

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

Burning Question #26

What Is The Restoration Movement? (3)

Ephesians 4:11-16

July 23, 2017

Communion: Archie Miller

Care Calling: Archie Miller

Host: Yessica Felix

Saturday 7/22: Clean Up: Julia White

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Ephesians 4:11-16 (NASB)

¹¹ And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working

of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Marshall McLuhan was a Canadian professor, and is universally regarded as the father of communications and media studies and prophet of the information age.

He predicted the Internet 40 years before it actually came into being.

His 106th birthday was Friday July 21, 2017.

His best known quote is: *The medium is the message.*

McLuhan's point — that massively distributed networks, like TV and radio, were more crucial than the content they conveyed — inspired authors and engineers decades later.

“Electric media” is an extension of ourselves, a communal act, he said, adding in a **1968** debate with Norman Mailer “an electronic world re-tribalizes men.”

But the quote which is relevant to this sermon is: ***A point of view can be a dangerous luxury when substituted for insight and understanding.***

This is the third of a series answering the question: What is the Restoration Movement.

Restoration is to be distinguished from Reformation.

Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and others clearly wanted to reform the Roman Catholicism of abuses.

There were others, however, who wanted to go back to the pattern of worship found in the Book of Acts, and as described in the New Testament.

They wanted to go back behind Catholicism, back behind the Orthodox groups, back to the Bible.

And, they are referred to as Restorationists.

So, where does this idea come from?

Where does the idea of restoring the church found in the bible, the worship pattern discernible in the bible, the the fellowship found in the bible, where does it come from?

Well, it comes from ministers who were deeply disturbed by the departures from the pattern found in the bible.

Dr. Robert Richardson was a physician who served the Bethany, West Virginia area, and took care of the Campbell's.

He was a professor at Bethany College, and assisted in the publication of the Millennial Harbinger.

In 1852, Dr. Robert Richardson published a letter in which he responded to someone who had inquired about the restoration movement.

Dr. Richardson's biographer referred to this letter as an "apologia for the integrity of the movement."

At the outset the doctor placed the plea within the Reformed tradition, explaining that its purpose was to take up where the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation had left off.

"Reformation is never a *fait accompli*, but an ongoing process. However acute a reformer's mind may be, he cannot, when first aroused from the lethargy of ages, comprehend at a glance the whole of divine truth.

The movement's mission was not, therefore, to disparage the labors and learning of past reformers, or to discredit the doctrines of Protestantism, but to advance in Christian knowledge and make larger discoveries of truth. To do this, the restoration movement sought to restore "a pure primitive Christianity in form and spirit, in principle and practice."

To realize such ends, the doctor argued that people must be free to study and think for themselves and not be bound by human creeds.

He thus named "liberty of conscience and right of private judgment" as imperatives for an ongoing reformation.

He spoke of the heart of the plea in saying, "This reformation was born of a love of union, and Christian union has been its engrossing theme."

The basis of such unity is the common faith that Jesus Christ is the

Son of God, or the facts of the gospel.

He thus distinguished between the gospel and the Bible.

The early Christians did not unite on the "Bible alone," as some of his own people were claiming, but upon the "gospel alone," for they did not then have the Bible as we know it.

The gospel is God's power to save through Christ, not the whole of revelation.

He put it another way by saying, "That alone which saves men can unite them."

Richardson held that it is only through this "generalization of Christianity" that believers can unite.

It was a restless zeal for particular doctrines that had divided the church into a multiplicity of sects.

When the church unites upon the gospel or the general truths of Christianity, it can allow liberty of opinion in particular doctrines. This does not mean that purity of doctrine is unimportant, but only that unity can never come by conformity to any doctrinal system.

In making these distinctions, Richardson quoted from Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address* to the effect that fellowship is based upon gospel truth and not upon a proper understanding of all doctrinal matters.

Thus in the very beginning of this effort to reform religious society, the subject matter of a saving or essential faith was distinguished both from the uninspired deductions of human reason, and from those divine teachings which, however necessary to enable the believer to make proper advances to Christian knowledge, are by no means necessary to Christian faith.

As Thomas Campbell put it in his *Declaration and Address*, in his first proposition:

The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one, consisting of all those everywhere

who profess their faith in Christ and obey him in all things according to the scriptures.

When Thomas Campbell penned these words in 1809, he use a term that was used by both Presbyterian and Baptist of the body of Christ at large.

It was broader than any single congregation.

Campbell spoke of the Church of Christ on earth as a reality.

This makes it evident that he had no illusions of restoring the true church **as if** it did not exist.

The church *did* exist, and it was catholic by nature, consisting of all followers of Christ everywhere.

And it was one by nature.

The Campbell's sought to reform the church by reclaiming its essential unity and catholicity.

Now, keep in mind that catholicity simply and only means universal.

William T. Moore in his *Comprehensive History of the Disciples of Christ*, says:

"In the beginning of the movement, no one thought much about church or churches. There was no thought at all about establishing another religious denomination. The primary aim was to break down the walls of sectarianism and give freedom in Christ Jesus to all earnest souls. From this point of view it was practically a second Protestantism. It was a movement on Society, and its aim was to reform all religious denominations so as to bring them into harmony with the teaching of the New Testament Scriptures.

But it was even more than this. It was an honest, hearty plea for Christian union. It affirmed for all the children of God the right to differ but not to divide. This has always been a fundamental principle with the Disciples from the day the great "Declaration and Address" was issued by the "Christian Association" to the present time. To put the matter, with respect to religious association and fellowship, in mathematical language, the Disciples have always contended for the greatest possible numerator with the least

possible denominator; or the greatest possible individual liberty with the least possible divisive element. In other words, they have made very much of Christ Himself, as the foundation of the Church and the basis of Christian union, but, at the same time, they have made very little of doctrines, opinions, and human creeds, which divide into denominations, and thereby weaken the people of God in their effort to take the world for Christ.

During the first stages of the movement it may properly be called a "Reformation," for at that time its advocates sought most earnestly to reform the churches which already existed, rather than to organize new churches which might result in a separate religious people.

But it soon became apparent that these earnest men could not maintain the position which they at first assumed. They were practically driven into a separate organization, and consequently they had to justify their separate position by contending for a complete restoration of Apostolic Christianity. During this special period, which extended from about the year 1830 to the year 1870, the movement may be called a "Restoration movement," as that was emphatically the chief plea made during the time indicated."

So, you can see that the desire is not to unify denominations, but, rather, to unify individual believers in Jesus Christ.

I think it would be helpful if I gave a quick background of the Restoration Movement.

Bear with me, and try to stay awake if you can.

As you know things became very intense between Great Britain and the colonies, which led to the revolutionary war of 1775.

Four years before that, John Wesley and Francis Asbury began spreading the Methodist Episcopal Denominational theology.

In 1781, John Wesley made Francis Asbury the "superintendent" of the Methodist work in the newly formed United States of America.

Asbury was considered the Methodist Episcopal Bishop, but he was rather dictatorial in nature.

Years ago, I used to participate monthly in a Los Angeles Council of Churches leadership gathering.

One of my friends there was Rev. Dr. Thigpen, Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal church.

Dr. Thigpen once said to be that we Christian church folk had almost killed the Methodist movement in the United States.

And Dr. Thigpen was correct.

You see, what happened is that Francis Asbury was so dictatorial that the Methodist clergy revolted.

Nine years after being made Bishop, in 1792, James O'Kelley, from North Carolina, and a number of the Methodist clergy withdrew and formed what they called the "Republican Methodist" church.

And, then wanting to become more obedient to the authority of the Bible, they became "Christian's only."

Over 7,000 people left the ME church, and became "Christian's only."

During the same period, but working independently, Elias Smith of Vermont and Abner Jones of New Hampshire led a movement espousing views similar to those of O'Kelly.

They believed that members could, by looking to scripture alone, simply be Christians without being bound to human traditions and the denominations that had been brought over from Europe.

Jones and Smith joined together in their efforts and began exclusively using the name Christian.

In 1801, the Cane Ridge Revival would plant the seed for a movement in Kentucky and the Ohio River valley to disassociate from denominationalism.

Ministers from Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist all preached only the gospel message at that revival.

25,000 to 30,000 people gathered there at Cane Ridge to listen to these various preachers.

Thousands gave their lives to Christ.

Barton Stone, a Presbyterian minister, was one of the leading figures at the Cane Ridge Revival, and he was censured by his denomination for mingling with ministers of other faith groups. Three years later, in 1804, Barton Stone, and several other Presbyterian ministers gave up denominational ties to the Presbyterian Church and preferred to be known simply as Christians.

Stone was influenced by his earlier involvement with O'Kelly and knew of the Republican Methodist practice of simply using the name Christian.

Elias Smith had heard of the Stone movement by 1804, and the O'Kelly movement by 1808.

The three groups merged by 1810.

At that time the combined movement had a membership of over 20,000.

This loose fellowship was called by the names "Christian Connection" or "Christian Church."

The cornerstone for the Stone movement was Christian freedom, which led them to a rejection of all the historical creeds, traditions and theological systems that had developed over time and a focus on a primitive Christianity based on the Bible alone.

In April 1807, Thomas Campbell left Ireland for the United States. This move was prompted by the advice of his physician. Thomas Campbell was one of the most educated Presbyterian ministers at that time.

When Thomas Campbell immigrated to the United States in 1807, he came under the direction of the General Associate Synod of the Anti-Burgher Presbyterian Church.

When he arrived in Philadelphia he was cordially received by the Presbytery of Chartiers in Western Pennsylvania.

Before leaving Scotland, he was prominent in the movement that sought union between the Burghers and Anti-Burghers at the Scottish General Assembly in Glasgow.

By temperament, education and inheritance, Thomas Campbell was predisposed to religious tolerance.

But if you asked him what he was, Thomas would often reply "[I

am a] ‘Old light, Anti-Burgher, Seceder, Protestant Christian.’”

Let me explain that:

Old Light—The church should have authority

Anti-Burgher—A minister should not pledge allegiance to their town or city.

Seceder—Believes the congregation has the right to choose their own minister.

Protestant—a non-Catholic Christian. One who protests the Catholic church.

He was a Presbyterian that thought they should select their own minister, and the mayor of the city should have nothing to do with it, holding to the original interpretation of the Westminster Confession of Faith concerning the power of civil magistrates in religion.

He was sent to Washington, Pennsylvania, western part of state, about 20 miles from present day Bethany, in July 1807.

But there were different kinds of Presbyterian people in the area, all different kinds of Presbyterians came to his worship services. He didn't have the heart to deny any of the people the right to the Lord's Supper even if they weren't in full fellowship with the Anti-Burgher Presbyterian Church.

And, another problem, is there were other churches in the area that asked him to preach for their assemblies.

He was called before the Chartiers Prebytery and censored for these infractions in October 27, 1807.

The Chartiers Presbytery took away his right to serve any Presbyterian church.

In spite of Presbyterian rejection Campbell did not reduce his ministerial labors.

He met with friends and neighbors to observe the Lord's Supper. Finally a group met at the home of Abraham Altars in the early summer of 1809 and again in August at which point they formed the Christian Association of Washington.

They association appointed 21 members to formulate a document

outlining their purposes and objectives.

The Christian Association of Washington was possibly the first Para-church organization in the United States.

We now know this document as The Declaration and Address.

No one saw the association as a church.

Only after the principles outlined in the Declaration and Address received little attention did they organize the Brush Run Church.

I have now brought up The Declaration and Address four times.

It is the most significant document ever penned on Christian unity.

Historians liken it to the

Code of Hammurabi

The Laws of Moses

The English Magna Charta

and The Declaration of Independence.

It's that significant.

And, it's part of your religious heritage.

It's my judgment that you need to have some idea what it proposes.

So, I've given you a handout with the original document.

Thomas Campbell wrote in his first proposition:

"The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one."

With Christians continuing to struggle for unity 200 years later, does Campbell still have anything to say?

Dr. Doug Foster, professor of Church History at Abilene Christian University, has done a Contemporary Restating of the 13 Propositions.

Proposition 1

Christ established one church—just one. This church is made up of everyone who has faith in Christ and is trying to follow him in the ways God's Spirit in scripture has told us, and who others can see

are being transformed into his likeness by the way they act. No one else has a right to be called a Christian.

Proposition 2

It is physically impossible for all Christians to be together in one place to worship and work, so there have to be local groups of Christians that reflect the culture, language, and context of each place. These groups will not all look, think, or act alike, yet they are all part of Christ's church and ought to recognize it. They must accept and embrace each other just as Christ has accepted each of us. This will happen when Christians have the mind of Christ—that is, when they are willing to give themselves for those Christ died to redeem. This is the rule of Christ. This and this alone will join them perfectly.

Proposition 3

Therefore, nothing should be required to recognize, fellowship, embrace, work, worship, and be fully and visibly united with all Christians that is not specifically made a requirement by God in his word. Nothing should be required in the way local bodies of Christians operate that is not specifically required by Christ and his Apostles for the church. Furthermore, the chief requirements for full fellowship that God has declared are our love for God and for people. This love is formed by our understanding of God's love for us shown through Christ.

Proposition 4

Both the Old and New Testaments are essential parts of the revelation of God's nature and work. They cannot be separated. While it is true that the practices required in the Old Testament (sacrifices, temple worship, priesthood, etc.) are not in force for Christians and that the good news of God's saving work is found fully in the New Testament, both testaments teach us about God's nature and work. The Bible is not primarily a constitution that functions as a legal document to consult in legal disputes. It is, instead, the sword of the Spirit; it is a place where we encounter God's Spirit and are transformed increasingly into the likeness of

Christ. Attending to scripture is essential to the visible unity of Christ's church.

Proposition 5

The Bible does not spell out in detail everything Christians are supposed to think, do or be—that is just not the nature of scripture. When there are specific actions Christians are told to take, there is almost never a set of detailed requirements for how to do it.

Humans often want more detail and try to expand on the specifics, often making them requirements for accepting other Christians or groups of Christians. That is wrong. Again, Christians are those who say they are Christians and who show that they are by the way they live. No one should be allowed to require anything for recognition and fellowship that is outside of scripture and its work of transformation.

Proposition 6

God gave us the ability to think and reason—that is a good thing. If, however, in the process of using our reason we come to conclusions that other Christians do not reach, and that causes us to reject them, we have been deceived by the evil one. Our pride has taken over and stopped our continued growth into the mind of Christ—a mind of complete humility and self-sacrifice. Human reason is not the ultimate standard for truth. Christians ought to be growing constantly in their understanding of the profound truths of the gospel—that's part of our spiritual growth as communities. But requiring or even expecting others to be where you are is not conducive to the visible unity Christ so much wants.

Proposition 7

Again, it is a good thing to use the intellectual abilities God has given us to plumb the depths of the marvelous truths of God. It is a good thing to think, and struggle and write about these matters. Individual Christians and Christian communities can and should draw great benefit in their spiritual growth from such efforts. Statements of belief can be very helpful in drawing our minds to the unspeakable riches and blessings we have been given and of

which we can and should tell others. However, we must realize that such statements are the product of our human reasoning which, like everything else human, is not perfect. Even when we reach a mature level of doctrinal understanding, we need to remind ourselves constantly that there will always be Christians at all maturity levels—but they are still Christians!

Proposition 8

Once again, having an understanding of every Christian truth is not a requirement to be a Christian, a part of Christ's church. No one who is trying to follow Christ ought to be forced to confess any belief beyond what they understand and know. All a person needs to know to be part of Christ's church is that they are lost and that salvation is through Christ. When they confess that they believe in Christ and that they want to obey him fully according to his word—nothing else can be required.

Proposition 9

Everyone who confesses belief in Christ and commits to obey him, and who shows the reality of their commitment by the way they live, should consider each other as the precious saints of God, should love each other as sisters and brothers, children of the same family and Father, temples of the same Spirit, members of the same body, subjects of the same grace, objects of the same divine love bought with the same price, and joint heirs of the same inheritance. Whoever God has joined together this way, no one should dare divide.

Proposition 10

Division among Christians is a sickening evil, filled with many evils. It is anti-Christian because it destroys the visible unity of the body of Christ. It is as if Christ were cutting off parts of himself and throwing them away from the rest of his body! What a ludicrous picture! Division is anti-scriptural, since Christ himself specifically prohibited it, making it a direct violation of Christ's will. It is anti-natural, because it makes Christians condemn, hate and oppose one another—people who are actually obligated in the

strongest way to love each other as sisters and brothers, just like Christ loved them. In other words, division repudiates everything Christianity is supposed to stand for.

Proposition 11

Two things are responsible for all the divisions and corruptions in Christ's church through the centuries. One is a neglect or even a fundamental misunderstanding of God's will for us in scripture—that we have the mind of Christ and be transformed into his likeness. The other comes from the first. Some Christians, assuming they are “right,” that they have gotten the “facts” perfectly, have assumed the authority to impose their conclusions on others as terms of recognition and fellowship.

Proposition 12

In reality, everything needed for the church to reach the highest state of perfection and purity on earth is first to receive as members only those who have understood their lostness and confessed their faith in Christ and commitment to follow him according to scripture; second, to keep as members only those who show those commitments in their everyday lives; and third, to see that ministers who reflect these ideals, preach only what is clearly taught in scripture. Finally, they must stick close to what scripture makes primary, seen in the example of the early church in the New Testament, without being distracted or corrupted by human tendencies toward pride and control.

Proposition 13

Finally, in every body of Christians decisions must be made about precisely how to conduct its work and worship. Scripture does not dictate such details. Whatever the best way of doing things for the local context should be adopted. These procedures, however, should always be understood as expedients or conveniences for that time and place. Others who do things differently should never be denigrated or condemned for such things, and when decisions are made to do things differently in the future, such changes should never be an issue of fighting or division.

In order to escape sectarianism and to promote the reunion of Christendom, the pioneers of the Restoration movement sought to stand on strictly catholic, that is, universal, ground; to teach and practice only those things that are universally admitted to be Scriptural and right.

By 1839 Alexander Campbell conceded that while unity had long been his "darling theme," he had not before clearly seen what he now saw—the "catholic grounds" for the visible and harmonious union of all believers.

He now had "the rule of union," catholicity, which he would publicly propose: "Whatever in faith, in piety, and morality is catholic, or universally admitted by all parties, shall be adopted as the basis of union."

The following summation of the principles of the Restoration movement is given by B. A. Abbott, Editor The Christian Evangelist:

" I. A universal church. The pioneers said, and their successors today declare, that 'the church of Christ is intentionally and constitutionally one, and all divisions which break this unity are contrary to the will of God.'

"2. They propose a universal book as the only rule of faith and practice, the only authoritative and complete repository of all that is necessary to faith, practice and expectation in this world and in that which is to come. That book is the Bible, the only book which can support claims of universality and of special revelation.

"3. The universal confession of faith, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. (Matt. 16:15-16.)

"4. The universal, Scriptural names,—believer, Christian, disciple, saint, brethren, and the other great words that describe the people of God.

" 5. The universally accepted ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, in form, administration and purpose as they were given and practiced by Christ and His apostles.

"6. The universal life, such as that set forth by Christ and His

apostles in the New Testament.

" 7. The universal aim, which is to establish the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven."

The Rev. Dr. William Newton Briney, preached for the Douglas Boulevard Christian Church in Louisville, KY, for over 40 years. In a sermon entitled "What the Restoration Movement Stands For," summarizes the principles of the movement as follows:

1. Loyalty to Christ the first criterion of Christian character.
2. "No creed but Christ."
3. His word the only rule of faith and practice.
4. Belief in, conformity to, His teaching, our message.
5. " Thus saith the Lord" in matters of faith.
6. Liberty in matters of private opinion.
7. Christian unity on the basis of the New Testament.
8. Calling " Bible things by Bible names."
9. Disavowal of human names and creeds.
10. Practice of the ordinances as they were kept in New Testament times.
11. Each local church of Christ a democracy.

Brother Briney concluded his sermon by saying:

"The unity of the people of God, Jesus Christ being made the head of the corner, the basis of unity the restoration of the New Testament church in its name, creed, ordinances, organization and life, as set forth in the Scriptures—that is what the Restoration movement stands for."

An inscription in the entrance porch of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society in Nashville reads in part:

THAT MEN ARE ENDOWED BY GOD WITH EQUAL RIGHTS TO THINK AND ACT FOR THEMSELVES IN ALL MATTERS OF BELIEF AND PRACTICE;

THAT A DIVIDED CHURCH IS SIN AND THE SPIRIT OF LOVE AND UNITY, LIBERTY AND CONCORD, IS TO BE RESTORED BY CASTING OFF THE SHACKLES OF HUMAN TRADITIONS AND RETURNING TO THE ORIGINAL FAITH

AND ORDER OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST;
THAT BELIEF IN JESUS THE CHRIST AND OBEDIENCE TO
HIM AS LORD IS THE ONLY TEST OF CHRISTIAN
CHARACTER AND THE ONLY BOND OF CHRISTIAN
UNION.

This inscription captures the heart of the Restoration plea: a divided church is a sin, and the way to unity is to make loyalty to Christ the only test of unity and fellowship.

This mandate for a free church made its way into our most meaningful slogan, which well summarizes the integrity of the plea:

**In essentials, unity;
In opinions, liberty;
In all things, love.**

That says it.

That is who we are, and that is our integrity.

All believers can unite upon the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

In nonessentials-opinions, methods, theories, scruples-let there be freedom.

The Apostle Paul says love has the power to bind us together:

Colossians 3:14-17 (NASB)

¹⁴ Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Prayer and Invitation

July 23 Lesson 8 Ezekiel

Devotional Reading: Ezekiel 17:22-24

Background Scripture: Ezekiel 1-3

EZEKIEL 3:1-11

1 And he said to me, “Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the people of Israel.” **2** So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.

3 Then he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

4 He then said to me: “Son of man, go now to the people of Israel and speak my words to them. **5** You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and strange language, but to the people of Israel—**6** not to many peoples of obscure speech and strange language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you. **7** But the people of Israel are not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for all the Israelites are hardened and obstinate. **8** But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. **9** I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people.”

10 And he said to me, “Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you. **11** Go now to your people in exile and speak to them. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says,’ whether they listen or fail to listen.”

Key Verses

He said to me, “Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you. Go now to your people in exile and speak to them. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says,’ whether they listen or fail to listen.”—Ezekiel 3:10, 11

Introduction

A. Gourmet or Garbage?

Foods considered delicacies in some parts of the world may turn stomachs in others. For example, in Mexico City you may be

offered a dish called *escamoles*. At first glance it may look like some sort of cooked grain. Don't ask, or you will be told that escamoles are ant larvae!

Casa marzu is a traditional Sardinian cheese. You may balk when you learn that the Italian name for it is *formaggio marcio*, meaning "rotten cheese." If it seems to you that it is moving, it is. This "delicacy" is a sheep-milk cheese filled with live maggots!

Coffee lovers may be tempted to try *kopi luwak*, the most expensive coffee money can buy. Some specialty coffee shops sell the brew for \$80 per cup. The reason this Indonesian delicacy is rare is that the coffee beans are first eaten by a type of wild cat, then collected after the beans have made their way through the animal's digestive system!

At one time or another, our reluctance to eat a certain food was met by someone saying, "Just try it!" The call of Ezekiel held forth a similar challenge. Ezekiel was commissioned to prophesy to people who found God's Word unappetizing. Therefore God offered Ezekiel a taste test.

B. Lesson Background

The prophet Ezekiel was a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah (see [lesson 7](#)). Both were living at the time Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC. Jeremiah was likely some years older than Ezekiel since (1) Jeremiah saw himself as "too young" when he received his call from the Lord ([Jeremiah 1:6](#)) in 626 BC and (2) Ezekiel was 30 years old (if that's the correct reference of the text) in "the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin" ([Ezekiel 1:1, 2](#)), which was the year 592 BC. Thus Ezekiel would have been born in 622 BC. Perhaps there was some personal contact between Ezekiel and Jeremiah prior to Ezekiel's captivity. But the Scriptures are silent on that.

Ezekiel is introduced as "the priest" ([Ezekiel 1:3](#)). And that is what he would have been had it not been for the tragic turn of events in the southern kingdom of Judah. The first stage in these events came in 605 BC, when Daniel and his friends were taken captive to Babylon ([2 Kings 24:1, 2](#); [Daniel 1:1-6](#)). Ezekiel's relocation to Babylon was a part of the second stage of exile; he was among the

10,000 of the elite citizenry taken in 597 BC (2 Kings 24:12-14). Daniel and other Jews were taken to serve “in the king’s palace” (Daniel 1:4), while Ezekiel found himself in a completely different setting: “among the exiles by the Kebar River” (Ezekiel 1:1). Even so, “the hand of the Lord was on him” (1:3). It was there that the Lord proceeded to call the priest to a task he undoubtedly did not anticipate.

The call began with an intense display of what Ezekiel describes as “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord,” which caused Ezekiel to fall facedown (Ezekiel 1:28). Then followed this command: “Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you” (2:1). As with other call accounts in this unit, Ezekiel’s included both sounds and sights. The sound was the voice of the Lord. The sight was, first, the awe-inspiring glory of the Lord, then an outstretched hand that held “a scroll” (2:9). As we recall from lesson 6, taste was the one bodily sense of five that Isaiah did not experience in his call. The situation was different with Ezekiel, however!

I. Tasted Words

(Ezekiel 3:1-4)

A. Command to Eat, Part 1 (vv. 1, 2)

1a. And he said to me, “Son of man,

The designation *Son of man* occurs over 90 times in the book of Ezekiel, always when the Lord is addressing the prophet. We recognize this phrase as a self-designation of Jesus in the New Testament, a title of messianic significance as it reflects Daniel 7:13, 14. However, the phrase does not appear to have any messianic significance when applied to Ezekiel. *Son of man* simply draws attention to the humanity and mortality of Ezekiel in contrast with the eternal God who calls him.

1b. “eat what is before you, eat this scroll;

The scroll that Ezekiel is commanded to eat is the one written “on both sides” with words of “lament and mourning and woe” in Ezekiel 2:10. Language such as this points to the visionary nature of Ezekiel’s call. It is similar to John’s dietary experience in Revelation 10:8-11, though the aftereffect in each case is quite

different, as later noted.

1c. “then go and speak to the people of Israel.”

It is important that Ezekiel first receives the message within himself. Only then is he qualified to carry out the command we see here. God’s Word must become a part of the messenger before the messenger can impart it to others.

2. So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.

Ezekiel complies. Those who preach on the importance of obedience to the Lord must first be obedient to him themselves.

B. Command to Eat, Part 2 (vv. 3, 4)

3a. Then he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it,

For Ezekiel to *eat this scroll* signifies that God’s message is to become the prophet’s source of spiritual nourishment. The comparison of God’s Word with food is found elsewhere in the Bible (see Psalm 119:103; Matthew 4:4; Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 Peter 2:2, 3).

The phrasing *fill your stomach with it* points to the thoroughness with which Ezekiel is to receive God’s message that is written on the scroll. The word translated *stomach* is used figuratively in the Old Testament to describe an individual’s inner self—the place of understanding and/or emotion. See the translation “heart” in Psalm 40:8 and Isaiah 16:11.

3b. and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

The sweetness that accompanies Ezekiel’s eating of the scroll may seem odd since its contents consist only of “lament and mourning and woe” (Ezekiel 2:10). Most likely the sweetness is linked to Ezekiel’s faithfulness to his appointed task. Even though his message will not be pleasant to hear and the audience will be resistant and hostile (a point the Lord will make shortly), Ezekiel’s fulfillment will come from his faithful delivery of the words given by the one who has called him (compare Jeremiah 15:16).

We must grasp the significance of honey in this era to get the full impact. Today we tend to view honey as one sweetener among

many that are readily available (cane sugar, corn syrup, etc.). But the people of Ezekiel's time and place do not have all these options. Honey is a delicacy (compare Proverbs 25:16). Psalm 19:9-11 places it alongside gold in a comparison with "the decrees of the Lord" by which "your servant is warned." God's decrees can be sweet, because "in keeping them there is great reward."

However, we note a certain contrast when the apostle John ingests "the scroll" in his heavenly vision in Revelation. It is "sweet as honey" at first, but turns bitter in his stomach (Revelation 10:8-10). Perhaps that is because the judgments John bears witness to are the harshest in Scripture, eternal in their scope.

What Do You Think?

What can we expect to experience when we taste God's Word? What is signified if we don't experience such things?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding our state of mind (Psalm 34:8)

Regarding our commitment (Hebrews 6:4-6)

Regarding our maturity (1 Peter 2:1-3)

Other

4. He then said to me: "Son of man, go now to the people of Israel and speak my words to them."

Here are the three essentials in conveying God's message in any era. First, we must take the initiative and *go*. Second, we must have an audience. Third, we must have a message from God.

What Do You Think?

What does the prophet's "go" mandate in Ezekiel 3:1, 4, 11 have to say, if anything, to Christians pondering how best to implement the "go" mandate in Matthew 28:19, 20?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding the mandates' similarities

Regarding the mandates' distinctives

II. Tested People

(Ezekiel 3:5-7)

A. Same Language (vv. 5, 6)

5. “You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and strange language, but to the people of Israel—

The prophet Daniel’s concurrent ministry is with *a people of obscure speech*, a language he and his friends are expected to learn (Daniel 1:4). Ezekiel, on the other hand, is to speak to people who share his identity and heritage: *the people of Israel*. One would think this would be a plus for communicating the Lord’s message. But such will not be the case, as the Lord proceeds to explain.

6. “not to many peoples of obscure speech and strange language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely if I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you.

Language barriers can be difficult to overcome. But here the Lord tells Ezekiel that people of other lands and *of obscure speech and strange language* would have welcomed the prophet’s message. Those in Nineveh, for example, heeded Jonah’s preaching and turned to God in a national expression of repentance (Jonah 3:4, 5). Jesus cites that incident in an indictment of those in his day who refuse to repent in response to his preaching (Matthew 12:41; compare 11:20-24).

B. Same Result (v. 7)

7. “But the people of Israel are not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for all the Israelites are hardened and obstinate.”

By contrast, *the people of Israel* (God’s covenant people) *are not willing to listen to* Ezekiel. Of course, ultimately it is not Ezekiel—the-spokesman who is rejected, but God. The prediction reminds us of what God told Samuel when the elders of Israel demanded a king: “It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me” (1 Samuel 8:7). Centuries later, Jesus will speak in similar terms to his disciples: “Whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16).

God uses the highly unflattering terms *hardened* and *obstinate* to describe his people. One would think that a people in captivity as a result of God’s judgment on them would be more sensitive to

spiritual matters and willing to heed his prophet! Some will be willing to give the prophet a hearing and will encourage others to do so as well (Ezekiel 33:30). But Ezekiel's audience ultimately sees him as an entertainer (33:32) and as one whose message is obscure (20:49). Any positive response ends up being nothing more than lip service (33:31, 32).

WAVELENGTH

Living in Ukraine, another American and I were spending several weeks in intense language training. There were many chances for miscommunication. One problem stemmed from Russian words that sounded or looked like English words.

One day our teacher was drilling us with flash cards that featured Russian words for common objects. The drill required that we point to pictures of the objects, and the word *krovat* kept tripping us up. We thought it was a type of necktie, but there was no such picture. We tried to describe it to the instructor, but she could not understand. Finally she pointed to the correct picture: *krovat* meant "bed."

We found that hilarious. Before long the teacher was laughing with us. Something that started as a communication gap ended as a bonding experience. Although we didn't speak the same language, we did indeed end up on the same wavelength.

Ezekiel's problem was the exact opposite. Sent to people who spoke his language, his message ended up being rejected because his fellow Israelites were not on God's spiritual wavelength. It's bad enough to face misunderstandings; it's worse to be understood but rejected anyway. May we have the strength God gave Ezekiel to face such opposition when it comes. —L. M. W.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways for Christians to prepare themselves for negative reactions that may come when sin is confronted within a church?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

For reactions that hide behind Matthew 7:1

For reactions that hide behind John 8:7

For reactions that hide behind cultural concepts of “privacy”
Other

III. Toughened Prophet

(Ezekiel 3:8-11)

A. Unyielding Messenger (vv. 8, 9)

8. “But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. God will not change the prophet’s message to make it less offensive to the hostile crowd, but he will change his prophet. God makes Ezekiel *as unyielding and hardened* as his opposition. The language pictures intense resistance toward the prophet, but also sufficient resources to counter it. Anyone who tries to “butt heads” with Ezekiel will meet his or her match and then some! The Lord’s promise to Ezekiel is similar to that which he gives to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:17-19) and to Moses (Exodus 7:1-5). The name Ezekiel means “God strengthens” or “God hardens” in Hebrew. God is promising his messenger the power to live up to his name.

9. “I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people.”

The word translated *like the hardest stone* is an adjective that conveys the idea of “firm” or “unyielding.” But it can also describe any substance, such as *flint*, of extreme hardness. Because of such preparation, Ezekiel need not *be afraid of* or *terrified by* his opposition.

Fear seems to be a common initial reaction of those called by God, so God reassures those he calls with various promises of his sustaining power. Ezekiel must not give in to his fears, though the opposition he is to face is likened to “briers and thorns” and “scorpions” (Ezekiel 2:6).

STUBBORNNESS AS A GO(O)D THING

My children love computers. So for the first week of summer break, we let them have unlimited time on the home computer. After a week of bloodshot eyes and disengaged children, we initiated a strict time limit. The first few days we saw rebellion.

They stubbornly insisted that they couldn't do any of their summer projects without online video instructions. They extolled the merits of learning correct keyboarding and keeping up with their generation by participating in online games.

We stood firm, however, and took them on bike rides to the park. We had family game time or group reading time. We invited neighborhood children over to play. We baked cookies and made dinner together. Within a few days, the powerful habit of continuous computer usage was broken.

How to Say It

Babylon *Bab-uh-lun*.

Babylonians *Bab-ih-low-nee-unz*.

casa marzu *caw-zoo marh-zoo*.

escamoles *ess-kuh-mow-less*.

Ezekiel *Ee-zeek-ee-ul* or *Ee-zeek-yul*.

formaggio marcio *fohr-mod-djoh mar-choh*.

Kebar *Kee-bar*.

kopi luwak *co-pea lu-wah*.

krovat *craw-vawht*.

messianic *mess-ee-an-ick*.

Moab *Mo-ab*.

Nebuchadnezzar *Neb-yuh-kud-nez-er*.

Nineveh *Nin-uh-vuh*.

Solomon *Sol-o-mun*.

Children can be stubbornly persistent in using childish logic to persuade parents to give them their hearts' desires! But when those desires threaten their development, parents must be more stubborn than their children. They must make rules and stick with them until the children themselves see the value of those rules.

Ezekiel faced what amounted to a nation of spiritual children. In that regard, they stubbornly insisted on following the ungodly way of their ancestors, "a stubborn and rebellious generation" (Psalm 78:8). Ezekiel had to match their stubborn hardheadedness with his own, since he was right and they were wrong.

We must cling to the truth. This does not give us license to hurt

those who disagree, since our hardheadedness is based in the softheartedness of John 3:16. But the exercise of softhearted compassion must not result in our spiritual compass pointing anywhere but to God alone. —L. M. W.

What Do You Think?

What forms should stubbornness on our part take and not take in spreading the gospel? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

To those of our own language and culture

To those of our own language but different culture

To those who differ in both language and culture

B. Unyielding Message (vv. 10, 11)

10. And he said to me, “Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you.

The Lord desires that Ezekiel *take to heart* what he is now hearing. The prophet has already had to “stomach” these words (Ezekiel 3:3, above), and the inclusion of *heart* stresses how complete Ezekiel’s reception of the Lord’s message must be.

The words of Psalm 119:11 are applicable: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” Ezekiel may be in captivity on foreign soil, but God’s Word is in no way held captive (see 2 Timothy 2:9).

11. “Go now to your people in exile and speak to them. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says,’ whether they listen or fail to listen.”

The Lord has spoken of Ezekiel’s audience as “hardened,” “obstinate,” and “rebellious” in today’s text. These add to their depiction as “briers and thorns” and “scorpions” in Ezekiel 2:6. Now, however, as the Lord’s commission to Ezekiel comes to its conclusion, he describes them in somewhat softer terms as *your people in exile*.

This phrasing indicates that Ezekiel is in the same situation as his fellow Israelites. It is a situation of servitude to a foreign power in a foreign land. They suffer with Ezekiel the same result of God’s

judgment. Because of their stubborn disobedience and refusal to heed prophetic warnings, the people deserve to be where they are. But they are still Ezekiel's kin; he shares with them a common identity as part of the covenant people.

Ezekiel undoubtedly views his fellow Israelites with the same compassion that moves the apostle Paul to say centuries later, "I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race" (Romans 9:3).

At the same time, Ezekiel's compassion must not be allowed to alter the Lord's message. Ezekiel still must declare *what the Sovereign Lord says*. Resistance to the message must not influence the prophet's delivery of it. *Whether they listen or fail to listen* makes no difference in that regard. Ezekiel's primary duty is to remain faithful to the Lord's message. His listeners must decide for themselves whether they will do the same.

The Lord will expand on this point in Ezekiel 3:16-27, where the prophet's work is compared with that of a watchman. The watchman can only sound the alarm when an enemy approaches; it is up to the residents of a city or town to take appropriate action. If Ezekiel is faithful to his duties as a watchman yet his listeners scorn his warnings, then they will have no one to blame but themselves when disaster strikes.

What Do You Think?

How do we know whether or not to move on when the gospel is stubbornly resisted?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering examples of staying put (Acts 5:17-21; 8:1b—regarding the apostles; etc.)

Considering examples of moving on (Luke 9:5; Acts 9:23-25; 17:32, 33; etc.)

Considering examples where both occur in different senses (Acts 18:1-11; 19:1-10; etc.)

Conclusion

A. Balancing Act

God called Ezekiel to walk a prophetic tightrope. On one hand, he

was given a message that was filled with mourning and woe. On the other hand, he noted that the message was nourishing and sweet. God's harshest rebukes are given for the eternal good of the hearer.

Christians today are faced with a similar balancing act. Some complain that Christianity is a religion of *no* and that we are defined only by what we are against. On the other hand, some look at positive, affirming messages and then grumble that the church does not take sin seriously anymore! How do we preach the sweetness of the gospel without compromising what the Bible says about the seriousness of sin?

The prophecies of Ezekiel contain some of the bleakest words in Scripture regarding the fate of those who resist the truth of God's Word. But the same prophecies contain great words of hope and conclude with the promise, "The Lord is there" (Ezekiel 48:35). May we seek to offer that same balanced message today.

B. Prayer

Father, harden us against whatever opposition we may encounter; but keep our hearts soft with your compassion for a lost world. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

A message of judgment without grace is no gospel at all.

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