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GOD'S GLORIOUS ATTRIBUTES HIS SOVEREIGNTY - Part 1 By Rayola Kelley



I have been praying about what I was to write for this newsletter. In the past I've written on the reality of God, but some still wonder "who is God" and how does a person come to a healthy life of service and worship where He is concerned? The great challenge for today is that if we do not know God, we could easily be deceived. Granted, He knows how to preserve us and will pull us out of delusion, but we need to avoid the pitfalls of seduction. We need to know what is real so that we can discern the pseudo from the genuine, but to know God we need to keep His attributes in a proper perspective.

The tendency of human beings is to erect a god and transfer their ideas, or that image, onto the God of the Bible. What they end up with is an idol that will fail them down the line, but sadly they keep on insisting on their understanding of God as they operate in denial about who the real God is. They have a tendency to emphasize the attributes of God that they are comfortable with, such as "God is love," while causing a greater imbalance in their understanding of Him. Often they take the definitions of the world and apply them to God's eternal attributes. This type of imbalance will create an idol or a lopsided view of God that will strip Him of His authority and glory in the person's mind. Such individuals will either hide behind the extreme while defining God according to it, or they ignore and deny altogether certain aspects of His character to

advance a personal narrative. The end result is that they will end up with a god of their own liking that is lifeless and will ultimately fail them.

Here is the challenge for every Christian. For every attribute of God, there must be an acceptable response on the believer's part that shows God and the world that he or she understands who He is in a way that aligns each heart attitude and faith walk to Him in adoring love, gratitude, and honor.

A.W. Tozer is the person who challenged me the most to consider the attributes of God. No doubt my different descriptions in this article along with those that follow will probably fall short of his presentation, but my understanding of who God is has greatly changed the way I consider and approach Him. In fact, my understanding of Him has enlarged my faith to embrace Him in greater ways.

As I meditated on which attribute to begin with, I realized that my premise must begin from what it means for God to be God. When the Lord introduced Himself to Moses, He stated, "*I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you*" (Exodus 3:14).

What does it mean for God to be the great I AM THAT I AM? No doubt there would be a variety of answers. But, when I hear that name, He becomes all-encompassing and wherever He is, is the present reality of a matter. There is no time when it comes to eternity. God is not bound to time, the earth, seasons, and days as we are. He is the one who will work out certain events to bring about what is known as, "the fullness of the time." God sets up the right temperature for a matter to come to fruition and then inserts a promise such as His Son into time and history to fulfill His plan.

The one aspect of His character that clearly defines His deity is His *sovereignty*. I must admit, I struggle with this word because it speaks of

God in ways that reveal He cannot be measured, comprehended, captured, controlled, or brought to some place of understanding or become subservient. He is supreme; therefore, He answers to no one: no being or entity will be able to rise above Him or cause Him to fall from His heights. This reality is clearly brought out in *Isaiah 14:12-14*, "*How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the side of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds: I will be like the most High.*"

Clearly the above statement reveals arrogance, but the reality is that any being who dares stand before God in such loftiness will eventually be brought down and exposed as pointed out by *Isaiah 14:15-17*, "*Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners.*"

The prophet Isaiah makes various claims about God that are noteworthy when it comes to establishing His supremacy, "*...and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no savior (43:10c, 11), I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (44:6), "...and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (45:14, 15).*"

It is clear that God stands alone as to who He is and what He is capa-

ble of doing. One of the most significant aspects of His sovereignty is His creation. Creation declares there is a God, a creator, someone who designed every intricate detail of it. God put everything within creation to function, properly interact, and bring Him glory. Whether it is the beauty, the uniqueness, the vastness, the depth, the height, or the unexplainable aspects of creation, it has never swayed from its main function to point upward to the Creator and bring glory to Him even though it groans under the great weight of sin (*Romans 8:22*). The only part of creation that often fails to bring glory to God is man, who was created and formed to reflect His glory in creation.

In the book of Job, God clearly stipulates the uniqueness of creation. In fact there are at least 15 scientific facts that are found in Job (and over 100 in the entire Bible). Some have been discovered recently and it is clear that objective scientists are now catching up with the scientific reality of the Bible. Even though man tries to downplay God by tacking on godless theories and situate science to fit his narrative to what is seen, he cannot explain the clear distinction found among God's creation. God asked, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding?" (*Job 38:4*). When God speaks, man is silenced because he cannot answer such a question. The wisdom behind God's sovereignty is often shrouded in mystery that can be observed, but not fully explained. A good example of this great wonderment found in creation is DNA.

Scientists have tried to recreate the function of DNA in order to explain it and fit it in their often godless narratives, but each attempt has ended in failure. The only conclusion that can be rightfully drawn is that there is a Designer and when He created man, He did so with everything intact so man could fully function in an environment that had already been prepared for him to live.

The Lord is self-governed. He does not need to have some law to keep Him above board or keep Him in line and morally upright. He is the one who established the holy Law and provided the means in which man

could stand justified before Him, but the means required His Son to die on the cross so that you and I could be redeemed.

The Lord is self-contained, all-inclusive without beginning or end and has He no need of anything. I have shared this story many times in the past but it would be beneficial to repeat it. There was a time I was wrestling before the Lord because challenges were many and I could not understand why the Lord would allow such struggles to greatly hinder me since I was working so hard to serve Him. In a nice way He showed me that He didn't need me. The air of arrogance was knocked out of me as I silently sat before Him. He let that simple truth sink in for a few seconds and showed me that maybe He didn't need me, but He desired to use me, but it had to be on His terms.

During Jesus' day there were Jewish leaders who thought that since they were biologically related to Abraham they were going to slide into the fullness of God's promises; but, John the Baptist clearly stated that an axe was going to be taken to their religious system, and when the religious leaders were criticizing Jesus for receiving the acknowledgment and adoration of the people on what we call, "Palm Sunday," Jesus made this statement, "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out" (*Luke 19:40*) (*Matthew 3:10*).

The truth of the matter is that the Lord can use anything to do His bidding, whether it is Balaam's donkey, the rocks crying out, a servant girl pointing the military leader, Naaman to seek out Elisha for healing, or a child leading by example (*Numbers 22:22-32*; *2 Kings 5:1-4*; *Matthew 18:3*). God is clearly not limited as to the instruments He is able to use, but as an instrument man will determine how much God can use him and in what way. He might use him as a vessel of honor such as Moses and Paul, or he might use him as a vessel of dishonor like Pharaoh and Judas Iscariot (*2 Timothy 2:19-22*).

God can move around individuals and still bring about His will in other matters, use circumstances to place a person in a certain place at a certain time to use him or her in a par-

ticular situation, or work through man based on how open and willing he is to be used. As stated many times before, man has his own free-will, and God will not step over it but He is never going to be limited by man when it comes to carrying out His will and plan.

Being sovereign entails God being able to bring a matter about. He is God Almighty, Creator and mighty in strength and power. We know there is nothing too great or small to God. His power disciplines all other power, as eventually all will submit to Him in one way or the other and declare what every believer knows, "That He is Lord" (*Philippians 2:9-11*). Yet, the Lord is aware of every little detail of our lives such as the number of hairs on our head (*Matthew 10:30*). He is faithful with the small things, practical in providing man's needs, and miraculous in deliverance.

It is important to remember that God has all power to bring about a matter, but He will never abuse His power. Abuse of any type corrupts power that will prove to be out of order and destructive. God uses His power to bring about His will, but He does not step outside of His character of holiness to do it. He will not use His power to force others to agree or comply with Him because such power proves to be oppressive. He will not use His power to seduce or force people to bend to His will, for that is a form of deception and witchcraft. His power will ensure freedom for man to make the right choice, to choose the excellent way of righteousness and worship.

In His sovereignty the Lord is also all-knowing. There is nothing that God does not know from its inception to its end. He will never be surprised by world events because He is directing them. He will not be thrown off by man's rebellion, and He will not be caught off guard when disaster strikes. God is behind the scenes in all matters. He may be allowing matters to bring about a certain end, He could be directing events to make sure of the right results, or He could be ensuring the right circumstances to produce the fruits He is after. It is clear He has inserted Himself into time and history according to events, as well as stepped into time during

His times of visitation, and ultimately directs the paths that time is to take.

God's sovereignty decides when and how He does something. He is not subject to some formula. He works within righteousness because of who He is, but He is not subject to unseen forces. It is easy to see His patterns and ways in Scripture, but there is no set formula in how something is going to turn out.

The reason there is no set formula is because man would work according to the formula instead of walking by faith. He would rely on his ability to work the formula to his benefit without obediently walking out the Christian life. In the end, he might do what was required of him but not what would be acceptable to God. Christianity is a heart matter and must be worked into our heart by faith, worked through it by obedience, and worked out of it by love.

Because He is sovereign, God can use what He wants to use when He so wills and He will ultimately be successful in whatever He does. He is the great chess player in the workings of the universe and knows every move beforehand that will be made and He will make the appropriate move when necessary to bring about a great checkmate at the end of this age.

The big problem people have with God's sovereignty is they realize they cannot dictate, influence, or control Him. They cannot figure Him out or keep one step ahead of Him no matter how much they try. At times they see Him as contradictory and unfair, for He does not fit in what they consider to be fair and just, but His ways and thoughts are much higher and He considers matters from a heavenly perspective.

Regardless of how we might deem God's ways and work as being questionable at times, we will always find that He is God and we can pray to Him to move on our behalf knowing that whatever He does is not because we deserve it, or He owes it to us, but because of grace. We have to keep in mind just because He moved once on our behalf in a certain way, that does not mean He will move the same way the next time, nor will He do the same for us as He does for another. I realize I have said the same thing about

His sovereignty in different ways in light of various subjects, but we must quit trying to put God in a nice controllable box by operating according to assumptions and wishful thinking. We cannot, nor will we ever, figure out God. That is why He is God and we are merely part of His creation.

This brings us to a very important point about God's autonomy. His mercy and grace operate according to His sovereignty. He can show mercy to whom He will and pour out His grace onto whom He will. He is not beholden to us because we believe in Him; rather, we are beholden to Him because He cared enough to give His only begotten Son on our behalf.

God's sovereignty always adds that element of mystery that will ultimately force us to cast ourselves upon Him to avoid judging Him based on circumstances, wrestle with Him because everything is out of control, and walk away from Him because nothing makes sense. In spite of God being hidden at different times, we can learn what it means to have child-like faith towards Him. After all, He is our parent who is not able to explain matters to us because it is beyond our comprehension. He is like our guide, and regardless of how much He may show us His plan in the Bible, we still need to follow Him through the dense jungle of the world. He is our Lord who must daily put forth our responsibilities, our Savior who must continue to meet us in our plight, our friend who wants to share important matters with us, and our God whom we must draw near to in faith for Him to meet us in a personal way.

I have often been mystified by God's sovereignty, but I realize that it is His sovereignty that clearly distinguishes Him as deity. If I could understand Him in His sovereignty, He would not be God and we would all be hopeless wretches, still lost in our sin and facing an uncertain and frightening future.

The next time you run up against God's sovereignty, instead of becoming frustrated, take courage, sit back and let Him be God. Trust Him to be God, holy in character, righteous in His ways, perfect in His will, and committed and faithful to saving and preserving each of us to the end. †

APPROVED UNTO GOD PART 2 "RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH"

By Jeannette Haley

"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"
– Matthew 4:4



Our Lord made it clear that every word spoken by God is what man is to live by, so in order to do that we need to settle it in our minds and hearts if we are going to believe the "whole counsel of God" from Genesis to Revelation or not. For some people this is like swallowing an Idaho potato whole. As one woman we once knew said, "God wrote a big, big book!" Yes, He did because He knew mankind would be totally lost without it! All 66 books of the Bible are for our benefit, and if compared to all the mountains of written propaganda and lies the devil puts out, the Bible isn't all that daunting after all.

If we say that we believe it then we need to know what we say we believe, don't you think? That means we must study it, hide it in our hearts, and live by it. Secondly, because the eternal state of our souls is at stake, we owe it to ourselves to at least know with assurance that we can trust the Bible version we use. (You may be interested in a sample comparison of the KJV and modern versions that have changed the original intent, added to or omitted God's words, which you can see here:

<http://www.servantofjesuschrist.com/archives/tag/gail-riplinger/>)

Some people argue that the Old Testament is no longer relevant (even though Jesus and the disciples quoted it) and that it doesn't pertain to

Christians, so there goes 39 books of the Bible out the window—books that give us the answers concerning who God is, the beginning and creation of time, matter and space, and the life of all things; why man was created; the reason for suffering and death; explanations as to the origin of nations and languages; the promises of the Messiah and our Savior, the Hope of all mankind; the establishment of Israel, and the Law upon which civilization is to be based, along with major miracles, prophecies, psalms of worship, history, science, health laws, and examples by which we can learn and gain wisdom, and so much more too numerous to mention. The Old Testament is the foundation of the New Testament, yet today it is all but disregarded as an immaterial, outdated history book foisted on “progressive thinking ‘Christians’” by organized religion.

Others sharpen their intellectual scissors and radical razorblades and cut out all the books of the Bible except the Scriptures from Acts Chapter 9 or Chapter 13 through the Pauline epistles, and that means the rest of the Bible, including the Words of Jesus, is relegated to the compost pile. There are still others who clip and snip any verse that makes mention of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Holy Spirit or the Holy Spirit in general, so there goes the power, the work of the Comforter, Teacher, and our Helper. On the other side of the teeter-totter are those who eliminate, ignore or ascribe a different meaning to Scriptures that refer to Satan and warn the Church of his wiles his devils and hell. Their attitude is “We don’t need to worry about Satan, so we’ll just pretend he and his demons don’t exist.”

Others cling to certain prophetic verses, take them out of context, and rearrange them to say what they want them to say concerning the latter days, and still others only consider those verses that talk about God’s love. Then there are those who are adamant that all Scriptures must be taken in a literal sense when it is clear that certain Scriptures should be understood and applied in “another sense;” that is, allegorically so as to discern the principle, intent, lesson, parable, revelation, or wisdom behind it. On the other hand, there are those who “spiritualize” or alter Scriptures in order to try and “fit”

them into their metaphysical, New Age occult mental framework, which results in perverted definitions with a totally different (demonic) spirit.

Of course there are the “positive only pick-and-choose” people who love to claim all of God’s promises while ignoring and tossing aside as irrelevant all of the accompanying conditions that go with them. These are the same folks that are all wired for sound and blather on day and night telling their itchy-eared audiences that once you decide to be a Christian (whatever that means) then you will never have a problem, or a sickness, or a disease, or any lumps in your gravy. HOG WASH!

And if all that wasn’t bad enough, we must continually be alert to any slothful tendencies we may have that results in us substituting genuine study for the many “short cuts” to a “successful spiritual life” that are being offered today by agents of satanic deception. *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” 1 Timothy 4:1.* So when somebody comes along and tells you that all you have to do in order to “arrive” is to open up and swallow his or her “condensed version” to instant spiritual “success,” rebuke and run!

Any Scripture can be taken out of context, twisted, distorted, overemphasized or “wrongly divided” to make it say what a person wants it to say. The disastrous results of making the Bible say what it does not say are evidenced in the numerous cults that are leading untaught, ill-informed people astray; the countless erroneous teachings floating about that undisciplined, and undiscerning Christians are so greatly attracted to, along with the rise of rampant immorality, worldliness, New Age beliefs, witchcraft, paganism, pride and rebellion all of which is the result of unbelief and utter disregard for the truth. The terrifying thing about all of this is the fact that professing Christians simply do not seem to care if God’s Word is being watered down; that error (or next to nothing) is being taught in churches these days; that people are coming under a wrong spirit; that the youth have no clue whatsoever about histo-

ry, or who the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is, nor do they have fear of God because they have no idea of what His Word declares, and no knowledge of the fact that they are lost sinners who must “repent or perish.” “Star Wars” is more of a reality to more than one generation than the truths contained in the Word of God.

God help us to wake up and realize that we are living in the day of great apostasy! *“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” 2 Thessalonians 2:3.* In a quote by H. A. Ironside he concludes, “And so we see the Lord standing **outside** the door of the professing church, and saying so tenderly, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.” Ah beloved friends, it is getting late in the dispensation; the night-shades are fast falling; and the Lord who, in the beginning, was in the **midst** of His church, stands outside that lukewarm system which calls itself by His name, and He knocks in vain for entrance. Yet, individuals here and there open to Him, and find His presence is more to them than all else that the earth or the professing church can afford.”

Fact: God is no respecter of persons. He is not impressed with a person’s oratory skills, clever clichés, gender, race, outward appearance, family ties, intellectual ability, college degrees, income, social standing, political platform, popularity, or “particular personal performance” while preaching. *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ, Jesus” Galatians 3:28.* What the LORD God desires is that people, whoever they are, come to salvation through Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, and that they trust and obey Jesus who commanded, *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the*

prophets.” *Matthew 22:37-40*. Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

If we are to keep His commandments, we need to know what they are: we need to know what pleases the Lord, and what doesn't please the Lord. It pleases the Lord when we approach His Word to believe it, and to search for Him, learn of Him and His ways, and His will for our lives, and then live it. But, one thing is for sure, and that is this: “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” *Deuteronomy 4:2*. “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it” *Deuteronomy 12:32*. “Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar” *Proverbs 30:5, 6*. “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” *Revelation 22:18, 19*.

Keeping all that in mind let's move on to some of the oft-repeated “Christian” clichés that are so popular today, how they are used, and take a closer look at the Word of God to see if the Word is being “rightly divided.” Here's the first one: “You are not to touch God's anointed.” This “out-of-context-admonition” is based on *1 Chronicles 16:22* and *Psalms 105:15* which state, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.” These verses, taken completely out of context, have become one of the most popular “Christian bashing clubs” used against discerning Christians in order to silence them from standing for truth, and exposing false prophets, heretics and wolves in sheep's clothing. These club-wielding, self-appointed judges swing their club against any who would dare to question or disagree with false teaching from so-called “anointed” “pastors,” “prophets,”

“teachers” or others who are in church leadership. Their goal is to quickly shut up and close down any Christian who dares to expose and warn others of wrong spirits, erroneous teaching, and wolves in sheep's' clothing along with those who replace the commandments of God with the traditions of men, doctrines of demons, sin, unbiblical practices, hypocrisy or demonic, ungodly activity in the leadership.

In full context this verse is referring to the children of Israel who “went from nation to nation, and from one kingdom to another people; He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproveth kings for their sakes” *1 Chronicles 16:20-21*. Blogger and Bible study author Michelle Lesley wrote, “The context of *Psalms 105:1* and *Chronicles 16* makes it obvious that this is **not** what this verse means, even in the Old Testament, as anyone who takes the trouble to read the whole chapter can clearly see. This verse is about God protecting the Israelites from oppression by foreign kings when they were wandering in the wilderness. ‘Touch not My anointed one’s’ and ‘do my prophets no harm’ is a warning to pagan nations to leave God's people – **all** of them, the common people as well as the prophets – alone during the Exodus.”

From the Web Site “Jesus Alive” we read this: “Reading these verses makes it pretty apparent that ‘touch not my anointed’ was not spoken by God as a promise for individuals to ‘claim’ today. This is why it is SO important to read ALL verses in context.

“Having said this, I would also add that ‘touch’ in ‘touch not my anointed’ is shown over and over in the Bible to apply to ‘physically touching.’ A look at Strong's tells us that the word ‘touch’ is the Hebrew word ‘naga’ which means ‘to touch, i.e. lay the hand upon’ (for any purpose). The first use is in (*Gen 3:3*) ‘But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch (*naga*) it, lest ye die.’ (See *Gen 32:25,32*, *Ex 19:12*, *Lev 5:2-3* for a few other examples)

“We can also see David applying this when he refused to ‘touch’ (or kill) King Saul in (*1 Sam 24:4-13*) because he was ‘God's anointed.’ In (*1 Sam 24:9-10*) David repeats something

similar to this later in (*1 Sam 26:9-11,23-24*), when he has a second chance to kill Saul, and repeats it a third time in (*2 Sam 1:13-16*) when someone later claims to kill Saul.”

In the Old Testament, **one** of the occasions for applying oil was in ceremonies to consecrate, or set apart someone (or something: *Genesis 31:13*, *Exodus 29:36*) for a particular purpose. For example, all Old Testament priests were anointed with oil, David was anointed with oil when God set him apart as king and Elisha the prophet was anointed with oil.

And, guess what? ALL true Christians are “anointed!” *2 Corinthians 1:20-22* says, “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us. Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” [Emphasis added.] In *1 John 2:27* we read, “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you ye shall abide in him.” [Emphasis added.] The *Forerunner Commentary* says: “Clearly, he is **not** saying that these people had no need for someone to teach them the difference between truth and error. They did need it! That is why John wrote his epistle! What they did not need was for anyone to teach them the church's basic doctrines, nor did they need human logic or philosophy to help them understand God's nature.”

Therefore, when you discern error, heresy, wrong spirits, or “unfruitful works of darkness” by the Holy Spirit, do not let anyone silence you with his or her “Touch-Not-Mine-Anointed” verbal weapon!

Another popular teaching among certain groups and movements within Christendom is the “you must have a covering” teaching which began in the early 1970's as the shepherding movement. Even though that evolved into a heretical, cultish disaster, the basic idea is still with us today in the form of church authority and oversight of the sheep. Unspoken rules and expectations serve as invisible hedg-

es and walls to keep people “in their place” and God-help-you if you should exercise your freedom in Christ by thinking for yourself and acting independently. Remember, control is witchcraft! In addition, if you find yourself in a church that tries to intimidate, shame, control or manipulate your life, your thoughts, your activities, your time, your church attendance and involvement, your money (who or what you support), or your life in Christ in any manner whatsoever, you are in a cult.

As for women being required to wear a “covering” the Apostle Paul stated, in his argument against the Jewish teachers of his day who taught certain restrictive rules for women from the Babylonian Talmud and Mishna, which were not from the Torah, *“But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God”* 1 Corinthians 11:16.

The Bible refers to the “covering” over the people in *Isaiah 25:7* which states, *“And he will destroy in that mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations.”* What a day that will be when the Lord God Himself shall utterly remove the evil covering that has kept the nations of the world in darkness and spiritual ignorance! In *Isaiah 30:1* God warns against any covering other than His Holy Spirit. *“WOE to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin.”* Therefore, for those of us who are in Christ, the Holy Spirit is our only covering! *Psalms 140:7* declares *“O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.”* In addition, our heads are covered with *“the helmet of salvation”* *Ephesians 6:17a*. When Moses beseeched the Lord to show him His glory, God put him in a cleft of the rock (representing our life hid in Christ) and covered him with His hand. As for “me and my house” we choose to be “covered” by the hand of God Himself! (See *Exodus 33:21-22*.) Jesus is our Head (source, protector, guide, leader and advocate). Jesus is, and should be, our only “covering” so that nothing and no one comes be-

tween us and our Lord.

Another example of wrongly “dividing the Word of God” is concerning idolatry and Christian art. Those who accuse artists, such as myself, of committing “idolatry” base their unreasonable conclusion on *Exodus 20:4, 5*. *“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.”* As many of you know, I was privileged to paint the murals for the Chapel of the Resurrection at Cedar Park Church in Bothell, WA, of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments and the life of Christ, but I have also painted a number of other Christian-related paintings and illustrations for books and book covers for both myself, and other Christian authors as well. I have received much encouragement along the way; many people have been blessed and inspired. The Holy Spirit has definitely granted me the ability and vision to be able to paint biblical scenes. However, there are always those who lack understanding of what the commandment means concerning idolatry, and who think paintings of Christ are in direct violation of *Exodus 20:4*.

God, from whom all talents and abilities flow, did not condemn painters, sculptors, weavers, designers, photographers, and others whose talented expressions highlight the beauty of God’s creation, and who, by illustration, often bring Bible stories to life, especially for impressionable children. What God is commanding is that man is not to make anything with his hands for the purpose of worship. Let’s read it again: *“Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.”* No person should ever worship the work of his or her own hands no matter what it is! If you come to our home and ever see me bowing down and worshipping one of my paintings, please feel free to slap me!

When it comes to creative expression, be it *inspired* music, art or literature, there can be no doubt that our Maker endowed mankind with cre-

ative abilities to reflect the image of God. In other words, God is The Creator, so mankind made in His image would likewise be creative. Creativity is an expression of the heart and soul, be it for good or evil, and I am a staunch advocate for promoting creativity in all three areas among children for their emotional, mental and even physical health. Obviously, the enemy of both God and man works tirelessly to influence music, art and literature by means of distortion and perversion of anything that reflects the life, light, beauty, holiness, power and love of God. Satan is the *“father of lies”* and the deceiver who deludes those who choose to dwell in darkness to believe that good is evil and evil is good. Therefore, Christians need to be careful to discern the spirit behind music, art and literature because these three areas possess great influential power for either good or evil.

Religious art, as well as music and literature through the centuries that has been deemed as “Christian” needs to be carefully scrutinized in order to discern what the intent (spirit) is behind it, and if the message it is portraying is biblical. If it leads away from the simplicity of Christ towards any religious system or church in which practices and traditions of men are the supreme authority, and if it is superstitiously revered and approached with fear or adoration then that work of art (or music or literature) is spurious and needs to be rejected as not being an authentic biblical representation. One area of idolatrous works of art is the gaudy iconic portrayals of religious entities created for the purpose of either aiding in “worship” or to be worshipped themselves. In short, icons in any form are idolatrous and demonic. We know of one instance that took place in AZ where an older woman was praying to her iconic cards and a demon manifested. She ran naked out of her house, screaming at the top of her lungs, grabbed a bush in her front yard with supernatural strength, and refused to let go. The EMT’s were called, and it took several strong men to forcefully release her grip on the bush and get her back inside her house where they managed to get a blanket around her,

and then wrestle her into an ambulance.

If all artistic depictions of things in heaven or earth are idolatrous and wrong, then why did the Lord instruct Moses, *"MOREOVER thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: with cherubims of cunning work shalt thou make them" Exodus 26:1?* Why did God give explicit instructions to Moses on how the Cherubim placed above the Ark of the Covenant were to be wrought? (See *Exodus 25:17-22*.) In King Solomon's temple there were engraved cherubims on the walls (*2 Chronicles 3:7*) and in the "most holy house he made two cherubims of image work, and overlaid them with gold. (For a complete description of the cherubims read *2 Chronicles 3:10-13*). In verse 14 we read a description of the cherubims that were made in the veil. If any sculpture of anything in heaven or earth is forbidden, then what about the "molten sea" and the "similitude of oxen, which did compass it round about: ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about. Two rows of oxen were cast, when it was cast," and there were "flowers of lilies made" and what about the pomegranates made on the wreaths to cover the two pommels of the chapters which were upon the pillars (See *2 Chronicles 4*)?

Early Christians left an impressive amount of art in the Catacombs, including what appear to be pictures of Jesus. You can view some of these at: <http://clfrancisco.com/painted-gospels/>

Did they "worship" their depictions of Christ and his miracles, or of events of their time? Of course not! "A picture is worth a thousand words," as they say, and leave us a witness and confirmation to those things which the Bible and history proclaims. How dare we accuse these faithful followers and martyrs of the Lord of breaking the second commandment! Furthermore, if it is the sin of idolatry to make any sculpture, carving, drawing, or painting of any created thing then we must toss out every illustrated teaching book for children, illustrated scenes from history must go, and we must destroy every illustrated scientific textbook that has pictures of anything from astronomy, animal husbandry,

agriculture, archeology, botany, geology, all the way to zoology. Error carried by fools to extremes becomes ridiculous and absurd; and, it surely must be the devil's choice form of entertainment.

Have the hysterical critics of the Christian arts ever stopped to consider that if people living in Israel 2,000 years ago had had cameras and all the technological gadgets that people have today that Jesus would be one of the most photographed people that ever lived? Personally, I wouldn't be surprised to see all kinds of photographs taken of Jesus when as the King of kings and the Lord of lords He sets up His earthly kingdom to rule and reign for a thousand years. After all, He is coming back not only as the Son of God, but also as the Son of man in His glorified body, with the nail prints in His hands and feet, not as an invisible "Force" of some sort. Jesus is fully man, and fully God. This we may never fully be able to comprehend in our minds, but we must believe it in our hearts!

Francis A. Schaeffer said, "I am afraid that as evangelicals, we think that a work of art only has value if we reduce it to a tract." And, "A Christian should use these arts to the glory of God, not just as tracts, mind you, but as things of beauty to the praise of God. An art work can be a doxology in itself." A. W. Tozer wrote, "Moses' law said, 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth' (Exodus 20:4). People thought that meant that you should never make any works of art. But the fact is there were works of art in the temple commanded by God. So God was not against works of art; He was against substituting them for God or thinking they were like God."

I don't know about you, but as for me, I truly miss those wonderful, beautiful, colorful reproductions of paintings on church flyers and bulletins of our Savior and Lord with the children; of Jesus as our Healer performing miracles; the Good Shepherd with His sheep; the Master teaching the people; Jesus walking on the sea; His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. I miss beautiful stained glass windows and works of art that reflect

the love and beauty of our Creator God and heavenly Father. Have we as a church, in our rush to please the world and not be "offensive" or "separate" or "too religious" become instead a shameful, displeasing offense to our Lord instead? Let us be "approved unto God" by "rightly dividing the word of truth," by using common sense when it is called for, and intelligently and prayerfully comparing Scripture with Scripture; and, hopefully we can keep our wits about us while praying for wisdom, seeking the Lord in "Spirit and in Truth," while humbly agreeing with the Holy Spirit as His light shines on the darkness of our confusion, wrong conclusions, and exalted, nonsensical, faulty convictions. †

THE BIBLE

The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its stories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. Here Paradise is restored, Heaven opened, and the gates of Hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good the design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, health to the soul, and a river of pleasure. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.— *Unknown*

"Brethren, we must preach the doctrines; we must emphasize the doctrines; we must go back to the doctrines. I fear that the new generation does not know the doctrines as our fathers knew them."

— *John A. Broadus* (1827-1895)

A true revival means nothing less than a revolution, casting out the spirit of worldliness, making God's love triumph in the heart.—*Andrew Murray*

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

Q: "I know the Bible doesn't contradict itself, but can you please explain why it says in Ecclesiastes 9:5 that the dead know not anything, but Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:8 that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord?"

A: It is important to define death. Death points to the inability to interact with your present environment. So if something is not able to interact with life in a particular surrounding, then it is considered dead. Some type of breath is also required in order to interact with a particular setting. Inhaling breath is taking in the life that is available, but exhaling is a way of interacting with the environment. A good example of this is that without taking air in, we can't speak (exhale).

Spirit points to breath or air. The type of environment we interact with also will determine the quality of our existence. For example there is the spirit of the world, Satan, which means we are partaking of his various systems and experiencing a certain lifestyle, and there is the natural spirit which means we need the air of the materialistic world as a means to interact and identify with a way of life. Finally there is the Spirit of God and without God's Spirit residing and moving in us, there is no way we can interact with the unseen God as far as prayer, service, and worship (1 Corinthians 2:10-14).

There are also three types of death: 1) physical death, 2) death to the self-life, and 3) spiritual death. To understand which death is being referred to you have to read above and below Ecclesiastes 9:5. You will see death in this text has to do with evil people. Therefore, it is speaking of both a physical death and spiritual death. The reason we know this is because the memory of these individuals will be completely forgotten after they die. Evil people in death will not know anything of the physical world because they no longer have a physical body to interact with it, and even though they will realize too late there is a God, they will know nothing of Him because they cannot interact with Him. Remember if you cannot interact with something, you are considered dead to it. In spite of the sick joke that

one won't be alone in hell, wicked people will die in their sins and as a result taste the complete utter isolation and torment of hell because there will be no spirit in the lost soul to interact with anything.

To interact with your environment you also have to have some history, but for the wicked, their name will be blotted out of the book of life as if they never were. The Bible tells us that any memory that the saint has of such individuals will also be wiped away with their tears (Revelation 21:4).

In 2 Corinthians 5:8, the Apostle Paul's statement is in relationship to those who are saved. Believers will shed their body at physical death. Since they are sealed by the Holy Spirit they will be ushered into the presence of the Lord to live with Him forever.

We each need to keep in mind that we are preparing for eternity by the type of life we live here on earth. Those who live for the world and according to the flesh will not be prepared, or comfortable, to be with God for eternity and those who live for God will have absolutely no part in hell. †

QUOTES TO PONDER

Are you allowing Satan to magnify the memories of your spiritual failures? He will always keep them before you unless you take your stand and move up in faith. The devil will whisper, "You didn't get very far along toward the deeper life, did you?" He will say, "You made a big 'to-do' about wanting to be filled with the Spirit and you really flopped, didn't you?" He will taunt you with the fact that you may have stumbled in the faith—and perhaps more than once! The devil wants you to live in a state of discouraged chagrin and remorse. Remember, the Bible does not teach that if a man falls down, he can never rise again. The fact that he falls is not the most important thing—but rather that he is forgiven and allows God to lift him up! —A. W. Tozer

To walk before God and in His presence, is the ground and the costly jewel of true Christian living. I would have you above all things to grasp this firmly, because, when it is rightly understood and practiced, it includes all else.—Gerhard Tersteegen

READING THE HOLY SCRIPTURE

By Thomas À Kempis

TRUTH, not eloquence, is to be sought in reading the Holy Scriptures; and every part must be read in the spirit in which it was written. For in the Scriptures we ought to seek profit rather than polished diction.

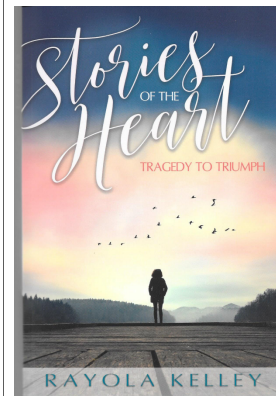
Likewise we ought to read simple and devout books as willingly as learned and profound ones. We ought not to be swayed by the authority of the writer, whether he be a great literary light or an insignificant person, but by the love of simple truth. We ought not to ask who is speaking, but mark what is said. Men pass away, but the truth of the Lord remains forever. God speaks to us in many ways without regard for persons.

Our curiosity often impedes our reading of the Scriptures, when we wish to understand and mull over what we ought simply to read and pass by. If you would profit from it, therefore, read with humility, simplicity, and faith, and never seek a reputation for being learned. Seek willingly and listen attentively to the words of the saints; do not be displeased with the sayings of the ancients, for they were not made without purpose.

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