

Expository Files

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front page

Come Back Tomorrow?

(Prov. 3:27,28)

Warren E. Berkley

“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,’ when you have it with you,” (Prov. 3:27,28, NKJ).

This is a call to generosity but it is written as a prohibition (“do not”). Here’s a little “secret” of good Bible study: *When you read a prohibition, spend some of your study time focusing on **the opposite**.* So when you read, “do not lie,” think of the value of honesty. When you come to “do not forget” God’s law (Prov. 3:1), consider how important it is to remember God’s law. Every prohibition has some positive opposite. The point of the prohibition is not only to keep us from sin, but to take us to that positive opposite.

In this case, “do not withhold good” is a call to generosity, sharing, benevolence. Whatever we have that is subject to sharing, we should be willing to give with those “to whom it is due.”

The hard part of this is figuring out “to whom it is due,” or (NIV), “those who deserve it.” To give profusely to undeserving recipients is obviously not wise. But it is

often not clear or easy to make those calls. Seems that the line between deserving and undeserving is not always easy to discern. *But I would say to us these things:*

1. God doesn't expect us to see everything He is able to see. God can look right through the externals to the internal motives, and God has in His perfect mind – *Instant Background Checks on everybody*. God knows that we have no such powers. So there is no expectation that we have perfect knowledge of every prospective recipient of our goodwill. We can only act on what we are able to know.

2. Never cancel a duty because it is qualified. Could be, we become so obsessed with the qualification (“those who deserve it”) we just cancel the duty, thinking the work is too imprecise or demanding. Generosity (as directed by God) involves the hard work of wisdom, discernment, good stewardship and prayer; that's part of the sacrifice of giving. Good responses to God and people are never subject to human anger, whim, greed or emotion. It should not become such a burden (deciding who is worthy), that we just toss the whole duty aside.

3. Don't let your experience with the undeserving lead you to deny the deserving. Most of us have heard people say something like, “I gave this guy some help, and he turned out to be a thief. So I just don't help people anymore.” That's reactionary, creates suffering for the deserving and puts you squarely against the will of God. Your experience should never be the basis of your generosity. The basis of all giving is, you are a recipient of God's grace and responsible to obey Him.

A Good Old Man (A Commentary on Holy Impatience)

Lk. 2:25-35

Warren E. Berkley

²⁵And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, ²⁸he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

²⁹ “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,

According to Your word;

³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation

³¹ Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

³² A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles,

And the glory of Your people Israel.”

³³And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against ³⁵(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Luke 2:25-35

Confession: My kinship with old men is growing with each passing day. I have a different view of their value compared to several years ago. And I love to read in the Bible of old folks who were also good folks, like Simeon. Let's become better acquainted with him.

He was not like other men his age. There is no evidence he was caught up in the religious empire built by the Pharisees, or that he was a zealot who sought the overthrow of Roman domination. He was a minority in his time.

He was “just and devout,” unlike many who were driven by earthly gain, personal ambition or some systematic religious creed. Just and devout men were rare in those days in Jerusalem, as evidenced by what the leaders did to Jesus.

Simeon was a man of holy impatience. He knew from the Scriptures that “the Consolation of Israel” would come and not a day passed without an awareness of that hope. Many did not read Scripture, or read it through human filters. Simeon was in good contact with the promises. He knew there was a big picture, and was waiting for Messiah to come.

He enjoyed a particular privilege, in that “the Holy Spirit” revealed to him “that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.” Not only was this old man of faith aware of God's promises, he enjoyed a special, personal promise. It is not a stretch to visual this old man getting up each day, passing by the Pharisees in the gate, moving toward the temple to watch and wait.

The day came for Simeon. “...he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms...” Think about that moment. The old man waiting “impatiently,” and now holding in his arms the Child promised by God.

The old man praised God with these words: “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.” Observe the eager

sense of privilege that filled his heart and tongue: “You are letting Your servant . . . my eyes have seen.” Age and approaching death was not a thief. He believed the promises of God and now had the Consolation of Israel in his arms and in his view. He knew this was about salvation, not just for Israel but all people.

Then he spoke to Mary: “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against.” This part of Simeon’s prophecy contained some unwelcomed news for Mary, that her Son would have a mixed reception, and be “spoken against.” This would be the reality of unbeliever’s rejecting Him. The rejection or acceptance of the Christ would “reveal the thoughts of many hearts.”

What does it mean for us today? Christians today are in this waiting mode, and may feel this holy impatience. If you are waiting on God, it will always be worth the wait. Like Isaiah said to the descendants of Hezekiah and the other captives: “those who wait for the Lord will renew strength,” (Isa. 40:31). As you age and find your affinity for old folks increasing, but also suffering some of the impact of the second law of thermodynamics, take heart Christian! You can become stronger and stronger while you wait. Expectation of Christ’s return will not disappoint His faithful people. That holy impatience is a good sign!

A Prepared Heart
Ezra 7:10
By Jon W. Quinn

The Scriptures say, “And Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.” (Ezra 7:10). This verse is actually a summary of Ezra’s life and purpose. He was determined to fully accept the Lord’s direction in life. This desire came from deep conviction and reverence for God. This led Ezra to seek out the Lord’s will in His revealed Word, the Scriptures.

It is no different today for those who desire to be faithful men and women of God. This is a worthy desire to have, but it is not fulfilled by happenstance or serendipity. It takes purpose of heart. “On this day, I resolve to live for God and all that this entails.” As Ezra knew, this purpose involves seeking to know the law of the Lord, to do it, and to teach it to others.

A Christian Named Ampliatus and His Friends

Some complain that the Lord's will is too difficult to understand. But others, like Ezra, have had no problem in understanding it. There is a whole list of just plain, regular folks in Rom. 16 who all understood it quite well. Notice some of them:

8 Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.

9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.

10 Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.

11 Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.

12 Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.

(Romans 16:8-12)

Now, what else do you know about any of these people other than what you have read here in these verses? Nothing! These are not people of fame or fortune. They are common, everyday people. They are “regular folks” as far as worldly renown is concerned. But they served their God in a commendable way. They were approved and worked hard for the Lord. They were successful in the same way as Ezra was: they had prepared their hearts to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and judgments.” So can we all.

Childs Play

Timothy is said to have understood it as well. Of course, he was a preacher and had the extraordinary experience of companionship with the apostle Paul.

But wait. It was not Paul who first familiarized Timothy with the sacred writings. Timothy was knowledgeable in the Scriptures long before he had ever met Paul, or before he had ever thought about being a preacher of the gospel. That knowledge of the Scriptures gave Timothy a great advantage when he did finally meet Paul in that it allowed Timothy to critically examine the things Paul was teaching.

Paul writes of this in his second epistle to Timothy:

14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them,

15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14-15)

So, Timothy knew the sacred writings even from childhood long before meeting Paul. Who had been Timothy's instructors? It had been his mother and grandmother that had passed along their faith to Timothy:

For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well. (2 Timothy 1:5)

See the point? When we seek to know the law of the Lord, we can come to a clear enough understanding of it to do it and to teach to others. It was meant to be that way.

Why is There Misunderstanding?

The fact is, Jesus said that some would never understand. But it was not because of a lack of ability but rather a lack of will. They have unprepared hearts. To understand, Jesus insisted that one must desire to have God in his or her life. He or she must be willing to open eyes, ears and heart.

The parable of the sower sowing seed is a case in point, well illustrating how important it is for us to prepare our hearts to understand and receive the words of Christ (Matthew 13:3-9; 18-23). One who is unwilling will often complain it is just too difficult to understand, but Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." (John 14:15).

In dealing with a rebellious people, the Lord chose Isaiah to be His prophet. Through Isaiah, Jehovah charged, "I called, but you did not answer; I spoke, but you did not hear." (Isaiah 65:12). These people had turned their backs on God, and the more alienated they became the more their nation's problems grew until finally their nation fell.

They did not answer God's call. It is important for us to understand that God still calls today; not through prophets like Isaiah but through the gospel of Jesus Christ, His Son. The Scriptures affirm that God "called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thessalonians 2:14). Answering this call means bringing our lives into harmony with the teachings of the gospel; to "walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

We do not know what the future holds for our own nation today. We can continue to ignore God's call and slide into tragic defeat just the way Isaiah's people did long ago. Or, we can remember our foundation and reclaim it. Though none of us as individuals can decide for our nation, we each can decide for ourselves to answer the call of God. Prepare your heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to share with others the Lord's statutes and judgments.

Advice

Proverbs 12:16

By Karl Hennecke

Most newspapers carry syndicated columns offering advice. Governmental leaders have people around them to give them advice about policy. All of us have had the opportunity to receive advice and to give advice. Proverbs says that the “fool is right in his own eyes but he that is wise listens to counsel” (Prov. 12:15). Fortunate is the man or woman who has a wise counselor to give them advice. But not all advice is good. Someone said, “Good advice costs nothing and it’s worth the price.” While it is true that some advice is worthless it is also true that some advice is priceless.

The books of Psalms and Proverbs (the wisdom literature of God), many times contrast good counsel with bad counsel. We need to recognize that God’s counsel is not optional but commanded. And so we need to think seriously about the counsel of God. Some will admit that their course of action is sometimes not wise. My question would be, when would it be a benefit to do that which is unwise? If we choose to do what God says in unwise what is the justification? Are seeking to please God or self?

But there is another aspect of this matter that we need to consider, and that is our personal responsibility to offer good advice to our family, friends and brethren. In 1 Thes. 5:14, 15, Paul encourages “pursuing what is good.” We need to offer that same advice to those over whom we have influence. Paul says that we are to be able to “admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14). In order to do this we like Paul need to “prove what is good and acceptable and the perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2), and “understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17).

The advice that we give and the advice we accept, must be in accordance with God’s will. When we ask for advice we may say, “What do you think?” Rather, we should be asking, “Help me understand what God would have one do in a situation like this,” or “What would Jesus have done?”

There are many examples in the Bible of “bad advice.” Consider the advice that Satan gave to Eve in the garden. Satan’s advice was that Eve should eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve listened to the advice and ate the fruit, disobeying God. Why did Eve take that advice? She took it because it was what she wanted to do. She saw that the fruit was good for food and desirable to the eyes and Satan promised that it would make her like God (Gen. 3:1-6).

Reheboam, the son of King Solomon, ascended to the throne following his father’s death. He had some important decisions to make. He had before him the choice of listening to the old advisors or the young advisors. In this case we see that bad advice came as a result of immaturity and the good advice as a result of maturity. Reheboam was foolish enough to listen to the young men, leading to a division in the kingdom (1 Kings 12:6-11). One’s own opinion is often reinforced by the advice of those around them, but that advice is not always right. In fact in most cases if you search long enough you can find someone who will support almost any decision you desire. Paul warned Timothy, “they will not endure sound doctrine but will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts” (2 Tim 4:3). We should seek out the advice of those whom we trust will not just be “yes men” but those who are truly concerned about the will of God.

There are many examples of good advice in the Bible. One of my favorite stories is that of the leper Naaman, who came to a prophet because he believed the prophet could cure him of his disease. He left the prophet in a rage because he didn’t like what the prophet told him to do. But we see a happy ending because Naaman listened to the advice of his servant and dipped in the Jordan seven times as Elisha instructed and was healed (2 Kings 5). Often we find ourselves in an emotional state that makes it difficult for us to think straight. We should be thankful to God in such instances for those who will give us good advice.

We need to be careful that the advice we give does not weaken or diminish the commandment of God. One who is already in a weakened condition, who is looking for an out, may listen to bad advice. We cannot apologize for God’s word. We cannot suggest that it is impossible to do His will. I have heard people advise others, who had a hard choice before them, that God wouldn’t expect them to do this or that. In fact, God does expect us to do some things that are difficult to do. For example, broken marriages often require the disciple of God to live a celibate life. God does expect one to do that if fornication was not the cause. But some, wanting to enter into a new marriage are willing to listen to bad advice and end up marrying

again without God's approval. God's word is powerful and forceful and we have no right to water it down or misrepresent God. Others claim that their present marriage situation is unbearable. Their friends will tell them, "God wouldn't expect you to stay married." Yes, He does expect you to stay married unless your spouse is guilty of fornication (Mt. 19:9). "Whatsoever God has joined together let not man put asunder" (Mt. 19:6).

The examples of bad advice one hears today are endless. Women are told, "You don't have to be in subjection to your husband." God says you must (Eph. 5:22). Parents are told, "You shouldn't spank your children." God says you should (Prov. 23:13-14). Others are told, "If someone did that to me, I'd never forgive them." God teaches that we must be willing to forgive (Mt. 6:15). Christians are told, "Don't worry about missing the assembling of the saints, it's just a tradition." God teaches that it is an important and vital tradition to provoke our brethren to love and good works in the assembly (Heb. 10:24, 25). Mothers are encouraged, "You need to get out of the home and go to work to better yourself." Paul through the Spirit instructed Titus that women need to be workers at home (Titus 2:4, 5).

The one who gives advice is responsible for that advice. He must ask himself does this advice encourage, support and most importantly is it according to God's word? It is better not to give advice than to give the wrong advice. Recognizing that the only infallible advice is that from above, the one receiving advice must be able to distinguish between that which is right and that which is wrong. In order to do that each of us is responsible to study God's word in order to become knowledgeable of God's will (2 Tim. 2:15) and pray for wisdom to make the application (Js. 1:5). That is the advice of God.

"I Did It Ignorantly In Unbelief"

(1 Tim. 1:12f)

Jim McDonald

"I thank him that enabled me, even Christ Jesus our Lord, for that he counted me faithful, appointing me to his service; though I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, howbeit I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief..." (1 Tim. 1:12f).

These words mark a turn in the apostle's train of thought. To this point he has admonished Timothy to maintain the charge to certain men not to teach a different doctrine, men who desired to be teachers of the law, although they understood not what they said nor what they confidently affirmed.

Was it a painful stab of memory that stirred Paul to write of his prior life before he became a Christian? One thing is certain: he had tenaciously adhered to the law, pressing his convictions zealously.

Despite his injury to the cause of Christ, the Lord counted him faithful, appointing him to his service. Let none suppose God counted Paul faithful when he persecuted the church, nay, not the church but Christ Himself. Remember our Lord's words to Paul on the Damascus road? "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me*" (Acts 9:4)?

We have, in Paul's words "*counted me faithful*" an example of God "*calling the things that are not, as though they were*" (Rom. 4:17). This latter quotation was Paul's commentary of God's words to Abraham, whose son Isaac was yet not born: "*a father of many nations have I made thee*" (Rom. 4:17; Gen. 17:5). The same sort of language appears again when a fearful Paul in Corinth was comforted by a heavenly vision: "*Be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee and no man shall set on thee to harm thee: for I have much people in this city*" (Acts 18:9f). God had many people prospectively in Corinth; Abraham was prospectively a father of many nations, and prospectively Paul would prove to be faithful, despite all odds.

"*Appointing me to his service.*" This is a reference to his apostleship to which, in Paul's words, God had "*separated me, even from my mother's womb*" (Gal. 1:15). God had His eye on Paul. He knew his character and doubtlessly providentially directed his early training which qualified him for the task he must fill: God's apostle to the Gentiles to preach the blessed gospel of His Son.

The humility of Paul is seen in his frank description of himself: "*although I was before a blasphemer and persecutor and injurious.*" One of the marks of the inspiration of the scriptures is that no effort is ever made to gloss over the sins and shortcomings of God's people. No man was more devoted to Paul than Luke. He remained with him when everyone else forsook him, and Paul called him "*the beloved physician*" (2 Tim. 4:11; Col. 4:14). What a bond existed between these two noble men! Yet, that bond did not cause Luke to "water down" the early harmful nature of his dear friend. In his Acts, Luke wrote of Paul, "*Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house, and dragging men and women, committed them to prison*" and "*Saul breathing threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord*" (Acts 8:3; 9:1).

"*I did it ignorantly in unbelief.*" One wonders how Paul could have claimed ignorance when he had been present at Stephen's stoning and had doubtlessly heard Stephen's defense (Acts 7)? Perhaps the answer is found in that the Law, its sacrifices and temple services were God ordained: temporary in God's mind, permanent in Jewish thinking. It was inconceivable to Paul that God was radically changing what He,

Himself had ordained 1,500 years before. His ignorance lay in his unbelief. Yet Paul obtained mercy because, however prejudiced he was, he still did not sear his conscious. In his words, *“I have lived before God in all good conscience to this day”* (Acts 23:1).

-- *Jim McDonald*

Topic Page

Confessions of an Internet Junkie

by Edwin Crozier

Some time ago, I confessed a sad television habit that was taking up too much of my valuable time. As I said in that article, I deleted my DVR scheduling and quit watching too much Law and Order. Not long after that, we actually got rid of cable all together. I should be the most efficient time manager of all now that I got rid of my cable, right? Sadly, we learn once again that nature abhors a vacuum. In true Matthew 12:43-45 fashion, the evil television spirit has gotten seven other spirits to attack and the last state might well be worse than the first. However, these spirits are called The Internet. (Please know that I'm speaking tongue in cheek about the spirits.)

The Internet is great. I can keep up with old friends. I can communicate with new friends. I can chat with brethren from all over. I can conduct Bible studies across continents. I can answer most questions with a click of a button. Want to know who was the 16th President? If you don't already know, the Internet will provide an answer. Bible study is cheap and easy on the Internet. Podcasts of the preaching of God's word abounds. Blogs with great inspiration, deep education, and powerful instruction can be found in plenty. The Internet is a veritable treasure trove.

However, if we're not careful the Internet can suck us in to the swirling black vortex of virtual non-reality. It can drain our days of precious time. Paul said we should look carefully how we walk. If not, we might end up walking like fools. Instead, we need to make the most of our time because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:15-16). I believe that is a reference back to Ecclesiastes 9:11-12, which claims we are all like the fish taken in an evil net or the bird trapped in a snare. Death and destruction come suddenly, therefore, we need to take this moment very seriously. Am I using it wisely?

When I get on the World Wide Web, I need to ask myself how I'm using my time. I am reminded that anything I do for 30 minutes every day equals more than a week of my year. Over a lifespan of 80 years, that will be more than a year and a half.

Don't misunderstand, I'm not saying every second of every day must be spent in some all-wise, life-changing, earth-shattering pursuit. We are allowed entertainment and relaxation. However, I sometimes fear that I'm entertaining and relaxing my life away without realizing it. A 5-minute break to check Facebook, can easily become an hour long look at endless status updates, searching for new friends, writing updates, sending messages, and playing games. And that can be after already checking Facebook three times that day. Hopping online to search for a book price can easily become an hour surfing Amazon for different products, reading their reviews and profiles. They put those "other people also bought" links up for a reason. They want to tangle us in the Web. Making a brief point in a religious forum can easily turn into an obsession for the rest of the day seeing if anyone responded, did they agree? disagree? care? Even the most innocent and noble pursuits can become a labyrinth, trapping us and endangering us.

There are plenty of great things to be done on the Internet. As soon as I'm done typing this article, I'll spend some time on the Internet posting it for people to read on the church's blog. But, we need to remember that God wants us to do more than surf and read. We need to get out and go. We need to spend most of our time in the real world, talking to real people, accomplishing real acts of service, performing real good works (Titus 2:14; Ephesians 2:10).

I'm not saying we should get rid of the Internet completely. However, I think we should all, no matter what our job, take a look at our Internet time and hold it alongside Ephesians 5:15-17. Are we keeping our Internet time in its proper perspective or letting it get out of control?

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Plan of Salvation

By Jon W. Quinn

Plan #1

Announced by the apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to new believers in Christ who asked what they must do:

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ -- this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:36-38).

Plan #2

On the back page of a tract, sinners were urged to pray this prayer to be saved. This prayer is not found in the Bible; nor were alien sinners commanded to pray for their forgiveness.

The Sinner's Prayer: "O' Lord, I accept that I am a sinner and that Jesus died for my sins. I now accept Him into my heart as Lord and Savior asking for your mercy and forgiveness in His name. Amen."

The editors of Expository Files are happy with plan #1 and thankful to the God of all grace for it. We cannot recommend Plan #2 at all, but will change our minds when this prayer can be shown to us in the Bible.

The Final Page 17.5

“Do Not Judge”

Matthew 7:1

By Jon W. Quinn

Jesus said, “Judge not that you be not judged.” (Matt. 7:1). Often, these words have been used to justify immorality, or at least suggested that immorality ought to be ignored because to speak negatively about sin is to judge. But this is not what Jesus had in mind at all!

Jesus was not condemning all judgments which we may make. In fact, He commands us to make judgments. On one occasion, He told us “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” (John 7:24). What Jesus was doing was not condemning all judging, but only a certain kind of judgment. He also commanded that we judge righteously.

Back in Matthew 7:1-5 we find Jesus was speaking against judging with hypocritical attitudes. We need to be aware of our own problems before we can help another with his. Later in Matthew 7, Jesus tells us to judge between good and false prophets (vss. 15-20). The Bible also tells us “not to participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead, even expose them.” (Eph 5:11).

Jesus never intended for His disciples to shut up and not speak out against sin. To be faithful followers of the Lord we must use the light of His word, both by living it ourselves and teaching it to others. His word says so!