



The Mustard Seed



Rehoboth Baptist Church Newsletter ~ February 2015



From The Desk of Pastor

The Trivial and the Sensational: Satan's dual assault on the sufficiency of Scripture.

One of the strongest condemnations of contemporary American Christianity was penned by the apostle Paul almost two thousand years ago: "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, **and be turned aside to fables**" (2 Tim. 4:2-4; emphasis mine).

With the recent admission by Alex Malarkey that his story about dying, going to heaven and returning to tell about it was a lie, hundreds of thousands of Christians who bought the book (*The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven*), have egg on their faces – and rightly so. The book was primarily written by Alex's father, Kevin, who is a licensed Christian therapist and family counselor (remind me not to consult him). Tyndale House, the book's publisher, has pulled all the copies and have apologized for distributing it. While it was essential for them to do so, it would have been far better if someone at Tyndale had sufficient biblical knowledge to reject it out of hand when the manuscript was first submitted to them. But, as Paul said, there are many who are willing to peddle the word of God – or what pretends to be the word (2 Cor. 2:17).

However, while Malarkey's book is no longer available, others like it are, and in far greater numbers.

Don (not to be confused with John) Piper's book "90 minutes in Heaven" has sold five million copies. Todd Burpo's "Heaven Is for Real" has also sold millions. Publisher Thomas Nelson reports that sales of the book have broken all records. A movie of the same name was recently released.

Without exception, these books trivialize life after death and trivialize God. The Bible does not say much about heaven, but when the biblical writers do address the subject there is always an overpowering sense of holiness, awe (fear and dread) astonishment and unworthiness on the part of those who are privileged to see a glimpse of glory (Isa. 6:1-7; Ezek. 1:26-28; Dan. 7:9-15, 8:27; Rev. 1:10-17). Paul was so overwhelmed by what he saw that he could not speak

of it (2 Cor. 12:2-4). In stark contrast, the descriptions of heaven, God, Christ and the Holy Spirit presented by the various authors of these fictitious visits to heaven bear no resemblance to that of the inspired biblical writers.

The real question that must be asked is this: Who do we believe, Isaiah, John and Paul, or Alex, Dan and Todd? We know who inspired the former, but who inspired the latter? We know there is truth in the words of the former, and we are learning that there are lies in the words of the latter. Jesus spells it out for us: "Sanctify them by Your truth, Your word is truth (John 17:17)... "You are of your father the devil...for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). It boils down to this: If someone lies about God and heaven, Satan is behind it. What is his intent? To portray the Triune God as nothing more than a kind and gentle soul who accepts anybody, and heaven as a place where everything is really designed for the enjoyment of men. Men are magnified, Christ is minimized. Is this what the Bible says (cf. Philippians 2:9-11; Rev. 5:13-14, 22:14-15)? Our Lord is to be magnified, not trivialized.

At the other end of the spectrum is sensationalism. Countless books have been written and films produced from both an antichristian and Christian perspective that distort the truth of Scripture. Heavily produced, glitzy stories such as Dan Brown's hugely popular "The Da Vinci Code" seek to destroy the reliability of Scripture. The notorious "The Last Temptation of Christ" sought to portray Jesus as no better than the average sinner. Tim LaHaye's blockbuster "Left Behind" series, while based on an eschatology considered orthodox by millions of Christians, cannot avoid stretching credibility to extremes (as the series now stretches to sixteen volumes, four movies and video games). The unintended consequence is that readers are desensitized not only by the sheer volume of material, but the extent to which fiction overtakes truth. There can be little doubt that anyone who has prolonged exposure to this sort of thing becomes less capable of holding a balanced theological perspective. While I would never question LaHaye's faith, I certainly question his wisdom and what motivates him, other than a large bank account, to continue to fill the shelves of Christian bookstores with what can only be described as a fable. Sadly, a lot of Christians have read all sixteen volumes of "Left Behind" but have yet to read through the Bible once.

The enemy of the church of God is the enemy of the word of God, so it is to be expected that he will seek to destroy it one way or another. He will do so by trivializing Scripture on one hand, or sensationalizing it on the other. Either way it will be a departure from the truth and dangerous to the soul (John 17:17).

"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

For the kingdom.
Pastor Ron



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MISSION NEWS!

In February we will be praying for
Mike and Agnieszka Green,
missionaries with World Venture in Poland.

A little background about Mike and Agnieszka -

Mike accepted Jesus as his Savior at the age of seven. Years later, while studying history at Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, he was involved in a prayer group, and became very interested in becoming a missionary.

In 1991 he earned a master of divinity, specializing in missions. He spent the summers of 1989 to 1990 in Poland, and felt God calling him to become a missionary to the Polish people. From 1992 to 1995, he served in Krakow, Poland, with World Venture as a short-term missionary. While there, Mike went through language training, was an elder at First Baptist Church, and helped to organize its spiritual life.

Agnieszka grew up in a Polish Catholic home. She had a knowledge of God, which she received from home and church. This gave her a spiritual stepping stone, but did not bridge the gap that she felt existed between her and God. A friend helped her understand the Gospel, while she was studying at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. Agnieszka accepted Christ as her Lord and Savior, and completed that spiritual bridge.

She met Mike in 1993 while attending his Sunday school class.

A year and a half later they were married, and since then have ministered together to Polish churches and the Polish people.

Their ministry in Poland -

Mike and Agnieszka help with the process of establishing churches and developing Christian community. Mike's responsibilities include, evangelism, discipleship, serving as an elder at the Second Baptist Church in Krakow, preaching, planning church services, and leading home Bible study groups. He was involved in establishing a School of Missions,

and serves on its Board. Mike teaches anthropology, conducts cultural research, and does consulting work with other Polish missionary agencies.

Agnieszka tries to reach women through evangelistic conferences and different Bible study groups. She is a Sunday school teacher and works closely with other organizations involved with reaching kids with the Gospel. She also helped to start and run the first Christian elementary school in Krakow. Agnieszka's ministry also includes translating work. Her skills have translated hundreds of contemporary worship songs and traditional hymns, as well as translate a couple of books on missions and how to bring real change to nations, making them available for Polish Christians.

Mike and Agnieszka have been helping at a small church plant in the town of Bochnia, which is about 40 minutes east of Krakow. The church was previously led by another missionary who has since left. The church has struggled and currently only has 5 people.

Mike and Agnieszka want to be an encouragement to the church, and help them overcome the hurts and issues that keep them from growing. Agnieszka will be helping them start a Sunday school program, and Mike will help the church analyze where they are spiritually.

Prayer needs -

Pray that God would give Mike and Agnieszka humility and wisdom as they minister at the church in Bochnia, and that the small group would grow.

Pray that the Lord would deepen the faith of the people who attend the Green's church, and bring new believers to the church.

Pray that God would give the church members a heart for evangelism, discipleship, and missions.

Pray for Mike and Agnieszka, that the Lord would deepen their faith and walk with the Lord, and that he would protect them from evil.

Major Challenge -

In Poland, Protestants tend to be viewed as part of a cult or sect, which creates a barrier in evangelistic efforts. Capitalism has now been in Poland for 24 years. This means that there is a generation in Poland who have never known Communism, but instead are immersed in consumerism. Thus there is an increasing tendency among Poles to disassociate themselves with the Roman Catholic church. Most of these people are just not interested in Christianity and the organized church.

Please continue to pray for Mike and Agnieszka, as they faithfully serve the Lord, in bringing the truth of the Gospel to people of Poland, and the challenges that they face each day.



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Where Do You Draw the Line with Grace?

By: Steve Brown on Wednesday February 4, 2015

I had lunch with a young man yesterday. He is a math and science teacher, and a very intense and focused Christian. He came to lunch with an agenda. First, he wanted to confess to being very angry with me when he first started reading my books and hearing me preach. This young man said, laughing, that I would be shocked by some of the things he wrote in the margins of my books. Second, now that he was no longer angry, he wanted to ask some clarifying biblical and theological questions.

I'm often asked, "Okay, I get this grace thing, but where do you draw the line?"

My standard answer is that you don't; and when you do, it's no longer grace. Grace covers white lies, murder and porn. It's an umbrella that invites gays, lesbians, adulterers, liars and thieves. It's for the pretenders of goodness and obedience. It covers the arrogant, the fat, the angry and the failures. It's for everybody who is unqualified.

And then I will often ask, "Why do you want to draw a line?"

The drawing of the line is more often than not an effort to attain power, manipulate, affirm one's own righteousness and keep out the spiritual cretins from the "family." Drawing a line is the stuff of which religious institutions are made. I find myself getting quite irritated when people do that. (I know that's self-righteousness too...and I repent. Grace covers the self-righteous...even those who, like me, are self-righteous about the self-righteous.)

Okay, nothing above will shock you. It's the essence of the Christian faith and, if you've been hanging around Key Life for very long, you already know that is what all the voices of Key Life teach. But the young man I had lunch with yesterday was different in his questions. He understood the radical nature of grace. He was quite honest about his own sin and lack of qualifications, and rejoiced in the finished work of Christ on the cross. His question was, "But what about the 'new creature' to which the Bible refers and the clear directions of what it means to follow Christ?"

In the magazine, *First Things*, I read this morning, the editor, R.R. Reno, referred to James Burnham's book, *The Suicide of the West*, a critique of political liberalism. Reno wrote that Burnham got it wrong in thinking that political liberalism was a philosophy or an ideology. Reno wrote that it was, rather, a technique for managing diversity, a flexible method of social control. The problem with political liberalism, according to Reno, is that it is a "dream of social justice without virtue...of virtue without censure...and of redemption without repentance" (*First Things*, January 2015, p. 7).

There is (and you know it's true) a mushy kind of

grace sort of like what Reno attributes to political liberalism. It's a "let's join hands and sing Kumbaya around the campfire. You're okay and I'm okay...so just keep singing because the singing is the important thing."

Because the young man was seriously concerned about himself and others, and had encountered "mushy grace," I took his question seriously. Let me tell you, in essence, what I told him.

Those who understand the clear message of grace understand the clear message of the law. The Ten Commandments, as someone has said, are not "ten suggestions," and the call of obedience and holiness is a serious call. The admonishments that call us to purity and faithfulness are clearly reflective of the mind of a holy God and his requirements. Anybody who ignores that fact will be shallow and superficial. And anybody who drops that reality from his or her spiritual vocabulary after "running to Jesus" will be even more shallow and superficial.

But here's the important thing I told my friend: there are two reactions to God's serious call to holiness and righteousness. One reaction is those who keep working at living up to the standard, creating a lifelong and back-breaking discipline of trying harder and harder. Sometimes, I suppose, making a little progress here and there, and hoping for more if they try harder still. I'm not too harsh about people like that given that I keep trying too.

On the other hand, there are those who confront God's call to holiness, obedience and faithfulness with the realization that nobody can do all of that, be all of that or live up to all of that. It's the heartfelt reaction of "You've got to be kidding, right?" And when one finds out that God isn't kidding, there follows the absolute helplessness, absolute unworthiness and absolute lack of one who simply hasn't, doesn't and never will come close to meeting God's requirements. It is the horrible realization that one has been "weighed" as Daniel wrote in his book and Johnny Cash sang in his song, "in the balances and found wanting."

At that point, one either runs away or runs to Jesus. Those who run to Jesus are overwhelmed by his surprising welcome, forgiveness and love. Those are the Christians. And the degree of one's inability to meet the standard is always correlated with how overwhelmed one is at that welcome, forgiveness and love. Jesus said about the prostitute, "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little" (Luke 7:47).

"But you don't say much about obedience and sin," my friend pointed out.

"I know," I responded, "and that's because the disobedient and the sinners don't need to be told what they already know, and the religious folks will work at being more religious and righteous, and thus miss the whole point."



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In the process, they will make everybody else miserable...starting with themselves."

The message of the Gospel was best said by Paul: "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost" (1 Timothy 1:15).

The problem is that many Christians leave out the "of whom I am the foremost." Leave that out and it becomes just more religion. You should never buy a used car from anybody who leaves that part out.

But what about being better?

Of course we get better. If you hang out with me, you'll start smelling like pipe smoke. Just so, if you hang out with Jesus, you'll start smelling like Jesus. Well, mostly. Sometimes we get better and sometimes we don't. But that's not what matters. If Jesus' finished work on the cross is in fact "finished" and I've been given his righteousness as my own, my inability to measure up doesn't matter anymore. I no longer have to please a God who is already pleased. Nothing I do or don't do will be more sufficient than Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

What a relief!

I really thought I would be better than I am by now. I'm not, but I'm surprised and pleased when Jesus (because he likes me) shows me the "project under construction" and the work that is being done even in me. Of course, he doesn't do that very often because he knows that if he gives me an inch, I'll take a mile. So he mixes the knowledge of my sin with the reality of my ongoing sanctification. Jesus does both to make sure I don't forget.

Then there is one other thing.

I told my young friend that those sour, condemning and angry Christians who seem so together are pretending. They know, in those times of an attack of sanity, they're just as needy, sinful and screwed up as we are. Go and hug one of them and whisper, "I'm so sorry." They won't like it and it will probably make them angry. But do it anyway.

Well, Steve, you say, that's the same thing you say all the time and not just to your new friend, the teacher.

I know. But I needed to be reminded and Jesus told me that you needed to be reminded too.

So consider yourself reminded.

Galatians 5:13: *For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*

Love & Marriage Quiz

1: What was the name of Abraham's wife?

- Rachel
- Sarah
- Rebekah
- Leah

2: How was Isaac's wife chosen?

- His father chose a local girl for him to marry
- Isaac fell in love with his friend's daughter
- His father sent a servant back to Mesopotamia to choose a wife from his own family
- Isaac fell in love with his servant girl

3: Which of his wives did Jacob love the most?

- Leah
- Zilpah
- Rachel
- Bilhah

4: What happened to Shechem, the prince who fell in love with Dinah, daughter of Jacob?

- He married Dinah
- He, his father, and the men of his city were slain by Dinah's brothers
- He invited Dinah's family to live in his city
- He eloped with Dinah, who never saw her family again

5: Where did Moses meet his future wife?

- At a well in the land of Midian
- In Pharaoh's palace in the land of Egypt
- In the wilderness on the journey to the promised land
- At the house of one of the Israelites

6: What were the restrictions on marriage for the daughters of Zelophehad?

- They must only have one husband each
- They must marry within their tribe
- They must marry before the age of thirty
- They must marry whoever is chosen by the priest for them

7: What was the name of Ruth's second husband?

- Elimelech
- Mahlon
- Chilion
- Boaz

8: What was the name of Abigail's first husband?

- Goliath
- Uzzah
- Joash
- Nabal



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9: Samson loved Delilah so much that she persuaded him to tell her what?

- The secret of his strength
- Where the Ark of God was
- How to defeat the Israelites
- How many Philistines he had killed

10: What convinced David he was in love with Bathsheba, to the extent that he was prepared to commit adultery?

- He saw her take a bath, and saw she was beautiful
- He had dinner with her, and saw she was beautiful
- He saw her with her husband, and saw she was beautiful
- She was his servant, and he saw she was beautiful

11: Who did Amnon love, and then hate even more than he had loved her?

- Dinah
- Tamar
- Leah
- Abigail

12: Who told his wife not to worry that she was barren and said, "am not I better to thee than ten sons"?

- Abraham
- Jacob
- Elkanah
- Manoah

13: In the love poetry in Song of Solomon how is the lady's hair described?

- As a rushing waterfall
- As a stream of silver
- As a bed of lilies
- As a flock of goats

14: What was the occupation of Hosea's wife?

- Housekeeper
- Dyer of cloth
- Harlot
- Money lender

15: Who does Jesus say are the two most important people to love?

- Your spouse and your parents
- God and your neighbour
- God and your spouse
- Your spouse and your children

16: Which married couple did Paul become friends with at Corinth?

- Ananias and Sapphira
- Aquila and Priscilla
- Jason and Lydia
- Peter and Mary

17: What is Paul's command to husbands in his letter to the Colossians?

- Love your wives, and do not be bitter towards them
- Ensure that your wife loves you before you marry her
- Love your wives, and ensure they keep an orderly house
- Ensure that your wife respects you

18: What does Paul say is the greatest?

- Faith
- Hope
- Love
- All three

19: How does Paul describe marriage in Hebrews?

- Loving
- Perfect
- A gift
- Honourable

20: Of what is the husband's love for the wife a symbol?

- God's love for us
- Christ's love for the church
- Man's love for woman
- Adam's love for Eve

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C. S. Lewis On Love

"Though our feelings come and go, God's love for us does not."

"Love is not affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained"

"Affection is responsible for nine-tenths of whatever solid and durable happiness there is in our lives"

"Have you not seen that in our days
Of any whose story, song or art
Delights us, our sincerest praise
Means, when all's said, 'You break my heart?'"

"Do not waste time bothering whether you "love" your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone you will presently come to love him."



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Steve's Devotional – Garbage In, Garbage Out

By: Steve Brown

Confession: In my lifetime, I've believed and taught some pretty dumb things.

One of them: If you memorize Scripture, pray a lot and do religious stuff, you will sin less, be more obedient and have a powerful witness for Christ in the world. The principle is: Garbage in, garbage out.

I'm a lot older and somewhat wiser. I now know that this idea suffers from two fatal errors...maybe more.

The first fatal error: The belief that we are a lot worse than we think we are and it's up to us to make us better.

Do you know what bothers me? Systems for godliness. I want to please God more than you can imagine and I read more books than you can imagine in the fond hope that someone will tell me how to please God. What they say simply doesn't work and, if I end up meeting the people who wrote the books (and I often do), the truth is, it hasn't worked for them either.

Every time someone tells me the ten ways to have a closer walk with God, I go off on another tangent of praying more, memorizing Scripture more and doing more stuff that I think will be pleasing to God. And then when I find that "Jesus has left the building," I keep kidding myself that he is still there and that I'm quite godly. After a while, I'm so phony I can't even stand myself.

Religious stuff doesn't make us better...it makes us more religious.

That's what Jesus meant in John 5:39-40 when he criticized the religious people for thinking that the Scriptures would give them eternal life when, in fact, all they did was point to him in whom was life.

I think it was the late Vernon McGee who said that the danger with most Christians is that we say what we're going to do, talk about what we're going to do, and think that we have done it when, in fact, we haven't done it at all. That is, of course, true of religion. We think that the more we "do" religion, the more godly we are. Sometimes just the opposite is true.

The second fatal error: The belief that being more godly, spiritual and religious is even the point.

What is the point then? The point is Jesus.

Jesus said that if we were really tired, we should come to him.

Jesus said that if our lives were empty, we could come to him and he would give us abundant life.

Jesus said that if we were sick, sinful and very needy, he would be there for us.

Jesus said that he came to love the people who couldn't pull off the religious thing.

Jesus said that he was a shepherd and not a butcher. He loved the sheep and gave his life for them.

Jesus said that he was light for the darkness, bread for the hungry, water for the thirsty.

Jesus said that if we ran to him, he would never kick us out.

In fact, Jesus' harshest criticism was reserved for the religious, the sanctified and the pure.

The spurious idea of "garbage in, garbage out" is just that...spurious. I don't know about you but I'm quite good at multi-tasking. I can memorize Scripture, pray, and sit in church, and at the same time, hate, lust, covet and be really ticked off at and unforgiving toward the person who is sitting next to me. Not only that. I found that the garbage doesn't come from the outside but is a lot closer to home...me (Mathew 15:10-20).

Am I saying that we shouldn't read and memorize Scripture, that prayer and going to church are bad things? Are you crazy? I'm a Bible teacher, I couldn't survive without prayer, and I make my living working as a religious professional.

To play on the words of C.S. Lewis, those who run to Jesus get him and his love with forgiveness, eternal life and sometimes even godliness thrown in. Those who focus on godliness get neither Jesus nor anything else.

**Time to Draw Away
Read Psalm 23 & Romans 8**

What's your personal "system of godliness"? How's it working for you? Most often the result is frustration, exhaustion and discouragement rather than obedience, holiness and purity. So what do you do? Run to Jesus. Forgiveness and love—and sometimes even godliness—will be yours. And they're only found in Jesus' grace store.

Song of Solomon 8:6-7: Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.

Galatians 2:20: I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.



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The President, the Passengers, & the Patience of God

By John Piper

Sometimes we are so overwhelmed at being treated better than we deserve that we must exult in the all-sovereign God—the God of birds' flight and Obama's rise. When King David pondered how many were God's "wondrous deeds," he said, "I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told" (Psalm 40:5). That's the way I feel watching God's public mercies in the last few days.

Have you considered how unlikely was the crash of USAir flight 1549 in the Hudson River on January 15, 2009—not just the rescue but the crash itself? Picture this: The Airbus A320 is taking off at an angle—maybe 30 degrees. It's not flying horizontal with the earth. Not only that, it is flying fast—not full speed yet, but perhaps four times as fast as your car would go at top highway speeds.

The geese are flying horizontally with the ground, more or less. They are not flying in a cloud like a swarm of bees. They fly level with the ground, often shaped like a V. In view of all that, what are the odds that, traveling at this speed and at this angle, this airplane would intersect with the flight of those geese at that very millisecond which would put a bird not just in one of those engines, but both of them?

Two laser-guided missiles would not have been as amazingly effective as were those geese. It is incredible, statistically speaking. If God governs nature down to the fall (and the flight) of every bird, as Jesus says ([Matthew 10:29](#)), then the crash of flight 1549 was designed by God.

Which leads to the landing in the Hudson River—which is just as unlikely. The airbus now has no thrust in either engine. The flight attendants said it was as quiet as a library in the plane without the sound of engines. The plane is now a 77-ton glider with its belly full of fuel. Captain Sullenberger decides to land in the river. Anywhere else would mean one big fireball.

He banks and misses the George Washington Bridge by 900 feet and glides the plane into a perfect belly landing. A few degrees tilt to the front or back or the right or left and the plane would have done cartwheels down the river and broken up. On the water, the flight attendant does not let passengers open the rear door. That would have flooded the cabin too fast. The emergency doors and front doors provide exits for everyone and the plane floats long enough for all of them to climb out. Ferry boats are there almost instantly. The captain walks the aisle twice to make sure everyone is off. Then he leaves. Later the plane sinks.

If God guides geese so precisely, he also guides the captain's hands. God knew that when he took the

plane down, he would also give a spectacular deliverance. So why would he do that? If he means for all to live, why not just skip the crash?

Because he meant to give our nation a parable of his power and mercy the week before a new President takes office. God can take down a plane any time he pleases—and if he does, he wrongs no one. Apart from Christ, none of us deserves anything from God but judgment. We have belittled him so consistently that he would be perfectly just to take any of us any time in any way he chooses.

But God is longsuffering. He is slow to anger. He withholds wrath every day. This is what we saw in the parable. The crash of Flight 1549 illustrates God's right and power to judge. The landing of the plane represents God's mercy. It was God's call to all the passengers and all their families and all who heard the story to repent and turn to God's Son, Jesus Christ, and receive forgiveness for sin.

I am writing these thoughts on the evening after the inauguration of Barack Obama, the first African-American President of the United States. I cried twice today. There were two points when I was overwhelmed by the magnitude of it all. Once was when I prayed with some brothers after Obama's speech and was overcome with the sinfulness of my own racist background. The other was in trying to express my emotion to an African-American brother about what this must mean for him.

As much as I reject Obama's stance on abortion, I am thankful to the bottom of my soul that an African-American can be President of United States. The enormity of it all is unspeakable. This is God's doing. The geese were God's doing. The landing of Flight 1549 was God's doing. And the Obama presidency is God's doing. "He removes kings and sets up kings" ([Daniel 2:21](#)).

And I pray that President Obama has eyes to see. The "miracle on the Hudson" and the "miracle in the White House" are not unrelated. God has been merciful to us as a nation. Our racial sins deserved judgment a thousand times over. God does not owe America anything. We owe him everything. And instead of destruction, he has given us another soft landing. We are not dead at the bottom of the Hudson.

O that Barack Obama would see the mercies of God and look to the One whose blood bought everlasting life for all who trust him. The parables of God's mercy are everywhere. The point of them is this: God is a just and patient Ruler, and Jesus Christ is a great Savior. Turn. Turn. Turn, O President of the United States and passengers of this planet.

Full of thanks for all God's mercies,

Pastor John

By John Piper. © Desiring God.



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On Love By John Wesley

Sermon 139

(text from the 1872 edition - Thomas Jackson, editor)

Preached at Savannah, February 20, 1736

Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:3

[1.] There is great reason to fear that it will hereafter be said of most of you who are here present, that this scripture, as well as all those you have heard before, profited you nothing. Some, perhaps, are not serious enough to attend to it; some who do attend, will not believe it; some who do believe it, will yet think it a hard saying, and so forget it as soon as they can; and, of those few who receive it gladly for a time, some, having no root of humility, or self-denial, when persecution ariseth because of the word, will, rather than suffer for it, fall away. Nay, even of those who attend to it, who believe, remember, yea, and receive it so deeply into their hearts, that it both takes root there, endures the heat of temptation, and begins to bring forth fruit, yet will not *all* bring forth fruit unto perfection. The cares or pleasures of the world, and the desire of other things, (perhaps not felt till then) will grow up with the word, and choke it.

[2.] Nor am I that speak the word of God any more secure from these dangers than you that hear it. I, too, have to bewail "an evil heart of unbelief." And whenever God shall suffer persecution to arise, yea, were it only the slight one of reproach, I may be the first that is offended. Or, if I be enabled to sustain this, yet, should he let loose the cares of the world upon me, or should he cease to guard me against those pleasures that do not lead to him, and the desire of other things (than knowing and loving him), I should surely be overwhelmed, and, having preached to others, be myself a castaway.

[3.] Why then do I speak this word at all? Why? Because a dispensation of the gospel is committed to me: And, though what I shall do to-morrow I know not, to-day I will preach the gospel. And with regard to you, my commission runs thus: "Son of man, I do send thee to them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; -- whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear."

[4.] Thus saith the Lord God, "Whosoever thou art who wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." (In order to this, "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.") "Forsake not the assembling together, as the manner of some is." In secret, likewise, "pray to thy Father who seeth in secret," and "pour out thy heart before him." Make my word "a lantern to thy feet, and a light unto thy paths." Keep it "in thy heart, and in thy mouth, when thou sittest in thy house, when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." "Turn unto me with fasting," as well as prayer; and, in obedience to thy dying Redeemer, by eating that bread and drinking that cup, "show ye forth the Lord's death till

he comes." By the power thou shalt through these means receive from on high, do all the things which are enjoined in the Law, and avoid all those things which are forbidden therein, knowing that if ye offend in one point, ye are guilty of all." "To do good also, and to distribute, forget not;" -- yea, while you have time, do all the good you can unto all men. Then "deny thyself, take up thy cross daily;" and, if called thereto, "resist unto blood." And when each of you can say, "All this have I done," then let him say to himself farther, (words at which not only such as Felix alone, but the holiest soul upon earth might tremble) "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing."

It concerns us all, therefore, in the highest degree, to know,

I. The full sense of those words, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned;"

II. The true meaning of the word love; and,

III. In what sense it can be said, that without love all this profiteth us nothing.

I.

As to the First: It must be observed that the word used by St. Paul properly signifies, *To divide into small pieces, and then to distribute what has been so divided*; and, consequently, it implies, not only divesting ourselves at once of all the worldly goods we enjoy, either from a fit of distaste to the world, or a sudden start of devotion, but an act of choice, and that choice coolly and steadily executed. It may imply, too, that this be done not out of vanity, but in part from a right principle; namely, from a design to perform the command of God, and a desire to obtain his kingdom. It must be farther observed, that the word *give* signifies, actually to deliver a thing according to agreement; and, accordingly, it implies, like the word preceding, not a hasty, inconsiderate action, but one performed with open eyes and a determined heart, pursuant to a resolution before taken. The full sense of the words, therefore, is this; which he that hath ears to hear, let him hear: "Though I should give all the substance of my house to feed the poor; though I should do so upon mature choice and deliberation; though I should spend my life in dealing it out to them with my own hands, yea, and that from a principle of obedience; though I should suffer, from the same view, not only reproach and shame, not only bonds and imprisonment, and all this by my own continued act and deed, not accepting deliverance, but, moreover, death itself, -- yea, death inflicted in a manner the most terrible to nature; yet all this, if I have not love, (the love of God, and the love of all mankind, 'shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Ghost given unto me') it profiteth me nothing."



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II.

Let us inquire what this love is, -- what is the true meaning of the word? We may consider it either as to its properties or effects: And that we may be under no possibility of mistake, we will not at all regard the judgment of men, but go to our Lord himself for an account of the nature of love; and, for the effects of it, to his inspired Apostle.

The love which our Lord requires in all his followers, is the love of God and man; -- of God, for his own, and of man, for God's sake. Now, what is it to love God, but to delight in him, to rejoice in his will, to desire continually to please him, to seek and find our happiness in him, and to thirst day and night for a fuller enjoyment of him?

As to the measure of this love, our Lord hath clearly told us, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." Not that we are to love or delight in none but him: For he hath commanded us, not only to love our neighbour, that is, all men, as ourselves; -- to desire and pursue their happiness as sincerely and steadily as our own, -- but also to love many of his creatures in the strictest sense; to delight in them, to enjoy them: Only in such a manner and measure as we know and feel, not to indispose but to prepare us for the enjoyment of Him. Thus, then, we are called to love God with all our heart.

The effects or properties of this love, the Apostle describes in the chapter before us. And all these being infallible marks whereby any man may judge of himself, whether he hath this love or hath it not, they deserve our deepest consideration.

"Love suffereth long," or is longsuffering. If thou love thy neighbour for God's sake, thou wilt bear long with his infirmities: If he want wisdom, thou wilt pity and not despise him: If he be in error, thou wilt mildly endeavour to recover him, without any sharpness or reproach: If he be overtaken in a fault, thou wilt labour to restore him in the spirit of meekness: And if, haply, that cannot be done soon, thou wilt have patience with him; if God, peradventure, may bring him, at length to the knowledge and love of the truth. In all provocations, either from the weakness or malice of men, thou wilt show thyself a pattern of gentleness and meekness; and, be they ever so often repeated, wilt not be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Let no man deceive you with vain words: He who is not thus long-suffering, hath not love.

Again: "Love is kind." Whosoever feels the love of God and man shed abroad in his heart, feels an ardent and uninterrupted thirst after the happiness of all his fellow-creatures. His soul melts away with the very fervent desire which he hath continually to promote it; and out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. In his tongue is the law of kindness. The same is impressed on all his actions. The flame within is continually working itself away, and spreading abroad more and more, in every instance of good-will to all with whom he hath to do. So that whether he thinks or speaks, or whatever he does, it all points to the same end, -- the advancing, by every possible way,

the happiness of all his fellow-creatures. Deceive not, therefore, your own souls: He who is not thus kind, hath not love.

Farther: "Love envieth not." This, indeed, is implied, when it is said, "Love is kind." For kindness and envy are inconsistent: They can no more abide together than light and darkness. If we earnestly desire *all* happiness to *all*, we cannot be grieved at the happiness of any. The fulfilling of our desire will be sweet to our soul; so far shall we be from being pained at it. If we are always doing what good we can for our neighbour, and wishing we could do more, it is impossible that we should repine at any good he receives: Indeed, it will be the very joy of our heart. However, then, we may flatter ourselves, or one another, he that envieth hath not love.

It follows, "Love vaunteth not itself;" or rather, is not rash or hasty in judging: For this is indeed the true meaning of the word. As many as love their neighbour for God's sake, will not easily receive an ill opinion of any to whom they wish all good, spiritual as well as temporal. They cannot condemn him even in their heart without evidence; nor upon slight evidence neither; nor, indeed upon any, without first, if it be possible, having him and his accuser face to face, or at the least acquainting him with the accusation, and letting him speak for himself. Every one of you feels that he cannot but act thus, with regard to one whom he tenderly loves. Why, then, he who doth not act thus hath not love.

I only mention one more of the properties of this love: "Love is not puffed up." You cannot wrong one you love: Therefore, if you love God with all your heart, you cannot so wrong him as to rob him of his glory, by taking to yourself what is due to him only. You will own that all you are, and all you have, is his; that without him you can do nothing; that he is your light and your life, your strength and your all; and that you are nothing, yea, less than nothing, before him. And if you love your neighbour as yourself, you will not be able to prefer yourself before him. Nay, you will not be able to despise any one, any more than to hate him. (Nay, you will think every man better than yourself.) As the wax melteth away before the fire, so doth pride melt away before love. All haughtiness, whether of heart, speech, or behaviour, vanishes away where love prevails. It bringeth down the high looks of him who boasted in his strength, and maketh him as a little child; diffident of himself, willing to hear, glad to learn, easily convinced, easily persuaded. And whosoever is otherwise minded, let him give up all vain hope: He is puffed up, and so hath not love.

III.

It remains to inquire, in what sense it can be said that "though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, yea, though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing."

The chief sense of the words is, doubtless, this: That whatsoever we do, and whatsoever we suffer, if we are not renewed in the spirit of our mind, by "the love



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of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us," we cannot enter into life eternal. None can enter there, unless in virtue of covenant which God hath given unto man in the Son of his love.

But, because general truths are less apt to affect us, let us consider one or two particulars, with regard to which all we can do or suffer, if we have not love, profiteth us nothing. And, First, all without this profiteth not, so as to make life happy; nor, Secondly, so as to make death comfortable.

1. And, First, without love nothing can so profit us as to make our lives happy. By happiness I mean, not a slight, trilling pleasure, that perhaps begins and ends in the same hour; but such a state of well-being as contents the soul, and gives it a stead, lasting satisfaction. But that nothing without love can profit us, as to our present happiness, will appear from this single consideration: You cannot want it, in any one single instance, without pain; and the more you depart from it, the pain is the greater. Are you wanting in longsuffering? Then, so far as you fall short of this, you fall short of happiness. The more the opposite tempers -- anger, fretfulness, revenge -- prevail, the more unhappy you are. You know it; you feel it; nor can the storm be allayed, or peace ever return to your soul, unless meekness, gentleness, patience, or, in one word, love, take possession of it. Does any man find in himself ill-will, malice, envy, or any other temper opposite to kindness? Then is misery there; and the stronger the temper, the more miserable he is. If the slothful man may be said to eat his own flesh, much more the malicious, or envious. His soul is the very type of hell; -- full of torment as well as wickedness. He hath already the worm that never dieth, and he is hastening to the fire that never can be quenched. Only as yet the great gulf is not fixed between him and heaven. As yet there is a Spirit ready to help his infirmities; who is still willing, if he stretch out his hands to heaven, and bewail his ignorance and misery, to purify his heart from vile affections, and to renew it in the love of God, and so lead him by present, up to eternal, happiness.

2. Secondly. Without love, nothing can make death comfortable.

By comfortable I do not mean stupid, or senseless. I would not say, he died comfortably who died by an apoplexy, or by the shot of a cannon, any more than he who, having his conscience seared, died as unconcerned as the beasts that beasts that perish. Neither do I believe you would envy any one the comfort of dying raving mad. But, by a comfortable death, I mean, a calm passage out of life, full of even, rational peace and joy. And such a death, all the acting and all the suffering in the world cannot give, without love.

To make this still more evident, I cannot appeal to your own experience; but I may to what we have seen, and to the experience of others. And two I have myself seen going out of this life in what I call a comfortable manner, though not with equal comfort. One had evidently more comfort than the other, because he had more love.

I attended the first during a great part of his last trial, as well as when he yielded up his soul to God. He cried out, "God doth chasten me with strong pain; but I thank him for all; I bless him for all; I love him for all!" When asked, not long before his release, "Are the consolations of God small with you?" he replied aloud, "No, no, no!" Calling all that were near him by their names, he said, "Think of heaven, talk of heaven: All the time is lost when we are not thinking of heaven." Now, this was the voice of love; and, so far as that prevailed, all was comfort, peace, and joy. But as his love was not perfect, so neither was his comfort. He [had] intervals of [anger or] fretfulness, and therein of misery; giving by both an incontestable proof that love can sweeten both life and death. So when that is either absent from, or obscured in, the soul, there is no peace or comfort there.

It was in this place that I saw the other good soldier of Jesus Christ grappling with his last enemy, death. And it was, indeed, a spectacle worthy to be seen, of God, and angels, and men. Some of his last breath was spent in a psalm of praise to Him who was then giving him the victory; in assurance whereof he began triumph even in the heat of the battle. When he was asked, "Hast thou the love of God in thy heart?" he lifted up his eyes and hands, and answered, "Yes, yes!" with the whole strength he had left. To one who inquired if he was afraid of the devil, whom he had just mentioned as making his last attack upon him, he replied, "No, no: My loving Saviour hath conquered every enemy: He is with me. I fear nothing." Soon after, he said, "The way to our loving Saviour is sharp, but it is short." Nor was it long before he fell into a sort of slumber, wherein his soul sweetly returned to God that gave it.

Here, we may observe, was no mixture of any passion or temper contrary to love; therefore, there was no misery; perfect love casting out whatever might have occasioned torment. And whosoever thou art who hast the like measure of love, thy last end shall be like his.

[Section numbers in brackets follow the Bicentennial Edition.]

Acknowledgements

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Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

...
And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. I Cor 13:4-13

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<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
1 9:00 AM Sunday School 10:30 AM Worship 6:00 PM Evening Service Bob Munroe	2 Groundhog Day	3 7:00 PM Deaconess 7:00 PM Missions Bob Walls	4 7:00 PM Prayer Meeting 8:00 PM Choir	5 7:00 PM Ladies' Bible Study 7:00 PM Men's Bible Study	6	7
8 9:00 AM Sunday School 10:30 AM Worship 6:00 PM Evening Service Bill & Linda Rose	9 7:00 PM Elders & Deacons	10	11 7:00 PM Prayer Meeting 8:00 PM Choir	12 7:00 PM Ladies' Bible Study 7:00 PM Men's Bible Study Lincoln's Birthday Ron Bridge	13 Cindy Williams	14 10:00 AM Neighborhood Visitation Kari Guest Valentine's Day
Ron & Mickie Vacation						
15 9:00 AM Sunday School 10:30 AM Worship 6:00 PM Evening Service Behiye & Mark Oldro	16 Katie Swallow President's Day	17 7:00 PM Deacons Pray & Visit	18 7:00 PM Prayer Meeting 8:00 PM Choir <i>Ash Wednesday</i>	19 7:00 PM Men's Bible Study	20	21 6:00 PM Conversational Dinners Adam Schneider
Ron & Mickie Vacation						
22 9:00 AM Sunday School 10:30 AM Worship 6:00 PM Evening Service Tory & AnnMarie MacDonald Washington's Birthday	23	24 Nicholas Phelps	25 7:00 PM Prayer Meeting 8:00 PM Choir	26 7:00 PM Ladies' Bible Study 7:00 PM Men's Bible Study Meredith Azevedo	27	28 Kathy Frye
Ron & Mickie Vacation						

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