



"If we don't have the truth, we don't have anything to start with and build on."

—Thomas Sowell

19-Jan-18

Appearing Before God (Part Two)

As Part One closed, we considered what [God](#) says in [Isaiah 55:10-11](#):

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

An important detail at the end of verse 11 is often overlooked: God says that His Word will *prosper* in what He sent it to do. The essence of the Hebrew word underlying "prosper" is "to push forward," "to promote," or "to advance" in the sense of "breaking out." It means "to be profitable" or "to cause prosperity." God is saying that this powerful effect of His Word goes beyond mere *accomplishment*; it is not a matter of merely checking an achievement off a list. God's Word prospers—it causes things to grow, to advance, and to increase.

For instance, in [Genesis 1:26](#), Elohim said, "Let Us make man in Our image," and look at the prospering—the advancement, the increase—that is happening from that command! If it were just a matter of accomplishment, God's Word could have been fulfilled when human beings' physical forms resembled God's own spiritual body. But God's Word is *still* reverberating 6,000 years later, advancing and causing an increase. When His pronouncement reaches its full potential, humanity will also be in God's *character* image.

In essence, God's Word causes things to increase just as rain causes crops to increase, but with God's Word, the increase is not always numeric. Often, it is qualitative rather than quantitative.

The Hebrew word translated as "void" in [Isaiah 55:11](#) is used in several other places, but one context is of particular interest:

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the [Feast of Unleavened Bread](#), at the Feast of Weeks, and at the [Feast of Tabernacles](#); and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you. ([Deuteronomy 16:16-17](#))

Verse 16 uses the phrase "empty-handed" ("empty" in the King James Version), which is from the same word rendered "void" in [Isaiah 55:11](#). The specific application in Deuteronomy is that God's people should not appear before Him without something of physical value to present to Him, but the spiritual application is much larger. While "empty-handed" is not an incorrect translation, it may serve to limit the instruction in our minds.

Remember, the Hebrew word translated as "void" and "empty" does not simply mean "without something to give." Its meaning is more general and not limited to a mere absence of something valuable. Combining the thought in [Isaiah 55:11](#) and the fact that *everything* around us has its source in God, the phrase in [Deuteronomy 16:16](#) could be paraphrased as "they shall not appear before the LORD without a *demonstration* of what *God's Word has produced*."

God's Word causes things to happen. God spoke, and plants fit for our food were created. He spoke, and the sun, which gives those plants light and energy, appeared. He spoke, and the seasons of the earth began their cycle. He spoke, and weather patterns were established so the plants would be watered.

As a result, in three seasons throughout the year, God commands us to appear before Him and offer proof of, not only what His Word has *accomplished*, but also what His Word has caused to *prosper*. In this way, offerings are beneficial to us as individuals, helping to remind us that God is the Source of everything and that His will determines how much is produced.

When we consider that the fundamental instruction in [Deuteronomy 16:16](#) is that we should not appear before God "in vain" or "with futility" and that the context refers to how God has blessed us, the applications are vast, since God's blessings are far more than just physical. A monetary offering is just its most specific application for us on [holy days](#), playing a large role in what the church can do in terms of feeding the flock and making a witness to [the world](#).

But we would be in serious error if we concluded that our obligation ends there. More on this in Part Three.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Vanity \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Vanity has many nuances, including transitoriness, futility, profitlessness, confusion, falseness, conceit, vainglory, denial, and idolatry. Moses encapsulates the Old Testament's understanding of vanity, comparing the eternity of God to the brevity of man - a mere breath or puff of wind. Solomon, in Ecclesiastes, adds the poignant insight that despite all of man's

accomplishments, at our very best, we are worthless. Even so, God has placed eternity in our hearts, obligating us to meet the challenges of life, with all its anxiety, frustration, and inconclusiveness, redeeming the time, waiting for God to reveal the big picture later.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Little Things Count!](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

When we look at ourselves against the backdrop of humanity, we can feel that we do not matter. We are just a number among billions. Yet, no one and no act is truly insignificant because of two natural principles: the natural tendency is to increase, and we reap what we sow. John Ritenbaugh shows that, concerning sin and righteousness, these principles play major roles in our personal lives and in the Body of Christ.

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).
