

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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Who Sigh and Cry

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Ezekiel 9 contains a prophecy in which the prophet witnesses in vision an angel going through the city of Jerusalem and marking all those "who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it" (verse 4). God is still looking for those who are grieved and disturbed by the mounting evils in society. Are we among them?

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Sin, Christians, and the Fear of God

Why do the Bible's writers illustrate sin in such strong terms? The Bible is unequivocal in its warnings and denunciations against sin from beginning to end. Part of the reason for this strong stance is because the writers perceived sin within the big picture of why God created mankind in the first place. They do not picture sin as a minor, momentary act but as a major impediment to achieving God's purpose for creating us.

Jesus' charge to us in Revelation 2:11 provides some insight: "He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." He similarly encourages each of the churches to overcome, clearly implying that success within God's purpose is tied to it. God did not create us and call us into His purpose for failure. The Greek term for "overcome" here is *nikáô* (*Strong's* #3528), which means "to subdue, to conquer, to prevail, to get the victory."

Jesus indicates that Christian life is challenging. The Bible does not view the worship of God as a passing activity on which a person spends a few hours one day a week. Rather, it shows the worship of God to be a full-time responsibility, a work requiring dedication and discipline. God calls upon each of us to be "a worker who does not need to be ashamed" (II Timothy 2:15). Sin impedes proper worship.

The reasons for the use of such strong terms does not become directly apparent until the New

Testament, where Jesus and the apostles give specific instructions to individual Christians on avoiding it at all costs. The Bible's writers see us in a battle for our very lives! In whatever context it appears throughout Scripture, sin is viewed as failure—as succumbing, not overcoming. Each time we sin, we suffer a defeat in life's overall purpose.

Besides defeat, Isaiah 59:1-2 provides us with another reason why sin is perceived so dreadfully: "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."

This second reason is in no way secondary in importance; it is in every way equal to or greater than the sense of failure. Sin creates estrangement from God. This is extremely important because our relationship with Him is the source of our power to succeed. He created us to have an everlasting relationship with Him in peaceful and productive harmony.

God does not sin because sin destroys relationships. As sinners, we would not fit within a non-sinners relationship. Despite human reasoning to the contrary, whether the relationship is with fellow humans or with God, sin *always* works to produce separation. A continuing life of sin de-

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stroys any hope of oneness. It never makes matters better; it never heals. Lasting success and sound relationships are never achieved through sin.

God teaches us this right at the beginning of His Book, in Genesis 2:15-17:

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Death is the ultimate in separation, but to make His point clearer, Adam and Eve sinned, He also physically removed them from His immediate presence, as Genesis 3:22-24 shows:

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Just in case anyone thinks God was kidding at the beginning of His Book, the end confirms that He was not. He is as serious as ever.

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city and from the things which are written in this book. (Revelation 22:18-19)

The lesson is clear: Sin destroys life!

Sin, an Implacable Enemy

God's warning to Cain in Genesis 4:7 adds another reality regarding sin's menacing presence: "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." In all its forms, sin is marked as mankind's enemy. It must be defeated to God's satisfaction for Him to accept us. If not, our relationship with Him will not be continued for eternity.

Because sin is an ever-present reality of life, it is essential that we have sufficient knowledge to recognize it before its fiery darts strike us down. This requires consistent, thoughtful study of God's Word and effort to build an awareness of its presence, enabling us to beat it to the punch, so to speak.

Overcoming sin is indeed a formidable task, but not a hopeless one. One reason why it is not hopeless, when rightly thought through, is quite encouraging. Jesus teaches in Luke 12:48:

But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

We are admonished to be alert because our enemy is at the door, stalking us as we make our way through life. However, we are also encouraged to understand that we are all judged individually. God judges everyone against the same standard, yet He judges individually according to our natural talents, gifts, dedication, faithfulness, discipline, time sacrificed, and energies exerted to overcome against what God knows we are capable of.

We stand alone, as it were, not measured against any other person. Though the ultimate standard is the holy, righteous character of the Father and Son, we are neither measured against their performance nor any other human's performance. We are not in competition against others.

Though not measured against the performance of the Father and Son, we are nonetheless urged to strive to be at one with them. They are in complete and total agreement with each other. It is to this oneness that God wants to bring us, not merely intellectually, but also in attitude and conduct. They do not sin, and imitating this sinlessness becomes our great challenge in life.

The Bible displays their standard in a multitude of word-pictures that reveal their nature and characteristics in word and deed. Just in case we have difficulty understanding clearly what sin is from the word-pictures of God's attitudes and conduct, He provides us with specific and clear statements. For instance, Romans 3:20 reads, "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." He has made it even simpler by inspiring I John 3:4 (KJV): "Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."

At its simplest, sin is a deviation from what is good and right. However, within any given context, the deviation and especially the attitude involved in the conduct are often revealed more specifically by other terms. It helps to be aware of these terms so that we can extract more knowledge and understanding.

Several Forms and Levels of Sin

The most common verbal root in Hebrew for the noun *sin* literally means “to miss, to fail, to err, or to be at fault,” and it is often translated by these terms depending upon context. It is *chata’* (*Strong’s* #2398). Job 5:24 does not involve sin, but *chata’* appears in the verse: “You shall know that your tent is in peace; you shall visit your habitation and find nothing amiss.” Here, *chata’* is translated as “amiss”: Nothing is wrong; the habitation is as it should be. *Chata’* is also used in Judges 20:16, translated as “miss.” Again, no sin is involved.

Solomon writes in Proverbs 8:36, “But he who sins against me [wisdom personified] wrongs his own soul; all those who hate me love death.” Here is a context that involves moral or ethical issues, requiring *chata’* to be translated as “sin.” The person is failing to live up to the moral or ethical standard.

Genesis 20:9 also contains it:

And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, “What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done.”

The word “offended” is translated from *chata’*, and “sin” is translated from a cognate. Abimelech charges Abraham as having missed the standard of behavior against him and his nation.

Jeremiah writes in Lamentations 5:7, “Our fathers sinned and are no more, but we bear their iniquities.” Here, the fathers missed achieving God’s standard, that is, the level of conduct He would have exhibited were He involved in the same situation as they. “Iniquities” is translated from the Hebrew *avon*, which suggests “perversity.”

Leviticus 4:2 presents us with a different situation: “If a person sins unintentionally against any of the commandments of the LORD in anything which ought not to be done, and does any of them. . . .” *Chata’* appears as “sins,” but it is modified by the Hebrew *shegagah* (*Strong’s* #7684), which means “inadvertently, unintentionally, unwittingly, or by mistake.” It can also indicate that “wandering” or “straying” is involved. These suggest weakness as the cause of missing the standard. The descriptor defines the sin more specifically, helping us to understand that God’s judgment includes more than the bare fact that a law was broken. It more clearly delineates the deviation.

David writes in Psalm 58:3-4: “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; they are like the deaf cobra that stops its ear.” Also, Ezekiel 44:10 reads, “And the Levites who went far from Me, when Israel went astray, who strayed away

from Me after their idols, they shall bear their iniquity.” In both contexts, the people sinned through ignorance, wandering, and other weaknesses. Even so, it in no way tempered the effect of them as minor. The sins wreaked destructive results, even though they were committed by simple carelessness, laziness, indifference, or not considering the end.

Another level of sin is devastating, to say the least, to the judgment of the sinner. Presumptuous sins are normally committed by those who know better but willfully commit them anyway. The Hebrew word describing these sins, *pasha’* (*Strong’s* #6588), is translated as “transgress,” “transgressions,” “transgressors,” or “transgressed” many times.

The word contains a sense of expansion, of breaking away, or of continuousness, thus leading to its meaning “to revolt or rebel.” It is translated as “transgressions” (plural) 48 times in the Old Testament, and interestingly, ten of those 48 occurrences—almost 20% of them—are in one book: Amos, which prophetically describes modern Israel.

Notice Amos 1:3: “Thus says the LORD: ‘For three transgressions [*pasha’*] of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron.’” It may be surprising to realize that God makes this charge against a Gentile nation—those who are supposedly without the law and therefore somewhat excusable. Yet He charges them with “transgressions”—rebellion. In other words, on some level, they really did know better.

God’s charge indicates a sin so bold, so vicious, so in-your-face, and so continuous in its revolting attitude that it cannot be passed over on the basis of ignorance or inadvertence. Of special note in this level of sin is its continuous nature. In other words, the sinner is not really fighting it. I Kings 12:19 says, “So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.” “In rebellion” is translated from *pasha’*, the root of *pasha’*.

Israel’s Rebellion

Amos 2:4-6 carries God’s charge against both Israel and Judah:

Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions [*pasha’*] of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept His commandments. Their lies lead them astray, lies after which their fathers walked. But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.” Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions [*pasha’*] of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals.”

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In contrast to the Gentiles, it is not so much the vicious intensity of Judah's and Israel's sins, but their continuous, revolting, grasping nature that so incenses God. In other words, the Israelitish people give every impression from their long history that they made little or no effort to stop sinning. Israel's problem is not so much an in-your-face willfulness, but a persistent, casual, hardheaded, self-centered, "I'll take care of it later" attitude.

In Romans 10:1-3, Paul describe the Israelites' problem:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

It is not so much a lack of the availability of true knowledge as it is a lackadaisical, careless, "it really does not matter all that much," "any way is as good as any other," "sin is not really all that bad" approach. It at first might seem to be a gentle form of stubbornness, but the real problem here is two major spiritual sins: pride and covetousness. In effect, Israelites are guilty of telling God that He does not know what He is talking about. As a nation, we are somewhat like teenagers who tell their parents that they are "out of it" old fogies, but it is far more serious than this.

Generally, Israelites are not a particularly violent people. However, our pride influences us, as Amos shows, to be deceitful and sneaky and to take advantage of those weaker than ourselves. We are masters of competitively seeking advantage, not for the purpose of sharing, but to get for the self. Consider Jacob's characteristics in his dealings with Esau and his father-in-law, Laban.

However, these sins are just as much deviations from God's standards as the violent and vicious sins of the Gentiles. Sin is sin is sin. God nowhere says, "This level of sin is passable"; sin will always be failure. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). The continuous nature of these *pesha'* sins strongly indicates that they will not be repented of.

A Surprising, Necessary Motivation

Sin comes in many levels of intensity. Once we begin to identify sin in us, how are we to find the motivation to overcome them? It would be convenient to be able to say some magical word like "Shazam!" and everything would be solved, but that is not the way God has designed things.

Sin must be overcome, and character in the image of God's must be created through cooperation with the Creator. It is not developed overnight. There are qualities,

mostly attitudes, generated within us that are most helpful toward accomplishing this task.

These qualities exist because God is with us in helping produce them so we can use them. One attitude is an absolute necessity because the others are the fruit of its existence, yet many Christians wrongly think that it has no part in Christianity.

The psalmist writes in Psalm 2:10-11: "Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling." David adds in Psalm 34:11, "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD." A hundred other verses say essentially the same thing: We must have the fear of God in us. Nevertheless, many persist in believing that, in Christianity, the fear of God has been replaced by love for God.

There is no doubt that God wants us to fear Him. Notice that Psalm 34:11 says that the fear of God is a quality that we must learn, indicating that we do not have this characteristic in us by nature. The fear of God, then, is different from the fears we normally have in life. Thus, it must be learned.

Fear is a powerful motivator. Our normal understanding of fear spans from being a mild apprehension or awareness of anxiety all the way to outright, bowel-moving terror. As an extreme, it creates the "fight or flight" response. Why, then, does a loving God want us to fear Him? Would He not rather want us to snuggle up to Him with no thought of fear?

Many people have that conception, but it is a mistaken one. We must not forget that God is not a man; He is *God*. He reminds us in Isaiah 55:8-9 that He does not think like a man. Yes, He wants us to love Him, but even in that love the sense of fear should always be present.

Recall that Psalm 2:11 commands, "Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling." To a Christian, fearing and rejoicing seem to be an odd couple. Paul writes in Philippians 2:12 to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Ordinarily, we associate "trembling" with fear, of being frightened. What is there to fear and tremble about in taking salvation to its conclusion?

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 says, "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." Within a Christian setting, we are much more comfortable with this command to love, yet notice verses 1-2:

Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may *fear the LORD your God* to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.

Immediately preceding and following (verse 13) His command to love Him, He also affirms that we are to fear Him. The sense of verses 1-2 is that this fear is produced *as* we keep His commandments, not before! Clearly, fear of Him and love for Him cannot be separated from our relationship with Him.

Isaiah 8:13 adds another interesting aspect. “The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.” Surely, we might think that someone as close to God as Isaiah did not need to fear Him, but here God commands Isaiah to fear him. Why? Because the fear gained within the relationship with Him always motivates movement in the right, godly direction, regardless of the intensity of life’s circumstances.

What about I John 4:17-18? Does it not contradict the assertion that our relationship with God should contain godly fear?

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

This passage does not contradict in the least, once we understand the kind of fear the apostle John is writing about. The clue to this fear appears in verse 17 in the term “boldness.” John is referring to being bold in spite of the circumstances we face from life in this world once we are converted. The love of God works in us to dispel the fear of disease, oppressions, persecution, and death, but it does not drive out the fear of God. If it did, John would be contradicting what the Bible says elsewhere about the necessity of continuing to fear God. Christianity has not replaced the fear of God with the love of God, as many wrongly believe. Instead, the two work hand in hand.

Mark 4:37-41 provides insight as to how the proper fear of God is nurtured within our relationship with Him:

And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace, be still!” And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!”

The disciples feared exceedingly! They were learning that God is not a man, and the proper level of respect was

beginning to be nurtured in them. We never become so familiar with God that we lose the edge of proper apprehension mixed with reverential awe and respect.

Psalms 130:4 provides more insight: “But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.” Notice the direct connection between being forgiven and fearing Him. We are forgiven so that we might learn to fear Him after experiencing His mercy! Does this not suggest that the fear of God is in some regards different than our normal perception of fear?

Christians: Those Who Fear God

While still pregnant with Jesus, Mary praises God in Luke 1:50, saying, “And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.” A Christian is a person upon whom God has shown mercy, and here Luke also identifies Christians as those who fear God. In Luke 18:2, 4, Jesus reveals in a parable that it is the unconverted who do not fear God. His followers fear God.

Elsewhere, the Bible identifies Christians as those who fear God. Notice Acts 9:31: “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” Later, Luke writes: “And they said, ‘Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you’ (Acts 10:22). Cornelius, a Gentile prepared for baptism, is called “one who fears God.”

Hebrews 5:7 describes Jesus’ fear of God: “. . . who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear.” Even Jesus, who knew God better than anyone who had ever walked the face of the earth, feared God. Note the special attention paid to the fact that God answered His prayers because He did.

God is holy. He is different to a level so far above mankind that those who truly know Him do not lose that apprehension and awe that comes from the privilege of being in the presence of sheer, powerfully pure holiness. Fear plays a large part in a good relationship with God.

Genesis 3:10 is the first time a form of fear appears in Scripture, and interestingly, it is in the context of sin. Adam responds to God, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” Elsewhere, the English word “fear” and its cognates appear in many contexts and forms: “feared,” “fearful,” “fearfully,” “fearfulness,” “fearing,” and “afraid.” These terms appear over 720 times in Scripture.

(continued on page 15)

The Torment

PART TWO

The life of a prophet of God is, by all accounts, a difficult and burdensome one. God's prophets have had revealed to them both insight into the nation's or world's present state of affairs *and* foresight into future events—and neither of these tend to dwell on uplifting subjects. Most of the time, prophets are forced to think about and warn of sin, societal meltdown, war, captivity, destruction, and death.

So it is that prophets like Jeremiah and Habakkuk complain to God and lament the downfall of their people. Their knowledge of life as it really is—as compared to life as God wants us to live it—makes them sensitive to their societies' frequent slippages toward the brink of catastrophe. Moreover, when they speak of God's displeasure with His people and predict impending divine judgment, the prophets often find themselves the targets of the people's hatred and persecution for pointing out their sins. Many died at the hands of their countrymen.

Realizing the burden of what it means to be a prophet of the true God makes Jonah's flight to Tarshish a bit more understandable!

Yet, in Ezekiel 9, God reveals that the prophets' sobriety and grief over the people's sins and the consequent destruction has His favor. While avenging angels are rampaging through Jerusalem and "utterly slay[ing] old and young men, maidens and little children and women" (Ezekiel 9:5-6), God directs another angel, clothed in linen and having an inkhorn at his side: "Go . . . through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it" (verse 4).

God spares those who suffer inner torment due to the rising societal evils around them. Why? What is so significant about sighing and crying over this world's abominable way of life?

REASON UNDERLIES EMOTION

Sigh, by way of definition, is *Strong's* #584, and it means "to groan," "to mourn," and "to moan." Its rather interesting first use is found in Exodus 2:23-25:

Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel *groaned* because of their bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them. (Emphasis ours throughout.)

Note from the context that our God is a covenant-keeping God. He remembers His covenant and acknowledges those who hear Him and those who sigh among His people. In the Exodus story, He moved to redeem them from their bondage in Egypt, making a distinction between them and their oppressors (Exodus 8:22; 11:7).

Cry is *Strong's* #602 (a fairly rare word, used only four times in Scripture), and it also means "to groan," but it has another meaning as well: "to shriek." This word contains a great deal of emotional meaning. It involves a person's innermost feelings.

Those of a Pentecostal persuasion might tell us that that is the end of it, that sighing and crying is just a lot of whooping and hollering, the outpouring of raw emotion. However, that is not all that it is—not in the least! For us to understand what God requires of us, it is necessary to explain the thinking, the reason, that is behind "sighing and crying." Sound *reason* underlies the emotion expressed by sighing and crying, which needs elaboration before proceeding further.

Neuroscientists used to talk about compartments in the brain. Sometimes in the popular press there is

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an occasional assertion that one section of the brain is for sight, another one for hearing, another one for mathematical skills, and yet another for artistic skills. The faculty of reason is supposed to reside in the prefrontal cortex, and emotion comes from another area. This idea is called the “localization thesis.” It is a simplistic view that has pretty much fallen by the wayside by neuroscientists who have come to know more about how our brains function. One critic of this thesis says:

. . . functions [of the brain], like properties, are distributed (they require a whole system or mechanism to be realized [or actuated]). . . . A danger inherent in the localization thesis may be illuminated by analogy to an internal combustion engine. In describing an engine, one might be tempted to say, “the opening of the intake valve is caused by the movement of the rocker arm.” Except that the rocker is, in turn, set in motion by the camshaft, the camshaft by the crankshaft, the crank by a connecting rod, the rod by the piston. But of course, the piston won’t move unless the intake valve opens to let the air-fuel mixture in. This logic is finally circular because, really, it is the *entire* mechanism that “causes” the opening of the intake valve; any less holistic view truncates the causal picture and issues in statements that are, at best, partially true. Given that the human brain is more complexly interconnected than a motor by untold orders of magnitude, it is a dubious undertaking to say that any localized organic structure [any section of the brain] is the sufficient cause and exclusive locus of something like “reason” or “emotion.” . . .

[For instance] the amygdala is said to be the seat of emotion, the prefrontal cortex of reason. Yet when I get angry, for example, I

generally do so for a *reason*; typically I judge myself or another wronged. To cleanly separate emotion from reason-giving makes a hash of human experience. . . . (Matthew B. Crawford, “The Limits of Neuro-Talk,” *The New Atlantis*, Number 19, Winter 2008, pp. 65-78)

Emotion and reason are not separate entities. They do not occur in discrete areas of the brain, and it is far better to understand them to be two sides of the same coin. One needs both sides; one cannot have a coin with a single side. It is an impossibility.

Therefore, sighing and crying are not just emotions or feelings. They are not just matters of the heart but also matters of the head. These expressed feelings have reason—thought—firmly attached to them.

EFFECTIVE SIGHING AND CRYING

With this understanding, let us look at four vital elements to effective sighing and crying before God. These are matters of the mind, matters of reason, which must underlie the very real and necessary emotions of sighing and crying.

One: Obviously, to sigh and cry over the abominations of Israel, *we have to know what sin is and what God considers abominable*. John tells us that “sin is the transgression of the law” (I John 3:4). In Romans 3:20, the apostle Paul instructs us that “by the law is the knowledge of sin.” In Romans 7:7, he reflects that he “would not have known sin except through the law.” So we must know God’s law in order to identify sin properly.

This is knowledge, pure and simple, not just emotion. Without this knowledge of the law, we would become subverted by the deceitful rudiments of this world, which are, in reality, demons. Paul writes of this in Colossians 2:8: about demonic philosophies that float around all over this world

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today, teaching, for instance, that abortion, bestiality, and gluttony are okay because they are simply personal expressions. Liberals here in the United States proclaim that they are acceptable choices! Nevertheless, by knowing God's law, we understand that they are not mere personal expressions and they are not acceptable—they are indeed sins and abominations.

The psalmist writes in Psalm 119:136, "Rivers of water run down from my eyes, because men do not keep your law." The psalmist weeps because he recognizes that people are not obeying God's law, and he can see where it leads: to ruin and death. It is not just emotion but it is real feeling connected with an understanding of God's law.

Two: To sigh and cry effectively over the sins of Israel, *we must know what those sins are*. In this particular context, this means that we need to be watching and listening attentively, just as Peter says that Lot was tormented by what he saw and heard going on around him (II Peter 2:6-8). Lot had to spend at least some of his time listening to SNN, the Sodom News Network!

We cannot sigh and cry if we are like ostriches and bury our heads in the sand. This is a type of denial. We need to be awake and aware, not slumbering and not sleeping (I Thessalonians 5:6). We need to ensure that we interpret the events that we see and hear in the news in terms of God's law, for that holy law is the standard, the benchmark, the touchstone, by which we must measure the deeds of our leadership, of our fellow citizens, and of ourselves.

Of course, awareness of sin does not imply participation in it. In one sense, we need to be like the man in the Bee Gees song, "I Started a Joke," which contains a line: "I started to cry which started the whole world laughing." The song is about an individual out of step with the world around him. He was alienated from it. We, too, are fish out of water—odd men out, as it were—and we cannot sigh and cry over the nation's sins if we are singing from the world's song sheet. To change the metaphor, we cannot march in step with this world and simultaneously sigh and cry at its sins. That simply will not work.

So, while we are *in* the world, we are not *of* it. We are spectators and not participants. Though we are watching from the sidelines, we dare not even for a moment cheer the ways of a world that is oblivious to God's law—a world that almost ubiquitously considers the law to be both odious and onerous. It is a world that is eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage (Matthew 24:38), laughing and living it up while we are crying all the time. We cannot successfully sigh and cry before God if we

are of this world, part and parcel of its sins. We must remain outside.

Have we ever considered where our commitment to God's law puts us? Liberals in the world see God as having no influence at all on their actions. They think God has gone away—they even say He is dead—so they believe that obedience to God is not important. In Ezekiel 8, that is exactly what God says is wrong with the leadership of ancient Judah! They, too, thought that God had left the scene.

But what about the conservatives? These people give lip service to the Ten Commandments. They even become exercised when the liberals remove them from courthouses. Yet, consider that, for the most part, they refuse to keep those same commandments themselves! At best, their argument with liberals over this particular issue is logically inconsistent and morally hypocritical because they do not practice what they preach. Their refusal to keep the Sabbath is a prime example. Further, some of the business practices of professing conservatives are appalling, breaking God's injunctions against lying and stealing! Not recognizing the need to keep God's law, most conservatives attend churches that preach heavy doses of salvation by grace through faith alone, saying that is all we need.

This puts true Christians right in the middle—caught between "right" and "left" on every side—trapped in a world of lawlessness on every side. There is no light in this world whatsoever. Though Paul speaks in Romans 2:14 of people "who . . . by nature do the things in the law," he does not say that they *obey* the law but merely practice things contained in it. We, however, are the only people who, by covenant, have committed ourselves to obey God's law. We are indeed odd men out who sigh and cry while the world laughs. And all that time, God remembers His covenant and acknowledges His people.

SUCCESSFUL WEEPING AND LAMENTING

Three: In order to sigh and cry successfully, *we must believe God*. This is vital! In this context, it means that we need to believe how He defines sin. For instance, we must never come to think that "weeping for Tammuz" (Ezekiel 8:13-14) is really not all that bad. God calls it an abomination! If He calls it that, that is exactly what it is, and we need to accept His definition.

To use a more contemporary example, many "good" folk in the world observe Christmas, sincerely believing that they are worshipping God. They will actually

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ready answer

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

Hating Evil, Fearing God

“The fear of the LORD
is to hate evil . . .”

—*Proverbs 8:13*

At the Feast of Tabernacles in Columbia, Missouri, my wife and I saw something that illustrates the double-mindedness of this world. Returning to the hotel after lunch one day, we pulled up to a stoplight. The first thing I noticed about the car ahead was the fake, bloody arm hanging out of the closed trunk. Gory handprints and footprints, as well as the outline of a bloody cleaver, marked the back of the car. Across the rear window, scrawled in blood-red paint, were the words “The Necropolis,” Latin for “city of the dead.” The Necropolis bills itself as “The Most Extreme Haunted House in Missouri” where “Terror never felt so good.”

This rolling advertisement for evil jarred our senses, but it was not surprising. We were, after all, in an active college town, and it was October, the silly season for Halloween. However, we were surprised when the driver, a young woman, got into the left-turn lane and turned into the College Park *Christian Academy*. While we cannot be sure that the driver actually attended the school, this scene at least gave the *appearance* that righteousness was fellowshipping with lawlessness and that Jesus Christ was in harmony with Belial.

If the driver of this depraved advertisement were, in fact, a student at the Christian Academy, she should have taken Paul’s words to heart: “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (I Thessalonians 5:22, KJV). Regardless of whether she considered herself a Christian, her public promotion of evil indicated that something critical was missing from her life. She did not have a proper fear of God, as we find in Proverbs 8:13: “The fear of the LORD is to *hate evil*. . . .”

Defining “Evil”

Proverbs 8:13 is one of the definition verses of the Bible, along with “sin is the transgression of the law” (I John 3:4, KJV) and “the love of God [is] that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (I John 5:3), among others. Here, the *fear of the Lord* is defined as “hating evil.”

In the Bible, “evil” is used in a wide variety of ways, but as we might expect, its basic meaning is simply “bad” or “negative.” It appears in both the passive and active senses. When used passively, it describes distress, misery, misfortune, calamity, or repulsiveness. Proverbs 8:13, however, does not express the passive form of evil, but the active form, which is used in two ways in the Bible. The first can be defined as “what is wrong with regard to God’s original and ongoing intent,” while the second is narrower in scope: “what is detrimental in its effects on mankind.”

People are most familiar with the second definition. When we think of evil, we typically imagine something that is purposefully injurious or intentionally unkind. It is not merely *bad* in the sense that a hurricane may be bad; it is more than merely unpleasant, but rather terrible *by someone’s design*. In this definition of evil, there is *intent* to harm—or at the very least, ambivalence toward harm done to another. Evil does not care if harm is done.

In his book, *People of the Lie*—subtitled “The Hope for Healing Human Evil”—Dr. M. Scott Peck provides a simple yet profound definition of *evil*: “that which does harm to life or liveliness.” The book is about “malignant narcissism”: self-centeredness so extreme and pervasive that those possessing it continually injure others around them, not with physical wounds, but with subtle assaults on their emotional or spiritual well-being. This evil cannot be observed directly—the malignant narcissist is a master of deception—but can be seen only in its effects on others, in subtle violence perpetrated against the human spirit in others. Even as these people are doing harm to life and liveliness, they are putting on a pretense of righteousness and piety, terrified at the thought that others might see them as they truly are or that they might actually have to face themselves.

This second way that “evil” is used in the Bible—“what is detrimental in terms of its effects on mankind,” or “that which does harm to life or liveliness”—can be quite subjective, thus the Bible also defines it as “what is wrong *according to God’s intent*.” A common description in the Old Testament is that a certain person or group “did evil in the sight of the LORD.” This description is key because the people did not consider their deeds to be evil. In their view, they were harmless acts. Nobody was getting hurt, and nothing detrimental occurred (that they could see), so they did not consider their behavior to be evil. But what they did *was* evil—in God’s sight.

Israel and Judah justified blatant idolatry and even child sacrifice by saying that they were not doing any harm, or that the harm it *might* do to the child was insignificant compared to the “greater good” that they believed would come from the sacrifice. The same justification is used for the practice of abortion today.

Israel did not consider temple prostitution to be harmful either, but in the eyes of God—the only eyes that see objectively—what they did was evil. It was evil not just in terms of going against God’s intent; it went against God’s intent *because* it was injurious to those

involved in it, even though they could not see it. In their myopic pride, they were unable to see that what they were involved in would ultimately bear horrible fruit. So God had to define right and wrong, good and evil, because man is so shortsighted that he often cannot see what will cause harm to himself or to a neighbor.

The “haunted house” mentioned above is a good example of this. Halloween is nothing short of the glorification of evil. Its roots go back to the Celtic—meaning Israelitish—festival of Samhain, who was the “lord of the dead.” It was a boiling mixture of drunkenness, revelry, licentiousness, vandalism, treachery, superstition, anarchy, and rank demonism.

Today, this festival is dressed up in a creative costume and dubbed “fun for the kids,” but its essence is the same. The world calls it “harmless fun,” but it is obvious from Scripture that it is “evil in the sight of the LORD.” The seed from which Halloween grew was paganism—really just a softer term for “demonism”—and if the seed is evil, the fruit will also be evil, even if presented in a “fun” way. Yet, the Israelitish people enjoy this annual dose of witches, vampires, and werewolves. They have no problem indulging in the occult, if only in their imaginations.

However, Proverbs 8:13 says that those who fear God instinctively and earnestly loathe those things that do harm to life and liveliness, even if the harm is not immediately apparent. The elements of Halloween, no matter what guise they are in, are contrary to eternal life with God. If we fear God—if we respect Him and what He stands for—then we also oppose all that He is against, which certainly includes anything associated with “the evil one” or his subservient “evil spirits.”

What Godly Fear Produces

But what does “the fear of the LORD” at the beginning of the verse entail? Another proverb, Proverbs 9:10, helps us to understand: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” While Proverbs 8:13 defines what the fear of the LORD *is*, Proverbs 9:10 shows what it *produces*. Understanding the effect of the fear of the LORD will help us to understand the cause.

This verse uses a Hebraism in which the two clauses are written in parallel. The “fear of the LORD” in the first clause is linked to “knowledge of the Holy One” in the second, while the “beginning of wisdom” corresponds to “understanding.” Most translations hide the fact that the Hebrew word rendered as “Holy One” is actually plural. It refers to both holy, divine Beings—the Father and the Son. We can more fully grasp this in conjunction with John 17:3, where Jesus says that knowing the Father and the Son—having personal, intimate knowledge of the Holy Ones—is eternal life.

In tying these things together, we see that the wisdom and understanding in Proverbs 9:10 are not abstract concepts but are related to eternal life. They are foundational to being able to live eternally. The

reverential awe and respect—fear—of God is what produces wisdom in making sound choices, in having good judgment, in understanding cause and effect. The fear of God makes for a good life—not just for the self, but also for everyone for all time.

James describes such “wisdom from above” as “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17). These elements produce a good life, a life of spiritual wisdom. All of them are opposites of evil, of causing harm. Godly fear causes a man to evaluate properly and to arrive at the correct conclusion about what he should or should not do. Ultimately, the fear of the LORD teaches us to live eternally—to live with the skill that the Father and the Son have in living.

Returning to Proverbs 8:13, we can see how hating evil fits into this. When we are vehemently opposed to all that does harm to life and liveliness, and our lives reflect this, we are beginning to live as God does. However, we have to put wisdom in the context of eternity. What may seem “harmless” in the short term may bear evil fruit in the long term. Unless we are able—and willing—to look as far forward as possible to see the outcome, we may not be able to see the harm.

Because of man’s fickle and shortsighted nature, God has explicitly defined what is good and evil in His law, and the evil that is defined is sin. It may not be immediately obvious to mankind that burning incense to the Queen of Heaven causes harm because mankind is shortsighted enough not to realize that he is paying homage to a worthless substitute of the true Creator, the One who gives life. Thus, God spells out that we can have no other gods (Exodus 20:3).

Mankind may not see the harm in a “little white lie” (Exodus 20:16), but the One “who inhabits eternity” knows that truth and life are inextricably linked. When falsehood enters in, so do defilement and ultimately death.

Humanity may not be aware of the harm caused by coveting (Exodus 20:17), but the One “who knows the end from the beginning” and who created the human intellect and human heart, knows that sin begins in the heart. The best way to stop sin at its source is to help mankind to guard his heart, before any sin can be produced.

Hate What God Hates

The last half of Proverbs 8:13 goes even further: “Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.” To see who is saying this, we have to back up a verse: “I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge and discretion.” Wisdom, personified here, vehemently opposes pride, arrogance, the evil way, and the perverse mouth.

An active understanding of what will produce abundant good for eternity—that is, wisdom—causes a person to hate its opposite: to despise evil and what causes it. All of the evil in the world is traced back to sin, and sin entered the world as a result of what Satan

did. Adam made the choice to sin, but Satan perpetrated evil by encouraging him in a way that ended up doing tremendous harm to life and liveliness, not only for himself, but also for every person that has come from him.

The four examples of evil in Proverbs 8:13, which *always* end up doing harm, were manifested in Satan, and all of his children continue to exhibit them (see John 8:38, 41, 44). A progression is shown: Pride and arrogance are conditions of the heart, which is where it all starts. Where there is pride in the heart, it will come out in “the evil way,” that is in *action*.

Evil also emerges in words, though it may not always be obvious. Jesus cautions in Matthew 12:34, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” When evil resides in the heart, it will be exposed in *perverse* speech, language contrary to the truth of God and to love. James 3:8 declares that “no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” He also says, “If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man” (James 3:2). We can only reach that perfection with God’s intervention and help, which, thankfully, we have.

The apostle Paul essentially says that the foundation of good works—particularly within the church of God—is humility or lowliness:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

However, if works are done with pride or arrogance, or for the sake of appearance rather than truth and righteousness, they will cause harm. They may also produce some good, but the account of the Two Trees in the Garden of Eden teaches that, in the context of eternity, a mixture of good and evil is really only evil.

In II Corinthians, Paul stresses the need for believers to separate themselves from what defiles—evil. His concluding instruction is that the fear of God is the means by which we accomplish this perfecting of holiness:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” Therefore “Come out from among them and be separate, says the LORD. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.” ‘I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,’ says the Lord Almighty.” Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all

filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (II Corinthians 6:14–7:1)

We who believe in Christ's name, who have received Him, have been given the right—the authority—to become children of God (John 1:12). If we, as Paul instructs, separate ourselves from what is unclean, we will be His sons and daughters. Children resemble their parents, and one way that we learn to resemble God is by loving the things that He loves and hating the things that He hates. God hates those things that harm the life and liveliness of His current and future children. As we grow in His image, we should also hate what is evil. That is one way that we fear and respect Him.

The more we fear and reverence the holiness of God, the more we grasp our own flaws and defilement. This, in turn, causes us to hate the evil that we find within ourselves (Matthew 5:3-4, 6) and to despise the elements of our nature that would make us miserable or that would cause misery in others if they were allowed to continue forever.

Yet, identifying those things is impossible without allowing the light of truth to shine into our lives. That light comes through knowing God and Jesus Christ. Knowing them helps us to develop the proper fear of God, and at the same time it helps us to begin to see, by contrast, what things in us cause harm to life and liveliness.

—David C. Grabbe

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say, “This is how I worship God,” but we understand that how *they* worship God does not amount to a hill of beans! Only God can define how we are to worship Him, and it is for us to follow Him and act accordingly. We need, then, not just to know the law, but also to believe that it defines sin for all time.

Some people can see sin right before their eyes, they can hear it around them, they can live amidst it, but they can never sigh and cry over it because they refuse to allow God's law to be the standard of their behavior. History is replete with examples of this, but we will look only at one. Who of the Jewish leadership—except for Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and perhaps a few others—sighed and cried over the perpetration of an illegal trial that resulted in Christ's death?

In John 16:20, where He is speaking to His disciples on the evening before His crucifixion, Jesus says, “Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.” The world, rejecting God's standards, rejoices at injustice and sin. Human nature can and does rationalize large-scale sin and social injustice, such as the Holocaust, sin that fills the land with vast violence. It can simply rationalize such atrocities on racial, economic, and religious grounds.

We in God's church must come to avoid partiality, mentioned in Leviticus 19:15, as we interpret the news and the social injustices that we see around us. After all, God did not ask Ezekiel to identify Israel's sins in his tour of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 8. God identified the sin for him, even when it was committed in secret. God calls out the sins in His Word, defining the abominations in His law, and we need to know those laws and believe that they are indeed sin. And we need to cry and sigh.

Four: Effective sighing and crying before God *does not imply an “I told you so,” self-righteous attitude.* Lot, Peter writes, was oppressed by what he witnessed around him; he wrestled with it. There is no indication at all that he self-righteously gloated at the cities' destruction.

What about Ezekiel? Understandably stunned by the destruction that he witnessed in the visions, he cried out to God, asking Him how far the judgment would go (Ezekiel 9:8; 11:13). Far from self-righteous gloating, this forward-looking prophet expressed his concern over the welfare of his countrymen. His was not a self-righteous response to the destruction that he saw coming.

Because Ezekiel asked, we know. God tells us that He does indeed spare and protect His people (see Ezekiel 11:14-21). We know that God will not destroy all Israel, but He will rescue a remnant out of which He will build a better world for our children's children. It will be a world where, as Amos 5:24 foretells, “justice [will] run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.” In that world, we will no longer need to cry and sigh over abominations.

But that will be then, and now is now. In this present evil world, let us sigh and cry over Israel's sins, praying that we use God's Word to understand exactly what those sins are. Let us remain awake and alert to what is happening around us, fully understanding what God considers to be sinful, but not participating at all in those sins. And let us not gloat in self-righteous glee in the wholesale death and destruction that we know will come, but rather pray for God's mercy and grace on all.

The days are becoming very evil, and the angel with the inhorn might just be roaming around here now. If we do these things, he might not pass us by.

—Charles Whitaker

personal *Sin, Christians, and the Fear of God*

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We tend to be uncertain about fearing God because we think of fear as a negative characteristic. We feel that we should love Him rather than fear Him. However, as we study God's Word and experience life with Him, we come to understand that, at the foundation of loving God, godly fear modifies our highly variable faith in God and love for God in significant ways.

All of those forms of "fear" express a wide range of emotions. Feelings such as dread, distress, dismay, trouble, terror, horror, alarm, awe, respect, reverence, and admiration may all appear as "fear" in Scripture. The fear that God desires in us is a good, positive, motivating quality.

This fear is one that we do not naturally possess. Recall Psalm 34:11: "Come you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD." How do we learn the fear of God? Psalm 33:8-9 gives insight: "Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." Godly fear is one of a deep and abiding respect that grows as we learn—from within a continuing, intimate relationship—of His character, His purpose, and His powers. The unconverted do not have this relationship as a sustaining presence.

In John 17:3, Jesus states an all-important piece of understanding about why our relationship with God is so important: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." The fear of God is a deep and abiding respect for His loving character and purpose. At the same time, we are also deeply concerned about His power to save. Thus, we dread losing our intimate relationship with Him by dishonoring Him in any way by our conduct and attitude. As Christians, we bear His name and greatly fear tarnishing it.

Proverbs 15:28 reads, "The heart of the righteous studies how to answer." The Hebrew word for *studies* means "to ponder, meditate, or imagine," and *to answer* means "to pay attention, respond, testify, or bear witness." As we seek Him within our intimate relationship, we gradually begin to relate Him more directly with His creation of things in the heavens and earth—and especially in His dealings with those whom He is creating in His image.

Gradually, we begin to see and appreciate the power of His vast intelligence. We begin to relate to the magnificent beauty of His handiwork as we stand in awe of the phenomenal size and grandeur of the universe He has created and of the prodigious quantity of plant and animal life on this earth. In Psalm 139:14, David exclaims, "I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." What a marvelous physical creation! When we realize more fully what He has already mercifully done for us and what He is working out in us, creating us in His image, it

is breathtaking. We gradually begin to grasp the power of His love, of His merciful forgiveness, of His healing, and of His providence.

We begin to understand His determined willingness to provide as our Savior the one Being with whom He shared life as an equal. We grow to appreciate His day-to-day upholding of everything and keeping it moving "by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). We all admire, even stand in awe, of displays of positive human qualities, such as artistry in voice or instrumental skill, in sculpture, in painting, or in writing of those gifted by Him. All of these and much more He has made and sustains, not just for His pleasure, but for ours as well.

So, how is it that the fear of God and joy are not really an odd couple? The fear of God motivates us to obey God. In turn, keeping God's commandments produces the fruit of His Spirit, one of which is joy. Further, there is a direct connection between fearing God and all of the fruit of God's Holy Spirit.

Moses writes in Exodus 15:11-13:

Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? You stretched out Your right hand; the earth swallowed them. You in Your mercy have led forth the people You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength to Your holy habitation.

Is there anybody like God? He is supreme in artistry and creative power and in every aspect of every good quality and its use that there is. So obvious is it that there is a Creator God to whom reverential awe should be given that men are without excuse (Romans 1:20). How much more should we fear Him who has called us to complete His purpose in us? His children are those who are learning and growing in these qualities through their relationship with Him.

If we are learning and growing, we should have an intense desire never to sin again so that we will be like Him. This intense desire has godly fear at its foundation, a fear that is a mixture of the entire span of terms used to describe fear: from mild apprehension even to outright terror at times. Such a one, under no circumstance, ever wants to see this relationship destroyed and lost because he has done something to bring dishonor to Him. Thus, the fear of God produces a strong and steady sense of obligation combined with an intense, humble appreciation and gratitude that One so great is paying attention to one so undeserving.

In Christian love,



The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Healing a Woman With a Flow of Blood

The healing of a woman with a flow of blood is found in three of the gospels (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48), a miracle sandwiched between two halves of another miracle, the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue. What makes the woman's healing unique is that it was performed without a word being spoken beforehand.

As it interrupted the raising of Jairus' daughter, the woman's healing was probably a test of patience for Jairus. More positively, the interruption had the potential to encourage him, helping to build the faith he had already exhibited, especially since his daughter had become much worse in the meantime. Indeed, she had died.

These two miracles are linked, not only in their parallel occurrence, but also by the number twelve, often used in the Bible to connote government. Jairus' daughter was twelve years old (Mark 5:42), and the bleeding woman had been sick for twelve years (Mark 5:25). However, both needed Christ to heal them. It does not matter how long one has been alive, salvation is always through Christ (Acts 4:10-12). Both the bleeding woman and the girl were about to see God's perfect government at work.



1. How had the flow of blood affected the woman and the Jewish community? Mark 5:25-26; Luke 8:43.

COMMENT: According to the purity laws of the Old Testament (Leviticus 15:25-27), a person with an issue of blood is to remain quarantined. Also, "Whoever touches those things shall be unclean; he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening" (verse 27).

During the poor woman's ordeal, her incurable disease had drained her, not only of her energy, but also of all her money. Her quest to find a cure from the physicians had solved nothing; in fact, she had gotten worse under their care (interestingly, in Luke's account, he—a physician—omits the phrase, "but rather grew worse"). Her condition, then, was both painful and distressing. The nature of her illness, its prolonged nature, and her fruitless reliance on physicians cost her all her money for expensive remedies, making her a hopeless case.

Nevertheless, she is a determined woman who has faith that she can find relief merely by touching Jesus. In her desperation, she displays considerable faith by risking the consequences of breaking a sacred rule in willfully coming into contact with other people.

2. What kind of faith does the woman show? Matthew 9:21; Mark 5:28; Luke 8:47.

COMMENT: The woman's genuine faith in touching Jesus' clothing is from a human standpoint, for, in reality, the power to heal is in Christ Himself (Mark 5:30-34). In touching Him, she is not thinking of His merciful and compassionate will, but of a physical healing power passing from His body to His clothing and then to the hand that touched it. She has a material conception of His healing power, a confidence that something magical flows through His clothes.

However, as physical and imperfect as the woman's faith is, Jesus does not scorn her and her limited belief. He uses His supernatural knowledge to identify with her, even though in the Jews' eyes this meant that He had contracted ritual uncleanness. Using what faith she has to glorify His

Father, He heals her by an act of His divine will, bringing her to a higher, spiritual faith. Though imperfect, her faith is essentially genuine and accepted by God because, as soon as she touches the hem of Jesus' clothes, her flow of blood dries up, and she feels her diseased body heal.

3. What is Jesus' reaction to the woman's touch? Matthew 9:22; Mark 5:30-34; Luke 8:45-48.

COMMENT: Jesus is aware of this woman's suffering and of her faith from the moment she touches Him, feeling power leave Him. He asks, "Who touched Me?" to glorify God by bringing this healing out into the open, which also identifies Him as the Healer. Although He puts the woman on the spot to confess openly what she had done, He encourages her by commending her faith. Jesus is thrilled to find faith in this Galilean crowd, since, while most in the crowd thronged Him outwardly, she connected with Him inwardly through her faith. His tender confirmation that her healing was permanent encouraged many, and the revelation that He is the One Healer who had truly made her well produced a tremendous witness.

Jesus says that her faith had made her whole, but faith has no actual healing power. Faith is a required *conduit* through which healing flows. The same holds true in our spiritual healing: "We believe [have faith] that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved" (Acts 15:11).

His command, "Go in peace!" (Mark 5:34; Luke 8:48), literally means "Go *into* peace." In other words, Jesus is instructing her to be thankful for her body's healing, but as she moved forward, she would enter into the peace that He had come to impart to all those who trusted in Him.

The restoration of an individual from sin to spiritual health parallels this woman's physical healing. In the same way, sinners cannot purchase the healing of their sinfulness. Christ alone can deal with our corrupt condition and fully and instantaneously restore us by His sacrificial death. Just as this woman's healing is freely given in response to her faith, so does God extend grace to those who believe Him.

—Martin G. Collins