

REDEEMING THE TIME

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16).

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"TO OPEN THEIR EYES"

The Call to Missions

BY BRAD K. GSELL

This message was delivered to the students of the Tipton Christian Academy, Tipton, Iowa, on Friday, September 10, 2021.

You are probably familiar with what many call the Great Commission. In Mark 16:15, Christ tells His disciples to "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." This is where Jesus Christ commanded all Christians, all those who have been born again by the power of God, to be missionaries throughout the whole world.

Then, we look at Acts 1:8. Here are recorded the very last words Jesus Christ gave to His disciples before He ascended up into heaven. And He said: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

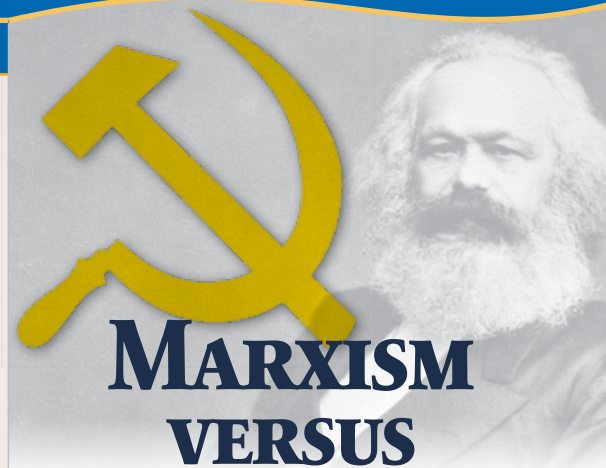
This verse shows that being a missionary is the duty of ALL Christians, whether we are living right at home, or whether we go to the other side of the globe. You and I are to be missionaries!

Today I want us to look at the Great Commission in another place in the Bible, that isn't always quoted as much. In Acts 9, we see Saul of Tarsus (who later became the Apostle Paul). He was a very educated Jewish leader, a Pharisee, who had a real hatred of the Gospel, and a desire to persecute all who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation. He was commissioned by the Jewish high priest to go hunt down these Christians, and put them in chains or ropes and bring them to Jerusalem. For Paul, it was much more than just a job. He had a passion to persecute Christians. He was a child of Satan, and Satan loves nothing more than to attack Christians. He even held the coats of

"To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

Acts 26:18

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MARXISM VERSUS *the* WORD OF GOD

A subject that needs to be revisited in the face of a troubling resurgence of communism and socialism

BY BRAD K. GSELL

This message was delivered via Zoom across South America as part of a panel of eight church leaders on September 26, 2021. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, many thought that communism and socialism had proved to be failed tyrannical systems, and that they would continue to decline. However, a new generation is embracing these systems once again.

When we begin to talk about forms of government and how our societies are structured, some Christians think that we are simply talking about politics, and that we as Christians should not concern ourselves with these things. It is very true that if we are looking for salvation in these things, we will be sorely disappointed. Christ tells us: "My Kingdom is not of this world." Hebrews 11:13 tells us that we are

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The Scottish Reformation

PART 5

BY MARK W. EVANS

EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

John Knox in Exile

For 19 months, John Knox labored as a slave in the French galley ships. He endured fatigue, exposure to harsh weather, sickness, and the oppression of his captors. This unrelenting punishment was intended to crush the human will. The Reformer remained implacable. Even when seriously ill, some believing that he would die, he was convinced that he would return to Scotland and proclaim God's truth.

Before leaving his native land, he had publicly preached that Rome was the Church of Antichrist and must be removed. He sowed the seeds of inerrant, Biblical truth that would eventually reap a glorious harvest.

Church historian P. Hume Brown wrote: "The mental operation of Knox with regard to the Church of Rome was very simple. Taking the Bible as the absolute standard of the Christian teaching, he applied that standard to the Church of Rome as he saw it. The conclusion was irresistible. In her polity, her morals, her doctrine, she was parted by so deep a gulf from the Church of Christ and the apostles, that not reform, it seemed to him, but extinction, was the divine decree that had gone forth against her."¹

It was more than Rome's moral corruptions that needed repair. Her doctrines, sacraments, polity, barbaric

discipline, and tyranny were so entrenched that she must be left to her own destruction. She was identified by the Reformers as Antichrist. The Bible gives a clear admonition: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

"The little seed he [Knox] had deposited in its soil eight years before had been growing all the while he was absent, and now when a second time he goes forth into exile, he leaves behind him a living organization — a company of men making profession of the truth."

J.A. Wylie

After Knox's release from chains, likely by English intervention, he returned to England in the spring of 1549. King Henry VIII had expired, and his young son, Edward VI (1537-1553), was heir to the throne. Because of his youth, he was under a council of regency led by his uncle, Edward Seymour, First Duke of Somerset. Later, John Dudley, First Duke of Northumberland, replaced Somerset, but continued the promotion of Protestantism. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, also aided in

the effort to establish Biblical Christianity.

For a few years, England provided a refuge for the Reformer. His native land of Scotland was under the control of the papacy. While in England, the Reformer continued his preaching and pastoral ministry in Berwick, Newcastle, and London. His impact was such that he became a chaplain in the king's court.

God's ways are not man's ways. Edward VI died at the age of 15. His parting brought the Roman Catholic "Bloody Mary" to the throne. Adopting Rome's method of reasoning, she executed some 300 Protestants. Many others fled from the land.

The Reformer was compelled to leave England and begin a journey in Europe. Historian P. Hume Brown wrote of Knox: "It was the incontrovertible fact that, for the time at least, the armies of Satan were triumphing on every hand. He did his best to console himself and the rest of the faithful with the Scriptural promises as to the speedy term of the wicked; but, meanwhile that, both in England and Scotland, the door was closed to any faithful preaching was a trial to men's faith, which must have the most disastrous results for many who as yet walked with but feeble steps in the new way."²

The historian also observed: "There was, in truth, but one spot on all the Continent to which Knox could look with any hope of finding a settled home, and a sphere where his gifts might be turned to some profit till better days should come."³ The exiled Reformer made his way to Switzerland to seek fellowship with John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger. He also found Englishmen seeking refuge from Rome's tyranny. In the Lord's providence, he was able to serve as pastor to two English churches organized while in exile.

In 1555, Knox returned to Scotland for a brief visit. Some eight years had passed since he was in chains.

When he arrived in Scotland, he found a number of the nobility con-

vinced of Biblical Christianity. Yet, he must teach them the necessity of separating from the Roman false church. J.A. Wylie explained: “Up to this time these men had attended mass, and were not outwardly separate from the communion of the Roman Church; but, at the earnest advice of the Reformer, they resolved not to participate in that rite in the future, and to withdraw themselves from the Roman worship and pale; and they signaled their secession by receiving the Sacrament in its Protestant form at the hands of Knox.”⁴

With this separation came the beginning of a true church in Scotland. Wylie wrote: “In the days of Hamilton and Wishart the Reformation in Scotland was simply a doctrine; now it was a congregation.”⁵

As Knox departed Scotland for the second time he had reason to rejoice. Wylie observed: “The little seed he had deposited in its soil eight years before had been growing all the while he was absent, and now when a second time he goes forth into exile, he leaves behind him a living organization — a company of men making profession of the truth.”⁶

The seed that was planted in Scotland continued to grow. Although congregations lacked preachers, they selected elders from the men qualified by their faith and practice. The historian wrote: “They were appointed to read the Scriptures, to exhort, and to offer up prayer. They were of all classes — nobles, barons, burgesses, and peasants. They felt the necessity of order in their meetings, and of purity in their lives; and with this view they chose elders to watch over their morals, promising subjection to them. Thus gradually, stage by stage, did they approach the outward organization of a Church, and it is interesting to mark that in the Reformed Church of Scotland elders came before ministers.”⁷

We learn in God’s Word not to despise the “day of small things.” While Rome was persecuting and kill-

ing true believers, the Head of the Church was keeping His promise: “I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). •

¹P. Hume Brown, *John Knox* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1895), Vol. I, p. 97.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

³*Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁴J.A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism* (London: Cassell and Com-

pany, n.d. [originally published, 1878]), Vol. III, p. 485.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 486.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.*



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On September 11, 2021, The Independent Board for Presbyterian Home Missions set up a display at the memorial in Shanksville, PA, for the twentieth anniversary commemoration of the 9-11 tragedy. Much Gospel literature and shirts with Bible verses were distributed, and there were many occasions for one-on-one evangelism. Pictured left to right above: John Paul Lauger, Gary Johnson, Pat Johnson, Randy Heller, Keith McCoy, Jerry Gardner, and Susan Ott. Not pictured: Carol Elwell, Linda Gardner, and Elizabeth Henderson.



The Gospel According to
JOHN

CHAPTER 1

IN the beginning ^awas the Word, and the ^bWord was ^cwith God, and the Word was ^dGod.

The “I Am”’s and “Ye Are”’s of the Gospel of John

BY ROBERT W. ANDERSON

Fifty-six years ago, when the International Council of Christian Churches met in Geneva, Switzerland, I proposed to the girl who became my wife. Back home I went in search of an engagement ring. The jeweler laid out a black velvet cloth to display his diamonds. The brilliance of those multifaceted gemstones in contrast to the backdrop of the black cloth comes to mind as an illustration of the contrast between our Lord’s “I ams” and His “ye ares” in the Gospel of John. The “ye ares” are the black cloth, His “I ams” are the diamonds.

Another illustration of the immense contrast between the Lord of glory and inglorious man is in the theater of a cloudless night sky. Between 63 and 210 light years from earth, the closest and farthest of the seven stars of the Big Dipper shine in all their quiet beauty against the midnight heavens. As the darkness of the firmament is the backdrop for the seven stars of the Big Dipper, so the seven “I ams” of John’s Gospel shine against the wicked, shameful “ye ares.” “I am the Bread of Life” and “I am the Light of the World,” with the other five, stand out in marked contrast against the darkness of “ye are

from beneath,” “ye are of this world,” or “ye are of your father the devil.”

Our Lord speaks, not only to inform us of His Deity, and what He is as a Savior, but also to drive home to our hearts what we are in our fallen state and need of a Savior. What Christ is accentuates what we are; what we are underscores His infinite excellence. The contrast shows the Lord Jesus more exceedingly glorious. It shows man more wickedly sinful.

Look first at the “ye ares.” What Jesus said about the spiritually ignorant and unbelieving is not restricted to the three examples above. John piles up statement after statement by Christ that exposes the inborn wickedness, blindness, unbelief and alienation of unregenerate mankind.

For the task of supplying the black sky against which the ‘I ams’ will shine more brightly, I will only use two “ye are” verses in John 8, but the entire chapter fairly bristles with exposing the depravity of mankind. Christ makes at least 20 charges against them! It is eye opening to work through the book of John, underlining all the instances in which Christ confronts His hearers with their sin.

“YE ARE from beneath”

(John 8:23)

Dwell on the opening assertion of John 8:23, “Ye are from beneath, I am from above.” The most natural commentary on “from beneath” sweats out of every verse that leads up to this statement. Scan back over verses 14 to 22 and listen to men’s words and tone toward Jesus. In their eyes He is “a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people” (Psalm 22:6). Conceited, they presume to assess and correct Him. They “speak evil of things that they understand not” (2 Peter. 2:12).

First, they audaciously assert that His claim in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world,” is false. Certain that His testimony could not be valid, because it was lacking the necessary two or three witnesses (*cf.* Deuteronomy 17:6), they charge, “Thy record is not true” (verse 13).

Second, when He speaks of His Father “who sent” Him (verses 16 and 18), they presume to ask, “Where is thy Father?” (verse 19). With the confidence of the Jews that they were “a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness” (Romans 2:19), and with the growing malignant bias against Jesus that permeates this chapter, we must wonder why they asked this. In Luke we read that the Pharisees “began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things: Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him” (Luke 11:53,54). Was a desire to “catch” Jesus somehow behind their question?

Third, when He says “Whither I go ye cannot come (verse 21)” they whisper among themselves, “Will he kill himself?” (verse 22). In their conceit, any uncertainty of His meaning must reflect against Him, never themselves.

Fourth, after this, in John 8:51-52, when Jesus says that any man who keeps His saying will never die, they accuse, “Now we know that thou hast a devil.”

Just how far did they dare to overstep in finding fault with the faultless Son of God? Paul speaks a profound truth when he says man “knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” (1 Corinthians 8:2). The remarks of Jesus’ critics showed that in spiritual terms they were “know nothings”; they were blind, and blind to their blindness.

To perceive the significance of being “beneath,” listen further to what Jesus says to them:

“Ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go” (verse 14).

“Ye judge after the flesh [human standards] (verse 15).

“Ye neither know me, nor my Father” (verse 19).

“If ye had known me, ye had known my Father also” (verse 19).

“Ye shall seek me [in vain], and shall die in your sins” (verse 21).

As Jesus continues to confront those Jews, He exposes what they ought not to have done, but did: “ye seek to kill me” (verse 37), “ye do the deeds of your father” (verse 41). He further points out the things they did not do, which they ought to have done: “ye cannot hear my word” (verse 43), “ye believe not” (verse 45), “Why do ye not believe in me?” (verse 46), and “Ye ... hear them not [God’s words], because ye are not of God” (verse 47). Every one of those declarations involves their awful culpability before God. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

The Apostle Paul describes what it is to be “from beneath” in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” The “from beneath” man is the “natural man,” unenlightened by the Holy Spirit.

“YE ARE of this world”

(John 8:23b)

In the next breath our Lord adds, “ye are of this world: I am not of this

world.” In the vocabulary of the Apostle John, “world” is frequently used, not in a merely physical, but in an ethical sense. “World” can simply mean the billions of humans who populate the earth, but here it means the mass of fallen men that pulses with all their wicked ways of life. Jesus spoke of the world to His disciples, “ye know that it hated me” (John 15:18). He neither did nor said anything worthy of reprehension. He “did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). Yet in their wicked madness the world loathed Him, and its leaders “crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:8).

John engages in a monologue in his first epistle: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:15,16).

The entire Bible is a documentary on the world, which Isaiah describes so well: “the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt” (Isaiah 57:20).

“YE ARE of your father the devil”

(John 8:44)

Following the “ye are from beneath” and “ye are of the world” is another castigation: “ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”

Jesus is not saying they are the physical progeny of the devil. They are his children because they act under the suggestions he and his demons excite in their hearts. They resemble him in their wicked thoughts, desires and actions. The apple does not fall far from the tree. Even in our present day, lurk-

ing behind the murders and lies that are a regular part of the news cycle is the leering face of the Wicked One.

It is difficult to miss the fact that the “ye are”s are the black, black night against which its seven “I am”s shine ever so resplendently.

“I AM the bread of life”

(John 6:35,48)

First among the stars is “I am the bread of life.” The setting for this claim was the feeding of the five thousand. John writes that, after the miracle, the people were seeking to force Him to be their king. They apparently reasoned that if He could miraculously feed them once, He could do it on a regular basis. Gone would be the tedium of providing food by back-breaking toil. Jesus turns their thoughts from the exciting prospect of free daily bread to vastly better bread — Himself. What ordinary bread is to the life of the body, Jesus is to the life of believing souls.

In its highest and best conception, human life involves the idea of happiness, activity and fruitfulness. When you have cause for joy, when you are busy and productive, that is life. Life from Christ has the same elements. There is blessedness in union and communion with Christ. We enjoy His love; experience the pardon of sins; access Him in prayer for His guidance, comfort and refuge; and acknowledge His daily mercies with thanksgiving. There are added blessings without number. As for activity, we are busy in our marriages and families, our homes, our places of employment, our churches, with our friends, as also in our witness for the Savior. By the grace of God, there is fruitfulness from our lives. By our good works we glorify our Father, which is in heaven.

In John 6:51b, Christ explains how He is our life: “The bread that I give is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world.” Jesus is our life by

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dying for us; "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15). As the substitute, He bore the penalty of their sins in His own body on the tree. Jesus is not bread to us personally until we believe and appropriate Him to ourselves, so we "eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood" (John 6:53).

Among other things, the reliability of this stupendous claim to be the bread of life was demonstrated when He miraculously gave "life" to those on the verge of death (John 4:46-53), to "dead" limbs (John 5:1-9), to "dead" eyes (John 9:1-7), to "dead" ears, and to the body of a dead Lazarus. He was "a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs" (Acts 2:22).

"I AM the light of the world"

(John 9:5)

When healing the man born blind in John 9, Christ showed Himself as "the Light of the world." He opened that man's eyes to see all that was about him by the light of the sun, and to see Christ Himself as the giver of that light. Asked if he believed on the Son of God, the man said, "Who is he?" Jesus replied, "it is he that talketh with thee" (verse 37).

Spiritual light evokes spiritual gladness. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart" (Psalm 97:11). Also light is associated with glorious liberty; Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would come "to open blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house" (Isaiah 42:7).

In the Prologue of the Gospel of John (John 1:1-18), John proclaims, "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (verse 9). The "light" of that verse seems to refer to the general il-

lumination with which every man is invested from creation.

The Apostle Paul, preaching the same truth, writes, "that which may be known of God is manifest in them (men); for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." Two verses later Paul says that, though naturally enlightened from creation, because men did not glorify Him as God, the "foolish heart was darkened" (Romans 1:19-21). They had enough light to be without excuse for their sins, but not enough to be saved. Christ came to a sinful world in a deplorable condition to be the Light and give light that attends saving faith in Him. "In thy light shall we see light" (Psalm 36:9).

"I AM the door"

(John 10:1,9)

The third "I am" is Jesus' claim, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9). He is the exclusive, legitimate passageway into the safety of the sheepfold and out into green pastures. His position as the door is accentuated by His description of those who sought their own good at the sheep's expense. "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber" (John 10:1). The scribes and Pharisees, religious men, were of that class. The same religious leaders mentioned four times in chapter 9 are likely present in chapter 10. As they had done their utmost to oppose Jesus being seen as the light, those same Jews are shown up here to be heartless, self interested, miserable shepherds.

By contrast Jesus says, "by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." What a blessed word, "saved," with all it entails for soul and body, for time and eternity! The opposite, "lost," is unthinkable — lost to God,

lost from the pardon of sin, lost from real life, lost forever from heaven. Christ Himself is the door. He opens it and says, "come unto me."

"I AM the good shepherd"

(John 10:11,14)

Woven together with His claim to be the door is the next one: "I am the good shepherd." Christ contrasts himself with those He denotes as "an hireling." Just as the Pharisees cared nothing for the blind man, Jesus said that the hireling (like Pharisees) "careth not for the sheep" (John 10:13).

Christ is manifestly the sole and rightful shepherd of the sheep. They are His by right of creation. In Psalm 100 God's people confess, "it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (verse 3).

Jesus adds "[I] know my sheep, and am known of mine" (John 10:14). It is a precious, intimate knowledge on both sides of the relationship. Knowing His sheep means He loves them. Love includes a sense and right of possession. A mother puts her arms around her child and says, "this is my child," in a way no one else can claim. Love includes delight. What a light of pleasure shines in the eyes of a man who says, "This is my fiancée." Love entails kindness and benevolence. It is easy and natural to do good things for those we love. Such is the love of Christ for His sheep.

Further, in verse 16, He says, "They shall hear my voice." Growing up on the farm, I saw that when a stranger came, the heads of the cattle or sheep would be thrown up and the animals would become skittish, ready to bolt. But they were calm and trusting with their owner. They knew his voice. So we, as spiritual sheep, listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd.

As our shepherd, Christ also leads His people. You know how music can create a picture and mood. Since hearing George Frideric Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, I have never forgotten those

beautifully repeated lines, sung in connection with the Exodus, “he led, he led them forth like sheep.” The mind can envision Moses, at the head of two or three million Israelites, leading them out of the house of bondage toward the land flowing with milk and honey. Beautiful as that panoramic picture is, it does not live up to the Bible’s portrayal of the Great Shepherd of the sheep leading His people, His blood-bought church.

Finally, “the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (verse 11). The thief comes to kill and destroy (verse 10). The shepherd voluntarily dies for the benefit of the sheep and in their place, so they might have a life of blessedness and fruitfulness. Even mature sheep “shall bring forth fruit in old age: they shall be fat [fresh] and flourishing” (Psalm 92:14)

“I AM the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25)

The next “I am” occurs in the little town of Bethany, just east of Jerusalem over the Mount of Olives. Here lived the family of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. When Lazarus fell seriously ill, they sent for Jesus, no doubt thinking He would come quickly. But Jesus delayed and Lazarus died. When Jesus finally arrives, He finds the stinging tears of sorrow. Martha, the first to meet Jesus, says, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (John 11:21). Jesus tells her, “thy brother shall rise again” (verse 23). Martha replies, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (verse 24). Martha would have known what Daniel had prophesied years before, “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2). In the bleakness of this moment, Jesus utters the diamond-like statement, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

Jesus then substantiates His claim by going to the tomb, where Lazarus

had been buried for four days, and calling out, “Lazarus, come forth! And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes ...” (verses 43-44). This gives a foresight of another day, when “the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout [like that of Jesus to Lazarus], with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise ...” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

It is difficult to miss the fact that the “ye are”s are the black, black night against which the seven “I am”s shine ever so resplendently.

Jesus announces Himself to be not only “the resurrection,” but also “the life.” It shall be eternal, the life of heaven, life in its highest conception. There, the cup of the redeemed shall run over endlessly. His claim to be the resurrection and the life also encompasses the life He imparts at regeneration — a spiritual, supernatural event — when one passes “from death unto life” (John 5:24).

“I AM the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6)

Our Lord next proclaimed, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” John Calvin comments that Jesus “lays down three degrees, as if He had said that He is the beginning, and the middle, and the end; and hence it follows that we ought to begin with Him, to continue in Him, and to end in Him.”¹

To begin, Christ is “the way” when one is regenerated (the first act of which is saving faith). A new spiritual life begins. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [creation]: old things are passed away ... all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). With this new life comes a love for what was hated, and hatred for what was

once loved. Regeneration is an “extreme makeover” of both the inward and outward life; thoughts, purposes, emotions, and values are all gloriously altered. Christ is the beginning point of “the way” to heaven.

To embrace Christ as “the truth” is to continue in Him. “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:31).

To illustrate how Christ is the one in whom faith begins, continues, and ends, think about your journey to church on the Lord’s Day. The trip begins in your driveway, and continues on the street called “truth.” You dare not branch off to any “new” truth. Calvin gives a summary of Christ’s description of Himself as “the truth”: “If any man turn aside from Christ, he will do nothing but go astray”² The journey ends at the place of worship, your “life.” That worship is a foretaste of your ultimate life with our Redeemer in heaven. “In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

“I AM the vine” (John 15:5)

Christ’s claim to be the “vine,” as well as His previous assertion that He is “the way, the truth and the life,” are among Christ’s parting words to His disciples before His betrayal, arrest, trial and crucifixion. The disciples were disturbed when He said one of them would betray him (John 13:21) and when He announced that He was going away. “Yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come” (John 13:33). The more He spoke, the more unsettled their minds became. Both His betrayal and His foretold departure could well have left them questioning their future. They might have wondered, “Have I deceived myself? Could I also forsake Him?” They had been with Him day and night for three years. They could

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not conceive of their lives without Him.

With those thoughts gnawing on their minds, Christ speaks to quell their doubts. "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit" (John 15:5). Judas would betray Him, but not the rest of them. Jesus would go away. They would not enjoy His physical presence any more, but they would enjoy a better relationship in union with Him. He assured them that they would "bring forth fruit" and that their fruit should remain [or endure] (John 15:16).

This intimate spiritual connection with Christ is the reason the disciples went out and morally and spiritually turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6) — though, in actuality, they turned it right side up. This is why Paul could say that those in the Colossian church were "fruitful in every good work" (Colossians 1:10). It is why Paul could commend the Thessalonians, because from them "sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad" (1 Thessalonians 1:8). They are the branches in the Vine.

While the church in every age and every place has its spots and wrinkles, she has faithfully imparted the Word, has been salt and light, and has been a force for good. All of this is owing to her relationship to the True Vine. Christ's life in His people has been infinitely prodigious. One day it will all be revealed.

Christ's description of his enemies is so potently true and just that there is no defense against it. If the Lord had said no more than those few words, it would have been enough. But the whole of Scripture lends its support to His declarations, both about His enemies and Himself. Isaiah, God's

prophet to their ancestors, said, "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward" (Isaiah 1:4).

Those scribes and Pharisees were just like their fathers.

On the other hand, the Bible's inspired writers pronounced Jesus as "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26). Can any greater encomium be imagined? •

¹John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, "Commentary on the Gospel According to John" (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, Reprinted 1981), p. 84.

²*Ibid.*, p. 85.



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"strangers and pilgrims" here on this earth.

However, God commands us to live our lives on this earth according to His Word. Therefore, we should promote government which recognizes that our rights come from God — not government. We should advocate for government that allows men and women to serve God and to obey His Word. The wickedness of Pharaoh in enslaving the Israelites and impeding their worship and service to God led to the terrible plagues which afflicted the great land of Egypt. God Himself instructed Moses to speak boldly to Pharaoh: "Then the Lord said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh, and tell him, Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me" (Exodus 9:1).

The children of God have often suffered under unjust governments. God has many times used unjust rulers for His all-wise purposes and for His glory in dealing with us. Yet, we as Christians should stand for government that is good, and that which will allow ourselves and others to worship and serve the Lord.

There has been one form of government, which arose in the 1800s, which has, more than practically any other in history, usurped the place of God, and demands the homage and obedience of all its subjects. Nations which have fully adopted this form of government have nearly always seen an increase in human suffering and death, have forced Christians to worship in secret and have executed stiff penalties for any who should dare seek to obey Christ's Great Commission.

The main proponents of this philosophy were Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Their *Communist Manifesto* clearly outlines their devilish teaching. The implementation of Marxism in the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, and Cuba, to name a few, was a terrible blight on the 20th century, and it continues to this day.

Perpetual Human Conflict

At the heart of communism is a belief that there are only two kinds of men. The Bible also teaches that there are only two kinds of men, who were all born in sin: those who die in their sins and spend eternity in hell, and those who come in faith believing on the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls, and who will spend eternity in heaven. Romans 3:10 tells us that "There is none righteous, no, not one." All men are sinners. But God sent His Son to die on the cross for all who genuinely come in faith believing. John 3:36 says: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." These are the two kinds of men of which the Bible speaks.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels rejected the Bible. Instead, they held that the sinners were those who owned the businesses, farms and companies. The saints were those who worked for them. Their goal was for these two groups (which they called the “bourgeoisie” and the “proletariat”), to always hate each other, with the workers eventually crushing the owners of the means of production, and the communist dictators rushing in to fill the void.

We are seeing this again in recent years manifesting itself in other ways. In the United States and around the world, those who espouse communist principles seek to divide people by race, and tribe, and culture. In any given country, they decide that all those of one race are sinners (oppressors). (EVERYONE in that race is guilty of oppression to another race, no matter what individual members of that race may say or do.) And, anyone of another race is always a saint (no matter what things they may say or do).

The stoking of these artificial hatreds is extremely dangerous, no matter who is doing it. One need only look at the appalling genocide in Rwanda in 1994, where many in the Hutu majority were enflamed to commit genocide against the minority Tutsis. Although there were other than tribal reasons, yet one group was demonized as a group, apart from any individual actions, and the unspeakable was the result.

Other conflicts are generated between men and women, rich and poor, young and old — whatever differences can be exploited.

To be sure, there are many things done by people against those that are the same — or different — than they are. The curse of sin has been a dreadful blight upon all of mankind, throughout all of history. We as Christians must always stand for justice and fairness, and against oppression.

The child of God, who truly understands the Scriptures, will not be one who hates another person simply



because he or she is of a particular race, sex, culture, or social status. Each of us is to be judged by God individually. Further, the Christian has a true spirit of love and desire to help those in need. Ephesians 4:32 tells us: “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

The Apostle Paul told the Christians at Philippi: “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Philippians 2:4).

A violation of the First Table of the Law

On top of the unbiblical hatred and division which is inherent in Marxism, the whole communist system violates the first four of the Ten Commandments, which deal with our relationship with God:

The First Commandment: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

The Second Commandment: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.”

The Third Commandment: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.”

The Fourth Commandment: “Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.”

Sadly, some who claim to be Christians have promoted what they



(left to right top): **Rev. Brad Gsell, Elder Stephen Ricker, and Rev. Hal Ricker, participate in a panel on September 26, 2021, which had as one of its topics: “Marxism Vs. the Word of God.” The panel was conducted via Zoom across South America.**

call “Christian Communism,” or “Liberation Theology.” These things sound good. They are promoted in the name of “fairness,” “equity,” “equality,” “caring for the poor,” and so forth.

However, in nearly every situation where forced communism takes place, atheism becomes one of its chief tenets. The reason for this is that, in order to enforce communism, a dictatorship is absolutely necessary. And, the dictators, and the governments, invariably take the place of God. Why is it that the corpses of many communist leaders are still on public display? Why is it that the three generations of North Korean leaders have all enjoyed god-like status, with myths surrounding their births, and giant photos of the “Dear Leader” displayed in public

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venues, and in people's houses. The same is true in Communist China, and elsewhere. This goes way beyond the mere honoring of historical leaders. Since they do not believe in God, or in life after death, these leaders usurp the place of God unto themselves. The North Korean leaders have held dozens of titles, such as "Great Leader," "Dear Leader," and even "Glorious General, Descended From Heaven"!

The whole premise of communism is that people are not considered as individuals, responsible directly to God, but are merely, as a group, responsible to the government. This is a clear violation of what the Bible teaches. Romans 14:12 tells us: "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." Instead of "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," it becomes "The government is my shepherd, I shall not want."

Contrary to this, we as Christians must "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 29:2). With Marxism, we are just a

collection of people who must work in communes and do exactly what the government tells us to do. Then, this government can decide quite apart from the will of the people what you should be given as far as food, clothing, housing, education, and so forth. Even what profession you will have is often decided by them. It is a cruel slavery, where you are simply robots to be controlled by the all-knowing government.

A violation of the Second Table of the Law

Commandments Six through Ten deal with man's relationship with his fellow men. These, likewise, are almost always violated in communist countries. When you look at Russia, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and many other countries, the presence of communism has seen millions of people killed in the worst possible ways, often by very brutal means. Since the State takes the place of God, control must be maintained at all costs. Any who seek to be free before God, with differences of opinion, are seen as a great threat. Thus murders, sham trials with many false witnesses and wicked judges are the norm. All must conform to the desires of the State, or be eliminated!

The Fifth Commandment tells us to "honor our fathers and our mothers." With the commune often being much more important than the family, great harm is done to the God-ordained order of father, mother and children. In the United States, the Black Lives Matter organization was started by those who brag that they are "trained Marxists." One of the tenets of this organization, listed on their website until recently, was their goal to "disrupt the nuclear family," in favor of collectivism. One thing for sure is that communism is opposed to the Biblical family as defined by God. Under communism, children are often trained to spy on their parents and report to communist officials.

The true Christian is going to be for racial equality. We believe that we are all created by God. We are all sinners, and our only hope is found in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. But, this organization has a dangerous agenda that goes very far beyond the noble goal of racial equality.

The Sixth Commandment says: "Thou shalt not kill." More have been murdered under communist dictatorships than at any time in human history. The *Wall Street Journal*, November 6, 2017, carried a headline which read: "100 Years of Communism — and 100 Million Dead: The Bolshevik plague that began in Russia was the greatest catastrophe in human history." Although it would be impossible to arrive at a totally accurate figure, other estimations are similar.

The Seventh Commandment instructs us: "Thou shalt not commit adultery": There have been various laws about marriage and family under different communist regimes. The Soviet Union began with advocating the dissolution of the nuclear family, in favor of the commune. Some laws became more conservative over time, when hundreds of thousands of orphans and women stranded by easy divorce filled the streets. One thing that has not changed over time is that the family has been seen as a mere economic arrangement, with no moral stigma to adultery, just the concern that the parents perform their mere financial responsibilities to their spouses and children.

One of the biggest crimes of communism is a violation of **The Eighth Commandment**: "Thou shalt not steal." If a government seizes your private property, it is stealing, plain and simple. God does not place it in the hands of government to steal from one group of people and give it to another group of people as it sees fit. Inherent in the Eighth Commandment is the right to private property.

Communist governments have been infamous for their show trials,

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complete with false witnesses. The interests of the State must be protected at all costs, even if massive lying is required. This certainly is a violation of **The Ninth Commandment**, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”

Finally, at the root of communism is the violation of **The Tenth Commandment**: “Thou shalt not covet.” Here again, this commandment clearly lays out the right to private property, and the sin involved in even having sinful desires for the possessions belonging to one’s neighbor. When communism takes over a country, industries are usually nationalized, and those with means often have their money and possessions stolen from them to be used by the State.

Is a just form of communism possible?

You may ask, “I know that communist countries have almost always had these unbiblical traits, but isn’t it possible to create a communist society without these things?” Two things are often pointed out: the Pilgrim’s experimentation with socialism in Plymouth Colony, and the passages in Acts 2 and 4 where the Christians had “all things in common.”

We know that the Pilgrims soon switched to a free enterprise system, because socialism was failing miserably. And, the passages in Acts do not indicate that that was the norm, or that it lasted very long. It appeared to be voluntary (For a discussion of these matters, please see the Winter 2021 issue of *Redeeming the Time*, pages 8 and 10).

A number of Christian communes have been established in the United States and elsewhere. Virtually all of these have failed and are now just a historical footnote.

The problem with communism is that it denies or ignores the total depravity of all men, and denies or compromises our individual responsibility directly to God. These two fatal

flaws doom communism to ultimate destruction.

When the United States was founded, James Madison, writing in *Federalist Paper* No. 51, February 8, 1788, stated: “If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to control itself.”

In order for the government to be obliged “to control itself,” the writers

The whole premise of communism is that people are not considered as individuals, responsible directly to God, but are merely, as a group, responsible to the government. This is a clear violation of what the Bible teaches. Romans 14:12 tells us: “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

of our Constitution realized well that the government would not be run by angels, but rather by sinful men. Therefore, they set up clearly defined limitations on the government, and established “separation of powers,” where each of three branches of government would be a “check and balance” on the other two branches. Further, the federal government was given limited powers. All powers not specifically granted to it reverted to the States or to the people.

The Declaration of Independence declares: “Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” All of this is antithetical to communism. There was much in the Presbyterian Form of Government which was copied by our Founders.

When people and governments rebel against the principles laid down in God’s Word, disaster always follows. A case in point is Venezuela. It used to be one of the most prosperous countries in the world. Now that the communists have been in charge, people are suffering very greatly, the money is virtually worthless, and millions are fleeing to other countries as refugees. This is just one example of many of what happens under communism.

What is a Biblical form of Government

“If communism and socialism are so bad, what is a good form of government?” you may ask. There is no perfect government, as long as government is in the hands of sinful men, as stated by James Madison above. Even the best form of government can be corrupted by the wicked purposes in the hearts of men and women in power. Also, the more wicked people in any society become, the more just governments will disintegrate and freedoms will be lost.

However, here are some principles of good government.

- 1.** Government should be limited. Government is set up before God largely for the protection and common defense of the citizens. The more a government intrudes, the more it usurps what belongs to God alone, and interferes with individuals’ freedom of conscience.
- 2.** Government has a duty to recognize that men must be free before God, and that God is the Author of Liberty — not government. In the United States, one of our symbols is the Liberty Bell. The whole way around the top of the bell is forged into the metal the words from Leviticus 25:10: “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof.”

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3. A man must be free to be responsible directly to God, and depend on God for his wellbeing. Paul tells us: “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). He further writes in 2 Corinthians 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” And, the writer of Hebrews states: “Let your conversation [way of living] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5).
4. A man must be free to set his own destiny before God, and to use the talents God has given him. Even Joseph, the father of Jesus, pursued his chosen profession of carpentry. It is not up to the government to tell a man that he has to be a farmer, a tax collector, a baker, or whatever. God has given each of us unique talents, and we use those talents to the glory of God, as the Lord leads. In Exodus 31:3-5, God told the Israelites: “And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.” Romans 12:6-8 speaks largely of spiritual gifts, but it can be applied to all of our gifts and talents, which are given to us by God alone: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering;

or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”

5. Government must be righteous and just. 2 Samuel 23:3 says: “The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.”
6. A man must be free to enjoy the fruit of his own labor. Ecclesiastes 5:18-19 states: “It is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion. Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God.”
7. The Bible teaches industry, thrift and excellence. Proverbs 21:25 says: “The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour”; and Proverbs 6:6-11 states: “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.” Paul confirms this in the New Testament. Romans 12:10-11 says: “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord”
8. Responsible capitalism is the best system to be employed under Biblical principles. A man is free to create products and services, and to fulfill 1 Corinthians 10:31: “Wheth-

er therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” However, capitalism can be used to evil purposes when greed and selfishness are used to harm those who are working hard. The Bible teaches that “the labourer is worthy of his hire” (Luke 10:7).

9. The Biblical teaching is that those who prosper should provide for their families, but also VOLUNTARILY give to those in need, as they are able. Ephesians 4:28 says: “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.”
10. A just government does not require hard working citizens to pay for those who will not work. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, Paul writes: “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.” James 1:27 states: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” And the Galatians are instructed: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). The Bible is full of many other commands for us to help the poor and afflicted. Christ’s account of the Good Samaritan is an excellent example.

Conclusion

Pope Francis, the World Council of Churches, and other major religious organizations have forsaken the Scrip-



The fall meeting of Faith Presbytery, Bible Presbyterian Church, was held on September 24, 2021, at the Bible Presbyterian Church of Charlotte, NC. The Moderator, Dr. H. Ronald Vandermeij delivered a sermon based on Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5: "Redeeming the Time."



tures in favor of a utopian dream of everyone living in a communist or socialist society with everyone supposedly having plenty. However, quite to the contrary, communism produces poverty, slavery, death and misery. The International Council of Christian Churches, in keeping with God's Word, promotes freedom over communism.

For the Christian, we should look after our family members when they are unable to work or provide for themselves. We should look after the needs of others, particularly those who are "of the household of faith." We must seek to live frugally so we do have funds to give to others in need. God has strong words condemning

those who do not help the orphans and widows in our midst. We should do all we can as citizens to promote government which operates in a righteous manner, affording great opportunities to all citizens to pursue their God-given callings, to work hard, to enjoy the fruit of their labor, and to be able to provide for their families. •

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some of those who stoned the godly Christian Stephen to death!

Paul's desire to do this had him going the extra mile to go even to out-of-the-way towns. He wanted to tear out the message of Jesus by the roots, and kill it for good.

On one of his trips to persecute Christians, to the city of Damascus, he suddenly saw a bright light from heaven. Christ confronted Paul. He not only charged him with persecuting Christians, but He asked him, "Why persecutest thou me?" Paul's attacks were really against the Lord Jesus Christ!

Paul was gloriously saved and immediately had a newfound submission to Jesus Christ. Paul asked Christ, in verse 6: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And that is the question each of us should ask. Not, "Lord, this is what I want you to do for me." No, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

When Paul left to continue into the city of Damascus, he was blind, and needed help to get to the place where he was staying. Meanwhile the Lord spoke to a godly man, Ananias, and instructed him to go talk with Paul.

Ananias questioned God about this request. He said in effect, "You mean that you want me to go talk to the man who is hunting down Christians to persecute them? Surely this must be some mistake!" But God assured him it was no mistake. In Acts 9:15, God told him: "Go thy way [it is no mistake; I want you to go talk with Paul]: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." And here, once again, God gives His Great Commission to go preach the Gospel to every creature. This time He is directing it specifically to Paul.

And we read that the Spirit of God came upon Paul. Before Ananias left, Paul was able to see again, and he immediately rose up and was baptized.

After receiving some food, to restore his strength, Acts 9:20 tells us:

"And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." Paul did not wait. He immediately began to fulfill the Great Commission and preach the Gospel of Christ right there in Damascus.

It is interesting that God told Ananias that Paul would preach to the Jews, the Gentiles, and to kings. In Acts 26, we see Paul appearing before a king — King Agrippa. Agrippa was the Roman king over Judea at the time of the Apostle Paul. Now that Paul was a born again Christian, the Jews wanted to persecute him, even to the point of death, and they brought the matter to the Roman rulers in the region.

**Paul was totally changed!
What he was passionate about
before, he totally hated now!
Now that "all things [had]
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the Gospel of Christ.**

King Agrippa asked Paul to speak for himself against these charges. Paul could have said he would no longer preach the Gospel, that he just wanted to save himself from prison or death. He could have said that he just wanted to live quietly in freedom and not make anyone angry at him. "I'm sorry if I got a bit out of line."

But, instead, guess what Paul did? He gave his personal testimony to the king of the whole region. He told how he had been a fine Pharisee, that he himself had persecuted Christians everywhere in the region under the orders of the chief priest.

He then told how all of that changed, how he had been saved from his sin on the road to Damascus. He told the king everything that Christ had said and done for him. And, now the whole purpose of his life was totally different.

There is no finer example of what God does in a person's heart and soul than the words Paul himself wrote to

the church at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Paul was totally changed! What he was passionate about before, he totally hated now! Now that "all things [had] become new," his heart was set with real zeal on proclaiming the Gospel of Christ.

When you are appearing before a judge concerning something you are being accused of, most people try to downplay what they have done, to dress it up in the best light so it doesn't sound so bad.

But not the Apostle Paul. No indeed! In Acts 26:20, Paul tells Agrippa that he preached the Gospel of Christ "first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." Paul was very well giving the king more evidence than he even knew about!

Paul was not going to try to hide in any way what God had done in his heart and what God had commanded him to do. Paul told Agrippa that God had called him to fulfill the Great Commission, and he was going to do it. In Acts 26:16 he kindly told King Agrippa about the heavenly vision, and what Christ had told him: "But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I [Christ] have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee."

In verse 18, he clearly defines what the message is that Christ commissioned him to give: "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." This is a wonderful definition of Christ's Great Commission!

In verse 17, Paul tells Agrippa that he was not afraid of what might hap-

pen to him. He told him of Christ's promise that He would "[Deliver] thee [Paul] from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee." Not only did he say that Christ would protect him, but he stated that he had been sent to preach to the Gentiles. In other words, he had no intention to cease what he was doing.

We should note that Paul would have stood for Christ, no matter what. However, in Acts 25, we see that he did appeal to Caesar to protect his rights as a Roman citizen. It is the place of the government to protect our rights. However, if they don't, we must still be faithful to Christ at all costs. In the United States, our Constitution guarantees each of us freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom to assemble together, and freedom to print or publish our views on the internet.

And, we should stand for our rights, and urge the government to protect us against those who would take these rights away. Yet, we are seeing some dark days. The days may come when we might be locked up for our faith. But, like Paul, we must stand for the Gospel of Christ.

Returning to our passage, Paul declared in verse 19: "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." In other words, "I am guilty as charged."

As if to really emphasize what he did, he states again in verses 22 and 23 his trust in God's protection, that he was preaching the Gospel to everyone, and then stating again what that Gospel was: "Having therefore obtained help of God [his source of protection and strength], I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great [whether kings like Agrippa, or the lowliest of men], saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles." He presents the Gospel again.



Above: Pastor and Mrs. Richard Smith (second and third from left) and Pastor and Mrs. Jonathan Smith (present pastor; fourth and fifth from left) have ministered for many years at the Tipton, Iowa, Bible Church. **Below:** With some of the students at the Tipton Christian Academy on Tropical Day!



Another Roman ruler, Festus, was listening to all that Paul was saying. Finally, he had had enough. In Acts 26:24, we read that "Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." In other words, "I think you are crazy."

Paul was respectful, but he did not shrink away from the disapproval of Festus. Instead, Paul declared: "I am not mad, most noble Festus; but

speak forth the words of truth and soberness."

Paul then appealed to King Agrippa, not thinking primarily of his own freedom, but instead for the salvation of the king. Starting in verse 26, Paul says: "For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him;

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for this thing was not done in a corner." Paul did not try to hide his teaching, or sugar coat it. No, he had been forthright and honest, and clearly presented what Christ had done for him and what He could do for King Agrippa and for Festus.

Paul continued: "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Here was Paul called before the King to defend himself from serious charges. And, before it was all over, Paul had instead witnessed to him of the blessed Good News of Jesus Christ!

Paul did not just end the conversation there. Using Agrippa's own words, he said: "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost [persuaded], and altogether [persuaded] such as I am, except these bonds." He didn't wish for others to be tied up like he was presently experiencing.

And so we see that even in the very worst of circumstances, the Lord can use us to turn the conversation to the Gospel of Christ. I would urge you young people not to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. Tell it to your friends and loved ones. Let the fruit of the Gospel be seen in how you live, and be a witness for Jesus Christ!

I have no way of knowing what the Lord has in store for any of you as you grow up, get a job and raise a family. In whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. It may be that some of you will be called to be pas-

tors or missionaries, or Sunday school or Christian school teachers. The need is so great! When I travel to other countries, there are many of God's people that need to be edified from the Scriptures, that need to be taught the Bible so they in turn can be Christian leaders, who need compassion, who need encouragement, who have physical needs. And there are untold millions that still have never heard that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, so they can spend eternity with Him in heaven.

Will you be the one who will give your life to go? Will you live your life as a Christian, in obedience to God's Word, so that you will be fit to be used

by our Master in fulfilling the Great Commission? If any of you think that serving the Lord full time may be His calling on your life, I urge you to meditate on and study the Word of God, keep close to the Saviour, and follow Him wherever He may lead you. I know that your pastor or I would love to talk with any of you concerning this. •



The Rev. Brad Gsell is a minister of the Bible Presbyterian Church of Charlotte, NC, and President of the International Council of Christian Churches and of The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions.



The American Council of Christian Churches held its Annual Convention from October 19-21, 2021, at the Hardingville Bible Church, Monroeville, NJ. The theme was "Jesus Christ, the Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever." The present slate of officers was reelected to serve in 2022: Rev. David Mook, President; Rev. Bradley Reider, Vice President; Rev. Jonathan Smith, Secretary; Rev. Kevin Hobi, Treasurer. Thanks is due to the Rev. Dan Greenfield, Executive Secretary, and the host church, for their excellent preparation for the Convention. Pictured left: Rev. John Mark Turner, pastor of the host church; Below: the Convention men's chorus, directed by Pastor Andy Merkle, also of the host church.

