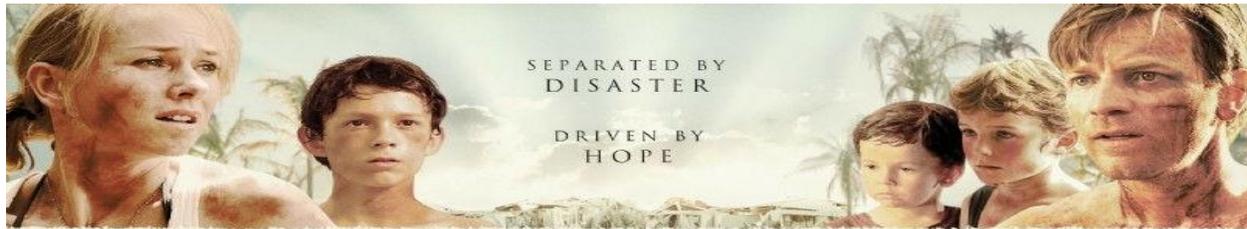


Could You Survive A Spiritual Tsunami?

By David Lee Burris



THE IMPOSSIBLE



Lessons Learned Of Natural Evil

The 1755 Lisbon Earthquake, Tsunami, and Fire Tornadoes



VOLTAIRE POEM ON THE LISBON DISASTER; Or an Examination of the Axiom, "All is Well"

-
- UNHAPPY mortals! Dark and mourning earth!
- Affrighted gathering of human kind!
- Eternal lingering of useless pain!
- Come, ye philosophers, who cry, "All's well,"
- And contemplate this ruin of a world.
- Behold these shreds and cinders of your race,
- This child and mother heaped in common wreck,
- These scattered limbs beneath the marble shafts—
- A hundred thousand whom the earth devours,
- Who, torn and bloody, palpitating yet,
- Entombed beneath their hospitable roofs,
- In racking torment end their stricken lives.
- To those expiring murmurs of distress,
- To that appalling spectacle of woe,
- Will ye reply: "You do but illustrate
- The iron laws that chain the will of God"?
- Say ye, o'er that yet quivering mass of flesh:
- "God is avenged: the wage of sin is death"?
- What crime, what sin, had those young hearts conceived
- That lie, bleeding and torn, on mother's breast?
- Did fallen Lisbon deeper drink of vice
- Than London, Paris, or sunlit Madrid?
- In these men dance; at Lisbon yawns the abyss.
- Tranquil spectators of your brothers' wreck,
- Unmoved by this repellent dance of death,
-

Who calmly seek the reason of such storms,
Let them but lash your own security;
Your tears will mingle freely with the flood.
When earth its horrid jaws half open shows,
My plaint is innocent, my cries are just.
Surrounded by such cruelties of fate,
By rage of evil and by snares of death,
Fronting the fierceness of the elements,
Sharing our ills, indulge me my lament.
“T is pride,” ye say—“the pride of rebel heart,
To think we might fare better than we do.”
Go, tell it to the Tagus’ stricken banks;
Search in the ruins of that bloody shock;
Ask of the dying in that house of grief,
Whether ’t is pride that calls on heaven for help
And pity for the sufferings of men.
“All’s well,” ye say, “and all is necessary.”
Think ye this universe had been the worse
Without this hellish gulf in Portugal?
Are ye so sure the great eternal cause,
That knows all things, and for itself creates,
Could not have placed us in this dreary clime
Without volcanoes seething ’neath our feet?
Set you this limit to the power supreme?
Would you forbid it use its clemency?
Are not the means of the great artisan
Unlimited for shaping his designs?
The master I would not offend, yet wish
This gulf of fire and sulphur had outpoured
Its baleful flood amid the desert wastes.
God I respect, yet love the universe.
Not pride, alas, it is, but love of man,
To mourn so terrible a stroke as this.

○ Would it console the sad inhabitants
○ Of these aflame and desolated shores
○ To say to them: "Lay down your lives in peace;
○ For the world's good your homes are sacrificed;
○ Your ruined palaces shall others build,
○ For other peoples shall your walls arise;
○ The North grows rich on your unhappy loss;
○ Your ills are but a link in general law;
○ To God you are as those low creeping worms
○ That wait for you in your predestined tombs?"
○ What speech to hold to victims of such ruth!
○ Add not such cruel outrage to their pain.

●

○ Nay, press not on my agitated heart
○ These iron and irrevocable laws,
○ This rigid chain of bodies, minds, and worlds.
○ Dreams of the bloodless thinker are such thoughts.
○ God holds the chain: is not himself enchained;
○ By his indulgent choice is all arranged;
○ Implacable he's not, but free and just.
○ Why suffer we, then, under one so just? (1)
○ There is the knot your thinkers should undo.
○ Think ye to cure our ills denying them?
○ All peoples, trembling at the hand of God,
○ Have sought the source of evil in the world.
○ When the eternal law that all things moves
○ Doth hurl the rock by impact of the winds,
○ With lightning rends and fires the sturdy oak,
○ They have no feeling of the crashing blows;
○ But I, I live and feel, my wounded heart
○ Appeals for aid to him who fashioned it.

●

○ Children of that Almighty Power, we stretch
○ Our hands in grief towards our common sire.

○ The vessel, truly, is not heard to say:
○ “Why should I be so vile, so coarse, so frail?”
○ Nor speech nor thought is given unto it.
○ The urn that, from the potter’s forming hand,
○ Slips and is shattered has no living heart
○ That yearns for bliss and shrinks from misery.
○ “This misery,” ye say, “is others’ good.”
○ Yes; from my mouldering body shall be born
○ A thousand worms, when death has closed my pain.
○ Fine consolation this in my distress!
○ Grim speculators on the woes of men,
○ Ye double, not assuage, my misery.
○ In you I mark the nerveless boast of pride
○ That hides its ill with pretext of content.

●
○ I am a puny part of the great whole.
○ Yes; but all animals condemned to live,
○ All sentient things, born by the same stern law,
○ Suffer like me, and like me also die.

●
○ The vulture fastens on his timid prey,
○ And stabs with bloody beak the quivering limbs:
○ All ’s well, it seems, for it. But in a while
○ An eagle tears the vulture into shreds;
○ The eagle is transfixed by shaft of man;
○ The man, prone in the dust of battlefield,
○ Mingling his blood with dying fellow-men,
○ Becomes in turn the food of ravenous birds.
○ Thus the whole world in every member groans:
○ All born for torment and for mutual death.
○ And o’er this ghastly chaos you would say
○ The ills of each make up the good of all!
○ What blessedness! And as, with quaking voice,
○ Mortal and pitiful, ye cry, “All ’s well,”

○ The universe belies you, and your heart
○ Refutes a hundred times your mind's conceit.

●

○ All dead and living things are locked in strife.
○ Confess it freely—evil stalks the land,
○ Its secret principle unknown to us.
○ Can it be from the author of all good?
○ Are we condemned to weep by tyrant law
○ Of black Typhon or barbarous Ahriman? (2)
○ These odious monsters, whom a trembling world
○ Made gods, my spirit utterly rejects.

●

○ But how conceive a God supremely good,
○ Who heaps his favours on the sons he loves,
○ Yet scatters evil with as large a hand?
○ What eye can pierce the depth of his designs?
○ From that all-perfect Being came not ill:
○ And came it from no other, for he 's lord:
○ Yet it exists. O stern and numbing truth!
○ O wondrous mingling of diversities!
○ A God came down to lift our stricken race:
○ He visited the earth, and changed it not!
○ One sophist says he had not power to change;
○ "He had," another cries, "but willed it not:
○ In time he will, no doubt." And, while they prate,
○ The hidden thunders, belched from underground,
○ Fling wide the ruins of a hundred towns
○ Across the smiling face of Portugal.
○ God either smites the inborn guilt of man,
○ Or, arbitrary lord of space and time,
○ Devoid alike of pity and of wrath,
○ Pursues the cold designs he has conceived.
○ Or else this formless stuff, recalcitrant,
○ Bears in itself inalienable faults;

o Or else God tries us, and this mortal life
o Is but the passage to eternal spheres.
o 'T is transitory pain we suffer here,
o And death its merciful deliverance.
o Yet, when this dreadful passage has been made,
o Who will contend he has deserved the crown?
o Whatever side we take we needs must groan;
o We nothing know, and everything must fear.
o Nature is dumb, in vain appeal to it;
o The human race demands a word of God.
o 'T is his alone to illustrate his work,
o Console the weary, and illumine the wise.
o Without him man, to doubt and error doomed,
o Finds not a reed that he may lean upon.
o From Leibnitz learn we not by what unseen
o Bonds, in this best of all imagined worlds,
o Endless disorder, chaos of distress,
o Must mix our little pleasures thus with pain;
o Nor why the guiltless suffer all this woe
o In common with the most abhorrent guilt.
o 'T is mockery to tell me all is well.
o Like learned doctors, nothing do I know.
o Plato has said that men did once have wings
o And bodies proof against all mortal ill;
o That pain and death were strangers to their world.
o How have we fallen from that high estate!
o Man crawls and dies: all is but born to die:
o The world 's the empire of destructiveness.
o This frail construction of quick nerves and bones
o Cannot sustain the shock of elements;
o This temporary blend of blood and dust
o Was put together only to dissolve;
o This prompt and vivid sentiment of nerve
o Was made for pain, the minister of death:
o Thus in my ear does nature's message run.

o Plato and Epicurus I reject,
o And turn more hopefully to learned Bayle.
o With even poised scale Bayle bids me doubt.
o He, wise and great enough to need no creed,
o Has slain all systems—combats even himself:
o Like that blind conqueror of Philistines,
o He sinks beneath the ruin he has wrought. (3)
o What is the verdict of the vastest mind?
o Silence: the book of fate is closed to us.
o Man is a stranger to his own research;
o He knows not whence he comes, nor whither goes.
o Tormented atoms in a bed of mud,
o Devoured by death, a mockery of fate.
o But thinking atoms, whose far-seeing eyes,
o Guided by thought, have measured the faint stars,
o Our being mingles with the infinite;
o Ourselves we never see, or come to know.
o This world, this theatre of pride and wrong,
o Swarms with sick fools who talk of happiness.
o With plaints and groans they follow up the quest,
o To die reluctant, or be born again.
o At fitful moments in our pain-racked life
o The hand of pleasure wipes away our tears;
o But pleasure passes like a fleeting shade,
o And leaves a legacy of pain and loss.
o The past for us is but a fond regret,
o The present grim, unless the future 's clear.
o If thought must end in darkness of the tomb,
o All will be well one day—so runs our hope.
o All *now* is well, is but an idle dream.
o The wise deceive me: God alone is right.
o With lowly sighing, subject in my pain,
o I do not fling myself 'gainst Providence.
o Once did I sing, in less lugubrious tone,
o The sunny ways of pleasure's genial rule;

- The times have changed, and, taught by growing age,
- And sharing of the **frailty** of mankind,
- Seeking a light amid the deepening gloom,
- I can but suffer, and will not repine.

-
- A caliph once, when his last hour had come,
- This prayer addressed to him he revered:
"To thee, sole and all-powerful king, I bear
What thou dost lack in thy immensity—
Evil and ignorance, distress and sin."
○ He might have added one thing further—hope.



God and the Tsunami

DAVE MILLER, Ph.D.

BIBLE INTERPRETATION DOCTRINAL MATTERS

The death toll is staggering: 150,000 and counting. On December 26, 2004, an underwater earthquake—which registered at 9.0 on the Richter scale—resulted in massive tidal waves from the Indian Ocean, wreaking death and devastation across portions of a dozen nations (Djuhari, 2004). Tsunamis are a series of very long waves generated by any rapid, large-scale disturbance of the sea. Most are generated by sea floor displacements from large undersea earthquakes (“Tsunamis,” 2004).

As shocking as this event may seem, many other natural disasters have occurred in human history that exceed the recent tsunami in their toll of death and destruction. For example, throughout China’s history, extensive flooding has occurred countless times as a result of the mighty 3,000-mile-long Hwang Ho River. Several of the most terrible floods, with their ensuing famines, have been responsible for the deaths of more than a million people at a time. The southern levee of the river failed in Hunan Province in 1887, affecting a 50,000 square mile area (“Hwang Ho,” 2004). **More than 2 million people died** from drowning, starvation, or the epidemics that followed (“Huang He,” 2004).

In reality, such events have occurred repetitiously throughout the history of the world —constantly: hurricanes, cyclones, earthquakes, tornados, floods, tsunamis, droughts, and volcano eruptions. In fact, natural disasters kill **one million people** around the world each decade & leave millions more homeless, according to the United Nation’s International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (“Disasters...,” 1997).

This circumstance inevitably elicits the pressing question: “Why would God allow such loss of life, inflicted on countless numbers of seemingly innocent people?” The number one argument marshaled by atheists to advocate their disbelief in God is the presence of widespread, seemingly purposeless suffering. They insist that if an infinite Being existed, He would exercise His perfect compassion and His omnipotence to prevent human suffering.

Even for many people who do not embrace formal atheism, the fact that God apparently seems willing to allow misery and suffering to run rampant in the world, elicits a gamut of reactions—from perplexity and puzzlement to anger and resentment.

But the Bible provides the perfect explanation for such occurrences. Its handling of the subject is logical, sufficient, and definitive. It sets forth the fact that God created the world to be the most appropriate, suitable environment in which humans are enabled to make their own decisions concerning their ultimate destiny (Genesis 1:27; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). We humans have been provided with the ideal environment in which we may freely accept or reject God's will for our lives. All instances of natural disasters & nature's destructive forces are the result of specific conditions that are necessary to the Almighty God's providing humanity with this ideal environment.

God is not blameworthy for having created such a world, since He had a morally justifiable reason for having done so. Human existence on Earth was not intended to be permanent. Rather, the Creator intended life on Earth to serve as a temporary interval of time for the development of one's soul. Life on Earth is a probationary period in which people are given the opportunity to attend to their spiritual condition as it relates to God's will for living. Natural disasters provide people with conclusive evidence that life on Earth is brief and uncertain.

Christians understand that no matter how catastrophic, tragic, or disastrous an event may be, it fits in the overall framework of soul-making—preparation for one's departure from life into eternity. Likewise, the Christian knows that although the great pain and suffering caused by natural disasters may be unpleasant, and may test one's mettle; nevertheless, such suffering is not intrinsically evil. Nor is it a reflection on the existence of an omnibenevolent God. **The only intrinsic evil is violation of God's will.** What is required of all accountable persons is obedience to God's revealed Word (given in the Bible)—even amidst pain, suffering, sickness, disease, death, and, yes, tsunamis.

Natural + Man-Made + Moral Evils Exponentially Tsunami!

The south Asia tsunami disaster of 2004 was of staggering and monumental proportions. Over 230,000 souls perished and many more went missing. Entire towns were literally washed from the face of the Earth. There were billions upon billions of dollars in property damage. It was a natural disaster which is unparalleled in modern times. However, this disaster provides us with an opportunity to reflect and prepare for what will be for most people the ultimate and final disaster...Judgment Day.

1) The Time Is Unexpected. When the tsunami hit most weren't expecting it. In fact, nearly everyone was engaged in their ordinary daily activities. The same will be true of God's final judgment. Jesus tells us that Day will come as unexpectedly as the flood came in Noah's time when people were busying themselves with the routines of daily life (Matthew 24:36-44). Many religious teachers today constantly engage in elaborate predictions of when that Day will come. But, their 'predictions' are false. For God's word says "of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matthew 24:36). Make no mistake about it, "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night" (2nd Peter 3:10).

2) The Devastation Will Be Total. The destruction that was wrought December 26, 2004 was stunning, but it pales in comparison to the devastation God will reek on Judgment Day. On that Day "the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are within it will be burned up" (2nd Peter 3:10). It is difficult for men to comprehend, but on that Day even the very element atoms composing the material universe will be "dissolved" (2nd Peter 3:11). In just the blink of an eye the entire material universe will come to a cataclysmic and complete end.

3) Every Person Will Be Affected. The effect of the tsunami disaster was far ranging causing deaths in 14 countries. But on the day of judgment Jesus says, "All nations will be gathered before Him" (Matthew 25:32).

It is nearly impossible to imagine, but on that Day every person alive now and every person that ever lived, will “appear before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ” (2nd Corinthians 5:10). Make no mistake about it, on that Day “we shall all have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Romans 14:10). No one will have the ability to hide (Revelation 20:11) and no one can miss or cancel this appointment! (Hebrews 9:27)

4) Only the Prepared Will Survive. Precious few were prepared for the devastating tsunami and able to flee to higher ground. Contrary to most popular denominational teaching, very few will escape their eternal damnation. For Jesus said, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: **Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it**” (Matthew 7:13-14)

Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people.

No one will make it there by mistake or by chance. Many scoff that the Day will come (2nd Peter 3:1-7), but that Day will certainly come! There’s only one reason why it has not come yet; God’s “longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2nd Peter 3:9) Could you survive a tsunami?

– *Craig Thomas*

THOSE ENTITIES THAT
HAVE SELF-EQUIPPED
IN THE SHORT-TERM
AT ROBUST RESPONSE
& IN THE LONG-TERM
ARE MATURED @LESS
FRAGILE & SEASONED
@WELL RESILIENT ARE
HARDENED TARGETS
OF PEAK POTENTIAL
FOR SURVIVAL!

IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP?

Fragile	No desire for change	Problem
Robust	Desire to return to 'normal'	Remedy
Antifragile	Desire to create something new	Outcome

Lawley

James Lawley, Antifragility, Clean Conference 2013 58

	Fragile	Robust	Antifragile
General	Large	Small but specialized	Small but not specialized
Ethics	No skin in the game	Skin in the game	Soul in the game
Human body	Mollification, atrophy	Recovery	Hormesis
Human relationships	Friendship	Kinship	Attraction
Psychology	Post-traumatic stress		Post-traumatic growth
Economic life	Bureaucrat. Academic. Corporate executive. Politician.	Owner occupier. Truck driver. Postal employee.	Entrepreneur. Taxi driver. Artist. Writer.

Taleb, Antifragile, pp.23-27

James Lawley, Antifragility, Clean Conference 2013 50

When it comes to random events,
“robust” is certainly not good enough.

we need a mechanism by which a system
regenerates itself continuously
by using, rather than suffering from,
random events, unpredictable shocks,
stressors, and volatility.

Taleb, Antifragile, p.8

James Lawley, Antifragility, Clean Conference 2015 20

Everything top-down
fragilizes and blocks antifragility and growth,

everything bottom-up
thrives under the right amount
of stress and disorder.

Taleb, Antifragile, p.5

James Lawley, Antifragility, Clean Conference 2015 28

PRINCIPLE:
In complex systems,
“causes” are usually impossible to isolate

PRACTICE:
Don't try –
Pay attention to the pattern in the signs

Lawley, 2015

James Lawley, Antifragility, Clean Conference 2015 41

Lessons in Moral Courage

By Mike Willis

The Lord revealed that “the fearful” would be cast into hell along with the unbelieving, abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars (Rev. 21:8). Moral courage, therefore, is a character trait which those who desire to be saved must develop.

What Is Courage?

Webster defines courage as “the attitude or response of facing and dealing with anything recognized as dangerous, difficult, or painful instead of withdrawing from it; the quality of being fearless or brave.” Its opposite is cowardly conduct. Rahab described the loss of courage in the hearts of the Canaanites as Israel moved to invade the promised land: “And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you” (Joshua 2:11). **A courageous man is one who is brave, willing to face his enemies and difficult circumstances, without withdrawing in fear.**

What Gives A Man Courage?

Several passages show us what gives a man courage. Here are several suggestions which may help to develop courage:

1. One can have courage because of the Lord’s promise never to leave or forsake him.

When the Lord commanded Joshua to be courageous, he said, “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage” (Josh. 1:6-7). The Lord’s promise never to forsake his children gives them courage to face every foe (Heb. 13:5-6).

2. The knowledge that our enemies are the Lord’s enemies gives us courage. When young David went out to fight Goliath, he took courage when facing the Philistine champion from the knowledge that Goliath was the Lord’s enemy. Goliath defied the armies of the living God (1st Sam. 17:26). Hence, David asked, “Is there not a cause?” (1 Sam. 17:29)

We can take courage so long as our enemies are the enemies of the Lord as well. Wherein those who are against us are the Lord’s servants, proclaiming his divine will, we have reason for our hearts to melt within us. So long as our enemies are the Lord’s enemies, we can take courage.

3. A trust in the providence of God inspires courage. Moses told Israel to trust in God. He said, “The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut. 33:27). A knowledge that the Lord in heaven is aware when a sparrow dies and even knows the number of hairs on my head inspires me to trust in his watching, caring & keeping of his saints. “The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore” (Psalms 121:5-8).

4. A wholesome fear of God inspires courage. A fear of man creates timidity, cowardice, hypocrisy, fawning, and other ugly attributes of character. However, a wholesome fear of God creates courage in men’s hearts.

Jesus inspired his disciples to withstand those who threatened their lives by saying, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28)

Esther showed this reverence for God when she risked her life to save her people. She had a greater fear of the Lord than of her husband king Ahasuerus or Haman. Mordecai exhorted her to have courage saying, “For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then there shall enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (4:14).

5. A confidence that God hears and answers prayer inspires courage. David found the courage to face his enemies in the knowledge that he could present his plea to God and God would answer his prayer. There are many examples of this in the psalms, but one is Psalm 140. David prayed that the Lord would deliver him from the evil man (140:1) saying, “Thou art my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O Lord. O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle” (140:6-7).

6. A confidence based on past deliverances inspires courage. When David faced Goliath, he found courage based on the Lord’s having delivered him from the paw of the lion and the bear (1st Samuel 17:37). As we reflect on the difficult circumstances from which the Lord already has extricated us, we can find assurance that he will deliver us from present problems and face them with courage.

We Need The Courage to Confess Sin

David manifested courage when he openly confessed to Nathan his sins with reference to Bathsheba (see Psa. 32, 51). David confessed two sins which were punishable by death – adultery and murder. Not knowing what lay ahead of him, he openly confessed his sin.

We need this kind of courage today. Christians need to openly confess their sins without regard to what circumstances may befall them. We shouldn't try to hide our personal sins by clothing our confessions in ambiguity, but openly should say, "I have sinned."

None of us lives sinlessly (1 Jn. 1:6-10). We stumble and fall from time to time. Jesus is willing to forgive our sins when we confess them to God and turn away from them in repentance. We need the courage to break away from the devil's bondage, turn away from our sins, and openly confess them to God and others, as may be necessary (Jas. 5:16).

A Study of John the Baptist

Johnny Stringer
Trumann, Arkansas

Preparing the Way (Isa. 40:3-5)

When an Eastern monarch entered upon a journey, it was customary to send harbingers ahead to make certain that the way for the king was prepared. This was especially true when he was to be traveling through barren, little-traveled country, where there would be no path in a condition conducive to traveling. Thus, all obstacles to travel which would hinder the king would be removed, and a path would be prepared for him. This would involve such things as leveling off high places, smoothing over rough places, and filling in low places. Similarly, when the King of kings and Lord of lords began to fulfill His mission among men, there was a need for preparation to be made for Him. As the path of travel needed to be put into proper condition for the earthly king, the hearts of men needed to be put into proper condition for the coming of the heavenly King. John the Baptist was the harbinger who went ahead of Christ to prepare the way for Him.

In serving as the harbinger of Christ, John fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" (Isa. 40:3-4). The application of this prophecy to John is repeatedly affirmed in the New Testament (Matt. 3:3; Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4-6; John 1:23). John obviously did not literally exalt valleys and make mountains low; the point is, his work of preparing the way for Christ was comparable to the harbingers who prepared a way for the earthly king to travel. Isaiah's language found a figurative application in John the Baptist, as he prepared the hearts of men for the coming of Christ. It was his task to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Lk. 1:17).

In fulfilling this vital function, John preached, "Repent yet for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). Because of the prophecies contained in the Old Testament scriptures, the Jews to whom John preached had long anticipated a mighty kingdom, to be established by the Christ ("anointed one") of prophecy.

The Christ for Whom they had waited would soon come and establish that kingdom, and in order to prepare the people for His coming and the establishment of His reign, John announced that the time was at hand (near). He called upon men to repent; otherwise, men would not be prepared for the kingdom of Christ. Truly, if men's hearts are not set on serving God, they are ill prepared for the reception of spiritual truths.

The Elijah-Like Preacher

John's task of turning corrupt hearts to God could not be fulfilled by one who offered nothing but comforting words and people-pleasing platitudes, or by one who spoke without a dogmatic certainty (e.g., "I think this is right, but everyone has a right to his own opinion, and we cannot really be sure about anything . . ."). It could not be fulfilled by the kind of "preacher" who continually wears a sickly little smile on his face and fills his message with sweet, heartwarming little stories. It could not be fulfilled by one who was fearful of speaking plainly lest someone be offended. To bring about the necessary change in the sinful hearts of men, it was imperative that the message be spoken plainly, forcefully, sternly, and with firm conviction. Men had to be made aware in no uncertain terms of their sinfulness and the importance of turning from their wickedness. Hence, the preacher needed to be one similar to Elijah of old.

John the Baptist was indeed precisely what was needed-another Elijah! God had promised, through the prophet Malachi, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mat. 4:5-6). While this prophecy caused men to expect the return of the literal Elijah, Jesus taught that the reference was to John the Baptist (Matt. 11:14; 17:10-13). This does not mean that John was the literal Elijah reincarnated, for he denied being Elijah in person (John 1:21). John, however, was so similar to Elijah that he was figuratively a second Elijah. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias and promised that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a son (John), he said that John would go before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk. 1:17). John was of the same nature and character as Elijah, and his preaching was similar to Elijah's in its bluntness, its incisiveness, its sternness, its forcefulness.

After the similitude of Elijah, John sternly denounced the sins of the people and warned of the judgment that would come upon the impenitent. In his plain, blunt way, he called the Pharisees and Sadducees a "generation of vipers" (poisonous snakes), demanded that they bring forth fruits of repentance, and minced no words in informing them that they could not depend upon their physical relation to Abraham for salvation from God's wrath (Matt. 3:7-9). He forthrightly warned of the punishment to be suffered by those who did not produce the fruits of repentance (Matt. 3:10-12). It was with a sense of urgency that he preached, for if men's corrupt hearts were not changed, they would be unprepared for the King, and rather than participating in the glories of the kingdom, they would be the miserable recipients of God's wrath.

John's straightforward, fearless preaching is well illustrated by his statement to Herod regarding Herodias. He said very simply and directly, "It is not lawful for thee to have her" (Matt. 14:4). That, good reader, is getting right to the point! One simply did not speak to a king in that fashion-unless he was a preacher like Elijah, who had been equally direct and to the point in his dealings with King Ahab (1 Kings 18:17-18; 21:17-24). In thus addressing the king, John knew that he could be imprisoned or executed, but he could not but speak truth. In fact, his rebuke finally did result in his execution (Matt. 14:3-12). If John could, in the face of such danger, inform the king that he had no right to live with the woman with whom he was living, surely preachers today should have the courage to tell men when they are living with someone without the scriptural right to do so; yet, many simply avoid the subject altogether, and others go to great lengths to devise theories designed to justify unscriptural marriages (Rom. 7:1-3; Matt. 19:1-12).

John's manner of life befitted his message. Similar to Elijah's, it was a plain, simple life of austerity and self-denial (Matt. 3:1-3). He began his preaching in the wilderness of Judea (Matt. 3:1), after spending his early years in the desert (Lk. 1:80). The word rendered "wilderness" and "desert" in the New Testament denotes an uninhabited area. The wilderness of Judea was rugged, rocky, sparsely populated territory west of the Dead Sea and the lower Jordan River. Laboring in such rough territory, he wore appropriate apparel-the coarse, rough garment of camel's hair, and a girdle that was made of plain leather rather than the soft linen or silk that was worn by many. He ate the food that was plentifully available to him in the outdoors-locusts and honey.

While his eating of locusts may not be appetizing to our tastes, it is not at all incredible. Locusts were specified in the Law as proper for the Jew to eat (Leviticus 11:22), and they are still eaten by some. It would be expected that one living in such circumstances would possess a stern, rugged character, and such a personality is reflected in John's stern preaching. As his manner of life was not soft, neither was his preaching. As his manner of life was plain, so was his preaching plain and straightforward, unembellished with meaningless flowery speech. It was most fitting that John live a life of austerity and self-denial as he denounced the self-indulgence, the greed, and the materialistic attitudes of men and women, calling upon them to deny themselves and devote their lives to God. As John preached repentance to those whose hearts were centered on material luxuries, his own austerity was a living protest against their sinful self-indulgence.

His Baptism

As John preached repentance, seeking to turn men's hearts to God so that they would be prepared for the coming of the Christ, he baptized them in the Jordan. It was due to his baptizing that he was called "the Baptist"-that is, the baptizer. The word "baptist" is basically a Greek word, which would be accurately translated by the English word "immerser." His baptism was for the remission of sins (Mk. 1:3). Of course, sin cannot be remitted apart from the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:22-10:4; Matt. 26:28), and Christ had not yet shed His blood when John baptized. Nevertheless, God knew that Christ would shed His blood, and knowing that the price would be paid for their sins, God could for all practical purposes consider their sins forgiven when they submitted to John's baptism. The blood of Christ would cover their sins, as it did the sins of their forefathers who had manifested faith (Heb. 9:15).

John's baptism must be viewed in the context of his overall mission-preparing men for the coming of Christ and His kingdom. People repented, turned to God, and were baptized for the remission of their sins because of their faith in John's teaching that the kingdom was coming soon and because of their desire to be a part of that kingdom. They were determined that when Christ came, they would be loyal to His rule and share in the joys of His kingdom. After Christ had come and set up His kingdom (Col. 1:13), the baptism of John, since it had been in anticipation of His coming, was no longer valid.

Therefore, we read that the group in Ephesus who had been baptized "unto John's baptism," needed to be baptized "in the name of Christ" (Acts 19:1-5). They had been baptized because of their faith in John's teaching that the Christ was coming to establish His kingdom, but they needed to be baptized because of their faith that Christ had already come, died for their sins, and established His reign. These are essential facts of the gospel to be believed prior to New Testament baptism (Mk. 16:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Rom. 10:9; Acts 2:33-38).

His Exaltation of Christ, Not Self

John had no illusions regarding his own position. He recognized that he was but a forerunner of the Christ. He was fully aware that the Christ, not His harbinger, was the One of supreme importance. His aim was not to attract people to himself, but to point them to the Christ. He always denied that he was the Christ, affirming that he was merely the harbinger to prepare the way for the Christ; and he ever proclaimed the vast superiority of Christ over himself, saying that he was not even worthy to perform the most menial act of service for the Christ, such as loosing and carrying His shoes (Matt. 3:11; Mk. 1:7; Lk. 3:15-16; John 1:19-23; 3:28). After the temptation of Jesus, John saw Him coming and pointed Him out to his own disciples as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world"; as a result, some of John's disciples began to put their faith in Jesus as the Christ (John 1:29-42). John's attitude is well summed up in his humble words to his disciples in reference to the Christ: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Christ's Approval of John

While John was in prison as a result of his rebuke of Herod, he sent his disciples to inquire of Jesus whether He was truly the Christ (Matt. 11:2). Why He sent them is a matter of speculation, since John had previously affirmed without doubt that Jesus was the Christ. Some say he sent them for their own strengthening, and not because of his personal need. Perhaps it was because his imprisonment had caused him to be discouraged so that he needed reassurance. Whatever the reason for John's query, Jesus replied by pointing to His works; they spoke for themselves (Matt. 11:4-5). After the disciples of John had departed, Jesus addressed the multitudes regarding John the Immerser (Matthew 11:7-14).

He first asked them what kind of man had attracted them out to the wilderness. Had the one in the wilderness whom they had gone to see been a "reed shaken with the wind?" The answer obviously was, no. Jesus thus drew attention to the fact that John was not weak, wavering, and vacillating. He was not one who was like the tall, slender reed by the Jordan which would passively bend with the wind. Rather, he was strong, steadfast, as a mighty oak. He stood for right and no force could sway him. Jesus then asked the multitudes if the one who had attracted them to the wilderness had been a man clothed in soft raiment, such as is found in king's palaces. Jesus thus drew attention to the fact that John was a man who lived a life of selfdenial, not indulging himself in material luxuries. He did not seek the soft, easy life, which would demand compromise of convictions. Had he done so, perhaps he could have been in the king's palace-rather than the king's prison. Through these questions Jesus paid tribute to the firm, strong character of John.

Jesus proceeded to affirm that John was not merely a prophet, but more than a prophet. He was in fact the subject of prophecy. He held the unique distinction of being the harbinger of the King of kings. Jesus asserted that of all who had been born of women, none had been greater than John the Immerser. What a remarkable statement! Jesus could not have paid John a higher tribute. There could have been no greater mission for a mere human to perform than that of being the forerunner of the Christ, and there could have been no more eminently qualified human to perform that mission than John the Immerser. Yet, in spite of his greatness, Jesus averred that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John (Matt. 3:11)! Surely, the least in the kingdom is not greater from the standpoint of character, strength, and dedication to God. The least in the kingdom is greater only in the sense that he enjoys an honor and a privilege that John never enjoyed. John, the harbinger of the Christ and His kingdom, died before that kingdom was established; hence, he was not permitted the privilege of being a part of the kingdom of which he preached.

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The Apostle Paul @Approved Example Spiritual Tsunamis Response/Reaction

Some Character Traits of Paul, the Apostle

By **Wayne Jackson**

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The renowned German scholar, Adolf Deissmann, once declared: “There is no single person since Nero’s days who has left such permanent marks on the souls of men as Paul the New Man.” He noted that the grand apostle of Christ, “rising from the mass of the insignificant many” is “still molding the world at the present moment” (1957, viii).

F.F. Bruce stated that he had spent more time studying the works of Paul than any other writer of antiquity. He further commented that Paul’s epistles are more “richly rewarding” than that of any other writer—either ancient or modern (1977, 15). He observed as well that “no single event, apart from the Christ-event itself, has proved so determinant for the course of Christian history as the conversion and commissioning of Paul” (1977, 75).

James Stalker, a close student of Paul, would write that the apostle was “one of the most influential teachers of mankind, multitudes in every century adopting from him their way of conceiving all the greatest objects of human concern” (Hastings 1926, 155).

Even Lyman Abbott, a radically liberal scholar, conceded: “The literary history of the world furnishes no parallel to the influence exerted by the writings of Paul, except such as is afforded by the history of the Bible in which those writings are found” (1898, 1).

Persistent

Sir William Ramsay was a devout student of Paul. He traced the steps of the noble missionary throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, and today’s New Testament student is indebted to his research in numerous particulars.

In assembling an approximate chronology of the apostle’s labor, Ramsay calculated that Paul was converted around A.D. 34, and likely was executed at Rome about A.D. 67. If this dating is fairly accurate, the apostle’s earthly life and labors spanned some thirty-three years.

In the December 1956 issue of the *National Geographic Magazine*, there appeared an article, as I recall, under the title, “In the Steps of Paul.” The author or authors, who had done considerable research on Paul’s travels, estimated his missionary endeavors consumed some twelve thousand miles, some by ship on the Mediterranean Sea, and also across its “arms”—the Aegean and Adriatic Seas. In addition, hundreds of miles were traversed by land. He visited about fifty cities in his evangelistic endeavors (McRay 2003, 11).

Yet within the thirteen epistles known to have been written by Paul, and penned over an era of maybe just under twenty years, there’s no complaint of fatigue, no whimper at hardships, no disappointment expressed of having been “crucified with Christ,” or of wasted years, or lack of family, wealth, or fame—just adulation. There was the simple joy in serving his Lord, and for the blessed hope of life to come. **Paul was a “stick-tight” who could not be budged from his resolute course.**

Patient

The thought of Paul's patience may not readily enter one's mind due to his more dominant qualities that easily engage one's attention. But patience is there—if one looks for it.

When the militant persecutor of Christ was brought to the Lord by means of the gospel (see the accounts of his conversion in Acts 9, 22, and 26), he was informed that he would be an instrument of mercy to “all men,” especially to the Gentiles (9:15; 22:15; 26:17). “Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles par excellence, so much so the church became predominantly Gentile by the end of the first century” (Ferguson 2005, 37).

The **militant apostle** was scarcely dry from his immersion when he began his preaching to the Jews of Damascus (Acts 9:20), with no apparent success entered into the record. It was at this point many believe Paul made his journey into Arabia, which consumed, at the very least, portions of three years (cf. Galatians 1:17). What transpired during those years is passed over in complete silence (no editorial emendation to satisfy our curiosity—an evidence of the credibility of the Galatian epistle). Perhaps this was a time of meditation, preparation, and communication with his Savior—maybe even a course in “Patience 101”!

Later Paul would return to Damascus where persecution by the Jews awaited him, and forced his flight to Jerusalem. Here again the Jews sought to kill him (Acts 9:29). But as he prayed in the temple, the Lord appeared to him and told of the immediate plan to send his apostle “far hence unto the Gentiles” (22:21). Some of the Jerusalem saints escorted Paul to Caesarea and dispatched him to Tarsus of Cilicia (some 225 miles to the northwest), where he would spend almost a decade doing mission work among the folks of his native land (cf. 9:30).

It is not unreasonable to assume that Paul's earlier training contributed to the amazing patience he exhibited in his letters to fledgling churches, whose problems he attempted to address.

All younger preachers could well benefit from some education in patience.

Courageous

It is scarcely necessary to argue the case for Paul's courage, and this quality cannot be passed over in silence.

It is unrealistic to imagine that Paul was never afraid. In Corinth the Lord spoke to the Apostle Paul in a night vision, cautioning: "Be not afraid" (Acts 18:9). The force of the Greek expression is: "**Stop being afraid.**" Courage is not the absence of fear; it is doing what is right even when you are afraid!

On the initial missionary campaign with Barnabas (Acts 13:4ff), these brothers came to the city of Lystra in Asia Minor. There they encountered a man who had been crippled all his life. By God's power Paul healed the man, and the crowds that witnessed the event were enthralled, attempting even to worship the apostle and his companion. But the brothers restrained them. Mere humans are not proper objects of worship.

Presently, though, a confederation of Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived and stirred up the fickle multitude. Paul was stoned, dragged outside the city, and left for dead. According to the Jewish Mishnah (*Sanhedrin* 6:1-4), a stoning victim was substantially stripped of his clothes, thrown from an elevated place twice the height of a human person, positioned with his heart upward, and huge rocks were then dropped (or thrown) upon him until he was dead (Arnold, 276; Boismard, 209).

The vicious mob at Lystra “supposed” Paul was dead and obviously left the site. But the Paul “rose up” (a hint of miraculous recovery). The following day he and Barnabas left the city, proceeding toward Derbe some sixty miles to the southeast.

Apparently, they worked in Derbe for some time, because “many disciples” were won for the Lord. Presently, however, they then determined they would return to Antioch of Syria, from where they had begun their gospel adventure. They might well have taken a more direct route, thus avoiding the dangerous cities visited earlier. But no, they would revisit the churches previously established—even the deadly Lystra—in order to confirm the disciples and exhort them to continue in the faith (14:22). What courage this required on the part of the battered apostle. Never mind though; the cause of Jesus was paramount.

Humble

While many character traits of Paul readily come to the student’s mind, likely humility is not the first of these. But the humble Pauline disposition clearly is there for the perceptive reader.

After Paul and Barnabas had completed their missionary campaign in Asia Minor, they settled for a while in Antioch of Syria. Presently, certain men from Judea arrived. Incredibly, they were teaching a “Judaistic gospel,” namely that unless one submits to the Hebrew rite of circumcision, in addition to the fundamentals of the gospel, he cannot be saved (Acts 15:1).

This doctrine, so adverse to the message that Paul and Barnabas had proclaimed in their previous preaching, required a response. There was much “dissension and questioning” about this issue, and the peace of the church was in jeopardy.

A suggestion thus was made that the two missionaries, in the company of several other brothers, should proceed to Jerusalem and inquire there of the “apostles and elders” about this matter (v. 2). Hence the investigative party dispatched to the holy city.

Now here is a question of interest. Why did not Paul interject himself into the initial discussion by demanding: “Listen, there is no need for a deputized group to consult with Jerusalem. I myself am an apostle of Christ, and not a whit behind any of the others [2 Corinthians 11:5]. I am perfectly capable, therefore, of settling this issue on my own. Circumcision will not be required!”

But the sensitive apostle knew this was a volatile situation. If the Christians at Antioch felt the need of consulting the broader band of apostolic authority, Paul would not insist on thrusting himself to the forefront. The larger cause of Jesus was more important on this occasion than his ego. He would humbly recede into the shadows for the moment, that the gospel might not be damaged. This was not the last time that this gracious servant of Christ would yield in a matter of expediency for the sake of his kinsmen in the Lord (1st Cor. 9:12).

Uncompromising

To suggest that Paul was the epitome of humility is not to affirm that he was a pushover and a compromiser of truth. Far from it!

When Paul, Barnabas, and Titus went to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1), some misguided members of the congregation secretly brought in “false brothers.” These propagators of error attempted to bind the law of Moses as an appendix to the gospel. They sought to deprive the Jerusalem Christians of their legitimate “liberty” in Christ and bring them into the bondage of the Mosaic regime. Some clearly wanted to demand that Titus, a Greek, submit to circumcision.

But Paul, and those who supported his leadership, would not stand for this defection from the truth. They refused to yield to the heretical clique—even “for a moment” (v. 5; Danker 1102).

On another occasion, when Paul was in Antioch (of Syria), Peter arrived on the scene. Having learned of another previous episode in which Peter had yielded to Jewish prejudice and withdrew from Gentile association, refusing to share in common meals with them, Paul chastised the wayward apostle. He wrote: “I resisted him to the face because he stood condemned” (Galatians 2:11). Other Jews, and even Barnabas, had been caught up in this “dissimulation” (v. 13). “Dissimulation” derives from the Greek, *hupokrisis*—the basis of the English, “hypocrisy” (cf. ESV).

Paul would not have the truth compromised & the cause of Christ endangered by any weak church members who gave in to social pressure. This unpleasant situation does have a couple of happy footnotes. Paul will later commend the support of Barnabas (1st Corinthians 9:6), and Peter would write of “our beloved brother Paul” (2nd Peter 3:15). No grudges held!

Yielding

While we admire Paul for his backbone of steel in doctrinal matters, no one should draw the erroneous conclusion that he was stubborn and non-pliable at the expense of honest souls who were struggling to grow in knowledge and practice of the truth.

When coping with a stubborn, anti-Paul faction within the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:1), the apostle was forced to defend himself against malicious charges hurled against him. A portion of that very defense is found in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

For though I was free from all men, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak: I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the gospel's sake, that I may be a joint partaker thereof.

A concrete example of this accommodating disposition on the part of the grand apostle is found in Acts 21:17-26. In that context, Paul did not hesitate to “purify” himself in the temple in order to ameliorate the Jerusalem Jews & create a friendlier environment for spreading of the gospel in the holy city.

Ethical

Paul was not one of the many whose practice is inconsistent with their teaching. He diligently strove to “take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men” (Romans 12:17).

In Rome, during a two-year span of house arrest—awaiting his case to be heard before Caesar—Paul came in contact with a man whose name was Onesimus (the name means “profitable”). Onesimus was a slave who had fled from his master, Philemon, a Christian in the city of Colosse (Colossians 4:9). Onesimus had made his way to refuge in the crowded imperial city. Apparently, the vagabond had wronged his master in some fashion—perhaps taking money from him, or rendering some other form of evil (cf. Philemon 18).

Somehow, likely under the Hand of Providence (v. 15), the servant had come into contact with the noble apostle to the Gentiles, and Paul converted him (v. 10). He thus became a “slave” of Jesus Christ!

But that was not to be the end of the matter. While Onesimus had received pardon from the Lord, he still had a moral obligation to his master, Philemon. And Paul was conscientious to see that this responsibility be fulfilled.

Accordingly, the apostle prepared a short letter to Philemon (to be delivered by Onesimus). Paul begged Philemon to forgive this wayward soul who had been so “unprofitable,” but who now has been transformed into a precious, profitable treasure (v. 11). He asks that Onesimus might be received, just as Paul himself would, should he make the journey (v. 17). He gently reminded his friend that he was indebted to him as well (v. 19).

Many would complain that Paul should never have sent the fugitive brother back to a life of servitude, but two things must be borne in mind: first, it was the “ethical” thing to do, given the social and legal situation of the day; second, Paul had every confidence Philemon would receive Onesimus not merely as a servant, but as a brother in Christ (v. 16)—and that would make all the difference in the world!

Forgiving

Finally, there is this character trait that scarcely can be ignored. In his final epistle to Timothy, Paul writes: “At my first defense no one took my part, but all forsook me: may it not be laid to their charge” (4:16). I have discussed this text in my book, *Before I Die—Paul’s Letters to Timothy and Titus*, and for convenience’s sake, reproduce that material here.

First, there is the matter of the historical context. What is meant by “my first defense”? The term *apologeia* clearly seems to refer to a legal proceeding. But what defense? That is by no means a fully settled question. While a few have argued that the phrase alludes to the apostle’s earlier two-year confinement in Rome (Acts 28), most

scholars are persuaded that the reference is to a preliminary trial in connection with Paul's present imprisonment.

In A.D. 64, a week-long fire had engulfed the Imperial city. The emperor Nero was rumored to have set the blaze to cover his own ineptness as an administrator. He maliciously blamed Christians for the catastrophe, and Christianity became an "illicit religion." Paul's arrest is believed to have taken place a couple of years following these events. It appears the apostle had been brought to trial initially, but was cleared of a preliminary charge. It is likely, however, that another allegation was pending, and he was waiting for a second trial phase—from which he expected no deliverance. His looming fate seems fairly certain in his mind (2 Timothy 4:6).

Second, it is clear that when this valiant brother was brought before the authorities in the initial segment of his trial procedure, no one—available and in a position to do so—was willing to stand with him. It may be that he had sent forth an appeal to brethren for character witnesses, but, for fear of their lives, many had "turned away" from him (cf. 1:15; 4:16). Where were those of the Roman church who had traveled out so joyously to meet the apostle when he first approached the seven-hill city (Acts 28:13-15)? Had many of these been martyred already? Certainly no assistance could be expected from the "anti-Paul" faction in Rome (cf. Philippians 1:15ff).

Third, the most amazing thing about this circumstance is Paul's attitude with reference to those who "forsook" him. He wrote: ". . . may it not be laid to their account." "Account" (logizomai) is a commercial term, used metaphorically; it signifies here "to place on one's record." Clearly, he is referring to a **final settlement** at the Judgment (cf. 1:16-18). Amidst the mystery of this passage, a few facts seem plain. (a) Paul was not petitioning God to ignore a willful, arrogant disdain of divine law, pursued with no inclination of repentance. (The verb is in the optative mood; it does involve a wish, a request.) Such a view would disregard other passages of emphatic import (Luke 17:3; Acts 8:22; 1 John 5:16). Within this same context

the apostle refers to Alexander, of whom he says, “the Lord will render to him according to his works.” [The King James rendition, which makes this a wish, does not have the best textual support.] There was no petition for mercy on behalf of such a one.

On the other hand, it seems that Paul did consider the neglect on the part of some as one of human weakness, rather than overt rebellion. Fear can cause one to panic under extreme conditions, which might not be the case under less stressful circumstances. It does appear that in this situation, the apostle at least sees the **possibility** that God will extend mercy on account of the human element (see Psalm 103:13-14). Perhaps he might extend grace to those who have not been as valiant as they could have been ideally. This text, therefore, may not only be a commentary upon the forgiving spirit of Paul, it may also underscore the mercy of the One who knows the true character of our hearts (2007, 294-296).

Conclusion

What a spiritually rewarding experience it would be to have a complete “album” of “character snapshots” of Paul, the apostle who has forever left his image upon the world. We can learn much from this remarkable man; may we exert the courage and energy to apply ourselves to his schoolroom of instruction.

Here are some 12 Resilient Themes for year 2022:

- **Jan** – Resilient: Looking Ahead – **Philippians**
3:13-14
- **Feb** – Resilient Love and Unity – **1 Corinthians**
13:13
- **March** – Resilient in the Word – **2nd Timothy**
2:15
- **April** – Resilient in our Actions – **Galatians**
6:10
- **May** – Resilient in Selflessness – **Philippians**
2:4
- **June** – Resilient with your Influence – **Matthew**
5:13-16
- **July** – Resilient with your Time – **Ephesians**
5:16
- **August** – Resilient at work/school – **Colossians**
3:23
- **Sept** – Resilient in Prayer – **1 Thessalonians**
5:17
- **Oct** – Resilient in Sharing Faith – **Philemon 1:6**
- **Nov** – Resilient in Thankfulness – **Colossians**
3:15
- December – Finishing Well: Resilient to the End
– **Revelation 2:10**

THE GOAL OF CHRISTIANS IS NOT TO JUST SURVIVE BUT TO THRIVE



“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” (John 10: 10)

