



Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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WILL THE
CEASEFIRE
HOLD?

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Israeli Defense Force soldiers proudly fly an Israeli flag as they leave Lebanese territory. After 34 days of fighting, both sides in the conflict had good reasons for agreeing to the ceasefire, but does either side have a good reason to resume the war? And, perhaps more to the point, what part does Iran play in this latest Middle East clash?

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Is the Christian Required To Do Works?

Part Five

In the previous four installments in this series, we have covered the subject of works in the following order:

1. The Bible's general approach to works.
2. Mankind's failure to appreciate the seriousness and costliness of sin and thus the need for works.
3. The inability of works to justify a person before God. No one, despite his sincerity or his many painful sacrifices, can be saved based on his own works (Ephesians 2:8-9).
4. The necessity of works for sanctification unto holiness, "without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

In this article, works will be shown in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Is there any doubt in our minds that we are within striking range of the return of Jesus Christ? Not that He is going to return the day after tomorrow, but that He will come back to this earth within our lifetimes. The gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached for

almost two thousand years, and prophecies made by Him and others regarding His return are being fulfilled. The crisis at the close is almost upon us. Mankind's only hope is revealed in the gospel, yet we find great ignorance regarding what His good news is.

The complete secularization of the Western, "Christian" world is almost accomplished, and doctrinal confusion abounds. It seems as though the vast number of professing Christians believe that all one must do is believe in the name of Jesus Christ to be saved. Believing in Jesus Christ is most certainly required, but Jesus Himself says in Mark 1:15 that one must believe in the gospel in order to be saved.

That is quite a bit different than merely believing in Jesus. While it is definitely true that Jesus died for our sins, the true gospel provides a great deal more instruction regarding Christianity and its purpose than solely Jesus' part in our salvation. It reveals that a Christian must play an active part in the spiritual creation that God is working in and through men.

Saved Immediately and Forever?

One of the more effective deceptions Satan has palmed off on mankind is that all God is attempting to do is to "save" people. Most Christians somehow fail

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to think of God and His Son, Jesus Christ, as actively involved in doing something more with those who are converted.

Consider this process, which most people believe: At some time in his life, the “saved” one had perceived the need to be forgiven of his sins. He then asked God to forgive him, and from that point on, because of Christ’s blood, he was “saved.” Is this true? Though this illustration has been simplified a great deal, it is nevertheless close to the prevalent belief.

We will add a biblical fact to that scenario. Almost all Bible commentators hold that the Israelite’s experience of walking through the wilderness following Israel’s release from bondage to Egypt is a type of a Christian’s walk following his conversion. Walking is typical of laboring or working to reach an objective.

Did the Israelites arrive in the Promised Land—a type of the Kingdom of God—immediately upon release from their bondage? No! They had ahead of them a forty-year journey filled with trials. As they journeyed, God worked with them and supplied their needs, preparing them for their inheritance. Release from Egypt only began another aspect of God’s work with them. To reach their objective, a great deal of labor lay ahead of them.

We all need to come to grips with the reality that our Creator is a God who works. He is not merely observing mankind, or worse still, having gone way off somewhere in the vastness of the universe, letting things run more or less on their own. Jesus says in John 5:17, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” More plainly, the Father began working in the indefinite past and has continued working right up till now. God is not sitting around passively saving people.

In Psalm 74:12, notice the psalmist Asaph’s revelation of what God is doing: “For God is my King from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.” The salvation of human beings requires God to work, yet some seem to think that all He does is as simple as turning a “forgiveness switch,” and the person is saved. However, in various places both the Father and the Son are called “Saviors.” It ought to be apparent that saving a person from circumstances he needs deliverance from requires a savior to work. If a deliverer or savior does not make a strenuous effort, the one in need of rescue will not be saved.

Jesus testified that the Father was working at that very moment. The Bible provides abundant records of Jesus, our Savior, working on behalf of mankind: teaching, counseling, praying, healing, setting the example for His disciples, and obeying His Father flawlessly in order to be the sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. Further, He says in John 14:10, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.” Jesus thus shows the Father to be His partner in His ministry.

In addition, when Jesus rose from the grave and

ascended to heaven, He was made Head of the Church, as well as its High Priest. As such, He is responsible to the Father for working with the members of His Body, interceding on our behalf. He thus bears great responsibility for the salvation of its individual members and the success of the church as a whole. These vital tasks require His careful attention, especially as events near the crisis at the close of the age.

The conclusion is obvious: The work of God abounds with works for all concerned in seeking the objective He has set before us in His purpose. That objective is the Kingdom of God.

What Did Jesus Preach?

Jesus came to this earth as a Messenger from God the Father: “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 3:1). Two messengers are mentioned in this verse. The first is John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the second Messenger, “the Messenger of the covenant,” Jesus Christ.

It is helpful to understand that, as Messenger, He did not speak His own words. John 8:38-42 combined with John 12:49-50 confirms this. Thus, the message He brought is *not* primarily about Himself but about the good news of the Kingdom of God that the *Father* ordained to be announced on earth. This does not discount Jesus in any way because He is clearly the most important person ever to inhabit this earth. Rather, it emphasizes the fact that the gospel Jesus preached is not just about Himself.

The inspired Word of God makes it quite clear that the good news Jesus brought is about the Kingdom of God. Mark 1:14-15 is typical: “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’” Luke 8:1 shows that proclaiming this good news was His customary activity, “Now it came to pass, afterward, that Jesus went through every city and village, preaching and bringing glad tidings of the kingdom of God.” He says plainly in Luke 4:43 that this was His appointed task: “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also: because for this purpose I have been sent.”

Even in those last days before He ascended to heaven and the church was born, He used His time with the disciples to teach the same message. “. . . to [the apostles] He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

Jesus was not alone in preaching the gospel of the

Kingdom of God. He charged His disciples with this responsibility, and they followed through as commanded. “Then He called His twelve disciples together and . . . He sent them to preach the kingdom of God . . .” (Luke 9:1-2). Later, others like the evangelist Philip joined in this effort: “But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized” (Acts 8:12).

Just in case one might think the apostle Paul preached a different gospel, he himself states in his farewell to the Ephesian elders, “And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more” (Acts 20:25). As Paul reached the end of his life, Acts 28:30-31 states of him, “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”

One final reference, Galatians 1:8-9, is pertinent to this important issue:

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

The Father’s message, purposely given to Jesus to deliver to mankind, had already been corrupted just a few decades after Christ’s death, and the Galatians had been deceived into believing the corrupted one! Similarly, the gospel Jesus Christ brought has been corrupted in modern times. Rather than focusing on the coming Kingdom of God, the message being palmed off in our day primarily focuses on the Messenger.

Without a doubt, within the context of the message, Jesus is important as God in the flesh, our sinless Savior, and our resurrected High Priest. However, the message He preached focuses on other important issues besides Himself. If this were not so, why did God not title the message with something focusing directly on Jesus? God intends the title “gospel of the Kingdom of God” to fix our attention on the issue He wants to be the focus of our lives after we are called and converted, since it is the only hope for the resolution of mankind’s numerous and presently unsolvable problems. The Kingdom of God is of such importance that, once we grasp the essence of its instruction, we can honestly say, without exaggeration, that it is the theme of the entire Bible.

Resurrection into the Kingdom of God is held out as the goal of those making the New Covenant with God. A covenant contains requirements that are to be met by both parties entering into it. Will those of us who have done so escape the responsibility to make efforts to live up to the New Covenant’s terms comparable to those required of Israelites under the Old Covenant? Many—

those who say that no works are required of Christians—believe so.

But what is a kingdom? A kingdom is simply a nation whose ruler is a king. The United States does not have a king, thus the term “kingdom” is never used in reference to it. However, Britain is ruled by a monarch (presently a queen), and the nation is frequently referred to as the “British kingdom.”

A kingdom has four basic elements: 1) a king who is its supreme ruler; 2) a territory with a specific location and boundaries; 3) subjects or citizens within that territorial jurisdiction; and 4) laws and a form of government through which the will of the ruler is carried out. In our day, the gospel has been distorted by diminishing the importance of some of these elements. However, if we ignore any of them, we will have distorted the message, resulting in a distorted faith that will not bring salvation to those attempting to use it.

Who Will Be King?

David, one of ancient Israel’s greatest kings, was well aware that the physical kingdom of Israel was only a type of the Kingdom God would establish long after he was dead. He clearly understood that there were two God beings and that one of them—the One who became the Son—will become the King over the earth and all of its inhabitants. Notice how Psalm 2:6-8, which David authored, begins to reveal this: “‘Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.’ ‘I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, “You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.”’”

Many more verses support this thought:

- “The LORD is King forever and ever; the nations have perished out of His land.” (Psalm 10:16)
- “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the LORD’s, and He rules over the nations.” (Psalm 22:27-28)
- “The LORD sat enthroned at the Flood. And the LORD sits as King forever.” (Psalm 29:10)
- “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.” (Psalm 45:6)
- “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations.” (Psalm 145:13)

Isaiah 9:6-7, the wonderful prophecy regarding Christ, reads:

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For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

As early as Genesis 17:6, God began promising that royal offspring would come from Abraham: "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you." This does not specifically designate the King of kings, but when combined with other promises, we can rightfully include this verse among those that prophesy of Him. In Genesis 49:10, God prophesies through Jacob that the scepter (kingship) shall not depart from Judah's line. Jesus' ancestry (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38) goes directly back to David then back to Judah and thus to Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham, to whom the promises were given (Galatians 3:26-29).

At the time of Jesus' first coming, the Jews were looking for a Messiah to rescue them from their downtrodden state. Though they were well aware of the Old Testament prophecies, they had made an incorrect interpretation: They were looking for a powerful, conquering king. When He came, He was indeed powerful, but He was powerful spiritually. The Jews' misinterpretation blinded them to the reality of where His power lay and how their downtrodden condition would be relieved.

The majority of the Jewish leadership overlooked such prophecies as Zechariah 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey." They completely overlooked the detailed prophecy of Psalm 22, which foretells of His crucifixion at the hands of cruel persecutors. They bypassed Isaiah 52-53, which reveals that He would die a horrible, disfiguring death while shedding His blood for the sins of His people. He indeed was the much-awaited Messiah/King, but for the establishment of His Kingdom, the wait would be much longer.

When He was crucified, the inscription over His head read that He was "King of the Jews." Yet, when asked just a few hours earlier by Pilate if He was a King (John 18:33), Jesus had replied, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (verse 36).

It *will* be established. We are much closer to that time than they were then. At His coming, Revelation 19:16 proclaims, "And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

Where Will the Kingdom Be Established?

Perhaps no other doctrine more clearly exposes the effectiveness and thoroughness of Satan's deception of the whole world (Revelation 12:9). Jesus plainly states in John 3:13, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of man who is in heaven." Yet, most of the Christian world believes that immediately upon death a person's soul wafts off to heaven to be with others of the dearly departed.

This verse does not stand alone; many scriptures confirm Jesus' testimony. Peter says regarding the highly respected, man-after-God's-own-heart David, "... he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. . . . For David did not ascend into the heavens . . ." (Acts 2:29, 34).

Other scriptures remind us that, when a person dies, he is without consciousness:

For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. . . . Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going. (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10)

Psalm 146:3-4 adds, "Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans [thoughts, KJV] perish."

Jesus identifies Himself in Revelation 1:18 as, "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen." He says something similar as He begins His message to the church at Smyrna: "These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life" (Revelation 2:8). Who are we to believe, a God who never lies or the tales of false prophets? Was Jesus telling the truth when He said He was dead—that He was not off in heaven during those three days conversing with the Father, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses? If we believe the Bible, the answer is beyond question.

The gospel Jesus Christ brought reveals the Kingdom of God as the Christian hope. The Bible teaches that a person must remain in his grave, unaware of events in the conscious world, until a resurrection occurs, when his life is renewed (just as Jesus' was), his body is changed to spirit, and he enters God's Kingdom.

In I Corinthians 15:50-54, the apostle Paul teaches that the resurrection does not occur until Christ returns. Then, those who "died in Christ" will be resurrected from their graves with spiritual bodies, and the living saints will also be changed, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. . . . [T]he dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (verse 52).

Galatians 3:29 speaks about our reward: "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs

according to the promise,” confirming that those who are true Christians—“in Christ”—will receive the same inheritance Abraham was promised. Romans 4:13 establishes beyond doubt what Abraham will inherit when he is resurrected: “For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.”

Furthermore, regarding those who will be resurrected with Abraham, Revelation 5:10 adds, “[You] have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.” Later, Revelation 11:15 says, “Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’”

Many centuries of pagan tradition have convinced people that heaven is their “home” and their reward when they die. Nevertheless, the biblical record is unassailable: God’s Kingdom will be established on the earth He created for mankind, and it will be an everlasting Kingdom with Christ as its King.

In awe of what he saw, John declares in Revelation 21:1-4:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

The Bible contains much more on this facet of the gospel. Yet, with just this small sampling of verses, there should be no doubt remaining that the gospel teaches that the inheritance of Christians is this earth.

Who Are the Kingdom’s Subjects and Citizens?

Another area of essential knowledge contained in the gospel shows considerable misunderstanding among professed Christians. When the wise men from the East appeared in Jerusalem after Christ’s birth, they stated that they sought the King of the Jews (Matthew 2:2). He most assuredly was that, as He said when on trial before Pilate. However, seeing that the promise to Abraham is the entire earth, which Jesus will inherit as King, how can His rule be limited only to Jews? It is not.

Recall that in the preceding section regarding the Kingdom’s location, several scriptures stated that His rule will encompass all the families of the earth—that all

nations, whether Israelitish or Gentile—shall come and worship before Him (see Psalm 2:8; 22:27-28; Revelation 15:4; etc.). However, the gospel instructs us that, though all nations and their populations will be subject to Him, not all of those people will be members of the Kingdom of God. All of the citizens of the Kingdom of God, under the leadership of Jesus Christ as King of kings, will cooperate in ruling all nations.

Who are the “kings” in Christ’s title as “King of kings”? It refers to those who are born into God’s Kingdom by means of the first resurrection, which occurs at Christ’s return. In I Corinthians 15:50, the apostle Paul reveals that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” Following the resurrection that occurs at Christ’s second coming, those entering the Kingdom will be changed from flesh and blood to spirit.

In John 3:3, Jesus reveals an easily understood truth if one will simply believe what He says. He tells Nicodemus that, in order for a person to enter the Kingdom of God, he has to be “born again.” It is at this point that the prevalent misconception arises. People have been mistaught that they are born again immediately upon acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and receipt of the Holy Spirit. This is most certainly *not* true. Jesus provides a simple illustration that proves this belief to be wrong.

In John 3:7-8, Jesus explains what Nicodemus misunderstood. “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Wind, composed of air, is invisible to the eye. When the wind blows, a person cannot see the wind but can see its effects. This describes a person who is born of the Spirit. Spirit is invisible, but is no less real than air. Nobody would argue that air has no substance, for though it is invisible, it is composed of particles that are too small to be seen by the unaided eye. Can we not see other people coming and going as they engage in their activities—even those who claim to be born again? If we can see them, they are certainly not like the wind, and they are definitely not yet born again or born of the Spirit. They are still physical, not yet born as spirit beings in the Kingdom of God.

People can be impregnated by God’s Holy Spirit, and thus begotten and oriented toward spiritual birth. However, there remains much growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, overcoming, and testing to be accomplished before that birth can take place. Even as an embryo and fetus must develop before a physical birth can occur, we must develop spiritually toward holiness within the womb of the church, as it were.

Jesus explains in Matthew 25:31-34:

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He

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will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

The Kingdom of God, then, ruled by Jesus Christ, will be inherited by those who will be born again—born spiritually upon being resurrected. The resurrected saints—citizens of God's Kingdom—will rule along with Christ over the remaining peoples of the earth, who will be the Kingdom's subjects (Daniel 7:27; II Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:26-28; 5:9-10; 20:4-6; 22:5).

What are the Laws of the Kingdom?

It is helpful to realize that at its establishment on earth the Kingdom of God will be ruling over unconverted people who have just passed through the most horrific period of tribulation in the history of mankind. These people will need guidance from absolutely trustworthy standards.

No nation, not even the Kingdom of God, can govern human beings without laws. There must be standards of conduct for citizens to follow, or chaos and anarchy will result as each person does what seems right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). But "God is not the author of confusion but of peace" (I Corinthians 14:33). His Kingdom will be peaceful and orderly because people will be led to submit themselves voluntarily to His rule of law—His commandments.

Unfortunately, many believe that the commandments are done away, having been replaced by love. This can easily lead a person to believe the opposite of what is true regarding the commandments. People have a strong tendency to think of them in terms of restrictive bondage, whereas love is perceived as liberating. The apostle John says, however, that the commandments of God are love and not grievous (I John 5:3).

What does Jesus teach? In Matthew 22:36, He was asked, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" His reply is instructive:

Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (verses 37-40)

Notice that both of the two Great Commandments encompass love. The first four of the Ten Commandments show man how to love God, and the second group of six shows man how to love fellow man. The commandments remove love from being merely an emotion and reveal how to apply love practically. As one commentator stated, "Love is what you do."

It was Jesus, as God of the Old Testament, who gave to ancient Israel God's laws in their codified form from Mount Sinai. When He became a man, what did He teach in reference to these very commandments?

· "If you love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

· "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." (verse 21)

· "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me." (verses 23-24)

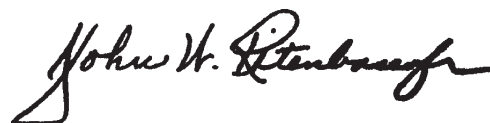
The apostle James calls the Ten Commandments "the royal law," meaning it came from a King and is worthy of His Kingdom:

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. (James 2:8-12)

God has never done away with His Ten Commandments, and they never shall be done away. They will be lived by all those given eternal life forever. They will also be the basic law of those possessing mortal life when Jesus returns. From God's commandments, all laws governing every aspect of a moral life will be drawn and applied in their spirit. Their standards will be the rule of law against which people's lives will be guided and judged.

This article has provided a foundation for the next and final installment in this series. All of the reasons works are required of the Christian are contained within the gospel. All the works in the world will not provide everlasting life; it is indeed a gift from God. Yet, God nonetheless requires works, as will easily be seen in the concluding article.

In Christian love,



EMBRYONIC STEM-CELL RESEARCH:

THE PROMISE AND THE REALITY (PART TWO)

“ . . . choose life, that both you and your descendants may live . . . ”
Deuteronomy 30:19

Last month, we defined the nature of embryonic stem-cell research. If scientists can understand and replicate the signals used to control embryonic cellular differentiation, they will be able to build mature cells for implantation into sick or injured individuals. However, far beyond that, they will be well on the path to understanding the blueprint God follows when He fashions the human person in the womb. This knowledge will permit them to “construct” a person, practically from the ground up—from a cloned embryo to a baby.

The present article will review the scientific challenges and moral issues that surround embryonic stem-cell research. It will close with a brief discussion of an alternative to this type of research.

SCIENTIFIC CONCERNS

Essentially, four scientific (or technological) questions dominate embryonic stem-cell research:

1. *Is an adult cell, artificially produced from a disassociated stem cell, in all ways like its counterparts produced by natural embryonic development?* An artificially produced adult cell, say a brain cell, may appear normal, but is it normal in all ways? One specialist points out that scientists cannot prove that such a “cultured” cell is “fully functional and capable of integrating into the architecture of the brain without exhibiting any undesirable properties (such as malignant growth).”¹

2. *Will the host reject the implanted cells?* This is a real immunological concern. In the case of organ transplants, even where there is a good “match,” the foreign organic material becomes targeted by the immune system for rejection. There is every reason to believe that the immune system would reject implanted stem-cell progeny as well. “Stem cell transplants, like organ transplants, would not buy you a ‘cure’; they would merely buy you time. In most cases, this time can only be purchased at the dire price of permanently suppressing the immune system.”²

3. *Can we simulate all the signals?* Embryonic stem cells split into more specialized, less totipotent, cells in response to at least three types of signals: chemical, electrical, and mechanical. Scientists claim they can simulate—replicate—the chemical (molecular) signals in culture. They are always brewing chemical soups in their Petri dishes. However, do these concoctions really imitate molecular configurations in a naturally developing embryo?

Further, can scientists simulate the electrical and mechanical signals present in a woman’s womb?

Many of the factors required for the correct differentiation of embryonic cells are not chemicals that can be readily “thrown into the bubbling cauldron of our Petri dishes.” Instead, they are structural or mechanical elements uniquely associated with the com-

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plex environment of the embryo. . . . Failing to replicate the full range of normal developmental signals is likely to have disastrous consequences. Providing some but not all of the factors required for embryonic stem-cell differentiation could readily generate cells that appear to be normal . . . but are in fact quite abnormal.³

Remember, stem cells are prolific, which is all to the good for embryonic growth. Yet, without any organizing factor, stem cells produce teratomas—tumors. If only a few imperfect adult cells “bred” in a Petri dish from dissociated stem cells were implanted into a patient, the result might be a fast-growing tumor that would lead to death.

Thus, it is extremely difficult to simulate electrical and mechanical forces in a laboratory culture. A Petri dish makes a poor substitute for a womb.

4. *What do animal studies indicate?* Generally, new medical technologies (whether drugs or procedures) are first tested and proven with animal subjects. In the case of embryonic stem-cell research, that proof is not forthcoming, as one expert emphatically states: “To date there is *no* evidence that cells generated from embryonic stem cells can be safely transplanted back into adult animals to restore the function of damaged or diseased adult tissues.”⁴ To begin

testing with human subjects would ignore normal (and legal) requirements for prior animal testing. Bypassing animal testing could be disastrous.

Scientists, keen to sell the public (and grant-giving governments!) on the curative promise of embryonic stem-cell research, have not been fully honest about these crucial scientific questions. The majority of California voters, responding to emotional pleas of celebrities in the November 2004 election, did not recognize the significance of these questions. Ignorant of the various inherent and perhaps insurmountable difficulties of making a dissociated stem cell do what bio-technologists want it to do, that majority handed the biotech firms a \$3 billion bond issue. We can only hope and pray that California’s credit rating is so poor that no one will buy the bonds!

THE MORAL ISSUE

To understand the overriding moral issue confronting biotechnologists, leaders, and the public at large, we need to backtrack just a bit.

Scientists, remember, have learned how to “extract” some stem cells from an embryo created either through IVF or cloning. In culture, these dissociated stem cells reproduce indefinitely and quickly. Scientists became fascinated with these cells when they discovered they could brew up chemicals in a Petri dish that would simulate the signals they receive in the womb. These

WORD GAMES: A ROSE IS A ROSE IS A ROSE?

During the last thirty years or so, biotechnologists have sought to gain public acceptance of their wickedness by playing word games. William L. Saunders, Jr. (“Embryology: Inconvenient Facts,” *First Things*, December 2004, p. 13) mentions the pre-game activities, which started as early as 1970. At that time, an editorial appearing in the journal of the California Medical Association spoke of the need for doctors to engage in “semantic gymnastics” with the public. It was necessary, the editorialist argued, to avoid “the scientific fact, which, everyone really knows, that human life begins at conception and is continuous whether intra- or extra-uterine until death.” The purpose: the creation of “a new ethic for medicine and society.”

A later expression of this word game was the creation in 1986 of the concept of “pre-embryo.” Scientists coined this term to refer to an embryo *before* implantation in the womb. This is a senseless and deceptive term; an embryo is an embryo from the time the zygote experiences its first cellular split. It is an embryo regardless of its state of womb-attachment. To use the term “pre-embryo” is to imply that a zygote/embryo is not a human organism until attachment. In this regard, Saunders quotes Lee Silver, a firm believer in stem-cell research. The following is from Silver’s 1997 book, *Remaking Eden*.

I’ll let you in on a secret. The term pre-embryo has been embraced wholeheartedly by IVF practitioners for reasons that are political, not scientific. The new term is used to provide the illusion that there is something profoundly different between a six-day-old embryo and a sixteen-day-old embryo. The term is useful in the political arena—where decisions are made about whether to allow early embryo experimentation. . . .”

By this prominent researcher’s own admission, “pre-embryo” is a term invented to create an illusion. It hides the reality that life starts at fertilization. It dehumanizes the pre-implanted embryo, setting it up for destruction for the purpose of scientific experimentation. Through its use, the bio-technician seeks to buy time, to construct a window for his killing.

Another manifestation of the word game revolves around researchers’ intentions. The logic goes this way: If the researcher never *intended* to implant the cloned (or *in vitro* fertilized) zygote into a womb, then it is not a zygote and will never become an embryo. It is not human. As such, it is fair game for destructive experimentation. However, as we have seen, every zygote, whether sexually or asexually created, whether in a Petri dish or a womb, has the potential to become

signals tell the stem cells when to split and what type of more specialized cells they are to produce. For example, these signals tell a stem cell to produce a proto-neural cell, rather than, say, a proto-heart cell.

What happens to the embryo that “donates” these disassociated stem cells? **It dies.** Always! In this fact lies the moral issue of embryonic stem-cell research. The embryo, an organism that, following a God-given blueprint, will normally and eventually develop into a breathing person in God’s image, is destroyed through stem-cell harvesting. It makes no material difference at all whether that destroyed embryo was intentionally created through IVF or through cloning: In either case, the embryo was a maturing human being and had the potential to become a glorified God being. Implicitly and inextricably coupled with embryonic stem-cell research is murder. Bio-technicians intentionally create embryos and then intentionally destroy them.

Paul Ramsey is right: “The embryo’s subsequent development may be described as a process of becoming what he already *is* from the moment of conception.”⁵ Stem-cell harvesting permanently interrupts the embryo’s development. To terminate that development for the purposes of research is to kill without God’s permission. For this reason, embryonic stem-cell research is part of the “culture of death” exemplified by such postmodern phenomena as abortion, euthanasia, and assisted suicide.

Thus, there are two reasons why the biotech industry’s marketing ploy in the recent California elections was irresponsible to the point of despicability:

1. First, it peddled empty hope—hope virtually bereft of scientific foundation. It paraded celebrity after celeb-

rity before the public, each with the same emotional plea: “Don’t deny the sick the hope of cure. Vote to fund embryonic stem-cell research.” The campaign was a cruel hoax, considering that “More than twenty years of unrestricted research on animal embryonic stem cells . . . has failed to yield a single cure for any human illness.”⁶ As we saw above, the lack of successful stem-cell experiments with animals, our experience with immunological rejection of implanted tissues, and our inability to replicate fully the environment of the womb all raise significant scientific questions. Yet, the celebrities’ plaintive cry for mercy—pathetically bellowing empty hope—never brought these issues before the public. The majority of the public voted with their hearts, not their minds.

2. Second, the industry did not so much as broach the moral issue—the taking of absolutely defenseless human life—inextricably connected with harvesting stem cells from embryos. It apparently assumes that such moral concerns are not worth mentioning in a secular society. Bio-tech firms undoubtedly consider such issues irrelevant.

Through purposefully creating and then destroying embryos to secure their stem cells, scientists seek to heal the paying sick at the expense of the helpless young—and make a pretty penny at the same time! The potential for profit from successful implementation of stem-cell implants is absolutely astonishing. Those able to pay will pay, and pay well. The biotech industry has a lot to gain, and shamelessly stoops to lying and murder to gain it.

a human being. In this regard, Saunders quotes a standard textbook by Keith Moore and T. Persaud: “Human development begins at fertilization. . . . This highly specialized, totipotent cell [the zygote] marked the beginning of each of us as a unique individual.” The researchers’ intentional refusal to allow that totipotent cell to develop to its potential does not change its nature from human to nonhuman. This is pure inanity.

A variant of this perverse thinking is the attempt to distinguish between “reproductive cloning” and “therapeutic cloning.” *Reproductive cloning* occurs when the cloned object (an embryo) is implanted into a womb. *Therapeutic cloning* is the creation of a clonal zygote with no intention to implant it into a womb—ever. Such a zygote is, again quoting Saunders, “simply kept in the lab, an innocuous cluster of cells to be put to good scientific use.” This, too, is a senseless distinction. Regardless of the researcher’s planned purpose, a zygote is a zygote—always a potential son or daughter of God.

Incidentally, the term “therapeutic cloning” is a contradiction in terms. Therapeutic exercise, as an example, *benefits* the recipient, the subject, but therapeutic cloning produces an embryo that is later *killed* to harvest stem cells. It hardly benefits the subject!

What about another term appearing in the media: “somatic cell nuclear transfer”? Scientists have simply re-named cloning, using a scientific-sounding euphemism that obfuscates meaning. Saunders writes: “Cloning is a laboratory procedure in which the *nucleus* for a *somatic* (body) cell is *transferred* or *transplanted* into an egg cell from which the original nucleus has been removed.” He rightly calls the use of multiple “long words instead of one short” word “linguistic mischief, not science.”

Another such term popping up repeatedly is “nuclear transplantation to produce stem cells,” a particularly insidious phrase. It is true that the nuclear transplantation (the cloning) is done with the aim of harvesting stem cells. However, scientists conveniently leave a middle step unmentioned in this euphemism: the creation of a human embryo. We know that the transplantation itself does not produce stem cells. It produces a zygote that experiences growth (cellular differentiation) in culture. That is, the transplantation produces a living, viable embryo, one generating stem cells on its way, in due time, to producing a mature human being. Wicked men, interrupting the process, extract the stem cells, killing the human being.

Call it what you will, a rose by any other name is still a rose. Murder by any other name remains murder.

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AN ALTERNATIVE

As if lying and murder were not bad enough, the industry suppresses knowledge,⁷ adding to its culpability. Conveniently, scientists have neglected to inform the public about a possible alternative to using embryonic stem cells for treating disease. That alternative lies in the existence of *adult* stem cells in adolescents and adults. Adult stem cells have not been studied as deeply as their embryonic cousins because of scientists' preoccupation—indeed, fixation—with discovering the blueprint of embryonic development.

If the industry had not been so effective in suppressing knowledge, the public would have learned that the use of adult stem cells avoids most of the scientific and moral issues surrounding embryonic stem cells. Adult stem cells are easily obtained by tissue biopsy from patients, including the sick patient *himself*. They are amenable to growth in culture, and can be “induced to differentiate into a wide range of mature cell types.”⁸ Because they come from the patient's own body, the mature cells they produce probably will not experience immunological rejection. They are not prone to form tumors. Most importantly, their use does not raise moral issues about the destruction of embryos. Harvesting adult stem cells through biopsy involves no killing.

Admittedly, there are technological questions about the therapeutic effectiveness of adult stem cells. For one thing, they are not as prolific as their embryonic counterparts. Scientists question if they could produce enough of them to effect a cure. Just as basic is the concern that adult stem cells may not be as multipotent as embryonic stem cells. They may not produce a broad enough spectrum of cell types to make their use practicable.

What is important about these two questions is just this: They could be answered, and possibly resolved successfully, through further *research*. Scientists may be able to learn how to increase the productiveness of adult stem cells. They may discover that there are different “populations” of adult stem cells in the human body, each population capable of producing a different type of specialized cell (brain, muscle, etc.).

THE SECRET THINGS

A great deal of research needs to be done before stem cells of any age (embryonic or adult) can become part of the medical practitioner's regular tool kit. It would be wiser to put limited research dollars into adult stem-cell research for at least two reasons. First, the challenges to effective, practical implementation of embryonic stem cells may be “insurmountable”⁹ for the scientific reasons reviewed above. Second, unavoidably connected to embryonic stem-cell research is the moral issue of embryonic destruction. However, the potentially more fruitful research involving adult stem cells will never take place so

long as the devastating culture of death prevails in the biotech industry, a greed-driven culture that impels scientists and industry leaders alike to lie, murder, and suppress knowledge. All this in search of God's blueprint.

By its definition, research seeks to uncover things hidden—maybe even secret things. God provides man with a “reality check” when He notifies him that there exist secret things that “belong to the LORD our God” (Deuteronomy 29:29). Some knowledge is simply not mankind's business. Is the blueprint—the organizing principle—God uses to form us in our mothers' wombs among those secret things? As we have seen, cellular differentiation is not random but blueprint-directed by the sovereign God. That this blueprint can be studied only by the wanton and deliberate destruction of defenseless life should tell everyone something: God considers knowledge of that blueprint to be *solely* in His purview.

Not all knowledge is secret, though, as Moses, continuing in verse 29, makes clear by using the word *but*: “. . . but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” God, Moses asserts, reveals certain knowledge for our good. It requires no research to discover this “declassified” information, as Moses points out in verses 11-13 of the next chapter. The law, he writes there, “is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven; . . . Nor is it beyond the sea. . . .” In verse 15, Moses tells us exactly what that revealed knowledge is: “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.” The knowledge of life and of good, revealed by God in His Word, is visible for all to see. God thunders, in verse 19, what we should do with that knowledge: “Choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.”

Postmodern man has not chosen life. Instead, he has chosen, and increasingly practices, a culture of death in the pursuit of “secret things.” As a result, he will die, as will his descendants—some of whom already have perished through abortion. In Deuteronomy 28, Moses enumerates the curses that will follow any peoples' rejection of God's revealed law. There are many. America waits to bear the very bitter fruit of her culture of death.

—Charles Whitaker

ENDNOTES

¹ Condic, Maureen L., “The Basic Facts about Stem Cells,” *First Things*, January 2002, p. 30.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Quoted by Saunders, Jr., William L, “Embryology: Inconvenient Facts.”

First Things, December 2004, p. 13. Emphasis added.

⁶ Condic, “Stem Cells and False Hopes,”

First Things, August/September 2002, p. 20.

⁷ See Romans 1:18.

⁸ Condic, “The Basic Facts about Stem Cells,” *ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

A Godly Quest for Pleasure

Throughout the entire creation, God Almighty has developed and produced repeatable designs and patterns. One of the most ubiquitous patterns consists of the *drive-reduction mechanism* found in all living things, from the single cell to the multicellular organism. An accepted scientific metaphor or theoretical construct, Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, places at the foundation of human behavior the systematic satiation of tissue needs or drives: hunger, thirst, fatigue, and sex. In simple terms, then, the drive-reduction mechanism is the means by which the body strives to reduce the state of tension that such needs produce.

Whole philosophies have developed around the satisfaction of these physical needs. For instance, among the Greeks and later the Romans, the Epicureans, also known as the Hedonists, stressed that the highest aim in life consists of attaining pleasure or, put another way, of satisfying the animal or carnal pleasures. Many similar philosophies and movements have existed throughout human history.

Paul warns Timothy that in the last days many would obsessively focus in on satisfying tissue needs—becoming “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (II Timothy 3:4), making an idol of pleasure and pleasure-seeking. A casual reading of this verse may lead us to disparage pleasure, regarding it as an intrinsic evil. The great God of the universe, however, does not intend for us to denigrate or disparage pleasure. After all, the marvelous drive-reduction mechanism (thirst, hunger, desire) reflects an aspect of God's very mind (Romans 1:20), something He pronounced good and wholesome after He created man (Genesis 1:31).

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with the legitimate satisfying of the desire for pleasure, as long as we do not make that process our overriding obsession, and as long as we play by God's rules, engaging those spiritual laws that bring about His desired ends. What we often fail to realize is that those desired ends may be the by-product, result, or consequence of something we have not yet considered.

Guard Your Affections

King David instructs in Psalm 37:4, “Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.” Later, the prophet Isaiah writes, “If you . . . call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD . . .” (Isaiah 58:13-14). Finally, Jesus Himself teaches, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?] shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

All of these prescribed behaviors set in motion certain of God's eternal laws—which will bring about the desired results, namely the quenching of some deep, unsatisfied desires.

One of the most awesome responsibilities God has given us is the management and healthful cultivation of our desires and emotions. Proverbs 4:23 advises, “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.” In other words, Solomon is telling us to guard our affections because they control or dictate everything we do.

English writer W. Somerset Maugham, in an ironic twist of this passage, wrote, “Be careful what you set your heart upon, for you might get it.” Some have mistakenly concluded that God intends that we stifle our feelings, keeping metaphorical “blindens” on our emotions. Indeed, a superficial reading of Proverbs 4:25-27 seems to prescribe this: “Let your eyes look straight ahead [with fixed purpose], and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil.”

While we are instructed to remove our feet from evil, we are not instructed to anesthetize our emotions in the process. The etymology of *emotion* goes back to the Latin *emovere*, meaning “to move out, to excite

or motivate.” The Eternal God has created tissue deficits and desires to excite and motivate us and to keep us productive.

In God’s Word, we learn that the laborer’s appetite works for him; “his hungry mouth drives him on” (Proverbs 16:26). In this context, we can see how a tissue deficit can bring about productive behavior. Frequently, God will allow a deficit or state of dissatisfaction to endure a long time in order to create an intense desire in us—one that we want with all our being to satisfy. Historically, our Israelite forebears had to endure horrendous slavery for a few centuries before they developed a passion for liberty (Exodus 12:40). In another example, those on the honor roll of the faithful in Hebrews 11 were all motivated by a state of dissatisfaction and a desire for something more permanent and lasting. Hebrews 11:16 says of them, “But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country.”

The Law of Compensation

American writers Emily Dickinson and Ralph Waldo Emerson both marveled at the Law of Compensation that permeates all living things, which states that the value of something is taught by its lack: The value of water is taught by thirst. The value of freedom is taught by slavery. The value of peace is taught by war. Even the value of precious gems is taught by their rarity. Does it not make sense that the preciousness of true righteousness may be taught by its apparent lack?

Dickinson writes:

Success is counted sweetest by those who ne’er succeed
To comprehend a nectar requires sorest need.

In his essay on *Compensation*, Emerson observes:

For example, in the animal kingdom, the physiologist has observed that no creatures are favorites, but a certain compensation balances every gift and every defect. A surplus given to one part is paid out of a reduction from another part of the same creature. If the head and neck are enlarged, the trunk and extremities are cut short.

Transferring this insight into the human world of affairs, Emerson records the following insight:

The farmer imagines power and place are fine things. But the President has paid dear for his White House. It has commonly cost him his peace and the best of his manly attributes.

Emerson could not have realized how prophetic his words proved in the late twentieth century. In the middle 1970s, when President Nixon resigned his post in dis-

grace, he and former contender Hubert Humphrey had a conversation. As President Nixon bemoaned his humiliation and disgrace, Hubert Humphrey suggested that he would have endured that disgrace if he could have occupied the Oval Office for one hour.

Reflecting on the presidency of Bill Clinton, one wonders if, in his most private moments, the former president has perhaps learned the value of a good name and an untarnished reputation (Proverbs 22:1). The bold, unfeeling mask concealing guilt and shame is purchased at a horrendous price. One can only hope that, during his own administration, George W. Bush has perhaps come to value real peace, privacy, and security, as these desirable states have been scarce since September 11, 2001.

Danger in Excessive Desire

Pleasure, peace of mind, and the desires of our hearts are the consequences, the results, the byproducts of seeking the rare righteousness of God. Consequently, it is only through seeking and practicing righteousness that our deepest needs can become satisfied. Paradoxically, setting our minds upon pleasure as an end in itself will give us no lasting pleasure.

Some people have mistakenly condemned wholesome things such as music, dancing, card games, alcohol, or sex as intrinsically evil. Such prudish attitudes have fostered warped behaviors and unhealthy emotions, perhaps the opposite of what was intended. Interestingly, our Puritan forefathers were not nearly as stuffy or prudish as historians have commonly drawn them. For example, Puritan preacher Cotton Mather once said, “Wine is from the Lord, but the drunkard is from the devil.”

In other words, God has not forbidden any desire, pleasure, or behavior when it is attained through exercising His holy law, but He sternly warns against the excessive or misdirected use of any good thing. God even condemns a vain display of righteousness, comparing it to “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).

If a person sets his heart on power or authority to the extent that it becomes his all-consuming passion—even to the extent that he would be willing to compromise certain aspects of God’s law to attain that goal—he will derive no pleasure from exercising that power (Leviticus 26:19).

God’s Word specifically warns not to set one’s desires on money, for “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). We also learn that if we obsessively chase after riches, “they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle” (Proverbs 23:5).

In a similar vein, Lebanese poet/philosopher Khalil Gibran compared romantic love to holding quicksilver in the palm of the hand. If one tries to grab it, the contents will spill on the ground, but if you gently hold it, the quicksilver will remain.

(continued on page 18)

“Be ready always to give an answer . . .” I Peter 3:15

Go the Extra Mile

“And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.”
—Matthew 5:41

In Matthew 5:20, part of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ instructs, “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” He then goes on to expound the changes of attitudes and approaches to God’s law that we must acquire to do just that, to exceed the righteousness of those very law-abiding people.

When He finished His sermon, the people were astonished, as He had taught them, not as the “letter of the law” scribes and Pharisees did, but “as one having authority” (Matthew 7:28-29). Jesus could preach with conviction and boldness because He saw past the rigid letter of God’s commandments to their very spiritual heart and purpose. He could confidently give the law its true meaning and relevance to life.

In essence, Matthew 5–7 contain instructions from Jesus for them, and for us today, to go further than the strictly physical application of the law—to God’s true intent in it, or as we say, from the letter to the spirit of the law. In His teaching, Jesus states a physical law, often quoting directly from the Old Tes-

tament. This base standard is to be met by all those who have made a covenant with God.

Then, He proceeds to amplify the particular law’s meaning, usually beginning His amplification with words similar to, “I say to you. . . .” Such words should be a flag to us that Jesus is expanding the scope of the law to include, not just physical actions, but the condition, attitudes, and inclinations of a person’s heart. In essence, He is teaching the standards required of His people to attain the Kingdom of God.

Lex Talionis

In one section of the Sermon on the Mount—from which two or three of today’s common proverbs have derived—He covers what is known as *Lex Talionis*, “the law of retaliation.” We know this concept by its more familiar name, “an eye for an eye.” Jesus says:

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 whoever 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. (Matthew 5:38-42)

Some may have taken the Old Testament guideline (see Exodus 21:23-25) in a literal fashion. At first glance, it seems that, if a person's tooth or eye were lost in a scuffle or accident, the one who caused the loss to happen would be required to forfeit his own tooth or eye. Though some may have demanded this in times past, it is clearly not God's intent for the law. Instead, it is a principle, given in concrete, understandable terms, that damage was to be justly compensated.

According to commentator Adam Clarke, the Jews of Christ's day abused this law to extract every last penny from another, and in the majority of cases, there was no mercy shown. Human nature being what it was then, and still is now, they insisted that the one who caused the problem receive every bit of punishment coming to him. In short, they wanted and exacted revenge!

Jesus wants us to understand that His disciples are not to act this way. We will study this section verse by verse to get the full force of Christ's explanation, in which He provides illustrations of His standard in action.

Beyond Retaliation

In countering the faulty understanding of this Old Testament law, Jesus teaches, "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Matthew 5:39). He begins by instructing us not to escalate the situation by stubborn resistance or, worse still, by perpetrating an additional offense. Elsewhere, Paul writes, "Repay no one evil for evil" (Romans 12:17). If of-

fended, do not offend in return. If injured, do not inflict an injury in payment. In other words, retaliation is not the answer.

Note that Jesus is not speaking of dangerous situations, like facing a robber with murderous intent or a rapist on a dark street. On His mind are circumstances of daily life that are insulting, bothersome, or even mildly injurious, but not life-threatening. *The Interpreter's Bible* comments on the latter half of the verse: "A blow with the back of the hand to the right cheek was an insult, thus the palm of the hand was now poised to bring a blow to the left cheek." The blow is struck contemptuously rather than homicidally.

In a situation like this, the first thing that comes to most minds is revenge! Jesus desires that, rather than avenging oneself and acting with the same attitude of hatred as the aggressor, we reflect our calling and suppress the urge to seek vengeance. We should even be willing to take a second slap, this one from the other's open hand, without retaliation. Such pacifism usually pours cold water on the situation, avoiding further tit-for-tat retribution.

Jesus continues, "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also" (Matthew 5:40). Certainly, no one likes to be sued. It is a time-wasting, frustrating, chaotic legal mess. It is often a huge disruption of normal life, and for a Christian, a terrible distraction from our spiritual priorities. Our Savior advises us to nip the suit in the bud by taking the loss—and even adding a premium to it if it will settle matters before they get out of hand!

In I Corinthians 6, the apostle Paul faced a situation in which members of the church in Corinth were being taken to court by other members. He writes in verse 7, "Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?" Neither Jesus nor Paul means that a Christian should not use the law properly, but they are more interested in the right attitude in these matters.

Many people take advantage of the legal system in a greedy, injurious manner, and Christians should not respond in kind. If confronted by such a person, it is usually better to suffer the loss of one's "shirt" than to fight back.

In Christ's example, He speaks of tunics and cloaks. The Jews of His day wore two principle garments, an interior "coat" or "tunic" (an undergarment), and a more costly exterior cloak (outer garment). This cloak was used, not only as a jacket or overcoat during the day, but also as a covering to sleep under at night. By Mosaic law, the outer cloak was an inalienable possession that could not be withheld from a debtor overnight (Exodus 22:26-27; Deuteronomy 24:12-13). Jesus is saying that, if we are sued even for a trifling amount, rather than countersuing and ratcheting up the hostility, we should be willing to give up what is rightfully ours to diffuse the situation.

In Matthew 5:41, Jesus instructs, "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two." His third example deals with the Roman practice of commandeering civilians or their property (mules, horses, oxen, camels, carts, wagons, etc.) to carry the luggage or other burden of military personnel for, in this case, one mile.

Evidently, the practice did not originate with the Romans but with the Persians. As there were no post offices at the time, and in order that royal orders might reach their destination quickly, Cyrus set up a system not unlike our Pony Express. A rider in this service was empowered to take a civilian's horse (usually his best or only horse), if his was worn out or lame. In addition, he could press a boat, cart, or any other vehicle into the king's service.

In recent centuries, this practice, often used to force seamen into the service of another nation's ships, has been called *impressment*. In America's Revolutionary War period, British ships would often intercept other nations' ships and force any American sailors found on them

to work for the Royal Navy. In Roman times, a man could have worked all day, his family waiting for him to come in from his fields, and suddenly, a Roman soldier could order him to carry a heavy load for a mile.

No one likes to be made to do someone else's work. At the very least, we are apt to complain, argue, or simply refuse to be so used. Being compelled to engage in "community service" by law or by might is demeaning and perhaps unjust. But Jesus tells us to take the sting out of the situation by being willing to carry such a burden an extra mile in a cheerful attitude.

In a similar vein, Solomon advises, "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the LORD will reward you" (Proverbs 25:21-22). Jesus says something very similar in His subsequent teaching (Matthew 5:44-45). Being struck, sued, or forced to carry a heavy load can bring out the worst in human nature: anger, resentment, outrage, and even violence. But when those who have been called find themselves in difficult and trying circumstances, their attitude must not be belligerent, spiteful, or vengeful, but helpful, willing, and good-natured. "Above and beyond" must be their motto.

A Generous Spirit

Jesus gives a final illustration in Matthew 5:42: "Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away." Some commentators cannot understand why Jesus places this example with the other three, as it does not seem to show having a good attitude under trial. However, having a godly attitude in parting with what we hold dear can be a test for us as well. The parallel scripture in Luke 6:30 shows that it follows the pattern of the previous illustrations: "Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back."

Many believe that what Jesus requires here is foolish, that is, to give to everyone who asks of us and to allow our goods to be plundered without objection. Perhaps Luke 6:34-35 helps to clarify what Jesus intends:

And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Highest. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.

His illustration in Matthew 5:42 deals with borrowing and lending, not with allowing oneself to be plundered. As in the other illustrations, His primary point is that it is preferable to suffer loss or harm than to retaliate or worsen the situation. When we give to someone in need, we should not expect to be repaid for our generosity, and we should certainly not take steps to force reimbursement. Christian charity should be done without expectation of gain. Yet, God sees, and He will show us favor: "He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given" (Proverbs 19:17).

If a person asks for a loan of money or goods, we should approach the request assuming that he makes it in good faith, if there are no extenuating reasons to doubt his sincerity. We should, however, keep in mind other principles from God's Word, such as being good stewards of what God has given us, taking care of our own, not encouraging laziness or sustaining the idle, not supporting vices (alcohol, drugs, or other addictions), and not being a party to shady or dubious get-rich-quick schemes. Jesus' suggestion is that, if we do lend to others, we might as well consider that money to be gone forever. The struggle to regain it will probably not be worth the effort, not to mention the damage it

could do to relationships and one's character.

In short, what does His final illustration require of us? It asks of us, not only that we should lend without suspicion and with no eye to profit, but that we also should have a generous spirit of outgoing concern for a brother or sister in need.

Pressed Into God's Service

All of these examples deal with the attitude of one's heart in exhibiting patience and love, and Jesus' intent in them is to raise us above the righteousness of the Pharisees to the higher righteousness of God's calling.

In Jesus, we have the ultimate example in responding correctly, when He said, while hanging on the stake, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). Not long thereafter, Stephen, when faced with death at the hands of a mob of hateful Jews, rather than responding with epithets or seeking revenge, beseeched, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin" (Acts 7:60). Both had a generous spirit and a true love for their fellow man.

Matthew 5:41 speaks of being pressed into service to do a task for another. It might be good to remember that each of us has been pressed into the service of Almighty God and asked to go the extra mile. For most of us, our calling was unlooked for and perhaps even came at an inopportune time in our lives. Yet, a Higher Authority has put us into service to do a work. Have we taken on our burden and cheerfully gone an extra mile for God?

And beyond God Himself, in our marriages, in raising our children, in dealing with each other, and in interacting with those outside our fellowship, we should be doing all we can to go that extra mile. By doing so, we reflect the higher standards of God's law, the standard of truly loving God and each other. This attitude will take us far beyond the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

—John Reid

(continued from page 14)

This paradoxical tension is also at work regarding setting one's heart on pleasure for pleasure's sake. Solomon warns, "He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich" (Proverbs 21:17).

We find a comparable caution regarding the desire for rest, sleep, and idleness. Scripture warns, "Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty" (Proverbs 20:13). The sweetness and deliciousness of sound, restful sleep is a by-product of productive, meaningful work, not an end in itself. In Ecclesiastes 5:12, we learn that "the sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much." By stark contrast, an old Yiddish proverb suggests that the hardest and most taxing work is to go about idle. The sluggard must expend tremendous reserves of energy explaining why he has not been productive.

In a similar vein, as a teacher I become amused at the elaborate stratagems students have devised to "con" or "beat" the system. One student made an elaborate "cheat sheet" consisting of a tiny, microscopic scroll containing the test answers, which he inserted into his watch. During the exam, he could retrieve all the answers just by winding his watch. Beside the obvious deceitfulness and dishonesty of the whole procedure, the precious energy spent at constructing this device could have been spent more profitably on wholesome studying, relieving the discomfort of a troubled conscience.

Our Elder Brother Jesus tells us not to set our hearts on security, warning us that anyone who is overly concerned about saving his skin will probably lose it (Luke 17:33). Excessive desires, even for normally good things, contain inherent dangers that lead to sin, destitution, destruction, and even death.

Craving More

Is there anything inherently wrong with power, money, food, sleep, rest, sex, or pleasure? Of course not! The controversy God has with us is the means by which we attain them. *God has deliberately designed our nervous systems so that they are not satisfied with impermanent or short-lived things.*

God expresses concern about the consequences of setting our hearts upon temporary pleasures, among which are the dangers of excess, or the danger of being distracted, from a more satisfying permanent source of pleasure.

If we love pleasure and devote our entire beings toward its pursuit, we will not be satisfied with a little pleasure. Like an addict, we will always crave more and more without being satisfied. "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing," observes Solomon (Ecclesiastes 1:8).

If we love sleep, we will not be satisfied with a little sleep. We will crave it increasingly more until the cumulative effects are realized (Proverbs 24:30-34). Setting our minds and hearts on anything per se, whether it is

money, pleasure, power, or position, may actually distract us or prevent us from attaining what we actually crave in our heart of hearts.

Even quality music does not really fill us up. As a teenager, I listened to portions of Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake" ballet until I almost became sick of it. As a ten-year-old, I did become sick of orange juice by trying to satisfy a craving. For a while, instead of having my appetite satiated, I developed an opposite reaction—an abhorrence for that which earlier gave me pleasure. The same thing occurred with ice cream.

God wants us to direct our affections at things that are going to last, things that will endure, things that will fill us up and satisfy us rather than increase our craving. It is like the old "Squirt" soft-drink commercial: "Quenches your thirst without an afterthirst." With godly pleasures, we receive no regret or unpleasant afterthirst. "The blessing of the LORD makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22).

Satiation Without Saturation

God's spiritual gifts have the capacity to satisfy us, to fill us up without the unpleasant after-effect of being overcome with guilt, feeling sick and bloated, or developing an abhorrence for those things. Jesus says we are to develop a thirst or a craving for God's Holy Spirit: "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37). The food that Jesus craved—He says in John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish the work"—would fill us up so that we would never go hungry again (John 6:35).

He tells us that, if we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we will truly be filled (Matthew 5:6). We are admonished to set our hearts and minds on the pursuit of wisdom. The consequences are protection, discretion, length of days, riches, honor, peace, and life (Proverbs 1:4, 2:10-11, 3:2). What more could we want?

David tells us repeatedly in Psalm 119 to set our hearts on God's law, which exemplifies love toward God and love toward mankind, including one's enemies. David testifies, "It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). There is no excessive satiation or kickback from setting all our affections on and performing God's law. The consequences are lastingly pleasurable, as David promises: "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble" (Psalm 119:165).

If peace and tranquility, the feeling of being totally filled or fulfilled, are our heart's desires, we need to channel our affections on those things that will bring about those consequences, ones that will bring us closer to God. David points the way: "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

—David F. Maas

The Israel-Hezbollah Ceasefire: Aftermath or Interlude?

Military commanders and historians often speak of “the fog of war”—the vague and uncertain perception of what is actually going on in the midst of an armed conflict. Southern Lebanon now lies in such a fog; the real nature of the Israel-Hezbollah conflict, along with its tenuous and ambiguous ceasefire, appears shadowy at best. In addition, Western news outlets have left many in doubt of what really occurred and what is happening in the wider region.

Hezbollah’s provocation of Israel was not solely that terrorist organization’s idea. Rather, Hezbollah’s killing of eight Israeli soldiers and kidnapping of another two, plus the rocket attacks on northern Israel, coincided with Iran—Hezbollah’s creator and primary patron—being under international scrutiny for its nuclear program. Hezbollah’s incitement of Israel was diligently calculated, coming after several years of stockpiling weapons and supplies in hardened fortifications. Thus, even as Iran needed a distraction and another lever to pull to demonstrate its virility in the region, Hezbollah was pleased to start a war with the “Zionist entity” in which *it* determined the place and time.

Hezbollah’s aim was simple: 1) inflict as many casualties on Israel—military or civilian—as possible, and 2) survive the inevitable Israeli onslaught. The latter was more important than the former, and the fact that Hezbollah withstood the Israeli counteroffensive without being entirely demolished made it feel as if it were victorious—despite not securing a single inch of Israeli ground and losing several times as many fighters as the IDF (Israeli Defense Force). Hezbollah’s aim was to pick a fight, and then prove that it could survive. It is badly battered now, but it achieved that objective. Thus—facts notwithstanding—it has claimed victory, and the dictators of Iran and Syria both likewise claimed credit for defeating not just Israel, but America as well.

By far, Israel had the more complicated position. Its citizens demanded it stop the daily Katyusha rocket attacks and recover its kidnapped soldiers, but because events were playing out in the court of international opinion, it had to destroy Hezbollah while inflicting minimal civilian casualties. Hezbollah was under no such restraints, and in fact, civilian casualties—Israeli or Lebanese—played into its hands. Moreover, Hezbollah became notorious for hiding weapons and fighters—targets of Israeli strikes—in private homes.

Additionally, the clock was ticking for Israel because of the region’s conventional wisdom that the IDF is an irresistible force. Israel felt a need to wrap matters up quickly and cleanly with a crushing blow, while Hezbollah benefited (in terms of reputation and respect) the longer events dragged out without a decisive Israeli victory. Due to its demographics, Israel could afford neither a prolonged ground war of attrition, nor an Iraq-style occupation and insurgency.

Under these conditions, the leadership of both Israel and Hezbollah calculated that the ceasefire was in their respective best interests. For Hezbollah, it was better to quit while

it was ahead. Though battered, it had survived the Israeli air strikes and remained capable of firing rockets on northern Israel. Their forces in southern Lebanon, in their fortified bunkers, had resisted the IDF troops sent in to clear them out and had caused IDF casualties. Through its shrewd definition of success, Hezbollah could claim that it had done what no other Arab fighting force ever had. It was better for Hezbollah to cease in this state than to be eradicated in a long conflict.

On the other side, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert calculated that the cost of sending IDF ground troops against fortified Hezbollah positions had become greater than enduring the relatively ineffective rocket attacks—and the cost to the IDF would only increase. Katyusha rockets, though dangerous, do not threaten Israel’s existence, but a war of attrition in southern Lebanon could certainly wear Israel down and make it vulnerable. Thus, a ceasefire would allow Israeli leaders to regroup without conceding defeat.

Israel remains in southern Lebanon, and will remain until an international peacekeeping force arrives. However, the ceasefire agreement contains so many conditions and loopholes that Israel may well stay indefinitely—or at least until it can finish the job. It can occupy southern Lebanon without the threat of further rocket attacks against northern Israel or guerilla attacks against IDF troops, for any such aggression would nullify the ceasefire and allow Israel to continue its destruction of the terrorist entity.

Will the ceasefire hold? The ceasefire agreement—U.N. Resolution 1701—calls for 15,000 peacekeepers to be deployed alongside Lebanese army forces by November 4. So far, not only has the “international community” not found its 15,000 troops, but also those nations that *have* pledged troops have done so under the proviso that Hezbollah voluntarily disarm first. Hezbollah refuses to disarm, asserting that it must protect southern Lebanon from “Israeli aggression.” Since Israel will not withdraw its troops until U.N. peacekeepers are in place, a perfect catch-22 exists. It is doubtful that 1701 will be implemented by November 4, at which point all bets are off.

That said, however, neither side has a compelling reason to resume fighting. Militarily weakened, Hezbollah has also lost much of its popular support as citizens return to their destroyed homes. Israel is no longer threatened with rockets, and Olmert is busy enough with post-action inquiries that he is unlikely to initiate further action just for the sake of the IDF’s reputation.

In the background stands Iran’s President Ahmadinejad—flush with success—refusing to stop enriching uranium, influencing Iraqi Shi’a to intensify their belligerence, claiming victory against a “weakened” Israel, and even challenging U.S. President George W. Bush to a televised debate. Clearly, he feels things are going his way. Hezbollah has proven to be a useful tool, to be used again when the time is right.

—David C. Grabbe

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Part One

Because the prophet Isaiah foretold the Messiah's exercise of miraculous power (Isaiah 35:4-6; 42:7), John the Baptizer asked for such a sign of Christ (Matthew 11:2-3). Jesus replied: "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (verse 5). His miracles provided proof of who He was.

Christ came into the world, not only as God's personal representative on earth, but as God manifest in flesh. He was Himself a miracle in human form, and His miraculous works are bound up inseparably with His life. When we accept the miracles of His prophesied birth, sinless life, and glorious resurrection, then any other miracle is possible. Born holy, undefiled, and separate from sinners (Hebrews 7:26), He was conscious of His God-given responsibility to bless and relieve mankind in miraculous ways.

In describing Jesus' healing miracles, Luke, a doctor, emphasized the power of God by saying, "The power of the Lord was present to heal them" (Luke 5:17), and "the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all" (Luke 6:19). Similarly in Acts, Peter describes "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38).

One could say Christ's miracles were parables in deeds, just as His parables were miracles in words. God designed His miracles to symbolize His power to meet spiritual needs, as well as physical and material ones. Jesus' recorded miracles are real-life experiences of what it means to be under the wonderful rule of the powerful but merciful King of God's Kingdom.

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1. Is there a difference between Old and New Testament miracles?

COMMENT: For the most part, the miracles of the Old Testament were of an external nature, sometimes on a global scale, as with the Flood, but more often on a national scale, as with the Exodus. Those of the New Testament, however, were primarily of a personal and spiritual nature. An individual's domestic life was often the scene of Christ's mighty works.

For example, the Old Testament records such miracles as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) and of Jericho (Joshua 6), yet in the New Testament, the sick are healed, demons are exorcized (Luke 6:17-19), and the dead, like Lazarus (John 11:1-44), are resurrected. In sum, Old Testament miracles tend to glorify God in relation to His sovereignty over the physical realm, while New Testament miracles chiefly glorify God in relation to His sovereignty over the spiritual realm.

2. Was Christ's purpose merely to excite His audiences, or did His miracles prove something significant?

COMMENT: Christ's object in performing miracles was not merely to astonish those who witnessed them. When asked for a startling sign from heaven, Christ refused to oblige (Luke 11:16-17). He was not a magician or an illusionist, as Herod learned, who thought he could command Jesus to perform a miracle to satisfy his curiosity. Nevertheless, some of His miracles did overwhelm onlookers (John 7:45-46; 18:6).

Because Christ was authoritative as a teacher (Matthew 7:28-29) and sinless in His character, His miracles not only formed an integral part of His teaching, but they were also proofs of His identity as the Messiah and of His purpose. Jesus' miracles, an exercise of God's creative power, were

the Father's way of authenticating His divine Son's mission among humanity.

3. What was the main purpose of Christ's miracles?

COMMENT: Jesus' miracles place the focus and glory on His Father. Thus, they serve to declare and prove God's existence and sovereignty. Christ never worked a miracle on His own behalf (perhaps the coin found in the fish's mouth is an exception to this rule; see Matthew 17:27). It appears that He did not do any miracles until He was thirty years old, and none that He did after that promoted His own ease and comfort. He performed no miracles for His own relief when suffering intense anguish in Gethsemane, when being beaten by Roman soldiers, or when hanging on the stake, since doing so would not have promoted the glory of God. Legions of angels waited to obey His command, but He never requested their help (Matthew 26:53). Though He provided ample food for hungry followers, He would not transform stones into bread to satisfy His own great hunger (Matthew 4:1-4; Mark 6:35, 41).

Christ never paraded His supernatural power. On occasion, He even commanded those He healed not to broadcast the news of their healing (Mark 1:43-44; 5:43; 9:9). He never performed a miracle to create a sensation or to win adherents. He rejected such use as a temptation, always refusing to perform a miracle to satisfy the demands of unbelief (Matthew 4:6-7; 16:4). When a miracle was necessary, He performed it: It took a miracle to raise Lazarus from the dead but not to roll the stone away from his tomb, since the disciples could do this.

The gospels reveal a purposeful and careful use of divine power. We can see that Jesus' miracles display His humility, mercy, and lovingkindness, and simultaneously, declare the sovereignty and glory of His Father.