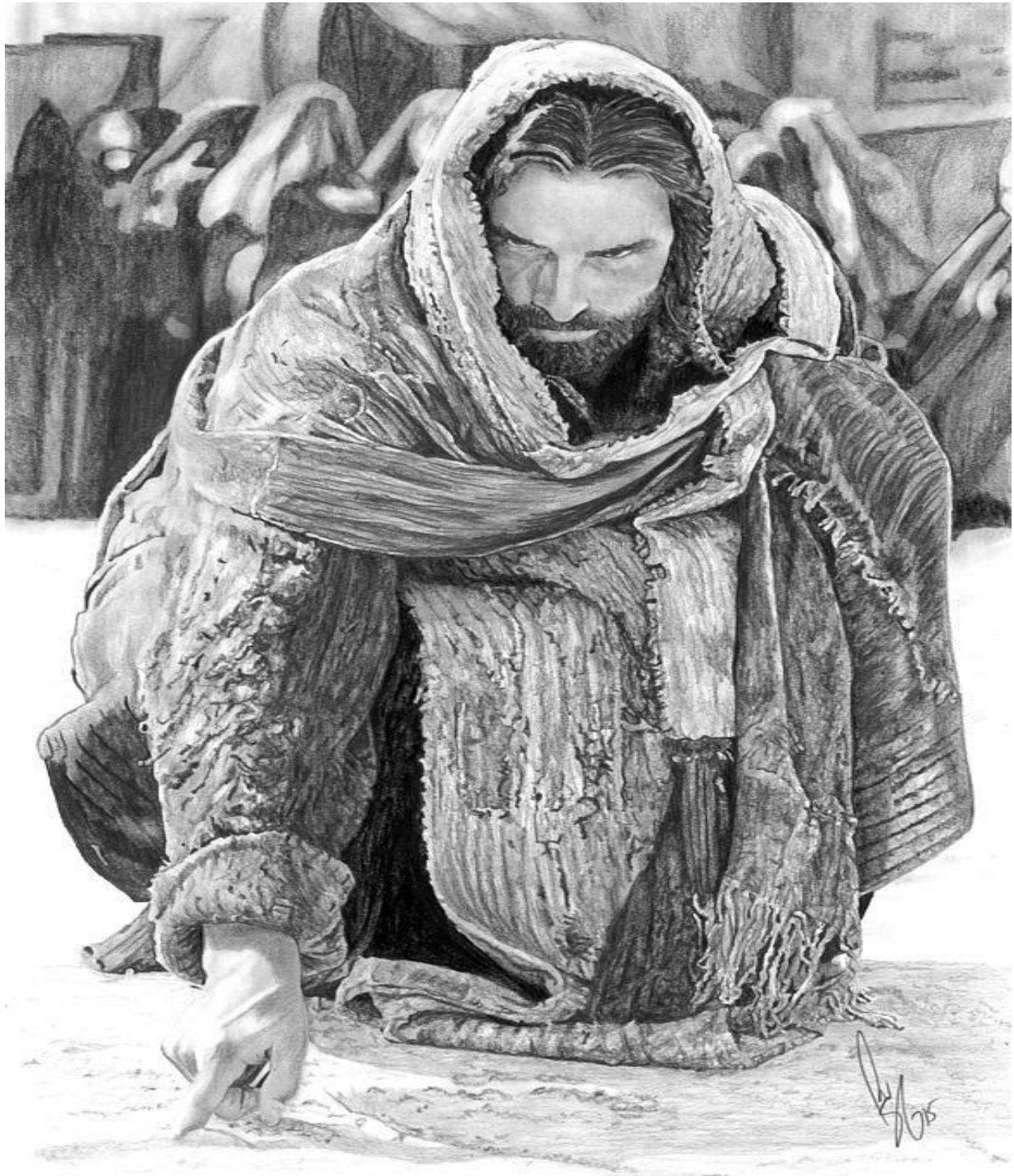


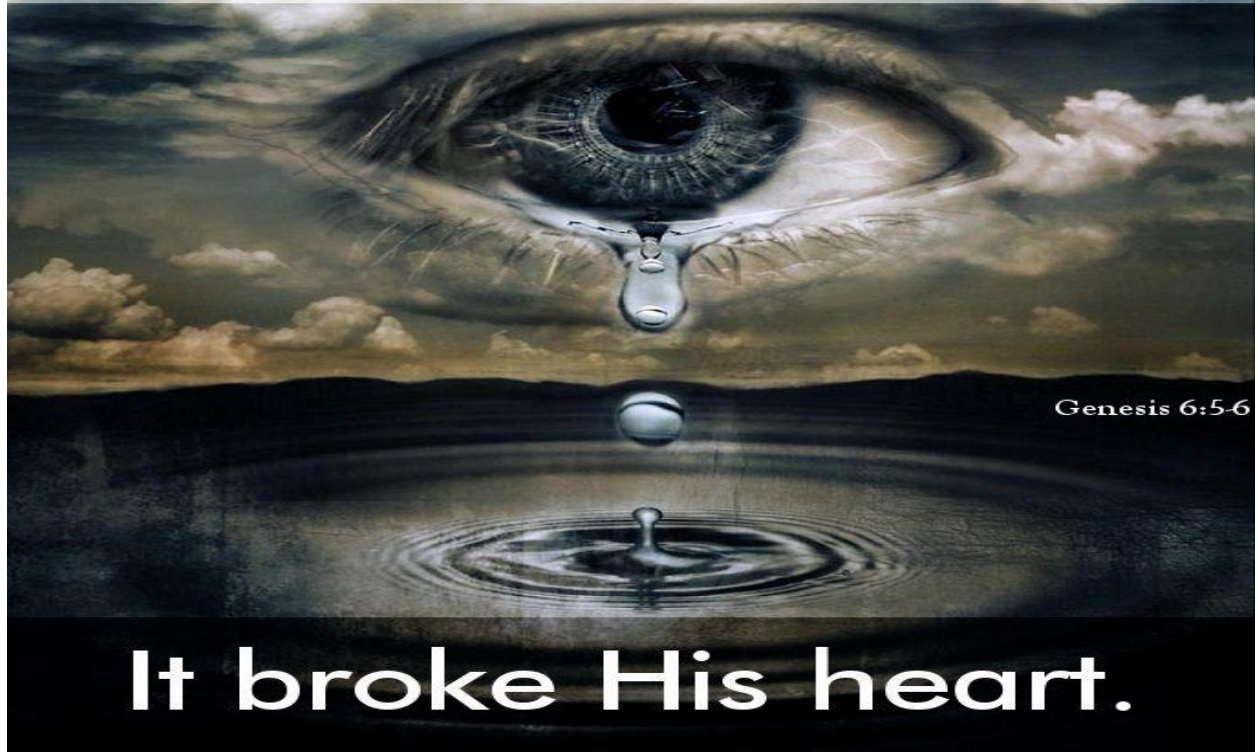
God Sees Speech, Action, & Motivation

By David Lee Burris



God Knows Mankind's Mind

The Lord observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and He saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. So the Lord was sorry He had ever made them and put them on the earth.



It broke His heart.

and that, every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually: the heart of man is evil and wicked, desperately wicked, yea, wickedness itself, a fountain of iniquity, out of which abundance of evil flows, by which it may be known in some measure what is in it, and how wicked it is; but God, that sees it, only knows perfectly all the wickedness of it, and the evil that is in it: the "thoughts" of his heart are evil; evil thoughts are formed in the heart, and proceed from it; they are vain, foolish, and sinful, and abominable in the sight of God, by whom they are seen, known, and understood afar off: the "imagination" of his thoughts is evil, the formation of them; they were evil while forming, the substratum of thought, the very beginning of it, the first motion to it, yea, "every" such one was evil, and "only" so; not one good among them, not one good thing in their hearts, no one good thought there, nor one good imagination of the thought; and so it was "continually" from their birth, from their youth upwards, throughout the whole of their lives, and all the days of their lives, night and day, and day after day, without intermission. – *Gill's Exposition Commentary*

6:5 Verse 5 records the consequence of vv. 1–4: the Lord “saw” and condemned the unprecedented corruption of the human family. Here is an intentional mimicry of the sons of God, who “saw” that the daughters of men were “beautiful” (*tôb*, “good”; 6:2). The wording in vv. 2 and 5 contrasts this deplorable scene with the pristine setting of creation. God “saw” his creation and evaluated his handiwork as “very good” (*tôb mē’ôd*, 1:31), but here the sons of God have taken the “good” (“beautiful”) and defiled it. This is reinforced by the play between man’s “great (*rabbâ*) wickedness” (v. 5) and human “increase in number” (*lārôb*; v. 2). It serves as a sad commentary on the divine command at creation to “increase in number” (*rābû*, 1:28). The blessing of reproduction is realized in v. 2 by the grace of God, but humanity has distorted God’s plan and reaped along with their progeny a harvest of sin.

Verse 5 therefore accentuates the decadence of the period: “how *great* man’s wickedness,” “every inclination,” and “*only* evil *all* the time.” Whereas human society deems these violent *gibbôrîm* as “men of renown,” God’s response is repulsion at their wickedness. So monstrous becomes the sin of Noah’s generation that the gravest of measures is the only proper response from heaven. The recurring phrase “on the earth” (vv. 5–7) anticipates the necessary purging of the now-polluted land by the waters of the flood (v. 13), and it also is reminiscent of the ground stained by Abel’s blood, which resulted in Cain’s life as a vagabond “on the earth” (4:12). But there would be no mercy for the murdering *gibbôrîm* as there had been for evil Cain.

Wickedness is an inner compulsion that dominates their thoughts and is not just overt action; they plot evil as a matter of lifestyle. Our phrase “inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil” is similar to God’s utterance after the flood (8:21), where sin is attributed to humanity from his youth. The flood does exact justice and rescue the lone remnant of a blessed lineage. God recognized the same evil “inclination” toward idolatry in his people Israel (Deut 31:21). “Inclination” (*yēšer*) probably is a play on 2:7, where God “formed” (*yāšar*) the first man (also animals, 2:19). The good which God created has been transformed by mankind’s evil inclination, over which God greatly anguishes (6:6; cf. Jer 18:11). Such “evil” (*ra’*) plans are the continuing aftermath of humanity’s first partaking of “good (*tôb*) and evil (*ra’*)” (2:17; 3:5–6, 22).

Human machinations are attributed to the “heart” since in Hebrew anthropology the heart is the center of a human’s cognitive processes (e.g., Gen 31:20; Ps 33:11; 1 Sam 10:26). This sort of scheming has its parallel in 50:20, where Joseph’s brothers “intended to harm” (*ḥāšabtem ... rā’â*) but God “intended it for good” (*ḥāšābāh lētōbâ*). Such “thoughts” for good, like the artistic skills for decorating Moses’ tabernacle, are enabled by the Spirit. Judgment of the human heart is the exclusive domain of the Lord (Jer 9:9–10; cf. 1 Cor 4:3–5).

6:6 Our narrator owes his insight into God’s fervent passion to the disclosures lamented by the Lord himself (cf. v. 7). **Whereas antediluvian man plots evil in his “heart,” God’s response to their imaginations is a wounded “heart” filled with pain. In this latter case “heart” conveys the emotional response of God.** Our verse, while describing God’s reaction to such human depravity, at the same time anticipates the respite God will enjoy at the “sight” of righteous Noah (v. 8). Earlier we acknowledged the debt of v. 6 to the words of Lamech in 5:29; both passages share these three words: “comfort”/“grieved” (*nḥm*), “labor”/“made” (*’āšâ*), and “painful toil”/“pain” (*’āšāb*). Thus, Lamech’s hope for his son as the deliverer from the toils of human sin is realized in part through Noah’s survival of the flood and his inauguration of a new world for the blessed seed. As we will see, however, it is accomplished only by the odd intervention of God, who himself is “pained” yet kindly preserves Lamech’s lineage through Noah (8:1). It comes about

through Noah's offering, which appeases God's wrath and leads to his commitment never again to bring such destruction against the earth (8:21).

"Grieve" (*yinnāhem*), translated "repent" in the AV, has troubled many expositors since elsewhere Scripture says God does not "repent" (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Ps 110:4). We find the same expression (*yinnāhem YHWH*) only twice more in the Pentateuch (Exod 32:12, 14). In the wilderness God changes his harmful intentions against idolatrous Israel because of the intercessory prayers of Moses: "Then the LORD relented [*yinnāhem*] and did not bring on his people the disaster [*rā'ā*] he had threatened" (Exod 32:14; cf. Ps 78:40–41).

The tension between these characterizations of God partly lies in the diverse contexts in which "grieve/relent" occurs in the Bible. Genesis 6:6–7 is describing the emotional anguish of God; our verse does not present an abstract statement about God's decision making. This would be altogether out of place for the intention of the passage, which depicts God as wronged by the presumptuous sin of humanity. Moreover, the parameters of this verse have been dictated by the author's intention to imitate 5:29 with its distinctive vocabulary and mood. This is shown especially by the subsequent clause, where it describes God's heart as "filled with pain" (*yit'aššēb*). This further echoes the painful consequences of human sin in the garden, where the cognate nouns narrate the "painful toil" the man and woman will endure (3:16–17; 5:29).

The NIV rightly reflects contextual differences by translating "grieved" ("was sorry," NRSV, NASB) in 6:6–7 but "change his mind" in 1 Sam 15:29 as well as "relent" in Exod 32:12, 14 (also Amos 7:3, 6). In Samuel's chastening of Saul the concern is the character of God's word, as indicated by the parallel "does not lie" (*šāqar*; 1 Sam 15:29). Close to the sense of 6:6 is God's sorrowful concern over Saul's moral failures, which precipitate rejection of his kingship: "I am grieved that I have made Saul king" (1 Sam 15:11; also v. 35). Similarly, **Exodus 32 is speaking of a new course in God's dealing with his people. This too is not a comment on the nature of God's sovereignty or promises. It is told so as to highlight the intercessory position of Moses with God, a reassuring thought for Israel. We have mentioned earlier the common language of our passage and Exodus 32. Now to this we can add "wipe" (*māhā*) from Gen 6:7, which is rendered "blot out" in Exod 32:32–33. If the Exodus passage is a veiled remembrance of God's "pain" at antediluvian humanity, Moses is expressing the same remorse over the sins of Israel. In the case of Israel, Moses' mediation delivers his people, but antediluvian man has no intercessor, and the whole world suffers as a result. It is solely by the grace of God that the human family has any chance at all.**

God's response of grief over the making of humanity, however, is not remorse in the sense of sorrow over a mistaken creation; our verse shows that God's pain has its source in the perversion of human sin. The making of "man" is no error; it is what "man" has made of himself. By recurring reference to mankind (*'ādām*) in 6:5–7, the passage focuses on the source of his grief. God is grieving because this sinful "man" is not the pristine mankind whom he has made to bear his image. The intensity of the pain is demonstrated by the use of *nāham* elsewhere in Genesis, where it describes mourning over the loss of a family member due to death. But his is not regret over destroying humanity; paradoxically, so foul has become mankind that it is the necessary step to salvage him.

This “grief” is explicated by the parallel clause of the sentence, “and his [God’s] heart was filled with pain” (v. 6b). By allusion to the “pain” and “painful toil” in God’s pronouncement of punishment for the crimes of our first parents (3:16–17; cf. 5:29), God indicates that unbridled human sin has become his source of anguish. Yet this anguish does not reflect impotent remorse; it entails also God’s angry response at the injury inflicted by human rebellion. Our earlier verb *nāḥam* may also indicate the execution of God’s wrath to relieve his emotional pain. “Lament is always an integral part of the wrath of God.”¹⁵² **In the only two other passages where the same verb, “pained” (*‘āṣab*), is used of God’s feelings (Ps 78:40–41; Isa 63:10), both motifs of divine grief and anger represent his opposition against rebellious Israel in the desert when they “grieved his Holy Spirit” (Isa 63:10; cf. Eph 4:30).** But we hear a mitigated mood in Hos 11:8–11; there the Lord refuses to execute his full wrath against his wayward son, Israel (cf. Deut 21:18–21). The reason is not human repentance; on the contrary, God’s repentance is because he is “not man” (Hos 11:9). The motivation for reversal is God’s constancy of promise and purpose, unlike capricious mankind (cf. Mal 3:6). Similarly, God’s anger is tempered by his favor toward Noah, the ark builder (Heb 11:7), who is the beneficent recipient of God’s promise to humanity.

God is no robot. We know him as a personal, living God, not a static principle, who while having transcendent purposes to be sure also engages intimately with his creation. Our God is incomparably affected by, even pained by, the sinner’s rebellion. Acknowledging the passibility (emotions) of God does not diminish the immutability of his promissory purposes. Rather, his feelings and actions toward men, such as judgment or forgiveness, are always inherently consistent with his essential person and just and gracious resolve (Jas 1:17). When we consider the metaphor of God as a feeling person who loves, is angry, and grieves, the aim of the figure is to point to a mitigated correspondence between human experience and God. This does not say that the emotions of humans and God are equivalent in their entirety either in intensity or in quality, for God does not grieve in the same way as men and women. Nor is he angry in the same fashion as sinful mortals, but to conclude that such language reveals nothing of God’s essential personhood makes all such language pointless. For what purpose is there in describing God in any terms understandable to us other than to reveal something of God’s mysterious nature? In Christ we see God so moved by grief and love that he chooses to take upon himself the very suffering of our sins.¹⁵⁵ **Do we not appeal to the incarnational role of Christ as our vision of the nature of his Father (cf. Matthew 23:37 par.)? God is not a dispassionate accountant overseeing the books of human endeavor; rather he makes a personal decision out of sorrowful loss to judge Noah’s wicked generation.¹**

¹ Mathews, K. A. (1996). [Genesis 1-11:26](#) (Vol. 1A, pp. 340–344). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The Omniscience of God

by [Caleb Colley, Ph.D.](#)

God is the only One Who possesses limitless knowledge. The *Illustrated Oxford Dictionary* defines “omniscience” as “knowing everything,” and the Bible certainly ascribes omniscience to God (Psalm 139:1-4; cf. Woods, 1988, p. 34). Consider a sample of what the Bible reveals about God’s omniscience: “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3). “Can anyone teach God **knowledge**, since He judges those on high?” (Job 21:22, emp. added). Consider a few of the implications of God’s omniscience.

God knows every past action. At times, humans struggle to interpret history because we often lack complete historical information. The eternal God, Who had no beginning, has no problems seeing clearly through the mists of time, for history is ever before Him (Isaiah 57:15). God emphasized this when He told Moses in Exodus 3:14, “I Am Who I Am.” John 8:58 reads: “Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I Am.’ ” In the Day of Judgment, we will be judged based on God’s complete knowledge of our history (see Revelation 20:12). God cannot be taught anything about the past (Isaiah 40:14).

God knows every present action. Psalm 33:13-15 reads: “The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works.” Despite the uniqueness of each person, God understands everyone individually, and knows everyone personally (see Matthew 10:29-30). God even knows everything that is done privately (Matthew 6:4), so no one can hide from God (see Kizer, 2001, p. 7). God cannot be taught anything about the present (Matthew 28:20; 1 Corinthians 4:5).

God knows every future action. The fact that God gave prophets the capability to predict accurately very specific events in the distant future is one of the great evidences for the inspiration of the Bible (Thompson, 1999, p. 19). God has emphasized repeatedly that He knows the future, perhaps never more emphatically than when Jesus Himself prophesied (see Matthew 24:1-51; Mark 8:31; John 2:19-22). The fact that God knows the future does not imply that humans somehow lose freedom of choice. Just because God knows that something will happen, does not mean that He causes it (see Bales, 1974, p. 49). God cannot be taught anything about the future (Acts 17:31; John 14:3).

God knows every human thought. King David addressed his son: “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever” (1 Chronicles 28:9). Psalm 94:9-10 reads: “He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct, He who teaches man knowledge?” God cannot be taught anything about the content of human intellect (Acts 15:8).

God knows what humans need. Ecclesiastes 2:26 reads: “For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight....” Noah of old would have perished in the Flood had God not given him a way of escape. The Israelites could not have conquered Canaan without divine guidance and protection. God has promised that He will provide for the physical needs of those who serve Him (Matthew 6:24-34). Most important, God has identified the problem of sin and death and provided the only possible solution—the blood of His Son (1 Peter 1:18-19).

God knows what is right and wrong, because He defines morality and truth—His Word is the standard for righteous judgment. Hannah wanted desperately to have a child, but she was unable to do so. In her fervent request for God’s intervention, she prayed: “...the Lord is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed” (1 Samuel 2:3). God has revealed what to do in order to please Him, and He knows of our obedience and disobedience (Proverbs 15:3).

What is the proper response to God’s omniscience? The inspired apostle Paul provided a fitting answer in Colossians 3:24: “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.” Those who refuse to serve the Lord should be frightened by God’s omniscience, because God knows of every sin. And unforgiven sin will be punished (Psalm 90:8; Romans 6:23). For God’s children, however, the implications of God’s knowledge are sources of peace and strength (2 Timothy 2:19; 1 John 3:22; Romans 11:33). Ultimately, the God Who knows everything will judge humans based on how we use the knowledge that has been revealed to us. We must act based on **our** knowledge to prepare for eternity.

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Collectively & Individually: Deity Knows Our Private Thoughts



The Miraculous Insight of Jesus Christ

By **Jason Jackson**

•

The miracles of Christ are proof that he is the Son of God (John 20:31). The Gospel writers record many of the miracles of Jesus, but certainly not all of them (John 20:30; 21:25).

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, collectively relate to us seventeen bodily cures, nine miracles over the laws of nature, six demonic cures, and three resurrections. Additionally, statements are made concerning miracles that Jesus performed that are without any specific details.

But there is another category of miracles, sometimes overlooked because of its subtle nature; this group is miraculous nonetheless. It provides, therefore, additional proof of the deity of Christ.

Sacred Insight

This category could be designated as miracles of **knowledge** or **insight**. In other words, Jesus demonstrated his ability to know things which **could not have been known by an ordinary man**. We recognize these incidents when we encounter them in the Gospels, but let us consider a number of them together, as a study in itself.

When the Lord was in Jerusalem, at the first Passover recorded during his earthly ministry, the apostle John wrote that many people believed on him, beholding the signs he did.

“But Jesus did not trust himself unto them, for that he knew all men, and because he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man” (John 2:24-25).

The Lord had a unique insight into human beings. He knew superficial faith for what it was. At the very least, we see that the ability of Jesus to perceive things concerning men was extraordinary.

Merrill C. Tenney illustrated the point by saying:

“He [Christ] could teach people more accurately than a doctor can read physical symptoms in diagnosing an illness” (46).

The miraculous knowledge of Christ is keenly observed on several occasions. In John chapter one, we find that Philip brought Nathaniel to Christ, saying, “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45).

Nathaniel was somewhat skeptical, expressing the view, “Can any good thing come of Nazareth?” (v. 46).

Philip simply responded, “Come and see.” When Jesus met him, he then commended him: “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile” (v. 47).

Nathaniel was perplexed, and he asked Jesus how it was that he knew him.

The Lord then remarked, “Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee” (v. 48).

Nathaniel immediately recognized the miraculous insight of Christ, and he agreed with Philip’s conclusion: Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ (v. 49).

Another conversation of Christ leads us to consider his miraculous ability to know facts unattainable only on a strictly human level. When traveling through Samaria, the Lord and his disciples stopped to rest at Jacob’s well. The disciples went into the city to buy food. A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water, and Jesus initiated a conversation with her.

He asked her for a drink of water. She was amazed that he would speak to her, a Samaritan woman. The Lord informed her that he had a “living water” that could quench one’s thirst forever.

She was intrigued by the thought of this “living water,” although she did not understand the deep spiritual truths expressed by the Lord in the symbolism.

Christ told her to go get her husband. She replied, “I have no husband” (John 4:17). Jesus, knowing the most intimate details of her life,

acknowledged that she had spoken correctly. For, he said to the woman, “You have had five husbands, and the man you are now with is not your husband” (vv. 17-18).

The woman recognized that the Lord was no ordinary man; she confessed that he must be a prophet (v. 19).

Near the end of the conversation, the Samaritan woman introduced the subject of the Messiah. Jesus said, “I that speak unto thee am he” (v. 26).

The woman, having been amazed at Jesus’ miraculous insight, went into the city, saying to the people, “Come, and see a man, who told me all things that ever I did: can this be the Christ?” (v. 29).

The final week of the Lord’s earthly ministry involved several instances when his use of miraculous insight was displayed. When he prepared to enter into Jerusalem, five days before the Passover, he told two of his disciples to go into the village.

“You will find a donkey and her colt. Untie them, and bring them. When you are asked, ‘What are you doing?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of them.’”

He noted also that the colt would be one on which no man had ever ridden.

Jesus miraculously knew exactly what would be found, where the animals would be, how they would be confined, that the disciples would then be questioned, the animals would be relinquished, and that the colt never had been ridden.

After Jesus was glorified, the disciples looked back on the events of this day with amazement and wonder (John 12:16).

Later in the week, Christ made preparations for the Passover meal. He instructed Peter and John to secure a place where they could eat the Passover. They asked where they might do this. The Lord revealed that when the two disciples entered the city, they would find a man carrying a pitcher of water. They were to follow that man. Interestingly, they would enter the house of the man they followed. Then, they were to ask the owner of the house, “Where is your guest room?”

“Just by chance” the man had a large upper room, suitable for their needs, and gave permission for the Lord and his disciples to use the house.

Again, Jesus demonstrated his ability to know the most minute details of events, even before they happened.

Consider this as well. Jesus knew that Judas would betray him. He revealed that Peter would deny him. He also indicated to Peter the number of times he would deny him (3), and when he would deny him (before the rooster crows twice). Christ also told the disciples that all of them would be scattered that night.

These incidents of miraculous insight may be compared with another form of knowledge that is generally referred to as **foreknowledge**, or predictive prophecy.

The Lord not only knew the most intimate details of events then unfolding, he could also look into the distant future and “call the things that are not, as though they were” (Romans 4:17; e.g., the destruction of Jerusalem — Luke 19:43-44; Matthew 22:7). These events were a different kind of “sign” than the healing Jesus performed. Yet, they clearly were supernatural.

The Lord did not always avail himself of miraculous knowledge during his ministry (cf. Matthew 24:36), but when he did, he gave yet another proof that he is the Christ, the Son of God.

Matthew 12:25-29

25 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.

26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?

27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they shall be your judges.

28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

29 Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.

MATTHEW 12:25 - And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

Pulpit Commentary

Verses 25-37. - Our Lord shows the monstrous character of their accusation, and **urges the need of a complete change at heart.**

(1) An **a priori** argument that such an action on Satan's part, as they suppose, would be self-destructive (vers. 25, 26).

(2) An **argumentum ad hominem**. The Pharisees cannot logically and morally acknowledge that their disciples' miracles are performed by Divine help without acknowledging that Jesus' miracles are also. But then they ought to recognize what this implies-that the kingdom of God has come (vers. 27, 28).

(3) This last alternative is true; for how otherwise can they explain the fact of Satan's captives being released (ver. 29)?

(4) An appeal to them and to the bystanders to be decided (ver. 30).

(5) Therefore he warns them solemnly against committing the sin for which there is no forgiveness (vers. 31, 32).

(6) Why be surprised at this language? Their words show that they need a complete change at heart (vers. 33-35).

(7) Is this to make too much of words? It is by words that men will be judged (vers. 36, 37). Verse 25. - Vers 25, 26, parallel passages: [Mark 3:24, 25](#); [Luke 11:17, 18](#). And *Jesus knew their thoughts* ([Matthew 9:4](#), note), and said unto them, *Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation.*

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers

(25) **Jesus knew their thoughts.**—The Searcher of Hearts saw the meaning of the whispers and the looks of real or affected horror, and now enters on a full answer to the charge. Of all the accusations brought against Him this was the one that caused the greatest Pain, and drew forth the most indignant answer. **He had restored peace and joy, freedom of reason and will to those who had lost them, He had been doing His Father's work on earth, and [yet] He was accused of being in league with the powers of evil.** The work of healing was represented as the bait of the Tempter luring men to their final destruction.

Benson Commentary

Matthew 12:25-26. *And Jesus knew their thoughts* — “It often happens, that through ignorance or weakness men form wrong judgments of things;” a conduct which, though censurable, admits of some excuse: “but when wrong judgments proceed from evil dispositions, then, indeed, do they become highly culpable. Therefore, to show that the judgment which the Pharisees passed at this time upon our Lord's miracles was of the latter kind, the evangelist observes, that **Jesus *knew their thoughts*: he knew that the wickedness of their hearts, and not the weakness of their understandings, had led them to form the opinion they had uttered, if it was their real opinion;** or rather, to affirm it contrary to the conviction of their minds, which was the reason that, at the conclusion of his defense, he reprimanded them in the sharpest manner.” *And said, Every kingdom divided against itself* &c. — He proceeds to demonstrate the absurdity of their calumny, by an argument drawn from the common affairs of life...

Do The Right Things For The Right Reasons

Giving Back To God: Good & Bad Examples

The Spirit of Generosity — A Study in Contrasts

By **Wayne Jackson**

•

An adjective is a word that describes. If one says, “The house is green,” green is an adjective describing the structure’s color.

Adjectives are used of people as well. Most of us would like to think that noble adjectives are employed when folks think or talk about us. For example, “He is a good person.” Or, “She is generous.”

The term “generous” denotes one who freely gives to others, one who is willing to share — without expecting anything in return. Someone who gives manipulatively, i.e., anticipating something in return eventually, is merely a “user,” not a real giver.

But, surely, we all would like to be viewed as generous. On the other hand, we doubtless would be repelled by the notion that our friends think of us as “stingy.” Universally, the niggardly person is seen in an unfavorable light.

There is much information in the Bible which indicates how God assesses both the generous and the stingy person. He applauds the former and condemns the latter. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the tight-fisted individual is so unlike the benevolent Creator himself.

God is so giving. He gave us life itself (Acts 17:25), he constantly sustains us by his providential gifts (Acts 14:17), and, most significantly of all, he gave his beloved Son so that any sinful person might enjoy salvation if he so chooses (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 6:23).

In this study, we would like to call attention to some biblical contrasts with reference to the matter of generosity versus stinginess. It is an enterprise which will reveal, quite astoundingly, how God views these traits.

Abraham and Lot

When Abraham entered the land of Canaan, he was accompanied by his nephew, Lot. It may not be unreasonable to assume that the kindly Abraham had taken his nephew under his care with the death of Lot's father.

At any rate, eventually a dispute developed between Abraham's herdsmen and those of Lot. This disagreement distressed the noble patriarch; and so he made this generous suggestion. Lot was to survey the whole of the land and choose the territory he would claim for his own; the patriarch would take the "leavings."

Rather than honoring his benevolent uncle, greedy Lot chose the well-watered valley of the Jordan, which was like a "garden of Jehovah" (Gen. 13:10). This episode was a real "index" as to the distinguishing character of these two men, and was a preview of things to come.

Nabal and Abigail

After the death of Samuel, there was a period of time when conditions were rather dark for David, the young champion who had slain the villain Goliath. Though Saul occupied the throne, God already had rejected him, and David has been anointed to take his place — eventually (1 Sam. 16:1-13). Saul, almost schizophrenic, would favor the lad one day, and on the next, would seek his life.

The shepherd youth wandered about the land (with a band of loyalists — about 600 in number), seeking refuge and enduring the rigors of being "on the run."

One day David's forces were in the neighborhood where a wealthy man, whose name was Nabal, was shearing his sheep. David had actually been a benefactor to the gentleman, protecting his flocks from local bandits (1 Sam. 25:15-16,21).

He therefore sent ten men to petition the prosperous Nabal for a few provisions. But the stubborn businessman, who is described as “harsh and evil” (25:3 — NASB), and who lived down to his name (which meant “fool” – vs. 25), rudely rejected the request. The stingy Nabal had nothing to share with this renegade he deemed to be a nobody (25:10-11).

David, doubtless in a moment of rashness, determined that he would destroy Nabal and every male in his household. He gathered together 400 men and proceeded toward his bloody mission.

Enter the picture — Abigail. She was the beautiful, wise, and generous wife of Nabal. One cannot but wonder how such a mismatch occurred. At any rate, she had learned of David’s intent and, with ample provisions, intercepted his approaching band.

Abigail fell at the warrior’s feet and asked that any blame fall to her. She apologized on behalf of her “worthless” husband (v. 25), and presented the gifts she had brought. David interpreted this as an act of providence (v. 32) and reversed his plan.

The Lord, however, wrote his own epilog to the story. Ten days later, “Jehovah smote Nabal, so that he died” (v. 38) — a divine commentary, perhaps, on how Heaven views the covetous disposition!

Barnabas Versus Ananias and Sapphira

In the early days of the church’s existence, certain needs arose that had to be met. Because of the conglomerate of disciples that remained in Jerusalem following the commencement of the church on the day of Pentecost, an emergency situation existed. Lodging was then needed for foreign saints, food was required for the hungry, etc.

By and large, the brotherhood was characterized by a wonderful spirit of sharing. Many sold possessions and divided their income with others (Acts 2:45); indeed, the vast majority operated under the premise, “what is mine is thine” (cf. 4:32-35).

One person, especially singled out for mention was Joseph, also called “Barnabas,” a “son of exhortation,” one who was of much encouragement to others. From Cyprus originally, Barnabas, later described “a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (11:24), owned a field. He sold his real estate and gave the resources to the apostles to distribute as they deemed appropriate (4:36-37). Clearly, this brother was greatly loved, highly respected, and quite influential.

The record of his example, however, is obviously introduced as a contrast to a sticky-fingered couple in Jerusalem, whose names were Ananias and Sapphira. Notice how Acts, chapter 5, begins ominously with a contrasting particle, “But ...” This pair, and the generous Barnabas, were as different as midnight and noon!

The details of the episode regarding Ananias and Sapphira are almost too well-known to need elaboration. Like Barnabas, they sold a possession. Unlike the “son of exhortation,” however, they brought only a portion of the revenue to the apostles, while representing the sum as the whole amount for which the object was sold (cf. vv. 8,9).

They both died, obviously as the result of divine judgment. Though they were specifically charged with lying to God, is there any doubt but that greed was an underlying factor in their apostasy? As an apostle would later write:

“the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:10).

A Rich Fool and the Good Samaritan

Two characters in Jesus’ parables illustrate the bold relief in the dispositions we have been describing.

A man approached Christ and sought help in settling a family dispute over money matters. The Lord rebuked the gentleman and warned him of the dangers of covetousness (Lk. 12:15).

The master Teacher then told of a certain wealthy man whose crops filled his barns. Thinking selfishly of no one but himself (in soliloquy he employs first person pronouns about a dozen times), he determined that he would expand his storehouses. God called him a “fool” and informed the egotist that his days on earth were over (vv. 16-21).

In stark relief was a Samaritan, who came across a wounded Jew on the dangerous road that led from Jerusalem to Jericho (Lk. 10:30ff). Ignoring potential harm to himself, he cared for the man, even providing for some three weeks of lodging in an inn along the way (Jeremias, 205). The Lord’s evaluation of the stingy, in contrast to the generous, is apparent.

Paul and Demas

Aside from the blessed Savior himself, there probably has been no greater benevolent soul than that of Paul the apostle. The major affirmation of his life was: “And I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls” (2 Cor. 12:15).

Of special interest is the fact that the term “spent” (15b), is a passive, reflexive form, suggesting that one permits himself to be “spent out” entirely, or, as we might express it, to be “used up.” And to think, this was written to a church that more than likely appreciated Paul less than many others!

Paul had given much (more than we will ever fathom) to be a Christian. It is likely that he had been disowned by at least some family members. Certainly he had surrendered his prominence as a leading Hebrew scholar. All these things, which once had been “gain” to him, he had thrown away for the sake of Jesus (Phil. 3:7ff).

The apostle had forfeited much of his health to serve his God. He had been beaten repeatedly, stoned at Lystra, and shipwrecked at least four times. On occasion, he had been hungry and thirsty, and without sufficient clothing. He had been at death’s door often, and yet, all of these hardships he happily endured for the honor of being a disciple of the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23ff).

Paul had trekked the Mediterranean world, from Arabia in the east (cf. Gal. 1:17) to Rome in the west (Acts 28:16ff), and perhaps even farther (cf. Rom. 15:24), a distance of at least 12,000 miles. This rugged soul had learned well his Master's admonition: the one who devotes himself to giving, is far happier than he who is ever the recipient (cf. Acts 20:35).

Consider, by way of contrast, one of Paul's erstwhile companions, known simply as Demas. This brother is thrice mentioned in the letters of Paul. First, he was with the apostle at some point during Paul's initial Roman imprisonment. His salutation is conveyed to Philemon, and he is complimented as Paul's "fellow-worker" (Philem. 24).

Later, when the apostle penned a letter to the brethren at Colossae, he strangely says: "Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas salute you" (Col. 4:14). Luke is "the beloved"; Demas, at this point, is just plain Demas. There appears to be a distance, a stiffness, in that.

Noted scholar J. B. Lightfoot remarked that the language here is possibly a "foreshadowing" of things to come in connection with Demas. He comments that in this context Demas "is dismissed with a bare mention and without any epithet of commendation" (240).

Finally, in the last epistle he ever wrote before being led away to execution, Paul urged Timothy to "give diligence to come shortly to me." The reason for the urgency is stated: "for Demas forsook me, having loved this present world, and went to Thessalonica" (2 Tim. 4:9-10).

Paul's word for "loved" is from *agape*. Scholars have associated this term with an action that tends "to choose its object deliberately ... a calculated disposition" (Turner, 263).

Did Demas grow tired of giving so much of his time to the Lord? Did he resent the deprivation of income? Was he weary of hot, dusty roads, or bone-chilling nights?

It is not fanciful to conclude that probably he finally had gotten a "belly full" of the sacrificial life, and so made a calculated decision to follow his heart back into the pleasures of that wicked era.

Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in
more than they all:

St. Luke XXI. 3.





A Widow's Offering

Jesus looked up and saw some rich people tossing their gifts into the offering box. He also saw a poor widow putting in two pennies. "I tell you that this poor woman has put in more than all the others. Everyone else gave what they didn't need. But she is very poor and gave everything she had."



Luke 21:1-4

What does Jesus want us to learn from what He said about the widow's mite?

Question: "What does Jesus want us to learn from what He said about the widow's mite?"

Answer: The Gospels of Mark and Luke both relay an incident involving a widow's gift to God. She didn't give much—just two mites—or did she?

The story is often called the story of the widow's mite or the story of the widow's offering. One day, Jesus was sitting with His disciples near the temple treasury watching people depositing money into the offering receptacles. The court of women held thirteen such receptacles, and people could cast their money in as they walked by. Jesus watched as the rich were contributing large sums of money, but then along came a widow with two small coins in her hand. The ESV calls them "two small copper coins, which make a penny" ([Mark 12:41](#)). The KJV calls the coins "mites." These were the smallest denomination of coins. The widow put her coins into the box, and Jesus called His disciples to Him and pointed out her action: "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on" ([Mark 12:43-44](#); cf. [Luke 21:1-4](#)).

There are several things that the story of the widow's mite teaches us. First, God sees what man overlooks. The big gifts in the temple were surely noticed by people; that's probably what the disciples were watching. But Jesus saw what no one else did: He saw the humble gift of a poor widow. This was the gift that Jesus thought worthy of comment; this was the gift that the disciples needed to be aware of. The other gifts in the treasury that day made a lot of noise as they jingled into the receptacles, but the widow's mites were heard in heaven.

Second, God's evaluation is different from man's. The widow's two mites added up to a penny, according to man's tabulation. But Jesus said that she had given *more* than anyone else that day ([Mark 12:43](#)). How could this be, when "many rich people threw in large amounts" ([Mark 12:41](#))? The difference is one of proportion.

The rich were giving large sums, but they still retained their fortunes; the widow “put in everything—all she had to live on” ([Mark 12:42](#)). Hers was a true sacrifice; the rich had not begun to give to the level of her sacrifice.

Third, God commends giving in faith. Here was a woman in need of *receiving* charity, yet she had a heart to give. Even though the amount was negligible—what could a widow’s mite buy?—she gave it in faith that God could use it. The widow’s faith is also evident in the fact that she gave the *last* of her money. Like the [widow of Zarephath](#), who gave her last meal to Elijah (see [1 Kings 17:7-16](#)), the widow in the temple gave away her last means of self-support. Does that mean the widow left the temple completely destitute, went home, and died of starvation? No. The Bible teaches that God provides for our needs ([Matthew 6:25-34](#)). We don’t know the details of this particular widow’s future, but we can be certain that she was provided for. Just as God provided for the widow and her son in Elijah’s day ([1 Kings 17:15-16](#)), God also provided for the widow in Jesus’ day.

It is interesting that, just before Jesus commented on the widow’s mite, He prior commented on the scribes “who devour widows’ houses” ([Mark 12:40](#)). The religious officials of the day, instead of helping the widows in need, were perfectly content to rob them of their livelihood & inheritance. The system was corrupt, and the darkness of the scribes’ greed makes the widow’s sacrifice shine even more brightly. “God loves a [cheerful giver](#)” ([2 Corinthians 9:7](#)), and He is faithful to take care of His own.



"To understand the distinct difference between 'Contribution' and 'Commitment', you need look no further than your common bacon and eggs breakfast plate. One gave a contribution, the other gave his life."

- www.CedricCrawford.com -

A Tribute to a Nameless Widow

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

There is a touching narrative recorded in Mark's Gospel account that is brimming with spiritual lessons. The record reads as follows:

"And he sat down over against the treasury, and beheld how the multitude cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a poor widow, and she cast in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and said unto them, 'Verily I say unto you, This poor widow cast in more than all they that are casting into the treasury: for they all did cast in of their superfluity; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living'" (Mk. 12:41-44; cf. Lk. 21:1-4).

Because of the historical information that we have regarding Herod's temple, we know that Jesus was in that portion of the sacred house called the "Court of the Women." This court was an open area, about 200 feet square, at the eastern end of the temple complex. The Lord occasionally taught in this region of the temple (cf. Jn. 8:20).

The Court of the Women also was called "the treasury" because in this segment there were thirteen, trumpet-shaped receptacles, posted around the walls, into which the Jews placed their offerings for the expenses incurred in conjunction with the temple services.

On this occasion, the Savior positioned himself at a certain station and "beheld" the Hebrews passing by, dropping their gifts into the coffer. The verb that reflects the Lord's gaze is one that gives attention to the examination of details, with more than passing interest. And the imperfect tense format suggests a sustained study of the matter.

Christ noticed that those who were wealthy cast much into the treasury (perhaps with considerable flare). In such cases quantity, of course, was to be expected, for to whom much is given, of them much is required (cf. Lk. 12:48). (Can you imagine the spiritual deprivation of those who have much, but with that abundance do little —or perhaps even nothing?)

As Jesus observed the situation, a delightful thing happened. A poor widow approached. The adjective “poor” (ptochos) is the Greek word for absolute destitution. It is related to a kindred term meaning to “crouch,” and, as Barclay notes, it describes the sort of poverty that has been beaten to its knees (p. 109ff). Luke also uses the term penichros (21:2), which describes the working person who has nothing left over after sustaining his existence. It is sufficient to say that this lady was inordinately impoverished.

Christ observed, however, that the dear lady cast “two mites” (lepta) into the treasury. Mark, writing for a Roman audience, notes that “two mites” make “a farthing.” This sum represented “all” the lady possessed, her “entire living.” It amounted to about 1/64 of the average working man’s daily wage in Palestine, which was approximately eighteen cents per day (cf. Mt. 20:2). Had she been inclined to feast that day, this poor saint could have afforded only one-half of a sparrow at the market place (Mt. 10:29).

Three quick points regarding this precious soul are worthy of note.

(1) She was devoted to Jehovah. She embraced the Old Testament concept that the presence of God hallowed the temple in a special way. In spite of her desperate condition, she would not be dissuaded from doing *what she could* to support this cause so dear to her heart. Her religious fervor eclipsed her physical interests.

(2) She was a self-less person. She did not calculate her resources to determine whether or not she was able to afford this gift. Her heart was beating with gratitude for Heaven’s gracious blessings and that was all that mattered at the moment. Some would call her irresponsible, even reckless; Jesus characterized her as uniquely generous.

(3) She was a believer in Jehovah’s providence. Even though she gave her entire income, she trusted that the Lord somehow would care for her. She did not believe that she would die of starvation (cf. Psa. 37:25). She was confident that the Lord was her Shepherd, and she would not “want” (Psa. 23:1). Such sacrificial trust is rare indeed.

But there are some truths to be learned from this incident *regarding Christ* as well.

(1) The Lord takes great interest in the level of dedication demonstrated by folks who profess a devotion to God. The case of Ananias and Sapphira is evidence aplenty of this reality. Everything that we own is the Lord's, and we are but his stewards. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be *faithful* (1 Cor. 4:2), for a man will give account for his stewardship (Lk. 16:2).

(2) While many in our modern world would criticize this lady for the lavishness of her gift, the Savior commended her. He elevated her above those who gave larger amounts, thus revealing that proportionate giving is more significant than a mere amount. Christ elevates quality above quantity.

(3) This incident also underscores the deity of Jesus: He intuitively knew that this lady had been married, and now was widowed; he knew that she was exceedingly poor, with only minimal resources to sustain her meager existence; and he knew that this woman had deposited into the treasury her entire income —“all her living.”

Christ could not have known these facts of a strange woman by merely observing the scene as it unfolded. This is but one of the countless lines of evidence that the man from Nazareth was no ordinary person. He was God in the flesh (Jn. 1:1, 14).

The gracious woman who is the heroine of this narrative remains unnamed across the centuries. Her example, however, has inspired countless sincere people who have needed a some “nudge” with reference to their monetary allegiance to the Almighty. We can't but call her blessed, and we may have every expectation of meeting her in the eternal kingdom.

Lessons From The Widow's Mite

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury & many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, *Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living* (Mark 12:41-44).

I suppose that the story of the widow's mite is one of almost every person's favorite lessons in the gospel narrative. It is recorded in both Mark and Luke's record (21:1-4). Think of these important lessons from this text:

1. *Jesus is Omniscient.* Jesus knew the circumstances of those who were giving. He was aware some gave from their abundance, which was observable from their outward appearance. He was also aware of the circumstances of this unnamed woman who gave. How did Jesus know that (a) she was widow, (b) how much she gave, (c) how much she had? Jesus knew these things because he was the incarnate God in full possession and use of his divine attributes, including his omniscience. "And Jesus sat over against the treasury and beheld how people cast money into the treasury." Jesus still watches to see how we give.

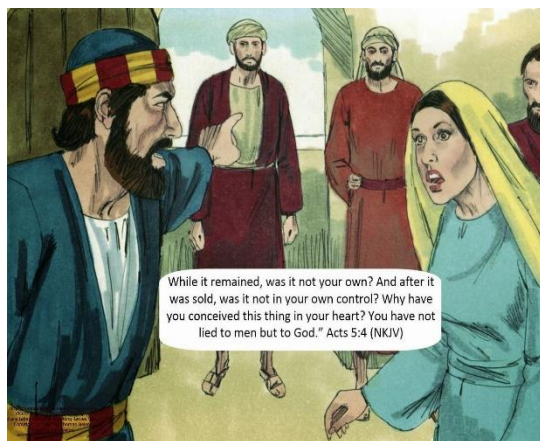
He is aware of the sacrificial gifts that some among us make. There is a widow with whom I used to worship whose sacrificial giving impresses me. Every Sunday she places her check in the collection plate just as do the others. I know her circumstances are those of one who is barely surviving. She doesn't have many dresses to wear to church; her car is far from the latest model. She reminds me of this widow in Mark in her sacrificial giving. I give of my abundance, but she gives in spite of barely being able to provide her necessities. I am privileged to witness and learn from her good example. Though her contribution amounts to a very small amount of the church's budget and, consequently, some brethren may not think what she thinks about anything is very important, God knows her sacrificial giving and esteems it. God sees my giving as well. Every one of God's children needs to think about the omniscience of God with reference to his giving, just as he thinks of God's knowledge of every other aspect of his existence.

2. *Giving is measured according to what one has.* Paul wrote, "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (2 Cor. 8:12). The fact that the widow could not give as much as others did not minimize her gift in the eyes of God. He measured her giving according to what she had. He saw in her a heart that trusted in God's providence for her needs and a heart that expressed its worship and appreciation to God in her giving. Our brethren in undeveloped countries need to remember the story of the widow's mite to consider that the Lord treasured the gifts of the poor, rather than allowing one's poverty to excuse him from giving. We who live in the prosperous United States must be sobered by the responsibility we have for the riches we have received so abundantly. — *Mike Willis*

What If God Is Listening To Our Songs?

By J.S. Smith

In Acts 5, we learn that two Christians, Ananias and his wife Sapphira, were intending to copy the example of Barnabas and other saints by selling a plot of land and bringing the proceeds to benefit the needy of the Jerusalem church. However, unlike Barnabas, this couple covets the notoriety of such a gift but does not want the pain of charity to afflict them so severely. Ananias and Sapphira conspire to pretend they are giving all when they are really only giving part of the proceeds. Truly, it was their option to give as they chose, but they endeavored to deceive their brethren into thinking they had done more.



The apostle Peter accuses the husband of his sin, claiming he had “not lied to men but to God” (v. 4). Maybe that was news to Ananias. Maybe he thought he could gild the lily and look like a big man and no one would ever know. Had Peter not possessed a prescient gift from the Holy

Spirit, he might have gotten away with it. But honestly, God would have always known the truth anyway. Ananias was struck dead & his unwitting wife soon joined him in eternity. They perished simply because they pretended to have piety when in fact, they were just going through the motions.

Our offering to God must be more than financial, of course. Money is only a part of the Lord's work and what he demands and deserves from his children. The Hebrew writer tells us that he also should receive from us "the sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of our lips" (13:15). Is God listening to our songs? As surely as God beheld the sacrifice of bulls & goats in Moses' day, he is beholding the notes and words of our songs today. Paul describes our song service as "singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). Our songs are directed toward heaven and they are received there.

For our songs to become a pleasing aroma to God, they must be sincere. The most avowed atheist could sing "Amazing Grace" on stage for money, but God would not be worshiped because the grace was not in his heart. We must worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24); that is, our songs must be authorized by God and sincere from the heart. If you don't mean it, don't sing it. If you don't mean it, God won't accept it.

What if God calls our songs as evidence in the judgment great day of reckoning? Will they have reflected the thoughts and purpose of the heart and body? Or will they be evidence of hypocrisy and vain worship? We have promised God over and over that we will "Take Time To Be Holy" by speaking oft with him and feeding on his word. We must ask how regular our prayer and study habit is. Or will the Judge convict us of singing insincerely?

When we sing "This World Is Not My Home," do the words emit from a heart secretly bowing at the altar of covetousness? Should God believe we are just a-passing thru when we are busy heaping up treasure on earth & accruing nothing for eternity (Matt. 6:19-21)?

We pledge allegiance to God beneath “The Banner of the Cross:”
“Marching on and on! Marching on and on!” Where are we going?
Are we marching into our communities, families, and workplaces
like Christian soldiers or have we declared neutrality in the world
war with the devil? If your faith never leaves the pew — you leave
it there on Sunday afternoon and pick it up next Sunday morning
— don’t sing like you plan to march under the Christian standard
all week.

“Make me as ‘Clay in the Potter’s Hand.’” Singing this means you
intend to truly be a disciple of Jesus, a person who is sincerely like
Christ. That requires that your life be molded and shaped by the
word and will of God. Will you read it? Will you apply what you
read to your own life?



HYMNS - HYMNS - The Way We Would Sing Them If We Were Honest

- *I Surrender Some*
- *There Shall Be Sprinkles of Blessings*
- *Fill My Spoon, Lord*
- *Of, How I Like Jesus*
- *He's Quite a Bit to Me*
- *I Love to Talk About Telling the Story*
- *Take My Life and Let Me Be*
- *It is My Secret What God Can Do*

HYMNS - HYMNS - The Way We Would Sing Them If We Were Honest

- *There is Scattered Cloudiness in My Soul Today*
- *Where He Leads Me, I Will Consider Following*
- *Just As I Pretend to Be*
- *When the Saints Go Sneaking In*
- *Sit Up, Sit Up for Jesus*
- *A Comfy Mattress is Our God*
- *Self-Esteem to the World, the Lord is Come*
- *Oh, for a Couple of Tongues to Sing*
- *Amazing Grace, How Interesting the Sound*

Conclusion

Christians must start listening to their songs and learning from them. God is listening. And if we are giving him a blemished sacrifice or keeping back part in pretense, we will be held accountable for it. What part of that offering might we be withholding? Is it the spirit or the truth? Could it be both?

Could God be reacting to our songs as he did to the Hebrews in Amos' day: "Take away from Me the noise of your songs" (5:23)



Paul's Motivations

By Aude McKee

For some time I have been considering the motivations of Paul's life. Probably no person suffered more for the cause of Christ, than did he, and few, if any, have surpassed him in devotion and commitment. What made him different from so many of us today? What did he have that lots of us lack?

The word "motivate" means "to stimulate to action; provide with an incentive or motive; impel, incite." The word "motivation" is defined as "an incentive, inducement or motive, especially for an act." The same act may be motivated differently in different people. One man buys a new automobile because his old one is worn out. His motive is need. A second man feels he can save money by getting rid of the old car before it begins to cost him for repairs, so his motivation is economics. A third man sees a shiny new model in his neighbor's driveway, and he trades out of pride. Two men might outwardly be equally committed to the Lord, but because of entirely different reasons. The first views the church as an institution in which he takes pride. He wants it to grow, surpass others in the area, etc., because it is "his church." The other man is equally faithful and works just as hard, but all he does comes from a heart filled with love for the Lord and the salvation of souls. The first man may see his zeal cool, his attendance slacken, and his work retarded if things don't go to suit him. If his favorite preacher moves or problems arise, his motivation may be gone. But the second man is stable and unwavering. His faithfulness is not tied to any man, or program. Externals don't affect his relationship to the Lord or the fact that he lives in a world of dying, lost people.

Some Things Which Did Not Motivate Paul

Now let us notice three things of a negative nature about Paul's motivations. First, he never did anything out of spite or ill will. In Philippians 1, we learn that some were preaching Christ in order to add affliction to Paul's bonds (vv. 12-18). Certainly, Paul did not defend the motive of those wicked men, but he rejoiced that Christ was being preached. Second, he never obeyed the Lord simply because it was convenient. Paul was a wealthy, well-educated and prominent member of the Pharisee sect, but from the day he met the Lord on the road to Damascus until the day he died in a Roman prison, he was continually faced with doing the inconvenient. When he learned the truth from the lips of Ananias, "he arose and was baptized." But that meant turning his back on his cronies with whom he had labored to destroy the Lord's church, and as soon as the news got out, he probably could count his friends on the fingers of one hand. The religion that he and his ancestors had held dear was put behind him because he began preaching that the law was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14), that Jesus is the Son of God (1 Cor. 1:2), and that He not only died on the cross but He was raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:14). And third, Paul was not motivated by the new and the novel. He wasn't on fire one day and dead as a mackerel the next. That old joke about the cat, that had been injected with gasoline, running around the room for a few minutes and then flopping over on his back, describes a lot of Christians. "What happened to the cat?" you are supposed to ask, and the answer is "He ran out of gas!" Paul's life could be described as a lot more of the same. Day after day of hard work, very little of this world's goods, persecution, hardship, and the danger of death were his lot in life. But in the face of all this, he could write, "Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Motivated By Gratitude

What did motivate Paul? For one thing, he was motivated by gratitude. On one occasion he wrote, “For I am the least of the apostles, that I am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am. . .” (1 Cor. 15:9- 10). He never forgot what he had been and what he was able to become because of God’s mercy and grace. I think that sometimes many of us feel we were pretty good before we obeyed the gospel – sort of like Simon in Luke 7:36-48 – and our gratitude simmers on low heat. If we could get a glimpse of the horrors of hell that we would have suffered had it not been for God’s forgiveness, we might be capable of a deeper sense of gratitude. How thankful we need to be every day of our lives!

Motivated By Trust In Jesus

Another thing that motivated Paul was his faith and trust in the Lord. In 2 Timothy 1: 12, he said, “. . . I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” To the Galatians he made an unusual statement: “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not 1, but Christ liveth in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). There is probably nothing that will rob a person of his zeal any quicker and more effectively than doubts. How could a person serve the Lord faithfully and make sacrifices gladly, if he is not sure that the one he serves is for real? When John the Baptist was in prison, he was afflicted with this problem of doubt, but Jesus laid it to rest. He told the two disciples John had sent, to go and tell John again what they were hearing and seeing. “The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them” (Matthew 11:2-5). I doubt Paul ever doubted for a moment, but if we suffer from the problem, the answer lies in more investigation of the evidences of our Lord’s divinity (Rom. 10:17).

Motivated By Desire To Save The Lost

A third thing that motivated Paul was his deep desire to see lost people saved. In 2 Timothy 2:10, he told this young man he loved so dearly, one of the secrets behind the sacrifices he made. "I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Again, regarding his Jewish brethren (in the flesh), he said, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 10:1). One chapter back, he made an amazing statement when he said he would be willing to be lost himself if his Jewish kinsmen could be saved! If we could arrive to the point of spiritual development where we see our neighbor as a person on his way to hell, instead of a good fellow who is a little mixed up in his religion, it would revolutionize our conduct, I have read that Henry Ward Beecher would occasionally say, as he preached before an audience of thousands, "I preach as a dying man to dying men and women." May God help us to increase our concern for the souls of dying men and women.

Motivated By The Unseen

Paul was also motivated by his ability to see the unseen. In 2 Cor. 4:8-9, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, not destroyed." How could he keep on keeping on under such circumstances? "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. While we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal" (vv. 16-18). Paul could see his eternal spirit as clearly as others of us can see our hands or feet. He could experience the second coming of Christ as though it had already happened, and heaven and hell were as real to Paul as Corinth or Antioch.

CREATURE EYES DON'T SEE CHARACTER

Enlightened Self-Interests & Mixed Motives

THEME: Whole Motivation

by Warren E. Berkley

Synopsis: When our principal goal is to fear God and keep His commandments, our motivations are multi-leveled and inner-connected.

I still mow the lawn! At various benchmarks in my sixties, I tried to give up yard work. The other day a young man in the neighborhood said, "Why are you still doing yard work?"

The motivation for a seventy-two-year-old to continue doing yard work is multi-leveled: (1) I like having a neat place; (2) City ordinances require yard maintenance; (3) My wife likes it; (4) The grandkids think they have surpassed such tasks; (5) Maybe the guy next door will get the message that he should do his.

This is really the way motivation works. It is that inner engine that ignites and fuels the outer engine. It cannot be faked or borrowed, and you can't do without it. Even bad behavior has various sources in motivation, albeit wrong. (The word "motive" originates from that family of words that has to do with movement. We generally use the word when speaking of that which causes or prompts movement.)

Why Am I a Christian?

Several related levels of motivation answer that question.

Being a Christian is part of the legacy I was given. My parents made certain that I knew what I needed to know about becoming and being a Christian. My father was genuine about passing on the torch. When he read passages like "...that the next generation might know them," he applied that to his efforts to teach us and model for us the meaning of becoming and being Christians (Ps. 78:5-6). Part of my motivation is to be true to that legacy.

Being a Christian is the best way to lead my family. While I cannot force my children and grandchildren to be faithful Christians, I can and must teach and show them. There is no higher standard for a father or mother. "Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" are words I took personally when we were raising our children (Eph. 6:4). As a grandparent and great-grandparent, that *legacy motivation* remains.

Being a Christian provides guidance and good attitude in being a good friend and helping people. Being a good neighbor (even to the guy next door who needs to mow his yard) requires a selflessness that is richly informed and encouraged by following the teachings of the New Testament. Long before Mr. Rogers, Jesus spoke of being a good neighbor (Luke 10:25-37). He illustrated maturity, disciplined responses to people, and loving the unlovely. I need that. It's part of my motivation.

Being a Christian prepares me for death. I know what everybody knows: We will die. Yet, what then? Of the two alternatives, I want the better. Paul said, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:57-58).

Being a Christian means I am able to get help from the highest source. As David said, "When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Ps. 34:17-18). I need this! "Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15).

Being a Christian means I am a participant in a worthy cause. I can tell and show people there is a way out of the destruction of sin. I can pass on the greatest message to ever be spoken and written. Without any doubt attached, any apologies, or timidity, I can speak what God caused to be written: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'" (Rom. 1:16-17). I became a Christian, and I continue that way of life for all these reasons.

A Common Bond

What do all these levels of motivation have in common? What is the principle motivation? *I am a Christian because of who God is, what He has done for my benefit through Christ, and what the gospel promises.* Every reason given is foundationally connected to the greatness and love of God in Christ. He made me in His image for

His purpose that came to fullness with the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. *While all six motives identified above hold value, they only hold value because of Almighty God.*

Popular motivational speeches and books may not be completely wrong or failures. *I think the common defect is that they are frequently incomplete.* The world wants a motivation that is earth-bound and self-serving, to be financially productive; to overcome some deficiency; to gain some temporary excitement here "under the sun." Billions of dollars have been banked by motivational books, seminars, and podcasts that omit the highest motivation available to man. Solomon concluded, "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13). A life that isn't "abundant" with Christ as the center takes one only to the grave. What then? Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

Much motivation talk is built around slogans, that may contain some truth, yet without wholeness and divine connectivity.

Often it's easy to take the teachings of Jesus and turn them into clichés. We're tempted to dial into these slogans whenever we're in crisis. But experience shows us that the slogans alone leave us hollow. So, what would it look like to take the teachings of Jesus seriously and orient our daily lives around them? Let's be honest—we need to do a whole lot more than stick a fish symbol on the back of our car (Pathak, 22).

Conclusion

God has created us in His image, and He has spoken and acted through Jesus Christ to get us out of the destruction of sin and into fellowship with Him. That goodness combined with our reverence for God is the principle motive, that has in it—all the other levels of motivation. I hope this helps you to stay motivated. Now, it is time for me to mow the yard again.

Sources

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What Jesus Can't Do For Us

This article is not intended to limit the power of God or of Christ. That is, it is not intended that the reader construe from this title that we believe God is less than the All-powerful creator of all things, or that Jesus and the Father are less than all-wise and perfect. However, we must recognize that God's power is a controlled power, and he does not do all that he has the power to do. Likewise, let us also recognize that there are some things – yes, many things - that cannot be done by God or man. For instance, even God in all his majesty and might cannot make wrong right. If I say that George Washington's body is still alive, God cannot make that the truth. God cannot change a wrong act into a right one.

Sometimes we hear a Christian, in wording a closing prayer, say: "We pray that what we have done here today has been in accord with Thy will." But there is no use. If we have done wrong, that wrong will not become right even if we pray for hours about it. In the following paragraphs let us notice a number of things which Jesus can't do for us.

He Can't Shine From A Life Of Sin

There are only two ways in which the love of God and of Jesus is radiated to the world of sin today. One of those ways is through the lives of God's people. Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14) Actually, though, the Christian has no real light of his own, but he reflects the light of God's love. The light that came to this sin-cursed world in Jesus is made manifest in those who follow him today. But the light of God's love cannot shine from a life that is blighted by sinfulness (unless and until that guilt is washed away in the blood of Christ).

Actually, the statement, "Ye are the light of the world" is a significant and beautiful way of saying that the world is to be influenced by the disciples of our Lord. Yet the potential influence of many children of God is nullified by sinful living. The greatest gospel sermons usually fall upon deaf ears unless Christian people exemplify the truths proclaimed. Jesus cannot open the eyes of those who are blinded by ungodliness in the pulpit and the pew.

So many sinners excuse themselves by saying, "There are too many hypocrites in the church." They are right too. Of course, one hypocrite is too many, but there may just possibly be more than one. At any rate, though such excuse will never avail for them, and they will be lost unless they obey Christ, regardless of the hypocrites, yet it is certainly a shame and a disgrace that God's people ever allow such an excuse to be given. If parents would have greater influence over their children, let them live such lives as the children, in the delightful and refreshing candor and honesty that is possessed only by children, can follow into lives of purity, honesty, integrity and righteousness. If husbands and wives would influence their companions, let them put away sinful words and deeds, for even marital love of the highest degree is inadequate to eliminate the cloud cast by sinfulness in those who should influence us most. Let us all remember, that, whether it be in the workshop, the school, the home, the community or on the farm, Jesus cannot use us as instruments of righteousness. If ungodliness prevails in our words and action.

He Can't Put Sin Out Of Our Lives

When we surrender to the will of Christ and obey his word the Lord will forgive our sins and our souls will be as pure as the soul of a new-born baby. But Jesus can't keep sin out of our lives - for that is the action that we must take in manifesting the fruits of repentance. Jesus said to the sinful woman, "Go and sin no more." Again, we read, "Draw nigh to, God and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands ye sinners; purify your hearts ye double minded" (Jas. 4:8). The responsibility for a change in our conduct and our character is ours. We must change! Jesus can't clean up our sinful lives while we continue in evil-doing. Paul did teach that the Christian will not be tempted above that which he is able to bear, and the Lord does promise to aid, guide and sustain us, but actual obligation for guilt is ours, not God's. If we would be rid of wickedness, let us put it away, for Jesus has never promised to do that for us, nor can he do so.

He Can't Purify Our Bodies While Our Hearts Are Evil

Jesus said, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:21).

Sin that is made evident in the actions of our body has actually originated in our minds. The intellect of man is responsible for man's sin. If we would possess bodies that are clean and pure, let us clean up the "inner man." If we would speak words that are sound and "that cannot be condemned," let us be sure that our speech emanates from a clean heart, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34). Whoever thinks evil long or much will surely say or do evil. Paul admonished Christians to think on the things that are honest, just, true, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and worthy of praise (See Phil. 4:8). Jesus can't control our thoughts, nor can he make our lives contrast that which we do think.

Christ Can't Do Our Religion For Us

Christianity is a doing religion. Jesus "went about doing good" and we are commanded to "be ye doers of the word, not hearers only" (James 1:22). Pure religion is to help those who need and to keep oneself unspotted from the world (Jas. 1:27). The Lord will not pay our debts; he will not give our money to the poor; he will not lay our hands upon the sick; he will not turn our feet into the way of helpfulness to the feeble and downtrodden. Pure religion does not consist of what Jesus does for us, but of what we do for him and for his.

Jesus can not make us honest, benevolent, helpful, zealous and kindhearted. Yet those are attributes that he requires in us. Let us remember that Jesus does not perform a miracle upon the Banker so our credit will be good. Furthermore, the Banker does not investigate the record of Jesus to determine our credit rating. Likewise, Jesus does not remove the food from our pantry and give it to the poor, nor does he reach into our purse to relieve the beggar. The widow and the orphan are not sustained by a miracle from heaven, nor does the Lord make the beds, wash the sheets and clean the blankets with which we may provide a bed for the unfortunate. The fevered brow of the sick is not touched with a cool, damp cloth from heaven, and the feeble and downtrodden, either ill body or in mind, are not sustained and encouraged, either by a guardian angel sent from God or by any other miraculous means. Jesus came to do the will of the Father, and did it perfectly, but he can't do for us what God has given as our responsibility.

Christ Can't Make A Good Worker Out Of The Unwilling

Jesus can't make a good teacher out of the unprepared, for to be a scholar, one must first be a student. The Lord can't make a good personal worker out of one who won't speak to people about truth, and he can't make a good bishop out of one who does not desire to thus serve. He can't make a preacher out of one who is unwilling to speak, and he can't make a song leader out of one who will not sing. Jesus can't even make a good janitor out of one who won't sweep, and he can't make a good deacon out of one who is not eager to be a servant of men.

Jesus Can't Preach The Gospel To The World

The Lord committed the gospel to earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7) and ever since the full and perfect will was revealed and given to us in the written word, the Lord has charged men with the responsibility of teaching that word, and if men fail it will not be preached at all. (See also 2 Tim. 2:2). And, just as surely as Jesus can't speak to lost men about their souls, neither can he take money from our pocket and put into the contribution basket to supply the support for those who do preach the word. If the church treasury is to be adequate for such work, we must supply the funds ourselves. The teeming millions who will face the Lord in judgment unprepared will not point the accusing finger at Jesus, but unless we have been faithful in our duty, they will accuse us, and justly. Jesus said that "Ye are the salt of the earth," but he can't use us to save the lost if we are passive and weak. Usefulness to Christ for man's salvation is dependent upon consecration on the part of the follower of the Lord, and the disciple who does not give himself first, and then his substance, to Jesus, is like salt that has lost its saltiness. Jesus can't fill the church treasury, nor can he use what the church keeps in it. The abundance of God's blessings will not make large contributions, but only the generosity of Christians will accomplish the Lord's will in this matter. Likewise, large contributions into the treasury will not make the church great nor its work significant unless it is properly used. Every dollar that lies idly in the church treasury is a dollar that Jesus can't use, either to bring relief to needy saints or to bring the gospel message to souls that are lost in sin. Funds of great consequence may give us a sense of security, but those funds that are not useful to Christ until they are buying necessities for the needy or are supplying the ways and means for preaching the gospel.

Jesus Can't Become A Christian In Our Stead

Christ left us an example of faith and obedience, which included a life of sinlessness and of complete subjection to the will of the Father, but the only faith and obedience that avails for us today is our own. He said, "Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of the Father which is in heaven." (Mt. 7:21). Significantly, when we surrender to the Lord's will the Lord cleanses us from guilt, for we cannot cleanse ourselves, but on the other hand, the purity of Christ does not purify us, and the faith that he had does not save us. His purity may motivate us, and his faith provided a way for our salvation, but he still can't purify the impenitent - he can't wash the disobedient - he can't give new life to the one who continues in the old life of sin. Jesus said, "Ye must be born again" (Jn. 3:7). The "incorruptible seed, which is the word of God" is the power to bring about this new birth, but our own action now, not the Lord's, brings us into the place where we may have this new relationship to God.

Conclusion

Jesus can't take our place today. Figuratively he has no hands but our hands with which to reach out in kindness and in compassion. He has no lips but our lips with which to speak words of love and truth. He has no feet but our feet with which to carry the gospel message to the four corners of the earth and to every human soul. He has no money but our money with which to carry out the work of his church. Let us give fervent thanks for the grave that provided that which we could never otherwise have had, and then let us with equal zeal and real devotion do those things which God wants us to do, and be exactly what Jesus would have us be.

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Primary Passion

By Robert Hudson Guardian of Truth XXXIV: 4, pp. 117, 120

I ask you to think for a moment on this question: What is your passion? What are you passionate about? This very question is one that would often be misunderstood, one that would very often only be considered from an illicit sexual standpoint. This is an injustice to a very strong and thought-provoking word. The word can be defined in many ways and the most common is that which we will examine in this article. Webster states that passion “usually implies a strong emotion that has an overpowering or compelling effect.”

With this in mind let us again ask ourselves what has this strong effect in our lives, our thoughts, our direction in life? Is it God? Well, it should be; nothing should change us more than the influence of God in our lives. How many of us can see the impact of God in the lives of those around us? We need to feel this impact so strongly in ourselves, in our day to day living that there is no doubt or question when we proclaim that our God and his word is our passion.

In Philippians 3:8 Paul writes, “I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.” The words of the apostle here are most applicable to our train of thought; he had changed what meant the most to him, thereby he changed his passion. He was no longer driven by that which once had been his motivation, in fact he had laid that down, left it behind, and viewed it as worthless and even as trash which he had no desire or use for.

This concept of changing our passion or finding a new motivation is one that is developed throughout the ministry of Christ and continued in each of the books of the new covenant. Peter clearly informs us that we must change in 1 Peter 2:1-2, “Therefore laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby.” We recognize that the evil works listed by Peter all have tremendous motivational powers. It is not unusual at all to see someone whose passion is that of envy, and that envy takes over all direction and guidance of his life until he ends up warped and twisted shells of the person that he once was. The apostle tells us to change what is directing us; in essence he says, “Turn from passions of evil to passions of righteousness.”

We often refer to patriots or martyrs as men of passion. Why? Because their conviction is so strong that they are willing to die for the cause. They demonstrate a high level of visibility concerning what they believe in, what they stand for. This is viewed as an honorable trait, and we need to develop this same degree of intensity in order to be pleasing to, and effective for our Savior and God. I guess the whole point here comes down to one rather simple question, how much does God mean to you? As easy a question that this is to ask, it's much more difficult to honestly answer. Are we passionate about our service to Christ?

One of the most dramatic illustrations of passionate service and dedication to God is found in the death of the Judge over Israel, the man of God Eli. This is recorded in 1 Samuel 4:12-18; for reasons of space - I shall set the context for you. The children of Israel had just lost a major battle to the Philistines, the army had fled, many people had been killed and the ark of God had been stolen by the enemy. Eli, who was 98, heard all of this from a young man who had escaped. Not only did this young man bear this news of great defeat and destruction, he also informed Eli that two of his own sons had died in this battle. Let us notice what Eli's reaction was to all this. “Now it happened, when he made mention of the ark of God, that Eli fell off the seat backward by

the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years” (1 Sam. 4:18). What news had the most impact on Eli? Find that and we find his passion. It wasn’t the fact that the army had fled, or that many had died. Yes, these hurt him; his own children had been killed and he would see them no more. What hit this man of God the hardest was that the ark of God had been taken by an ungodly people. He cared about all of these other things, but he cared most about God. God was his passion.

Eli is not the only example of a passionate servant that we find in the Scriptures. Time after time we see men and women who were willing to die for, and most importantly, live for their Father and God. The question that needs to be addressed at this time is where did their godly zeal and passion come from? The writer of the Hebrews letter after discussing many of these impassioned men says, “all these obtained a good testimony through faith.” All spiritual direction and guidance, all righteous motivation, all godly passion must be grounded in faith. After all how can one truly be devoted and given to that which does not have his total trust and conviction? With faith comes a degree of passion and, as that faith grows, passion grows with it.

Our passion for God is predicated by our level of knowledge. We have all heard of a vicious circle, some set of unfortunate events that demand all the strength that only God could supply. What made Jesus rise up and walk to a quiet place to talk to God? The same thing that will make you get up earlier, or stay up later, or watch one less TV program so that you may pray to your Heavenly Father, a true passion for God.

Intensity and depth, love and devotion, strength and discipline, these are the elements that form the passion for God that all of us must have in order to please God, to serve him, and to bring others to him. Passion is such a misunderstood and yet powerful word; does it dwell in your heart as far as your God and Savior is concerned?



