

christian

WORKER



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

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LIVING IN TRYING TIMES

Kevin W. Rhodes

People today live in circumstances very different in some ways than previous generations. The constant bombardment of a news cycle that went from the day to day grind of the newspaper and eventually network news to the 24-hour cycle of CNN and then FoxNews to the minute by minute cycle of social media has taken its toll on the modern psyche. We have come to anticipate bad news, and in the process, it has desensitized our soul. The call for realism that now has extended even to fictional characters in television and movies based upon comic strips (consider *that* irony!) has produced the expectation that most of life requires superhuman strength just to handle the problems of the 21st century. However, the truth remains that we invite most of this negativity into our lives unnecessarily instead of proactively building a faith designed not only to survive but also to thrive regardless of the external environment. David lived in times just as trying as anything we face today, though removed from us by three millennia. He knew all too well the soulful challenge of facing outside adversity without allowing it to destroy the spirit within, and his emotional words of Psalm 140 provide a welcome guide for our own spiritual trial.

If we can learn nothing else from David, the value of turning to God in prayer would prove sufficient (Psa. 141:1-2). When overwhelmed by life's problems, prayer remains the best first action you can take. Through prayer we can channel all of our fear, all of our anxiety, and all of our anger into a humble request offered to the LORD of heaven and earth, knowing He will listen to the righteous as surely as welcoming the specific worship He has requested (John 4:24). However, prayer alone does not answer all tests of life, though it does bring them into perspective. We still

must exhibit personal self-control lest we allow our problems to provoke a reaction in us just as wrong as the problem we face (Psa. 141:3-4). Regardless of the constant chatter that characterizes the society today, we must work at controlling our speech so that we do not resort to retorts, retaliation, or response in kind to handle attack but rise above such wickedness rather than finding ourselves comfortable among the world's folly. Moreover, instead of letting the tragedy of the moment rule our hearts, we can benefit greatly by learning from the experience (Psa. 141:5-7). The most negative of experiences can offer numerous learning opportunities. Through them we can learn to listen patiently to constructive criticism, to accept correction

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Editor

Cody Westbrook



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

USING THE UNUSABLE

Cody Westbrook

Modern society gives us the ability to discard things that we see as flawed. If we bring a new item home from the store, say a new grill or a piece of clothing, only to discover that there is a blemish or imperfection of some kind, we simply return it to the store and replace it with one to our liking. Never mind that the item may still be useful, we want it to be perfect! It is one thing to function this way in regard to things but quite another to do so in regard to people. Yet sometimes our yearning for flawlessness in things carries over to our expectations of people, and sometimes it can cause a person to reflect on his past and wonder whether God can use him in His service. Perhaps we read about the great men and women of faith, then we look at our own lives and wonder how we could every be as they were, or how God could ever love or use someone who is so flawed. But it is imperative to remember that the heroes of faith were still humans and, like us, were imperfect. Yet God still loved them and used them in His service. There are four such people listed for us in the first section of Matthews's genealogy (Matt. 1:1-6).

Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation. God promised to bless him with a son and subsequently bless all of humankind through that son (Gen. 12:1-4). Through Abraham's lineage came Christ, and all of those who are Christians are his spiritual descendants (Gal. 3:29). Paul even devoted an entire chapter to his life and presented him as exhibit "A" of what true biblical faith looks like (Rom. 4). However, Abraham was not a perfect man. Immediately after God's instructions to him in Genesis 12, he traveled into Egypt and lied to Pharaoh about Sarah (Gen. 13), and he did the same thing in Genesis 20 to Abimelech. In Genesis 16 he cooperated with his wife in a plan to violate the sanctity of their home by lying with Hagar in order to try and help God's plan to have a son. That

decision would reap negative fruit for generations to come.

Rahab was instrumental in the victory that God's people had over Jericho. She hid the spies on the roof of her house in order to save their lives. In the New Testament she is described as a woman of faith—"By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace" (Heb. 11:31), and an example of an obedient faith—"Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works." (Jas. 2:25). Yet this woman was involved in what most people consider one of the most heinous sins imaginable—she was a harlot.

Ruth is the great example of loyalty that we see in the book bearing her name. She refused to leave her mother in law after the death of her husband but instead reaffirmed her faithfulness to her (Ruth 1:16). She would later marry her kinsman redeemer, Boaz, and would be the great-grandmother of the sweet singer of Israel, David. But Ruth was a Moabite, and Deuteronomy 23:3 forbade Moabites from even coming near the temple of the Lord.

David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). As a young man he killed the giant, Goliath. He was the greatest king that Israel ever knew, he wrote numerous psalms, and it was through his lineage that God promised the Messiah would come and would sit upon his throne forever (2 Sam. 7). Nevertheless, as great a man as David was, one of the most memorable occasions of his life was committing adultery with Bathsheba and subsequently arranging the murder of her husband, Uriah (2 Sam. 11-12).

The bible speaks highly of each of these individuals. It tells us about their faithfulness to God and their willingness to spend and be spent for His cause. But

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it also tells us that, just like us, they were human and were flawed. But that did not mean that God could not use them. Rather, He was patient with them as they worked to overcome their deficiencies to His glory. Abraham lied to Pharaoh because of fear but later offered Isaac upon the altar with full confidence that God would resurrect him (Heb. 11:19). David sinned greatly but his greatness is measured in that he dealt with his sins properly (Ps. 51). Rahab was a harlot, and Ruth was a gentile, but both are known for their faithfulness and, like Abraham and David, have a place in the genealogy of the Lord. Each of these serves as an excellent example to us that regardless of the past God loves all people (John 3:16), and through obedience to His will He can use anyone in His service to His glory. No one is unusable.

CW

YOU WON'T LIKE HEAVEN

Trent Kennedy

Although the word heaven is tossed around often today, most people use the word, not of the dwelling place of God nor of the eternal abode of His faithful children, but in the words of Webster, “a place or condition of utmost happiness.” Certainly, everyone wants to ‘go to heaven’ or ‘experience heaven’, but if we consider what the Bible has to say about heaven, I am not sure that everyone who wants to go to heaven would even enjoy the eternal dwelling place of Almighty God.

Singing and Worship: Revelation 5:9-11

Heaven, even the very throne room of God, according to Revelation 5:9-11 is filled with song. Before His throne God’s people come together to participate in a glorious ‘congregational singing’ (Rev. 14:3). Heaven’s chorus is a song of victory (Rev. 7:9-10, 15:3). However, as one looks around the auditorium on Sunday after Sunday he will notice that some of the Lord’s church do not engage themselves in congregational singing. Often excuses can be heard from those who do not lift their voices in praise to God, “I don’t have a good voice,” “I am singing on the inside,” “I don’t like to sing,” or “Singing is for little kids.” Those who would make such excuses violate

God’s command to sing (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16), but the question is, ‘will they like heaven?’ What about the worship in heaven? It is continual (Rev. 4:10) and directed at God (Rev. 19:10, 22:8). If it is hard for us to even come to the worship assembly and enjoy that short time of praise to God with our fellow brothers and sisters while we are on earth, will we like heaven?

Service: Revelation 7:15-17, 22:3

Beside the continual worship and singing done before the throne of God, the Bible describes heaven as a place of service done by bondservants (slaves).

Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them, (Rev. 7:15).

“... And the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein: and his servants shall serve him,” (Rev. 22:3). The existence of the saved in heaven will be a life of rest in service to the Lamb and to the Father. What a glorious thought for those who love to labor in His kingdom on earth! But, for those who cannot muster enough energy to serve God daily in this life, will they like heaven?

Seconds: Revelation 21:1-3

Heaven will be a place of new things, different than this earth. The ‘second heaven and second earth’ is a new dwelling place for the saved of God. There will be a new city, the city of gold, the city foursquare built especially for God’s children. With this new heaven and new earth, the old will be no more (Rev. 21:1, 2 Pet. 3:10-13). Unfortunately, some Christians have become much too attached to this earth at the expense of their relationship with Christ: cars, careers, houses, boats, money, television, and even people. We should put nothing on this earth above God, not even our mother or father (Matt. 10:37). When this earth passes away will those who glory in their possessions or worldly talents so openly today really like heaven tomorrow?

Seclusion: Revelation 21:27, 22:15

Heaven’s seclusion is like no other. No unclean thing will be there (Rev. 21:27); in fact, only those who have entered in by the only Way (John 10:9, 14:6) will be in heaven. No unrepented sinner will enter into the gates of the city (Rev. 21:8, 22:15). Even though this is a refuge for the people of God, many Christians would rather spend their time on earth with those

outside the body of Christ. Oftentimes this is not for the purpose of influence or conversion (like Jesus, Mark 2:16-17) but for the purpose of entertainment. “Those ‘church-of-christers’ are too boring. They’re prudes,” some have said. If you do not like to spend time on earth with God’s children and that is the only company to be had in eternity, will you like heaven?

Certainly, heaven is the destination we should all desire and seek. It is the place God wants all of us to go (1 Tim. 2:4). We must remember, just as we are saved on God’s terms and worship on God’s terms, heaven is the dwelling place of God and set-up on His terms not ours. May we all execute faithful service today and dwell with Him and each other tomorrow and forever more.

CW



The Gospel Radio Network launched in January 2014 as a 24/7 internet radio station broadcasting sound gospel preaching throughout the world. This work is overseen by the elders of the Mount Vernon church of Christ in Mount Vernon, TX.

For a schedule of programs visit them at www.thegospelradionetwork.org

“They Have Not All Obeyed”

Don Walker

The title for this article is taken from the tenth chapter of the book of Romans, verse 16. It is quoted from the King James Version. In the American Standard Version the passage reads, “But they did not all hearken to the glad tidings.” It is a sad verse, no matter which version you consider.

We are well aware of the power of the Word of God. Scripture is replete with passage after passage which exalts this Divine truth. In the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2 we see, “And God said ... “ a number of times. We also see that everything that God said came about. When we consider the salvation of the

souls of men, we learn very quickly that it will not come about without the Word of God. James told us the Word of God is able to “save our souls” (Jas. 1:21). Peter said the Word of God is essential to the new birth (1 Pet. 1:23). The power of God’s word is magnificently proclaimed by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 10.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Yet, as powerful as God’s Word is, it cannot penetrate certain kinds of hearts.

In Luke 8 Jesus spoke what is commonly known as the “Parable of the Sower.” As we learn in the explanation of the parable (vs. 11-15), it focuses upon the hearts of men. Of the four kinds of soil only one ultimately benefits from the power of God’s Word. We are reminded of the words of Jesus when He was questioned concerning His use of parables. In Matthew 13 the disciples questioned, “Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” (v. 10). In answering the question Jesus taught that it was so men could be divided. That is to say those who had a desire to know truth would be separated from those who did not. Jesus said, “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given” (v. 11). The difference is seen in verse 15. Jesus said,

For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Matt.13:15).

The truth is that not all men will avail themselves to the soul-saving Word of God. Not all will see the value in obedience to those things revealed in the Word (Matt. 7:13,14). There will be those who reject the “good news’ even when they have the opportunity to obey and be saved. Paul’s answer to those who rejected the Word was, “ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life” (Acts 13:46).

On the other hand, there will be those who are lost because the people of God lost their evangelistic zeal. Paul wrote, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost" (Rom. 4:3). Jesus said to go and make disciples. When we fail to do such, we fail in glorifying our God. Ezekiel spoke of the responsibility of the watchman in Ezekiel 3. A failure to warn and provide opportunity for men to obey is to fail in our primary purpose of our existence—to glorify our God.

It is a sad tragedy that not all men will be saved. In fact, it is magnified by the fact that a majority of the people that traverse the paths of this world will be lost. But it will be in spite of God's desire for "all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). God has provided the power for our salvation in Christ Jesus. He has revealed that plan and power in the Word of God, the Bible—or more specifically, the New Testament. If we fail to hear and to obey, then the loss of our souls is in our own hands. Let each of us meditate on these sobering truths as we study our Bible more and more.

CW

IMITATING GOD IN FORGIVENESS

Kevin Cauley

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

The perfect standard for behavior is God Himself, and the gospel exhorts all to be perfect as God is perfect. This entails that in whatever ways one may possibly imitate God that he so do. "Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children" (Eph. 5:1 ASV). We would, therefore, do well to imitate God when it comes to forgiveness.

That God places conditions upon forgiveness implies that God will not forgive some, though God desires to forgive all (2 Pet. 3:9). Peter says explicitly to Simon the Sorcerer, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22). Peter's words are clear: if Simon wants forgiveness, he must meet the condition of prayer to God. Some, however, will simply not be forgiven. Those who blaspheme the

Holy Spirit, by rejecting His word for their life, will not be forgiven (Matt. 12:32). God refuses to forgive the individual who does not practice forgiveness himself (Matt. 6:15). God does not forgive everyone, and Christians cannot run beyond God in forgiving such individuals. Pride and arrogance alone cause us to think that we can accomplish what God cannot. However, where God has forgiven and forgives, we need to be keenly responsible to so imitate Him 1) in who He forgives, 2) in how He forgives, and 3) in why He forgives.

Who does God forgive? God forgives all men potentially and the penitent actually. Jesus spoke about potential forgiveness in Mark 3:28 "All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme." Actual forgiveness, however, comes when an individual repents and turns to God (Mark 4:12). God forgives private sins that are confessed to Him privately (1 John 1:9). God, through Christ, forgives public sins when they are confessed publicly, as Paul wrote to the church at Corinth,

To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ (2 Cor. 2:10).

Christ considers those sins that are confessed before the church forgiven; and if Christ so considers them forgiven they are truly forgiven. No individual person or congregation has the right to withhold forgiveness under such circumstances.

How does God forgive? God forgives generously. One of the greatest statements in the Bible concerning God's forgiveness occurs in Psalm 103:10-14:

He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

The Christian who possesses penitence of heart and who fears God has great consolation, knowing that God's desire and practice is not to deal with us after our sins, but to forgive. In Christ, actual forgiveness is realized, and

God refuses to memorialize our sins (Heb. 10:16-18). Would to God that our brethren would be so generous!

Why does God forgive? God forgives because each person has eternal value worth more than the whole world (Matt. 16:26), and He wants them to be saved. God so valued each person that He offered His only begotten Son as sacrifice. Romans 5:6-9 states,

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

Each person is at least as precious as the precious blood of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:19). And because God has so offered forgiveness to all men, so ought we to have an attitude of forgiveness.

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph.4: 32).

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Col.3: 12-13).

We would do well to imitate God in forgiveness at each moment. Such does not entail forgiving those who refuse forgiveness or who do not seek it. However, for the child of God who stands in a relationship with God of having his sins forgiven, the opportunities for forgiveness are rich and deep. May we be so forgiven and so forgive!

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Some Reasons for Christians to be Happy

Mike Batot

Christians should be the happiest people in the world. Paul told Christians to rejoice in the Lord always (Phil. 4:4). The Hebrews writer encouraged the Jews who converted to Christianity to be content with the things they had (Heb. 13:5). We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1). We are free from sin (Rom. 6:18). The love of God is with us (Rom. 5:5). While there are many other reasons for the Christian to be happy, this list is a good refresher on why we should be happy in this life.

We are to rejoice in the Lord. Christians are called by this name because we are followers of Jesus the Christ, who died for us. The Messiah was sent to seek and save the lost. He became the ultimate sacrifice for us (Luke 19:9-10). On the first day of the week we gather to sing praises to our heavenly Father for the blessings He has given us, and the plan of salvation that He put in place. The reason the Christian is to be happy every day is because we have another day to rejoice in the Lord. We can rejoice by praising His name through prayer, by giving Him public credit for all we

accomplish, or by being a humble servant in helping others. We rejoice because we can do all these things.

When we rejoice in the Lord, we recognize and exhibit an attitude of contentment. We are not constantly in a mind of covetousness. Luke reminds us to avoid this practice (Luke 12:15). The Christian finds happiness in the life we have in Christ and not the material things we enjoy. We are content with all we have. and to be called Christians.

Being content brings peace to our lives. Being in peace with God means we understand whose will we are to follow. We are to let the peace of God rule in our hearts (Col. 3:15). Yes, we will have trials and tribulations in an imperfect world. There is suffering, but when we understand that someday we are going to a place that promises there will be no sorrow, it should bring a measure of peace that we can overcome anything through our faith in God. Having this inner peace in the good times will sustain us during the bad times. I imagine you see or can think of loved ones or friends that go through trying times and yet project an attitude of peace and happiness. This causes those in the world to wonder how someone can have that attitude. It is because the peace of God rules in their hearts.

Having this peace comes from the knowledge that we have become free of sin through obediently following the teaching of Jesus and the will of our Heavenly Father. We are to stand fast in the liberty in which Christ made us free from the bondage of sin. This is a bondage to which we must not return. We know, as children of God, we can repent when we stumble and remain free of the bondage of sin as we go through this life (I John 1:9).

The opportunity to be free comes from the love God has for us. God's love is unconditional. We need to have the same love for God and the souls of men. We should show agape love daily. It should make Christians the happiest people in the world.

CW

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when necessary, and to oppose evil without letting it affect our character. With such determination, even in the harshest of circumstances, the faithful child of God can still grow in faith (Psa. 141:8-10). Spiritual

growth can flourish in the midst of turmoil and trial if we use it properly. During such times, we should focus on God more and more, giving ourselves over to the spiritual as a refuge from the onslaught of evil offered up by a world addicted to sin. In response to the diet of excess provided by Satan, we should instead enrich our souls. The trying of our faith, properly considered, can hone our ability to overcome temptation (Jas. 1:2-4). Most of all, spiritual situations such as these grow our faith by reminding us to focus on controlling ourselves and letting God handle the rest.

The idea that this life should have no difficulties and that hardship somehow argues against God remains one of the persistent lies Satan repeats endlessly because the faithless hear it so eagerly. Failing to learn from Job they also ignore the lesson of Jesus. By allowing Satan opportunity to influence creation once completed, evil and its children—sin, suffering, and adversity—have an impact on our lives. However, Satan does not get to determine the full extent of that impact; we do. While we necessarily suffer due to the poor decisions of others, of generations past, and of ourselves, and while that can impact our health and comfort, we have the power at our disposal to decide how to react to these things. We do live in trying times, because that is the nature of this world. Therefore, rather than feeling sorry for ourselves, we should respond with trust in God and with a life characterized by rising above Satan's challenges in imitation of our Savior. We can indeed live and prosper spiritually even in trying times when we do not allow those times to define us but instead define ourselves by the glory of eternity (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

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