

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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The Value of Wisdom

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Several passages of scripture compare wisdom to precious metals and gemstones, illustrating its high value to our lives. In Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, Solomon focuses on the pursuit and use of wisdom as a practical and beneficial facet of a godly person's life. Through wisdom, a Christian has the means to make correct decisions.

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Ecclesiastes and Christian Living

Part Thirteen: Confessions

Ecclesiastes 7:21-22 is a brief, two-verse paragraph addressing an element of the paradox-event of verse 15, one we should consider before moving on: “Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others.”

Here, Solomon deals with what might be a lingering effect of the trial of the paradox. While the individual endures what transpires, it attracts the attention of others, usually close friends and family members—and they talk. This kind of talk has a tendency to intensify the paradox’s discomfort.

The talking might be better called “gossip,” but that is not an absolute because it may be sincere, well-intentioned conversation. Even if it is sincere, well-intended, and in no way malicious, it may be taken very hard by the one experiencing the paradox and be difficult to overcome.

Human nature is prone to take advantage of another’s hard times, pointing out and passing on what it thinks are others’ mistakes or outright character weaknesses. But for the other person, it is like taking a punch to the gut. Every one of us will be on the receiving end of gossip, maybe even frequently.

Why is it so difficult to deal with? Because it damages our pride, our opinion of ourselves. The

best defense against it is a clear conscience, that is, to be innocent of what the gossip supposes of us and to be consistent in goodness, a fruit of God’s Spirit. Such a person can patiently weather the passing of the gossip storm clouds.

Though He was perfectly innocent, Jesus had to endure the taunts of others. Should we expect to escape the same? Thus, verse 22 follows with the reminder that we are in all likelihood guilty of practicing the same against others. What goes around comes around. What one sows, one also reaps (Galatians 6:7). It is a character weakness to give in to the hurt feelings, forgetting that none of us is infallible, and we might have given cause for the grief now coming back on us.

Can we remember the times we lost our tempers and called somebody a “stupid idiot”? Can we remember when we cut somebody off on the highway and given others grief? How many times have we forgotten, been late, or been outright careless in our self-centeredness? Since we have not been absolutely pure in character ourselves, we cannot claim the high ground above others, maintaining we do not deserve the gossip.

God’s counsel through Solomon is that it is best just to take our licks, repent, and do better in the future without feeling we have the right to complain.

A Confession from the Preacher

Ecclesiastes 7:19, 23-29 might be titled “Solomon’s Search for Wisdom.” In the previous article we saw that *The Preacher’s Homiletic Commentary* titled the paragraph containing the paradox as “The Cautions of a Religious Philosopher.” The key word is “cautions.” This subsequent paragraph is titled, “The Confessions of a Religious Philosopher,” the key word being “confessions.” God is allowing us some insight into Solomon’s heart and life. He gifted Solomon with a proclivity for understanding and wisdom, but this paragraph reveals that achieving them did not come easy.

Note that the true God gifts us to enable us to fill our place in the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:1-11), but this does not mean He gives the gifts in full-blown perfection so we can fulfill that role without effort (Matthew 25:14-30). His gifts must be developed, fine-tuned, and polished until they are truly fit to be used—even then they are still less-than-perfect in actual practice.

Solomon is confessing a truth that we, too, discover as we continue our conversion. Finding wisdom is difficult and not as satisfying as what we might think. What we see in this paragraph is an exposé, a confession by the author that, despite all the great intellectual gifts given him, in the end what he did not know far exceeded what he actually knew.

This paragraph is a reminder of Solomon’s purpose, as stated in Ecclesiastes 1:12-13: “I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this grievous task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised.” He was indeed gifted, but God in no way drilled a hole in the top of his head, stuck a funnel in the hole, and poured wisdom in, requiring no effort on Solomon’s part. He had to participate in the search to reach his goal. It became a lifelong pursuit.

This pursuit took earnest effort. Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 7:23, “All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, ‘I will be wise,’ but it was far from me.” His goal was set; his was no superficial overview. With earnest, exhaustive thoroughness, he applied himself to discover what lay behind the conduct he observed. He wanted to know the reason of things, as verse 25 shows: “I applied my heart to know, to search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things.” Why did he search so thoroughly? A major reason appears in verse 19, “Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city.” He was looking for spiritual strength through understanding. The fruit of that search would be wisdom to equip him to make better choices.

Wisdom, in terms of spiritual sagacity, can be an extremely valuable resource. *Sagacity* indicates “discernment,” that one is “keen,” “perceptive,” and “sound in judgment,” insuring that one’s choices produce good

fruit. Through verse 19, the Bible is showing us that wisdom can govern thought, the will, and one’s actions in order to produce good results. This is not to say that he found them all, but that is what he was determinedly seeking.

The deep insights he found revealed the order and harmony supporting the things he witnessed from the outside. However, we should understand that seeking wisdom exacts a price. It is interesting how the Bible compares the costs of achievement: by the value of what a person might buy on the market. It declares that one pays more for wisdom than for goods that people expect will fetch a high price on the open market. Wisdom’s costs are largely in terms of time, attention, and discipline to achieve. Notice these examples:

- Proverbs 3:13-15: “Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.”
- Proverbs 8:11: “For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared to her.”
- Proverbs 16:16: “How much better to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.”

These expressions of value clearly state why Solomon sought wisdom so diligently. Should we not do so too?

He looked at problems from all sides, and even analyzed the opposite of the way he first saw things. He uses terms like “wickedness,” “folly,” and “madness,” showing that he was looking deeply at human behavior. He examined these things so closely that he believed that at least emotionally, he experienced a small measure of the characteristics—even the bad ones—he was searching into.

What did Solomon learn from this? Ecclesiastes 7:23-24 reveals it was humbling: “All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, ‘I will be wise.’ But it was far from me. As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, who can find it out?” It was far more difficult than he imagined when he began. If we measure our gifting against his, what kind of wise plan could we produce that would impress God to remove the burden of a trial? As we can see, searching for wisdom is a necessity but difficult. The answers are rarely right on the surface.

Humility and Judgment

This entire section examines wise judgment, whether the source of our problems is God, our fellow man, or our-

selves. We must ask ourselves if we are truly making an effort to pursue holiness, without which, Paul says in Hebrews 12:14, “no one will see the Lord.” Is that where our problem lies? Are we really making an effort worthy of the treasure we have been freely given? Do we have something to repent of regarding the time and energy we expend? Our conclusion will parallel his conclusion to some degree: It is no wonder that salvation must be by grace!

A thought from Ecclesiastes 3:11 will balance this: “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.” We will never have complete answers because God in heaven is also working things out in our lives, and His purposes take precedence over our weak efforts and conclusions. There is much beyond our control.

We can learn two major truths from Solomon’s confession: First, a truly wise person will be humbled knowing that he does not know everything, and this lack of knowledge will affect his choices and conduct because he knows he is terribly ignorant. Second, the humbling will move him to be cautious in his judgments so that he does not condemn God, others, or even himself. Recognizing these truths tends to balance our thinking because we know that what we have now is marvelous—but crumbs compared to what is coming. Thus, we can see that a study of the path Solomon took, though difficult, can be beneficially humbling.

The children of God must be constant learners. Why? We are not merely looking for salvation but also preparing for the Kingdom of God and for service to Him and mankind in that Kingdom. However, we must submit to the fact that the knowledge of God is like a distant star, a destination so far off that we will never reach it in dozens of lifetimes. This reality points to a reason we need everlasting life. It is something we must humbly accept now, knowing we will never reach it, but will nonetheless earnestly work toward it to be as prepared as possible.

I Corinthians 4:1-8 presents a hurdle that we must deal with regarding the accumulation of knowledge or position:

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God. Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not

receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you have not received it? You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!

There is a pitfall in even the earnest searching for wisdom and truth: Human nature sometimes follows the path of flaunting it. This must be strongly resisted. The wise person knows what Paul says here is true and resists self-glorification. This restraint makes him wiser.

A Few Conclusions

Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 7:26-29:

And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be taken by her. Here is what I have found, says the Preacher, adding one thing to the other to find out the reason, which my soul still seeks but I cannot find: one man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found. Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

Beginning in verse 25, Solomon makes clear that wisdom is found, not on the surface of events, but only by those willing to work, to dig, to study, and to analyze to uncover it. Truth and error are most often mixed together in the same problem, so they must be disentangled from each other. We are discovering in the current liberal bent of our nation that some forms of human evil are so bold and irrational that they almost defy description. By way of contrast, Satan was so subtle in deceiving Eve that he slid the lies right in front of her, and she, in her naïveté, missed seeing the trap altogether.

We cannot expect, then, to have wisdom and safety always clearly spelled out for us. Some evil does not collect its due until a long time has passed. For example, Adam and Eve did not die for many years. Solomon’s phrasing at the end of verse 25 suggests that he is searching for the most vivid examples of the most painful aspects of evil that he can find.

We covered a few examples in chapter 2. Recall that he deliberately sought pleasure. He clearly learned that sometimes evil is pleasurable, even seemingly fun, as one participates in it. But know this: Pleasure is deceptive, as his testimony shows, because it eventually produces painful enslavement.

It is becoming clearer that wisdom has two major elements. The Bible emphasizes practical wisdom, which, in actual usage, is skill in living. In the world, though, the emphasis is on sagacity, which is more intellectually slanted, but also has practicality in being helpful in giving or receiving counsel. Both of these elements are good, especially when enhanced with God’s truths.

In this section, Solomon is weaving the two elements together, which is why he uses such strong terminology. He uses “folly,” “foolishness,” and “madness”—significant terms—as descriptors. He wants to grasp the full gamut of wisdom; he digs deeply. In one sense, this is a warning: Do not be fooled by initial feelings. Everything that is not truly wisdom never satisfies for long, but it inevitably becomes more difficult to bear and overcome. The folly and madness of sin, which is never wisdom, always eventually appears. Its fruit cannot be hidden.

We can deliberately hide from its folly, but it is there. A lack of wisdom is always destructive. The Hebrew terminology in verse 27 indicates that he carefully made this search and that he apparently wrote Ecclesiastes late in life.

In verse 26, God gives him the opportunity to provide an example from his own life, which he does with vivid description. He describes a woman whose heart is “snares and nets and whose hands are fetters.” It seems he writes of this woman in Proverbs 7:

Follow my advice, my son; always keep it in mind and stick to it. Obey me and live! Guard my words as your most precious possession. Write them down, and also keep them deep within your heart. Love wisdom like a sweetheart; make her a beloved member of your family. Let her hold you back from affairs with other women—from listening to their flattery.

I was looking out the window of my house one day and saw a simple-minded lad, a young man lacking common sense, walking at twilight down the street to the house of this wayward girl, a prostitute. She approached him, saucy and pert, and dressed seductively. She was the brash, coarse type, seen often in the streets and markets, soliciting at every corner for men to be her lovers.

She put her arms around him and kissed him, and with a saucy look she said, “I was just coming to look for you and here you are! Come home with me, and I’ll fix you a wonderful dinner, and after that—well, my bed is spread with lovely, colored sheets of finest linen imported from Egypt, perfumed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come on, let’s take our fill of love until morning, for my husband is away on a long trip. He has taken a wallet full of money with him and won’t return for several days.”

So she seduced him with her pretty speech, her coaxing and her wheedling, until he yielded to her. He couldn’t resist her flattery. He followed her as an ox going to the butcher or as a stag that is trapped, waiting to be killed with an arrow through its heart. He was as a bird flying into a snare, not knowing the

fate awaiting it there.

Listen to me, young men, and not only listen but obey; don’t let your desires get out of hand; don’t let yourself think about her. Don’t go near her; stay away from where she walks, lest she tempt you and seduce you. For she has been the ruin of multitudes—a vast host of men have been her victims. If you want to find the road to hell, look for her house. (*The Living Bible*)

Jesus testifies, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). In this case, the temptress’ very heart is snares and nets, which she uses with consummate skill to accomplish her purpose. Notice her flattering secrecy. It is as though she is letting him in on something nobody else has access to. She makes it seem as if she deliberately sought him to the exclusion of all others. She puts her all into the part, an actress playing in a dangerous drama. She continues to use alluring salesmanship, emphasizing enjoyment and safety, since her husband would be away for a long time. This fellow is trapped from the beginning, as it seems he deliberately took the path right past the place where she frequently plied her trade.

What principles are at play in this illustration to provide wisdom in facing temptations beyond the use of a prostitute? The temptress stands as a type of the enticement of any unlawful desire burning in the mind as that desire seeks fulfillment. Notice how many tricks the prostitute employs to play on her customer’s desire.

In another situation, that desire might be for drugs. Some are greatly vexed by the desire to smoke, while others have a keen yearning for alcohol. Others crave great quantities of food or certain foods that are not healthy for them. These days, through its easy availability on the Internet, pornography is a strong temptation. Perhaps the possibility of winning is the lure that draws some to gamble. Some desire to skip work or school. Many drivers hanker to drive much faster than the law allows. Sometimes it is a desire to put off a distasteful chore that needs doing.

Whatever the desire, the enticement’s purpose is to induce some form of pleasure. It is like a siren’s song, increasing the pressure by offering one reason after another why it would not be so bad to fulfill that desire just one more time. All too often, the lusting person becomes progressively more willing to fulfill his desire until he caves in. He can no longer endure the sacrifice of denying himself.

In reality, we argue ourselves into surrendering and fulfilling our desire. Like the young man in Solomon’s illustration, we deliberately walk in temptation’s direction. Despite the Bible’s counsel regarding wisdom’s value, when we give in, it has done us little good to that point, if at all.

(continued on page 13)

Wool and Linen

*“You shall not wear a garment of different sorts,
such as wool and linen mixed together.”*

—Deuteronomy 22:11

What is the strangest law in the Bible? For many, it is Deuteronomy 22:11, “You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, such as wool and linen mixed together.” This directive is repeated in Leviticus 19:19. The phrase “garment of different sorts” is from the Hebrew *sha’atnez*, literally “mixed stuff,” which Orthodox Jews define as specifically wool and linen together, not any other mixture.

The Law of Sha’atnez, they feel, is a *chok*, a decree that the King has passed for His subjects, for which we do not know the reason. Rabbinic commentators believe that many of God’s statutes are of that sort. He provides no reason and expects us to accept them on faith. One rabbi has said, “Why ask why?” Their point has validity, certainly, but is there really no reason for this edict? Can we discern God’s original point here, and does this mandate have any significance for Christians today?

We will consider several possibilities for God stating that we should not wear wool and linen together.

Possible Reasons

The great medieval Jewish scholar, Maimonides, wrote that ancient pagan priests used to wear wool and linen together while practicing the occult and idol worship. Therefore, he reasoned, we should stay away from *sha’atnez*. In contrast, a more recent, non-Jewish writer said the reason for this law was that both the priestly garments of the Old Testament and the Tabernacle weavings were a combination of wool and linen, so laypersons were prohibited from dressing the same way.

Both comments could be legitimate, but the second has a problem. That the priest’s white undergarment was made of linen and his vestment was made of wool is true, but they are two different articles of clothing, not one item of mixed fabrics. Deuteronomy 22:11 reads, “You shall not wear a [singular] garment of . . . wool and linen mixed together” (emphasis ours).

Another option offered by some is that mixing wool and linen upsets the

environmental and/or metaphysical fabric of the universe. *The Jamison, Faucett and Brown Bible Commentary* asserts that

the observations and researches of modern science have proved that wool, when combined with linen, increases its power of passing off electricity from the body. In hot climates, it brings on malignant fevers and exhausts the strength; and when passing off from the body, it meets with the heated air, inflames and excoriates like a blister.

This was written in 1871, so when the authors refer to “researches of modern science,” they are speaking of not-so-modern research. Lest we make light of the seeming absurdity of this statement, other sources support this view. Articles, easily found on the Internet, tout the healing properties of linen and, to a lesser extent, wool, not to mention scientific studies that have measured the respective electronic frequencies of the human body and different fabrics. The most beneficial was linen, while silk had none at all. Wool did well, but its benefits were not nearly as good as linen.

Another possibility for God giving this command involves the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4. According to Jewish tradition, for what it is worth, the offering they were to give was for Passover. These same traditions have Cain bringing flax (from which linen is made) and Abel, a sheep (and thus wool). After Cain killed Abel, it was decreed, the thinking goes, that never again should the two substances mix.

Moreover, Abel’s lamb resembles the paschal lamb, but Cain’s offering recalls Egypt, which is identified by its production and use of linen. One rabbi went so far as to write that linen is unrighteousness and wool is righteous. He clarifies that wearing linen by itself is not forbidden, just that it represents Egypt. Yet, Revelation 19:8 tells us that the resurrected saints will be clothed in fine linen, clean and white, which would seem to demolish the “linen equals Egypt” theory.

A “Christian” website reasoned along similar but exactly opposite lines when it opined that wool is Old Covenant or “works,” and linen is New Covenant and “grace.” It went on to state that the two can *never* mix!

Our own website features a short article on the wearing of mixed fibers. Based on answers to questions sent in to the Worldwide Church of God many years ago, it explains Leviticus 19:19 and Deuteronomy 22:11 as a kind of “consumer protection law.” Clothing is made from two basic kinds of natural fibers. One kind is from plant cellulose fiber, such as linen and cotton. The other is from animal protein fiber, such as wool and silk. Since they differ markedly in strength, washability, absorption, and so forth, they should not be mixed. The article goes on to say that combining wool and linen produces a

cheaper garment.

What we generally know about clothing agrees with this. A 100% wool suit is of higher quality than one of mixed types. A 100% silk tie is preferred over a blend, and so on. This short piece on our website ends by pointing out that

wearing such materials is not a sin in itself. Rather, God does not want manufacturers producing shoddy materials in order to take advantage of their customers. A wise principle to follow in selecting either a pure or mixed garment is to purchase the best quality one can afford—it will last longer and fit better than inferior, less expensive clothes.

Which of these possible reasons for this law is correct? Are all of them right? Is this a *chok*, a law whose logic is not evident? Each of these options has some merit.

Note the Context

Before coming to a conclusion, we need to look at the context in which God gave this statute. A quick scan of Leviticus 19, which the *New King James Bible* heads as “Moral and Ceremonial Laws,” will be helpful.

Verse 1 informs us that God spoke directly to Moses and that he was to share all of this with the children of Israel. In the next verse, God says, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.” *Holy* means “sacred” and “set apart.” The points that follow are designed to set Israel apart, and if observed, these statutes and judgments would keep Israel undefiled.

Verses 3 and 4 cover the first, second, fourth, and fifth commandments, and the following four verses deal with sacrificing. Verses 9-10 handle harvesting procedures and leaving something for the poor. Verse 11 covers the eighth and ninth commandments, while verse 12 rephrases the third commandment. Verse 13 gives counsel on dealing with neighbors and employees, and verse 14, with the handicapped. Verse 15 encourages us to judge righteously. Verse 16 condemns gossip, and verses 17-18 concern familial relationships.

After this, verse 19 begins: “You shall keep my statutes . . .” The Hebrew word underlying “statutes” is *shamar*, “to hedge about, guard, protect, attend to, preserve, observe, and to treasure up in your memory.” God covers a great deal of ground in the first 18 verses, so at the chapter’s half way mark, He inserts a reminder that these laws and life principles, this huge amount of wisdom, is to be guarded, protected, attended to, preserved, and observed. He closes the chapter in verse 37 with the same reminder.

Notice the three matters listed in verse 19: “You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment

of mixed linen and wool come upon you.” Sandwiched between His admonition to bear no grudges and love your neighbor (verse 18) and the penalty for adultery (verse 20), we have these three directives.

Are they on a par with some of these others? No, of course not. Nor is idol worship (verse 4) comparable with gleaning the fields (verse 9). The chapter ends with God commanding us to observe “all My statutes and all My judgments.” We have to discern what this means.

Not Done Away

Some of these verses deal with the Ten Commandments. Do any of us doubt that these are still in force and to be kept? Even so, few of us farm the land anymore, so what does mixing livestock or seed have to do with us? For that matter, how many tailors do we have today? What do we know of mixing fabrics? It is possible that pagan priests wore this mix; that one fabric signifies the Old Covenant, and the other, the New; that it was simply a consumer protection law; or that all of the above are true, which is likely. But what does it mean for us today?

Verse 27 admonishes us not to shave around the sides of our heads or “disfigure” the edges of our beards. These were things Egyptians did, and perhaps some of the Israelites had adopted those practices. From this distance in time, we do not really know what they were doing with their beards and hair, but God tells them, “No, don’t do that. You are a special people. Come out of Egypt.” So, although we do not have to worry about our beards or hair as much in this regard, we still have to be aware of the “Egypt” around us and come out of her.

This same principle applies to mixing wool and linen. Note that this prohibition does not stand alone because in the same verse, God also forbids mixing cattle and seed. It is the principle of clean and unclean, righteous and unrighteous, Christian or pagan, Egypt or God.

In Matthew 5:17-18, Christ says:

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

Even the smallest point in the Old Testament is not “done away” until “all is fulfilled,” until “heaven and earth pass away.” Has that happened yet? Of course not. Some of the physical rituals—such as circumcision, the various washings, sacrifices and offerings—may not have to be performed anymore, but the spiritual intent lives on.

The Old Covenant emphasized physical things as a means of righteousness, but the emphasis under the New Covenant is on spiritual elements in our relationship with God and each other. Under the New Covenant, we become a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), and that sacrifice begins in our mind. This change from the Old to the New forces us to make spiritual use of the laws already

written. They are not done away; we just have to figure out how they apply to us now.

A Principle of Separation

So as to not mixing wool and linen, there could well be health benefits, just as there are health benefits to circumcising baby boys on their eighth day. But if mixing these fabrics is not a sin, what is the point for us?

The point is that a spiritual principle is involved, and it is nothing more than the principle of separation. Just as God wanted the physical nation of Israel to be kept separate from the nations around it, we are to maintain spiritual separation from the sin that surrounds us.

Deuteronomy 14:2 says essentially the same thing to the children of Israel: “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (see Exodus 19:5). For this reason, Israelites were not to mix wool and linen, nor mix physically with those around them.

With this understanding, we can bring the principle to the New Testament and apply it under the New Covenant:

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.”
(II Corinthians 6:14-16)

The part that Paul quotes at the end—“I will be their God, and they shall be My people”—is found in at least a half-dozen Old Testament verses (Jeremiah 24:7; 31:33; 32:38; Ezekiel 11:20; 37:23, 27; Zechariah 8:8). More importantly, the apostle clearly indicates that the principle still applies! Except now it is God’s church that is separated out.

Further, Paul writes in Titus 2:14, speaking of Christ, “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed, and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” Recall the “Christian” website mentioned earlier that asserted that wool stands for works and linen represents grace, and the two can *never* be mixed. But does not the apostle Paul do just that in this verse? Christ gave Himself for us, to redeem us from sin, which is grace. Then he goes on to say that Jesus did this to purify us, to set us apart, to make us a people “zealous for good works.” He redeemed us by grace so we could strive to live a sinless life, which we fail at repeatedly. But we try.

(continued on page 14)

Every Word?

Both the Old and New Testaments often repeat the principle that to establish a fact requires two or three witnesses.

This criterion applies to the death penalty (Deuteronomy 17:6; Hebrews 10:28), accusations against an elder (I Timothy 5:19), disputes with the brethren (Matthew 18:16), establishing iniquity or sin (Deuteronomy 19:15), and problems in the church (II Corinthians 13:1).

What if God gives us a command, not just two or three times, but *fifteen* times? Surely, such repetition would establish the importance God places on that instruction. In Deuteronomy, we find such a repeated charge, in which God declares fifteen times that we are *to be careful* to obey all His commands.

Because God felt the need to pound this idea into our minds, following His example, here are the fifteen times in Deuteronomy He tells us to be careful in our obedience:

“ . . . be careful to observe them . . . ” (4:6).

“Take careful heed to yourselves . . . ” (4:15).

“ . . . be careful to observe them ” (5:1).

“ . . . be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you . . . ” (5:32).

“ . . . be careful to observe it . . . ” (6:3).

“ . . . if we are careful to observe all these commandments . . . ” (6:25).

“Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe . . . ” (8:1).

“ . . . you shall be careful to observe all the statutes and judgments . . . ” (11:32).

“These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe . . . ” (12:1).

“Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (12:32).

“ . . . you shall be careful to observe these statutes ” (16:12).

“ . . . be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes ” (17:19).

“ . . . be careful to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul ” (26:16).

“ . . . if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them ” (28:13).

“ . . . command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law ” (32:46).

The message is loud and clear: be careful to obey

every and *all* commands of God. Some would consider these many statements as mindless repetition. Why this “overkill”? Because humanity has proven since the beginning that it is nearly unfailingly *not* careful. Were Adam and Eve careful to obey all that God commanded? No, and their progeny, all humanity, has followed in their footsteps ever since.

Was ancient Israel careful to obey? Of course not! Their history is a record of failure nearly at every turn. Was the early church careful? Not completely. So, in various places we find the writers of the New Testament having to admonish those who were missing the mark. What about in more recent times? Were the leaders of our former fellowship careful in their obedience? Like ancient Israel, the answer is the same: of course not! God’s church would look far different if they had been.

What about those in the greater church of God today? Most recognize that we are in the Laodicean era of God’s church. What is a Laodicean? Scripture describes a Laodicean as one who is lukewarm or half-hearted, suggesting that such a Christian shows a lack of intensity or focus that is almost the opposite of being careful.

To admit that we are in the Laodicean era is to acknowledge the reality that the vast majority of us *are not* careful in our obedience to God. This situation illustrates the perversity of human nature that, for most of us, the repetition of a command fifteen times is still not enough to make the message stick.

While Deuteronomy repeatedly warns us to adhere carefully to all that God commands, Christ takes it even further, saying, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word” that comes from God (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4). In Matthew 5:18, He adds, “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” Not even the smallest letter or word or even one little hook of a Hebrew letter is to be overlooked.

Therefore, we are to live by every word as Christ commands, even if it is only two or three words or just a small two-letter word. Everything matters. Notice two examples that illustrate that it is a mistake to overlook even the smallest of details.

COUNT FOR YOURSELVES

For the first example, notice an instruction that God gives regarding Pentecost in Leviticus 23:15: “And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed.”

This verse teaches how to count Pentecost, but it also reveals *who* should count Pentecost. Who is the “you” in verse 15? In verse 6, “you” is the person who is to eat unleavened bread. This “you,” then, is each one of us. The addition of “for yourselves” makes it even more emphatic that *we* are to do the counting. It is not done by a calendar, not by the ministry, but “for yourselves.”

Just as the ministry does not eat unleavened bread for

us because God commands “you” to eat it, it follows that they are not to count Pentecost for us either. We eat unleavened bread every year, so we should also be counting Pentecost *for ourselves* every year. “You” and “for yourselves” are not in and of themselves significant words, but here they become significant because *God* said them.

Does this counting seem to be a small thing? Yes, it does seem inconsequential. But we are to live by every word that God gives to us, not just those *we* consider important. The name “Laodicea” originates from two Greek words: *laos* meaning “people” and *dike* meaning “to judge” or “to decide.” For a Laodicean, *they*, the people, take it upon themselves to decide what is important instead of submitting to whatever God says.

Why would God have each of us count Pentecost in place of looking at a calendar—the way most of us have always determined which day to observe? Each of us counting every year when calendars are easily available does not seem to make much sense. But that is irrelevant. What is relevant is that we do what God commands us to do, to be careful to obey *all* He commands.

Consider an experience Herbert W. Armstrong recounted in the May 1981 *Good News* article entitled, “Why Many Don’t Understand Pentecost”:

I had learned in my intensive, almost night-and-day study of the Sabbath question that we are commanded also to keep the seven annual Holy Days.

I DID NOT KNOW WHY! I knew only that God said, “DO IT!” My wife and I did—alone! For seven years!

We have his good example to do whatever God tells us to do and trust that God, who loves us, has a reason for what He commands, even if we are clueless as to why. Herbert Armstrong was one who followed all those admonitions in Deuteronomy to be *careful* to obey *whatever* he saw commanded by God, even if it meant changing years of error he adamantly taught. Do we follow that example, or are we Laodiceans deciding for ourselves rather than counting for ourselves as God specifically commands?

GOD’S LOVE

A second example illustrates well the error of overlooking even the smallest of words. As believers, we have been personally called by God, which is a great honor. However, are we aware that God loves no one in the universe more than us—*no one*, including Jesus Christ? By what authority is that claim made? How about Jesus Christ Himself?

In His last prayer just before His arrest, Christ prays for “those who will believe in Me through their [the disciples’] word” (John 17:20). That includes each of us who believe in Christ because of the words His disciples wrote in the Bible. Referring to these believers in verse

23, He asks God to reveal to the world “that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

Understanding the full impact of this verse hinges on the little, two-letter word “as.” One definition is “to the same extent or degree; equally.” “Equally” means no more, no less. This definition makes Jesus’ request staggering in its implications! It means we can truthfully say that there is not a being in the universe—including Jesus Christ—whom God loves more than us. Every individual whom God has called can say the same thing. God loves us all at the same incredible, beyond-our-comprehension level.

This verse also shows Christ’s unbelievable love for us. He has been with God forever, yet the Son feels no animosity that our Father loves us Johnny-come-latelies just as much, unlike the elder brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In fact, in His prayer Jesus is asking God to broadcast this truth to the world! Our Savior is preeminent in position and responsibility—but not in the Father’s love. As the perfect Parent, God does not love any one child more than the others.

Yet, in the midst of our trials, do we believe Jesus Christ? Is there any bit of knowledge more important to have deeply embedded in our minds as we face life’s many problems and challenges? We have the assurance of the depth of God’s love for us from Christ Himself. That could be the most important single piece of information about God’s love that we can know, and God packed it into one, two-letter word.

Are we to be careful to live by every word, not to overlook even one of them, no matter how small? That question deserves a resounding, “Yes!”

UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES

Through these two examples, we see that every word matters. From the many repetitions in Deuteronomy, we see that carefully obeying every word is vital. We should not make the mistake in thinking this is a small point.

Failure to be careful in our obedience has unique consequences as we approach the end of this age. It will be a time of tribulation whose severity the world has never seen or ever will see again. Christ warns us of that in Mathew 24:21, “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.”

God promises protection for some during this time:

Because you have patiently obeyed me despite the persecution, therefore I will protect you from the time of Great Tribulation and temptation, which will come upon the world to test everyone alive. (Revelation 3:10, *The Living Bible*)

Seek the Lord [inquire for Him, inquire of Him, and require Him as the foremost necessity of your life],

all you humble of the land who have acted in compliance with His revealed will *and* have kept His commandments; seek righteousness, seek humility [inquire for them, require them as vital]. It may be you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger. (Zephaniah 2:3, *The Amplified Bible*)

Who receives this offer of protection? It is those who “have patiently obeyed” Christ and “have acted in compliance with His revealed will and have kept His commandments.” It could not be more clear.

In conjunction with obedience, Zephaniah also instructs us to “seek humility.” Why is humility vital? It takes humility to submit carefully to *all* that God commands compared to the Laodicean arrogance in deciding for oneself what is important to obey and what is of too little consequence to obey completely.

Many call this place of protection where God hides the obedient at the time of the Great Tribulation the “Place of Safety.” They consider it a refuge provided by God for three and a half years of final training. People in God’s church have debated the where, the why, and the how of this subject for decades.

If there is a Place of Safety, who would God want there? It would be a time of intense training. Would He not want people who have *already* proven they are completely in sync with Him, believing and living by His every word, willing to follow without question wherever He leads? Why would He take on at that crucial time the task of herding cats, people who have proven they prefer to do their own thing? He has already demonstrated the futility of such an undertaking in His dealings with ancient Israel.

At this unique time in history, being careful could be the difference between being protected from what is to come and being left squarely in the middle of it. It could be a choice between life or death, escape or tribulation. Are we making our choice now by how we respond to those fifteen commands in Deuteronomy?

We can be careless about our obedience and lie to ourselves about the quality of that obedience. After all, it is what Laodiceans do:

Because you say, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. (Revelation 3:17)

God sees the truth. Time seems short as we see the world around us rapidly disintegrating daily. So, at this critical time, we need to consider soberly, honestly, and carefully, and obey *all* that Christ means when He says, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (Luke 4:4).

Carefully obeying every word matters.

—Pat Higgins

(continued from page 6)

In an overall sense, Solomon found what we might label “the overwhelming, general sinfulness of mankind.” Worded another way, he found that sinfulness is not rare and not hard to find. In fact, it is everywhere, universal. Conversely, it is righteousness, purity, and wisdom that are hard to find.

The Prostitute Imagery Expanded

It is interesting that Solomon begins to relate his conclusions by listing the prostitute first. It seems he uses her in three senses: The first is in the specific sense of Proverbs 7, the way of a literal street-walker. The second sense is the suggestion that she could illustrate any of the powerful but unlawful desires working within any of us. The third way is perhaps that she symbolizes all of mankind being lured by the spirit of this world. In other passages, God characterizes Israel’s conduct before the world in this way.

I Kings 11:1, 4-6 sums up Solomon’s life in one vital area:

But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. . . . For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David.

This same man advised in Proverbs 5:3-6:

For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell. Lest you ponder her path of life—her ways are unstable; you do not know them.

Failing to follow his own advice, Solomon was ensnared by many foreign women who lured him away from God and into the worship of foreign gods. The term “foreign” can apply, not only to those of a different ethnicity, but also those of a different religion and thus a different way of life that should have been alien to him. Used in this way, the prostitute symbolizes the world and its gods to the Christian. The world may be alluring to the senses, but it is deadly poison to a relationship with God.

The third sense may lead us to a positive solution. Solomon gives solid advice in Proverbs 7:4-5: “Say to wisdom, ‘You are my sister,’ and call understanding your nearest kin, that they may keep you from the immoral

woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words.” It has been scientifically determined that children are genetically more closely related to each other than they are to their parents. With this knowledge, we can grasp why Solomon suggests making understanding one’s sister. Such a close, protective relationship would serve a young man well. In addition, Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 7:18, “For he who fears God will escape them all.”

Putting these factors together, we find that understanding, wisdom, and the fear of God are effective deterrents to any temptation. Solomon’s greatest weakness appears to lie in his lack of the fear of God.

Believed and used, I Corinthians 10:13 provides a wonderful promise from our faithful God: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” Understanding and wisdom, combined with the fear of God, will enable a person to find ways to flee the temptations to fulfill evil desires, as Joseph did in Genesis 39. The solution equation is easily stated and remembered—but we cannot let the intensity of the impulse to give in build, or we will probably lose.

Was Solomon a Male Chauvinist?

Before allowing ourselves to conclude that Solomon was a sexist pig as a result of his writing about women, we should rethink it. We should not think that he was totally down on women, since he speaks positively of them in many other places. However, God allowed a small bit of Solomon’s personal experiences and their results to appear in His Word because they can serve as wisdom for us. Wisdom must be used!

Ecclesiastes 7:27-28 take us further along the line in terms of Solomon’s personal experiences and attitudes toward women:

“Here is what I have found,” says the Preacher, “adding one thing to the other to find out the reason, which my soul still seeks but I cannot find: One man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found.”

The text directly labels this as his personal experience. He might have actually been counting. Several commentators believe they are simply general statements similar to what we might use today. We may have even heard a person, whether male or female, described as “one in a million.”

If taken as true, the one-in-a-thousand figure posits that a man is but one one-hundredth of one percent better than a woman. But sin is an equal-opportunity predator. Taken as a whole, the Bible has much more to say about sinful men than sinful women. Solomon himself says in verse 20, “There

Personal

Ecclesiastes and Christian Living

is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.”

The emphasis in verse 28 is on man as contrasted to woman. The reality is that even the one good man that he found was still a sinner. In Solomon’s personal experience as king, a high number of the women he had contact with were from aristocratic families, likely spoiled and bitter floozies accustomed to getting their way all their lives. Considering his writings (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs), he generally has good things to say about women. Yet, even the righteous women, such as the lady of Proverbs 31, were, like men, still sinners who need saved by grace. Overall, though, his experiences with women seems not to have been good.

Man’s Many Schemes

Ecclesiastes 7:29 is especially thought-provoking as an Old Testament statement containing a little insight into what is called the Doctrine of Original Sin: “Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.” It plainly asserts that God did not create man for the purpose of sinning.

Through the millennia, mankind has shown a persistent and strong proclivity for blaming God for all his troubles. We are indeed created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). God gave us a spirit (Job 32:8), and by it, we have the ability to understand and harness many of the powers that God placed within our nature and environment. But Ecclesiastes 7:29 clearly indicates that man, specifically Adam and then all humanity after him, including women, have deliberately chosen to sin.

This point appears in the final part, “But they have sought out many schemes.” Time and history have proven repeatedly that we do not always do things constructively. We seem to pollute everything we touch, creating new problems with each generation, most of which we cannot solve. Potential problems exist now that could, except for God’s mercy, wipe life itself from the face of the earth.

Ready Answer

Wool and Linen

(continued from page 9)

The laws of God give us our borders, our limits. Without them, there would be no sin (Romans 3:20).

I Peter 2:9, describing the church, the apostle Peter writes, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

Where does this leave us in terms of Deuteronomy 22:11 and Leviticus 19:19? Just as not circumcising one’s baby boy would not be a sin, since it is not a sign under the New Covenant, so with mixing wool and linen. However,

We could loosely interpret verse 29 as, “God made man to be upright, but man has defeated himself by his own schemes. He strives to do things his way. He goes to so much trouble to make trouble for himself instead of reading God’s Book, believing it, and submitting to it.”

Mark Twain is highly respected as a writer, but he was, according to contemporary accounts, sarcastic and cynical regarding God and life in general. By means of his skilled writing, he managed to hide from the public his hatred of God, Christianity, and life itself. However, it is revealed in *Huckleberry Finn*, his most popular and critically acclaimed novel. In it, he portrays God, and Christians especially, as ignorant, pharisaical, and silly, demanding dolts, killjoys who take all the fun out of life.

Twain blamed God for all of mankind’s troubles. On these thoughts, he wrote a book in the last few months of his life, *Letters to Earth*, and it so offended his daughter that she would not allow it to be published until thirty years or so after his death. She feared it would destroy his reputation. In another place he wrote, “Whoever has lived long enough to find out what life is, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first great benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world.”

Thank God that there is also a Last Adam! By virtue of His sinless life, atoning death, and resurrection, we can by God’s grace receive the quality of life God intended from the beginning. We do not have the wisdom to solve all the deep mysteries of life, but from our experiences, we should be wise enough to look within ourselves and see the deadly sin in our hearts, asking God to be our Savior through Jesus Christ.

We will conclude chapter 7 next time, summarizing Solomon’s counsel.

In Christian love,



there are proven health benefits to circumcision. God is not capricious that way; there is great good in following His instructions, even if they are no longer binding under the New Covenant. It would not be surprising if there are health benefits to not mixing these fabrics as well. Certainly, all of one or the other produces a better quality garment.

For us today, however, the takeaway is to keep *ourselves* spiritually pure, to concentrate on not mixing with the sin of this world, for we are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood a holy nation, His own special people.”

—Mike Ford

Is Obama Redistributing Power?

Among the most distressing news this year has been the direction of the ongoing negotiations over Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. Despite signing the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 1968—during the reign of the shah—Tehran has coveted weapons of mass destruction at least since the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. However, it was not until the 1990s, under Supreme Leader Ali Hosseini Khamenei, that the Shiite Muslim nation took significant steps to develop and expand its nuclear capabilities, turning to Russia and China for assistance.

Since then, Iran has been incrementally adding to and upgrading its abilities to mine and process uranium, as well as to convert and enrich plutonium. In 2000, Pakistani help in the form of centrifuge technology enabled the Iranians to begin constructing industrial-scale enrichment facilities, and it was not until a couple of years later that Western powers were made aware of their progress. From that time, the world's leading nations have pressured Iran to curtail or surrender its nuclear ambitions.

At every turn, it seems, Iran has been able to work the international system to further its aims. It has been so skillful that it stands on the threshold of joining the five “official” nuclear powers: the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, China, and France. Based on International Atomic Energy Agency data, the December 2014 Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control report found that Iran could produce enough weapons-grade uranium for a single nuclear warhead in just under two months. While its negotiators are prolonging talks in Geneva, Iranian nuclear scientists are well on their way to making those negotiations meaningless.

Diplomats, led by American Secretary of State John Kerry, believe they have secured Iranian acceptance of a set of restrictions that will halt Iran's bomb-making ability at a year away from completion for at least a decade. However, realizing how Tehran has been able to advance their nuclear scheme while under sanctions, there are significant doubts that they can ensure Iranian adherence to an agreement. A major sticking point is that Iranian officials, including Ayatollah Khamenei, have promised to limit or even block access to sensitive military sites and nuclear scientists. Iran also wants international sanctions lifted quickly, while Western nations desire a mechanism that will “snap back” appropriate penalties if the Iranians breach the agreement.

Knowing the history of both Iran and the devious path of its nuclear ambitions, critics of the negotiations—particularly American conservatives and the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—are befuddled about why the Obama administration has complied so readily with Iranian delays and demands. Despite the administration's denials, it appears that it is actually facilitating Tehran's procurement of a bomb. But how could any rational person back any plan that puts nuclear weapons in the hands of a

rogue nation like Iran, which is likely to use them to advance its radical Shiite Islamist agenda?

Some ascribe a personal motive for President Obama's enthusiastic support of the negotiations, that is, his personal antipathy for the Israeli Prime Minister, who is adamantly against any concessions to Iran. His office requires Obama to rise above his personal feelings to perform his duties for the nation. His peevish reactions to Netanyahu's visit to America and his speech to Congress, however, indicate that animosity may be a factor.

Yet, that is too simplistic. More likely, Obama's eagerness for an agreement with Tehran lies in his stated goal: to fundamentally transform America. He seems to be working against U.S. interests abroad because he wants to reduce American influence. Having signaled that the United States has for too long dictated to and policed the rest of the world, he appears to have taken it upon himself to return much of that power to the nations. This policy played out in the Benghazi fiasco: By not intervening to save American lives, he restricted U.S. power. He has followed this timid, hands-off policy throughout the Middle East especially.

How, then, would allowing Iran to go nuclear advance his aims? It would immediately expose the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a sham, and several nations already with the technology to produce nuclear weapons would likely accelerate their programs or declare their capabilities (perhaps Israel, Germany, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, India, etc.). In addition, it would force Sunni Saudi Arabia to join the nuclear club, as would Turkey and maybe Syria and Egypt. The Islamic State would certainly try to get its hands on a bomb. With a dozen or more countries armed with nuclear weaponry, the playing field, as Obama may see it, would be more level, and the United States could no longer dictate to the rest of the world as it has.

He likely perceives this potential multi-polar world as a more just scenario than the present one dominated by a superpower. To him, the supremacy of a solitary hegemon is “unfair,” the hallmark term of his presidency. As he has worked to redistribute wealth through his domestic policies, his foreign policy seems designed to redistribute power, the currency of international relations, to the nations that have long lacked it.

One of God's curses for disobedience reads, “I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you . . .” (Leviticus 26:17). Has America reached the point of “those who hate you shall reign over you”? A president who works against the best interests of the country he governs fits the description.

Within the context, God provides the solution: returning to Him in repentance. Do Americans have the spiritual resolve to turn to God before it is too late?

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Healing Blind Bartimaeus

Christ's healing of blind Bartimaeus is the only miraculous healing of blindness recorded in at least three of the Gospels (Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43). Although the accounts of the healing of Bartimaeus are similar, they contain a few significant differences. The two major ones concern the place of the miracle and the people in the miracle.

With regard to the place, Matthew and Mark report this healing to have taken place when Jesus left the city of Jericho. However, Luke writes, "Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho" (Luke 18:35). The alleged discrepancy is answered by noting that two Jerichos (a new and an old city) existed at that time, the new Jericho lying about two miles south of old Jericho. Leaving old Jericho would be the same as "coming near [new] Jericho," as Luke records it.

With regard to the people, Matthew reports two people were healed while Mark and Luke mention only one person. The latter simply focus on the healing of the prominent individual, Bartimaeus (only Mark reports his name), while Matthew reports on both individuals who were healed. This incident is one of two times that Matthew records two people involved in a miracle where the others account for only one. The second is the exorcism in Gardara (Matthew 8:28-34; Luke 8:27-39; Mark 5:1-20).

Mark provides the fullest detail about Bartimaeus' healing. Jesus, journeying to Jerusalem for the last time with His disciples, led a large procession of people. In less than a week He would give His life as the sacrifice for sins. Although feeling the pressure of the suffering He was about to endure, Jesus' compassion still motivated Him to tend to the needy.



1. Does Bartimaeus really know Jesus' significance?

COMMENT: While Bartimaeus sits by the roadside wondering, "Why all the commotion?" he is told that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. In addressing Him as "O Lord, Son of David," his crying out to Him for mercy acknowledges Christ's deity and humanity, as well as signifying his acceptance of His Messiahship as the future King of Israel. "Son of David" was a well-known designation of the expected Prophet (Ezekiel 34:23-24; Matthew 9:27; Luke 1:32), the Promised One at whose coming the eyes of the blind would be opened (Isaiah 29:18; 35:5).

2. Is Jesus' healing of the blind men merely physical?

COMMENT: The fact that their eyes can now see alludes not only to receiving physical sight, but also—more importantly—to their eyes being opened spiritually, verified by the words "and they followed Him" (Matthew 20:34; Mark 10:52; Luke 18:43). The world ridicules Christians for calling out to God in faith, but this is exactly what the Son of God wants us to do. Many who are spiritually blind to God's truth have a bitter attitude, disliking those whose eyes are opened to Christ, the only path to salvation.

Since Bartimaeus was blind, he likely felt a certain tension in straining to ascertain Jesus' reaction to his shout. No doubt, he felt great relief when He responded with compassion. Most people do not realize how far they are from God and the wonderful gifts He offers to those who respond to His call. However, because they will not cast off their self-righteousness, they remain alienated from Him, in enmity with Christ (Romans 10:3). When God calls, we must lay aside every weight and enticing sin (Hebrews 12:1-3).

3. If Christ is omniscient, why does He ask, "What do you want Me to do for you?" Matthew 20:32; Mark 10:51; Luke 18:41.

COMMENT: Jesus asked similar intriguing questions in Mat-

thew 9:28 and John 5:6: "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Do you want to be made well?" As the omniscient One, He knew what they needed. However, He often questioned those desiring healing, prompting them to express their need and faith in words so that, in a fuller exercise of faith, they would be prepared to receive the desired blessing. His question, then, is intended to produce a dynamic exercise of faith in the men and to be a sign that He was willing to aid them.

4. How does Bartimaeus respond to Christ's question?

COMMENT: When Bartimaeus answers Jesus, he addresses Him respectfully. In the King James Version, all three accounts indicate that he uses "Lord." But in Mark, the word rendered "Lord" is different than those in Matthew and Luke: *rabboni*, correctly translated in the New King James Version, meaning "My great master." Akin to "rabbi," it is a higher and more respectful term. It is found only in Mark 10:51 and John 20:16, where Mary Magdalene uses it of Christ after His resurrection. We must honor the One from whom we seek it.

Their earnest request is illuminating: "Lord, that our eyes may be opened" (Matthew 20:33). Unless we confess our need, showing our desire to have the need filled by Christ, He will take no action. The same is true in the matter of salvation: We must confess that we are a sinner if we expect to be forgiven and saved. The apostle John writes, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). No confession to God means no forgiveness and no salvation.

God's blessings, like this healing, are intended to improve our devotion to Him, but people often pervert their blessings to other uses. Many become distracted by them, leading to backsliding. We should instead follow the example of our Savior, who came, not to be served, but to serve.

—Martin G. Collins