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“Thus saith the Lord, ‘stand ye in the ways, and see and ask for the Old Paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest of your souls.’ (Jer. 6:16) “And they that be of Thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Paths to Dwell in.” (Isa. 58:12).

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DOES PSALM 51:5 TEACH TOTAL HEREDITARY DEPRAVITY?

By *DAVID GRIFFIN*

Those who teach the doctrine of total hereditary depravity cite several passages which they allege to support the doctrine. One such passage is Psalm 51:5. “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (NKJV). We will examine this passage to determine whether it truly teaches this doctrine.

As Bible students are aware, to understand any passage one must first consider its context. We begin with the title of Psalm 51. As do many of the Psalms, the 51st Psalm bears a title printed before verse one. Sometimes these titles can help establish the historical context of a Psalm. Although such titles are generally not considered part of the inspired words, they are quite ancient, and have been part of the Hebrew text for many centuries. Hence, they carry at least some historical significance. The title appended to Psalm 51 says: “A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba” (NKJV)

Second Samuel 12 depicts David’s emotional frame of mind when composing Psalm 51. After Nathan the prophet had indicted David first for his sin with Bathsheba, then for arranging the death of Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, David is confronted face to face with his sins. Second Samuel 12:13 records David’s response: “I have sinned against the Lord.” Nathan then informs David that because of his sins, the child conceived by his illicit relationship with Bathsheba will die. During the following seven days, David is so remorseful of these sins and the consequences to the child, that his servants, upon observing his behavior, are concerned about his emotional welfare. Verse 19 depicts them as “whispering” among themselves as to how they should deal with David during this heart-rending time. When after seven days, the child ultimately dies

as Nathan foretold, “ ... David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate.” It was during those seven days of distress, prior to the death of the child, that David presumably composed Psalm 51.

Verses 1-3 read as follows. “Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.”

In these opening words, David, appealing to the Lord’s “lovingkindness” and “tender mercies,” begs the Lord not to deal with him as he deserves, but rather to “have mercy” on him, to “blot out” his transgressions, to “wash me thoroughly,” and to “cleanse me from my sin.” Clearly, David is overwhelmed with the guilt of his sin, and not only his guilt, but with the realization that such guilt has alienated him from his God. The emotional force of this Psalm is thus evident from the opening line throughout!

Verse 5, however, is the passage at issue. The advocates of total hereditary depravity assert that it must be taken literally. The following paragraphs will challenge this assumption by demonstrating two things: 1) That the advocates of total hereditary depravity do not in reality take the passage literally, as they claim, and 2) given the poetic nature of the Psalms generally and the context of Psalm 51:1 specifically, the passage should not be taken literally.

First, contrary to their claims, the advocates of total hereditary depravity do not take it literally. The expressions, “I was brought forth in iniquity” and “in sin my mother conceived me” are indeed a far cry from the language of the creeds teaching total hereditary

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Editorial

SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

By DON L. KING

In Ephesians 4:15 the apostle said: “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ;”

Paul had previously given some wonderful information about brethren coming into the unity of the faith, etc., and now stresses that the truth (gospel truths) is to be spoken in love. This is an interesting concept. The New Testament fully furnishes us with all we need to teach in the church. According to Romans 1:16,17 the righteousness of God is completely revealed within it. We are furnished with every good work (II Timothy 3:14-17). Peter tells us that His divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto Life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue, etc. (2 Peter 1:3) Of course, there are some things taught in the New Testament which are unpopular with many. Long hair on women, (1 Corinthians 11:2-16) one cup and one loaf in the communion, 1 Corinthians 11:23-34; Paul’s warnings about being worldly, Galatians 5:19-21, etc., and the list could go on and on. How should we teach these and so many other matters? What should our attitude be?

Every teacher and preacher must shoulder his responsibility as he stands before the church in affirmation of the Truth. Our choice is not whether or not to teach the truth. We are commanded to do so. (Titus 1:2; 2 Timothy 4:2-5) The truth, and all of it, should be taught. We must never soft-pedal the truth. If we do, we may be sure Heaven will not be pleased with us. There is nothing bad about using illustrations, when profitable, but we must keep in mind that our duty is to preach the Word, and it must be spoken in love. As our children grow up, we must occasionally speak to them in a disciplinary manner. However, because we love them more than life, our speaking is done in such a way as to demonstrate our love for them. Our children should never wonder if we love them, and brethren should never wonder if we love them as we teach. If so, we have failed in our duty.

Probably every teacher has wrestled with the manner in which he should present the Word of God in order to achieve the desired result. Surely, we have all thought

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“BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS” 1993*By JAMES D. ORTEN*

“The following article by Brother James Orten is one that every person should read with care and concern. Not only are brethren, in some places, rushing to disagree and divide, they are also involving other people and churches by mailing out letters detailing every aspect of their trouble. Such practices have a double negative effect: (1) problems are advertised that would better be kept private. People feel impelled to take sides, which usually only intensifies the problem rather than solving it, (2) such advertising only tends to crystalize and make the local situation worse. There must be a better way, I believe Brother Orten shows us that way.” —Ronny F. Wade

The phrase that titles this article was spoken by Jesus in His great Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapters 5-7. This was one of the first, if not the first, public declarations by the Messiah of the doctrine of His coming kingdom, His miracles had already made Him famous (Mt. 4:24), so the world was waiting for His call to arms.

Can you imagine what an American politician, businessman, coach, or motivational speaker might have said on such an occasion? Whatever you think that might have been, it likely would be directly opposite of what the Master uttered. This was no “thrill of victory and agony of defeat” speech. It was not a “when the going gets tough the tough gets going” exhortation, and it was not a pepper upper filled with such phrases as “tough competitor”, “take no prisoners”, “every ounce of energy”, and “to the victor goes the spoils”.

Instead the Lord introduced His kingdom with a series of nine statements that recommend a very different attitude. Listen to a few of them, “Blessed are the poor in spirit”, “Blessed are they that mourn”, “Blessed are the meek”, and “Blessed are the merciful”, How surprised and disappointed many of His hearers must have been, What a contrast to U.S. culture, which may explain why it is so difficult for modern Americans to be true Christians. It was in this context that Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”

Jesus chose a word for peacemakers that, so far as I can tell, is used nowhere else in the New Testament. I do not know what was in His mind when He selected that

word, but perhaps He did it to make a stronger contrast with the other side-peacemakers and peace as opposed to combatants and conflict.

There is such a clear Biblical theme regarding how God feels about strife. For example, Proverbs 6:16 gives a list of the seven things God hates. It includes liars, murderers, and so forth and concludes with “...he that soweth discord among brethren.” Paul took an equally strong stand against strifemakers. “For whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men?” (I Cor, 3:3).

The history of the human race, as Paul implied, truly is a chronicle of conflict. It is as old as Cain and Abel and as new as this morning’s headlines. And every conflict has left a legacy that men had to get over, usually with great difficulty, to grow in Christ. It does not matter whether the strife is between husbands and wives such as Nabal and Abigail (I Sam. 25), between brothers as was the case with Cain and Abel, factions within a church like the one at Corinth, or divisions within a brotherhood such as the one caused by the Judaizing teachers in the First-Century church. There is always hurt feelings, innocent people discouraged, and ultimately souls lost.

Lately, I have wondered where are the peacemakers that the Lord blessed? In view of the great need for them, of Jesus’ promised blessing, and God’s condemnation of conflict, one would expect an abundant supply. Yet, it is obvious that there has been no stampede into the peacemaking field. Assertiveness clinics do a brisk business, but peacemakers are hard to find.

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Two Types of Peacemaker:

The Scriptures acknowledge peacemakers of two types, which I simply label as “formal” and “informal”. Informal peacemakers are recognized as much by who they are as by what they do. Philemon is an example here. Of him Paul said, “We have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother” (Philemon, v. 7). The word “refreshed” refers to the renewal of strength that comes after rest, and because that type of refreshment frequently comes after sleep, the word also means “to keep quiet”.

Philemon was the type of person who calmed you down, not stirred you up. I believe he was a teacher who stepped out of the pulpit leaving you glad you are a Christian. I think when you visited in his hospitable home you left feeling better about yourself and other Christians. Philemon probably did not think of himself as a peacemaker, but he was one. No wonder Paul had confidence in that church. When I see a congregation with leaders that have such personalities, I feel confident too.

Formal peacemakers are identified in Paul’s discussion (I Cor. 6:1-7) of Christians taking each other to court. He said, “Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?” Clearly, the combatants in Corinth were not eager to use peacemakers, I think I know why. Because they were carnal (I Cor. 3:1), they had more trust in the worldly principles and procedures of a human court, than in the spiritual justice that would be administered by a wise Christian. Sad, isn’t it?

I believe, however, that there is a trend in recent years toward getting wise and sober heads involved before conflicts are allowed to run their full destructive courses. Because the practice is Biblical, I would like to make suggestions to encourage it and to make it work effectively. First, some comments to combatants; second, suggestions for would-be peacemakers.

Choose Peacemakers Well

Some people are surprised to find that the Bible gives a clear list of qualifications for peacemakers. When a quarrel erupted between the home-born and foreign-born Jews in Jerusalem, the apostles said, “Wherefore, brethren look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:3). The fact that these men had a practical part in implementing the peace plan did not obviate their role as peacemakers.

The qualifications are notable, in the first instance, for what they do not say. The apostles did not say, “Each of you choose men from your own sides.” That likely would have intensified the quarrel. Instead they said choose men of “honest report”, or those who had earned a reputation for honesty and fairness.

The second qualification is “full of the Holy Ghost”. Because this is put in opposition to “wisdom”, which means human wisdom, I do not understand it to speak of a miraculous gift. Rather, I take it to mean full of divine wisdom as revealed by the Holy Ghost. We do not have to worry about how these men got filled with the Spirit, ie. whether through the word or a personal indwelling. It will be quite sufficient to judge whether their lives have shown the fruits of the Spirit as described in Galatians 5. Note how admirably those fruits equip a peacemaker: Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, faith...

The “wisdom” that concludes the list refers to knowledge that belongs to men, and specifically to skill in handling human affairs. Peacemakers should be persons whose lives show that they love people, are peaceful persons, wise in divine wisdom, and skilled in working with humans.

Different Types of Conflict

Solomon compared strife to fire (Prov. 26:20-21), which is an instructive analogy. Firemen learn early that different types of fires must be handled in different ways. The methods that extinguish one fire may make another worse. Most housewives know that putting water on a grease fire is a bad idea. The Bible recognizes at least three types of conflict. 1. Conflict over matters of doctrine. The distinguishing feature of this struggle is that it is over a definite Biblical principle, thus, one side is right and the other is wrong. For example, the Judaizing teachers argued that circumcision and other observances of Jewish law were necessary to salvation. Paul was not about to allow that false doctrine to stand. He said, “To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Gal. 2:5).

The church has faced conflict over doctrinal matters several times since the days of the apostles. I am grateful that there were leaders who, in the tradition of Paul, gave no place to false doctrine. And I hope that when we face such situations in the future we will have similar courage, But it is important for peacemakers to know that this template, of one side right and the other wrong, does not fit all cases. And to force it onto

a situation in which it does not fit can do great harm. 2. Conflict over matters of judgment. An example of this type is Paul and Barnabas who argued over whether to take Mark with them on a missionary journey (Acts 15:36-41). Barnabas was “determined” to take him and Paul was equally determined not to, because Mark had deserted them on an earlier trip. Who is right and who is wrong in differences over matters of judgment? Both are right, if they simply are pleading for what they think is best for the Lord’s cause. Both are wrong, if they push issues to the point of division or ill feelings.

Paul was so convinced that Mark would not be a profitable worker; and the church sided with him (v. 40). But they were wrong, a fact that Paul later graciously acknowledged (II Tim. 4:11), and one that should make us humble about our own judgments. To argue over matters of judgment, as if they were matters of right and wrong, is exquisitely destructive.

Georges Simenon, in his great novel, *The Cat*, described a contrary husband and wife who ruined their lives over whether the husband’s cat should be allowed in the house. I have seen spouses who blighted their marriages over such things. But what is worse, I have seen Christians who ruined churches over matters of judgment that, in the long run, did not amount to much more.

How do wise peacemakers handle conflict over matters of judgment? First, they clearly identify it as such. Then if the combatants are implacable, they condemn the sinfulness (Rom. 1:31) and propose an objective method of settlement. According to the definition of the word “appointed”, there was a budding argument among the disciples in Acts 1 over whether Barnabas or Matthias should replace Judas. Someone wisely proposed that they pray and cast lots, which they did and the matter was settled. Both men were qualified and it was only their judgments about which would be best, thus, casting lots was an appropriate, perhaps not an elegant, method of settling the matter. They probably remembered that Solomon said, “The lot causeth contentions to cease” (Prov. 18:18). When I hear brethren arguing over which faithful preacher to have for a meeting, whether to build a new church building, or even what type of lawn mower to buy, I wish they too would pray and cast lots. 3. Conflict over who is going to be the greatest, or struggles over power. This is probably the most dangerous type of conflict and the most common. Jesus’ disciples argued about it frequently, the last time just after the Lord’s supper and

just before His betrayal (Lk. 22:24); Who is right and who is wrong in struggles for power? Both sides are wrong. The motivation that produces such conflicts and the behaviors that come from them are diametrically opposed to what Jesus said His kingdom is about. He made it clear to his disciples (Mt. 18:3) that if they continued struggling to be the greatest, they would miss the kingdom of heaven altogether!

Several features make these conflicts especially invidious. For one thing, they usually are filled with vicious personal attacks and quick attempts to disfellowship the other side. Remember the rebellion Miriam led against Moses (Num. 12)? God said, “Wherefore were ye not afraid to speak against my servant, Moses?” Diotrefes, who “loveth to have the preeminence,” tried to “cast out of the church” those who disagreed with him (III John). More objective Christians are appalled at the hateful quality of the things these combatants say and do.

Another common characteristic is deceptiveness. These combatants, sensing that observers may not admire such struggles, do not wish to reveal their true nature. Jesus once asked His disciples, “What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves who should be the greatest” (Mk. 9:33).

As unsavory as the disciples’ behavior sounds, more reprehensible ways sometimes are used to cover the nature of the conflict. One is to clothe it in bogus doctrinal issues to lend an air of respectability (a fact that may confuse less experienced members of the church). This may require the weirdest doctrinal positions, ones the combatants never took before, and occasionally ones no one ever took before.

At times, of course, there may be doctrinal issues. But the fact that these are not the real source of trouble is clear because the warriors did not worry about them before the fight started. It is clear too from how far combatants are willing to go to “save” the church from newly-discovered sins. Solomon knew that a real mother would give up possession of her child rather than see it destroyed (I Kings 3). And a true Christian will not destroy the church in order to “save” it.

How do peacemakers extinguish conflicts over power? Again, it is important to name it what it is and to clearly label the sin on both sides. It requires strong stands; one should expect it in struggles for power. Jesus condemned

the lot of His disciples and told them they were about to be lost. God gave Miriam leprosy to humble her. This is not a task for those who are timid or fearful.

Peacemakers must not be sidetracked by the spectre of doctrinal issues. For one thing, they often are not real; but even if they are, they can not be settled until the more basic issue of control is confronted. To paper over such rotten spots only guarantees more trouble later. This is the reason so many hatchets are buried with the handles sticking out.

But there is an even greater danger in being taken in by bogus doctrinal issues. If peacemakers go into a conflict such as this trying to impose a “one side right and one side wrong” solution, both sides likely will be lost. The side that “loses” senses that the decision was not made on good grounds. They usually leave the church, creating a split, endangering their souls, and embarrassing the Lord’s cause in the community. The side that was declared “right” is further emboldened in their arrogance and not led to repent of their sins. Sinners will be lost, in the church or out.

Summary

These are some types of conflict that Bible writers discuss. There may be others; and it is possible for a conflict to have evolved from one type into another. For example, what starts as a sincere difference of judgment may, with a few inappropriate words or actions, escalate into a struggle for power.

In addition to the suggestions made above, peacemakers should be prepared for the fact that neither side may appreciate their work. As a kid on the farm, I learned that trying to separate a dogfight can get you bitten by both animals. This uncomfortable situation is especially likely in struggles for power, a fact that can seduce less secure mediators into unwisely taking sides. In this role, one must keep in mind that the blessing comes from Jesus; it is sufficient reward for now that warriors beat their swords into plowshares.

STAYING IN THE PEA PATCH

By TERRY STUDDARD

II Samuel 23:11-12

11 And after him was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered together into a troop, where was a piece of ground full of lentiles: and the people fled from the Philistines.

12 But he stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines: and the LORD wrought a great victory.

These verses are part of the account of David’s mighty men. These were a group of highly trained soldiers who fought with David and aided him in his victories. Among these men were three others who served as David’s personal bodyguards. These men and their exploits are described in these verses. Let us notice one of these three special men by the name of Shammah. He is described for us as man who took a stand against overwhelming odds and won a great victory by the help of the Lord. He is a man that we can learn a great deal from.

The Bible tells us that the Philistines attacked the people of God. It was during the time of the harvest when they came. Most of the people were occupied in the business of getting the crops in. When the enemy came, they were busy working and not prepared for war, so they ran away. That is, except one man named Shammah! He took his stand in a field of lentils, or peas and he won a great victory. I would like to take a closer look at this man Shammah and what he did because he teaches us a lesson that we would do well to learn.

First - This was a decisive time of great conflict. The enemy came to steal and pillage intending to leave nothing to spare. The people had long since adopted the defeatist attitude. Their strength and courage were gone and they they were all too willing to lay down and accept whatever fate the enemy intended for them. They were much like the church of Ephesus.

Revelation 2:1-7

1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not hear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the

Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

God has not left us without warning!

I Peter 5:8 - Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

Neither has He left us without an example!

Nehemiah 4:16-18

16 And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah.

17 They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.

18 For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.

The enemy came for one reason, to inflict casualties and destroy the crops and found no opposition because all the people fled from before them.

Second - It was a time of great courage! It always takes a time of crisis for great courage to shine forth. The Bible tells us that Shammah "stood". Shammah knew that some things were worth fighting for! Some things are worth dying for!

Ephesians 6:11-18

11 - Put on the whole armour of God, ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 - For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the ruler of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places,

13 - Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.

14 - Stand therefore having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

15 - and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

16 - Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 - And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the work of God:

18 - Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saint.

The Bible is replete with examples of men and women of great courage who fought monumental battles against horrific odds for Truth and Right. Battles have been fought against military enemies, political foes, social prejudices, and spiritual antagonists since creation. This is yet another example that God plus one is always a majority.

Third - This was a time of great victory! Lest we be mistaken, the Lord defeated the enemy. It was the same when David walked into the valley against Goliath. Or when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stood their ground. Or when Daniel continued to pray in spite of what the king commanded. When we face the spiritual battles of life, we need to remember that those battles are the Lord's!

II Chronicles 20:15 - And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.

Psalms 35:1 - A Psalm of David.

Plead my cause, O LORD, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me.

1 Samuel 17:47 - And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hands.

Therefore, when you fight the battles, whether you win or lose, you have done what the Lord requires, you have been faithful! Because God had one man who was willing to stand, the fields were protected and the people were saved from starvation and from slavery!

The enemy is still attacking the people of God today just as he did through the Philistines long ago. And, just like it was then, so people are still fleeing from the scene of the battle. People are abandoning the harvest and are choosing to flee rather than fight. Where do you stand? Are you willing to stand idly by while the enemy ransacks the church? Or, like Shammah, are you

willing to take your stand for God, regardless of the consequences and fight until the victory is won. Will you stay in the pea patch while other are running away? Terry L. Studdard (tstuddard75@gmail.com) (256-913-7498)

MISTAKES OF YOUNG PREACHERS

“Many young preachers start out to “clean up” something or somebody. Their knowledge of the scriptures being limited, they get hold of a part of the truth of some subject, then try to compel others to accept their constructions.

This mistake, or class of mistakes, is not confined to preachers, other brethren are often just as “one sided,” having learned part of a truth, push it just as hard, but we are at this time writing about the mistakes of young preachers.

The remedy is to be found in more and better training, not in a college or Bible school, but in the church, by the church, and through the church as the Lord has pointed out.

Christ’s apostles were mature men, yet He did not send them out to preach until they had traveled with Him, observing His manner and methods, as well as the things taught.

Paul tried the young preachers he sent out, by having them with him, by sending them on trips, by giving them special work, after which they reported to him, thus showing the apostle was keeping in close touch with and directing the young preachers he expected to put in the field. When by experience and training they were prepared, he sent them forth and wrote them letters of divine instructions.

We have the same divine instructions which will serve young preachers now, but as then they need training by churches and older preachers, that they may have the experience which will enable them to more fully comprehend the instructions.

The Lord’s way is the best and His way was not to send boys one by one to the field by themselves without first giving them the training needed, and this training can be furnished by associating them with older men. The young preacher who starts out as an evangelist without

such training is making a serious mistake.”

Selected from *The Apostolic Way*, December, 1928

DOES PSALM 51:5....continued from page one

depravity. According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, when Adam and Eve sinned they became “wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body,” and since they are “the root of all mankind,” they, in turn, “imputed ... the same death in sin, and corrupted nature ... to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation” (The Westminster Confession of Faith Chap. 6, Sections II & III; the other Protestant Creeds teach essentially the same).

It appears that if David had intended to teach total hereditary depravity, he would have indicted Adam and Eve in verse 5 rather than his mother. He says, “I was brought forth in iniquity,” and “in sin my mother conceived me.” Taken literally, the language naturally suggests David’s mother was guilty of sin in David’s conception and birth. It is evident that if the creeds are correct, and total hereditary depravity is true, then Adam is the one at fault here! It is surely not the fault of David’s poor unsuspecting mother, who likely never had a clue that having a son by her own husband (in keeping with the law of God) would involve her in such a crime as this. Here are some more things to consider. If David is indicting his mother as responsible for passing on total hereditary depravity to him, why does David not also include his father Jesse in the indictment? Was not David’s father involved in the conception? Is his mother alone responsible for David’s supposed total hereditary depravity? All of this demonstrates that total hereditary depravity advocates do not take the passage literally as they claim, but simply accommodate its language in support of cherished Reformation dogma.

Now, I am aware that the advocates of the dogma would likely characterize the above as a “straw man” argument. In response, I would say that since this passage is so often quoted as a blanket statement unequivocally proving total hereditary depravity, then these questions are not irrelevant. I post all these thoughts simply to emphasize that, if taken literally, all that Psalm 51:5 says is that David was “brought forth in iniquity” (where the agent is evidently his mother) and that she conceived him “in sin.” The passage says nothing overtly about either

David's depravity, or "Adam and Eve" or "all their posterity," or their supposed "corrupted nature" being "imputed by ordinary generation" to the whole human race! Yet the verse is constantly quoted as proving such, when in reality one must assume the doctrine, in order to derive it from the passage. This, I would say, is essentially "begging the question."

Now concerning David's mother, there is no indication in the historical record of the Bible that she committed sin in conceiving a child by her husband and in giving birth to that child. David's mother is in fact never named in the Scripture, although the Jewish Talmud gives her name as Nitzevet. However, all indications in the Old Testament are that David's father, Jesse, was a godly man, and although we do not know much about David's mother, we may assume the sanctity of the union between Jesse and David's mother, at least based upon our knowledge of his father. It is hard to see then how David's mother committed sin in David's conception and birth, especially when two parties are involved in the conception, but the other party (David's father) receives no blame in the matter.

Second, it is for these and other reasons we conclude that verse five cannot be taken as a "raw," literal statement. When thus taken, it presents the absurdities demonstrated by the above questions and reasonings. Therefore, we must look elsewhere than a "literal" interpretation for Psalm 51:5.

All one hundred-fifty of the Psalms are poetic. This means that the Psalms throughout employ language that is characteristic of poetry, including simile, metaphor, hyperbole, and parallelism (which is especially common in Hebrew poetry), as well as many other devices of poetic expression. Poetic passages therefore are not like "doctrinal treatises" that spell out doctrinal principles in literal and logical propositions. Poetic language is tinged with emotion and pathos; its expressions are often lofty and elevated above the literal, compared to texts written in prose. I believe this is the case with Psalm 51:5.

None of this means, of course, that no line in the Psalms (or other poetry for that matter) can be taken literally. It only means that poetry is especially given to figurative language and exaggeration, and one must be on the alert for these characteristics when reading and interpreting poetry such as the Psalms and many other parts of the Bible (particularly the Old Testament).

That said, for a variety of reasons I feel compelled to

understand Psalm 51:5 as hyperbole (pronounced, hy-PER-bo-ly). Hyperbole (already mentioned in an above paragraph) is a rhetorical device defined as "exaggeration or extravagant language used as a figure of speech" (The Collegiate Dictionary 1984).

Applying this concept to Psalm 51:5 means this. David, when composing Psalm 51, is immersed in the throes of his emotions and realizes the impact of his sin both on God and all the human characters drawn into his sordid affair with Bathsheba. In this state of mind, while he composes a song, only the most elevated exaggeration can capture his sense of remorse.

"I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me" is simply the way David expresses how engulfed he is in sin. He is overwhelmed with the realization that his sins brought so much bad to so many people. He is not writing a treatise on hereditary total depravity; he is not composing a Psalm to teach that his mother had a "corrupted nature" inherited from Adam, passing it on to her son. He is simply expressing in poetic terms the sense of guilt and remorse he feels for his sins related to Bathsheba.

As further evidence that verse 5 is hyperbole, consider that verse 4 also expresses a similar exaggeration. Speaking to the Lord, David says, "Against You, You only have I sinned" (Ps. 51:4). Yes, David did sin against the Lord, but not the Lord ONLY! This fact is evident, given all the consequences of David's sin with Bathsheba. It involved not only sin against the Lord in the heavenly realm, but sin against his fellow actors on the human stage. David sinned against Bathsheba, a married woman, by committing adultery with her. He sinned against Uriah the Hittite (Bathsheba's husband), both by the affair itself, and later by deliberately sending Uriah into the forefront of a hopeless battle to make sure he was eliminated. He sinned against Joab by involving him, unknowingly, in the maneuver of putting Uriah in harm's way. One can also say David sinned even against the child of the illicit affair whose little life was cut short as judgment upon David himself. And there may be others against whom David sinned in this whole mess.

Yet, verse 4 says "Against You, YOU ONLY have I sinned." This is obvious hyperbole intended to emphasize the depth of transgression David has committed against the Lord. This hyperbole continues into the next verse—verse 5. Therefore, Psalm 51 :5 fails to provide Biblical support for the doctrine of total hereditary depravity. —OPA

SPEAKING THE TRUTH....continued from page two

within ourselves: “How can I teach this subject and bring about obedience?” One thing is pretty certain. Even if the truth is presented with a poor attitude, it will probably not have the desired result. If the teacher sounds as though he is angry, personally upset, or manifests a poor spirit, his words are likely to fall on deaf ears. Far better to obey the Lord and speak the truth in love! Our hearers will more likely accept and be benefitted by what they hear. We always need to consider the audience. If we have non-members present, it is not the time to rebuke the audience, or deal with some problem only we know about. Personal issues should not be approached from the pulpit. We shouldn’t get in the pulpit to “grind axes,” as the old preachers used to say. Save that for a more opportune, and private occasion, if at all. Ask yourself: do I want to see these people be saved or do I want to treat them so that they may never return? If they never come back, what have we gained? An opportunity to perhaps save a soul has been wasted. The gospel is the good news that may, and often has, turned a bad person into a good one. We want them to return and hear the truth again. That way, the seed of God’s Word may be planted in minds and bring forth fruit.

Keep in mind the Lord’s way is always the best way. Even a rebuke should be presented in love if we expect a change for the better to take place.

Many years ago, my father related an incident from his preaching experience. He went to a certain place to hold a meeting and was asked to accompany a preacher who lived there to visit someone. During the visit, which lasted only minutes, the preacher he had accompanied bluntly accused the person of some things. The man stood up and ordered both of them out of his house. Later, in the car, the preacher said, “Sometimes you have to make them mad before they will do anything.” Dad said, “Well, he should be doing something pretty soon then because he is certainly mad.” The visit might well have ended with success had the approach been made in love.

Our experience has been that most people will accept, and benefit, from preaching that is firm and to the point, if it is presented in love. Most will even listen to things about which they disagree when it is presented in a manner showing we care about their souls. They may not care how much the preacher knows until they

know he cares about them! Only Heaven knows how much harm a poorly presented sermon may bring about because of an absence of love in the presentation. Inspiration had a reason to tell us to speak the “truth in love.” (Ephesians 4:15)

When dealing with members who are new in the church we can expect, like a little child, that they will make mistakes. Remember, just as when our young children make mistakes and we must speak to them, we usually speak in a tender manner. We want them to learn from their mistake and do better, but we don’t want them to run away from home because we were so severe. Obviously, dealing with a spiritually mature member’s failure may require a more severe approach. (Titus 1:10-13; Titus 3:1-10) Oh, that we could have the wisdom of Solomon!

Many years ago, an older preacher reminded me of a wonderful verse found in Galatians 4:19. I’ll leave it with you in closing: “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.” Paul was very patient with the Galatian members. A child is able to see Paul’s love in such a statement!

Think on these things. —DLK

Announcement

WHERE THE SAINTS ASSEMBLE 2021-2022 - The new directory is at the printer. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 and the printer’s inability to obtain ink, it will not be finished until the end of May. If you have already ordered the directory, I apologize for the delay and will get them out as soon as I get them. If you would like to order some the information is below. Thanks for your support. —Rick Martin

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Field Reports

Don L. King, 1147 Sherry Way, Livermore, CA 94550, old_paths@juno.com, May 14. The church at home is at peace and worshipping three times each week again. It is wonderful to feel a little more normal. Our meeting with Cullen Smith is planned to take place soon and we plan to be in Weatherford, Texas soon after the 4th of July for a meeting. A number have their vaccinations for Covid now, and we hope things will continue to improve. It was my pleasure to preach once at Stockton recently to a nice crowd. The brethren in the Philippines are suffering from the virus situation. However, they are still working and baptizing people. Please, pray for them and all who are so affected by this terrible illness. Lord bless the church.

Billy D. Dickinson, 2850 N. Oakland, Springfield, MO 65803, bddickinson@juno.com, April 23. Things seem to be getting back to normal with each passing day here in the Ozarks. My brother, Jerry, recently stayed with us while in his meeting at the Mission Hills congregation (April 14-18), giving us the opportunity to visit and reminisce like brothers do, and this is something we were looking forward to. Due to the pandemic and all the restrictions associated with it, the last time we had actually been together was back in August of 2020 when we taped a “virtual meeting” in Tulsa, OK. Jerry’s meeting on the south side of Springfield involved large crowds with visitors, demonstrating that brethren in our area are ready to have meetings again, and a precious soul was baptized into Christ after one of the services. To God be the glory! It looks like I am going to have a busy year, especially in the next several months: First, I will attend and participate in the 11th Annual Mid-MO Study that is scheduled for May 3-7. My topic is ‘Christian Involvement With Civil Government,’ an issue that I have been focused on for some time now, and many experienced preachers will deal with other issues of interest and importance. It’s always a joy to be with the Rice Road congregation who is composed of zealous and hospitable brethren. Here is my meeting schedule: Blue Springs, KY on May 16-23; Columbia, MO on June 6-13 (along with Jerry); Paris, TX on Aug. 22-29. If you are in driving distance, please come and help us out in these endeavors. On a personal note, I would like to say that I was greatly saddened when I received the news that Cliff Arney died on April 2. Although he was 90 years old, I was caught off guard

and can’t imagine the Oklahoma City area without him! I treasure those times we shared in gospel meetings, enjoying the hospitality of their home, playing golf together and benefiting from the friendship of a good and godly man. Yes, I am sad, but I have the hope of seeing him again in “the sweet by and by” where there will be no death or separation of any kind. May the Lord hasten that day!

Irvin Barnes, 3218 East Farm Road 88, Springfield, MO 65803, May 9, 2021. We are deeply saddened by the passing of our beloved Sister Kathy Meents. Our sympathy is extended to Kathy’s husband Donnie, her sons Randy and Steven, her grandchildren and other family members. Steven’s family along with Donnie and Kathy have worshiped at Pleasant View for 12 years. Due to the complications of Covid, and to be nearer Kathy in her extended illness they have been attending services at Bolivar for several months now. They are greatly missed by the church here. I personally cherish the association with these wonderful people. They have contributed in many ways to Lord’s work in the church here. Donnie’s care for Kathy in her sickness is the personification of love described in 1st. Cor. 13:4-8 & Eph. 5:25. Donnie exhibits a wonderful concern for others and a great joy for the blessings in Christ. I appreciate Bro. Don King printing the sermon on Romans 1, by Wayne McKamie and mentioning that I have several copies of this sermon in tract form. We have a good supply left if anyone can use them. I received a sad letter from Bro Hernando Motta in South America. He moved from Peru to his homeland of Columbia to try to establish the faith in the area where he grew up. Covid hit there with a vengeance and now the country is under lock down from political upheaval. He reports that it has been dangerous for them to leave their homes. Please pray for the rulers there that this awful situation will soon end. Bro. David Griffin preached here recently. He continues to grow in the faith and in preaching ability. I suggested in a previous report that congregations should consider going ahead and sending preachers who had to cancel meeting because of covid, “at least a part,” of the support they would have received for the meeting, had it not been canceled. The part, that might be deleted, would be for travel expense that would not be needed for the original meeting. Pray for us. Irvinbarns@aol.com

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WALKS THROUGH THE BIBLE...

“I WONDER WHAT GOD WANTS THIS TIME!”

“Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’ So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.’” (Genesis 22:1-5)

It must have been sometime in the middle of the night when God spoke to Abraham because the Bible says he rose up early to do what the Lord had called him to do. This was not the first time, of course, that Abraham had heard the voice of the Lord. God had previously called on him to leave his home in Ur and go out into the unknown, promising that He would multiply and bless his descendants; and more, that the whole world would be blessed by Abraham’s seed. Whether or not Abraham understood that promise, we know it was a promise that was fulfilled in our Savior. What a test for Abraham and Sarah his wife! Leave your home? Leave all family ties behind? For what? Where were they going? Would it be a better land with a big house and prosperity? The Bible says he went out not knowing where he was even going. Can you believe that? The Hebrew writer says he was looking for a country whose builder and maker is God. He passed the test!

Next, God told Abraham that even though he and Sarah were well past the age of having children naturally they would have a son who would be the means of fulfilling all that God had promised him regarding his seed. This was perhaps a greater test of faith than leaving Ur. Sarah laughed with incredulity that she could have a child at her advanced age. Abraham did not laugh! He believed God and His word, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14) Abraham had passed every test, proving himself to be faithful and loyal to every call and command of the Lord.

Now, however, came the greatest and most challenging test of all! “Take your son, your only son, the one whom you love,” demands the Lord, “And offer him as a burnt offering to Me!” Can you believe what God is asking of Abraham? Notice God says, “Take your son whom you love.” The Lord knows how much Abraham loves Isaac. He loves him as every father loves his son; but more, he is the son of promise. All of God’s promises are in this boy! Surely God does not intend for His promises to fail. How can the Lord keep His promise if Isaac is dead? I wonder if Abraham had these kinds of thoughts that night when he heard again the voice of God.

We are not told what Abraham thought, but surely (it seems to me anyway) when he heard his name being called again he must have thought, “I wonder what God wants this time!” The amazingly incredible thing is that Abraham responded to the test and rose up early the next morning and set out to do what God called him to do. He headed for the land of Moriah, fully intending to kill his son and offer his body as a burnt offering. Incredible faith indeed! He ties Isaac to an altar and raises the knife. He is going to do it! The Lord, however, calls his name out again. “What does God want this time?” Abraham surely thinks. “Do no harm to the child for now I know that you fear God!” He passed the test, and because of that Abraham has two remarkable titles, The Friend of God and The Father of the faithful! He is revered by Christians, but also by Judaism and Islam as well,

My fellow gospel preacher and good friend Bob Johnson heard me preach a sermon on this story many years ago and I used the phrase, “I wonder what God wants this time?” in the sermon. That resonated with Bob and every time I see him, even now after all these years, he will approach me and exclaim, “I wonder what God wants this time?” He then will give his characteristic laugh, which of course, causes me to laugh too. I look forward as I write this to hearing him say the phrase the next time we meet - and the laughter too.

We must inquire, before leaving this great old incident, what was God seeking? Did the Lord really want a human sacrifice? Did God actually want Abraham to kill his son? Oh no! The story clearly shows that God was not after Isaac - He was after Abraham! The test was to prove that Abraham feared and loved the Lord and nothing, not even Isaac, took precedence to the Lord and His will. Even so today the Lord is not seeking your money, or possessions, or job, or even your time - He is seeking you. The Lord is after you and me, and the test is to prove we fear and love Him more than anything or anyone, even our children. What a test indeed! Many, far too many, claim to fear and love the Lord but the test is too much. The test is coming. Are we ready? Now, before the test, is the time to decide to follow in the footsteps of our spiritual father Abraham!