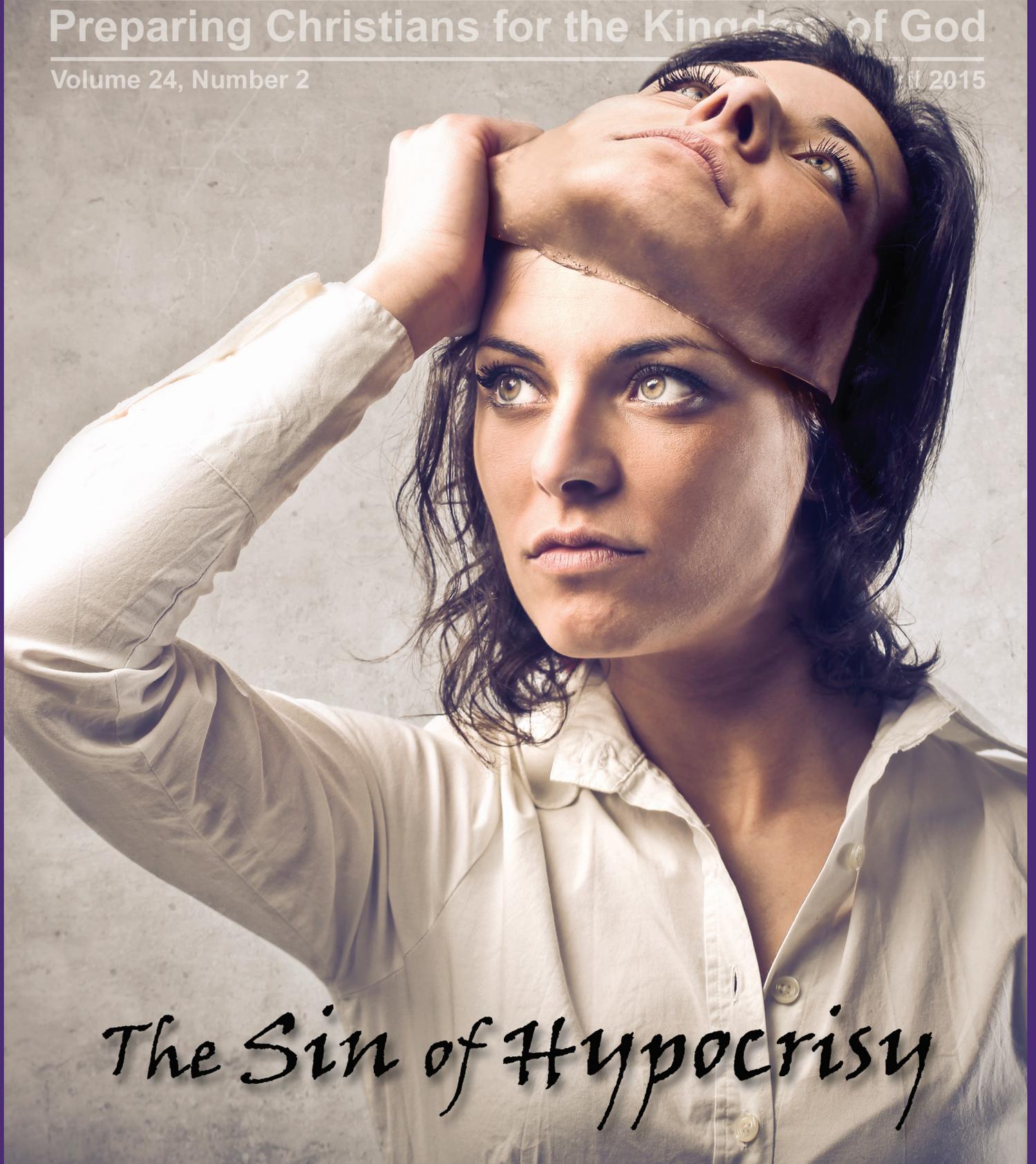


Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 24, Number 2

April 2015



The Sin of Hypocrisy

March-April 2015

Volume 24, Number 2

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No one wants to be called "two-faced," but we cannot deny that we have all played the hypocrite from time to time. Whether we have professed one thing and done another or pretended to be something we are not. Hypocrisy is a serious spiritual sin that springs from pride and fear, and corrupts good character. Well does Scripture exhort us to beware hypocrisy.

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This free publication is made possible through the voluntary tithes and offerings of its subscribers and members of the Church of the Great God. All American and Canadian donations are tax-deductible.

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Ecclesiastes and Christian Living

Part Twelve: Paradox, Continued

Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 7:15-18:

I have seen all things in my days of vanity: There is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself? Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time? It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all.

I have never spent so much time attempting to acquire a clearer understanding of so few verses as I have on this paradox. I do not regret it in the least because Solomon's seemingly simple observation in verse 15 states a potentially serious challenge to the converted. As mentioned in a previous article, Ecclesiastes 7 may be the most controversial chapter of the entire book because Solomon says so many confounding things within it. In addition, people have such varied opinions about what he meant. Verses 15-18 may be the most confounding of all.

The paradox of verse 15 is a head-scratching statement. The paradox itself is clear. It simply

describes a “why are these things happening to me?” circumstance. Part of the problem that arises is that, in the context, Solomon gives no specific answers to the dangers posed. He cautions us about the paradox in verses 16 and 17, but then another question arises: What is the danger or dangers? My purpose, especially as we begin, is to warn against misjudging the seriousness of the issues of verse 15.

Psalm 73 helps to provide some explanation because it presents an event in the life of a godly man that is an almost perfect fit for expanding our understanding of the paradox. Psalm 73 explores the seriousness of the challenge of discontent combined with envy. If left unresolved, both of those reactions are dangerous. The issue in Psalm 73 is not merely a passing trial, as it calls into question God's sense of justice, and the psalmist himself expresses that it was to him a serious situation—so much so that he says his foot almost slipped. As we would say today, he almost left the church.

We also know that the psalmist did the right things in order to receive a solution. Overall, he not only endured it, he actively endured it through prayer. He was not just passively enduring a confounding and confusing thought pattern. The

psalmist reports that he went into the sanctuary and prayed in faith. God solved the problem.

However, Psalm 73 still does not answer why Solomon cautions his readers so sternly regarding the paradox's spiritual dangers. He goes so far as to ask, "Why should you die?" indicating that he perceived the paradox as a serious challenge. He did not mean why should one die at this moment, but rather, why should one die *spiritually*, that is, having lost one's opportunity to be in the Kingdom of God. Since Solomon does not give much help right in context, we must look elsewhere within the Bible for answers.

Misjudging God and the Paradox

The authors of *The Preacher's Homiletic Commentary*, p. 109, catch the essence of the paradox's seriousness to a righteous person. In a rather long analysis of Ecclesiastes 7:17-18, it states

This is not a caution against aiming at the highest excellence in goodness or wisdom, for these are the proper objects of a righteous ambition. It is rather a caution against the conduct of those who presume to find fault with the methods of God's dealings with men, as if they could devise and conduct a more satisfactory scheme. This is the most daring form of human arrogance.

The comment warns against the probability that, after first misjudging God's part in the trial, the righteous person will foolishly act on his misjudgment and begin producing its bad fruit. Thus, his second misjudgment is that he will actively attempt to impress God by means of his works.

Three comments drawn from *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes* by Sidney Greidanus, p. 189-191, are helpful to show the seriousness of turning to super-righteousness to solve the paradox:

Choon Leong Seow states: "Becoming overly righteous is the hubris that one must avoid. That attitude is the very opposite of the fear of God." Becoming over-righteous is a flaunting rebellion against God's will because, in this case, hubris is not merely a normal, carnal pride but excessive, defiant pride. Why? God has willed that He will save men by His grace. Exhibiting hubris through super-righteousness is saying to God, "I will force You to save me by dint of my works."

Another commentator, Michael V. Fox comments, "Straining for perfection is presumptuous, a refusal to accept human limitations." Note the humility of the apostle Paul in contrast to this presumptuous hubris: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; I labored more abundantly than they all. Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (I Corinthians 15:10). Paul humbly accepted his limitations, taking no credit whatever.

Commentator William P. Brown remarks, "A life ob-

essed with righteousness, in fact, blinds a person to his or her own sinfulness." His comment is bluntly insightful in terms of the trap within super-righteousness: The super-righteous person is so blinded by his conceited efforts that he does not see that his focus is completely on himself.

Each of these comments is a caution not to overlook the serious consequences of misjudging God and the trial. Those quotations isolate the danger: a possible mistaken judgment of the circumstance followed by an unthinking reaction to the spiritual and emotional suffering the righteous person is experiencing, emphasizing his own works. Any normal Christian would desire to end his suffering; it is only reasonable. To resolve to do better is also good, but Solomon's cautions suggest concern for a reaction that will produce bad fruit that are a threat to a person's salvation.

We know from Psalm 73 that the psalmist reacted correctly:

If I had said, "I will speak thus," behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children. When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me—until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, so, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. (Psalm 73:15-24)

Putting the picture together correctly, we can grasp the thread of the psalmist's thoughts as his trial proceeded. The psalmist was in grave spiritual danger of misjudging his suffering as punishment for sin. In reality, he was harshly judging God, accusing Him of unfairly overdoing a painful correction. Is it even possible to find God being unjust? Earlier in the psalm, the psalmist was indeed guilty of a sin: He clearly perceived his envy of the wicked. However, his grasp of the real problem was late in coming: that he was filled with fear and lacked faith that God was truly always with him, overseeing his life, his best interests, and therefore his spiritual development.

His lack of faith and its resulting fear drove his envy, twisting his mind into perceiving the wicked as better off. The issue clarified when he went into the sanctuary and began to see through prayer that God was fully justified and not picking on him unfairly. By the term "sanctuary," he may have literally meant the Tabernacle or Temple, but we can understand that it does not have to be a literal building but a place of private prayer in communion with God where He enabled him to think correctly. Verses 21-24 clarify this.

Thus, the psalmist immediately began a four-step program:

1. He continued on by faith, enduring the suffering.
2. He prayed fervently for God's solution to take effect.
3. He firmly rejected any attempt to solve the problem on the basis of his own spiritual righteousness.
4. He was thoughtfully careful that he did not misjudge his circumstances any further.

The truth expressed in II Timothy 1:6-7 is helpful. "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." God's gift of His Spirit enables us to confront our fears and make sound spiritual judgments in alignment with His will. It leads us to understand that, once we are called and converted, these trials, though sometimes very difficult, are rarely punishments. They are exercises in learning good judgment regarding faith, love, and fear. If one misjudges in the manner of the paradox and therefore reacts wrongly, the effect could lead to one of two possible spiritual extremes. Thus, Solomon gives his cautions.

Perhaps these possible alternatives can be illustrated this way: Imagine a horizontal line drawn across a blank sheet of paper. Both the beginning of the line on the left and the end of the line on the right represent extreme reactions as well as the results produced should a person make wrong choices within the trial.

One can react radically to the left, becoming completely liberal, by choosing simply to give up. The result would be spiritual death. The other extreme reaction would be to choose to turn sharply right, becoming righteous over much, and the bad fruit also produces spiritual death.

Why? Because either extreme is rebellion against God's grace. The psalmist neither gave up nor attempted to become super-righteous so that God would be impressed and owe him the blessing of relieving the pressures of his suffering. He chose a path right down the middle, to trust God.

Turning to the right to become over-righteous is the choice we should be more concerned about. Why? Because most of the truly converted will not simply give up. They may become weary and confused, but they will not walk away from God's mercy.

Envy of the Unconverted

Let us begin evaluating the envy of unconverted people as illustrated in Psalm 73. To aid us in not growing envious of the unconverted, it is helpful to remember a small number of things to help us judge the circumstances, and we will see that these factors add up to them being in a precarious spiritual position. Why should we envy them in their precariousness?

Romans 1:18-20 describes the position any given un-

converted person is in because of his failure to repent.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them, for since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

The unconverted are most definitely being held accountable by God. They are not escaping judgment; they are not being given a "free pass" on their sins simply because they are unconverted. Therefore, their poor choices have the potential to eliminate them from conversion and eternity. The converted must not misjudge unconverted people's apparent ease in living without faith and the fear of God. Their lives are not as contented as they might seem to the casual observer.

Based on Romans 1:18-20 their position is insecure, to say the least, so we will quickly evaluate their position realistically:

First, the wicked are making choices, but with neither faith nor God's grace guiding them, and God is judging them. Second, they are making those choices without a relationship with God to access in their times of need. Third, we know full well God is not giving them an unlimited get-out-of-jail-free card just because they are unconverted. Our conclusion has to be that we converted people have tremendous advantages over them because of our calling. There is no valid reason for envying the unconverted.

Understand that a deep trial sometimes requires us to repent and change our ways and thinking. The danger, the reason the cautions are given, lies in being lured into thinking, by our resolve to be righteous, that God owes us something because we do a few good works. If we yield to that temptation, the trial becomes a major danger.

A simple but important question needs to be answered: Do we truly grasp—have we thoroughly thought through—the fact that God owes us *nothing*, absolutely nothing, zero, zilch, nada? Yet, we owe Him *everything*—from life itself to every breath of air we breathe, to the knowledge we have of Him and His purpose, to forgiveness and the gift of His Spirit. Everything!

This is where the knowledge of John 17:3—"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent"—comes to our aid. Knowing God becomes especially important because intimate knowledge of Him is the very thing our carnality does not want to achieve. Our carnality fears knowing Him and draws back from it to avoid becoming dependent on Him. Thus, Romans 8:7 warns us that our nature looks upon God as the enemy; it fears being beholden to Him. Our carnality is nothing more than a remnant of the spirit of Satan's world in us. It is a spirit of self-centeredness that always wants to hold some of itself back in order to preserve its independence.

A Sharp Turn to the Right

What can happen if a person chooses to make a sharp turn to the right, an attempt at super-righteousness? Just like everything else concerning spirituality, Satan has his counterfeit. In this world, super-righteousness as a solution may appear attractive to certain personality types. Consider Colossians 2:18-22:

Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—do not touch, do not taste, do not handle, which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men?

The key to grasping this austere regimen lies in the phrase “basic principles of the world” (verse 20; “rudiments” in the KJV). The subject of Paul’s teaching does not involve God’s laws at all but worldly, pagan teachings that involve asceticism and demon worship. A “rudiment” is a basic, elementary principle or act of worship, and these rudiments are drawn from the world. These ascetic practices have nothing to do with God’s true religion. Verse 22 confirms this when Paul writes that these regulations are the decrees and teachings of men, not God.

Paul’s counsel on the extreme disciplines of the super-righteous, such as those practiced in the world by ascetics, is that they produce a puffed-up mind—pride, a haughty spirit—rather than humble obedience that truly impresses God, such as that praised so highly in Isaiah 66:1-2:

“Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,” says the LORD. “But on this one will I look; on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

In no way is the apostle teaching that we must not discipline ourselves to live balanced lives within God’s laws to avoid sin. The super-righteousness Solomon cautions us against would include conduct similar to what Paul is telling us about here.

There are people in this world who are deeply and sincerely religious but not because of conversion. They are prone to do extreme things like virtually imprisoning themselves, living in all-male or all-female religious compounds, and spending their entire lives in prayer and study.

Yet where is the generous giving of their lives in service to fellow man? Such are those who will crawl from bottomland to mountaintop on hands and knees out of dedication to their god. They will permit themselves to be nailed to a cross and displayed in a parade through town on a holy day dedicated to that town’s patron saint.

Consider what the Catholic Church does by forcing their ministry to remain unmarried because they think it is a holier state and impresses God. But look also at all the sexual molestation cases it has produced. Does celibacy produce good fruit?

Romans 12:3-13 provides us with a profound list of services God desires of us:

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly that he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one, body, but the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them; if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

A Brief Look at Pharisaism

We need to be as clear as we can be about what the paradoxical situation has the potential to produce in a person’s life if it goes unrecognized and is allowed full freedom to take over and produce its fruits without resistance. The following is a worst-case scenario. Not everybody will end up this badly, but the potential exists, which is why God gives the warnings about its dangers. It tends to focus the individual entirely upon himself.

Paul writes in Acts 26:4-5:

My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

The key phrase for our purposes here is “the strictest
(continued on page 13)

Why Was Jesus Not Crucified as Passover Began?

*“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, . . .
and yielded up His spirit.”*

—Matthew 27:46, 50

Part Two

Jesus Christ kept His final Passover with His disciples the night before He suffered. He set the example for us of when and how to keep it “in remembrance of [Him],” and Paul underscores Christ’s instruction with the summary that “as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (I Corinthians 11:26).

However, Jesus, our Passover (I Corinthians 5:7), did not die until much later, near the end of the 14th day of the first month. Since His death did not occur when we might expect—at the beginning of the 14th—what is the significance of the day and hour that God chose for the crucifixion to happen? When something as earth-shattering as the death of God in the flesh takes place at a unique time, we want to be sure we understand what He is telling us!

“The Very Same Day”

The account of Israel’s exodus from Egypt provides a clue to the significance of the afternoon of the 14th:

Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night of solemn observance to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. (Exodus 12:40-42)

The Israelites had killed the lambs after sunset on the 14th, smearing the blood on the doorposts of their houses. They then roasted and ate the lambs, burning the remains. At midnight the Death Angel passed over, slaying the firstborn of those not under the blood. The Israelites remained in their houses until daybreak, after which they finished spoiling the Egyptians, then all 2-3 million of them traveled to Goshen. Numbers 33:3 records

Ready Answer

Why Was Jesus Not Crucified as Passover Began?

that they departed Rameses on the 15th day—“the day after the Passover”—and Deuteronomy 16:1 verifies that they left at night.

The Exodus, then, began at night, as Abib/Nisan 15 began. This “night of solemn observance” is the “very same day” or the “self-same day” (King James Version [KJV]) as an event that happened 430 years before—to the exact day. That prior event is the initial covenant God made with Abraham:

Then He said to him, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.” And he said, “Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?” So He said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. . . .

Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. . . .

And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram. . . . (Genesis 15:7-10, 12-14, 17-18)

In verse 13, God’s states that Abraham’s descendants would be enslaved for 400-some years, then they would be delivered. This is that “very same day” to which Exodus 12:41-42 refers—the beginning of the 15th day, just after sunset. Genesis 14-15 contains time markers that help us line up these events with the Passover and Exodus from Egypt, as well as the Passover and crucifixion in the New Testament:

- “Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; [H]e was the priest of God Most High” (Genesis 14:18). This corresponds with Jesus’ Passover observance with bread and wine, which took place at the beginning of the 14th.
- “Then He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be’” (Genesis 15:5). Abraham is outside and viewing the stars. The time has progressed to full dark on the 14th.

- The sacrificial activities described in Genesis 15:9-11 indicate the arrival of the daylight portion of Abib 14; it was light enough to make sacrifices. This method of making a covenant symbolizes that, if the terms were not met, the transgressor must be cut in half, just like the animals (see Jeremiah 34:18-20).
- “Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him” (Genesis 15:12). The sun begins to go down as soon as noon has passed, so this verse could indicate any time in the afternoon or early evening.
- “And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces” (Genesis 15:17). The sun has set and Abib 15 has begun. The symbol of a burning lamp is linked with the salvation of God’s people (Isaiah 62:1) and describes the eyes of God (Daniel 10:6). In addition, when God descended on Mount Sinai in fire, its “smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace” (Exodus 19:18). Through these symbols, God is seen confirming His covenant to Abraham by passing through the middle of the sacrificed animals.

What happened during the daylight portion of the 14th in Abraham’s day was a conversation about inheriting the land, then Abraham divided and arranged the animals at God’s command in preparation for the covenant. Thus, the timing of Christ’s crucifixion on the afternoon of Abib 14 points to something centuries before the Passover in Egypt—to the promises God made to the father of the faithful and to the preparations made for their covenant.

Spiritual Promises

God makes this covenant in response to Abraham’s question about inheriting the land. Yet, what is at stake is far greater than it first appears. Up to this point, God had already made promises about the land on three separate occasions, promises that included much more than just a geographic location with boundaries. When Abraham asks about the land, then, it is a simple way of referring to all that God had previously promised. If the Creator God was willing to swear to His own destruction with regard to the land, we can be sure He will fulfill everything else, too! To grasp the significance of this covenant, then, we must see what God had promised along with the land:

Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families [or nations] of the earth shall be

blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3; our emphasis throughout)

God tells him to head toward a different land, which is linked with Abraham becoming a great nation. We usually interpret this as meaning a vast number of physical descendants, and God has certainly fulfilled that, considering the teeming populations of his offspring. However, the real meaning of being Abraham’s children has to do with those who have the faith of Abraham (Galatians 3:7).

The Jews boasted that Abraham was their father, yet they were concerned only with physical lineage. Jesus told the priests and Pharisees that the kingdom would be taken from them and “given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Matthew 21:43). That nation is defined, not by a physical bloodline, but by a certain faith and a different spirit. Peter calls those with the faith of Abraham “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a *holy nation*, His own special people” (I Peter 2:9).

Genesis 12:3 says that in Abraham “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Paul explains this promise in Galatians 3:8: “And the Scripture, foreseeing that *God would justify the Gentiles by faith*, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘*In you all the nations shall be blessed.*’” From the Genesis 12:3 promise, Paul derives the idea that justification by faith would become available. In addition to foretelling a spiritual nation, God’s promise of the land also suggests many being brought into alignment with God’s standard of righteousness based on belief in Him.

Genesis 13:14-15 contains another promise involving the land:

And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.”

This is a direct promise of not only Abraham’s children’s owning of the land, but also of Abraham’s *personal* ownership of it. Yet the only land he ever owned was Sarah’s burial plot—certainly not all the land he could see! For him to receive this promise, and for him to receive it “forever,” means that he and his descendants will live forever.

Now eternal life has entered the picture. Eternal life includes a spirit body that will not decay and a nature that is appropriate or fitting for endless life, one that is sinless and not continually incurring the death penalty. Only in the resurrection of the dead at Christ’s return will the called of God—including Abraham—be raised incorruptible and given immortality, such that death is swallowed up in victory (see I Corinthians 15:42-54). Then, Abraham and his spiritual descendants will inherit the Promised Land, retaining it forever.

The Faith of Abraham

Romans 4:13 expounds on the promise of the land: “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.” God’s promise to Abraham was not based on perfect obedience to the law, but on the imputed righteousness that comes by faith, which happened when Abraham “believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). This took place well before the covenant of circumcision (Genesis 17:1-14). Abraham’s faith *produced* good works, as true faith always will; in Genesis 26:5, God says, “Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.” But his righteousness in God’s eyes was shown in his belief in God’s faithfulness, not in anything he did or did not do.

Clearly, God’s promise of the land to Abraham goes far beyond physical inheritance—it is, rather, an eternal inheritance, bestowed on those who have become his spiritual descendants through receiving the faith of Abraham. The patriarch, though, was among those who “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them” (Hebrews 11:13). So significant are these promises that God confirmed them with a covenant that condemned Him to destruction if He failed to fulfill the terms. Not only that, the timing of Christ’s sacrifice coincided with the preparations for God’s covenant with Abraham, for it is His sacrifice that allows us—Abraham’s spiritual seed, his “great nation”—to begin to receive these promises.

Hebrews 9:15-17 speaks of the “eternal inheritance” in the context of the comparing the Old and New Covenants:

And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant [with Israel], that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.

“The promise of the eternal inheritance” harkens back to the inheritance that God promised to Abraham, of which we become heirs through having the same faith as Abraham. It includes justification by faith, being part of a spiritual nation, and eternal life. As Paul writes in Galatians 3:29, “if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Gilbert Wakefield offers an alternative translation of Hebrews 9:16-17 that brings out an important detail:

For where a covenant is, there must be necessarily introduced the death of that which establishe[s] the covenant; because a covenant is confirmed over dead things, and is of no force at all whil[e] that which establishe[s] the covenant is alive.

Similarly, *Young’s Literal Translation* finds a commonality between the two covenants by using the term “covenant-victim” rather than “testator”:

(continued on page 15)

What Is Joel 2 REALLY ABOUT?

During a telephone conversation with an old friend, prophecy featured as a major topic. My friend brought up the subject of a list he had made of the prophetic events for which we should be watching. People who have been in the church for decades believe that, because of all the sermons and articles they have heard and read over the years, they have the future timeline of prophecy nailed down. What has been preached as speculation has, in the minds of many, become dogma.

A few days after the phone call, my Bible opened to the second chapter of Joel. As many know well—especially because of the fact that we sing about it from our hymnal—this chapter describes an army attacking, running upon the walls and climbing in, even leaping through, the windows. Clouds and darkness cover the sky, the very earth quakes, trumpets blare, and flames blaze all around. It is a thoroughly unsettling account of a people totally unable to defend themselves against an overwhelming onslaught!

Because of the mention of trumpets and the timing of “the day of the LORD” (Joel 2:1), we frequently read these verses (or sing them) on or around the Feast of Trumpets. However, they often go unexplained—or at least they are not shown to be describing what they are literally about. We think we are reading about a mighty, nearly invincible army attacking a defenseless people pale with fear and suffering many agonies (verse 6). In literal terms, though, we are wrong.

A STRONG, IMPLACABLE NATION

The book of Joel is a prophecy divided into three chapters. The prophet begins by describing an event so singularly extreme that it has never happened before, one that demands to be related to succeeding generations, as it will never occur again. It is a warning to the people about the dangers of turning from God.

What Joel describes is an attack by invading swarms of locusts. The assault almost seems coordinated: “What the

chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten” (verse 4). As he goes on to relate, the devastation has been so complete that nothing is forthcoming: There will be no new wine, no figs, no wheat, no barley, no pomegranates, no dates, no apples—not even anything that could be used to make an offering to God (verse 9).

So, in verse 14, the prophet urges the people to sanctify themselves, fast, and gather together to beseech the Eternal for mercy, for conditions are dire.

Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seed shrivels under the clods. Storehouses are in shambles. Barns are broken down, for the grain has withered. How the animals groan! The herds of cattle are restless, because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep suffer punishment. O LORD, to You I cry out; for fire has devoured the open pastures, and a flame has burned all the trees of the field. The beasts of the field also cry out to You, for the water brooks are dried up. And fire has devoured the open pastures. (Joel 1:16-20)

Joel captures the depth of the dearth, devastation, and the urgency of the moment. This is what a day of judgment from the Lord looks like: scarcity, destruction, pain, wailing, fire, and drought. Death cannot be far behind. Only a return to God and His subsequent compassion can fix such a dire situation.

Before we move on, we should consider the drought the prophet mentions. Droughts do not come and go quickly. It takes time to dry up the rivers and streams. Judea had probably fallen on hard times caused by drought for an extended period before the army of locusts attacked. Indeed, in areas like Africa that are periodically subject to being overrun by locusts, there is invariably at least a

year-long drought prior to the land being covered by uncountable millions of locusts. If the drought is part of God's punishment on an apostatizing people, their backsliding had been ongoing for a good while.

To make a nearly impossible agricultural situation even more difficult, Joel announces that a "nation" (Joel 1:6) has come upon his land, and its population is "strong, and without number." The nation of which he speaks, as we have seen, is not made up of humans but of locusts. God says, "[That nation] has laid waste My vine, and ruined My fig tree. He has stripped it bare and thrown it away; its branches are made white" (verse 7).

AN ARMY OF INSECT SOLDIERS

Joel 2 is a more complete description of this nation of insects that has overrun Judea, describing the individual soldiers and their actions. We must read these verses carefully to notice that he is describing the locusts metaphorically to raise the reader's emotional response.

Joel 2:4 says they have "the appearance of horsemen"; they do not actually look like horses or *have* horses, but they run as horses do, headlong and swiftly. This is also a reference to their warlike activity, since the Bible connects horses with war (see Proverbs 21:31). This exact comparison is made in Revelation 9:7, part of the description of the fifth trumpet plague: "The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle."

Verse 5 describes their assault as so exceedingly massive and heavy that the beating of their wings sounds like chariots on the move. Two verses later, Joel depicts their rush toward their prey, writing that they run "like mighty men, . . . every one marches in formation," up and over the walls. Nothing stops or hinders them. They are a determined, unstoppable force.

In the King James Version, verse 8 reads, ". . . when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded." The translators of *The Amplified Version* seem to have a better grasp of the situation, rendering this as, "And they burst through and upon the weapons, yet they are not wounded and do not change their course." Locusts certainly would not be hurt by landing on a sword, and trying to kill millions of them with ordinary hand weapons would be a futile endeavor indeed.

The following verse shows them in firm control of every part of the city, running wherever they please. They climb into houses through the windows and any other opening, covering the walls and roofs, part of the living quarters at the time. No soldier with actual weapons at the ready would try to climb through a window if a doorway were readily available! Going in through a window would be an awkward and dangerous way of entering a building. But for locusts, such an entry would be natural.

Finally, in Joel 2:11, God takes responsibility for this "nation" of insect soldiers on the march: "The LORD gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it?" He repeats His ownership of this army in verse 25, calling it once again "My great army which I sent among you."

He sent it as punishment for sin and breaking the covenant, and the locusts did their jobs with brutal efficiency.

What happened to God's vast army of locusts? Joel 2:20 speaks primarily of the future human fulfillment of this, describing a "northern army" removed into a barren, uninhabited area between the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, where its soldiers will die and rot with a great stench. Perhaps a similar thing happened to the horde of locusts.

A PERIOD OF RESTORATION

Joel does not record how many died as a result of this catastrophe, but it must have been significant. Because there are no crops with which to feed those left alive, God must send them "grain and new wine and oil" (verse 19). Unless He sent a miracle that caused the crops to rise up and mature overnight, as He did to the gourd that provided shade for Jonah (Jonah 4:6), it would have to be in the form of humanitarian aid from other nations. Without such an extraordinary miracle, several years must pass before the agricultural cycle returns to normal productivity.

In verse 22, the pastures are restored, as are the fruit and fig trees and grape vines. We could expect that the wheat and barley harvests would soon resume. Again, without an absolutely stunning miracle, the restoration of these crops takes time. When fruit trees have had their bark removed and eaten by locusts, those trees are dead and need to be replaced.

After fruit trees are replanted, its fruit cannot be eaten until the fifth year, as Leviticus 19:23-25 commands:

When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to the LORD. And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I am the LORD your God.

So the fruit trees could not be counted on to help relieve the famine.

Nevertheless, eventually, the productivity of the land returns to normal. The former and the latter rains water the earth on schedule (Joel 2:23), a sign of God's faithfulness to His people and the covenant. Wheat fills the threshing floors (meaning that a bumper crop was harvested), and vats of new wine and oil overflow (verse 24). Actually, it appears as if conditions were improved to better than normal, with peace ample food and the resulting joy and gladness!

A FUTURE FULFILLMENT

As one reads Joel, it is important to catch the changes in verb tense and in chronology. The first chapter describes a historical locust plague, one of such magnitude that the prophet sees it as a punishment from God and urges the people to fast and repent before God. Chapter 2 moves on to God's army of locusts, speaking of them in the present tense. It is easy to see the depictions of the locust plague as the testimony of a person who actually witnessed the

Prophecy Watch

What Is Joel 2 Really About?

calamity. The description is immediately followed by another call to repent from God Himself (Joel 2:12-17).

Then, in verse 18, the tense of the verb changes from present to future tense. This is significant because it signals that the locust plague of chapters 1 and 2 is a type of something similar in the end time. The language changes slightly to describe the future fulfillment, and the reader has to understand that it applies only in type to the historical fulfillment. By the time we read the end of Joel 2, the focus is primarily on the future event. In fact, the locust plague of ancient Judah is almost entirely forgotten.

We can see this in verses 26-29. In the first two of those verses, Joel writes about the post-restoration people of God: “My people shall never be put to shame.” This cannot be true of the ancient Jews, who have repeatedly been put to shame down through the centuries. The history of the Jews has been a litany of distrust, accusation, oppression, exile, exclusion, and even holocaust. Clearly, Joel is looking far into the future. Verses 28-29 confirm this:

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My spirit in those days.

God will pour out His Spirit upon the people to such an extent that seemingly everyone will be prophesying, dreaming, or seeing visions. This did not happen anciently to Judah, though it did occur in a more limited way on Pentecost after Jesus Christ died (Acts 2). This is speaking about the conversion of many people, and by their conversion through the receipt of God’s Spirit, they become “His people.”

As a matter of speculation, there is a way of looking at the timing of the end-time fulfillment as a literal locust plague before the Great Tribulation. For instance, the several years it takes for grape vines and fruit and olive trees to mature and produce in abundance could indicate that the Tribulation is at least several years off when the locust invasion strikes. Then come the “wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD” (Joel 2:30-31). These signs (the sixth seal; Revelation 6:12-17; Luke 21:11) are the precursors to the great day of God’s wrath.

The last verse, Joel 2:32, is most interesting, as it points out that those who call upon the Lord shall be delivered and saved. Here is how James Moffatt translates it: “But every worshipper of the Eternal shall be saved, for Sion hill shall hold those who escape, as the Eternal has declared, and the fugitives whom the Eternal calls shall be inside Jerusalem.” *The Amplified Bible* renders it: “And

whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered and saved, for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the remnant [of survivors] shall be those whom the Lord calls.”

Who are those fugitives who escape and from what are they running? Who are those whom the Eternal calls? Revelation 12:15-17 prophesies of a remnant of commandment keepers, presumably the church, fleeing from a flood of Satan’s persecution. In fleeing, where did they go? In this speculative scenario, they go to Jerusalem before the army of locusts attacks and perhaps before the drought takes hold. They are in Jerusalem during that catastrophe where, apparently, there is food and water.

These church members could be the fugitives and those whom God calls. However, at this point their refuge is not what we call the Place of Safety, as the Tribulation has not yet begun. Those who are at the time in Judea, which includes Jerusalem, are later warned to run for the protection to be found in the mountains just as the Tribulation commences (Matthew 24:16-20).

Keeping in mind that Scripture was not written to the world at large, but to the few who have been called, it is not a great leap of faith to realize that these people delivered at Jerusalem are true Christians who flee from Satan’s “flood.” The same group is warned to flee Judea to a safe place in the nearby mountains.

NO REPENTANCE

If this speculative scenario is correct, it brings up an interesting question. One would think that, with all that the Lord will restore to Judah after the devastation visited upon them by the drought and locusts, every one of them would return to the worship of God. Do the Jews repent? Unfortunately, that is not what transpires.

In the prophecy, the flow of events continues straight into Joel 3. Consider Moffatt’s translation of verses 1-2: “For in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, then I will gather all nations and bring them down into the Judgment Valley. . . .” The prophet Zechariah foretells of something similar: “For I will gather all nations to battle against Jerusalem. . . . Half of the city shall go into captivity. . . .” (Zechariah 14:2). It does not make sense that God would have allowed Jerusalem to be attacked and taken if the nation had repented and returned to worshipping Him.

So, the modern Jews who are delivered from famine and destruction from the mighty locust army, who have their fortunes restored by God’s perhaps miraculous blessing, fail to turn back to God in any meaningful way. God, then, is forced to act in judgment again, this time, with even greater devastation and death.

This prophecy of Joel 3:2 and Zechariah 14:2—gathering the nations to war against Jerusalem—could not have taken place before the 1967 Six Day War, as it was not a “whole city” of which a half could be taken. A portion of

Jerusalem had been captured 19 years earlier by Jordan, and no Jew was allowed in that part of the occupied city. There was no freedom of religion; only Islam was allowed. After 1967, it was reunited and administered wholly by the State of Israel. It is now an entire city of which half can be sent into captivity.

Jesus, in Matthew 24:15-16, 21, reveals what will spur the flight of God's people from Jerusalem:

“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. . . . For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.”

This is when the church is taken from Jerusalem to a Place of Safety. There, it is promised, she will be protected and “nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent” (Revelation 12:14).

If we surmised time was short a few years ago, we must be on the very cusp of turbulent events soon to assail God's church and His saints. We *must* be diligent in stepping up our efforts at securing our salvation, at being counted worthy of divine help during these uncertain times of peril and upheaval to come. The words of Jesus in Luke 21:36 should remain constantly in mind: “From hour to hour keep awake, praying that you may succeed in escaping all these dangers to come and in standing before the Son of man” (Moffatt).

—Mike Fuhrer

Personal

Ecclesiastes and Christian Living

(continued from page 6)

sect of our religion.” The history of the Pharisees shows that they had thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that would fit well under the definition of super-righteousness. In fact, they established and built the Pharisees into what they were at the time of Christ.

Super-righteousness is a beginning step into Pharisaism, and we know well the relationship Jesus had with them, those who “strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.” Is it wisdom to become like the Pharisees, who, because they thought God was not strict enough, added their traditions to His laws?

The foul fruit of super-righteousness is pride, and that is why Solomon cautions us so strongly in Ecclesiastes 7. Pride destroys relationships, whether with God or man, because the proud person demands attention and submission that can never be satisfied. It is the height of self-centeredness. They are demanding, display various degrees of narcissism, and tend to be standoffish, considering themselves to be better than others.

In the case of the Pharisees, their narcissism drove them to their absolute failure: not to recognize God in the flesh through His teachings. Instead, they, like Satan, actively attacked Him and succeeded in manipulating political and religious pressures to the extent that they, with the help of the Romans and Sadducees, put Him to death.

Jesus' famous castigation of them in Matthew 23 reveals many of their characteristics: They made things hard on others but would not bend to help; they showboated their good works; they expected to be catered to, not serve; they desired public praise; they loved to receive titles; they looked down on others as inferiors; their teachings were false; they heaped greater difficulties on those who already needed help; their sense of judgment was completely skewed; they pursued tiny points of law with great zeal while overlooking truly important things; they were outright hypocrites; they loved to say, “If I were

in that position, I would never have done that”; and they were clever deceivers.

Faith, Fear, and Wisdom

The solution to the Ecclesiastes 7:15-22 conundrum, which is so simply stated, involves the converted person's faith in God. At the same time, it also heavily involves his fear of God and applying thoughtful wisdom to ensure he analyzes the situation accurately. Two of these spiritual qualities are directly named in Ecclesiastes 7. The one not directly named is faith, but it is critical to the right solution. Influencing all three qualities is knowing God well enough from within the relationship to activate them all correctly. II Corinthians 5:4-7 will help our understanding:

For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight.

God is preparing us for entrance into His Kingdom in much the same way a human instructor prepares a school student for graduation and service. There are two major differences though: We must matriculate our lessons by faith, and in our case, the purpose—to be clothed with glory and eternal life—is huge by comparison.

These verses assure us that God has made a contract with us—the New Covenant—in which we are responsible for carrying out assigned duties. He is preparing us to fulfill those responsibilities to a far greater extent in His Kingdom. As He is preparing us, we must live by faith.

Luke 14:26-27 reminds us of the seriousness of the pledge we made to Jesus Christ at baptism, to live by faith

while carrying out our responsibilities:

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

This serious commitment works in our favor. Knowing God's character from the midst of this close relationship, we can always confidently be reassured that God is in control despite how difficult events look to us. This truth became the foundation for the psalmist's victory in his situation in Psalm 73. Our responsibility is to trust Him as the psalmist did, to walk by faith, not by appearance or physical observation. God is faithful!

Paul, then, clearly establishes what our aim should be no matter the circumstances in our lives. We should desire to please God by being faithful to Him in return as demonstrated by trusting Him. He reinforces this by stating that we must be ready to answer for our choices.

Romans and Ephesians make it clear that God accepts us in His presence at conversion and at all times during conversion only upon the meritorious sinless works of Jesus Christ. This is because, as Paul shows in Romans 7, sin stains all our works no matter how meritorious they may seem to us.

Perhaps the most important counsel regarding the paradox appears in Ecclesiastes 7:18: "He who fears God will escape them all." He means that the God-fearer will escape all the paradox's pitfalls. Notice he says escape, which means we will face them, not miss them entirely.

Why is the fear of God the solution for the godly? David explains in Psalm 34:11 that the fear of God is a resource the godly must have, but they must learn it. We do not have it by nature. Why? Consider first that the carnal mind is enmity against God. Yet, to fear God is to have a deferential, reverential respect for Him. Those qualities are direct opposites. An individual does not even begin to grasp God's character until he is called and experiences a close, intimate relationship with Him, coming to know somewhat of God's power, purpose, and character as a result.

That knowledge is why the deference and respect are part of his thinking. The fear of God thus includes some measure of experience with Him and therefore trust of Him. When we trust Him, we *know* He is involved. He never tries us beyond our abilities, and He is ever-faithful. With that package, we are equipped to face our trials with humility, letting Him carry on with His creative purposes without our getting in the way by doing our own thing, as the super-righteous would surely attempt. This combination opens the door to true wisdom.

The apostle Paul's example shows we will come through the trial knowing that God has delivered us by His grace.

There will be absolutely no room for boasting before Him, which, if done, could very well seal our doom by keeping us from His Kingdom. Regardless of what others are doing in their situations, those with the fear of God will strive by faith to face life's trials humbly and patiently. This principle will guide and guard us from the temptations that the evil fall into so easily.

The wisdom for us lies in having faith that Christ is our righteousness, our wisdom, our sanctification, and our redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). Christ in us is our hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). Salvation is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). Therefore, we do not need to put ourselves under the frustrating pressure of super-righteousness, to manufacture our own righteousness and wisdom that will never measure up anyway.

True wisdom is that we must patiently discipline ourselves not to allow ourselves to be persuaded or even goaded by the misdirection that the unconverted can fall into because Christ has revealed more important matters for us to attend to. He encourages us to have a "single" eye (Matthew 6:22, KJV), that is, to be single-minded in following our Savior. We must let God do His creative works at His pace and not try to outdo Him by our own misguided efforts. We are preparing for an eternity of cooperating with Him. So let Him do His perfect work.

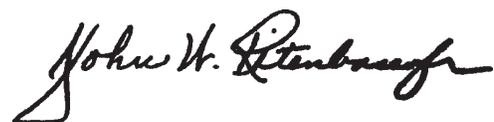
Notice this wisdom clearly spelled out by God in a cautionary admonition to Israel:

And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. (Deuteronomy 8:18-19)

We cannot completely stop the influence of worldly righteousness because of the carnality remaining in us, but we can forcefully resist it by using the gifts Christ has given us within our relationship with Him. We know our weaknesses, but we must carry on in that relationship despite human nature's vain appeals. Salvation comes from within the relationship with Him. The better the quality of the relationship, the more God is pleased and the better life is.

What does He want from us? He wants from us what is good for us. That is simply to keep His commandments, not anything we add to them. Keeping them as He commands is hard enough and sufficient for Him to create the image of His Son in us.

In Christian love,



(continued from page 9)

. . . for where a covenant [is], the death of the covenant-victim to come in is necessary, for a covenant over dead victims [is] steadfast, since it is no force at all when the covenant-victim live[s].

In verses 16-17, most translations use “testament” and “testator,” which are indeed possible meanings of the Greek words. Like a “Last Will and Testament,” the New Covenant goes into effect only when the testator dies. This nuance, though, can apply only to the New Covenant, while the context of Hebrews 9 is *both* the Old and New Covenants. Both of them were sealed with “covenant-victims”—living beings that had their blood shed for the sake of establishing the respective covenants.

In the covenant with Israel, the covenant-victims were oxen and goats (see Exodus 24:5-8; Hebrews 9:19). The New Covenant, though, was confirmed with the bodily death of the Son of Man. Hebrews 10:5 says, “*a body You have prepared for Me*”—a body capable of having its blood drained out in sacrifice, both for the remission of sins and for the establishing of a covenant.

For Abraham, the covenant victims were mere animals. However, despite it not being explicitly stated, that covenant also required the life of the Creator. Paul explains in Galatians 3:8 that the promise that “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” indicates that God would justify the Gentiles by faith. Justification by faith is possible only through belief—trust—in a sacrifice of equal or greater value to the life forfeit due to sin. The blood of bulls and goats could never pay the life-debt of any human being; only the death of the sinless Creator could provide propitiation—justification—for all people. In this way, even though the Abrahamic covenant was confirmed only with slain animals, inherent within it was a promise of a future sacrifice so great that it would justify all those who believe in it.

Terrifying Darkness

The gravity of the Abrahamic covenant is demonstrated by the “terrifying darkness [that] came down over him” (Genesis 15:12; *New Living Translation*). This is echoed in the three hours of darkness—from noon until 3 PM—on Abib 14 as Jesus was being crucified (Matthew 27:45), after which the firstborn Son of God died. Similarly, three days of extreme darkness (the ninth plague; Exodus 10:21-23) preceded the death of the Egyptian firstborn and Israel’s exodus from Egypt.

The prophet Amos helps tie these three events together:

“And it shall come to pass in that day,” says the Lord God, “That *I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight; I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist, and baldness on every head; I will make it*

like mourning for an only son, and its end like a bitter day. (Amos 8:9-10)

This is a prophecy of judgment on the northern ten tribes of Israel, just as the darkness and death of the firstborn were a judgment on Egypt (Genesis 15:14). Jesus’ crucifixion was a judgment as well—on the nation that rejected its own Creator and King. After His death, “all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts” (Luke 23:48, *New English Translation*). Their feast had been turned into mourning, “like mourning for an only [S]on,” on the day that the sun went down at noon and the earth was darkened in broad daylight—on the afternoon of Abib 14.

It is not known what Abraham inferred from the terrifying darkness. Darkness sometimes describes the covering God uses when approaching mankind, so He does not annihilate weak flesh by the supreme brilliance of His presence (Exodus 20:21; Deuteronomy 4:11; 5:22-23; II Samuel 22:10, 12; Psalm 18:9, 11; 97:2). Undoubtedly, part of Abraham’s terror was the nearness of the awesome God, just as He was on the scene in His deliverance of Israel, as well as in the final hours before the death of His firstborn Son. Another cause of Abraham’s terror may have sprung from an arresting foreshadowing of his own promised son’s death, or perhaps he received a horrifying vision of the death of God’s Son as covenant-victim and propitiation to open the way for justification by faith.

A final piece of the picture: When Jesus was crucified, He fulfilled the requirement of the Passover lamb, as well as the prophecy that *not one bone would be broken* (John 19:36; Exodus 12:46; Psalm 34:20). Not one part of the structure of His body was separated from the rest, and so His crucifixion *cannot* be taken as an admission of guilt that He broke the covenant with Abraham. Unlike the animals, He was not cut asunder; His body served a positive purpose rather than one of defeat or failure.

Christ’s sacrifice confirming the New Covenant occurred on the anniversary of God’s covenantal promise to Abraham—the same day and hour! Its specific timing draws our attention to the “eternal inheritance” promised to Abraham and his spiritual seed. Jesus set the example of when and how He wants us to observe the Passover—at the beginning of the 14th—and then on that afternoon, He shed His blood so that a New Covenant could be made.

This covenant is an outgrowth of the covenant with Abraham, making his “great nation” a reality. It provides for justification on the basis of faith—for Israelite and Gentile alike—and promises eternal life to those who continue to the end in faith. Christ is our Passover, not by lining up with the timing outlined in the instructions given to Israel, but by renewing and advancing the covenant God made with Abraham.

—David C. Grabbe

Beware of Hypocrisy

Has anyone on earth not had at least a moment of hypocrisy? Sadly, many have lived a lifetime of it. *Hypocrite* originally had a neutral sense, “someone who answers,” and *hypocrisy* meant “answering.” Initially, these words were used of the normal flow of question and answer in conversation or discussion. They later became connected with question-and-answer sections in plays, naturally followed by the idea of acting a part. Eventually, “hypocrite” came to describe one who is never genuine but always play-acting. The basis of hypocrisy is insincerity.

Hypocrites inhabit every walk of life, trying to impress others in an attempt to hide who they really are. In the Christian life, a hypocrite is someone who tries to appear more spiritual than he really is. Such a person knows that he is pretending, and he hopes he will not be found out. His Christianity is a shallow charade.

As the crowds following Him grew, Jesus decided to warn His disciples of this spiritual pitfall. They could easily surrender to human nature, giving in to the temptation either to gain popularity by pleasing the crowds or to avoid trouble by pleasing the Pharisees. Human nature drives us to want people to like and admire us, and it seems so easy to “act the part” that others want to see.



1. How can we avoid the pitfall of hypocrisy? Luke 12:1-3.

COMMENT: Jesus compares hypocrisy to leaven, which symbolizes sin (I Corinthians 5:6-8; Galatians 5:9). Like leaven, hypocrisy begins small but grows quickly and quietly. As it does, it infects the whole person and eventually the whole society. When a person is puffed up with pride, hypocrisy flourishes and character deteriorates (I Corinthians 4:6, 18-19; 5:2). Hypocrisy, like all sin, must be stopped before the underlying pride has an opportunity to spread (James 1:14-15). The longer he waits to deal with it, the worse it gets. Nothing can really be hidden (Mark 4:22), which makes hypocrisy foolish and futile. So why keep pretending?

Jesus was perhaps concerned that His disciples might be tempted to compromise the truth to avoid offending the crowds or the Pharisees (see Luke 8:16-18; 11:33). Many who profess to be God’s ministers do something like this to remain in their pulpits. God’s truth is like light, not leaven, and it must not be hidden.

2. What causes hypocrisy? Luke 12:4-7.

COMMENT: Jesus mentions “fear” five times in these verses, teaching that a basic cause of hypocrisy is the fear of men. People will do almost anything to avoid embarrassment or harm. When we are afraid of what others may say or do to us, we try to impress them to gain their approval, and our human nature will stoop to deception to accomplish its purposes. Sadly, many of the Pharisees were more concerned about reputation than character—what people thought about them than what God knew about them. The fear of men always brings a snare (Proverbs 29:25), and Jesus wants His disciples to avoid it and be stable in their faith. As Scottish novelist and poet, Sir Walter Scott, wrote, “Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive.”

3. What is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Luke 12:8-10.

COMMENT: Jesus appears to contradict Himself. In Luke 12:8-9, He demands that we openly confess Him without hypocrisy, but in verse 10, He says our speech against Him can be forgiven. Yet, God will not forgive speaking against the Spirit. Why? One who blasphemes God’s Spirit so thoroughly rejects its power to work in him that he refuses to

submit to God. Too proud and rebellious to repent, he cannot be forgiven. A true Christian, though, constantly depends on the Spirit to reflect Christ’s life as much as possible.

Christ’s sacrifice for the overall forgiveness of sin and the receiving of God’s Holy Spirit applies only once for each person, and if an individual rejects God’s grace, it cannot be applied again (Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-27). This is why apostasy is so serious a matter and why the first-century apostles contended so fiercely against heresy. Eternal lives are at stake!

Sustained neglect can also lead to eternal death. The sinner may know he should repent of his sins, but through lethargy, he never bothers to overcome them. In his apathy, he may try to appear righteous, but he is not fooling God. In effect, he is blaspheming God’s Spirit by refusing to repent, so his sin is unpardonable.

4. How can we overcome hypocrisy? Luke 12:8-12.

COMMENT: The remedy for hypocrisy is reverent fear of God, the fear that conquers all other fears, because the person who truly fears God fears nothing else. The apostle John teaches that the love of God casts out fear (I John 4:18, 19). Thus, we can ignore the negative things people say and do. With God standing by us, why should we fear the criticism of others (Hebrews 13:6)? They can do no more than kill the body, but God can destroy both life and body (Matthew 10:28). Since Christ is the ultimate and eternal Judge, it is logical to put the fear of God ahead of everything else.

Fearing man often results in denying Christ, bringing severe consequences (Matthew 10:32-33). A Christian can avoid persecution by denying that he is Jesus’ disciple, but the eternal cost of doing so is far worse than the persecution that he sought to avoid. The opposite of denying Christ is to confess Him before others, that is, to be a true witness for Him by living God’s way. A Christian living any other way is a hypocrite.

There is no shame in suffering for being a Christian. If we suffer for righteousness, we should keep on doing what is right, trusting our lives to our Creator, because He will never fail us (I Peter 4:16-19).

—Martin G. Collins