of Jarchi’s, that David after he came to the throne is everywhere called King David, but, when he came to die, only David (1 Kings 2:1); no king nor ruler can stand against death any more than a beggar; no man is lord of death any more than of life, but death is lord of all; all must and do submit to it, high and low, rich and poor; there is a day fixed for it, and that day can never be adjourned, or put off to another; and as man has not power to deliver himself in the day of death, so neither his friend, as the Targum, nor any relation whatever; and [there is] no discharge in [that] war; death is a warfare as well as life, with which nature struggles, but in vain; it is an enemy, and the last that shall be destroyed; it is a king, and a very powerful one; there is no withstanding him, he is always victorious; and there is no escaping the battle with him, or fleeing from him; a discharge of soldiers in other wars is sometimes obtained by interest, by the treaty of friends, or by money; but here all cries and entreaties signify nothing; nor does he value riches, gold, or all the forces of strength (see 2 Samuel 12:18; Job 36:19); under the old law, if a person had built a new house, or married a wife, or was faint hearted, he was excused and dismissed; but none of these things are of any avail in this war (Deuteronomy 20:5,6,8); captives taken in war are sometimes dismissed by their conquerors, or they find ways and means to make their escape; but nothing of this kind can be done when death has seized on the persons of men.

Some render it, there is “no sending to” or “in [that] war”; there is no sending forces against death to withstand him, it is to no purpose; there is no sending a message to him to sue for a peace, truce, or reprieve; he will hearken to nothing; there is no sending one in the room of another, as Jarchi observes, “a man cannot say, I will send my son, or my servant;” no surrogating is allowed of in this case, as David wished for (2 Samuel 18:33). Aben Ezra interprets it, no armour, and so many interpreters; and so the Targum; “nor do instruments of armour help in war;” in this war: in other wars a man may put on a helmet of brass and a coat of mail, to protect and defend him, or throw darts and arrows; but these signify nothing when death makes his approach and attack; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it; or “the masters of it”; that is, from death; neither Satan the wicked one, as Jerome, who is wickedness itself, and with whom wicked men are confederate, can deliver them from death; nor sinners the most abandoned deliver themselves, who have made a covenant with it, and an agreement with hell (Isaiah 28:15,18); such who are masters of the greatest wicked craft and cunning, and who devise many ways to escape other things, can contrive none to escape death; nor will riches gotten by wickedness deliver the owners of them from death; (see Proverbs 10:2 11:4).

To be continued

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4 The Collected Writings of John Gill. CD-ROM, 2000, AGES Software, Inc., P.O. Box 216, Rio, WI, 53960.
ship to us determines how he directs that love to us. The same is true of a loving man. A loving man holds back aspects of his love until he meets the woman upon whom he determines to shower that love. At the same time that he is withholding some aspects of his love toward one person, he exhibits various other aspects of his love to other people. If we rebel and oppose God, we may well cut ourselves off from the one who is love. Our attitude, however, does not change the fact that God is love.

God freely manifests, displays, and expresses his love in accordance with his sovereign will and grace. He would still be love even if he never directed his love toward us.

We must realize that in spite of some similarities, God does not love in exactly the same manner that we love. This is definitely a good thing. If we define love as the way that we love, we will be way off the mark much of the time. Our love is so often merit-based. Sometimes, our love is affection for or desire for someone or something. If, however, this attitude defines love, then God does not love at all — for God has no needs. Do you think that God ever once thought, “He is so cute and has such a good character. I’ve got to have him?”

I love the way God explains the motive behind his love directed toward Israel.

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh King of Egypt. (Deut. 7:6-8, emphasis added)

He says, “I loved you because I loved you.” He purposed it for his own glory. It has everything to do with God.

In order to show the difference between God’s love and man’s view of love, I would like you to consider an illustration. Jeffrey Dahmer was a convicted mass-murderer — a homosexual who killed seventeen boys, cannibalizing a number of them. Before he died, at the hand of some fellow prisoners, he made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and was baptized. In his will, he repeatedly expressed love and confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ and the assurance that Jesus Christ had forgiven all his sin. The prison chaplain stated he was confident that indeed Jeffrey Dahmer was converted and born anew by the Spirit, and was trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Thus, he is now in God’s presence and loved as an exalted son. Along with all other justified sinners, he is exalted with Jesus Christ and blessed with all the rewards of heaven.

For the most part, hearing this makes the world angry. To think that such a man could be received with favor into heaven goes against everything they believe. Even many Christians want to doubt the reality of such a conversion because Dahmer was so wicked and vile. Yet this illustrates the amazing God who is love and who grants salvation to sinners, not because of anything deserving in them, but for his own great name’s sake. To see the love of God directed to such as sinful wretch as Jeffrey Dahmer testifies to the abounding grace of our God — as does the love of God directed to such a sinful wretch as Saul of Tarsus, or Murray McLellan, or you. Love is bound up in the very nature of God. God is love. Ω

The Bible’s authority is undermined by our culture in every area, whether natural science, social sciences or history. Unless we are convinced that the attacks on the Bible’s authority in these areas are groundless, our spirituality will necessarily be affected.

Jerram Barrs and Ranald MacCaulay

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There is a wide difference
—in both principle and practice
—between the godly and the ungodly

The affections of the godly are refined
—and their desires exalted.

The inclinations of the ungodly are corrupt
—and their desires groveling.

Sin has but a tottering standing, and a momentary
abode
—in the godly.

But sin has fixed its throne, and taken up its eternal
residence
—in the ungodly.

In the godly, grace and sin struggle for sovereignty.
In the ungodly, sin domineers and there is no
struggle.

The godly is deeply concerned about world to come.
The ungodly has no concern about eternal realities.

The speech of the godly is seasoned with grace.
The discourse of the ungodly is insipid and vain.

The godly has his hope fixed on God.
The ungodly has no fear of God before his eyes.

The godly use the world without abusing it.
The ungodly, in using the world, abuse both
themselves and it.

The godly confesses God in his daily life,
and rejoices with his whole heart in Him.

The ungodly says in his practice
—“there is no God”
and wishes in his heart, that there were no God.

The godly adores the Creator above all else.
The ungodly worships the ‘creature’ more than the
Creator.

The godly uses God’s name with profoundest reverence,
and departs from iniquity.

The ungodly profanes God’s name with impudence,
and adds iniquity to sin.

The godly redeems his time.
The ungodly trifles away his time.

The godly studies his duty in obedience to all God’s
precepts.
The ungodly shakes himself loose from every
command of God.

The godly forgives his foes.
The ungodly lays a snare for his foes.

The godly commits it to God to avenge his wrong.
The ungodly, fiery and tumultuous—seeks revenge.

The godly loves chastity in all things.
The ungodly wallows in uncleanness.

Excerpt from But I Say Unto You

John G. Reisinger

“You have heard that it was said,
‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a
tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an
evil person. But whoever slaps you
on your right cheek, turn the other
to him also. If anyone wants to sue
you and take away your tunic, let
him have your cloak also. And who-
ever compels you to go one mile, go
with him two. Give to him who asks
you, and from him who wants to
borrow from you do not turn away.”
(Matt. 5:38-42)

… In this passage, Christ is neither
correcting a faulty interpretation of
Moses nor explaining what Moses
actually meant. He is showing again
that his new law based on grace
requires more than the law given
at Sinai to Moses required. This is
the new lawgiver laying down the
new rules for people living in his
kingdom. Some of these rules not
only were impossible under the law,
they would have been unlawful under
the Old Covenant.

Look carefully at the text quoted
above. If we accept the normal
meaning of those words, and apply
the same kind of reasoning we
use when we interpret the rest of
Scripture, we find the following:

First, it is impossible to make
these verses mean that Christ is
contrasting his teaching with the
alleged distortions of the Pharisees.
Jesus said, “You have heard that it
was said” and immediately quotes
exactly what Moses said about an eye
for an eye. … [O]ur Lord here never
mentions either the Pharisees or
what they believed. There is nothing
either explicitly or implicitly stated
in Christ’s words in this text that can
be used to prove that Christ’s “but I
say unto you” statement contrasts his
teaching with that of the Pharisees
or what they believed. There is nothing
either explicitly or implicitly stated
in Christ’s words in this text that can
be used to prove that Christ’s “but I
say unto you” statement contrasts his
teaching with that of the Pharisees
in any way. The text clearly and
emphatically contrasts Christ’s
teaching, not with distortions of
Moses by the Pharisees, but with the
The godly is content with his condition.  
The ungodly covets all the day long.

The godly is pure in heart.  
The heart of the ungodly is like a cage full of unclean birds.

The godly walks at liberty in the ways of God.  
The ungodly is the servant and slave of sin.

The Holy Spirit rules in the heart of the godly.  
Satan rules in the heart of the ungodly.

The godly has his conversation in heaven.  
The ungodly has his conversation in hell.

As there is such a wide difference in their principles and practices — so also, in their eternal destinies.

God is faithful—He has promised felicity to the pious, and threatened vengeance to the wicked.  
“The wicked is thrust out in his wickedness; but the righteous has hope in his death.” Proverbs 14:32

The godly are under the blessing of God's love.  
The ungodly are under the curse of God's law.

The godly with joy, draw water out of the wells of salvation.  
The ungodly shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty.

To the godly pertain all the exceeding great and precious promises.  
To the ungodly pertain all the threatenings of God.

Heaven shall be the palace of the godly!  
Hell shall be the prison of the ungodly!

While the godly shall dwell through eternity with God, the ungodly shall be driven away into everlasting darkness!

Thus, the righteous and wicked are separated in their life, and divided in their death.

They are divided ...  
in their principles,  
in their practices,  
in their choices,  
in their joys,  
in their thoughts,  
in their company,  
in their speech,  
in their fears,  
in their expectations,  
in their death, and through eternity itself!

teaching of Moses himself.

Second, nowhere in the entire Old Covenant legislation can we find anything that is similar to Christ’s but I say unto you statement in verses 39-42. If Christ was showing what Moses really meant, and if Moses indeed taught the same principle as Christ did in this contrast, why did Christ not cite that Mosaic teaching? Why did Christ simply not quote Old Covenant passages that command Israelites to turn the other cheek? That is what he did with Satan in Matthew 4. When Satan quoted a text and used it incorrectly, our Lord quoted another text that clarified the issue. If Moses somehow really had meant that the Israelites were to “turn the other cheek” when he said to “repay an eye for an eye,” then why did Christ not prove it with other passages of Scripture as he did with Satan? Likewise, those who insist that Moses still reigns as lawgiver would strengthen their argument if they could show us (1) where any New Testament writers appeal to the eye-for-eye principle as a Christian’s duty for today, and (2) where any Old Testament writers said or implied that the “eye for eye” legislation actually meant “turn the other cheek.”

It is impossible to read the turn-the-other-cheek principle of the law of Christ back into the law of Moses or to read the eye-for-eye and tooth-for-tooth law of Moses forward into the New Covenant. We can find clear examples in the Old Testament Scriptures where people’s actions proved that the grace of God was operating in their hearts, but the law of Moses neither demanded those actions nor produced the motivation for them. We find many proverbs and laws in the Old Testament Scriptures that gave clear objective rules of conduct to an Israelite under the Old Covenant. However, we cannot find Christ’s new commandments based on grace (in Matthew 5:39-42) anywhere in the Old Testament Scriptures. Likewise, we cannot find any New Testament Scriptures that reaffirm the absolute duty of eye-for-eye and tooth-for-tooth without pity or mercy. Ω
single-handedly, with God’s power, defeated Ahab’s four-hundred and fifty prophets of Baal at one altar call. This same God led Gideon and his three-hundred men to victory over the host of Midianites. This God can allow people to follow their own wills to the point that they will absolutely fall from their self-designed condition on that last day. He will warn them and give them opportunities to do the proper thing, but they will respond just like Pharaoh and will be beaten by their own stubbornness. Not only did Pharaoh ignore many warnings from Moses and Aaron, he foolishly led his army into the trap of being drowned by the closing of the Red Sea.

One can almost see the foolishness of God’s detractors acting like the Philistines, who tried to capture Samson. They were the victims of Samson’s deception three times, but never gave up trying to defeat him. When at last they seemingly did gain a victory, Samson defeated them in one last act, bringing the prison house down on three-thousand of them. Who was the victor? The God that America is trying to closet is the same God that led his people out of four-hundred years of servitude in Egypt and successfully saw them enter the Promised Land. That same God rescued his chosen few and then, in one instant, poured out his wrath and destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of their rebellious spirit. Possibly the greatest tragedy in America’s trying to closet God is that those bent upon that task have failed to read and heed the history of those who have gone before them with the same purpose. If God appears to be absent from the cultural scene, it is of his own choosing and is not the doings of his detractors. They would be well warned that around the next corner they might come face-to-face with the God they are trying to destroy and would then experience the humiliation of their own defeat.

The mightiness of the one and only Sovereign God is amply displayed in his act of bringing forth the entire creation. Yet those who are bent on rebelling against God’s authority use the creation as the center argument in their denial of his existence. But his greatest act of power was accomplished through his Son’s victory over death. Not only did Christ’s victory wipe away the terror of death for his people, it paved the way for the complete reconciliation of all of the blemishes throughout the entire universe at the time of the dawning of that glorious New Day. That was prophesied in Isaiah 25:8: *He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it.* It was later confirmed in 2 Timothy 1:10: *But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.* And Paul said that Christ gained the final victory in 1 Corinthians 15:26: *The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.*

These are perilous times, maybe not the worst of all times, but there are dangers in how those who profess Christ respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century culture. Should one who professes to be a follower of Christ steer clear of the dirt and the issues, be a silent warrior, or become involved by choosing how to respond to the many issues? Will God be pleased if we choose not to become involved in the process to end the greatest violation of civil rights through the wanton murder of babies in the womb? What should Christ’s command in Matthew 5:13-14 to be the salt and the light of the world mean to us? How do we give evidence of our fruits of the Spirit to a lost and dying world if we are on the sidelines? Should our response to our culture be determined by a willingness to do all that we can do for everyone that we can reach, or should we ignore them because we know that this world will ultimately be subjected to the fire, mentioned in 2 Peter 3:7 and 1 John 4:17, that will melt the elements on that last day of judgment?

Can we passively stand by without denying the very Lord that we profess? We will choose to serve the one true God or another god through
our response to the needs of our fellow men. For Joshua, the choice was clear (Joshua 24:15):

   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.

Christ warned us in Matthew 10:33 that the act of denying him will have eternal consequences:

   But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

But in 2 Timothy 2:12 we receive hope:

   If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.

How must we live so that we do not ignore the warning given by Jonathan Edwards about falling into the hands of an angry God? Certainly the God who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah cannot have great compassion on an America that willfully violates his instructions nor on those who are not fulfilling his salt and light command. Those who are involved in leading America must be warned according to John 12:48:  

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. After all, since we are breathing his air, drinking his water, eating his food, walking on his earth, and enjoying his creation, do we not owe something to him?

Yes, there is a move to remove God from the fabric of America’s culture. But for those who would strive to be faithful servants to the Lord they profess, there is the promise that even though they may not find success here and now, in the end they will see the truth Jesus spoke in Matthew 19:26:

   But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

The final victory is assured through the sovereign providential provisions of the same God that brought about our creation and has assured us of his new creation. There is a sense in which we are like the Hebrew youths in the Book of Daniel who were about to be thrown into the fire. They had no assurance they would come out alive, but they knew that ultimately they were in God’s hands to do with as he chose. They chose to obey God and face the fire. Their words to the king should be burned into our consciences. We should constantly say the same to our present evil culture and its powerful proponents:

   Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. (Daniel 3:16-18)

   God has providentially placed us in our culture here and now to serve his divine purposes and to proclaim his gospel. We must remember an oft-used saying that has been accredited to the wrong person, but still contains cultural truth: America is great because America is good. That saying does not work if reversed. ω

3 R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of Romans (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1945), 834.
For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Rom 1:18-23 ESV

PROVIDENCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY COLORADO

Providence Theological Institute is in the process of moving from Texas to Colorado Springs. It has been approved by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education to function as a seminary under the name of Providence Theological Seminary.

The target date to begin a special one-year Diploma in Theological Studies is January 2007. The Seminary holds to the doctrines of grace and baptistic ecclesiology and will emphasize the need to teach the whole counsel of God and understand the fulfillment of God’s eternal redemptive purpose as revealed in the New Covenant Scriptures.

Initially, the plan is for semester classes to be taught in the evenings with a daytime, concentrated, one week, two-hour credit course taught in January and/or May. The curriculum will expand to a two- and three-year program of studies as the Lord enables.

For information see the Seminary’s new website at www.ptsco.org. Also you may contact Pastor Dwight C. Brown, the Seminary Administrator, at dcbrownjr@juno.com, or Dr. Gary D. Long, the Faculty President, at glongpti@hot.rr.com.