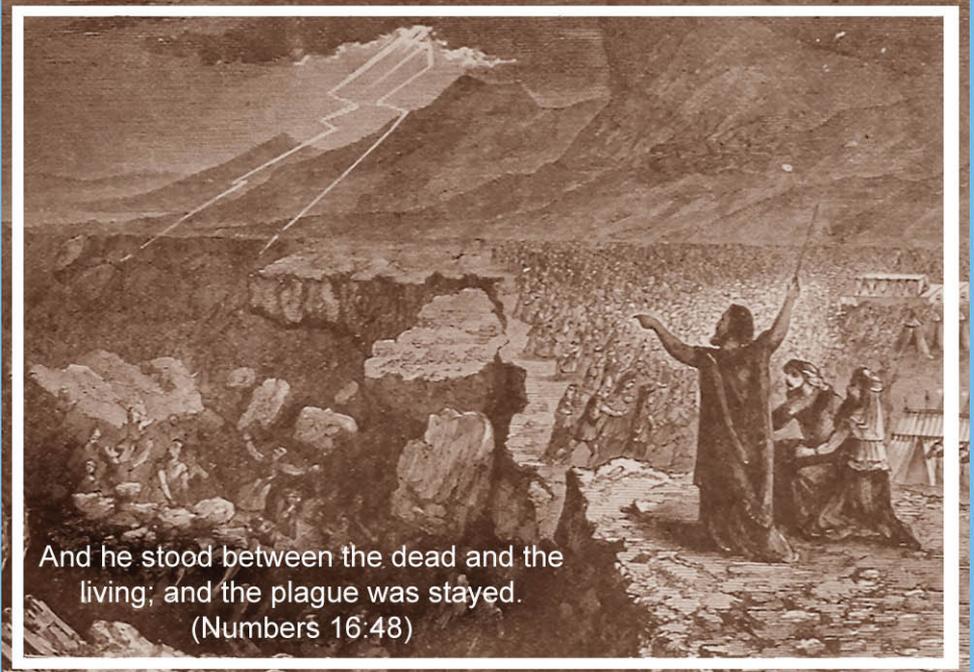


# V&B

The Vine & Branches  
The Newsletter of Workers Together With Him

ESTABLISHED 1999

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And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.  
(Numbers 16:48)

*Destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, illustration from the 1890 Holman Bible*

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## Get Out the Prayer!

“If the church wants a better pastor, it only needs to pray for the one it has.” A friend of mine sent this to me in a list called “Christian One-Liners.” This quotation is immensely useful: simply replace the word “church” with “you,” and the word “pastor” with “husband, wife, parent, child, friend, boss, Senator, President...” the possibilities are endless!

The article in this issue of the Vine & Branches by Dave Duris entitled *Intercession* speaks to this end. As I read it I thought of this passage from the book of Ezekiel:

And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.  
(Ezekiel 22:30)

How relevant is this truth to our day and time! God is looking for men and women of faith who will stand in the gap for their land. God forbid that we should relive the days before the fall of Jerusalem when God could find no one willing to “make up the hedge.”

An insolent child will point his finger and call people names. We have no right to complain that our governmental leaders fail to keep their duty when we fail to keep *ours*. It is our duty as Christians to “pray for all that are in authority” (1 Tim. 2:2) – and not only the ones we like! Get out the vote? Okay. But first get out the prayer! It is a much more powerful ballot box.

*Tim Sullivan*



### NO MORE STRANGERS AND FOREIGNERS

BY REV. TIM SULLIVAN  
Founder, WTWH

Every Fourth of July the citizenry of the United States commemorates America’s Independence Day. Sadly, the significance of this holiday seems to fade with each passing year. When last season’s cellphone seems woefully obsolete, the rule of mad King George over the thirteen English colonies seems like ancient history. For generations Americans have known nothing but independence from foreign rule (conspiracists, enter your comments *here*). By and large we Americans have difficulty appreciating our freedom because we cannot remember a time when we were *not* free.

In most Western societies most *unbelievers* know that the Christian church is waiting with bated breath for them to accept the gift of salvation. Almost every altar call includes a word about how *easy* it is to enter the kingdom of God. This indeed is true – *it is* easy. But without a knowledge of the way things used to be, Christians will suppose that the welcome mat has always been set out before the door to the kingdom. This idea is not true, and it is one reason that God wants Christians to know our Bible history.

Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands.... (Ephesians 2:11)

To find the meaning of this verse we must understand the dishonor that came with being called “the uncircumcision.”

From the time of Abraham all the way to the church age, God divided humanity into only two groups: the Hebrews and the Gentiles. The Hebrews are the seed promised to Abraham; they are God’s chosen people. Everyone who is not Hebrew is Gentile. Ever since the Assyrian overthrow of the northern tribes of Israel, the Hebrew people of Judaea have been called the *Jews*. (Of course, like all the names in the English Bible, the terms *Hebrew* and *Jew* have been anglicized.)

As a token reminder of God’s covenant with Abraham and his seed, God instituted the very private mark of circumcision for both a man’s heirs and slaves.

And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. (Genesis 17:12–13)

Any Jewish male child who was *not* circumcised was excluded from God’s covenant.

And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant. (v. 14)

Circumcision represented not

only a sanctified seed but also a man’s heart being tender and open toward God.

Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked. (Deuteronomy 10:16)

Now, the moment the Jews became the Chosen People, the Gentiles became the *unchosen* people, the rejected people. The Gentiles were the uncircumcised heathen. No matter their standing amongst the other nations of the world, they were a lower class of humanity, entirely excluded from God’s sanctuary.

Thus saith the Lord GOD; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel. (Ezekiel 44:9)

Witness the utter disdain that David showed for the giant Goliath. “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine,” he said, “that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Sam. 17:26).

The Gentiles were completely cut off from God’s covenant with Israel. The only way the Gentiles could receive a blessing from God was by showing benevolence towards the Jews.

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Genesis 12:3)

The grace shown toward Rahab is an example of this blessing.

And the city shall be accursed, *even* it, and all that are therein, to the

LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that *are* with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. (Joshua 6:17)

In every other way the Gentiles were left out in the cold. Even if a Gentile acknowledged Jehovah as the true God, he could no more make himself a Jew than I can make myself a Latino.

These are truths that God wants every Christian to know, as witnessed by Paul's letter to the Gentile Christians of Ephesus:

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.... (Ephesians 2:12)

#### WE WERE WITHOUT CHRIST

"Christ" means "Messiah" (see John 1:41). The Messiah was promised for the Jews only. Gentiles had no Messiah; they were without Christ. That is why they could not partake of the Passover.

And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This *is* the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof.... (Exodus 12:43)

Not eating of the Passover, of course, excluded the stranger from receiving the benefits of the Passover.

#### WE WERE ALIENS FROM THE COMMONWEALTH OF ISRAEL

Gentiles were not and could not become members of the House of Israel. Even if they spent their entire life among the Jews, they were always considered outsiders. Jesus himself forbade his disciples from

ministering to anyone who did not belong to the house of Israel:

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Matthew 10:5-6)

#### WE WERE STRANGERS FROM THE COVENANTS OF PROMISE

Briefly, there were four covenants of promise. The *Abrahamic* Covenant was the promise of a sanctified people. The *Palestinian* Covenant was the promise of land. The *Davidic* Covenant was the promise of an everlasting kingdom. The *New* Covenant was the promise of the full restoration of Israel. But all these wonderful promises did nothing for the Gentiles. The Gentiles were outsiders looking in; they were strangers and foreigners.

To appreciate the disregard shown to *foreigners*, consider the law of the year of Jubilee. Every seven years the Jews were commanded to release their neighbor of his debt:

At the end of *every* seven years thou shalt make a release. And this *is* the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth *ought* unto his neighbour shall release *it*; he shall not exact *it* of his neighbour, or of *his* brother; because it is called the LORD'S release. (Deuteronomy 15:1-2)

But as for the Gentiles, it was for-*ign*-*schmoreigner*! They were given no jubilee relief.

Of a foreigner thou mayest exact *it again*: but *that* which is thine

with thy brother thine hand shall release... (v. 3)

Now, according to the plan of God for this age, there are many more Gentiles than Jews who accept Christ. The greater odds are that you, dear reader, were yourself born into that portion of humanity called the Gentiles. What a turnaround has occurred! Before, Gentiles had no hope of salvation and were utterly without God in the world – not necessarily because they did not want God but because God did not want them! But now, those who were once outside of the fold have been made fellowcitizens with the saints, members of the commonwealth of the House of Israel.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.... (Ephesians 2:19)

We are fellowcitizens with the saints. But who are the saints? Christians are prone to look back no further than the church of the first century to find an answer. But the congregation of saints began long before the Day of Pentecost.

Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, *and* his praise in the congregation of saints. (Psalm 149:1)

Aaron, the brother of Moses, is one of the saints of the Lord.

They envied Moses also in the camp, *and* Aaron the saint of the LORD. (Psalm 106:16)

What caused this great change? Not mortal man had a clue it was coming!

Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit... (Ephesians 3:5)

The inclusion of the Gentiles in God's everlasting covenants with Israel is the glorious mystery of Christ.

That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel... (v. 6)

This truth was hid in God until it was revealed to Paul, who then made it known to the world.

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all *men* see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.... (vv. 8–9)

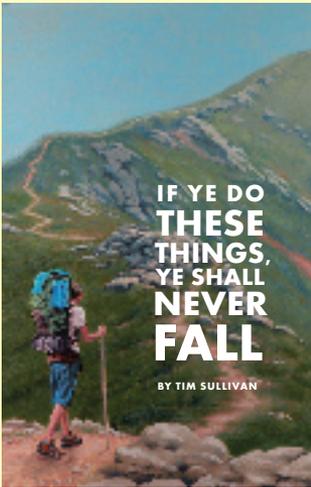
Now we who were strangers are fellowcitizens with the saints. We who were foreigners are members of the House of Israel. Before, we had no part, but now we are partakers with the Children of Israel, "partakers of their spiritual things" (Rom. 15:27); "partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17); "partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3:6); "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12); "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1); "partakers of the Holy Ghost" (Heb. 6:4); "partakers of his holiness" (Heb. 12:10); and "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4).

Now we can understand why God wants us to remember that we were “Gentiles in the flesh.” We who were once excluded from God’s covenants are now full members of the House of Israel with the same rights and privileges as his chosen people. This is the mystery

of Christ, hid in God from the beginning of the world. This is “the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11) – “that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (v. 6).

New in the Workers Together With Him Bookstore:

## *If Ye Do These Things, Ye Shall Never Fall*



Once I ate at a Marrakesh restaurant. It was a very different approach to the dining experience. They brought out each course separately, and it was placed in the middle of the table for all of us to dig in. When through, the next course was presented. All this while unusual entertainment and uncommon music was the backdrop. It was not just another meal; it was unique and unforgettable.

This is how I felt when I read Tim’s book *If Ye Do These Things, Ye Shall Never Fall*. Each chapter was a course of a meal you just had to dig into in order to get to the next one, and each built upon the other to make the experience unforgettable. It is not a lot of pages but it is not a light read. You have to be prepared to digest each morsel to appreciate the texture and flavor of the next. It helped to unravel years of confusion I held regarding forgiveness and various other topics such as judgment and the duty of a watchman. The walk with God is a joyous one, but more is expected than some kind of casual stroll on the beach. There is also a responsibility to understand what is expected. In Tim’s book I understood my part in salvation wholeness and the need for the believer to mature into all we can be for God.

I highly recommend this book for those who are ready to leave the milk of the word and want to “grow-up”.

Paula Reagan  
Snellville, Georgia, USA

For more information visit [wtwh.org](http://wtwh.org) or write [info@wtwh.org](mailto:info@wtwh.org)



## FORSAKING ALL

BY REV. EVAN B. PYLE  
Head Pastor, WTWH

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

(Luke 14:33)

The idea that I must forsake all that I have in order to be Jesus' disciple has always troubled me. I have kept some things from my past such as photographs, mementos and family heirlooms. I very much want to be Christ's disciple, yet I have not forsaken houses, lands, wife, children, sisters or friends. If I am to be a true disciple of Jesus, must I forsake all of these things? I believe a deeper look into the meaning of this verse will help us to live our lives in a purposeful, Christ-honoring way and serve as a guide for the many choices we will face.

To *forsake* means to leave, abandon or get rid of a thing.

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)

Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. (Psalm 37:8)

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (Isaiah 55:7)

The relative merit of forsaking depends upon who or what is

being forsaken. As in the preceding examples, it is good to forsake sin, anger, wrath and our wicked ways. On the other hand, it is not good to forsake God or the life to which he has called us. In a quest to be Jesus' disciples, we must be ready to forsake the "all that he hath" to which Jesus refers in Luke 14:33. The verses that precede Jesus' pronouncement shed more light.

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish *it*? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish *it*, all that behold *it* begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. (Luke 14:28–30)

My wife Nancy and I are in the finishing stages of a long-delayed project at our house. Though it has been planned a long time, we did not begin until we knew we had sufficient resources to finish the project. Until there is enough to finish, wisdom dictates that the project should not be undertaken.

Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. (vv. 31–32)

Once the king determines that his forces have no chance against a superior enemy, the only responsible choice is to avoid the conflict. It would be foolhardy and

destructive to rush headlong into a situation that would certainly spell ruin for the king and his armies. A Christian, contemplating whether he has the wherewithal to walk for God, must be willing to take an honest measure of his ability to live out his convictions successfully to the end.

The examples of the builder and the king teach the same lesson. In both cases, they did not have enough to successfully complete the tasks. So it is for the Christian believer. In ourselves, we do not have the resources to walk in God's will all our days. We do not have the wisdom to stay on the path marked out for us. We do not have the strength to always resist the tempter's attacks. Jesus is teaching his disciples that they must admit their weakness and abandon their own feeble resources in favor of his rich supply. To be his disciples, we must truly forsake "all that we have."

### A QUESTION OF HATE

If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26–27)

If I find the idea of *forsaking all* troubling, I find the idea of *hating* my closest family members doubly so. It seems strange for Jesus to demand that I *hate* my family. What does he mean by this? What does he mean when he says that I must also hate my own life in order

to be his disciple?

No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Luke 16:13)

Jesus is describing a hate that is different from the loathing one has for a mortal enemy. The question is one of loyalty: who is first and what is most important. Jesus is calling for *first place* in the heart and service of his disciples. Yes, he is to occupy a place above our family members and our own lives.

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. (Matthew 10:37–39)

As the old saying goes, blood is thicker than water. For the prospective disciple, Christ's shed blood on our behalf demands a loyalty greater than to family and even mortal life. Many Christians through the ages have lived up to this ideal by willingly suffering a martyr's death for the testimony of Christ. They proved that they "hate" father, mother, sister and brother as well as their own lives for the sake of the gospel. Jesus' blood can and should be thicker than familial and worldly loyalties. *Only then* can believers show themselves to be true followers of the Lord.

Though the cost of discipleship

seems high, the reward is great. What we lose for Christ we gain in a new and sanctified way. Our lives are no longer our own, and we now live unto him.

For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God. (Romans 6:10–13)

For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. (Philippians 1:21)

### PETER'S DILEMMA

Just as discipleship requires forsaking all and giving Jesus first place in all things, so it is with Christian ministry. Jesus personally confronted Peter about giving him first place in ministry to others.

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. (John 21:15)

When Jesus asked Peter if he loved the Master more than the sheep he would shepherd, he wasn't asking Peter to choose between the two. He was emphasizing that Jesus must always come first in Christian ministry. Ministers often mistake service in the minis-

try for serving the Master. We get so focused on feeding the sheep, we forget that the Chief Shepherd of our souls always demands first place. He did not choose us for our superior talent, intelligence and abilities (see 1 Cor. 1:26-29). Christ chose us for his own purposes that he might be glorified in us. If we forget this, we will minister to others from our own feeble abilities. Only when we deny ourselves and follow Christ will we be vessels fit for the Master's use. The Church needs yielded ministers through whom Jesus works his will!

Forsaking all to follow Christ is not without reward. Jesus has promised his followers great reward, both in this life and in the life to come. May we be faithful followers of the Master.

And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. (Matthew 19:29)

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*One Soldier Speaks:*

## OUR FREEDOM

BY F. JAY PEARSON  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

But now being made free from sin,  
and become servants to God, ye  
have your fruit unto holiness, and  
the end everlasting life.  
(Romans 6:22)

Our freedom was purchased at a cost far beyond our full comprehension. Only as we search the scriptures and walk in the direction of our Lord can we begin to grasp the sacrifice made for our redemption, our release from the bondage of sin.

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31–32)

We are not freed from sin to go on a rampage of new sins. We are freed from sin to serve our Lord Jesus Christ who purchased us, and to him we belong.

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. (Romans 6:6)

Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.  
(1 Corinthians 7:23)

If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will *my* Father honour. (John 12:26)

Our freedom is so wonderful, yet

I believe we fail to personalize it in our souls. Our freedom is easily lost in the old thoughts and focus of an old-man nature, a nature that is dead. That old-man nature is the way it was, not the way it is.

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:11)

In the song “I’ll Fly Away” there is a lyric line: “Like a bird from prison bars has flown, I’ll fly away.” Picture that bird joyously, thankfully flapping its wings as fast as it can to get far away as quickly as possible from that imprisonment. Wow! We should be so joyous for our freedom that we never fly back into that cage.

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

How did this redemption, this purchase, this identification happen? Every temptation, every stripe, every insult, every nail, the piercing of his side, and the pouring out of his blood were for you and me and those that will come. Sin was defeated in our lives that we might be free to serve our Lord and our God. Yes, we still sin, but sin is defeated. It has been fully paid for. With three words your sin and mine is paid for in full: “It is finished.”

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. (John 19:30)

Each of us must deal with our daily sin problem. It is necessary to face

our sin and seek the Lord's help in ongoing struggles. There is only room for one king in our lives and that King is Jesus Christ. We can't allow sin to reign in our lives.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

(Hebrews 12:1-2)

Let's lift up our eyes looking unto him and walk in the newness of life. Like the bird that from prison bars has flown, let us joyously flap our spiritual wings to his glory and reflect the Christ in us and in every work that God has worked in us to his glory.

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. (Philippians 2:13-16)

Let's not continue to be burdened down with the way it was by focusing on our imperfections. Let's focus on the Lord's work in us. Let's deal with our sin appropriately. I believe this next verse is one of the most critical

in the Scriptures for the Christian's well-being. Without this truth the Christian is immobilized and defeated in his or her daily function and breath-life here on earth.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

The way to deal with our sins appropriately is to confess them and receive his forgiveness and cleansing. Let's be thankful and let the Lord be reflected in our smile, our confidence in him, and our daily tasks. We are free to serve and to enjoy this gracious life God has given us. It's a life more than abundant, not materially, but in length and beauty. It is eternal. What life could be more abundant than eternity? Let's not reflect our tarnished flesh. Let's reflect Christ in us and shine as lights to the world.

We can say we are running a race, but we aren't until we actually run. We can say we are fishing, but we aren't until we actually fish. We can say we are serving the Lord, but we aren't until we actually serve him.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. (James 1:22)

We are free to do God's will. Our freedom has been purchased by a cost incomparable to any and established by the Creator's hand. It's a done deal. Let's walk in this wonderful freedom bringing glory to God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Our old nature bound in sin is the way it was. Our freedom to serve the Lord is the way it is.



## INTERCESSION

BY DAVE DURIS  
Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Intercession is an expression of God's mercy and love. It is often demonstrated in the Bible through individuals that stood between God and the object of his judgment. The intercessors, or mediators, would pray or act on behalf of those meriting judgment, often with a view toward reconciling a severed relationship. Taking a closer look at these examples of intercessors can help us to gain an understanding of the intercession we may need, and inspire us to intercede for others.

Our Lord Jesus Christ offers the perfect example of a mediator standing between God and the sins of all mankind. In the book of Hebrews a comparison is made between the ministry of the Old Testament high priest and the heavenly priesthood of Jesus Christ at the right hand of God. The Old Testament high priest intervened for men by providing a temporary animal sacrifice for sin. Jesus Christ's intervention consists of his sacrificial death for sin, providing a permanent way for men to be reconciled to God. Since his priesthood is unchangeable, he is our mediator, giving us continual access to God the Father and forever living to make intercession for us.

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5)

But this man [Jesus], because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable

priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:24-26)

### THE REBELLION OF KORAH

A wonderful picture of intercession is seen in the book of Numbers. Numbers 16 opens with the murmuring and rebellion from Korah, Dathan, Abiram and the 250 princes of the assembly who challenged the authority of Moses and Aaron. The judgment of God fell upon these rebels as the earth opened and swallowed up these three men and their households, and fire from the Lord consumed the 250 others. The next morning the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron and accused them of the deaths of those who were killed the previous day.

But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD. And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment. And they fell upon their faces. And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go

quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed. (Numbers 16:41-48)

This account gives insight into the mercy and love of intercession as it is extended to undeserving individuals. It is amazing that the very one whom the children of Israel rejected is the one who stood between the people and the plague in order to avert God's judgment from them. This act of intercession presents us with a picture of Jesus Christ, because he is the one who stands between the living and the dead. It is his atoning blood that saves us and averts the judgment of God not only for our sins, but the sins of the entire world. If we only knew the magnitude of the power of the blood of Jesus Christ which cleanses us from all sin and unrighteousness!

And he is the propitiation [atoning sacrifice] for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

Isn't it interesting that the Lord told Moses and Aaron to separate from the congregation to avoid the plague, but Moses instructed Aaron to make an atonement for the people to save them from the plague? At this point it would seem that Moses and Aaron would be in-

clined to step back and let the judgment of God take its course, but instead their merciful and loving response was to intercede. Not only did Aaron make an atonement, but he ran into the congregation to do it, which may have been challenging since he was elderly at this time. This action was one of mercy and love, seeing he had many reasons not to run into the midst of this congregation. They were hostile toward him, and the events of the previous day not only failed to bring about their repentance but instead furthered their rebellion.

One might ask if these people were even worth saving. Did Aaron himself want to be a target of the plague which was in the crowd he was running into? Even though the children of Israel's actions in this record provoked God's judgment to begin the plague, God stopped the plague in response to Aaron's atonement.

### PAUL AND ONESIMUS

In the Word of God intercession and reconciliation are closely aligned. The New Testament offers an example of the apostle Paul, who stood in the middle of two men. One man received intercession because of an offense, and the other man received a reason not to enforce merited judgment for the offense. The purpose of Paul's mediation was to reconcile the broken relationship between these two men. This record gives us a picture of the mind of Christ we should have toward the ones we intercede for in our prayers and actions. The book of Philemon offers an account of how the apostle Paul helped rec-

oncile the relationship between a runaway slave named Onesimus and his owner Philemon. When Onesimus was separated from Philemon, he eventually met Paul and became a believer in Jesus Christ. Paul then exhorted Onesimus to return to his owner and wrote Philemon in an effort to intervene and restore their relationship.

People will always have reasons to be at variance and not to reconcile, but God's Word offers us Jesus Christ's example of how to receive others.

Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. (Romans 15:7)

I am thankful that Jesus Christ received me despite all my sin and shortcomings, and not on the basis of my worthiness. Was the prodigal son's acceptance based on worthiness, or on sparing no expense in communicating the joy of an unworthy one who is reconciled? We often lose sight of the intrinsic value of a child of God, because we judge others by our estimation of their worth and do not see God's estimation of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul told Philemon that Onesimus was once unprofitable to him, but now is profitable to both Philemon and himself (Philemon 1:11). Paul approached Philemon on this basis and asked him to receive his once unworthy slave as he would receive Paul himself (v. 17). Paul also said he would repay Philemon for any wrong or debt incurred by Onesimus (vv. 18-19). Thus, he removed any potential of past offenses or debt from the situation that could hinder the cur-

rent reconciliation process. When offended by another, how often do we hold unforgiving thoughts or "mental debts" against them in our minds? True reconciliation can only occur when we are willing to completely forgive and not wait for the offender to do something worthy enough in order for us to justify our acceptance of them.

Paul's mediation in the mending of this relationship also had with it high expectations.

Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt do more than I say. (v. 21)

It should arrest our attention that Paul had an expectation that Philemon would do more than he said, and this is in the context of Paul's exhortation to reconcile and mend a broken relationship. Do we put limitations on our efforts to intercede and reconcile others? May God grant us a fuller understanding of his love for the body of Christ and his desire for all to be restored and reconciled.

### AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD

One can only imagine the benefits of having an eternal high priest at the right hand of God, whose sacrificial life was an atonement for our sins and who forever lives to make intercession for us. How often are the consequences of our sinful behavior averted and mercy extended to us because of Jesus Christ's priestly ministry at the right hand of God? One can hardly comprehend the love of Christ which was manifested when he interceded for those who hated and crucified him

and sought forgiveness for his tormentors when he prayed, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Have you ever considered the fact that Jesus Christ's earthly ministry was relatively short compared to his heavenly ministry? He has been at the right hand of God making intercession for people for over two thousand years. The love of Jesus Christ continues to be extended to us via his mediation for us whether we realize it or not. This same merciful and faithful high priest also extends his love to us by helping us in times of temptation.

Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted. (Hebrews 2:17-18)

### INTERCESSORY PRAYERS

The Word of God exhorts us to make intercessory prayers, which are different from other types of prayer. The book of Timothy makes this distinction when it exhorts us to make supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks for all men, for kings and for all that are in authority (2 Tim. 2:1-2). Despite our inabilities as we endeavor to pray for others, God has given us the supernatural provision of the ability to pray via the Spirit which makes intercession for us.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not

what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (Romans 8:26)

The examples of intercession described above were performed in the midst of some difficult circumstances, but those who intervened always acted out of a heart of mercy and compassion. God's mercy and love is at the heart of intercession. Those interceding expressed this mercy and love when they set aside their own needs and offered up their prayers and lives on behalf of others. We are often in need of mercy, and we have great encouragement with the knowledge of Jesus Christ's reconciling love for us and that he lives to make intercession for us. May these truths inspire us to have the mind of Christ to intercede for those who are in need of mercy and reconciliation.



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