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- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

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Finally, brethren
WHATEVER THINGS are true
 are noble
 are just
 are pure
 are lovely
 are of good report
 IF THERE IS ANY VIRTUE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at christistheway.com.

Cleanliness, Godliness

David Lipscomb, via "Lenexa Edifier"

For a parent to require a child to wash his face and keep his body clean and not require him to learn and obey the Bible, is to teach him the body is worth more than a pure heart and clean spirit. For a parent to require a child to learn spelling and reading and not require him to study the Bible is to teach him that it is much more important to be qualified to live in this world than to be fitted to live in heaven.

A Soul Winner for Jesus

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Years ago a younger man moved to work with me in a small, rural town. He preached for a church farther out in the country. My hope was for him to keep my home Bible studies going when I was out of town. The problem was, though he had a fair knowledge of the Bible and could preach an acceptable sermon, he couldn't teach a home Bible study to save his life.

The song states, "I want to be a soul winner for Jesus every day...." This should be true of you as well as

me. "Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:3). How can we become effective soul winners?

(1) **We must first recognize:**

(a) The Need: Our friends and loved ones who are not Christians are lost. Salvation is only in Christ (John 14:6). Only those who by faith have been baptized into Him are saved (Galatians 3:26-27). As in Jesus' day:

"But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest'" (Matthew 9:36-38).

(b) Our Responsibility. Disciples who fail to use their abilities and opportunities in the Master's service will be cast into outer darkness (Matthew 25:14-30).

(2) **We must love:**

(a) The Lord, with all our hearts, souls, and minds (Matthew 22:35-39).

(b) The Word of God: "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. (Psalm 119:97).

(c) People (Matthew 5:43-48). See in that enemy a person in the image of God with a soul in need of salvation.

(3) **We Must Study:**

a. The Word of God, to know what to teach. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15); cf. Matthew 15:14; 1 Peter 3:15).

b. People, to understand how to teach them. We must sit where they sit (Ezekiel 3:15). We must become all things to all people, so by all means we can save some (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). My dad grew up a city boy in Little Rock, but he loved to preach for country churches in the Ozarks and spend hours with them hunting and fishing. He baptized one hundred ten people in one ten day meeting in the country in Southwest Arkansas.

(4) **We must Depend on the Lord.** When we follow and use His word to do His work, "it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). We can thus "do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20-21). We must not use financial incentives, food, fun, or gimmicks. Just plainly, lovingly present the truth of the gospel.

"Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together" (John 4:35-36).

The Authorship Of Hebrews: A Summary

Wayne FAncher Jr. | Searcy, Arkansas, USA

Several years ago I did a personal study on the authorship of Hebrews. I wanted to do an in-depth study of the original Greek text of Hebrews to see if there was any internal evidence within the book that could help identify the author of the text itself. The following is a summary of the results of my study.

A Comparative Study Of The Greek Of Hebrews

I started my study with a comparison of the Greek of the Hebrew text to the rest of the New Testament. I took each Greek word in the book of Hebrews and searched to see where else the word was used in the New Testament. What I was looking for was words that were uniquely used only by one author of a New Testament book that were also found in Hebrews. I was curious if any pattern would emerge from this study that might be a clue to authorship of the text. To my surprise and joy a pattern did indeed come to

the surface. I found within the Greek text of Hebrews 69 uniquely Pauline words that are only ever used by Paul in the books he received by revelation. Once this pattern was confirmed, I started a comparative search of the Greek sentence phrases in Hebrews to the rest of the New Testament. This study resulted with 60 purely Pauline phrases only ever used by Paul in the New Testament text. Realizing my study was actually working, I then did a comparative study of the theological teachings contained in the book of Hebrews to the rest of the New Testament. From this study I found 48 theological teachings that are what I call purely Pauline theology, in that he is the only author of New Testament text to write about these theological concepts. The following is a brief summary of this part of my study. In the near future I will send more summaries of each chapter in my studies of the authorship of Hebrews.

Introduction To Hebrews The Authorship Of Hebrews

I. Purely Pauline Words In Hebrews

Parabasis - breaking, transgression - Romans 2:23, 4:15, 5:14; Galatians 3:19; 1 Timothy 2:14; Hebrews 2:2, 9:15

Kauchema - boast, rejoicing - Romans 4:2; 1 Corinthians 9:16, 5:6, 9:15; 2 Corinthians 1:14, 5:12, 9:3; Galatians 6:4; Philippians 1:26, 2:16; Hebrews 3:6

Agon - conflict, fight, race - Philippians 1:30; Colossians 2:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:2; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7; Hebrews 12:1

Euarestos - acceptable, well pleasing - Romans 12:1-2, 14:18; 2 Corinthians 5:9; Ephesians 5:10; Philippians 4:18; Colossians 3:20; Titus 2:9; Hebrews 13:21

Enistemi - things present, present, come - Romans 8:38; 1 Corinthians 7:26, 3:22; Galatians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Timothy 3:1; Hebrews 9:9

I have found a total of 69 purely Pauline words in the book of Hebrews.

II. Old Testament Quotes Only Used By Paul Found In Hebrews

Hebrews 1:5 - Huiós mou eí sú egoó seémeron gegénneeká se- 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'

Hebrews 5:5 - Huiós mou eí sú egoó seémeron gegénneeká se-'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You'

*Acts 13:33 - Huiós mou eí sú egoó seémeron gegénneeká se-' You are My Son, Today I have begotten You'

Hebrews 2:16 - Spérmatos Abraám - the seed of Abraham

2 Corinthians 11:22 - Spérma Abraám - the seed of Abraham

Romans 9:7 - spérma Abraám - the seed of Abraham

Romans 11:1 - spérmatos Abraám - the seed of Abraham

Hebrews 10:30 - Emoí ekdíkeesis egoó antapodoósoo - "Vengeance is mine I will repay"

Romans 12:19 - Emoí ekdíkeesis egoó antapodoósoo légei Kúrios - "Vengeance is mine I will repay, says the Lord."

Hebrews 10:38 - ho dé díkaiós mou ek písteoos zeésetai – But the just shall live by faith

Romans 1:17 - Ho dé díkaios ek písteoos zeésetai - But the just shall live by faith

Galatians 3:11 - Ho díkaios ek písteoos zeésetai - But the just shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:18 - En Isaák kleetheésetaí soi spérma - "in Isaac your seed shall be called."

Romans 9:7 - En Isaák kleetheésetaí soi spérma - "in Isaac your seed shall be called."

III. Purely Pauline Phrases Found In Hebrews

**Hebrews 5:7 - deeéseis te kaí hiketeería - prayers and supplications

Ephesians 6:18 - proseucheés kaí deeéseos - prayer and supplication
Philippians 4:6 - proseucheé kaí teé deeései - prayer and supplication
1 Timothy 2:1 - deeéseis proseuchás - supplications, prayers
1 Timothy 5:5 - deeésessin kaí taís proseuchaís - supplications and prayers
Hebrews 6:10 - diakoneésantes toís hagíois - ministered to the saints
Romans 15:25 - diakonoón toís hagíois - minister to the saints.
2 Corinthians 8:4 - diakonías teés eis toús hagíous - ministering to the saints
2 Corinthians 9:1 - diakonías teés eis toús hagíous - ministering to the saints
Hebrews 10:34 - toís desmíois - in bonds ASV
Philippians 1:7 - toís desmoís mou - my chains
Philippians 1:13 - toús desmoús mou - my chains
Philippians 1:14 - toís desmoís mou - my chains
Colossians 4:18 - mou toón desmoón - my chains
Philemon 13 - toís desmoís - my chains
Philemon 10-toís desmoís-my chains
Hebrews 13:3 - en soómati - in the body
1 Corinthians 12:18 - en toó soómati - in the body
1 Corinthians 12:25 - en toó soómati - in the body
2 Corinthians 4:10 - en toó soómati - in the body
2 Corinthians 5:6 - en toó soómati - in the body
2 Corinthians 12:2 - en soómati - in the body
Colossians 1:22 - en toó soómati - in the body

Why Should You Read, Study, Know The Bible?

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

Without doubt, the Bible is the world's most widely distributed book. Year after year, since the printing press was invented in 1454, the Bible continues to outsell all other books. Why is this so? Why does virtually every home in America (indeed, around the world) have one or more Bibles? There must be reason for this. Why does virtually every hotel/motel room in America have a Bible in it? Why do travelers include a Bible among their belongings?

Some the reasons would include the following:

- (1) **The Bible is regarded as a revelation from the mind of God, our Creator.** There is abundant evidence that this book could not have been written by man without Divine aid. The facts supporting this are beyond successful controversy, although that is not the theme of this study.
 - (2) **The Bible has been respected for thousands of years as a guide leading mankind to eternal life.**
 - (3) **While dealing with eternity, the Bible instructs us in daily living, as its principles are suited for life where we are right now.**
 - (4) **The Bible answers questions as to man's origin, the meaning of life, and our final destiny.**
- These, and other reasons, give us a great incentive to really know the Bible. But in our time, many who claim they believe the Bible, and who may even be "religious", do not really know the Bible for themselves. This is written to encourage people to read, study and know what the Bible is all about.

An Owner's Manual

When I buy an automobile, I receive an "Owner's Manual." One of my cars had 350,000 miles on it, and was still running well when I sold it. When I first bought it, I carefully read the Manual. My reasoning was that the people who manufactured the car certainly knew best how to care for and service it. I might prefer to change the oil once a year, but the Manual stated this should be done every 5,000 miles. So whose advice should I follow? If I have good sense, I will follow what the manufacturer says. And this is true with any mechanical device we might possess.

You and I also came with an "Owner's Manual." It is called a Bible. The One who created (manufactured?) us gave us a book of instructions. It only makes good sense that we follow it. Now, it may be that I do not understand the reasons for some commandments, and I may think I have reason to disagree with them, but if I have trust in a God who only wants the best for me, then I will respect His wisdom, which is far superior to mine. Just as many automobiles are ruined because the owner does not follow the instructions, many lives are ruined because the "Owner's Manual" has not been followed. For example, consider Ephesians 6:1-3:

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth."

How many young people have ruined their lives because they refuse to consider the good counsel of parents and other older, wiser people? If you want your car to do well, you follow the Owner's Manual. If you want your life to do well...same advice.

A Code to Buried Treasure

Suppose you found a code with detailed instructions for the location of a fortune. What would you do with it? Lay it aside as a curiosity? Skip through the pages looking only for the interesting parts? Decide to follow only part of the instructions? All of the questions would be answered in the negative. You would carefully read and study every word, and then set out to follow the instructions to the best of your ability. Wouldn't that be logical?

Why don't people treat the Bible that way? As a matter of fact, the Bible describes the Kingdom of heaven as a treasure. Matthew 13:44: "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." Does it not seem reasonable that you would want to know what great treasures God has in store for you, and then read and study the directions for obtaining these treasures? But some complain, "I just can't understand the Bible", or "I don't find it interesting." Would that be your excuse for putting aside the treasure code? If that really is your problem with the Bible, there are solutions.

A Textbook

When the student sits in the classroom on the first day, the teacher goes over the course material. Very likely, a textbook is passed out. The teacher may say, "If you will learn the material in this book, I guarantee that you will pass the course." Now, what should the student do with the book? Some will lay it aside, thinking they will learn enough from hearing the teacher and other students discuss the material. Other students will scan through it just before exams trying pick up bits of information. But the good student will take the book, read it, study it, and get to know it well. Guess who will pass the course?

Could we look upon the Bible as a textbook for the course of life? We might note that Christ himself spoke of the Bible in such a way in John 12:48: "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day." Do you see the similarity? A student will be judged (examined) by the words of the textbook. And we will likewise be judged (examined) by the words of Christ. How will things go with you when you stand before the Great Throne of God for judgment? Revelation 20:11-12:

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds."

We know that this Day of Judgment will come, for God has so decreed it. Hebrews 9:27: "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." The Scriptures also tell us that each

one of us shall be there. 2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Doesn't it just make for good common sense that we come to know the book that will be the standard by which we are going to be judged?

Does Becoming A "New Creature" Mean All Previous Marriages Are Erased?

Patrick Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

In a recent personal evangelism study my denominational student was quite adamant that since a sinner becomes a "new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17), that means all old marriages are forgotten by God - so it would be okay to remain in one's current marriage even if it is a second or third marriage in clear violation of Matthew 19:9. This is a complete misunderstanding of what becoming a new creature means - according to Christ's law.

Becoming a new creature means the exact opposite of that. In the 2 Peter 2:22 analogy, God doesn't change the mud to soap; instead, the cleaned pig is supposed to stay out of the mud. God doesn't magically change sinful relationships to holy relationships; instead, He expects us to become a new creature by terminating those sinful relationships.

Becoming a new creature does not mean God transforms me from being Patrick Donahue (with all my circumstances in life) to a different person, John Doe, with zero present circumstances. If it did, then that would mean:

- my parents are not my parents anymore, that I don't have to honor them
- I'm no longer married to my wife, that my wedding ceremony never happened; I'm now single and I need to remarry her (if I even still want her)
- all my debts are wiped off the books; I don't have to repay them
- if I am in jail for murder, they have to let me out because I never committed the crime
- when I was converted in my junior year of college that none of my previous credits really happened, that I had to start back as a beginning freshman

If the record of all my previous marriages is erased when I become a Christian, it would also mean every current situation, every contract, every relationship would become non-existent.

Everybody knows that is not the case; they are making an argument they don't really believe. Fact is, becoming a new creature means the converted sinner (not God) starts to walk a new life (Romans 6:4), he crucifies (puts off) the "old man" of sin, he destroys the "body of sin," he quits serving sin (Romans 6:6) and starts serving righteousness (Romans 6:18). In short, becoming a new creature doesn't mean God allows sin to continue (because you are a different person), but it means said person dies unto sin, i.e., we quit letting "sin ... reign" in our lives (Romans 6:12).

What God is talking about when he says someone born again must become a new creature is that the person should follow through on his commitment to change his life in regard to sin ("repent") when he was "baptized for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Instead of being freed from financial debt, that means we make a renewed effort to be honest and pay off all of our debts. Instead of being freed from the obligations of a scriptural wife, it means I commit to being a better husband to her. Instead of losing credits at college, I commit to earning future credits without any cheating. Instead of thinking I should be released from jail, I make up my mind to become the best inmate the warden could ask for. And instead of being released from obligation to my parents, I become more focused on being the best son or daughter I can be.

If I have been a burglar, then I quit being a burglar. If I have been a drug addict, then I stop that. If I am in

a gay marriage, I terminate that relationship. And if I have been committing adultery with a second wife I have no right to (per Matthew 19:9), then I stop that adultery by terminating the “not lawful” (Mark 6:17-18) relationship. When I become a new creature, God does not release me from all previous obligations (such as a previous marriage as described in Romans 7:2-3). Instead, God demands I fulfill all previous obligations with renewed vigor. This whole argument is just another way to compromise what the Bible clearly says about submitting 100% to the Lord.

The Wrong Decision of the Rich Young Ruler

Jim Mickells | Sellersburg, Indiana, USA

In Matthew 19:16-22 (parallel accounts in Mark 10:17-22 & Luke 18:18-23) we have the story of the rich young ruler and the conversation he has with Jesus. This young man has a great number of attributes we all would do well to imitate. Yet the sad thing is, he still lacked one thing. And that one thing kept him from the treasure of heaven.

He came to the right person – Good Teacher – Jesus Christ (verse 16). Most are not willing to come and many of those who are willing go to the wrong person when seeking to be saved. Salvation only comes through our Lord. He is the way to the Father (John 14:6); He is the door where the sheep enter to protect them from the thieves and robbers (John 10:9); He is the good Shepherd who gives His life for His sheep (John 10:11); He is the bread which gives life to those who partake (John 6:48); Only through His name, by His authority, can one be saved (Acts 4:12); It is only through His blood reconciliation to the Father is made possible (Romans 5:9-11), etc.

He asked the right question – what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life (verse 16)? This young man recognized there was something he had to do; it was not just the grace of God involved. If any of us are saved it will be because of the favor of our Lord (Ephesians 2:8). But it requires our obedience to the gospel (Romans 10:15-16). Jesus on one occasion told His disciple those that come after Him must deny self and take up the cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). Yet He points out the great value of making any sacrifice in serving Him. It will result in saving the one thing we have which has eternal worth, our soul (Matthew 16:26). What is the opposite of eternal life? It is everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:46). What greater question could anyone be concerned about?

He was given the right answer – keep the commandments (verse 17). The greatest command given is to love the Lord our God with all our heart (Matthew 22:36-38). But we are also told how to show our love to Jesus, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Jesus is the author or source of eternal salvation yet only to those who are willing to obey Him (Hebrews 5:8-9). Far too many speak of loving Christ with some emotional feeling while refusing to do what is required of them by the Lord. James says it is the doer of the word that will be blessed, not just those who hear along with some feeling (James 1:22-25). Will we listen to the answer given?

He initially responded correctly – all these things I have kept from my youth (verse 20). After asking which ones (verse 18) the Lord gives a list of some of the commands he was to obey (verses 18-19). He was a very moral ruler as the result of doing these things. He was not a murderer, an adulterer, nor a thief; he did not lie about others; he was a good son to his parents; and to sum up how he treated his fellowman, he loved his neighbor. These are some great characteristics we all should imitate.

His second question – what do I still lack (verse 20)? I am not sure why he asks this question. Did he sense something was still missing or did he simply want to make sure he had all the information? Obviously, Jesus did not give all the commands he needed to keep. Christ, knowing the hearts of all men (John 2:24-25), knew there was an idol possessing his inward being, his material blessings (verse 21). It was something he had to remove from his mind. It is so easy for us to become attached to the things of the world. Material things can become our god, just like they did for Israel in the Old Testament. They were warned about having houses, wells, vineyards, being full, then forgetting the Lord (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

May we examine our inward man making sure the Lord is in complete control lacking nothing.

His sad departure – he went away sorrowful (verse 22). What a sad ending to such a promising life. Through the years I have seen many who simply leave the Lord and His service. To them other things were more important. Not only will they lose their soul, but their influence can also cause family and friends to spend eternity separated from God as well. Why go away sorrowful? Repent and obey the Lord. Do what He tells you to do so that you might hear His words in judgment, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21). Not only is this rich young ruler sad at this time but he is also suffering.

Second Guessing the Apostle Paul

Greg Gwin | Columbia, Tennessee, USA

In a sermon I once preached there was a point made about Paul's dialogue with the Roman official Felix (Acts 24:24-27). I stressed that Paul taught Felix about God's law, urged him to obey it, and warned him about the consequences if he did not. In fact, Paul's warning about “judgment to come” was so forceful that “Felix trembled.” I emphasized that (despite popular opinion to the contrary) Paul saw the advantage of fear motivation in his effort to prompt Felix's obedience. Other examples of such fear motivation can be found in a host of passages in both the Old and New Testaments.

A visitor to the services that day - a Christian - wrote the following response to the lesson:

“Fear tactics would be great if they worked - but what is the bottom line? Did Felix obey the gospel? What about the world today - fear runs away - love draws. Yes, truth should be preached, but I believe more will be converted and stay with the positive love of God and all the blessings in Christ.”

It's not hard to conclude that this lady did not like the sermon. She's not the first, nor will she be the last, to find something wanting in a particular lesson. But more careful analysis reveals that she was not just faulting this sermon - she was, in fact, criticizing the inspired apostle himself! Look again - do you see it? She clearly implies that Felix would have likely obeyed if Paul had only had enough sense to put more emphasis on “the positive love of God”.

The truth remains - do not forget it – “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). Think!

The God of Peace

Michael D. Hickox | Mattoon, Illinois, USA

While most people desire peace, the majority look for it in all the wrong places. In John 14:27, Jesus told His disciples, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, I give to you. Don't let your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful.” Several passages refer to God as the “God of peace” (Romans 15:33; 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20). One of the names attributed to Jesus is “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). It is clear that God offers peace that far surpasses anything the world can offer. Though God deserves the glory for this peace, it's not attained by us without pursuit. 2 Corinthians 13:11 and Philippians 4:9 both teach requirements that must be met for the God of peace to be with us.

Pursuing peace first demands receiving the peace with God He offers through Christ (Romans 5:1). Salvation involves “crossing the bridge” Jesus built from spiritual death (separation from God) to spiritual life (fellowship with Him). Those reconciled to God, having harmony with Him restored, are able to enjoy the peace that only He can provide.

Those at peace with God learn the need to pursue peace with others. Jesus taught, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

Peace must never be pursued at the expense of truth (Matthew 10:34-39), but as Romans 12:18 exhorts, “If it is possible, as much as it is up to you, be at peace with all men.”

This provides a peace when mistreated by others that can't be attained by the “get-even” mindset of the world (cf. verses 17-21).

God's children are able to have a special peace with one another through Jesus. In Ephesians 2:14, Christ is referred to as “our peace.” The context stresses the peace Christians of a Jewish background are able to have with those of a Gentile background.

The more general principle seen is that all Christians are able to have fellowship with one another, regardless of wealth, background, ethnicity, and the like. While the world tends to use these things to divide people, God shows us that Christians make up one big family, with each child having equal inheritance from the Father.

This inheritance is connected to what is probably focused on the most when speaking about the Christian's peace: peace within that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

This inner tranquility is longed for by most everyone but received by relatively few.

Philippians 4:6-9 shows that the peace that surpasses understanding is a by-product of living to please God, casting those cares outside of our control on Him, and trusting Him that things will ultimately (eternally) be OK as long as we serve Him. Verse 8 shows the importance of thinking on the beautiful things His Word teaches and promotes. Part of this is the knowledge that those who are at peace with Him have the greatest safety and security a person can have.

In the midst of the chaos and divisiveness of the society we live in, it's a great comfort to know that the peace of Christ can rule in our hearts (Colossians 3:15). As Jesus said, “I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble; but cheer up! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

God's Authority and the Sinner's Prayer

Ethan Jennings | Olney, Illinois, USA

There are many who claim to be Christians but reject God's authority. One example of this is regarding those who teach that the sinner's prayer is necessary for salvation. Many people have taught that we must recite the sinner's prayer for salvation even though God never commanded this. God's plan of salvation is clear. He has told us specifically what to do to be saved. God says one needs to believe in Jesus (John 3:16), repent of sins (Acts 2:38), confess his faith in Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized (Mark 16:16). God has commanded that folks follow that plan to be saved. To say anything else is to reject God's authority!

Rejecting God's authority takes one to a place no one should go. When one reads the Old Testament, one sees what happened when folks rejected God's authority. Nadab and Abihu rejected God's authority when they offered “strange fire” to the Lord (Leviticus 10:1-3). The text tells us it was a fire “which He had not commanded them” (Leviticus 10:1). They decided to act in a way other than what was commanded of them and were punished for it. It says, “and fire came out of the presence of the Lord and consumed them both” (Leviticus 10:2). They died for rejecting God's silence!

Folks may have the best intentions when advocating for the doctrine of the sinner's prayer. However, they're still wrong. The Bible tells us that we can think we're doing the right thing and still be wrong. This is seen in the book of Proverbs. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12, 16:25). We need to follow what God has said rather than our own "think so's." We need to teach what God has said rather than what feels right. 1 Peter 4:11 tells us, "Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God." It's essential for those who teach God's word to teach only God's word! Not their think so's, not what one feels is right. Preach God's word.

The scripture says nothing about reciting a "sinner's prayer" to be saved. Instead, one needs to obey what God has said. To anyone reading this article, if you have not followed what God has commanded to be saved, why not? Become a Christian today (Hebrews 3:7-8; 2 Corinthians 6:2)!

Short Prayers

PRAYING LIKE JESUS

William Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Paul wrote, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The apostle's point is not that we must pray 24 hours per day, but have a life focused on prayer. We ought to have set times for prayer, but in addition to that, little prayers here and there throughout the day. Prayer is not reserved for Sunday services and mealtimes – it is intended to be ongoing contact and communication to our loving God.

There are a lot of short prayers in the Bible. My favourite is in Nehemiah 2. At the time, Nehemiah was the cupbearer for Artaxerxes, the king of Persia. The king sensed that something was bothering Nehemiah and thus asked him about it. Nehemiah explained, though his people had been able to return to their homeland after the time in Babylonian captivity, Jerusalem and its gates remained in ruins. The king inquired, "What do you request?" Before answer, the king, we read the following: "So I prayed to the God of heaven" (Nehemiah 2:4). We do not have the words of his prayer. It was likely a silent prayer, and just for a moment – the king was awaiting his reply. It may have been as simple as "Lord, be with me."

There are occasions in life where there is not a lot of time to pray, and yet prayer is warranted. We might refer to these as spontaneous or instinctive in nature – the situation calls for prayer, even if but for a moment. If we are people of prayer, we will find ourselves going to the Father, even when no time is available to do so.

In The Midst Of Teaching

In Matthew 11, some came to Jesus from John the Baptist, inquiring, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" (v 1-3). Jesus responded to their inquiry by pointing to the miracles and teachings He did (v 4-6). He then proceeded to teach the multitude who were present (v 7-24), defending the integrity of John the Baptist, emphasizing the importance of John's mission, and rebuking the unbelief of those who rejected John and were also rejecting Jesus as Messiah.

As Jesus addressed their unbelief, Jesus worded a short prayer of thanks to God. I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. (Matthew 11:25-26)

The unbelief of so many prompted Him to express thanksgiving to God for those who do believe. The indication in the text is that He said this aloud, and then went on teaching, offering peace and rest to those who follow Him (v 27-30), and encouraging those who have eyes to see and ears to hear (cf. Luke 10:22-23).

For Answered Prayer

In John 11, word came from Bethany that Lazarus, Jesus' friend, was sick. He waited a few days and then rose with the apostles to go to Lazarus. The Lord would raise him from the dead. As He approached the town, Martha came to meet Him. She declared her confidence that had He been there, Jesus could have healed her brother (v 21), but further, "...even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You" (v 22). Jesus promised, "Your brother will rise again" (v 23).

The Lord went a bit further, and Mary met Him. She crumbled at His feet in tears, professing the same trust in Him as Martha, that had Jesus been there, He could have healed her brother (v 32). As one would expect when a loved one dies, it was an emotional time. Mary wept (v 33a), those who came with her wept (v 33b), and indeed, Jesus Himself wept (v 35).

Jesus asked to see where they had laid Lazarus' body (v 34) and coming to the tomb He commanded that the stone be rolled away (v 39). Martha protested, but Jesus reminded her of His former words, saying, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (v 40).

In Perea with the apostles, before they headed to Bethany, Jesus had said to the twelve, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God..." (v 4). He then revealed to them that Lazarus was dead, but that He would go to waken him, saying, "...I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe" (v 15). And then, along the road, He had made the wonderful and powerful statement to Martha,

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?
(John 11:25-26)

His intention from the start was raise Lazarus from the dead.

But before Lazarus walked out of the tomb, Jesus spoke to the Father in prayer. It was not a request, but a prayer of thanksgiving. The Father had heard Jesus concerning Lazarus' resurrection prior to his death. Jesus thanked the Father for hearing Him and answering.

Do we thank the Father for hearing our requests? Is our confidence and trust in prayer such that we know He hears (regardless what the answer may be)? In this short prayer, Jesus wanted to affect the faith of those around Him, "...that they may believe that You sent Me" (v 42).

It is right that we express our thanksgiving to God (Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2). And sometimes, the occasion for thanksgiving will be upon us speedily. The tomb was opened, and so Jesus expressed thanks for what was about to happen – Lazarus would walk out.

In Genesis 24, Abraham's servant was returning to Mesopotamia to find a wife for Isaac. As he approached the area, he prayed that God would give him success. Verse 15 says, "...it happened, before he had finished speaking..." Rebekah came out to get water, and all the things he had been praying about were coming to pass. Verse 26, "...the man bowed down his head and worshiped the LORD." Whatever the timing of God's answers, it is always right to speak a few words of thanksgiving to Him.

When Distress Comes

In John 12, Jesus and His disciples were in Jerusalem preparing for the Passover. Verses 20-22 speak of some Greeks who sought to see Jesus, asking Philip and Andrew to arrange it. Whether they got a private audience with the Lord or not, we do not know. But in verse 23-24, Jesus began to tell His disciples that

the time of His death was at hand. He spoke of the commitment which would be required of them as His disciples (v 25-26), and then He prayed:

Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." (John 12:27-28)

The discussion of His imminent death was troubling. Knowing His purpose didn't take away the distress about going to the cross. Rather than turn from the Father and ignore His will, Jesus took His trial to God. He expressed His will, "save Me from this hour," but He pursued the course of the Father's will, "Glorify Your name." We see the same in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus expressed His will, "Take this cup away from Me," but immediately declared, "not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36).

What do we do when trials come? Do we bring them to God, even if we only have a moment to do so? Doing so will give us perspective. Reading through the Psalms we find a common outline. The psalmist is going through trials and troubles and is overwhelmed. The psalmist seeks God's involvement, bringing his conflicts to the Lord. Then the psalmist experienced peace, rest, assurance, confidence, and victory.

In John 12, Jesus' moment with the Father while distressed provided encouragement and strength. He determined to obey God's will, and it affected those who were around Him for good. The Father responded in verse 28, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." Some who were nearby thought that an angel had spoken to Jesus (v 29), but the Lord clarified,

This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself. (John 12:30-32)

When we seek God's strength, when we look to increase our own faith, there will often be the opportunity for it to overflow and affect others for good as well.

Praying For Others

As the time of His betrayal approached, Jesus was concerned for His disciples. In Luke 22, He identified the hand of His betrayer as being on the table with Him (v 21). All the disciples began to question who among them would do such a thing (v 23), but then the discussion turned into a dispute about which of them was the greatest (v 24). The Lord rebuked their eagerness for greatness and taught them what makes one truly great – service (v 25-30; cf. John 13:2-10).

In Luke 22:31-32, Jesus spoke directly to Peter,

Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.

When did He pray for Peter? I have no doubt, Jesus often prayed for Peter. But perhaps even while He watched the conflict among them about greatness, Jesus spoke a few words to the Father about Peter. Sadly, Peter didn't get it. His confidence was high; his understanding about what he was about to face was low. He zealously declared his willingness to remain and even die with the Lord (v 33). Zeal is good, but it is the commitment to follow through which makes the difference.

Friend, it is right that we pray for one another, and further, to let them know we are praying for them. We won't know the trials and difficulties others face as well as Jesus did, but we can certainly pray, even a few words, concerning the faith and faithfulness of our brethren. If we don't know quite what to pray, look at what Jesus prayed – "...that your faith should not fail..." What an excellent thing to pray for those who are enduring hardships, that faith will see them through.

Even at Calvary Jesus was concerned for and praying for others. Imagine the scene – He is nailed to a cross, every breath is painful and difficult, and yet Jesus prayed for others, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). It was not a prayer for Himself – how many of us would be praying for relief?? No, He was praying for others, that they might be forgiven.

When the End Comes

Finally, Jesus last words on earth before dying were in prayer.

...when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit,’” Having said this, He breathed His last. (Luke 23:46)

When an exceptional way to go. Not focused on earthly things, but on God and on the glory ahead. You hear people talking about light at the end of a tunnel or angels coming near or other such things. I don’t know about these things or how much stock to put in them. But what I do know is we should live for the Lord, and if we do so, when the time of our death comes, our focus will no doubt be on the reward ahead, on being with the Lord. And it may be, should circumstances permit, that we’ll be able to word a short prayer to the Father, even as Jesus did.

Conclusion

Oswald Chambers, a late 19th century minister from the Holiness movement wrote:

The battle of prayer is against two things in the earthlies: wandering thoughts, and lack of intimacy with God’s character as revealed in His word. Neither can be cured at once; but they can be cured by discipline.

If we want to become more and more focus in prayer, we need to be aware of the things that will challenge us and stand in the way. It is easy to be distracted; it can even happen while we are praying if we’re not careful. We need to keep our minds focused. We need to become more and more intimately acquainted with the person of God and His will.

If we are struggling in either or in both areas – don’t give up. Keep praying. Keep studying. Keep pursuing a closer relationship to God. May we grow in prayer. May we be disciples who pray like Jesus.

In The Beginning

Introduction to Genesis

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

The Law

The first five books of the Old Testament are usually called “the law” or “the Torah” by the Jews. The term “Torah” means “direction, law, instruction.” These five books collectively are also called “the Pentateuch.” This term is derived from two Greek words: “pente” (five) and “touchos” (volume). Thus, they compose a five volume book.

In the Old Testament itself the Pentateuch or Law is called “the law” (e.g., Joshua 8:34; Nehemiah 8:2,7,14), “the Book of the Law” (e.g., Joshua 8:34; 2 Chronicles 34:14; Nehemiah 8:3), “the Book of the Law of Moses” (e.g., Joshua 8:31; Nehemiah 8:1), “the Book of Moses” (e.g., Nehemiah 13:1), “the Law of the Lord” (e.g., 2 Chronicles 31:3), “the Law of God” (Nehemiah 10:28-29), “the Book of the Law of God” (e.g., Joshua 24:26), “the Book of the Law of the Lord” (e.g., Nehemiah 9:3) and “the Law of Moses” (e.g., Ezra 3:2).

In the New Testament, these books taken together are designated “the law” (e.g., Matthew 12:5), “the book of the law” (Galatians 3:10), “the law of Moses” (e.g., Luke 2:22; 24:44), “the law of the Lord” (Luke 2:23-24), “the law of the Jews” (Acts 25:8), “our (Jews - KS) law” (John 19:7) and “your (Jews - KS) law” (e.g., John 8:17).

Author

It is obvious from the titles already cited that God is the ultimate author of the Law and that Moses was the instrument through whom God gave that Law. Although neither the book of Genesis nor the Pentateuch as a whole contains an introduction naming Moses as the author, the evidence supporting the fact Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible is overwhelming.

The Pentateuch itself contains weighty evidence to the Mosaic authorship. The Lord commanded Moses to write “in the book” (Exodus 17:14). Moses wrote “all the words of the Lord” (Exodus 24:4) that comprise the “Book of the Covenant” (Exodus 34:27). At the command of God, Moses recorded the itinerary of the Wilderness Wanderings (Numbers 33:2). Moses wrote the Law in a book (Deuteronomy 31:9,24).

The remainder of the Scriptures unanimously ascribe the authorship of the Law to Moses. The Old Testament (Joshua 1:7-8; 8:31-32,34-35; 11:15,20; 14:2; 22:9; 23:6; Judges 3:4; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 21:8; Ezra 6:18; Nehemiah 13:1; Daniel 9:11-13), Christ (Matthew 19:8; Mark 10:4-5; Luke 24:27,44; John 5:46-47; 7:19), and the New Testament writers (Acts 3:22; 13:39; 15:5,21; 1 Corinthians 9:9; 2 Corinthians 3:14-15; Revelation 15:3) unite in naming Moses as the author of the Law.

Name

The word “Genesis” is from the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Old Testament, which renders Genesis 2:4, “This is the book of the geneeses of heaven and earth.” The word means “origin, source, or generation.” The Jews called the book “B’reshith,” which means “in the beginning.” This is the first word in the book in Hebrew.

Theme

Genesis is quite literally “the book of beginnings.” It is the introductory book to both the Old Testament and the Bible. In Genesis we find the beginning of (1) the universe (1:1 - 2:3), (2) the earth (1:1 - 2:3), (3) life on earth (1:1 - 2:3), (4) mankind (2:4-25), (5) marriage (2:18-25), (6) sin (3:1-6), (7) sins consequences (3:7-22), (8) redemption (3:15; 12:3), (9) worship (4:3-5,26), (10) cities (4:17), (11) polygamy (4:19), (12) instrumental music (4:21), (13) metal work (4:22), (14) nations (10:1-32) (15) various languages (11:1-3) (16) the nation of Israel (12:1-3,7) and other things. Genesis is the only reliable record of the origin of all things and the history of the ancient world. The purpose of Genesis is to tell how things began.

Type of Literature

History is the written record of the past. If Genesis is history, the events recorded therein actually happened as they are written.

Epic poetry, on the other hand, is “a long narrative poem recounting the deeds of a legendary or historical hero” (Webster’s dictionary). Poetry abounds in figures of speech and appeals to imagination and emotion by the use of various literary devices.

Those who contend that Genesis is epic poetry do so to throw doubt on its historical accuracy. They think the book is a collection of Hebrew legends about the distant past. If the book of Genesis is such a work, it is simply the product of the Hebrew people, not inspired of God, and has no higher claim for acceptance as

truth than myths of other ancient peoples.

There are several reasons to reject the position that Genesis is myth and to accept the fact it is sober history. The book is not written in the style of Hebrew poetry but of history. Moses introduces each new section with the phrase, "This is the history" (or "genealogy") (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10,27; 25:12,19; 36:1; 37:2). So far as archaeology has been able to check the Genesis record, it has proven accurate. The author displays amazing historical objectivity, a quality unknown to other ancient records. He records the drunkenness of Noah, the lies of Abraham, and the adultery of Judah; at the same time he tells the noble qualities of Pharaoh and Abimelech. Since Jesus accepted the Genesis record as literal history (Matthew 19:3-6; 24:37-39), all who claim to be Christians must accept that Genesis is history. Furthermore, the apostles add their testimony to the fact Genesis is literal history (1 Timothy 2:13-14; 1 Peter 3:18-21; 2 Peter 2:5-8). To claim the Genesis record is mythological is to reject the testimony of the Son of God and of His apostles.

Scientific Accuracy

Science is knowledge gained by observation and experimentation. To be a subject of science, a process must be something that can be observed, measured, and repeated. Genesis is not intended to be a science book, but neither are its statements which touch on science inaccurate. It is true that human assumptions about Genesis often contradict science. For example, Catholic theologians of the Middle Ages asserted that Genesis teaches that the earth is the center of the universe. In reality, the book teaches no such thing. At the same time, human assumptions about science may contradict Genesis. For example, the false philosophy of general evolution does indeed contradict the Genesis account of creation. But the facts of natural science do not uphold general evolution. Thus, there is no conflict between the actual Genesis record and the facts of science.

Divisions

Genesis is composed of two major sections. In section one Moses traces the beginning of all things up to the call of Abraham (1:1 - 11:26). In the second section he shows the rise of the Hebrew nation as the offspring of Abraham, the friend of God (11:27 - 50:26).

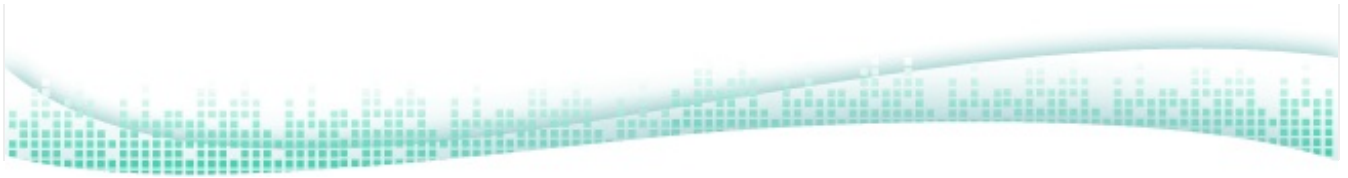
Key

The threefold promise to Abraham (Nation, Seed, Land: Genesis 12:1-3,7) is at the hub of Genesis, the key to the entire Old Testament, and the connection between the Old and New Testaments.

Outline

Moses himself divided the book of Genesis into eleven sections with the phrase, repeated ten times, "This is the history (genealogy) of." Therefore, Genesis is naturally outlined thus:

- (1) In the Beginning (1:1- 2:3)
- (2) The History of the Heavens and the Earth (2:4 - 4:26)
- (3) The Book of the Genealogy of Adam (5:1 - 6:8)
- (4) The Genealogy of Noah (6:9 - 9:29)
- (5) The Genealogy of the Sons of Noah (10:1 - 11:9)
- (6) The Genealogy of Shem (11:10-26)
- (7) The Genealogy of Terah (The Sojourn of Abraham) (11:27 - 25:11)
- (8) The Genealogy of Ishmael (25:12-18)
- (9) The Genealogy of Isaac (25:19 - 35:29)
- (10) The Genealogy of Esau (36:1 - 37:1)
- (11) The Genealogy of Jacob (37:2 - 50:26).



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