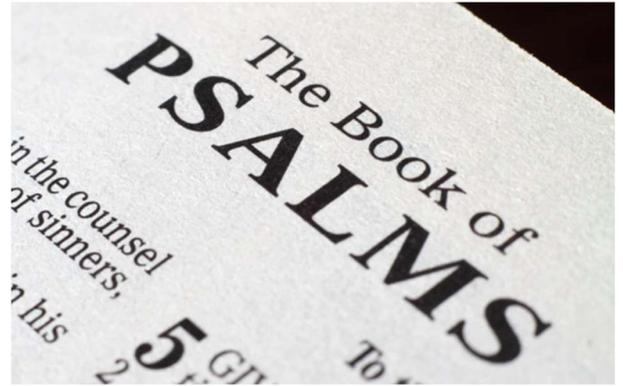


## A Call to Worship

Written on: August 5, 2024

Article by: Thayer Salisbury



### Psalm 34

This is an acrostic Psalm. Structurally, it is very much like Psalm 25. It is therefore very difficult to feel completely confident about any attempt to break it into parts according to content or theme. But perhaps the following observations will help us grasp the message.

#### Initial call to worship

*I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. <sup>2</sup>My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. <sup>3</sup>Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!*

This psalm is a call to worship. “Come, let us worship the Lord” (1). There seems to be an intentional paradox of boasting and humility (2). There is an insistence on involving others in praise (3).

#### Reasons for worship

Verses 4-10 then give some of the reasons why we ought to worship the Lord.

*I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. <sup>5</sup>Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. <sup>6</sup>This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. <sup>7</sup>The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. <sup>8</sup>Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! <sup>9</sup>Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! <sup>10</sup>The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.*

The Lord’s provision is described in memorable ways. Personal experience of provision is mentioned (4-5); and this personal experience is to be expected by others who will seek him (6-9). Lions are less likely than most animals to be in need, and young lions especially. Yet those who seek the Lord — even if they are poor (6) — will lack nothing (10).

#### Fear of the Lord

Verses 11-16 tell us what it means to fear the Lord.

*<sup>11</sup>Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. <sup>12</sup>What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? <sup>13</sup>Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. <sup>14</sup>Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. <sup>15</sup>The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. <sup>16</sup>The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.*

This instruction is much needed today. People are very confused as to what it means to fear or seek the Lord. It does not mean cowering in a corner and avoiding him. Nor does it mean merely saying, “I seek the Lord.” It means controlling our tongues (13). It means avoiding evil and doing good (14-16). As James will teach centuries later, real faith, real seeking of the Lord, real fear of the Lord will be active.

## **Deliverance through trouble**

Verses 17-22 make it clear that the promise is not freedom from trouble, but deliverance through trouble.

<sup>17</sup>When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. <sup>18</sup>The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. <sup>19</sup>Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. <sup>20</sup>He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. <sup>21</sup>Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. <sup>22</sup>The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Taken selectively, this is used by the preachers of the prosperity gospel to support their unbiblical claims. But this psalm does not claim that we will never be caused to cry for help, or that we will never be brokenhearted or crushed in spirit. We will suffer these things, but in the end the faithful will be delivered.

This certainly agrees with the teaching of Jesus and of the New Testament as a whole. Jesus said, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Paul added, "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor 4:17-18).

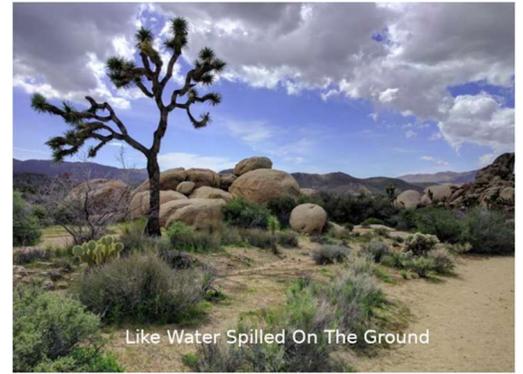
Let us worship the Lord and call others to do so. Let us worship him, for he has abundantly provided for us. Let us worship him, for he will deliver us through the manifold trials of this sin-filled world.

## Like Water Spilled On the Ground

*Written on: August 1, 2024*

*Article by: Kevin Pickles*

In 2 Samuel 13 we read that David's son Absalom fled after killing his brother Amnon. Absalom had taken it upon himself to punish Amnon for the horrible act he had committed which had gone unpunished by King David. Following the murder of Amnon, Absalom was afraid of retribution from his father and brothers, so he fled Israel and sought political assylum with his maternal grandfather Talmai, the king of Geshur. And he remained with him for three years.



In 2 Samuel 14:1-21 we read about Joab's response to Absalom's prolonged separation. Joab was a son of Zeruah, King David's sister (1 Chronicles 2:13-17). He was David's general and for most of his life was very loyal to him. It seemed apparent that he knew David's heart and his desire to be reconciled to his son.

So Joab made a decision to intercede and devised a plan to help facilitate reconciliation. His plan was to have a wise old woman – go to the king, pretending to be a widow with two sons. She told him the story, that one of her sons had killed the other in anger and now her entire clan was demanding that her remaining son be put to death for murder. The woman appealed to David to protect her son. And David did so by ruling: "As the Lord lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground."

For the sake of that family, David placed mercy and forgiveness ahead of justice. This was exactly what the woman wanted to hear and she proceeded to boldly ask David why he "does not bring his banished one home again?" She goes on to state, "For we will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away a life; but He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him."

Following some additional discourse King David declared to Joab, "All right, I have granted this thing. Go therefore, bring back the young man Absalom."

There is much that we can learn from Joab and the wise old woman who spoke to King David.

**We need to love all people and recognize that each one of us needs reconciliation with God.**

Joab knew that King David longed to have his son back. Joab recognized the need for reconciliation between David and Absalom and he acted to help make it happen. We, too, need to have the courage to bring about reconciliation between people and God. I admit that when I look at people around me, I often fail to recognize their separation from God and need for reconciliation. It is just not at the top of my mind, and yet the need is there. The question is, 'do we love others enough, as Joab loved David, to help make reconciliation possible?'

Romans 3:23 tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The prophet Isaiah teaches us that our iniquities have separated us from God. I am confident we all know that our sin has separated us from God, but do we truly appreciate the dire need for reconciliation? In 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 Paul teaches us that we can be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. Christians have in fact been given a message of reconciliation. May we recognize what we have been given and love others enough to bring about reconciliation with God. Our ministry of reconciliation requires us to make others aware that sin has separated them from God and that reconciliation with Him is possible through Jesus Christ.

## **We need to speak the truth with boldness, trusting that God will give us the right words to say.**

We don't know much about the woman Joab sent to speak with David. But we do know that she spoke with boldness. She was direct with David when asking him why he did not bring his banished son back home. I think that it would have taken a lot of courage to speak to the king that way.

- When Peter and John were commanded by the Sanhedrin to stop preaching about Christ, they returned to their peers and prayed that they might declare God's word with boldness (Acts 4:29).
- Paul and Barnabas spoke boldly about the Lord, despite opposition from the unbelieving Jews at Iconium (Acts 14)
- After describing the armour of God in Ephesians 6, Paul asked the church there to pray- that he would "open his mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which he was an ambassador in chains; that in it he may speak boldly, as he ought to speak."

These examples encourage us to pray for the ability to speak boldly in the face of opposition. And when given the opportunity, to rely on God's help to forcefully and effectively proclaim the gospel. The gospel is all about God's plan to reconcile the world to himself.

## **Our lives are short and when we are dead, reconciliation is not possible.**

The 'wise woman' described our lives – like water that is spilled on the ground. Once it is spilled it cannot be recovered. She was emphasizing the urgency of reconciliation and the price of opportunities neglected.

- James reminds us that we do not know what tomorrow will bring. He describes our lives as a mist or vapour that is here for a short time and then disappears. We are not promised tomorrow, we are only given today (James 4:13-14)
- Moses reinforced the brevity of life, when he asked God to "...teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom." (Psalm 90:12)

Because we don't know how much time we have, we need to preach and teach the gospel today.

- Jesus pointed this out in John 4:35 when he said to his disciples "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!"
- Paul said much the same thing in 2 Corinthians 6:1-2, "We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

Both of these passages reinforce the urgency of teaching the gospel message. Paul had accepted his personal responsibility to preach the gospel, yet he writes in a way that extends that responsibility to us. To the church at Corinth he wrote: "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16)

## **God has given us a way of bringing each of us back to Him.**

In the words of that 'wise woman':

- “God does not take away a life; but He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him.”

Other translations word it this way

- “But God does not just sweep life away; instead, he devises ways to bring us back when we have been separated from him.”
- Or “But that is not what God desires; rather, he devises ways so that a banished person does not remain banished from him.”

God has always wanted His people to repent, to turn from their ways, and to live. As he explained to the prophet Ezekiel, “Therefore you, O son of man, say to the house of Israel, ‘If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?’ Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’” (Ezekiel 33:10-11)

Israel was accusing God of making his judgment so severe that there was no room for repentance. God’s response was, that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked and that His desire was for them to repent, to turn to Him and be saved.

Our God is not cruel nor does He make repentance impossible. And while he does not want to see humanity suffer, He will also not withhold justice and punishment from those who refuse to obey and follow Him.

- Jesus explained this to Nicodemus when he said: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” (John 3:16-17)
- And Peter reminded his readers of the same, writing: “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:8-9)

How can I apply these insights to myself?

- I must act upon the responsibility of sharing the message of reconciliation in a serious way. I need to pursue a love for the lost and a willingness to share the message of reconciliation with them.
- Our lives are short and uncertain. Therefore I must have a sense of urgency when sharing the gospel message, which includes helping others understand the consequences of their separation from God.
- I need to take advantage of the opportunities that God sets before me. I need to pray to God to help me to have a spirit of boldness and courage to speak the truth to others.

God has given us a tremendous gift in Jesus Christ and it is through Him that we are reconciled to God and promised eternal life with Him. God has put people in our lives who have loved us, who have seen our need for reconciliation and shared God’s word so that we could receive this incredible gift. This gift is far too important to keep to ourselves. I must love others and be willing to share it with them. We need to be praying for opportunities to have God put us in the lives of others to share His incredible Good News.

Like water spilled on the ground which cannot be gathered up again, our opportunities to share the gospel will one day cease. Our loving God wants all people to come to repentance. His desire is for each one of to be restored to Him. He doesn't want anyone to perish. But our God is also just, visiting the consequences of eternal damnation upon those who reject his salvation and refuse to be obedient.

In Ephesians 5:1-2 Paul calls us to be like God and to love others as Christ has loved us. To do that, we must have a strong desire and an unfailing commitment to see that as many as possible are called to repentance and a saved relationship with God.

**Kevin Pickles**

*Owen Sound*

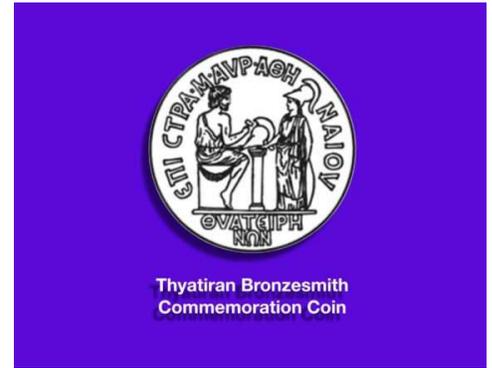
# “What you have, hold fast until I come”: Jesus’ Letter to Thyatira

Written on: August 1, 2024

Article by: Paul Birston

## Revelation 2:18–29 Part 1

### Introduction to Thyatira



Carpenters, plumbers, electricians, hairstylists, teachers, engineers, nurses, LPN’s, physicians, surgeons and others working in trades, personal services and professions today usually must be members of associations and/or colleges in order to receive licenses to legally work in their chosen field. Governments give these associations and colleges self-governing authority to set educational, registration and practice standards for their members who pay annual dues for them to function.

In the first century Greco-Roman world of Thyatira the name for this type of self-governing authoritative college association in Latin was a collegium, or collegia in plural. For practical trades we will also hear collegia referred to as guilds. Collegium is from the Latin for “gathered together” or “joined together” and so shares the essential meaning of synagogue from the verb “he gathers together” and the ekklesia, the common or koine Greek word for an “assembly” of those with common interests (usually mistranslated as the Anglicism “church” which is from an entirely different Greek word). Our most important common interest in the ekklesia, the assembly, is of course God: Father, Son and Spirit.

Of all the seven cities of Asia to whose churches Jesus writes, Thyatira had the most collegia or guilds for skilled craftspeople. Thyatira was known as a centre of manufacturing and trade. We have inscriptions from Thyatira that identify many of these guilds including: wool-workers, linen-workers, makers of outer garments, fabric dyers, leather workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers and bronze smiths and modelers in bronze. The latter will ring a bell for you when we read Jesus’ description of Himself in the opening greeting of His letter that He carries forward from John’s vision of Him in chapter 1.

For your interest, other Roman trades guilds included the collegia of: gladiators, Bacchus the god of wine worshipers (also known as Dionysus, outlawed by the senate for their raucous behaviour), wine makers, makers of chairs for the gods, underwater divers, junk men, actors, mowers, brothel keepers, and shoe makers.

Like modern associations and colleges, ancient guilds and collegia had authority to control membership, require skills, tools, trade secrets and, importantly, the control of a tradesperson’s ability to practice one’s trades within the city. The latter is crucial for those who depend on their trades to feed their families.

Like modern associations, ancient guilds had meetings. There was big difference, however, in the ancient culture of Thyatira where everyone was “religious” for personal, civic, or business reasons. Collegia and guilds often had patron gods. Meetings could include meals and acknowledgments of the patron gods through tributes, offerings and libations (pouring a liquid sacrifice or drinking ceremoniously) in addition to allegiance to and worship of the emperor of the day as a god. Emperor worship was particularly common in these eastern parts of the empire. We also know that symposiums similar to collegia for more well to do men often included heavy drinking and sexually immoral activities.

It is an understatement that this tension between the deference to pagan gods and emperors in the guilds vs. the need to be a guild member to make a living posed huge problems for Christians. There were enormous

pressures for Christians to compromise their faith in Jesus and synchronise it with the majority culture around His humble assemblies in order to work for a living.

Two examples of gods directly relevant to Jesus' people in Thyatira are Hephaestus and Athena (aka Athene). Hephaestus was the god of blacksmiths, metalworking, carpenters, craftsmen, artisans, sculptors, metallurgy, fire and volcanoes (known as Vulcan in the Roman pantheon). Athena (Minerva is her Roman name) was the goddess of war, wisdom and craftsmanship. Here on this coin commemorating the high level of craft of the bronze workers in the city we see a Thyatiran bronze-smith hammering the finishing features of a helmet for Athena:

For your interest, the temple of Hephaestus in Athens (Athena as the Greeks call it today) is the most well preserved ancient Greek temple extant today. While perhaps well-built by those honouring Hephaestus as the god of quality craftsmanship, it has been spared the ravages of earthquakes, war and vandalism. Paul had a very clear view of this temple from Mars Hill (the Areopagus) when he spoke with the Athenians in Acts 17.

You will recall from seeing John's vision of Jesus in Revelation 1:15 that Jesus' **"feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace."** Thyatiran craftspeople were famous for their skill in bronze. The word Jesus and John use for burnished bronze here and in His opening greeting to Thyatira is unique to these two verses and all of ancient Greek literature. It is chakolibanon (χαλκολίβανον). Chakolibanon is a "particularly valuable type of bronze or brass, possibly even an alloy containing some gold, with the emphasis on its lustrous appearance." Through this simile in His letter Jesus will show the Thyatirans that His presence, power and authority are infinitely superior to the skill and authority of their illustrious guilds and their patron gods. We will also see that the authority over nations Jesus gives the overcoming Thyatiran Christians is infinitely superior to the authority of guild members.

Interestingly, from geographic, historic, economic and cultural terms, Thyatira and Philadelphia had the most modest statures of all seven cities to whose assemblies Jesus writes. The name of Thyatira is thought to be related to the Greek for daughter, named so by Seleucus Nicator I, "the victor." He was another one of the diadochi, the successors of Alexander the Great like Lysimachus who, as we have learned in our articles on Smyrna and Pergamum, was instrumental in rebuilding Smyrna and funding the grand construction of Pergamum.

Thyatira sat in a shallow fertile valley with low hills on its east and west horizons and so lacked the impressive towering acropolises of Smyrna, Pergamum and Sardis. The soil and growing conditions were good for Rubia, commonly known as madder. Rubia is a source of red pigment for fabric dye used by the craftspeople of Thyatira. This was a cheaper alternative to dying fabric than the coveted royal Tyrian purple dye originally developed in Phoenicia and made from the secretions of the Murex rock snails that live near sea shores and become visible at low tide.

You will recognize one notable citizen among the manufacturers and merchants of Thyatira. She met the Apostle Paul in Philippi in Acts 16. Lydia, whose namesake is the ancient region of western Anatolia, was a porphuropowlis, a seller of purple fabrics and a worshiper of God. She may have been Jewish by birth or a proselyte. Her faith testifies to the likelihood of a Jewish presence in Thyatira and of course Philippi where Paul met her a "place of prayer" where Jewish people met often located near a stream or river, sources of running or "living" water for ritual washings.

Lydia picked a good location for her business in Philippi in Macedonia since it was roughly at the half way point along the Via Egnatia, the equivalent of the Trans-Canada Highway 1 or 401 of ancient northern Greece. It was

the international trade route that connected Rome to Byzantium and all points east including Jesus' seven churches in Asia.

Thyatira was 61 km (37 miles) southeast of Pergamum and 83 km (50 miles) east of Smyrna. Though modest in so many ways compared to the other of the seven cities of Asia, Thyatira's place on the ancient trade route from Rome and Byzantium (later Constantinople and Istanbul) made it valuable to the Romans for protecting the road through the Hermus Valley from the Ancient Near East to Pergamum. Like Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum, in a pagan sense, Thyatira profited from being an ally and protectorate of Rome along with all its pagan civic and religious dimensions.

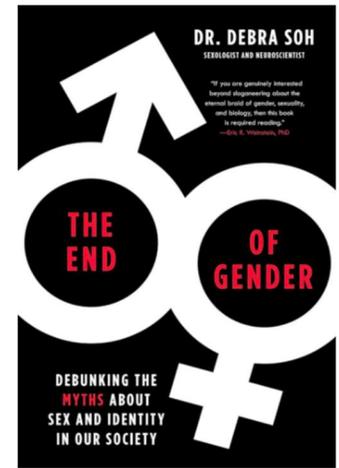
*To be continued...*  
*Hamilton, Ontario*

# A Review of “The End of Gender” by Dr. Debra Soh

Written on: August 1, 2024

Article by: Kevin Cleary

In a somewhat surprising twist, our culture has reached a strange place. While it’s been popular for some time to push back against “societally imposed gender norms” no one anticipated that push back would extend to rejecting DNA. Yet in a recent health class my son was instructed by his teacher that gender was a spectrum which had little or no relation to biology. His class of grade 8 students responded in an interesting way to the instruction, but we can save that story for the end of this review. If you were to guess how my son responded, you might suspect that his response would be informed by his moral and religious upbringing (As his father I hope that you would be right). You might think something like well of course he feels that way his dad is a preacher.



However, what if you were to guess how a sex researcher would respond to such instruction. What if I told you that this particular sex researcher was female and liberal in her politics? Further that she held a PHD in Neuroscience and self-described as a sexologist? The person I am describing as some may have guessed is Dr. Debra Soh the author of “The End of Gender.” Dr Soh describes herself as sex positive (that is in favor of a more liberal view of sexuality) and as working to combat sexual stigma and shame. With that brief background one might suppose that Dr. Soh does not hold a Godly view of human sexuality and that would be accurate. We might also suspect that she would be completely on board with the current trend to divorce sex from gender and promote gender as something that is fluid and constructed socially rather than biologically. It is on this last point and a number of others that Dr. Soh defies the current progressive view as completely unscientific and unsupported by evidence.

The book is organized into eleven chapters nine of which debunk specific myths about sex and identity in society.

It is probably helpful to let Dr. Soh define sex and gender at this point. Sex refers to biological identity and is based on chromosomes or gametes. Gender is the outward expression of one’s biology. With this in mind we can proceed to a brief overview of the chapters.

Dr. Soh introduces her book by lamenting a problem facing the study of biology. The problem for Dr. Soh is that politics and activism are being allowed to restrict scientific inquiry. Research that does not support the current politically correct talking points, like men can get pregnant or gender is a social construct, is simply not allowed. Having pursued hard science with a desire to learn and share scientific discovery this is deeply troubling to her. With this motivation in mind, she sets out to offer the real science on various myths regarding sex and identity that have captured the modern imagination.

Myth number one, Biological sex is a spectrum.

This key introductory chapter primarily addresses two aspects of this myth.

First that biological sex is not a spectrum but rather a binary defined by which gametes an individual produces eggs for females and sperm for males. Secondly, the idea that biological sex is a social construct. Soh points out that males and females are different in several specific ways which are not subject to cultural influence (there is more on this in later chapters). She also addresses the enforcement of certain language related to the term

“sex assigned at birth” and other related terms. She makes the powerful point that “Activists wish to reinvent sex in this way because it allows for the separation of sex from an objective basis in reality. Adopting this position allows for science and logic, which currently serve as barriers to their unsupported theories, to be taken off the table when discussing gender.” Soh finishes this chapter by pointing to real life examples of unscientific ideas that are taught as facts in schools and the problems that this can create. In simple language, Dr. Soh explains why the current view of a sexual spectrum is not accurate or helpful.

Myth number two: Gender is a social construct.

In this chapter Soh primarily focuses on the brain. Since Gender is the expression of sexuality it is largely driven by mental processes. Thus Dr. Soh points out that human brains are sexually dimorphic. Male and female brains differ in both structure and function. Specifically, she points out that differences exist in the hippocampus, amygdala and interstitial nucleus of the anterior hypothalamus. Further, men have a greater number of connective tissues running from the front to the back while women have a greater number running from side to side. Functionally brains are also sexually dimorphic. Differences exist in verbal fluency (greater affinity in women) and mental rotation (greater proficiency among men). Men and women’s amygdala’s react very differently to visual sexual stimuli. Soh goes on to point out that even many traits that are sometimes claimed to be socially informed are due to exposure to testosterone in utero. She adds several other physiological differences and makes a critical point. Ignoring differences between men and women leads to bad research and wrong medical treatment. She goes on to discuss and largely debunk the accusation of sexism in STEM. Dr. Soh does a great job of summarizing the relevant studies and making them accessible for the non-initiated reader.

Myth number Three: There are More Than Two Genders.

In this chapter as the title implies Soh makes the point that there are only two genders, male and female. She points out that even the language used to describe transgender feelings are only meaningful because they assume a gender binary.

She helpfully adds two further discussions. First, that being a male or female doesn’t mean strict adherence to a set of rules (this was once common knowledge). Soh states that boys and girls can still be boys and girls while being interested in things that are not traditionally associated with their gender. Even more helpfully, she adds that some of the underlying thinking that comes with contemporary gender identity is very problematic. For example, she quotes a girl who said, “girls are weak, but I feel strong so must identify as a man.” She also speaks about young people who don’t like some of the changes that come with puberty, such as periods, saying, that since they don’t like that aspect of being a woman, they won’t be one. She rightly concludes that individuals should feel free to be themselves but be taught that changing genders is not needed or helpful in doing that. In a world where we often hear about tens or hundreds of gender identities it is helpful to have a neuroscientist explain why this notion is unscientific.

Myth number four: Sexual orientation and Gender identity are unrelated.

Soh says a “New, bizarre strain of thinking has sprung forth. Due to the trendiness in conceptualizing gender and sex as a spectra, the concept of “sexual fluidity” claims that anyone can be gay , and that human sexuality is in actuality free floating.” She contrasts this notion with the previously hard fought and presumably won idea, that sexual attraction is innate. In other words, people are born with a certain sexual attraction. Soh includes some of the most current discussions of sexual orientation and homosexuality. It may relate to an immune response in the body, or to a neurological difference in which some brains become partially feminized. Whichever theory turns out to be accurate or most accurate is irrelevant, the point Soh is making is that

attraction likely stems from a biological cause not a sociological or cultural one. She makes a great point here which is that if sexual orientation is fluid, flexible and choosable (sic) then so is gender identity. This is exactly the opposite of the argument many transgender activists are trying to make.

In this Chapter Soh also includes a discussion of gender non-conforming children, an issue which has been the focus of much of the current discussion. Here she makes the point that gender stabilizes as a person reaches puberty and the vast majority of gender dysphoric children grow out of their condition. The current trend of early transitioning caused one author to describe the whole situation as simply sterilizing gay people. Soh also points out in this chapter that “it remains unclear whether the brain differences are a reflection of gender identity. She also makes the key point that when someone is struggling with gender dysphoria their issues with their gender would more appropriately be considered a symptom of another mental health condition. Studies have shown that this is the case in 75% of those dealing with gender dysphoria.

Dr. Soh demonstrates in this chapter and throughout the book a great deal of compassion. Her desire is to do what’s best for people with real problems. While it’s already been noted that Dr. Soh is an atheist, she does an admirable job of sharing the truth in love . It is this chapter that a Christian reader is likely to take issue with the most. It is helpful to keep in mind that identifying a natural cause or predisposition for a behaviour, does not morally justify it.

Myth number five: Children with Gender Dysphoria should transition.

Dr. Soh’s short answer is no. She offers the following reasons.

- First 60-90% of gender dysphoric children desist by puberty.
- Second because children don’t fully understand what they are saying, for example children will sometimes say they want to be the opposite sex simply because they want to do something they see the opposite sex doing.
- Third because children are being given a diagnosis without a strict adherence to the diagnostic criteria.
- Finally Soh points out the very severe consequences of transitioning which do permanent damage to the individual and which are not possible to reverse. She does allow that transition may be the best option for a very small percentage of cases, but only in adulthood.

As Christians we would oppose this outside of actual medical conditions related to DNA.

Soh makes some other powerful points in this chapter: she explains that there is no such thing as a transgender child because; “Transgender is an identity and political label denoting that an individual identifies as the opposite sex. Children, and particularly pre-pubescent children, do not possess the emotional maturity to identify this way.”

She also laments the current medical approach of “gender affirming care” which is mandated by law in many jurisdictions. This is done despite having no evidentiary foundation. She addresses the common claim that this is an effort to avoid suicide, noting there is no difference in pre-and post-transition suicide rates. Further pointing out that no children were actually involved in the cited studies.

Lastly, she discusses rapid onset gender dysphoria. This phenomenon is new and largely found among teenage girls. Dr. Soh gives some credence to the social contagion explanation. She asserts that this is largely a result of peer pressure and negative experiences. She shares the story of one girl who had been a repeat victim of sexual assault and who said if she was a boy no one would bother her anymore. She ends the chapter by

predicting that we are only seeing the tip of the iceberg in terms of transition regret and closes by saying “When society looks back in horror- we tried to warn you.”

Myth 6 No differences exist between trans women and women who were born women.

Soh describes her position well saying “It feels insensitive to point out that transgender women are in any way different than women who were born women... But we can agree that transgender people deserve equal rights and legal protection while acknowledging that some biological differences do exist.” In the chapter Soh addresses the issues surrounding what is called inclusive language. She rejects the strange rules regarding the use of terms like people who menstruate or have certain body parts or functions. She also points out that gender neutral spaces can and have been used by predators to gain access to victims. Finally, she addresses sports in which transgender men have been allowed to compete as women. As has often been done she stresses: First that this unfairly disadvantages biological women because trans men are not a threat to competitive male athletes. Second, she points out that trans women have considerable advantages by virtue of being born male. Again, it should be remembered that Dr. Soh has no moral axe to grind in relation to these issues which can cause some pause for those of us who do. It is expected that the Christian reader will rightly take issue with some details in this chapter.

Myth 7 Women Should behave like men in sex and dating.

In this chapter we take a break from the discussion related to gender and politics and instead focus on the predominant approach to sexuality in modern western culture. Louise Perry has called this sexual disenchantment, in other words reducing sex to simply a physical behaviour with nothing sacred or special about it. Here Soh points out that men and women have different motivations and desires when it comes to sexual behaviour and dating. She pushes back quite effectively on the idea that men and women are the same and that sex differences are socially imposed and can be unlearned. She argues that it hurts women to behave like men.

She addresses the idea that gender norms are a social construct by pointing out that similar beauty and desirability standards exist across time and culture.

She also addresses the current concept of toxic masculinity, pointing out that women are often quite harmful to one another, and so toxic behaviour is not restricted to one sex. She also points out that women prefer men who demonstrate what she calls benevolent sexism. We might simply call it respecting sex differences.

Myth 8 Gender-Neutral Parenting works.

In this chapter Soh deals with the idea that gender typical traits are taught to children from the moment they are born (in other words socially constructed). If Children are raised in a gender-neutral environment, they will not display gender differences. She cites several examples of this effort being adopted by government, hospitals, and schools. She insightfully questions how this idea can be reconciled with the idea of trans children. Dr. Soh points out that gender typical behaviour is normal and healthy. Related to this the concern that a child may have been “assigned the wrong sex at birth” is dealt with. Soh responds saying that its greater than 99% chance that upon reaching adulthood the child will be the sex that everyone thought it was. By saying 99% she allows for true medical intersex disorders not the current gender fluid thinking. Soh reiterates, that gender is largely biological. However, she speculates that this will cause some to start theorizing that gender stereotypes are learned before birth. She spends a good bit of the chapter examining the case of David Reimer and the debunked theories of John Money who’s views still hold considerable influence despite having been completely debunked. She includes a discussion on what parents can do. Here she suggests that parents

help girls fight the pressure to be more like boys and vice-versa. She says we need to stop pretending that the sexes are identical.

Myth 9, Sexology and Social Justice make good be fellows.

This chapter reveals much of what drives the author to write such a book and illuminates some of the harmful consequences associated with political correctness. Soh states "Activism has no place in scientific research. There is no such things as "feminist science." "queer science," liberal or conservative science." Soh again cites troubling examples of political ideas being applied to science in a very illiberal way. She warns us to examine anything published in the last few years to determine if the information that it shares is scientific or propagandistic. She also discusses the cost to your career in academia and in general to speaking out in defence of truth or in criticism of progressive activism. She offers examples of preschool children being taught about queer rights, and a school in British Columbia putting up posters addressing white privilege. She calls for parents and others to speak up saying "The only reason this manner of thinking keeps proliferating is our silence."

Dr. Soh concludes with a short epilogue entitled "the end of academic freedom". In it she shares more examples of social justice taking truth captive. She laments the trends that she sees in her own field of sexology. And she fears the negative impact that unscientific and often harmful ideologies are having upon our institutions.

Having considered this overview of the book, Christians will take issue with the liberal stance that the author takes on sexuality. Christians will also disagree with some of the theories that she advances especially regarding homosexuality. Having said that, Dr. Soh's insights as a Neuroscientist and sex researcher are quite informative. Further Dr. Soh's philosophical background lends considerable credibility to her views when discussing moral issues with unbelievers.

Becoming familiar with the data that she brings to bear and working to understand the scientific insights that she offers can go a very long way in aiding discussions about human sexuality with our children, with our congregations and Sunday school classes. We can use these truths to prepare university students to respond intelligently to the pressure they will face to buy into the current progressive trends surrounding sex and gender.

Familiarizing ourselves with Dr. Soh's research and insights can give us a greater ability to show the love of God and truth of the gospel to those embroiled personally in gender confusion.

This book is not easy to read and is of primary value for the scientific and biological information that it offers. It is also of value in that it confronts current gender ideology on a scientific level, which is an area of the discussion that we in the church may not be prepared to do. Thus, it is a valuable resource.

I'll end by saying that all hope is not lost. When my son's teacher presented the myth that there are more than two genders, many students in his grade 8 class took issue. In fact, there were so many comments made in opposition to the teacher that she cut the discussion short in frustration. I consider this a win and a perfect application of Dr. Soh's request that we all speak up. I feel compelled to ask, if a class of grade 8 students have the courage to stand on their convictions, then what is stopping the adults around them from doing so.

*Kevin Cleary*

## Understanding a Tool

*Written on: August 1, 2024*

*Article by: Thayer Salisbury*

When my family gathered to divide up our parents' belongings, I was given most of my father's tools.



Among the tools I inherited was a small object that looked like a pizza cutter, but which, I had been told, was used to install new screen wire on windows and screen doors. That tool lay in my toolbox for about three years. I looked at it occasionally, but I never figured out how to use it.

Then my wife asked for a new drying rack for use when she makes soap. I figured a screen would be just the thing. So, using a tool that I had never used, and never even seen used, I attempted to assemble a screen. My first effort was a complete failure. On my second try I managed to get the screen assembled, but it did not look very good. On my third try I produced a screen as good as most you would buy in the store.

That little tool is handy, once you learn how to use it. But you never can learn to use it without using it. Practice may not make perfect, but practice is the only way to make even an imperfect screen. The tool resting in the toolbox does nothing and teaches nothing. The tool taken in hand and applied may not work perfectly, but it begins to make a difference — both in terms of accomplishment and understanding.

There are many great truths resting, unused, in our Bibles. We complain that we do not understand them. Some suggest that they never do anyone any good. The key is to get them out and put them to use. We will never understand until we do so.

Understanding a tool requires using the tool. Understanding God's word comes only when we sincerely attempt to put his teaching to use in our lives. Apart from obedience, we will not understand. As Jesus said, "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority" (John 7:17, ESV).

# A Time and Place For Everything

Written on: August 1, 2024

Article by: Dave Knutson

## Ecclesiastes 3:1-14

You don't have to be around for very long before you hear someone refer to the cosmos as a time-space continuum. It sounds daunting, but what they mean is that our present existence can be summed up in terms of time and space. That which is, must be at some place, in order to exist. And the thing that is somewhere, must also be there at some time. So if someone exists outside of time they are also outside of space.



Ecclesiastes 3 is all about time and space. It is about God's order for things "under the sun", and for these there is a time and place for everything. Solomon's premise appears to be – that God has ordained that certain things should take place.

It may be useful for us to picture a big circle. That circle represents all of the things that God assigns to our human experience, many of which only God controls. But inside of that circle is a smaller one which represents those things over which God grants us some measure of control. The test for all who live inside of God's big circle, is to order the things in our smaller one, so that they comply with the nature and the purposes of God.

In our first article from Ecclesiastes, we found Solomon searching for and grappling with the meaning of life. The conclusion(s) that we drew, become the starting point for this article.

In Eccl. 2:24 Solomon finally looked beyond the things of earth and appealed to God for an answer. He said in effect, that we have to learn to trust God and can do so for good and sufficient reasons. For as God has made us with physical needs which he satisfies, he has also created us with spiritual ones. And one of these is felt as a craving for meaning and purpose.

He has made us to rebel against the notion that life has no meaning. It is hard-wired into us, to demand that our lives should count for something. So Solomon concludes, that surely God has not failed us. As food satisfies hunger and water quenches thirst – in just that way, the very existence of God provides meaning for life – in a place that not 'under the sun'.

Chapter 3 begins then with the premise that all things on earth are of God, who has made them as they are for a very specific purpose. And that is true, whether or not we ever know what that purpose is. This includes things that appear mundane and repetitious, but actually serve some higher purpose. And though we are caught up in certain routines and boxed in by life 'under the sun', there is a message in the fact that we can know that we are in that box.

Perhaps God has put us here so that we will seek and find the one on the outside. Time and space do not exhaust the realms of existence. There is life beyond time and outside of space, and knowing that makes all the difference.

Now we have mentioned a thing called progressive revelation. What we mean by it, is that God has revealed himself to us over a long period of time. God's self-disclosure was completed through Jesus Christ and his apostles.

But Solomon did not have the advantage of knowing what we do. He asked questions that God intended to answer in the future. He was a man ahead of his time, who did the best, with the information that he had. There is no doubt that God granted him valuable insight into life and especially our participation in it.

And one of those insights was, that God grants to each one, the power to enjoy the fruit of his labour. We can purpose to do a thing, do it, and then look back upon it with satisfaction and enjoyment. It may be a fine meal, a new home or a family raised to fear and honour God. Whatever it is, God gives us the power to enjoy it.

This brings us to our text in Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 which speaks of times and seasons. "Life under the sun" is structured, organized into times and seasons ordained by God.

Now, there are two ways for us to respond to these boundaries. We can accept them for what they are, understanding that God has designed human life as a finite thing. And we can use wisdom from God to live life as he wants us to.

Or... we can fight tooth and nail against God's order. We can try to shake loose of the hold that life under the sun has upon us. We can turn against life itself as a horrid thing and accuse the God of incompetence and evil. But raising a hand against God has no effect upon times or seasons. It will not prolong our days upon God's earth, but only serve to try God's patience.

Chapter 2 ends with two thoughts.

1. The righteous life is full of reward, both pleasant and blessed by God.
2. But a life of rebellion is life without joy or satisfaction. It is hemmed in by God who frustrates it's purposes.

It is against this background that we ask the question: "What is this discussion of times and seasons, all about?" What are they and what difference should they make to us?

Circa 1965, a group called 'The Byrds' had a hit single entitled "Turn, Turn Turn" that put these verses to music. It was written in the 1950's by Peter Seeger but not released until the sixties. It had a catchy tune – but as a protest song against war, it may to some degree have missed the point that Solomon was making.

Solomon seems to be saying, that the providence of God disposes and arranges the details of a man's life<sup>1</sup>. The inference then is, that we ought not fight them, but live through them in a godly way.

Before we get into the passage, we might ask: "what is the difference between times and seasons? Seasons appear to be a 'fixed or definite portion of time', whereas times look very much like the beginning of a period.

To each of these, Solomon says, that there is a 'delight' or a 'purpose'. There is meaning hidden in each and perhaps also a blessing. Divine providence arranges a moment when everything should happen and assigns the duration of each event.

So, while a person may work and sweat, it is up to God whether or not something positive or lasting, comes of it. When you get right down to it, God is the one who distributes his blessings. And for that reason, blessings should be enjoyed as a gift from God.

Now Solomon illustrates his point in a series of 14 contrasting statements. Some of these are things external to us while others are internal. We have control over some, but not over others.

So it is, that there is a time to give birth and a time to die.

Despite the fact that in 2007, a 67-year old Spanish woman gave birth to twins, there is still a time to give birth and a time to die. Even those who give life must one day pass from this life. As the writer of Hebrews says: "It is appointed for men once to die". It is an appointment that we will all keep.

There is a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.

What is true for man is true for all life. Birth and death are a part of the nature of things, made so by God. One generation plants a tree and another cuts it down.

There is a time to kill and a time to heal.

Solomon may have had capital punishment in mind. The apostle Paul explained that government, "does not bear the sword in vain". Our writer may also be thinking of justifiable homicide...the taking of life in self-defense or in defense of others. Such times do come as do times of healing. Taking a life and saving a life are things that may be forced upon us, and Solomon says – there is a time for each.

There is also a time to tear down and a time to build up.

The principle remains as we move from the human realm to the material one. Things grow old and need to be replaced. Old buildings unfit for human habitation, demand attention. It is important to know when to tear down and when to build up – when to bail on a money-pit and to start over.

There is a time to weep and a time to laugh.

You never know which one is just around the corner. None of us knows what life holds for us 10 minutes from now. But we do know that there will always be a time for joy and a time for sorrow. And we should know when it is right to laugh and when we really ought to weep.

And then there is a time to mourn and a time to dance.

Solomon seems to put two occasions side by side. What do you do at a funeral? What about a wedding? Some get the two confused – crying at weddings and joking at funerals.

And maybe Solomon is saying something else that we also need to hear. It really is okay to be happy. Joy and celebration are good and proper responses to the blessings of God. God gives us permission to be happy.

Others of us also need to know that it is okay to mourn. When a loved one dies, mourning is in order – even when we believe that that person is saved. Our loss is real and we are separated permanently from the deceased in this life. So God says...go ahead and mourn. There really is a right time and place for each.

Now this next pair are a bit harder to explain. There is a time to throw stones and a time to gather stones.

When I was kid, throwing stones was a good way to get a spanking...nor did it help for me to quote this scripture. But what exactly was Solomon talking about?

Commentators offer different suggestions – none of which are all that convincing.

The fact is that there are many reasons for gathering stones. Where my dad grew up in southern Saskatchewan, clearing stones had to be done before any farming could commence. In places where other building materials are scarce, stones are put to use.

Whatever purpose Solomon has in mind, he means that when that purpose has been served, there comes a time to undo what has been done. A man's plans come and go. His work is done and eventually undone.

There is a time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.

There are times when a display of affection is called for, and others when refraining from such is the right thing to do. Dad used to observe that some dating couples seemed, "joined at the hip". He was talking about the apparent need to be in constant physical contact – regardless of when and where. I don't think that Solomon was talking about dating – but the principle certainly applies to a wide range of relationships.

There is a time to search and a time to give up as lost.

This principle may apply both to people and to things. There is a time to pursue a business venture and also a time to get out before losing everything. There also comes a time when you've searched for the lost, all that you can. To continue may put more lives at risk than those that you hope to rescue. This instruction is about accepting human limitation. Sometimes the lost cannot be found. And sometimes the spiritually lost cannot be restored. This is especially true when trying to restore faith in those who are actively putting it to death.

There is a time to keep and a time to throw away.

When your ship is sinking, it may want to throw the cargo overboard. It is vital to know, when to keep and when to throw away.

There is a time to tear apart and a time to sew together.

The 'security patches' that my mother sewed onto the rear-end of my pants, were working long before Microsoft borrowed the term. But how old do the clothes have to be before you toss them?

It is also possible that Solomon was thinking about torn relationships. When a loved one died in ancient times, torn clothes was a sign of a torn heart. But in due season, God provides a renewal of hope and the assurance that life with Him is truly worth living. That is when you mend your clothes and get on with life.

There is a time to be silent and a time to speak.

When Job's friends first came to share his grief, they sat in silence for 7 days. It was when they opened their mouths that things 'went south'. Some things are beyond words. Knowing when to speak and when to be silent is a mark of wisdom. And while it is true that wisdom should be shared – real wisdom chooses the time with great care.

And then there is a time to love and a time to hate...a time for war and a time for peace.

These two sayings express the same truth. The first applies to a person, the second to a nation. Each of us should love righteousness and hate evil. We should embrace goodness, kindness and mercy. But the statesman

is often called to defend his country. Peace should always be the first option, but may not always be possible. There is unfortunately, a time for each...both war and peace.

Left to ourselves, we might ask the same question that our writer did: "What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?"

To which we might respond: "nothing". There is no profit. We cannot control the times or the seasons. We don't get to choose the circumstances of our lives, so why bother trying?

Verses 10-14 give a different answer. We go on trying because God has given us a job to do. God has so ordained things that they take place, each at the appropriate time.

And just when we tire of being the creature before the creator, we recognize that God has done one more thing. He has set eternity in your heart and in mine. He has made us yearn for something more...something beyond 'life under the sun'.

He has created us for eternity...but has put us here in time and space. And he knows, that we will never be satisfied with life on earth. We cannot be. God has planted dissatisfaction deep in our hearts, because he wants us to seek Him

God is a God who wants to be found. He's not the one who is lost – we are. He wants us to find Him and the ultimate satisfaction of our souls. And he has given us his word, to guide us home.

Perhaps your life is like the one that Solomon describes. Mundane. Repetitious and predictable to the point of boredom. But life can also be unpredictable and downright terrifying. By its very nature, life 'under the sun' calls us to trust in God.

Solomon didn't have the answers that Jesus provided. He did not know much about God's plans to share eternal life with us. But we do, and are so incredibly blessed.

Solomon was the wisest man of his time yet did not know what we do. And while God has not answered all of our questions, we can know all that we need for life and godliness.

So let us trust God – day by day as we too live 'under the sun'. Let us use the power that God has given us to enjoy his blessings, here and now. And let us do that knowing that God will also empower us to enjoy life with him in heaven.

He reserves that promise for Christians...as he calls all people to repent. God offers so much more than just intellectual answers. He offers eternal life in his presence – which is the answer, and satisfies as nothing else can.

1 James Smith, The Wisdom Literature and Psalms, pg.727

## Was Jesus too protective of His disciples?

Written on: August 1, 2024

Article by: Jean Volcy

Some feel that Jesus was overprotective of his disciples. I do not think so.

As I study and follow Jesus throughout the 4 gospels what I see is divine love. In his omniscience, Jesus knew that tough roads lay ahead for the disciples (John 16:33). And while he loved them to the uttermost, He did not neglect to teach them or to warn. As the cross approached, his love for them became that much more evident, so that in his prayer (John 17) we can almost reach out and touch it.

In John 17:9-12, Jesus explained:

“I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled”.

And then he added: “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”

Jesus knew that his opponents were dangerous and deadly. And he knew that their animosity toward him would be redirected toward his 12 apostles. Thus, He warned them to be careful and wise: saying “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” Matthew 10:16

Jesus was concerned both for their physical welfare and their faith. He did not want the gospel supplanted by the traditions of men. So He warned them about the “Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matthew 16:6). The disciples discussed this among themselves, thinking that Jesus was talking about the fact that they had forgotten to take bread with them. Jesus told them that they were mistaken and that He was not talking about physical bread, but rather about the teachings of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They were false teachers.

“11 How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” (Matthew 16:11-12)

R. C. Bell expressed it this way, “Our difficulty lies not in comprehending but in obeying.” The glorious hope of the Christian is more than enough to flood the soul with rejoicing, even in the midst of abounding disappointments, provided it is kept in focus by the mind. This hope is the anchor of the soul (Hebrews 6:19) which enables the child of God to endure whatever storms may come, but not, however, without prayer. Prayer is the breathing of the redeemed soul, and the cessation or neglect of it will smother and destroy spiritual life.

Knowing that these Scribes and Pharisees were a bunch of hypocrites who were heading straight to hell, Jesus warned the crowds and his disciples not to follow their example. In Mat. 23:13-33 Jesus pronounces several



woes to the Scribes and pharisees. They were blind guides, and Jesus warned his followers to beware of their teachings.

**Unfortunately, similar leaders are still around.**

2 Peter 2:1-3 warns, “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”

**Christians must not follow blind leaders. We must listen to what Jesus says.**

In Matthew 15:14 Jesus instructs, “Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” There are many blind guides out there today leading other blind and as followers of Christ, we must make sure to stay away from them.

How can you identify them? By comparing their message with what Jesus and his apostles taught. True preachers devote themselves to the apostles’ teachings (Acts 2:42). If anyone preaches anything contrary to what Jesus and his apostles preached then beware. Do not follow them.

So for example, Jesus stated very clearly in Mark 16:16 “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” And Peter repeated this in Acts 2:38, in the first gospel sermon calling on men and women to, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Those who are truly preaching what Jesus did, will hold fast to this very same doctrine. If not, beware.

If you are reading this article but have not yet obeyed the gospel, then we want to encourage you to follow the example of those who believed on the day of Pentecost. Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. If you wish to obey the gospel, contact the nearest church of Christ and we will be happy to assist you.

# Baptism is a Work of God

Written on: August 1, 2024

Article by: Matt Wallin

Jesus was the plan before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). God worked out the plan of salvation through the ages (Genesis 3:15/Matthew 1:16; Genesis 12:3/Galatians 3:8). When we discuss our salvation, we must acknowledge that God has been working out a plan for a long time, and He has done the heavy lifting.

There is no plan; there is no solution; there is not even a chance without the work of God.

When presented with these facts, many of the people in the New Testament asked a similar question: "What should we do?" (Acts 2:37; 9:6; 10:4; 13:42; 16:30). They understood that the overwhelming work of God demanded a response on their part.

Today, if we agree that God has made salvation possible, and we agree that it demands a response on our part, let us ask the same question the people in Acts asked: "What should we do?"

Consider this.

Hearing the word of God is a lot of work. We must clear our schedule, find some alone time, and read. Hearing takes work.

Belief is a lot of work. Humbling ourselves to the point where we can be taught is hard. Changing what we have thought for years, or what our family has thought for generations, is tough! Belief takes work.

Is repentance hard? Ask the person who is addicted to sin. Changing our behavior after 5, 10, or even 50 years is hard. Repentance takes work!

Confession can be challenging. Confessing Jesus in a crowd may put us out of our comfort zone. Confessing Jesus with our words, and the way we live, as we go back to work and into our family can be new and difficult. Confession takes work!

Although each of these things requires work on our part, most people have no problem understanding their role in our salvation. However, even though the majority of conversions in Acts specifically mention baptism, some people object to baptism, calling it a work.

Did you know that only one verse calls baptism a work? This verse does not say that it is our work, but the "powerful working of God" (Colossians 2:12).

Baptism is the most passive part of our conversion. In baptism we give up control, both physically and spiritually, and let someone immerse us in water while God does the work. This is a divine precedent for the rest of our Christian walk: we will need God and other people.

Yes, God has done the heavy lifting. But His hard work demands a response from us. In light of what God has done, what will you do?

