

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

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CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

REDEMPTION

Part 1

(Oppression)

By Rayola Kelley

As some of you may know, I have struggled with the English language most of my life. Because of how I heard words in my formative years, I had to receive speech therapy in the fourth grade. This struggle was also greatly evident when trying to communicate my thoughts and ideas on paper.



Since English rules change and many of its words or terms came from other languages, I used to blame my challenges on the language itself. However, after working with some different cultures, I began to appreciate the English language. I could see how it provided various words to best express the meaning or intent of ideas, while some of the other languages did not always separate different words with similar points of identification as a means to bring distinction or clarity. For example, the words redemption and consecration would be lumped with the word salvation.

As I found myself defining words in order to bring clarity when teaching non-English speaking people, I began to appreciate my native tongue. Although considered by some a garbage language, I learned that if presented in the proper light, the English language is a language that can paint powerful pictures when bringing distinction and meaning to a word.

One of the words that fascinated me in my studies is the word, "redemption." Granted, I had my assumed notions about what I thought redemption meant, but after studying the word, I found my notions or assumptions to be vague. Such discov-

eries often challenge me to consider what I really did understand when it came to the words that are consistently found in Scripture.

When considering what other subject I needed to address in our monthly newsletter, the word, "redemption" came to my attention. As believers who are facing the uncertainty of the days in which we live, it would serve us well to come to terms with what it means to be redeemed. We may sing about it, hear the word mentioned occasionally in some sermon or teaching, and we may even read about it once in awhile, but how many of us understand what it really means to be redeemed?

As I began to consider the concepts about redemption, I started to see the outline for another series. Redemption is not just a one-time subject. It is the main theme running throughout the Bible. The references to it are many, and the implications far reaching. Obviously, it is not a word that should remain vague to us as believers. We need to know what it means to understand our relationship to God and our rights in His kingdom.

To understand redemption, we must come to terms with the environment that requires redemption. The main environment that requires such intervention has to do with someone being taken captive by circumstances or by captors who are seeking means to control, blackmail, or seek ransom. Such an environment points to some type of captivity or oppression. Clearly, people who are not in captivity or oppressed do not have any need to be redeemed.

The idea of redemption points to repurchasing, ransoming, rescuing, procuring, attaining, and possessing something that is held in some type of captivity or bondage. When you study the concept of redemption in the Old Testament, the first promise God gave in *Genesis 3:15* had to do with redeeming man. Because of man sinning in the Garden of Eden, all mankind has been taken into captivity by

sin. People are slaves to sin, under the harsh taskmaster of Satan, facing the bondage of hopelessness in this dark world, and the consequences of death. Clearly, Satan has become the god over man in his fallen condition, sin has become his master, the world his prison and tormentor, and death his unbearable chains that hold him steadfast in his spiritual plight.

Obviously, mankind needed to be redeemed. He had fallen from his original state of innocence before his Maker into a state of oppression and bondage. For him to be restored back to his original place before his Creator, God would have to repurchase or ransom him. After all, who would put any type of value on man other than the one who created him for a specific purpose?

Praise God, He did pay the ultimate ransom for His people. However, before He repurchased humanity, He began to present a mosaic of what this ransom would entail in the Old Testament. We are about to consider this incredible thread that God cleverly weaved throughout His presentation. To me, it is a wondrous picture that is void of any confusion, debate or misunderstanding. Let us now summarize this presentation.

Redeeming a people: The first great example of redemption happened when God redeemed the people of Israel from under the tyrannical bondage of Pharaoh. God did not redeem ideas, buildings, or lands, but a nation of people. After all, what became lost in the garden was man. It was man's lost state that caused creation to spin out of control, doomed to groan under a fallen state.

To acquire a people, God first had to choose and call a man named Abraham to journey to a land He would promise to his descendants. Out of Abraham would come a great nation. This nation would eventually be enslaved. It would be in this captivity that God would actually claim and win this nation for Himself. He would have a people that would become His possession in which He could bring forth the

actual payment to buy back humanity.

In their slavery, the descendants of Abraham would understand that they needed to be redeemed. They were slaves in a harsh land. The whips of oppressive man served as their bitter cup, the endless drudgery as their hopeless despair, and the threat of death to their future generations their promise. There was no escape from their oppressive lot. They were born into slavery and from all appearances, they would die slaves, paupers in a land that they were considered foreigners in.

However, God had chosen them to be His people. He not only knew what it would take to win their release, but He had the means to do so. It is vital we understand the steps He took to procure their release.

He first claimed them as His own. It must be pointed out that the people of Israel did not belong to Pharaoh. He had not gained them in any battle, he had simply enslaved them because they were considered foreigners. This is why there is no purchase mentioned at this point.

Before people claim something as belonging to them, they must first have a former claim on it. To God, these people were to be His heritage. His claim to them went back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is from this premise that a price would begin to formulate. It is amazing what price God put on the children of Israel. It was not a price He would pay; rather, Pharaoh would end up dictating the amount of the payment as he failed to win the battle with Jehovah God for the people of Israel.

The example of Israel also revealed that the payment would come from outside of those who are held captive. People who are enslaved have no means in which to redeem themselves. Pharaoh and all of Egypt would end up paying most of the price for the release of the children of Israel. Let us consider this price.

Vengeance: Vengeance is associated with redemption. Often, captives have been unfairly or violently taken for some type of gain. Sometimes, in order to rescue captives, it takes acts of vengeance. God would exact ten judgments on

Egypt to procure the release of the children of Israel. Each price exacted from Pharaoh proved to be more devastating. It is the final judgment that would not only cause the children of Israel to be released, but it would point to the payment God would make on our behalf.

Death of the first born: Pharaoh was trying to control and eventually wipe out any record of the people of Israel's existence by trying to kill all their male babies. However, the final judgment that was leveled at Pharaoh caused all of Egypt, including Pharaoh's household, to lose their first-born sons along with the first-born males of their flocks. What a price to pay, but we get a small glimpse into the price God would pay when His only begotten Son died on our behalf.

The Passover Lamb: Every aspect of this lamb had to be utilized by the people of Israel in their deliverance. The blood of the lamb identified and separated the children of Israel from the judgment of death. The lamb took the vengeance of death in the place of every Hebrew. Its blood pointed to the payment for sin. After all, only the blood can remit or provide pardon from sin. The meat was used as food.

John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. He became God's payment for our sin. Vengeance fell upon Him as He took the judgment of sin upon Himself. His blood established a new covenant, His life became the bread we must partake of to live, His will, word, and purpose would serve as the meat that would bring spiritual maturity, and His Spirit would empower us to walk in this new life according to God's will.

As you can see, the concept of redemption is far reaching. The question we must ask is, "are we marked by redemption?" We all need to be redeemed because of sin. Sin has wreaked a vengeance on each of us, but we have been given a way out of such bondage through the provision of the Lamb of God.

As we embark into a new year, let us above all else resolve the matter of Jesus' redemption. †



COMMENTS

"Thank you ladies for another year of hard work and dedicated service to our Lord. Thank you also for your prayers for us. We know the Lord is going to bless and minister to you in a miraculous way through this coming year!" - WA

"Thank you, Rayola, on your comments on your Q & A Corner. I do know the scriptures, but at times can't quite get them into perspective." - B.C.

"I wish you both a very blessed Christmas time. This year I decided not to get involved in the "Commercial Blitz" which is what it has become. We dare not speak about Jesus publicly, because if somebody says it offends them, we will be arrested! I have sent out only a few cards to unbelieving friends, with the true message on them." - UK

[From a newly widowed sister.] "No one from the churches ever call or check. It is hard, very hard. The loneliness is unbearable at times. My kids live too far and have their own trials. The Lord has been faithful, but it would be nice to find the true church. Another young Christian couple that is losing their home said that the Mormons help each other, our daughter who is struggling said to forget that thought and be thankful she is a Christian. I can understand why the cults grow, they do more than say, 'I will pray for you,' they actually get involved. All of this puff and fluff must really hurt and grieve our Father's heart. Thanks for asking, I know the Lord will bring me out of this sorrow soon, but it is no picnic. . . . The shaking that is going on will be good for all of us if we trust the lord to remove all the stuff in us that is not of Him. We all have accumulated stuff that is not of the truth." - WA

"I have prayed for you and also that someone will come forth to secure the publishing for you. Regardless, the devotional series is changing the lives of many and showing us how to become 'overcomers'. You both are a blessing to many . . . - ID

"This life is a dressing room for eternity - THAT'S ALL IT IS!" - Leonard Ravenhill

SOMEBODY ELSE

By Jeannette Haley

It is interesting how we human beings think. We start out, and may even go through most of our lives assuming that the difficulties and tragedies others face will never happen to us. We are the exception, not the rule. It always happens to “somebody else.” Somebody else disappeared on a mountain, somebody else drowned while rafting, and somebody else got into a car accident. Somebody else was buried in an earthquake; somebody else lost their job, their home, their pets and their lifestyle. Somebody else was falsely accused and sent to prison. Somebody else was robbed, somebody else got cancer, and somebody else was blown up. Why should we worry? Floods, fires, tsunamis, storms, plagues, starvation, and wars—all that bad stuff always happens to “somebody else,” right?

Now we find ourselves launching off into the unknown variables of another new year. Our world has become much more dangerous, and our government has become tyrannical on every level. Evil is exalted as the norm, and often rewarded, while those who fight against it are persecuted, and even prosecuted. Right is condemned as wrong, while wrong is upheld as right. The whole world is spinning out of control. Surely, “somebody else” will step on the scene and stop the madness. After all, it is not *my* responsibility to do what I can to warn, educate or sacrifice for my country, or is it?

The question is, as Christians do we have the right to adapt the “somebody else” mindset? Where did this self-centered mental state originate? Is it only found among unbelievers, or is it the norm? I hate to say this, but I am old enough to have earned the right to say it. I have sat in churches on and off for most of my 66 years, and the attitude is predominately the same when it comes to “somebody else.” As long as the music suits everybody (whether it is God-honoring or not is beside the point these days), and as long as the preacher isn’t too long-winded, as long as the sermon isn’t convicting, and as long as the social programs are grandiose, then it’s considered a

“good church.” As long as “somebody else” oversees evangelizing and such things as world missions with maybe an occasional offering taken, that is usually acceptable. However, the mere mention by some fanatic like me of the congregation’s *personal individual* responsibility towards those closer to home who are without Christ, the homeless, the widows (that includes single women), and the personal needs among the church members, as well as the community, can suddenly make people squirm. The prevailing attitude is “I’m a flag-waving American and a good Christian. I go to church. I even give the church my tithe. I get involved in church activities sometimes. So, let ‘somebody else’ take care of those things. It’s not my responsibility.”

Try telling that to God on Judgment Day. God is not impressed with our patriotism, or religious habits and activities—what He wants from us is our obedience. This might come as a shock to some, but going to church does not impress God. We go for our sake, not His. Furthermore, fleshly “worship” is a stench to Him. Offerings given in order to sustain the religious kingdoms of men rather than the Kingdom of God merit no eternal reward because they are idolatrous and worldly. Church social activities may be pleasant, but generally lack true fellowship in the spirit, and leave people with a false sense of what real Christianity is. Jesus said, *“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips: but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”* Matthew 15:8, 9. In other words, it is all vanity.

Jesus told the Church at Ephesus that it had left its first love. He said, *“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”* Revelation 2:4. Churches abound that have lost their first love, or love for Jesus—not the modern Jesus, but God Incarnate. A church becomes idolatrous when the church itself, the pastor and other leaders, doctrines and liturgies, music, and programs take center stage, for the Spirit of God will depart. The sad thing is, few miss His

presence, but instead continue to pump time, money and energy into it in a vain effort to revive it. There is much talk about revival, but nobody knows what it is. Louder, upbeat music, equipment that is more modern, better entertainment, great comforts and more fun in order to keep going through the motions, week after week. After all, the show must go on. The tragedy is, without the Spirit, the body is dead, period.

To be honest, what has been a great source of grief to my heart where the church is concerned is the lack of godly love. This lack of true Christian love is like the hollow echoes within a tomb, and manifests itself as a cold mist of indifference. This bone-chilling indifference silently settles over entire congregations, penetrating dulled consciences and unsuspecting hearts, undetected. No wonder the “first works” are lacking, or are a very rare occurrence. As a whole, we do not even notice that the “first works” are missing until, one day, we find ourselves as a hurting, needy “somebody else” to everybody else. In addition, “everybody else” probably couldn’t care less about you, as a “somebody else.” This ought not to be, but sadly, it is the norm in both the world and the church, which is just one more indication that we are living in the last days.

The first works. What are they? What was so important about them? Perhaps we should blow the dust of the ages off these ancient teachings and revisit them. Ah, there, buried within the forgotten scrolls are clues to these first works. Like the flash of precious nuggets long buried under years of dusty reinterpretation and paraphrasing, their light begins to penetrate the darkness left by generations of indoctrination. We hold the precious scroll closer. Does it truly hold the key to the lost first works?

Squinting through the dimness of unbelief, error and spiritual poverty, the words become clear to our eager eyes. These are our Master’s very words! How could such precious words become lost? His words!—so simple!—yet so profound! *“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets”* Matthew 7:12. The impact

is stunning. How could this be? What if every Christian actually lived by these words instead of heaping upon self, and letting "somebody else" take care of what God wanted us to do. Would there be any need for the "somebody else" such as government to step in and pick up where the church has left off? What if the churches had been diligent to do the "first works?" Would America still be strong and free instead of plunging into the dark abyss of communism? The implications are staggering! Instead of giving of ourselves sacrificially, we are about to reap the consequences and be sacrificed to the beast of big government. The course is set, there is no turning back. God have mercy upon us.

Nevertheless, there must be more to the first works. Somewhere within the forsaken scroll there must be another clue. There must be something about us building a bigger church, about us becoming famous, about us developing as a sanctimonious "Christian culture" within the culture. There must be something about us being served by "somebody else."

Suddenly, a flicker of light sparkles from the dusty pages. There! Another nugget, a gem from the past. Quick! Read it before it becomes lost to view. More precious words from God Incarnate! He said, *"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."* Tears sting our eyes as His words pierce our hearts with conviction. Our mind is racing, "How can we do the first works if we are disobedient, therefore not abiding in His love?" We want to run, to hide, to weep. Nevertheless, we are strangely compelled to keep reading, drawn by the power of His words. *"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."* Joy? Isn't joy a word we see on Christmas cards? Joy? Who has joy in this day and age? Another three-letter word flashes across the screen of our mind and somehow we find ourselves in our church, seeing but being unseen. The three-letter word is everywhere, bouncing crazily from person to person, zipping through the sanctuary, gyrating on the podium, swinging dizzily through the

musical instruments. We watch aghast as it makes its way into the youth room where its mocking laughter sickens us. It finally lands in the foyer where it rocks back and forth like a drugged rock star. Suddenly, "FUN" is not so funny. It has replaced true joy.

We are suddenly whisked back to the dusty scroll with that contains the words of the great I AM. *"This is my commandment..."* We chuckle with glee. "At last. A commandment. This is more our style. Something we can be legalistic and judgmental about." We peer closer. His words pierce our hearts as only a two-edged sword can. *"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."*

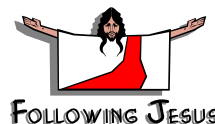
"But, what about religion? You know, there just has to be something about religion and the first works. After all, we're educated theologians. We have spent years in study, earned our degrees, been awarded our titles. . ." As if in answer to our less-than-godly attitude, we find our eyes glued to James 1:27, *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."* "Oh oh!" We cry. "That means I have to change my way of thinking. It's not up to 'somebody else,' it's up to me!" Our eyes fall upon another gem, a clue to the first works, and we read: *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* The realization that our sins of omission, or failure to do what is right, even in the smallest sense, are producing a weight too great to bear. We feel our heart sinking, deeper, and deeper and cry out, "God, forgive me, a sinner!"

At last, it begins to dawn on our restless souls that the first works were not about an outward show, but an inward transformation that resulted in doing the works of Christ, not works to be seen of others, but to be offered as sacrifices to God for His glory alone. Suddenly, the ancient scrolls began to sparkle with a thousand, no, thousands of beams of light. We hear someone read to us from 1 John 3:16-18, words that sound vaguely familiar,

but which we have conveniently forgotten because to obey means sacrifice... *"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."* Our hearts melt, our knees buckle, tears fill our eyes. It's time to repent.

Do you see that in order to do the first works, we must love Jesus with all of our hearts? We must cherish and guard our first love. It is impossible to please Him, to live for Him, to obey Him, if we leave our first love. To love Him above all else means that His love will flow, not only to us, but through us. To love Jesus means that we have exchanged our life for His. We no longer belong to ourselves. Our life is not our own, but His. *"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me"* Galatians 2:20. Yes, Jesus gave Himself for you and me. He could not leave it up to "somebody else" for nobody else could take His place. If Jesus had left our redemption up to "somebody else," we would be forever lost in our sins, separated from God, without hope or life. He gave himself as the ultimate sacrifice for us, so that we can give our lives as a living sacrifice for Him.

Dear Reader, have you left your first love? Are you struggling to serve God in your own power? Are you withdrawing from whatever the Lord has put in your path that you have the means to help, such as the needs of others around you, however great or small, because your heart is telling you that "somebody else" can take care of it? If so, will you turn around and come back, right now, to the only true source of love and life and power? After all, He is waiting for you with wide-open arms. †



RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

"Which Version?"

Q: *A couple months ago you wrote about how our particular Bible translation might spiritually dull us down. I am confused, isn't the Bible the Bible regardless of the translation? Would you please clear up my confusion?*

A: The word "Bible" means "book." There are many books out there touting that they are a form, paraphrase or translation of the Bible, but are they truly representative of the book that contains God's Word?

What makes the "Bible" unique among other books is that it is God's Word. He said it; therefore, it is the essence of truth. However, there are criteria as to what constitute God's Word. In summation, not any "bible" will do. God's Word is meant to make an impact on us down to our very spirit, the intents and marrow of our innermost being (*Hebrews 4:12*). If the criteria are missing, then the best it can be is a story book with some great literature that is comprised of history that will feed the intellect, poems that will stir up our sentiment, and inspiring thoughts and teachings that will feed our religious conscience, but it will lack the spirit and life that makes it revelation to our spirits with the reality of the living God (*John 6:63*). Let us consider the criteria that must be present:

Inspiration: The Bible is an inspired book (*2 Peter 1:20-21*). The inspiration of it comes solely from the Holy Spirit (*2 Timothy 3:16*). He is our true teacher of Scripture and will lead us to all truth about what we need to understand (*John 16:13; 1 John 2:17*) If the right intent is missing, then the Spirit will be missing. Intent has to do with changing the meaning of something. Anytime man adds or takes away from the intent of the Bible, he perverts it. It becomes strange to the Holy Spirit; thereby, He cannot honor or illuminate it to our spirits. He is the One who brings the Bible alive with godly wisdom and revelation (*Ephesians 1:17-21*).

Revelation: Revelation involves an unveiling to our spirits the deep matters of God. This is one of the

main purposes for the existence of His Word, other than salvation. Without revelation, everything we know and understand about God remains within the natural or carnal arena of knowledge and sentiment (*Romans 8:4-13*). Revelation is the way the Spirit connects us to the throne, heart and mind of God (*1 Corinthians 2:10-14*). It is what transforms the mind, as well as feeds and renews the inner man. Instead of simply remaining a fact, concept or creed, revelation is what makes God alive to our spirits, a living Person who works on our behalf and whom one day we will have to face as our ultimate Judge.

Sacred: The Bible must be sacred. I am not talking about adorning our coffee table with a Bible as it collects dust. I am talking about regarding it as God's Word. The problem with many "bibles" is that their particular take on it has made God's Word "common." By watering it down to accommodate worldly agendas and pursuits, perverting its intent to make it more acceptable to our cultural, pragmatic view, and adjusting it to sound more tolerant towards sin so people can merrily go to hell without being challenged, has made the Bible common. We do not have to ponder its deep truths because we assume we understand it. We do not have to think about it because it has been adapted to fit into our cultural philosophies. We do not have to spiritually discern and wait before the Spirit to illuminate it because we have our theology and doctrine down pat. Ultimately, it has been reduced to a good moral, religious book or work of literature that can be lightly considered, applied when convenient to do so or ignored if it does not serve personal purposes.

The translation that I feel possesses all of these criteria is the King James Version. Although there are those who mock my preference, while others become insulted that I would even suggest their particular version might lack one or all three of these criteria, I can testify that in my personal experience it has proved to be the version that seems to flow with ease when it comes to inspiration, revelation and power. In my attempt to bring Holy Spirit inspired truth and instructions from God's Word, I have been thwarted because of other translations.

I have repeatedly discovered that the King James translation makes the greatest impact into people's lives as it has set them free, transformed their way of thinking, and caused them to ponder and consider the eternal depths of God's character, power and purpose. In fact, in some cases the people went out and purchased a King James Version after discovering the inconsistencies and weakness of their modern version.

On the other hand, I am not one of those arrogant individuals who go around touting how I am a King James Version person. In my experience with such individuals who do so, they may believe that the King James Version contains the necessary inspiration to qualify it as a credible translation of God's Word, but some of these individuals have never read or studied it for themselves. You would think if such people believe it is the credible Word of God, they would not only know it, but they would be obeying it. Clearly, it even appears that we have made the type of version or paraphrase we read a matter of debate, common doctrine or religious elitism, along with many of the other things we tout from our religious pinnacles of self-righteousness. The Apostle Paul, who rebuked the Corinthians for finding religious elitism based on who baptized them, summarized their foolishness as being carnal. He referred to them as babes in Christ who could not bear the meat of God's Word (*1 Corinthians 3:1-4*)

Perhaps as Christians, we need to quit majoring in minors, swatting at gnats while swallowing camels and spiritually grow up into our high calling as Christians. We are living in precarious times. We need to be spiritually equipped to stand in these days against the great darkness that is engulfing this world. There is no doubt we will need the inspiration, revelation and integrity of God's Word to do so. †

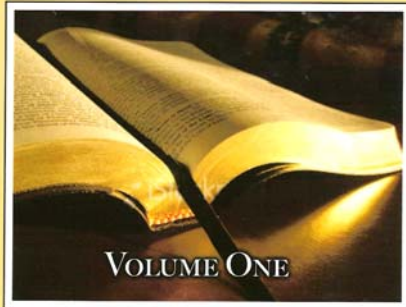
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My Words Are Spirit & Life

by Rayola Kelley—This book is a must for every Christian library. It opens up the Bible on a personal level by challenging attitudes and confirming that when properly divided, the Lord's words prove to contain the power and intent behind them that is capable of producing abundant life. (See page 6 for purchasing info.)

Establishing Our Life In Christ



Foundations of the Christian Life

Rayola Kelley

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