

Praying to “Change the World”

By David L. Burris

Percy Shelly tells of temporal permanence in his poem of *Ozymandias* (Title of Office Translated: Ruler of All that Breathes) ... “I met a traveler from an antique land, who said ‘Two vast and trunkless legs of stone stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand, half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown, and wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command, tell that its sculptor well those passions read; Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things, the hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed: And on the pedestal these words appear: *My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings: Look on my works, ye Mighty and despair!* Nothing beside remains, round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare the lone and level sands stretch far away’.” Reminds @“Viva La Vida” lyrics: *I used to rule the world... I discovered that my castles stand upon pillars of salt and pillars of sand.*

Youthful idealism in typical generational frustration with what lacks of lasting improvement is expressed well in the lyrics of the John Mayer hit single “Waiting on the World to Change” – *Now we see everything that’s going wrong with the world and those who lead it, **We just feel we don’t have the means to rise above and beat it;** So we keep waiting (waiting) for the world to change. It’s hard to beat the system when we’re standing at*

a distance. And when you trust your television, what you get is what you got; Cause when they own the information, oh – They can bend it all they want; So we keep waiting (waiting) for the world to change. It's not that we don't care. We just know the fight ain't fair. One day our generation - is going to rule the population; So we keep waiting for the world to change.

The hit song “Waiting for the World to Change” provided the soundtrack for the hit movie *Evan Almighty*. In this movie a news reporter named Evan Baxter runs for U.S. Congress and wins using the mantra “Think Big. Think Baxter and ‘Change the World’.” Once he is elected, his wife Joan prays for the family to remain close and then Evan prays “...I am now in a position of great power and I know that with great power comes great responsibility. So, *God, please help me to Change the World.*” The fun starts when God decides to answer his prayer. God asks this newbie Congressman and 21st Century Social Media Personality to build another ark to the original specifications of Genesis 6: 14ff. In a movie takeoff of the Bill Cosby Comedy Sketch at Conversation between Noah and God – Baxter tries to explain to God that building an ark did not fit into *his plans* to Change the World and God Laughs.

There are several scripturally correct takeaways from this movie. First, be careful what you pray for – you might get it. Second, God will answer not according to what you want – but according to what you need. Third, God answers your prayer according to the needs of those immediate and outward in

terms of degrees of separation and of an intertwined destiny. Fourth, God answers that prayer providentially in time according to His intergenerational purposes and His plans for the human race. Fifth, God says no if there is no turn of spiritual benefit or He says no in the direct proximate not the indirect ultimate – such as Evan’s wife’s prayer for the family to grow closer. Sixth, as He explains to Evan’s wife – He often answers prayer with “opportunity.” Theologians often call this “arranged circumstance” – putting people in a certain place at a certain time – giving them the opportunity to accomplish great purpose - as when Mordecai tells Queen Esther: “Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?” (4:14). Seventh, Hollywood God answers Evan’s prayerful question as to how to start “Changing the World” is to begin – *by one act of random kindness after another.*

In my opinion, there are two Christian Era examples of God providentially positioning people at points of historic inflection. The first example is First Millennium of Missionary Frontier:

“Boniface decided to deal with the problem once and for all by attacking at the very center of their pagan religion. One morning he appeared at the Oak of Thor with an ax in his hand, surrounded by a pagan crowd who cursed him and expected the gods to intervene and kill him. He raised his hand against Thor and delivered the first blow. According to Willibald, immediately a strong wind came and blew the ancient oak over. Seeing that Thor failed to protect his holy tree and to kill

Boniface, the Hessians converted to Christ. This event is considered the beginning of the Christianization of Germany. From Hesse, word spread, and other German tribes turned to Christianity. Boniface went to many places, destroying the altars and high places of the pagans, proving the superiority of the risen Christ over the blood-thirsty German deities.” [In my opinion, this episode is source for the Traditional X-Mas Tree.]

The second example is Second Millennium of Global Empire:

“Between September 6th and December 22nd sixty cases of severe dysentery broke out among the 440 captives on the slave ship Zong sailing from the West African Coast to deliver its human cargo to the sugar plantations on the island of Jamaica. This was significantly above the average mortality rate of 12.5% normal to this valuable merchandise on this particular passage. Captain Collingwood was gravely concerned for the potential financial loss to the vessel’s owners should the disease spread further and weaken even more.

Collingwood wrote in his journal a proposal of alternative action: ‘It would not be so cruel to throw the poor sick wretches into the sea as to suffer them to linger out a few days under the disorders to which they were afflicted.’

The latter remedy had the added advantage of being covered by insurance – thirty pounds indemnity for each of the jettisoned slaves. But the underwriters refused to pay. The case was brought to court where the jury found for the ship’s

owners, on the grounds that there was no more wrong attached to disposing of an ailing slave than to putting down a horse with a broken leg. The insurers appealed, and a second trial ensued. In the end, [Lord Mansfield] the magistrate ruled for the insurers – *agreeing humans cannot be insured property - citing an unreferenced ‘higher law’ than property law.*”

According to the experts, this incident and the subsequent ruling were the catalyst for the 1807 Slave Trade Act that outlawed slavery throughout the British Empire.

God’s Sovereignty: Obeyed Higher Law & Observed Higher Love

Through the Eyes of God – what people value and how they value people must be balanced in *Symbiotic Relationship*. We are not to measure men by what they possess or what their position. We must have a love for people and a love for souls. Although, the worldly minded might measure men materially – calculating their market worth by way of Wealth Assets, Productive Value, Insured Value, Litigation Value, Cadaver Value, or Transplant Value - the spiritually minded only see a child of God. Christians do not value rank humankind as in a spiritual triage. **God Cannot Triage.** Genesis 1: 26 indicates mankind is made in God’s Image. Acts 10: 34 indicates “God is not a respecter of persons.” Jeremiah 1: 5 indicates He knows us all. John 3: 16 indicates God rescues – calculating not in years – but forever saving in - Lives Everlastingly. The unit “book value” of any created object is bottom-line determined by the original price paid in purchase – for Christians it was -

The Cross of Calvary. Recognizing God's Higher Law and Expressing God's Higher Love in our lives demands *agape love* for the species.

Love Versus Duty. From William George Jordan We Learn:

Duty is forced, like a pump; love is spontaneous, like a fountain. Duty is prescribed and formal; it is part of the red tape of life. It means running on moral rails. Analyze, if you will, any of the great historic instances of loyalty to duty, and whenever they ring true you will find the presence of the real element that made the act almost divine. It was duty — plus love.

Duty is a hard, mechanical process for making men do things that love would make easy. It is a poor understudy to love. It is not a high enough motive with which to inspire humanity. Duty is the body to which love is the soul! Duty is a hard, mechanical process for making men do things that love would make easy. It is a poor understudy to love. It is not a high enough motive with which to inspire humanity. Love, in the divine alchemy of life, transmutes all duties into privileges, all responsibilities into joys. The workman who drops his tools at the stroke of twelve, as suddenly as if he had been struck by lightning may be doing his duty — but he is doing nothing more. No man has made a great success of his life or a fit preparation for immortality by doing merely duty. He must do that & more. If he puts love into his work, the 'more' will be easy. — William George Jordan

Jesus Christ @Countering Dehumanization. Matthew 5: 39-42
Jesus Advocated Assertive Non-Violence in Turning the Other
Cheek Central Illustration. Acting This Out Gets to The Point:

You can be struck on the right cheek only by an overhand blow or with a backhand blow from the right hand. But in that world people did not use the left hand to strike people. The left hand was 'reserved' for 'unseemly use.' Thus, being struck on the right cheek meant one had been backhanded with the right hand. Given the social structure of the day a superior hit an inferior, whereas one fought social equals with fists. This means the parable presupposes a setting in which a superior is beating a peasant.

What Should the Peasant Do in Such Situation?

Verse 39 – “Turn to Him the Other Cheek.”

What Would Be the Probable Outcome of Following This Advice? The only way the superior could continue the beating would be with an overhand blow with the fist – which would be treating the peasant as an equal.

Perhaps the beating would not have been stopped by this act but it would have been very disconcerting. He would only have continued the beating treating the peasant as a social peer!

Verse 40 – “Let Him Have Your Cloak Also.”

Under civil law a coat could be confiscated for non-payment of debt – there was not any bankruptcy protection back then. For the poor, the coat then served as a blanket at night. In that

world, the only other garment typically worn by a peasant was an inner garment, a cloak. In advising to give the cloak as well – Jesus is saying to strip naked! *In that [honor-shame society] world, nakedness was a **shame to the person observing it.***

These were potent methods to confound and expose social injustice. In reality, this new way, was a radical approach to empowerment. (combination of commentaries)

An Early Application Of Jesus' Admonition Reveals the Risks –

“One day, however, at the height of the gladiatorial games, during a celebration of the Roman victory over the Goths about A. D. 370, a lone figure interrupted the proceedings. Without warning, a rough and weather-beaten man jumped over the wall and into the arena. Shouts of excitement over the combat gave way to a profound silence, as all eyes turned from the gladiators to look at the lone figure.

He was covered with a mantle. He had come all the way from Asia to Rome. He was a Christian. He had heard about these barbaric entertainments, and, by the grace of God, he intended to stop them. He had shoved his way to the edge of the arena and jumped into the midst where every eye could see him. He advanced to the two gladiators who were engaged in mortal combat. Interposing himself between the combatants, he faced the crowd. Fearlessly, this hero raised his voice. ‘In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, I command these wicked games to cease. Do not requite God’s mercy by shedding innocent blood.’

A shout of defiance met the voice of our hero. Pieces of fruit, stones, daggers, and other missiles were hurled down from the stands. One of the gladiators, expecting the applause of the crowd, stepped forward and rammed his battle axe into the skull of the man who had dared interfere with Rome's favorite entertainment. As the hero sunk lifeless to the ground, the angry cries of the crowd died away into a profound silence in the arena. As the life's blood of this new martyr joined the blood of the thousands who had bled there before him, the crowd suddenly faced a courage that was greater than the strongest gladiator. The work of this Christian was accomplished. *His name was Telemachus.* From the hour of his martyrdom, the gladiatorial games ceased. According to John Foxe, in his famous book of martyrs, "From the day Telemachus fell dead in the Coliseum, no other fight of gladiators was ever held there." Such was the legacy of a man who dared to jump over a wall and declare that an aspect of popular cultural entertainment was ungodly and unlawful." – *Discerning History*

In other words, sometimes God calls upon us to stand in the gap to hold against a contrary change. The phrase *Athanasius Contra Mundum* or Athanasius Against the World comes readily to mind. Church History credits him as single-handedly resisting Bishop Arius & preventing Arianism from obtaining Orthodoxy.

3% of American Colonists Defeated the Entire British Empire.

American Restoration Movement @HUMAN WORTH.

The question of worthiness. By Luther's lifetime, the phrase for the communion ceremony and host had been altered & with it a change of emphasis. The term Eucharistia, which means thanksgiving, had been replaced with Missa, which means the dismissal of the unworthy. Individual worthiness itself had metamorphosed in meaning from a subjective introspective responsibility to an objective meaning measured by works.

Catholic hierarchs determine individual worthiness.

Reform churches each establish closed communions as evidencing their determinations of individual worth.

Restoration churches teach human worth as God given intrinsic and in the memorial supper - inner examined.

American Restoration Movement @HUMAN DIGNITY.

"The American leaders, however, understood a different principle to be at work. America was a new continent. It was as if God had provided a new Eden and given humanity a fresh start. Accordingly, they appealed to Nature and a biblical understanding of creation whereby every person bears the image of God. In creation, all are equal & have inherited certain divine rights which no king can take away ... This finds its way into the Declaration of Independence in the statement: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal & that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...' The American political leaders

rested their case for independence and democracy on this biblical foundation...”

The equal justice of God. “For the leaders of the American Restoration Movement, God is just & rules according to immutable laws. He is neither arbitrary, capricious, nor partial. Each human being has equal standing before Him & is equally amenable to His laws. Those laws are not hidden. They are revealed in a written and unchanging constitution: The New Testament. Moreover, they aren’t understood through subjective human experience, but normal objective reasoning...”

The sovereignty of the individual. “Since God is impartial and all humans are equal before Him, the Calvinist doctrine of election, whereby God chooses who will receive salvation, was rejected. Each person is free to participate in one’s own destiny, to accept or reject salvation!” - Dabney Phillips

Natural Law: Positive Versus Negative Rights – These are rights of either legal or moral character that oblige either action (positive rights) or inaction (negative rights). Negative Rights, similar to those found within the U.S. Constitution’s Bill of Rights, exist unless someone acts to *negate* them. For a positive right to be exercised, someone else’s actions must be *added* to the equation. In theory, a negative right forbids others from acting against the right holder while a positive right obligates others to act with respect to the right holder. Rights are of graded absolutism according to legal and moral obligations or responsibilities that confer duty. – Wikipedia

God's Law: Sins of Commission & Omission – Brother Gary Hutchins describes for us in detail the difference between the **Christian's positive and negative responsibilities:**

“Sins of commission are overt, sinful acts. They're sinful because they're something we do that we're not supposed to do. Sins of omission, on the other hand, are acts left undone, things that God expects us to do, but we don't do them. They're sinful because they're things we don't do that we're supposed to do.

Both types of sins represent disobedience. Sins of Commission are acts of outright disobedience to clear and direct commands to abstain from this or that. Sins of omission demonstrate disobedience to a clear instruction to do something.

Sins of omission are covered under Jesus' admonition, 'If you love Me, keep My commandments' (Jn. 14:15). To 'keep' the Lord's commandments is to obey His commandments. To not obey is to be disobedient to His commandments. Some people feel that they're basically righteous simply because they abstain from overtly unrighteous acts such as murder, theft, lying and using vulgar language. But Godly righteousness is equally demonstrated through active obedience to commandments that demand action.

The most basic sin of omission is the failure to repent of one's sins, openly confess faith in Christ and surrender to Him in baptism for the remission of one's sins (Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 2:38). Willful neglect to worship God with the church can also

be a sin of omission (Heb. 10:23-25). A lack of active service and dedication to Christ (Rom. 12:1-2), *not being involved in ‘good works’ God has designed for us to be involved in as faithful Christians (Eph. 2:10; Tit. 2:14) can be another sin of omission.”*

Unfortunately, some Christians do not get past the “first” in First, Do No Harm! The world is no worse due to their being born – neither do they leave a Spiritually Positive Footprint.

H.L. Mencken Said of Short-Sighted Single Dimension Morality -
Man, at his best, remains a sort of one-lunged animal, never completely rounded and perfect, as a cockroach, say, is perfect. If he shows one valuable quality, it is almost unheard of for him to show any other. Give him a head, and he lacks a heart. Give him a heart of a gallon capacity & his head holds scarcely a pint... In all my years of search in this world, from the Golden Gate in the West to the Vistula in the East, and from the Orkney Islands in the North to the Spanish Main in the South, I have never met a thoroughly moral man who was honorable!

John Schaar’s Contemporary Characterization Pulls No Punches:
Definition of an Evangelical Fundamentalist - *A fundamentalist is someone who hates sin more than he loves virtue.*

Negative Unity Under the Restoration Regulatory Principle –

Unifying in the Negative, the **Regulative Principle** states that Christians are to do nothing in worship except that which has been prescribed or commanded in Scripture. Not only does this

principle underscore the fact that God has revealed in His Word how he desires to be worshiped, but it also wonderfully safeguards worship from the innovations of sinful mankind. Calvin once remarked that our minds are idol factories, always inventing new objects of worship and dreaming up new ways in which to worship. The Regulative Principle takes very seriously both the truthfulness of God's Word and the deceitfulness of men's hearts. Lutheran German and Calvinist Swiss Reformers differentiated on the Regulative Principle specific to worship: Germans "We can do any worship activity not specifically forbidden." Swiss "We only allow in our worship service what the Bible specifically approves." The American Restoration Movement extended the Regulative Principle beyond Sunday 24/7/365 to all aspects of Christian Living. During the period of the first major Split in the American Restoration Movement - there had developed two separate mindsets regarding both worship service and evangelistic organization and two very different interpretations of the Regulative Principle: Churches of Christ "We must not add what God has not authorized." Disciples of Christ "We must not condemn what God has not."

Brother Roland Worth on Negative Focus & Positive Omission:

"In His parables, Christ viewed omissions as a just cause for receiving severe punishment. In Luke we read, 'And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready, or act according to His will, shall receive a severe beating, But he

who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a, light beating. Everyone to whom much is given, of him will much be required: and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more' (12:47-48).

Any time we omit what we know to be right we have sinned. 'Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin' (Jas. 4:17).

Christ condemned the Pharisees for the omissions in their religion. Christ's condemnation was blunt and to the point; 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!' (Matt. 23:23-24). The King James Version makes this point even stronger by using the word 'omitted' where the Revised Standard Version (quoted above) uses the word 'neglected.' In either case the point is the same."

In my opinion, the greatest correction for sins of omission is by considering the alternative scenarios - of either good or evil - for the community – when each individual within covenant relationship choses - event specific - either action or inaction.

Small Actions Create Change - Hollywood God answers Evan's prayerful question as to how to start "Changing the World" is to begin – by one (small) act of random kindness after another.

PART ii: HONORING THE FAMILY NAME

Bad Group Think Is Tribalism. “To the degree we are sensitive to the destructive effects of conforming to the larger society, some church people may want to isolate themselves from outside contact. Attacks on the church from outside, if there have been any, may contribute to cohesiveness within – a sense of *‘us’ against ‘them’* – and make church unity an end in itself. Ironically, in our press for unity within the church, we may lose the very strength and vitality we seek.”

“Another factor which may contribute to groupthink in the church is the false idea that faith is antagonistic to exercising critical judgment on any issue. We don't encourage loyalty to God by a faith that refuses to exercise critical judgment. Alternatives are either not examined or quickly dismissed. Suggestions to review or reconsider, to delay temporarily or exercise caution are rationalized as reflecting a lack of faith.”

“To the degree that important social needs are met, a *clublike atmosphere* may pre-empt concern for the difficult tasks that must be faced. The fact that many of us within the church work together, worship and socialize together may suppress critical

thought. The result may be a failure to offer both direction and leadership in confronting critical issues...” – *Human Connection*

Good Group Think Is Charity. Being Contagious in Well Doing.

“Even if we have a kind of treasury, this is not filled up from a sense of obligation, as of a hired religion. Each member adds a small sum once a month, or when he pleases, and only if he is willing and able, for no one is forced, but each contributes of his own free will. For these are the deposits made by devotion. For that sum is disbursed not on banquets nor drinking bouts nor unwillingly on eating-houses, but [disbursed] on the supporting and burying of the poor, and on boys and girls deprived of property and parents, and on aged servants of the house, also on shipwrecked persons, and any, who are in the mines, or on islands or in prisons, provided it be for the cause of God’s religion, who thus become pensioners of their confession.” – Tertullian, 2nd Cent.

1st Cent. Christians @2% Population Fulfilled Matthew 28:19ff

“Julian ascended the throne as Caesar in 360. He was the nephew of Constantine the Great who ‘Christianized’ the Roman world. Julian sought to re-establish pagan worship in the Empire & was thereafter known as ‘The Apostate.’ Julian openly began to persecute Christians and he withdrew the legal protection granted them by Constantine. He accused Christians

of seeking to obtain followers by bribing the sick. 'These impious Galileans,' he wrote, 'give themselves to this kind of humanity [the sick] as men allure children with candy, so they... bring converts to their impiety. *Now we can see what it is that makes these Christians such powerful enemies of our gods. It is brotherly love which they manifest towards strangers and towards the sick and the poor.*' [Roman Christians routinely rescued female infants when pagan parents exposed to die.]

Julian Went On To Say - "[Christianity] *has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers and through their care of the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar & that the [Christians] care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help we should render them.*"

"Julian had been educated in Athens alongside a committed Christian by the name of Agaton. Although he persecuted Christians, he invited his friend Agaton to serve in his court. Julian frequently teased his Christian friend. One day, in front of a large group of wealthy Romans, Julian asked, 'Agaton, how is your carpenter of Nazareth? Is he finding work these days?' Agaton smiled and answered, 'He is perhaps taking time away from building mansions for the faithful to build a coffin for your Empire.' Less than two years later, on June 26, 363, Julian lay dying with a Persian arrow in his chest. He had led his troops in an attempt to take the ancient Persian Empire. Julian grasped a

handful of dirt, red with his own blood. Flinging the dirt Heavenward he uttered his last words, 'Vicisti Galilae.' That is, **'You have conquered, Galilean'.**" (uncertain authorship)

Roman Persecution Causation Relationship: **Sociological**

In those ancient honor-shame societies one's physical presence and/or absence signaled either praise or insult. The Romans would observe such with the Cliché – *Conspicuous by Their Absence*. Socially, Christianity was considered a threat to the organization of society; Politically, they were considered intolerable & seen as an official threat - a State Within A State.

"The Christian ethic lived out became itself a criticism of pagan life. Meals at heathen feasts and social parties began with a liquid offering and a prayer to the pagan gods. As such, serious Christians would not participate in them. By such actions, the early Christians were frequently labeled as being unsociable, prudish, non-tolerant, boorish, and the like."

Roman Persecution Causation Relationship: **Polity/Economy**

"There was a balance of power Rome insisted upon holding when questions of loyalty to the imperial authorities were concerned. With a unifying political force of 'Caesar worship' having become the 'keystone' of imperial policy, several accusations were brought on Christians. They were looked upon as being unpatriotic and potential sources of chaos to an already faltering political & economic system."

Roman Persecution Causation Relationship: Value System

“Francis Schaeffer additionally presents a philosophical pre-suppositional perspective. He views the antagonism as key to the whole consideration. The worldview expressed by the official Roman elite was a combination of ideas from many sources. The only ‘absolute’ clearly distinguishable concerned the support of the city-state. All values had meaning only in reference to the polis. Christians were thus not killed because they worshipped Jesus, but because they would not worship Jesus and Caesar. As such, they were considered rebels.”

- *Darkness to Light*; Volume V, Issue 22

1st Century Christians Routinely Experienced Roman Hybris.

(ii) *Christian Infringement of Roman Law*

Was there a legal charge for which Christians could be indicted? In an early constitution, *Lex coloniae Genetiae Juliae* (45 B.C.), Section CVI records, ‘No colonist of the colony [Roman] Genetiva, established by order of G. Caesar the dictator, shall (get together) any assemblage or meeting or conspiracy’. According to Hardy who was its editor, ‘These would come under the category of *majestas*’, i.e., ‘treason’. All the Julio-Claudian emperors saw associations as hotbeds for fomenting political dissents and therefore a thorn in their side.²⁴

Robinson in *The Criminal Law of Ancient Rome* discusses ‘Offenses against the State’, i.e., ‘treason’, ‘sedition’ and the official repressing of *collegia* (associations). Augustus’ legislation on associations meant that Christians could not legally meet weekly, although Jews had been specifically exempted in the same legislation and could do so. For all others, ‘regular meetings were to be no more than monthly’. Robinson also notes the consequences—‘This is one reason why Christians could hardly have formed legal *collegia*, since they need to meet weekly for worship.’

In the eyes of the emperors of the first century, and sometimes governors and ruling authorities in cities of the empire, *collegia* ‘represented a threat to Roman order rather than a standing offence, but they could be repressed severely; accusations were made before the Prefect of the City’. In *Lex Irnitana* there was a specific provision ‘concerning illegal gatherings, societies and colleges (*collegia*)’.

No one is to take part in an illegal gathering (*coetum facito*) in that *municipium* (self-governing town) or to hold a meeting of a society or college for that purpose or to conspire that it be held or to act in such a way that any of these things occur. Anyone who acts contrary to these rules is to be condemned

to pay 10,000 sesterces to the *municipes* of the *Municipium Flavium Irnitatum* and the right of action, suit and claim of that money and concerning that money is to belong to any *municipes* of that *municipium*.

González, the editor of this bronze inscription, draws this significant conclusion—‘It is important to observe that the only thing actually banned is a *coetus*’, i.e., an ‘assembly’.

One legal prohibition in Roman law applied to Christian gatherings for weekly worship. This may well explain the significant exhortation ‘not neglecting the meeting together (*ἐπισυναγωγή*) as is the habit of some (*καθὼς ἔθος τισίν*)’ (10:25). Hedged around this exhortation is the prelude ‘to hold fast the confession of our hope that it does not waver’ (v. 23), also the call to ‘love and good works’ (v. 24) along with the subsequent warning not to sin willfully because there were no more sacrifices for sin, and there was an alarming fate for disloyal Christians (vv. 26–30). The reason for absenting oneself was not specified but, given the evidence in Hebrews, a good case can be made for some realizing that attendance on a weekly basis was in breach of Roman law, for only the Jews were permitted to do this.

Pliny the Younger later noted that all associations in Pontus were prohibited because of their suspected anti-Roman stance. ‘When people gather together for a common purpose, whatever name we may give them and whatever function we may assign them, they soon become political.’ In the same letter he reported to the emperor, Trajan, following the interrogation of Christians—‘They affirmed, however, the whole of their guilt or their error was that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang a hymn to Christ, as to a god.’ They were in breach of Roman law by meeting as they did on ‘a certain fixed day.’¹

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1st Century Christians Changed The World By Raising The Bar

Bruce W. Winter’s first book in the Cambridge Book Series of First-Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World was **Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens**.

In this book Bruce Winter presents a detailed expository of –

Chapter One @1st Peter 1 – 2:11ff, Chapter Two @Romans 13: 3-4 & 1st Peter 2:14-15, Chapter Three @1st Thessalonians 4: 11-12 & 2nd Thessalonians 3:6-13, Chapter Four @1st Timothy 5:3-16, Chapter Five @Philippians 1:27 – 2:18, Chapter Six @1st

¹ Winter, B. W. (2015). [*Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians’ Responses*](#) (pp. 275–277). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Corinthians 6:1-11, Chapter Seven @Galatians 6:11-18, Chapter Eight @1st Corinthians 7:17-24, Chapter Nine @1st Corinthians 8 – 11:1, and Chapter Ten @Romans 16:23.

The title of Winter's book is directly linked to Jeremiah 29:4-7 –

(4) Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: (5) Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. (6) Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters – that you may be increased there, and not diminished. **(7)** *And seek the peace [welfare] of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace.*

Benefaction & Citizenship Topics Subjected to Author Analysis –

Eschatology, Benevolent Mission, Public Arena, Patron/Client Relationship, Political Quietism, Financial Independence, Civil Litigation, Personal Enmity, Unrighteous Magistrates, Civic Obligations, Caesar Cultism, Civic Feasts, Social Status, Social Mobility, Christian Calling, and the Aedileship Oath of Office. The last chapter is of exclusive focus on the Corinth City Treasurer Erastus mentioned Acts 19:22 & Romans 16:23.

1994 Winter Book Excerpt, pg. 37

The use of singular 'you' in Romans 13:4 shows that it is addressed to the individual rather than the whole church. The cost of a benefaction was very considerable and beyond the ability of some, if not most, members of the church.

Benefactions included supplying grain in times of necessity by diverting the grain-carrying ships to the city, forcing down the price by selling it in the market below the asking rate, erecting public buildings or adorning old buildings with marble revetments such as in Corinth, refurbishing the theatre, widening roads, helping in the construction of public utilities, going on embassies to gain privileges for the city, and helping the city in times of civil upheaval. There must have been Christians of very considerable means to warrant Paul's injunction in verse 3 and that of 1st Peter 2:15. This further evidence supports the view that there were members of significant social status and wealth in a number of congregations in the early church.

1994 Winter Book Excerpt, pg. 42

Paul would not endorse a Christian continuing as the recipient of private benefactions by way of the parasitic client relationship with a patron even though it was widely accepted in the secular world as an important element in the social fabric of public life. This relationship would have been the one reason why some citizens apart from the rich in the city of Thessalonica, or in any other city in the empire, did not have to

work... [Paul] was initiating in Gentile regions a radical social ethic which he regarded as binding on Christians. The secular client must now become a private Christian benefactor.

1994 Winter Book Excerpt, pgs. 201 - 204

The welfare of the city was seen to be two-fold. It was 'physical' and 'spiritual', and in the former case it was revolutionary in certain respects. It linked wealthy Christian members of the city into the civic benefaction convention. At the same time it expanded the definition of 'benefactor' to encompass all those in the Christian community who had the capacity to meet the needs of others from self-generated resources. It required all to be doers of good. This involved the renunciation of the client's full-time role in politeia forcing Christians to withdraw from unproductive existence where they were part of the paid retinue of a patron. Unlike the secular trends of the first century with the development of a welfare syndrome favoring those with status and/or wealth, the Christian community was to be discriminating in the distribution of 'benefactions' to its members, 'honoring' only those who were genuinely needy – the godly Christian widows without relatives.

Paul was concerned as an 'association' they lived in a way that was worthy of the gospel. This involved securing concord in their midst to be a gospel witness in politeia where discord could be the rule rather than the exception. To live in a manner worthy of the gospel proscribed its members struggling for 'primacy' in their Christian community (Phil. 1:27ff). It also

required them to abandon the use of vexatious litigation in civil actions which was one of the secular means of securing power in any group (1st Cor. 6:1-8) ...

By ancient standards, the 'nature of the politeia' for Christians was commended as something unique. It was not that they were postulating heaven as a 'republic'. Rather, Christian conduct in the politeia of their present cities was seen as a 'selling point' for the Christian message in the apologia to Dioqnetus. It was sufficiently different from that of others to draw attention to its distinguishing and startling characteristics.

PART iii: PRAYER THAT CHANGES THE WORLD

Genre Of Biblical Prayer In Sojourner Motif; Serious Endeavor: Bridge Between Worlds; Prayer Life Is Oriented In Watchfulness
Prayer Life Part Of Righteous Obedience; Prayer Is Learning Experience & Service; Piety Includes Others & Petty Only Self;
Partisan Pride & Social Superiority Mocks; Prayer Princely Privilege – Duty & Honor; Prayer Requires Reconciliation
Horizontal Before Supplication Vertical; Prayer Requires Honest & Humble Approach; In Prayer We Match God's Demands of Justice with Our Intercession Requests For Mercy; Public Prayer Is for The Spiritually Matured

OUR LORD THE BEST EXAMPLE & MASTER TEACHER ON PRAYER
Sacrificial Incense Heavenly Ascending Now That of Brotherly Love; He Has Put The Expanding Forces Of His Cause As

Receptive To Our Prayers; Jesus Makes Prayer Out As All-Inclusive: It Has No Limitation As To Extent Or Subject - Gods Answer To Prayer Rules Over Forces Of Nature & Injustices Of Men In An Arranged Coincidence > Luke 18: 1 – 8; Christ Illustrates How Prayer Relates Both To God's Spiritual Work & His Worldly Rule; Matthew 18: 19 – Power Of Prayer Related To Purity Of Church & Unity Of Spirit; He Bases Both The Possibilities & Necessities Of Prayer On The Relation Of Father & Child; The Child Crying For Bread & The Parent Giving That Which The Child Has Asked; Sterile Religion & Barren Unfruitful Cannot Pray; We Are To Pray For Church Growth & For The Harvest – Matthew 9: 38; When Within The Crucible – With God As First Mover Not As Last Resort - Mitigating Prayer Can Ameliorate Severity – Matthew 24: 20; Christ Teaches Prayer As Not The Rote Of Mere Rite But Request For Answers, Pleas For Gain, & The Seeking Of Great Good; He Instructs Humankind That Personal Prayer Is To Be Most Holy & Private Exercise

“To Pray” Is Translated From Five Greek Verbs & Four Nouns

The verbs and their definitions are: (1) “Euchomai,” “To ask, beseech, to pray to God for something.” (2) “Proseuchomai,” “A comprehensive term in the New Testament denoting prayer in general.” (3) “Erotao,” “to ask request, entreat, beseech.” (4) “Deomai,” “to desire, ask, to pray, make supplication.” (5) “Parakaleo,” “to beg, entreat, beseech.”

The nouns and their definitions are: (1) “Euche,” “a prayer, wish.” (2) “Proseuche,” “prayer (generally).” (3) “Deesis,” “a

need, asking, entreaty, supplication.” (4) “Enteuxis,” “a petition to a superior.” *In other words, prayer involves asking, supplication, requesting, & thanking.*

The context of our passage demonstrates that prayer involves inclusively each of these meanings. The phrase “giving of thanks” in (1 Tim. 2: 1) translates “eucharistia,” which in this context means, “a prayer of thanksgiving.” In (1 Tim. 1: 12), the Apostle Paul states “...I thank Christ Jesus our Lord...” “Thank” translates “charis,” the root word found in “eucharistia.” *In this text, Paul uses a term which expresses his gratitude to deity (Christ) and this gratefulness was shown by Paul to Christ in prayer - - (1 Timothy 1: 12 thru Chapter 2).*

PRAYING FOR OPPORTUNITIES (ROMANS 15: 30 – 33) - -

Paul views prayer as a part of our struggle (15: 30 ‘strive together with me in prayers...’).

“The phrase here represents one verb in the Greek, used only here in the New Testament. Other forms of the same word-group appear in the New Testament, sometimes in connection with prayer (Col 4:12, 2:1). The word group is often associated with the strenuous discipline of the athlete who struggles to prevail. It was used of wrestlers in the Greek games. It has the idea of agony in it. The same root word is used of Jesus in the garden: ‘*being in agony, He prayed more earnestly*’ (Lk 22:44).

This is a large, visionary view of prayer. It keeps in mind the details of immediate concern, but also the broader picture,

looking forward to long-term goals. Paul dreamed great dreams, and all those dreams were in line with God's purpose for his life. And all of those dreams depended on God's grace and help. That's why he prayed." – *Praying for Spiritual Growth*

There are several scripturally correct takeaways from the 'Evan Almighty' movie. First, be careful what you pray for – you might get it. Second, God will answer not according to what you want – but according to what you need. Third, God answers your prayer according to the needs of those immediate and outward in terms of degrees of separation and of an intertwined destiny. Fourth, God answers that prayer providentially in time according to His intergenerational purposes and His plans for the human race. Fifth, God says no if there is no turn of spiritual benefit or He says no in the direct proximate not the indirect ultimate – such as Evan's wife's prayer for the family to grow closer. Sixth, as He explains to Evan's wife – **He often answers prayer with "opportunity."** Theologians often call this "arranged circumstance" – putting people in a certain place at a certain time – giving them the opportunity to accomplish great purpose - as when Mordecai tells Queen Esther: "Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?" (4:14). Seventh, Hollywood God answers Evan's prayerful question as to how to start "Changing the World" is to begin – *by one act of random kindness after another.*

PRAYING FOR COURAGE TO SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES GRANTED

RFK South African Anti-Apartheid Speech Addressed Timidity –

After focus on Futility & Expediency – Kennedy gave attention to the Third & Greatest Danger to Great Change – Timidity.

“And a third danger is timidity. Few men are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues, the wrath of their society. **Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence.** *Yet it is the one essential, vital quality for those who seek to change the world -- which yields most painfully to change.*”

In other words, evangelistically, let’s develop the strength of The Apostle Paul & discard the weakness of the Apostle Peter, who proved himself overly concerned with human opinion. We should care not what Men Think but rather what God Knows!

Galatians Epistle 2:11–21 & Luke Gospel Chapter 22: Verse 31 -

“**Human Weakness was the Devil’s Advantage.** When Jesus addressed Peter, he used his former, original name Simon, not his new, promise-filled-with-power name, Peter. Surely, this hearkened Peter’s mind back to his pre-Christ life. The significance of this and its repetition is noted by Norval Geldenhuys in the New International Commentary on the New Testament: ‘By addressing Peter as ‘Simon, Simon’ (with the repetition), the Saviour calls upon him to realize the seriousness of the matter which He is going to discuss. And by calling him *Simon* instead of *Peter*, Jesus reminds him of his human weakness—he is, as regards his own powers, not *Peter*, but *the rock*, but a mere helpless human being.’ Satan’s means

to laying Peter aside temporarily was not some grotesque, appalling sin that would even be shameful to the Gentiles (though all sin is surely grotesque, appalling, and shameful to a degree); it was through Peter's human frailty that Satan would tackle him to the ground. **It was Peter's fear of man and cowardice that Satan would take advantage of** for the sake of his own demonic plan." – Paul Tautges, Counseling One Another

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