



et this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of **JESUS** every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

~ PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

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"[The Bereans] . . . searched the scriptures daily, [to see] whether those things were so." —Acts 17:11

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The Secret of Biblical Self-Improvement

Part Two

T. A. McMahon

As we noted in part one of this series, everyone wants to improve himself or herself, whether it's one's situation, condition, image or whatever else people feel would make them happier. The world has conjured up a host of approaches in attempting to accomplish that goal, but its successes are rare and, at best, short-lived.

The biblical approach, on the other hand, has, as its objective, temporal improvement *and* eternal outcomes. In His Scriptures, God has given mankind instructions that will vastly improve one's condition on earth as well as prepare us for eternal rewards to come. As our Creator, God alone knows every aspect of every human being, from the most minute part of our physical bodies to every thought our mind thinks. In other words, there is nothing that God doesn't know about us. Therefore, as we deal with situations and circumstances that come our way, we can't do better than to turn to the One who knows us best.

According to the Manufacturer's Handbook (the Bible) the first humans, Adam and Eve, were created in perfection but then disobeyed God, which resulted in the corruption of their natures and subsequently the natures of their offspring (Romans 5:12). Their sin affected their relationship with God, separating them and all mankind from Him spiritually and physically for all eternity (Romans 3:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Yet God in His mercy sent Jesus to pay the infinite penalty required for mankind to be reconciled to Him. Our Lord's sacrifice satisfied God's perfect justice and made the way for all who by faith accept Christ's payment on their behalf to receive the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23).

Those who put their trust in Christ are born again spiritually. Their nature has been changed from one that is in bondage to sin and under God's condemnation to one that belongs to God and is no longer controlled by sin. A born-again Christian still retains his old nature and can therefore choose to sin, but his new nature enables him to refrain from sinning. Although his sins—past, present, and future—have been completely paid for by our Savior Jesus Christ,

thus securing his eternal destiny, whatever sins he may commit nevertheless still have temporal consequences. They adversely affect his relationship with the Lord, the answers to his prayers, and his relationships with others. He will reap what he has sown, experience the ill effects of immoral activities, will have to pay penalties for breaking civil laws, and so forth.

Those consequences can be avoided by simply obeying the instructions that God's Word presents. That's the "secret" to biblical self-improvement, which, as I mentioned in the first part of this series, is only a secret in the sense that too few Christians know their Bibles well enough to be aware of the instructions of the Scriptures. Even if a believer is willing to obey God, he can't do what God wants if he doesn't know His instructions.

That brings us to the first imperative of biblical self-improvement: we have to know what God says, and that can come about only by diligently reading His Word. A habit of reading the Scriptures daily is not only the best habit a believer can have—it is critical to his having a fruitful life in Christ and maturing in his relationship with the Lord.

Self-improvement, biblically, as we have noted, is diametrically opposed to the world's way of going about improving "self," as well as being contrary to the world's understanding regarding "self." The world sees "self" as inherently good; it is to be highly esteemed and held foremost in one's endeavors; it is to be loved above all, and even deified, according to some religions and psychotherapies. The Bible, in contrast, deems "self" as mankind's major problem, as inherently evil, as continually biased toward the person himself. Even among believers, it is their greatest hindrance to a life of following Jesus, which is what Christianity is all about. In Matthew 16:24, Jesus declared to His disciples: "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*" Nothing and no one must come before our Lord. Moreover, believers are to consider others before themselves. That's what the Bible teaches, and when we do what it teaches, the effect is that our temporal lives, whether as individuals, families, or churches, are transformed because we are drawing closer to the Lord.

Biblical Christianity is all about selflessness. It is about being "other-directed,"

putting others first. Jesus exemplified that and taught it: "*...But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister [servant]; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant [slave]: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto [served], but to minister [serve], and to give his life a ransom for many.*" "*And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.*"

(Matthew 20:26-28; Mark 9:35).

Our Savior's sacrifice for us on the Cross was the supreme act of selfless love, as Charles Wesley noted in his hymn: "Amazing love! How can it be, that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?" Jesus not only paid an immeasurable ransom for our salvation; He gave us a commandment that reflected His sacrificial love in our relationship with others: "*This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*" (John 15:12-13).

Too often we think of astounding acts, such as a sacrificial death on someone else's behalf, and miss the everyday opportunities that we have to manifest selflessness. Jesus gave us such an example when He washed the feet of His disciples: "*So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them*" (John 13:12-17).

Foot washing is certainly a wonderful act of humility, but the Lord's example is much more than that. Jesus is telling us that serving one another needs to be *the rule* in the realm of everyday life. Foot washing was a very common activity when the chief mode of traveling to and from was walking on dirt paths in sandals.

Consider verse 17: "*If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*" This is the "secret" to biblical self-improvement, which has been displaced in our Laodicean, humanistic, psychologized, self-serving

end-time church. The church is not “happy” because it isn’t practicing what Jesus, our Lord of lords and King of kings, demonstrated and taught. The consequences are that there is little difference statistically between the ills of the world and the problems that beset Christendom, i.e., both professing Christians and true believers.

Take, for example, divorce among believers. If there is a case in which one’s *self-interest* on the part of one or both is not the root problem, I haven’t seen it in my experiences over the years in ministering to couples considering divorce. What about relationships that are mostly in turmoil among family members—husband and wife, parents and children, between siblings themselves? Pick an issue and consider whether or not *self* has raised its ugly head in causing dissension. That is the battlefield we are all in. The Apostle Paul in his letters (inspired by the Holy Spirit) describes the battle regarding “self” and the condition of the combatants. The troubles among the Philippian were caused by their doing things through selfish ambition and conceit. Paul’s corrective instructions zeroed in on the “self issue”: “...but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other[s] better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” Paul underscores the fleshly “me-first” bent that we all struggle with from time to time: “For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s” (Philippians 2:3-4; 21).

Again, being a bondservant of the Lord, putting Him first, serving others and putting them before ourselves, are the marching orders for those who have received the “unspeakable gift” of eternal life. Scriptures abound with teachings regarding selflessness: “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Romans 12:10). “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities [scruples/conscience] of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me” (Romans 15:1-3). “For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more” (1 Corinthians 9:19). “Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth [well-being]” (1 Corinthians 10:24). “Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Corinthians 10:33).

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, who were racked with selfish leanings, he wrote a profound chapter on love, in which he stated that true love “seeketh not her own” (1 Corinthians 13:5). In other words, biblical love is concerned first and foremost with others. The Corinthians of Paul’s day were not the only believers with a “self” problem; it was a characteristic of many believers in all of the churches, with notable exceptions such as the church of Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13) and others of similar mindsets down through history. Yet Paul prophesied of a “*perilous*” time prior to Christ’s return when a chief characteristic on earth would be that “*men shall be lovers of their own selves*” (2 Timothy 3:1-2). That prophecy, as noted in Part One of this series, not only has been manifested in an unprecedented way in the last hundred years in the world, but incredibly, it has become a false doctrine in the church and is taught by many popular evangelical preachers and Christian psychologists. This is a shocking development in the face of so many Scripture verses that clearly teach the opposite. Yet in light of another prophecy by Paul, we can see how it was possible for such false teachings (self-esteem, self-love, self-image, self-worth, and on to self-ad nauseam) to enter the church: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3).

Prophecy, however, is not deterministic. God’s foreknowledge of events that will take place doesn’t predestine individuals to fulfill the prophecies regarding these events. His knowing that the “me generations” will manifest themselves in our day does not relieve those generations of being held accountable for their self-serving choices. Although the acts and consequences of selfishness are seemingly everywhere, that doesn’t mean that believers have to conform to them or be controlled by them. The solution to preventing our lives from reflecting the destructive “self” litanies of our day are hardly complex. In fact, many of those problems of living can be averted by implementing two words: Stop it!

Temptation comes along, whatever it may be, and we can either buy into it...or not. We can *stop it* before it becomes sin. The “stop it” solution can certainly be overstated, but too often we bypass the truth that correcting a sin or a potential sin is always a matter of our wills. Scripture, for example, tells us to flee youthful lusts. That’s what Joseph did when Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him. We don’t find him standing around hoping and praying that the Lord would take his lust away as she grabbed

him by his garment. No. He split, leaving his garment behind. James tells us to resist the devil. Peter writes that we are to “resist steadfast in the faith.” Obviously, we are to make choices. We either choose to serve ourselves and sin or serve God by acting in righteousness. In our willingness to please God rather than self, we have God’s grace, we have the true wisdom from the Word of God, and we have the help of the Holy Spirit, the prayers, encouragement, and support of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Here’s a very short “self” checklist for our consideration and correction: 1) Am I making decisions based on what pleases me rather than what pleases the Lord? That’s a *self-love* issue: Do I love me more than Jesus? Think about our situations regarding the opportunity to sin. Guess what I’m going to decide if I love me and want to please me rather than loving Jesus and pleasing Him! 2) In a marriage situation, are we giving preference to ourselves rather than to our spouses, and in the process not treating each other with loving kindness, affection, and respect? 3) What about the way we talk to one another? Does our communication with others reflect a sharp tongue, sarcasm, and put-downs rather than loving and esteeming them? Regarding 1 through 3, two words need to be implemented to correct the problem: Stop it! 4) As parents, are we teaching our children to obey the Scriptures in the way that they treat their siblings and friends? 5) Are we examples to our children regarding the Bible’s instructions, and do we consistently and biblically correct them when they act selfishly toward others?

Although this list is just the tip of the iceberg regarding the application of God’s Word for living our lives as biblical Christians, I guarantee that even those few things, when obeyed according to the Scriptures, will have a transformational impact in our personal lives, our family relationships, our relationships outside our families, our witness to unbelievers, and, most important, our growth in our relationship with Jesus. Why am I so confident? Simply because we are doing what God tells us to do, and in doing so, we will be enabled and supported by an abundance of His grace through the Holy Spirit.

So the “secret” of biblical self-improvement has been exposed in the light of the Scriptures. Let it no longer be so removed from our lives that it seems a mystery to us. Rather, by God’s grace and enablement, let the application of biblical service and selflessness help to demonstrate to the world the truth of the Bible and the reality of a Christianity that obeys what our true and living God has communicated to us.

TBC

Quotable

Life has no ultimate meaning unless it continues not temporarily but eternally, beyond both the grave and the passing existence of this physical universe. Consequently, life is only lived wisely to the extent that it is spent in preparation for the eternity which follows.

—Dave Hunt,
Whatever Happened to Heaven?

Q&A

QUESTION: I've heard several speakers say that Jesus was afraid that Satan would kill Him prematurely in the Garden of Gethsemane before He could get to the cross. And that's why He cried out, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," the "cup" being a premature death in the Garden. Is that true?

RESPONSE: Hardly. Dying on the Cross as the sacrifice for sin was the culmination of Christ's purpose in being born into this world. The prophets had foretold it, and Christ himself had confirmed it (Mt 16:21; Jn 12:32-33). Nothing and no one could have killed Him or otherwise prevented the fulfillment of His mission.

Jesus is God. Neither man nor Satan could take His life. He declared, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (Jn 10:17-18).

Christ is also perfect, sinless man—the one and only God-man. As man, He would not for a moment have been in fear of Satan's slaying Him, for He was walking in perfect obedience to and under the complete care of His Father. To suggest such a fear indicts Christ with the rankest unbelief.

Remember, also, that after asking if the cup might pass from Him, Christ said, "nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Lk 22:42). If the "cup" he wanted to escape was death in the Garden, then by saying, "nevertheless...thy will be done," Christ was suggesting that it might be the Father's will for Him to die in the Garden at the hands of Satan rather than to pay for our sins upon the Cross, which is unthinkable.

Nor was the "cup" the physical pain of being crucified. Many had bravely endured crucifixion and Jesus was no coward. The "cup" from which He shrank was the awful separation from God that His justice required as the penalty for sin: that His holy soul would be made "an offering for sin" (Is 53:10)—He would literally be "made [to be] sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21). His prayer, therefore, was an earnest request from Son to Father:

"Might there not be some other possible means of saving sinners?" The Father's answer was "No." We know, therefore, that Christ's death upon the Cross as our sin-bearer was and is the only way of salvation. Horrible beyond comprehension, what He endured we will never know. He fully paid that penalty for us.

QUESTION: Is it not true that the teaching in the gospels is for Israel and the Millennium and that the teaching for the church is found in the Epistles?

RESPONSE: Was it not in the Gospels that Jesus said He would build His church? He trained and commissioned His disciples to do just that during His earthly ministry related in the Gospels.

In Matthew 28 Christ tells the Twelve to make disciples. Shouldn't we? In Mark 16 they are told to "preach the gospel." Don't we preach the gospel? Is it different? No! Where does our authority to preach the gospel and to make disciples come from if not from Christ's command to the Twelve? They were to teach the disciples they made to observe all that Christ had commanded them, which would include making disciples . . . down to us today.

If Paul was the one who brought teaching to the church and the Gospels are only for Israel, how do we deal with the fact that the church was formed before Paul came along? That wasn't Israel being formed or restored on the Day of Pentecost! Peter and the other disciples preached the gospel before Paul was converted. It was clearly the same gospel by which Paul was converted and that he later preached.

How can one say that Paul's epistles are for the church but that Acts was a "transitional" period between Israel and the church, when Paul wrote his epistles during the period of the Book of Acts? So, we cannot ignore the Gospels and teachings of our Lord as though they apply to some past and future age but not to the church or to Christians right now.

QUESTION: I've been told that you are not cessationists. If that's the case, how do you explain the fact that nowhere in the church today do we see anything close to the signs and wonders that took place during the time of the Apostles?

RESPONSE: We simply try to be biblical Christians, thereby avoiding cessationist, non-cessationist, continuationist, or any of the other labels and definitions imposed by man on certain beliefs. We believe that the gifts of the Spirit are given for the edification of the church and will continue through the church age. If the gifts had ended after the death of the last apostle, then all of Paul's

instructions regarding the gifts and the work of the Holy Spirit would have been seriously short-lived. That makes no sense.

Why don't we see miracles like there were in the days of the apostles? A couple of reasons should be evident: 1) Those who take a cessationist perspective (that the gifts have ceased) would hardly storm the throne of God seeking His miraculous intervention. That would include a large portion of those within conservative evangelical churches. 2) Sadly, many of those who do seek after signs and wonders don't demonstrate the prerequisite holiness for God to work through them. Certainly God, for His own glory, can and does sovereignly override such limitations.

Miracles that were manifested through the apostles confirmed that what the apostles taught was indeed the word of God. Yet that was not the only reason why God worked through them; they were not only "talking the talk, they were walking the walk." In other words, as God's vessels, they reflected His truth through holiness.

When one considers the landscape of the church today, whether Pentecostal, Charismatic, or conservative evangelical, God's holiness is sorely lacking.

If you're going to have the power of God operating in this way, then you can't have people who claim to be miracle workers who are committing adultery and involved in homosexuality and lying and cheating and so forth. How are we going to have a church that is demonstrating God's miracles to the world when they're not living pure lives? That would be a horrible testimony of God. He could hardly put His stamp of approval on such a church.

So basically, as far as seeing this in the church as a whole, you're not going to see it. It might happen in some special cases. We've all seen Him do some amazing things, but as a general rule, we're going to have to live holier, purer lives if we're going to see what they had in the first century. They lost it because of sin entering in, just as with Israel.

And yet we still hear of God moving in miraculous ways today. We hear of genuine healings and provision for needs (in ways that only God could have orchestrated). We hear of God's deliverance of individuals from certain death and His placing people in the right place at the right time to accomplish His will. It's usually done quietly and behind the scenes. God is always God. He doesn't change. And His Spirit is still working. Unfortunately, much of what is done in His name and promoted as "miraculous" is not His work at all. So, yes, we believe that the Holy Spirit is still active in believers' lives today, but much of what is splashed around out there as "miracles" is coming from another spirit.

TBC NewsWatch

CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER MUST NOT USE "ALLAH"

THEGUARDIAN.COM, 10/14/13, "CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER MUST NOT USE 'ALLAH', MALAYSIAN COURT RULES" [EXCERPTS]: A Christian newspaper in Malaysia may not use the word "Allah" to refer to God, a court has ruled, in a landmark decision on a matter that has fanned religious tension and raised questions over minority rights.

Monday's unanimous decision by three Muslim judges in Malaysia's appeals court overturned a 2009 ruling by a lower court that allowed the Malay language version of the newspaper the *Herald* to use the word Allah – as many Christians in Malaysia say has been the case for centuries.

"The usage of the word Allah is not an integral part of the faith in Christianity," chief judge Mohamed Apandi Ali said in the ruling. "The usage of the word will cause confusion in the community."

The government argued...that the word Allah is specific to Muslims and that the then-home minister's decision in 2008 to deny the newspaper permission to print it was justified on the basis of public order.

"As a Muslim, defending the usage of the term Allah qualifies as jihad. It is my duty to defend it," said Jefrizal Ahmad Jaafar, 39.

Christians in Indonesia and much of the Arab world use the word without opposition from Islamic authorities. Churches in the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak have said they will continue to use the word regardless of the ruling.

In recent months, prime minister Najib Razak has sought to consolidate his support among majority ethnic Malays, who are Muslim by law...His new government—dominated by his Malay-based United Malays National Organisation—has introduced steps to reinvigorate a decades-old affirmative action policy for ethnic Malays, reversing liberal reforms.

(<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/14/allah-reserved-muslims-malaysia-court>)

WOMAN ARRESTED FOR DRIVING

THEBLAZE.COM, 11/4/13, "Saudi Police Arrest Woman for Driving Her Sick Father to the Hospital" [EXCERPTS]: A Kuwaiti woman was arrested for driving her sick father to the hospital in an area

just over the border in Saudi Arabia, a country in which women are prohibited from operating motor vehicles.

The woman told police that her father, who was sitting in the passenger seat, suffers from diabetes, could not drive and was in need of urgent treatment, the *Kuwait Times* reported, citing a police report.

The woman remains in custody as police continue their investigation.

More than a dozen women were detained [the week of October 27] in Saudi Arabia after getting behind the wheel in order to lodge a protest against the female driving ban. The *Kuwait Times* report did not suggest that the unnamed Kuwaiti woman was involved in that effort when she was operating the car.

"Kuwaiti women are free to drive in their country and enjoy far more rights than those in Saudi Arabia, who are not allowed to travel abroad, open a bank account or work without permission from a male relative," Reuters reported.

Besides the reported 60 women who took part in the driving protest last week, the *Kuwait Times* said "a growing number of men are quietly helping steer the campaign, risking their jobs and social condemnation in the conservative kingdom."

(<http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2013/11/04/saudi-police-arrest-woman-for-driving-her-sick-father-to-the-hospital>)

IN A MOOD? CALL CENTER AGENTS CAN TELL

NEWYORKTIMES.COM, 10/12/13, "IN A MOOD? CALL CENTER AGENTS CAN TELL" [EXCERPTS]: In a YouTube clip from one of Steve Jobs's last interviews, he appears to be enjoying reminiscing about how he first hit upon the idea for the keyboardless tablet that eventually became the iPad. "I had this idea of being able to get rid of the keyboard, type on a multitouch glass display and I asked our folks, could we come up with a multitouch display that I could type on, I could rest my hands on and actually type on," Mr. Jobs says, smiling slightly as he recounts his enthusiasm at seeing the first prototype.

But in a billboard superimposed over the nearly two-minute video clip, an emotion analytics company called Beyond Verbal has added its own algorithmic evaluation of Mr. Jobs's underlying feelings. It is an emotion detection system meant to parse not the meanings of people's words but the intonations of their voices.

"Conflict between urges and self-control. Loneliness, fatigue, emotional frustration," the ticker above Mr. Jobs's head

reports as he speaks. Moments later, it suggests a further diagnosis: "Insistence, stubbornness. Possibly childish egoism." And then concludes: "sadness mixed with happiness. Possibly nostalgia."

Humans generally have inklings when their interlocutors, out of solicitousness or sarcasm, utter phrases aloud that contradict their inner feelings: *Thanks a bunch. You've been very helpful. Wish I were there. Let's have lunch.*

But now, new techniques in computational voice analysis are promising to help machines identify when smiley-sounding phrases like Mr. Jobs's belie frustration and grief within. Although the software is still in its early phases, developers like Beyond Verbal, a start-up in Tel Aviv, are offering the nascent technology as a deeper approach for call centers and other customer services that seek to read and respond to consumers' emotions in real time. The company says its software can detect 400 variations of different moods.

The more invasive audio mining also has the potential to unnerve some consumers, who might squirm at the idea of an unknown operator getting an instant entree into their psyche.

(<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/13/business/in-a-mood-call-center-agents-can-tell.html>)

IRAN'S CRACKDOWN ON CHRISTIANS CONTINUES

CHARISMANEWS.COM, 11/4/13, "IRAN'S CRACKDOWN ON CHRISTIANS HASN'T LET UP" [EXCERPTS]: When Christians marked the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church in November, Iranian pastor Behnam Irani will mark nearly 900 days in prison for his Christian faith.

Irani, 43, has served more than two years of his sentence, and has suffered deteriorating health. The Christian group Present Truth Ministries reports the husband and father of two children has endured beatings from Iranian guards and suffers from an inflammatory bowel disease that has crippled him at times. Prison officials haven't offered sufficient medical treatment.

Other Christians serve lengthy sentences with little international attention. Iranian pastor Farshid Fathi has spent nearly three years in prison for his Christian activity. A judge sentenced Fathi, 34, to six years in Evin prison.

(<http://www.religiontoday.com/blog/iran-s-crackdown-on-christians-hasn-t-let-up.html>)

T. A.'s Speaking Schedule

- Jan 23-25** **Biblical Counseling, Psychology & the Church Conference**
Boise, ID
(208) 703-8688
- Apr 11-12** **Discerning the Times Conference**
Saskatoon, SK
(306) 371-1570
www.discerning-the-times.org

STS 24/7 Broadcast Schedule

- Dec 6 & 13** **Warren Smith**
"Another Jesus" Calling
- Dec 20 & 27** **TBA**

Listen to Search the Scriptures 24/7 at:
www.thebereancall.org/radio
(Schedule is subject to change.)

Letters

Dear Berean Call Staff,

Thanks for the April 2013 *Berean Call* newsletter. The article, "Catholicism—Christian? Or Cultic?" as well as the Quick Reference Guide, "Catholicism vs. The Bible" helped solidify our personal beliefs and gave us concrete material to share with others....

As "born again" believers saved out of cultism (specifically, Mormonism), it is sad to see how much compromise is occurring between Christians and those that "have another gospel."

Thank you for your faithfulness in providing sound materials, especially the quick reference guides. It is our fervent prayer that we will have both the courage and opportunity to use them wisely as God leads. R&LA (AZ)

Dear Tom,

Thank you so much for being obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ. I have been excited about the weekly STS 24/7 broadcasts. They are so informative and interesting. I don't happen to meet folks of the level that are being interviewed and I am so glad that you are! TF (email)

Dear Tom and Staff of TBC,

We are writing to convey our gratitude for the life, writings, research, and clear direction that has been given to us by Dave Hunt and the ministry....

We are so very grateful to you for continuing in the ministry and giving the much needed warnings and guidance to the church today. Sadly, we find that there seem to be so few "ears to hear," but we are blessed by

a small minority from the up-and-coming generation of leaders that have not forsaken the fountains of living water. Your work is so vital and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

We have many friends and family members who are caught up in various forms of false teachings and you have given us the clarity to dialogue with them, as well as materials to offer them.

We will miss Dave, and our prayers go out to all of you who personally feel the loss of such a great friend. However, we rejoice with you that he is "in His presence." L&MW (MO)

Dear Bereans,

At a recent reading of the Scriptures, I was appalled by the exclusion of critical words in the text that are integral to our understanding of doctrine: words still found in older translations. Meanings were altered and foundational truth was only a sugar-coated shell of "feel good" isms. What has become of the Christian's responsibility to rightly discern the Word of God and insist on accurate renditions of God's revelation?

In his August TBC article "One More Translation: One More Step Away From the Truth," Edwin Newby hardly scratched the surface of the watering down of Truth that modern translators are foisting upon us in order to advance their own flawed agendas. They will pay a horrible price for their part in unbiblical deceptions. Berean beware! KK (OR)

Dear Mr. McMahon,

I want to thank you for carrying on so faithfully with the wonderful ministry of The Berean Call. There is no other ministry that I trust more. I am especially encouraged to hear of your burden for today's youth. There are so many times when I'm speaking with the Lord that I weep for the young people, thinking they don't stand a chance in today's antichrist culture. But I am reminded that God's hand is not shortened at all that it cannot redeem, and He still has power to deliver. And He still has a few true servants who love His Word and who uncompromisingly labour on to speak truth and contend for the faith. May God continue to bless and strengthen you, your family, and your co-labourers as you stand so faithfully for Him. AT (Canada)

Dear Friends,

I just want to thank you all for continuing to stand up and be counted with the soldiers of Christ...and for earnestly contending for the faith. You all have been such a rich blessing to me...especially in the environment I live in!

I have been incarcerated for 17 years now....The Lord has called me to the

ministry of preaching and teaching and *The Berean Call* has been a constant help, assisting my "equipping process."

As the years go by more and more aberrant doctrines are popping up everywhere. While I was reading "They Claim to Speak for God, Part 2" (June 2013), I realized that this "new apostles" movement is the main doctrine being taught here....These teachings have hindered the remnant of Bible-believing Christians in soul winning and genuine Bible discipleship. Please pray for us! CP (FL, prisoner)

Dear Berean Call Family,

I am eager for each issue of the informative and helpful newsletter and read it several times. The recent two-part series "The Critical Value of the Bible" is excellent. Thanks for your emphasis on the Word! We live in a troubled world. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" Ps 46:1. May we keep our focus on Him as we await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ for the church. KK (PA)

TBC Notes

FYI and PS

For Your Information and Prayer Support, we are thinking and praying about an online conference possibly in February of next year. We haven't settled on the details yet, but it would likely involve one or more of our speakers from our past conferences. We would stream their messages online (either new ones or those we've videoed in the past) and allow the speaker(s) to answer questions from our viewers following each message.

Our goal is to utilize to the best of our abilities the technology of the day in order to get the content of TBC to as wide an audience as possible. That is particularly important regarding the upcoming generation, which majors on using technology to receive information. And, of course, the "information" that we want to get to them and—get them into—is the Word of God. We covet your prayers to that end. We will keep you posted as to our developments and schedule for this project.

For up-to-the-minute news about our upcoming conference, please subscribe to our email newsletter. Look for the red button at thebereancall.org.

T. A. McMAHON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ATHEISM, ISRAEL, AND THE VIRGIN BIRTH

EXCERPTED FROM *Cosmos, Creator, and Human Destiny* BY DAVE HUNT

WE HAVE TRIED TO BE FAIR in our citing of much scientific evidence refuting atheism, materialism, and evolution. These three fit hand-in-glove with one another and really constitute a rival religion to theism. We have shown that in spite of much effort on the part of their loyal adherents, they still lack convincing scientific evidence and must be taken by faith.

Arguments of a purely scientific nature could continue, but these alone would still leave the two sides far apart and with differences unresolved. There can be no argument, however, with clearly stated biblical prophecies or with the history recording their fulfillment.

Atheists know that they must destroy the Bible, and they have been attempting to do so for many years. Biblical Christianity, with the virgin birth, sinless life, death on a Roman cross, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of Israel and the world, must be proved to be contrived fables. Together, in the final analysis, these attempts to discredit the biblical testimony are a rival religion—they must also be taken by faith.

Richard Dawkins calls the resurrection of Jesus Christ “petty, parochial, trivial, unworthy of the universe.” This statement makes him not only “anti-God” but “anti-Christ.” The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus are foundational to biblical Christianity. As did Carl Sagan, Dawkins (along with his fellow “Four Horsemen” and many other atheists) literally hates God but reveres the cosmos that he denies God created. Instead, atheists insist that it came about through a giant explosion of something called energy (though no one knows its origin or cause), leaving in its wake a chaos of gasses. The gasses that came out of this mysterious explosion somehow gathered themselves together into clumps, which, over an unknown number of billions of years, developed by chance into the cosmos that we are still trying to fathom today. What is energy and why does it exist? In spite of diligent effort and brilliant discoveries, scientists have found no answers to this or the many other “why” questions, to some of which we have already referred.

The Battle for Truth Heats Up

Declaring that theists don’t know the meaning of “theory” when they attempt to demean evolution by calling it “only a theory,” Christopher Hitchens says a theory is successful “if it survives the introduction of hitherto unknown facts. And it becomes an accepted theory if it can make accurate predictions about things or events that have not yet been discovered, or that have not yet occurred.” Evolution fails on both of these counts.

Sam Harris repeatedly betrays his monumental ignorance of the Bible and biblical Christianity while pretending superior knowledge of both. He also displays a perverse refusal to admit the vast differences between the many religions. Apparently, he sees no difference between Islam’s firm declaration that there is only one true god and Hinduism’s embrace of more than 300 million. Addressing Christians, he says, “CONSIDER: every devout Muslim has the same reasons for being a Muslim that you have for being a Christian.” He couldn’t be more wrong. The reasons a Christian has for believing in Jesus Christ and all that the Bible says about Him are as different from a Muslim’s reasons for believing in Allah and Muhammad as day is from night. We just mentioned the resurrection and the fact that no leader of any religion rose from the dead except Jesus Christ. The Qur’an denies the death and resurrection, plus almost everything else foundational to Christianity.

Yet Hitchens and most atheists treat all “religions” as if there were only petty differences among them.

As we have already noted, the God of the Bible is called “the God of Israel” more than 200 times. Not once is He called the God of the Germans or the French or the Spanish or the Arabs or the Muslims, although He gave His Son to die for all mankind. The Bible was inspired through 40 different prophets over a period of 1,600 years. We have their names and sayings and historical documents in support of each. They were from different times in history and widely different cultures. In stark contrast, Muhammad claimed to be the *sole prophet* of Allah, who allegedly inspired him *alone* to write the Qur’an. The claim that Muhammad is the sole prophet is an integral part of Islam, including the confession that every Muslim must make and every convert declare. In contrast, every prophet inspired to write the Bible has 39 other witnesses to what each one of them declares. We have only Muhammad’s word that he alone was inspired by the Prophet Elijah through the angel Gabriel to write the Qur’an. This one fact alone separates Christianity from Islam and from every religion in the world.

Betraying Their Ignorance and Bias

The Christian has archaeological, historical, and scientific proof for the Bible. Where else in the world’s religious literature is such proof offered? The Bible, the God of the Bible, and Jesus Christ as the Messiah are proved irrefutably by *hundreds* of prophecies. Nothing comparable is found anywhere else. Certainly atheism can offer no proof for its religious faith. Yet Harris mistakenly declares that Christians and Muslims have the same reasons for what they separately believe. It simply isn’t true. This is only one example of the disinformation Harris foists upon his unsuspecting following and to bolster his own faith in atheism.

Hitchens and the rest of atheism’s “Four Horsemen” condemn “religion” because many religious people are zealous in their attempts to make converts. With the broad brush he typically wields, Hitchens declares that religion “*must* seek to interfere with the lives of nonbelievers, or heretics, or adherents of other faiths.” Isn’t this the very same reason why atheists write books and spread their “gospel”? As we have shown, Richard Dawkins declares: “The *atheist movement* has no choice but to aggressively spread the good news. *Evangelism* [to convert the world to atheism] is a moral imperative.”

When I was an undergraduate math major at UCLA nearly 60 years ago, I read everything I could find that the atheists, skeptics, and critics had written against God, Jesus, and the Bible. The more I read, the more it strengthened my faith and confidence because the critics’ arguments were devoid of substance. One would think that in all the time that has elapsed since then, their rebuttals of the Bible would have improved. In fact, the same worn-out arguments are still in vogue, such as the denial of the prophecy that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. Here is the most maligned of those prophecies in the Old Testament: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin [*almah*] shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Sam Harris comments:

Unfortunately for the fanciers of Mary’s virginity, the Hebrew word *alma* (for which *parthenos* [Greek for virgin] is an erroneous translation [in the Septuagint]) simply means “young woman,” without

any implication of virginity. It seems all but certain that the Christian dogma of the virgin birth, and much of the church's resulting anxiety about sex, was the result of a mistranslation from the Hebrew. . . . It would appear that Western civilization has endured two millennia of consecrated sexual neurosis simply because Matthew and Luke could not read Hebrew. For the Jews . . . the dogma of the virgin birth has served as a perennial justification for their persecution, because it has been one of the principal pieces of "evidence" demonstrating the divinity of Jesus.

First, let's correct a few of Harris's most obvious errors. There is a vast host of Christians today (and there has been throughout history) who believe in the virgin birth and the divinity of Christ but would never persecute a Jew. In fact, they have a special love for Jews as God's chosen people and as Christ's brethren. The persecution came from the Roman Catholic Church because of its unbiblical teaching that the Church had replaced Israel as the people of God and that the Jews deserved to be hated because they had crucified Christ. Nor is the Christian belief in the virgin birth "one of the principal pieces of 'evidence' demonstrating the divinity of Jesus." Harris simply doesn't understand the Bible, though he may have read it, and that makes his ideas about Christianity not only mistaken but inexcusably ridiculous. Equally ridiculous is the idea that these two disciples, Matthew, a Jew, and Luke (though a Greek, an educated physician), both living in Israel, couldn't read Hebrew. How does Harris know this?

Harris reiterates this argument elsewhere, as do other atheists. The skeptics have directed their attack against the virgin birth by focusing on Isaiah 7:14. Let's examine not only this prophecy but the many others that teach a virgin birth. Yes, *almah* means a young, *unmarried* maiden. Though not true today in Israel, in Isaiah's time an unmarried maiden was sure to be a virgin. Nor would it be a sign from God for a woman who was not a virgin to bear a child. Further, Immanuel means "God is with us." Israel was sinking deeper into apostasy, and God's judgment upon her had been pronounced by many prophets, including Isaiah, from his first chapter onward.

Therefore, this name could not have meant that God was with Israel to bless her but that the child would be God himself, born in Israel. Could any other child be called "God is with us"? And how could such a child enter the world except by a virgin birth? The only other use of this word is found two chapters later, when Israel is called, "thy land, O Immanuel." So God's land, the land of Israel, belonged to this child named Immanuel. But this is only one of numerous prophecies in the Bible, all of which corroborate one another.

The Overlooked, Irrefutable Proof

The Bible is about 28 percent prophecy. Its major subjects are Israel and the Messiah. Biblical prophecy has four primary purposes: 1) To prove irrefutably the existence of the Creator and that He is "the God of Israel"; 2) To identify Israel beyond any doubt as the chosen people to whom that disputed land in the Middle East was given by God for "an everlasting possession," and thus belongs to them today; 3) To prove that the Bible is the Creator's Word to mankind (there are no such prophecies in the Qur'an, Hindu Vedas, Baghavad Gita, Ramayana, sayings of Buddha, or Confucius, et al.), and 4) To identify the Messiah beyond dispute so that Israel would know who He was when He came. The fulfillment, without fail, of so many specific biblical prophecies given centuries and even thousands of years in advance proves all of these points for those willing to face the facts.

Later in Isaiah, the prophet presents a clearer prophecy concerning the "child" previously spoken of: "For unto us a child is born . . . a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David . . . even for ever." This can refer only to the promised Messiah, who (as many other biblical prophecies foretell) will reign on David's throne in endless peace. The declaration is also unmistakable that this babe is God's Son and yet is God himself come to earth as a man. God is His Father, yet He himself is called both God and Father. Certainly, this one is Immanuel—and only a virgin could have the honor to be His mother. The rabbis picked up stones to kill Him when Jesus said, "I and my Father are one," but His claim agreed with the Hebrew prophets.

What about this claim to be the one and only son of God? Jews in particular reject this term, claiming that it is found only in the New Testament's record that when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary, an astonished young virgin, that she would bear a son, she was told that "He . . . shall be called the son of the Highest. . . ."

The prophet Micah declares where this amazing babe, the "son of David" and heir to his throne would be born: in Bethlehem, the city of David. The prophecy that He "shall be ruler in Israel" once again identifies this one as the coming Messiah. At the same time, Micah reiterates the fact that Israel's Messiah could only be God himself because He existed eternally before being born of a virgin into this world:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

These are not the only prophecies declaring that the Messiah would be God, virgin-born into this world. Similar prophecies come from many different biblical prophets who never knew one another and who lived at various times in history and were part of diverse cultures. The critics never present the entire scope of biblical statements concerning the virgin birth of the Messiah. The atheists hammer away at Isaiah 7:14, but that Scripture is only one of many prophecies, which all speak with one voice....

With the threat by the pope of burning him at the stake, Luther bravely declared, "I stand captive to the Word of God. I can do no other." Atheists likewise stand captive to the Word of God—not because they love God or believe His Word but because they passionately hate Him. A way of escape through faith in Christ is offered to atheists, but they refuse to accept it. One day, Christ's warning will haunt them, "The words that I have spoken will condemn you in that day."

We will give many other prophecies that are precise and that have been or are in our day being unmistakably fulfilled. Any honest reader will be forced by his conscience to concede that these prophecies (which are merely a sampling of hundreds in the Bible) could come only from the one true God, speaking His infallible Word to mankind.

See page 2 for a very special holiday offer on Dave Hunt's masterful work, Cosmos, Creator, and Human Destiny: Answering Darwin, Dawkins, and the New Atheists, which Dave intended to minister to skeptics and believers alike with inescapable evidence of God's love for humankind.

NEW YEAR – NEW HABITS!

Begin the new year by deepening your walk with the Lord! To encourage you in your goal to draw nearer to God and “redeem the time” — we’ve compiled a collection of Bible study resources that may be helpful in accomplishing your new year’s resolutions!

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

— COLOSSIANS 3:2

AS WE start a new year we want to present some practical tools for searching the Scriptures more in 2014. Although there is a downside to our digital world, there is also a huge upside for the edification of believers who want to grow in their knowledge of the Word of God. Here are some resources that may assist you:

• READ THROUGH THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

There are a variety of plans and schedules on the Internet to encourage you to read through the Bible in a year. The easiest is to just commit to start in Genesis and read for 15 minutes a day. Most readers will finish in less than twelve months.

Another option is to use a chronological Bible. We don’t sell a chronological Bible, but you can find a free reading schedule online by searching for “chronological Bible schedule.”

You can read through the Scriptures on almost any tablet, phone, or computer using Amazon Kindle. You’ll likely do most of your reading on a tablet or computer, but a useful feature when reading a Kindle book is that you can open it on your phone in spare moments and the book will open to the same place. Go to thebereancall.org/help/kindle for more information.

• LEARN HOW TO USE PODCASTS

Subscribing to a podcast allows you to listen to free audio when you want and where you want on your phone, tablet, iPod, or computer.

There is a huge variety of edifying audio programs available by podcast. Most are updated weekly or more often. The podcast is downloaded to your device automatically and you can listen to it any time you want.

Our weekly radio program *Search the Scriptures 24/7* is available as a podcast. You can find other valuable (and free) resources online like audio Bibles, sermons, and Bible commentaries. Go to thebereancall.org/help/podcasts for more information.

• TRY A NEW DAILY DEVOTIONAL BOOK

One of the hidden gems in our bookstore is *Waiting on God* by Andrew Murray. This little book presents 31 inspirational meditations that will encourage you to slow down and let the things of God’s Word speak to you. You can find other devotional book options featured on pp. 12-13 of this newsletter or online at: thebereancall.org/store/Devotional

• TRY A NEW APP FOR YOUR PHONE OR TABLET

There is an enormous selection of apps that can help us better understand Scripture and memorize verses. We’ve highlighted a few on this page or search online (carefully!) and find one that’s perfect for your needs.



APPS

Recommended applications for your smartphone or other devices.



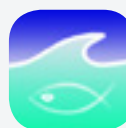
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AUDIO

Podcast information and Search the Scriptures 24/7.



Search the Scriptures 24/7

Search the Scriptures 24/7 with T. A. McMahon, the co-author of *The Seduction of Christianity*, engages guests in discussions that biblically evaluate popular trends and teachings that are influencing millions of Christians today. The objective is to encourage listeners to be like the Bereans of Acts 17:11. They listened to the Apostle Paul and were commended for searching the Scriptures daily to see if what he was preaching was true to God’s Word.

Device: iPhone, iPad, desktop (requires iTunes) • **Cost:** Free

Download: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/search-the-scriptures-daily-at/id370144632#>

*O*H, love the LORD, all you His saints! For the LORD preserves the faithful, and fully repays the proud person. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD.

— PSALM 31:23-24

OVER THE YEARS, numerous people have told me that they appreciate the fact that I am a humble person. I have always taken great pride in that! But seriously, folks, if pride is something God repays, then obviously He attaches great magnitude to this sin.

It is also worth noting that David here contrasts faith and pride as receiving opposite rewards, and therefore they are opposing attributes. Preservation from the Lord for the faithful and repayment from the Lord for the proud tell us that humility is of the Lord and pride is...well...of the devil.

David also reminds us that the life lived by faith requires courage. This courage is necessary to deal with elements in our day that have always been present but never quite as flagrant as they are now. In biblical times, pride was often associated with the rich, but pride today is marketed to the rich and poor alike as an essential aspect of getting ahead. We know this is true simply by walking through a modern bookstore and counting the number of rows and shelves containing books under the theme of self-help.

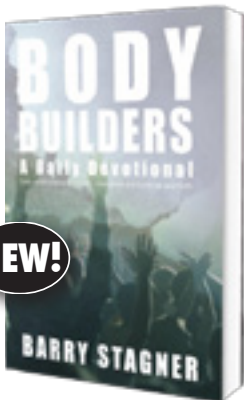
But the Bible tells us, friends, that exaltation is reserved exclusively for the humble (Matt. 23:11). There is no help in self; our help is in the Lord. However, it takes courage to be humble, and it takes courage not to promote self or climb over others on the ladder of success.

The fact is, God hates pride. He says, "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). So there you have pride's reward: destruction and a fall. But conversely, divine preservation, courage, and strength are the reward of the humble.

In this age of self, strength and courage await the *humble*. Give it a try today and see how you stand out. Also, you'll see just how hard it is to do! But don't return insult for insult, and don't try to climb above others by tearing them down. Be humble today, which simply means, "Don't exalt yourself." It takes no strength to be proud. Any weakling can do that!

— Excerpted from *Body Builders: A Daily Devotional* (see page 12 to order) by Barry Stagner, Sr. Pastor at Calvary Chapel Tustin, CA, and featured speaker on the nationally broadcast radio program *The Truth about God*.

NEW! BODY BUILDERS A DAILY DEVOTIONAL



Body Builders

Stagner—This outstanding, contemporary daily devotional by Pastor Barry Stagner is sure to stretch, strengthen, and build up your faith. Stagner's heart as a pastor comes through on each page as he encourages his readers to look to the Lord Jesus and His Word as they walk life's path. A number of our staff members have used this resource and highly recommend it! "My friend gave me a copy of Pastor Barry Stagner's book as a birthday gift and have I ever been blessed! *Body Builders* has become a vital and encouraging part of my morning routine. Pastor Barry has a real gift for explaining how to apply God's Word in one's day-to-day life while exhorting his readers to press forward toward a good finish with their eyes firmly fixed on the Lord Jesus. At TBC we hear from so many folks who are discouraged because they can't seem to find a 'good church.' A devotional book can't be a replacement for good, consistent fellowship, but *Body Builders* could be a valuable and invigorating resource to fortify your walk before God!" — TBC Staffer, Sally O. Xulon Press, 440 pp. Retail \$22.99

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ENDORSEMENT FROM THE BACK JACKET:

Devotionals are a powerful way to both encourage and strengthen a follower of Christ daily. Body Builders delivers that much needed (non-painful) spiritual shot in the arm faithfully! Pastor Barry in his easy and motivating style of delivery has produced what I consider now one of my favorites. Do yourself or a loved one a favor and put this contemporary yet ancient time-tested and biblically based treasure book of truths on your nightstand. You won't be disappointed!

— Victor Marx
Evangelist, National Speaker

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CA03

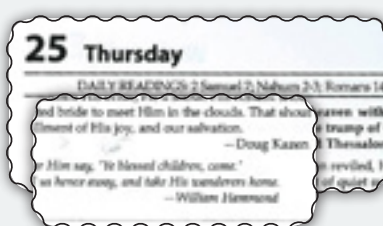
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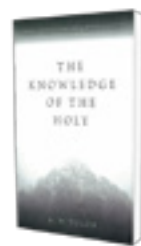


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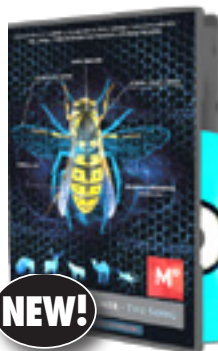
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