

THE BAPTIST LANDMARK

“REMOVE NOT THE ANCIENT LANDMARK, WHICH THY FATHERS HAVE SET.” PROVERBS 22:28

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SOVEREIGN GRACE

by Greg Dunham

I recently received a message from a Facebook acquaintance asking if I believed in Sovereign Grace. I confess I hesitated before replying to Him. On the surface the answer should be an absolute affirmative. Sovereignty, by definition, is the innate right of an individual, such as a king, to hold and exercise absolute power in all matters, and the context of the question indicates that this is reference to God almighty. Of course, I believe that the Great God of heaven has absolute authority to act as He sees fit. Grace is that attribute of God whereby He imputes mercy to a lost and dying people through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. I not only believe, but I have experienced that grace that flowed so freely from the throne of God. So, yes I do believe in Sovereign Grace.

But when these two terms are taken together today, they have come to mean something more. The term “Sovereign Grace” has been hijacked by those who believe what is commonly called Calvinism. Calvinism is the belief that before the foundation of the world God chose to “elect” a certain number of persons to ultimately be saved. Those, and those alone, are all who can be saved and no one else has any possibility of redemption. To this, I cannot agree. There are tenets of the Calvinistic doctrine that I do agree with, such as Security of the Saints and Total Depravity; however, I cannot reconcile the unconditional election of saints, or sinners for that matter, with the scriptures.

A consideration of election should lead us to some clear conclusions. In the 11th Chapter of Romans, Paul begins by asking a question, “Hath God cast away his people?” He answered his question in the next verse by assuring us that “God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.” (One should note that foreknowledge is not election or predestination. Foreknowledge is the ability of God to declare the end from the beginning but does not include a predetermination that it will be that way.)

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CHURCH DISCIPLINE

by H. B. Little

A few days ago, a local news outlet reported on a letter written by a group of “church elders” to one of their members. The letter was written to inform this member that her actions had warranted their concern. And that if she did not repent, the society to which she belonged would “withdraw fellowship” from her. The report drew many emotional responses. Some called these elders modern-day pharisees. Others called them self-righteous, judgmental, and unchristian. Others said the actions of these men were evidence of the sad state of Christianity.

Church discipline is often misunderstood. When people hear the terms associated with it, such as *withdrawing fellowship*, *exclusion*, *excommunication*, etc, they often misconstrue these with barring a person from attending worship services. This usually comes from a misconception of the nature of “church”. A church is not a place where we meet to worship God. A church is not a gathering of saved people. A church is a society for saved people to join. And like every society, its members are subject to its by-laws. And a society without the ability to regulate its membership according to its by-laws will quickly become lawless or at least lose its core principals. Church discipline is a church’s ability to regulate its membership according to its by-laws. And the by-laws of a scriptural church are the Scriptures.

Church discipline is an emotionally charged topic. As such, we often judge it with our feelings. We may feel that church discipline cannot be according to God’s will. We may feel that Christian love and church discipline cannot coexist. We must remember that our feelings and popular opinion are not the standard of right and wrong. God has warned us that our “heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked.” Jer 17:9. Instead, we are instructed to appeal to the Bible for the standard of right and wrong. Paul wrote “*scripture is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for

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THE PLACE CALLED HELL

by M. A. Brawner

God has let us know what to expect as time unfolds and the Lord’s return draws near. He has told us that sin and wickedness would increase while love would wax cold, Matt 24:12. Men would love pleasures more than they love God, 2 Tim 3:4. The world would follow their own lusts and seek out teachers who would share “ear tickling fables” rather than the truth, 2 Tim 4:4. As the Lord has said, so it has come to pass. Among those who like to call themselves Baptist, we are witnessing teachings which could be referred to as “fables.” These are being used in the place of the basic truth as it is found in the Word of God. There may be no topic where this is more true than the topic of the place called Hell.

Have you considered lately how many times you have heard the place called Hell shared from the Word of God? It would be highly unlikely to hear much on this topic outside of Old Time Churches who are still trying to serve the Lord. If it is encountered, rather than being shared clearly as it is presented in the Bible, the topic will be smoothed over and presented using “the wisdom of men.” The power of sound teaching is missing in all such messages. Let’s consider some of these points.

When men take up teaching on the place called Hell, they often fall into the trap of depending on the “wisdom of man” rather than just “preaching the word.” According to what Paul wrote in 1 Cor 2:4-5, he avoided this at all costs. He wanted people to have their faith in “the power of God” rather than in “the wisdom of men.” Those who are impressed with their own wisdom are taking an opposite approach. It comes out when they teach on such topics as the place called Hell. We find this when the underlying Greek words are transliterated and substituted for the plain English word “Hell.” This is why we hear the word “Hades” or “Gehenna,” and find them in new versions of the Bible rather than “Hell.” There are major issues with this which will be addressed later.

The Church in Colosse was warned of the
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danger of such teachings. The Church was warned that it would be exposed to the philosophy of man. "Philosophy," can be defined as the study of the principles of knowledge based on logical reasoning. Such reasoning as man would present could greatly harm the Church, unawares. Specifically, he warned that the philosophy of man would ruin them. As in the days when Paul penned this warning, so it continues to be valid in this day. Men love to gather-up their reasonings and philosophies. Others seem impressed to hear how much these men know. In the Bible, God lets us know He is not impressed with their wisdom. God counts the wisdom of man as foolishness. One day, all such wisdom will be brought to naught and all who truly glory will glory only in the wonderful wisdom of God.

There are extreme consequences to using worldly wisdom and human philosophy to justify teaching that the place called "Hell" is actually just "Hades" or "Gehenna." When the place called Hell is taught, it needs to be taught as just that: Hell. There are specific traits and characteristics which come to mind immediately when this word is heard or read. This is true across many cultures world-wide. "Hell" has meaning. This is far different when it comes to encountering the words "Hades" or "Gehenna." The problem is that movies, shows, and other entertainment present Hades as a place where people visit and depart. It is where people are living in some underground kingdom with an oppressive ruler. Hollywood has painted a picture of Hades far different than what God tells us about Hell in the Bible. Gehenna, on the other hand, is presented as a some big fire pit for garbage. Fire pits burn out. Many have fire pits on their property. The point is, there is no description of a Gehenna fire pit that touches what God has told us about Hell in the Bible.

When we read the Bible, the place called Hell is described in a very specific way. While solely focusing on this place called Hell, a number of descriptions can be listed. Here are a few of them. One, if a person dies without soul salvation, they go to the place called Hell. Two, though a dead person's body is in the grave, their lost soul is in Hell. Three, there is no escape for people who go to the place

called Hell. Four, people who go to Hell know they are there. Five, people in Hell remember their past. Six, Hell is a place where torments are real. Seven, the torments of Hell are unimaginable including unquenchable fire. Eight, at the end of the final judgment, Hell will be cast forever into the lake of fire. Others could be added, but these are easy to see.

Let's consider scriptures which help us identify many of these points. Other verses could be considered but this lesson from Luke 16 gathers many of the characteristics of Hell into one place. It would be helpful to read through all of Luke 16:19-31 before taking up the following explanation. The following will consist of verses extracted which specifically focus on how God describes the place called Hell in the Bible.

Luke 16:19-31 gives the historical record of two men who knew each other during their lives. One man was very wealthy but the other extremely poor. A time came when both of these men died. The historical record is unique for these two men because what happened to them when they entered eternity at death is also recorded. The very poor man found comfort but the rich man entered eternal torment in Hell. The details that follow will focus on the man who went to and is still in Hell at this very moment. Let us consider what the record tells us.

Verses 22 and 23 tells us that the rich man died and his body was buried. As much as many would like to believe that the burial of the body is all that takes place at death, the Bible tells us something much different. Man is a twofold being. There is the outward man which consists of our body. There is also the inward man which consists of our soul. These verses tell us that even though the body remained in time and was buried at the point of death, the soul went into eternity immediately entering the place called Hell.

Verse 23 helps us understand that the rich man's soul went to Hell right away. There was no delay or period of time that passed. The man died and lifted his eyes in Hell. His soul left his body and entered into Hell.

Verse 23 also tells us that the man began experiencing the torments of Hell as soon as he arrived. It is noticed that the man did not just experience torment, as in one torment. Rather, he experienced

torments, as in many torments. Though two thousand years have passed since this man began to experience these torments, he is still experiencing them today.

Verse 24 gives the testimony of the man who has been in Hell all these many years. He said "I am tormented in this flame." When given the chance to speak for himself, that is what he had to say. The consequences of rejecting the loving offer of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ are terrible indeed.

Verse 25 help us to see that this man remembered his previous life. He could remember his life of luxury as well as the poor man's life of poverty. This memory must be part of the "torments" of Hell.

Verse 26 allows us to understand that those who go to Hell have no hope of escape. There is a "great gulf fixed" which keeps those in Hell trapped with no way of departing.

Verse 27 gives another testimony from Hell. Anyone who has natural affection for their family members has a desire to get to be with them in eternity. Sometimes this is called the Great Reunion Day. This man in Hell called out that he had five brothers who were still in time. Their eternity was yet to be forever fixed. He had absolutely no desire for his brothers to spend eternity with him seeing that would mean they would also be forever in Hell. He remembered his family and greatly desired for them to overcome the great crime he committed which brought him to the torments of Hell.

Verse 30 allows everyone to see that those in Hell know why they are there. This man plainly stated that it was a failure to repent which landed him in Hell. He desired his brothers to repent so they could be saved from the fiery torments of Hell. It is repentance that will keep anyone in this day from being forever lost in Hell. He wanted his brothers to repent

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of unbelief and trust the Lord to be saved from Hell. No doubt, God wants all to be saved from Hell seeing He recorded this historical account for all of us to prayerfully consider.

The examples extracted here from Luke 16 represent just a small part of the information which God has had recorded in the Bible. These are presented because there is a great need in our day to renew in our minds the plain teachings we have about the place called "Hell." These teachings are completely lost when the word "Hades" is inserted in its place. May God help those who know the truth to stand on these basic teachings. Let's pray for each other that we would be found in that camp who loves to teach "simplicity that is in Christ."

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Paul continues his discourse with the complaint of Elijah to God. Elijah was troubled that the Israelites had digged down altars and killed God's prophets, and Elijah was left alone. God's answer was returned to Elijah that there were still 7,000 who had not bowed to Baal. Paul went on to declare that there was still a remnant according to the election of grace. Going forward he asserts that if it be by grace then it cannot be of works. He asserted Israel has not obtained what he sought, but the election had obtained it. He then shows how Israel fell through their blindness, and coming to verse 11 says "I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but *rather* through their fall salvation *is come* unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy." This verse points out two things that seem to be in contradiction. First he says they have not stumbled that they should fall, but then goes on to state that through their fall salvation is come to the Gentiles.

Here is where we need to ask a serious question. Is Paul's discourse talking about the salvation of their souls, or could He be meaning something more? If this is about the salvation of the soul, then had not at least some of Israel fallen? I have no fear in stating that all the old Israelites that truly had heart-felt salvation were eternally saved, sealed with the Spirit of promise, and therefore finally saved. But something was lost. Israel as a nation

stumbled at that stumbling block that was before them which was Christ; therefore, they voluntarily removed themselves from that special place they held with God as his special people. Their rejection of Christ allowed the grafting in of the wild olive trees (Gentile nations) that would come to God and be His chosen people.

Now let us back up to verse 16 and consider it. "For if the firstfruit *be* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*: and if the root *be* holy, so *are* the branches." First let us consider the firstfruit that was Holy. The firstfruit or firstfruits was a term familiar to the Jewish nation. It described a harvest feast and was to be kept yearly at their harvests. The Jews were told to offer to God their first, or best, fruits as an offering. In the New Testament however the verse most pertinent to this is in 1 Corinthians 15:23, "But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." A number of other verses in the New Testament refer to the saints as being a type of firstfruits, but returning to verse 16 we notice that the firstfruit is holy. Therefore, we conclude, because all of our works of righteousness are as filthy rags in the sight of God, that the firstfruit is none other than Christ. Again, consider that the reference also calls Him the root, which is a reference to Isaiah 53:2, "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire him." Also we see in Revelations 5:5, "And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." This verse leads us back to our thought. Jesus is the firstfruit and the root, both of which are Holy. Taken together we will notice that it is Christ who fulfilled the Law of God, making Him the firstfruit to God. If we hope to find a resting place for more than our soul, it is found in drawing our sustenance from the Root which is Christ. For He was that Lamb that stood in Revelation 5:5 and took the book.

So, let us now look to the idea of election; who is the elect? Through the New Testament we find this term consistently applied to those who are saved and separated from the world by being baptized into the body of Christ, which is His church. Notice, however, that no one can be part of the Lord's church without

first having been born again, so we are talking about church members. It might be well to ask a question here, what is an election? An election is simply a choice. It is familiar to all readers as an idea, and we have probably taken part in elections either by choosing or being chosen in the past. This election though is one that you and I have no part in choosing. The choice was already made before mankind was formed by the voice of God. The choice was made by God and His choice will stand. Isaiah 42:1 says "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, *in whom* my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." There is no way that I can see this verse applied to any other than Jesus Christ. He is the one who brings in the Gentiles to be a part of God's chosen people. So, we can clearly see that the Elect, or the choice of God, was Jesus Christ.

I hope you now see that the election pertains to Jesus, and those who are His. This was a choice that was made by God before the world began and was brought to fruition through the workings of God. Left to mankind, it would undoubtedly have failed. It is not a determination on the part of God to save a select few, but a choice to establish a plan of Grace, through Jesus, that "whosoever will" might come and be saved. After which they can separate themselves from this world and be hidden in Christ, by baptism into His body, whereby those that were not a people could be called the people of God.

Romans 11:33 "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

Romans 11:36 "For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen."

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doctrine...for instruction in righteousness.” 2 Tim 3:16. The question we should ask is not, “what do I think about church discipline?” It is “what does scripture say about the topic?”

Let’s consider the command of our Lord concerning church discipline. He said, “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” Mat 18:15-18. This is the law of Christ concerning private offenses in the church. He plainly says first seek to correct the erring member. If this cannot be accomplished after much effort, He says “let him be...as an heathen man.” Dr. John Broadus (1827-1895) in his Commentary of the Gospel of Matthew interprets this *heathen man* as “one with whom you have no communion or association”. The Lord plainly taught that some difficulties within the church could only be resolved by expelling the offending party.

Let’s consider the command of the Apostle Paul to the Church at Rome. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” Rom. 16:17-18. Paul *besought*—or begged—the church to note those who cause scandals in the church by living and practicing contrary to the teachings of the Bible. He not only says mark them, but also says avoid them. Dr. John Gill (1692-1771) in his Commentary of the Roman Epistle interprets this *avoid* as meaning “have no communion with them at the Lord’s table, withdraw from them as disorderly persons”. This avoidance is plainly a command to excommunicate.

Let’s consider the command of the Apostle Paul to the Church at Corinth. A member of this church was having an affair with his stepmother. When Paul heard of it, he wrote to the church

instructing them “not to company with fornicators.” 1 Co 5:9. This instruction was particular to members of the church and not to members of the community or “those without”, 1Co 5:12. Paul clearly stated “if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner...put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” 1 Co 5:12-13. Dr. A. T. Robertson (1863-1934) in his Word Pictures in the New Testament interprets the passage, “By this quotation from Deu 17:7 Paul clinches the case for the expulsion of the offender”. Paul clearly taught that lawless church members ought to be excluded.

Let’s consider the command of the Apostle Paul to the Church at Thessalonica. “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.” 2 Th 3:14. Paul taught that disobedient members of the church should not have company with the church. In this context, *company* means fellowship. In other words, Paul said have no fellowship with them. This is another clear edict for church discipline.

When we consider the practice of church discipline in the light of scripture, every church has the right and responsibility to exclude willfully and impenitently erring members. However, we have no responsibility to judge the lives of those outside of our membership. Paul made this clear when he said, “For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth...” 1 Co 5:12-13. Concerning those outside of our churches, we are responsible for sharing the truth with them.

We also have a responsibility to carry out church discipline with the proper christian character. Paul told the church at Thessalonica to “count [the excluded member] not as an enemy.” In the same passage he states the point of the discipline is to “admonish him as a brother.” 2 Th 3:15. The purpose of church discipline is correction and reformation, not vengeance or hatred. Paul told the churches in Galatia that correction should be done with humility and empathy, “considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Gal 6:1.

Church discipline is often misunderstood and emotionally charged. However, it is commanded in the Bible. This is not a

fringe or radical interpretation of the Bible. Doctors Broadus, Gill, and Robertson were mainstream theologians whose scholarship was beyond question. While we should not lean on these men to interpret the Bible for us, their opinions on this misunderstood topic provide evidence that church discipline was more widely practiced in their day. Their churches were better for it. Ours would be too.

EXHORTATION TO URGENCY

The following passage is an excerpt from J. S. Coleman’s sermon to the Daviess County Baptist Association on August 14, 1888. The title of the sermon was *The Work of the Baptists, an Urgent Work*. As the title suggests, it was an exhortation to be zealous in the Lord’s work. His text for the sermon came from 1 Sa 21:8, “the king’s business required haste.” While the entire sermon is worthy of consideration, the final exhortation is more applicable today as it was when first delivered. It was:

The final thought suggested by the text is, that our work as Baptists requires haste. If the positions now assumed in this discourse are well taken, what industry, liberality, self-denial and urgency should characterize our efforts to possess this world for our Master. Surely our work is an urgent business... We should be in haste because the Master seems to be in a heavenly hurry. See how His great and strange providences are wheeling the nations into line...We should make haste because the WICKED ONE, together with all his subalterns are making haste to mislead, deceive and destroy. The devil never sleeps, he is always alert, watchful and vigilant, seeking whom he may devour. While we sleep he works. While we stand idle he plies all his hellish ingenuity to embarrass and hinder our work...We should make haste because every form and shape of religious errorists are making haste to propagate and plant their pernicious principles and doctrines in every community in the length and breadth of the land. Their success is our failure; their triumphs our defeats...We should make haste because the time in which we can work is so exceedingly short. Already the day is far spent, and the night comes on...O! my brethren, let us "awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Let us remember that "the King's business requires haste."