

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

Burning Question #29

What Is The Restoration Movement? (6)

Romans 6:1-7

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Care Calling: The Webb's

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Saturday 8/12 Clean Up: Elizabeth Thornton-White

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Romans 6:1-7 (NASB)

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? ² May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done

away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin.

in necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas

I took Latin 65 years ago, and if your Latin is as rusty as mine, I suspect you need help translating the phrase on your sermon notes. I would paraphrase it as "in the necessary things unity, in doubtful things liberty, in all things, charity."

It has been part of our Restoration Movement history since Thomas Campbell quoted the German Lutheran theologian, Rupertus Meldenius, by writing

**In essentials, Unity.
In opinions, Liberty.
In ALL THINGS, Love.**

Honestly, there is so much I would like to share about one of the most thrilling unity movements in history.

But, with this sermon, I am, at this time, closing the series. My goal has been to share our background, and some of the fascinating personages who pushed for unity in the 18th century.

One of the hymns we sing from time to time is Timothy Dwight's classic:

**I love thy church. O God; her walls before me stand,
dear as the apple of thine eye, and graven on thy hand.
For her my tears shall fall, for her my prayers ascend;
to her my cares and toils be giv'n till toils and care shall end.**

You are here this morning because you love the Lord and the Lord's church.

Your love for our Lord and His church is seen in your generosity, in your love for each other, and in the way you come to assist in any and every way you can.

And, I'm thankful that someone asked the question, "What is the

Restoration Movement?"

We've never claimed to be the ONLY Christians, but we have claimed to be Christians ONLY.

I have shared that we desired to unite on the commonalities of our Christian faith, while remaining true to our best understanding of the Bible.

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

" **1. 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,"

he summarizes the principles of the movement by saying:

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.

There are some key issues here that we can easily gloss over. So, keep in mind that when we in the Restoration Movement preach, we keep the universals of the Christian faith in focus.

How did we become a Christian?

What is our pilgrimage?

What does being a Christian mean?

How does being a Christian change my life?

Those are the questions I choose to focus on today.

Paul in **Romans 6:1-7** states we are baptized into Christ, crucified with him, buried with him, and raised to walk in the likeness of his resurrection.

There are some very uncomfortable things to consider in this passage of scripture.

For example:

I. Baptism of Suffering

Mark 10:35-40 (NASB)

35 James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, *came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." 36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 37 They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" 39 They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. 40 "But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

In the context of this passage in Mark, "baptism" does not seem to refer to water baptism, but more an immersion into the suffering and anguish of Christ's ministry.

Paul states that when we are baptized, we are also immersed into the agony and suffering of his death.

Romans 6:3 (NASB)

3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?

Do we ever think that when we were immersed that we died?

Colossians 3:3 (NASB)

3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

True to His words, His disciples did indeed partake of this baptism. Tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside down.

If this is true, then our Lord's prophecy concerning Peter's demise was fulfilled in it's most minute detail:

John 21:18-19 (NASB)

18 "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will

gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." ¹⁹ Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He *said to him, "Follow Me!"

History tells us that all of the apostles suffered Martyrdom for the cause of Christ, except John.

However, he too was persecuted in the name of Christ.

Revelation 1:9 (NASB)

⁹ I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance *which are in Jesus*, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

In this manner, all the disciples were baptized with this same baptism of suffering.

John exhorted those of congregation in Smyrna to remain faithful in this suffering, even unto the point of death

Revelation 2:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Although Jesus promised us ultimately a mansion in heaven, He did not promise us a rose garden while on earth.

Instead he promised us a life of persecution and turmoil.

Christians continued to be the most persecuted group across the globe.

An average of 90,000 **Christians** are **martyred** each year.

That's **248** Christian martyrs a day, 365 days a year.

Only by the grace of God are you not one of those martyrs.

Perhaps you will never experience what those Christian martyrs

experience, but Christians will experience suffering as they follow a Christ-like lifestyle, and you can expect to be ridiculed because of your life choices.

The world will not understand nor appreciate the commitment of Christian men and women who honor their marriage vows. Such commitment is often greeted with amazement, amusement, condescension, and tasteless jokes.

The business world will not understand scrupulous honesty in all the details.

Even when Benjamin Franklin said “Honesty is the best policy,” he meant honesty was a crafted decision because it established credibility as a business attraction, not because it was an attractive trait even if it lost business.

Christian respect for the sanctity of life is often vilely attacked in the media.

And, if our Lord suffered persecution, do you think you are exempt?

II. Crucified with Him

Galatians 2:20 (NASB)

20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

It is always easy to think of the death of Christ as a stain removal project in which we are completely passive.

Some years ago I became the owner of a World War Two military desk painted in that old military green.

It was in pretty good shape, but it was rather unattractive in

appearance.

The paint had blackened with age.

It represented quite a refinishing task.

I applied paint and varnish stripper several times, scraped off the gunky goo, and my efforts were met by a an attractive Birds-eye Maple desk.

I sanded the wood repeatedly, and finally put on some linseed oil to give the product a bit of a shine.

The result was worth it.

But throughout the process, the desk did nothing.

I did all the work.

But the desk was passive throughout the entire process.

It did nothing.

Grace is like that.

God forgives our sins, and we do nothing to deserve it.

But Paul hints at another element in the development.

our old self was crucified with *Him*

It may be true that we do nothing to earn our salvation, but in the process of redemption our responsibilities are more than merely being passive recipients of God's grace.

We have to be active in the process as well.

We have the responsibility of putting ourselves down on the altar—and if necessary even tying our selves down so we don't crawl off and away from the altar.

our old self was crucified with *Him*

That means the things that marked our former way of life are killed.

A crucifixion should not be confused with a picnic.

The people who are Christ's are those who have crucified their own fleshly nature.

Killing off the vestiges of our former lifestyle is not a pleasant summer afternoon's entertainment either.

The desires for revenge against those who have maligned us—

those desires have to be killed.

Lusting for illicit sexual pleasures—this has to be stopped.

Fondness for carousing, wild partying—these should come to an end.

Having a sharp tongue and cutting other people down—this is not acceptable Christian behavior.

An egotistical desire to always be first—we need to bury such unloving actions.

When God says

Matthew 25:23 (NASB)

23 Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.

Wouldn't you agree that is the mark of what we have *done*, not just what we have received.

Being crucified with Christ is an ordeal of suffering, and that is more than just passively receiving God's redemptive process.

III. Buried with Him

Paul says

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death

A burial is a solemn process of putting something behind us and never dealing with it again.

When we bury a loved one, we still cherish his or her memory and keep it alive with us.

But the body is buried, never to be with us again.

It would be a nauseating thing if we were to keep digging up the body just so we could associate with it again.

Paul says our old self is buried with Christ.

That means it is gone for good; we don't keep digging it up over and over.

Each of us have different parts of **our old self** that we would like to hang on to.

Some want to hang on to being Number One.

Others want to hang on to the desire to accumulate material resources or financial security.

Others may want to hang on to worldly friends or a social-climbing circle of acquaintances.

Some want to hang on to prestige, prominence, and privilege.

Whatever the lure, we all struggle with discarding the baggage of this life.

It isn't easy.

Burials are no more fun than crucifixions.

But such a burial is essential for those who want to experience the total benefit of being redeemed.

For his entire earthly life Jesus abandoned the identifying marks of heavenly residence.

Philippians 2:6-7 (NASB)

⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.

It is important to understand the New Testament concept of a slave, that to the Greeks to be a slave was to be subject to an utterly debasing social and anthropological position.

Autonomy was the highest prize of the Hellenistic world; thus servitude was the absence of any such freedom.

The dependence of the slave upon another and his or her subjection in service made it repulsive to Greeks.

It is important to see that His emptying was voluntary.

He had to do this in order to take upon himself the essential attributes (*morphē*) of a servant.

And, it's also important to see that when Jesus laid aside His divinity, He actually took something upon Himself.

Becoming a human, of course, necessitated that He lay aside the prerogatives of deity, so it was a true self-emptying.

The term for "**likeness**" (*homoīōmati*) implies a true human likeness and not a mere phantom, as some have suggested.

If we are going to be buried with him and ascend to the heavenly life, we need to voluntarily abandon many of the identifying marks of earthly residence.

IV. Walk in Newness

Paul says:

as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

The Christian life, however, is not just a bunch of negatives. In the late nineteenth century, when it was hip to denigrate the American Puritans, one wag said a Puritan was a person obsessed by the fear that someone, somewhere, was having fun.

Not true.

The Puritans certainly believed in having fun, as any investigation into their family lives will show.

But they also believed that having fun ought to be done in ways that many today would consider incredibly strait-laced.

Persons who have gone through the redemptive salvation of Christ ought to forsake their worldly ways, but there are other habits and attributes they ought to cultivate.

Paul tells us

Ephesians 4:22-24 (NASB)

²² that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of*

God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

There is both a negative and a positive aspect of conversion to Christ.

Put off the old and put on the new.

The negative is Paul appealing for an actual casting off of sin. Eugene Peterson puts it this way

Colossians 3:5-8 (MSG)

⁵ And that means killing off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it, and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That's a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God. ⁶ It's because of this kind of thing that God is about to explode in anger. ⁷ It wasn't long ago that you were doing all that stuff and not knowing any better. ⁸ But you know better now, so make sure it's all gone for good: bad temper, irritability, meanness, profanity, dirty talk.

Now we come to the positive aspect of the process. **renewed in the spirit of your mind**

renewed is a present passive infinitive (*ananeousthai*).

It is present because it is a continuous process.

It is passive because God accomplishes the work only as believers yield to the Holy Spirit.

It takes place "**in the spirit of your mind**" a reference to the fact that your will is involved in causing the process to continue.

At the same time Christians must also "**put on the new self**"

It is our decision to allow the Holy Spirit to be the controlling force in our lives.

If we are doing this it will manifest itself in "**righteousness and holiness**"

The Greek word for "**new**" (*kainos*) here refers to newness in

quality, not quantity.

This passage, along with many others, shows that the apostle Paul certainly did not believe the fallen, sinful nature was removed completely at salvation.

There is a struggle that continues throughout this earthly life. But the more the Christian yields to the Holy Spirit, the easier it becomes.

That new life includes the fruits of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:18-26 (NASB)

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

We have a whole new frame of reference that should characterize our lifestyle.

Our former walk in life was marked by the things of the world; now our walk is marked by living the life of Christ daily.

Walking in the likeness of his resurrection means walking *In His Steps*, as the title of Charles M. Sheldon's novel rightly phrases it. If we walk in the steps of Jesus, our lives are transformed.

Self-sacrifice replaces self-centeredness.

We "do unto others" not just because that's the way we want them to treat us; we do it because it's the right thing to do.

We reach outside ourselves to touch the larger world with the spirit of Christ.

We disdain bias and prejudice and treat others as individuals, regardless of cultural, ethnic, or racial differences.

We share others' triumphs and victories rather than seeing them as competitors who are racking up more points than we are.

We experience a newness of life because we have, on a small scale, replicated the ministry of Jesus.

Since through baptism we have been planted in the likeness of his death, we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection.

Jesus conquered both life and death.

By sharing in his suffering, crucifixion, and burial, we also share in His conquest of both life and death.

By walking in his steps, we demonstrate that we have also conquered the things of this life.

We also demonstrate that we have no fear of death, because Jesus conquered that for us as well.

Let us live that we

Philippians 3:9-11 (NASB)

9 may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, **10** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; **11** in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Prayer and Invitation

August 13 Lesson 11 Called to Break Down Barriers
Devotional Reading: [Romans 10:9-15](#)

Background Scripture: [Acts 8](#)

[ACTS 8:26-39](#)

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” **27** So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, **28** and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. **29** The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.” **30** Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. **31** “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. **32** This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”

34 The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” **35** Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. **36** As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” **38** And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. **39** When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

KEY VERSE

Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.—[Acts 8:35](#)

Introduction

A. Crossing Cultures

Approximately 8,500 Sudanese live in Omaha. Most have immigrated since 1995 because of warfare in their nation. The number of Somalis who live in Minneapolis is estimated to exceed 60,000. Louisville has about 80,000 immigrant refugees from Bhutan, Burma, Iraq, and Somalia.

Your nearest city likely has its own population of new immigrants whose culture is very different from the traditions of that city. How do we effectively understand and communicate with people having languages and customs different from our own? Our lesson today reveals how Philip reached across cultural lines for Christ.

B. Lesson Background

[Acts 8](#) records two episodes in which Philip, a Jewish Christian from Jerusalem, was pressed to cross cultural lines. First, he found himself in Samaria after persecution broke out in Jerusalem ([Acts 8:1b, 4-8](#)). The Samaritans of a certain city had for years been under the sway of a sorcerer named Simon ([8:9-11](#)). This was a people invested in the occult—surely not how Philip was accustomed to living! But despite crossing two cultural lines, Philip preached boldly, and many Samaritans came to faith in Christ ([8:12](#)).

Dealing with those cultural distinctives was a stretch for Philip, but at least he did not have to deal with barriers such as language difference or economic status. Yet the second episode (today's lesson) challenged Philip to cross even more cultural lines. As we consider his success in this, we take care to remember that he is “Philip the evangelist” of [Acts 21:8](#), not the apostle Philip of [Mark 3:18](#); etc.

I. Obedience

([Acts 8:26-29](#))

A. Road ([vv. 26, 27a](#))

26, 27a. Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”

So he started out,

In Old Testament times, the city of *Gaza* was in Philistine territory

([1 Samuel 6:17](#); etc.). Gaza in the first century is on the important commercial roadway that connects Egypt with cities such as Jerusalem, Antioch, and Damascus. To travel the approximately 50 miles from Jerusalem to Gaza, one has to cross a semiarid coastal plain described here as *desert*. This indicates an unpopulated place. The movements of Philip are not devised by his own planning but directed by God through *an angel of the Lord*. In obedience, he travels through the countryside to be where God wants him at the precise time God intends.

WHOSE PLANS?

An elderly gentleman collapsed in the store aisle where my friend happened to be. As she called for help and rushed to steady him, she observed people avoiding the scene and looking away. When we have the opportunity to assist someone else, will we decline because of schedule or inconvenience (compare [Luke 10:30-32](#))? Will we argue with ourselves whether helping is a good idea (compare [Acts 9:13, 14](#))? Philip was a busy man, already occupied with an astonishingly successful ministry in Samaria ([Acts 8:9-13](#)). He could have objected to the angel's call with something like, "You want me to leave a successful ministry here and go to the desert?" But the text reveals no such reluctance, no such objection. Will we self-justify our plans over God's? Will we argue with him, or will we go willingly where he sends? —C. M. W.

How to Say It

Antioch *An-tee-ock*.

Caesar *See-zer*.

Caesarea *Sess-uh-ree-uh*.

Kandake *Kan-dak-ay*.

Damascus *Duh-mass-kus*.

Esaias *Ee-zay-us*.

Ethiopia *Ee-thee-o-pea-uh* (*th* as in *thin*).

Ethiopians *Ee-thee-o-pea-unz* (*th* as in *thin*).

eunuch *you-nick*.

Gaza *Gay-zuh*.

Pharaoh *Fair-o* or *Fay-roe*.

rabbi *rab-eye*.

Samaria Suh-*mare*-ee-uh.
Samaritans Suh-*mare*-uh-tunz.

What Do You Think?

What new challenge would cause you to step away from a successful ministry?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering things that seem to be *pushing you out* of the current area of service

Considering things that seem to be *pulling you toward* the new area of service

B. Read ([vv. 27b, 28](#))

27b. and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship,

Philip meets an exotic character whom he would have seen only from afar prior to this encounter. We learn five things about this man that create cultural separation from Philip. First, he is *an Ethiopian*, coming from a kingdom in Africa south of Egypt. While it is likely that he speaks Greek, that is not his primary language. Second, he is a *eunuch*. Eunuchs originally served kings who had harems. Having been emasculated, eunuchs do not pose a threat in looking after the king’s wives and concubines. Since this man serves a queen, his duties do not include harem management. Third, he is a servant to royalty. In particular, he serves the *queen of the Ethiopians*, the *Kandake*. This is not a personal name, but a dynastic title. This title functions much like the Roman title *Caesar* or the Egyptian title *Pharaoh*. The text implies that this man is under the direct command of the queen, making him one of the top half dozen officials of the realm.

Fourth, this man serves specifically as the treasurer for the queen. Not only is this a position of great responsibility and influence, but also one that probably makes him quite wealthy. Evidence of his wealth is seen in the fact that he is traveling by chariot rather than by foot, camel, etc. It’s almost certain that he is accompanied by

servants and bodyguards, but the text gives no details on this. Fifth, the man's awareness of the much larger world beyond Israel is evident in the fact that he is even here. A trip from Ethiopia to Jerusalem and back is an arduous one exceeding 1,000 miles. It is for him the trip of a lifetime, a treasured experience.

The reason for the Ethiopian's having traveled to Jerusalem is *worship*. The man may be Jewish by lineage, having Jewish parents in Ethiopia. Or he may have converted to Judaism at some point; this is a possibility since a Gentile convert to Judaism is mentioned in [Acts 6:5](#), which is prior to God's extension of the gospel to Gentiles in [Acts 10](#). The fact that the man has invested so much time, money, and effort to make such a trip allows us to conclude that he is quite devout in his faith.

What Do You Think?

Which of the ways the man is described would be the most helpful to know if you were to share the gospel with him today? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Country of origin (Ethiopia)

Physical condition or limitations (eunuch)

Status in life (important official)

28. and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet.

The Ethiopian is returning home in a manner befitting his position. The chariot is a mode of travel that allows him to sit, not stand as a chariot warrior would. Someone else is driving.

The man has what is probably a souvenir of his trip to Jerusalem: a copy of *the Book of Isaiah*. This is a confirmation of his great wealth, for the cost of such a handwritten scroll is out of the reach of most people. This is likely a copy of Isaiah in the Greek language. The fact that he is able to read any language is a testimony to his high level of education. As with many details of this story, these factors do not seem to be accidental, but somehow prepared by the Lord. Isaiah, of all the Old Testament books, has the greatest witness to the coming Messiah. So the stage is now set

for Philip to talk with the Ethiopian about Jesus as being that Messiah.

C. Ride ([v. 29](#))

29. The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

A common man like Philip does not have the status to accost a rich and regal person such as the Ethiopian in this scenario. It is a “don’t speak unless spoken to” situation.

Furthermore, the Ethiopian and his crew might see Philip as a threat. A lonely road is a perfect haunt of bandits, so for Philip to appear and run toward (see the next verse) the Ethiopian is risky. But the Lord nonetheless directs Philip through *the Spirit* to approach *that chariot*. That prodding gives Philip both direction and confidence.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to overcome hesitations to share the gospel?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Hesitations tied to cross-cultural issues

Hesitations tied to a generational divide

Hesitations rooted in “beneath me” or “above me” economic distinctions

Other

II. Observation

([Acts 8:30-35](#))

A. Investigation to Invitation ([vv. 30-34](#))

30. Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

Reading is done aloud in the ancient world, so Philip is able to hear the Ethiopian and recognize the text he is working through. Philip takes the risk of speaking first, but the Lord has given him the perfect question: *Do you understand what you are reading?*

Philip’s Spirit-given insight likely provides him the answer before the question is even asked.

What Do You Think?

What questions could you ask to open a door for teaching an unbeliever about Christ?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

When the unbeliever has recently lost a loved one

When the unbeliever is in financial distress

When the unbeliever is in a midlife crisis

When the unbeliever is actively seeking spiritual direction

31. “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

The Ethiopian’s response to Philip’s question is almost as if he is saying, “I bought this scroll, and I should have hired someone in Jerusalem to come with me and explain it.” The Ethiopian sees no threat in Philip, so he invites him *to come up and sit* on the bench seat of the chariot. This highly educated man is not ashamed to admit his lack of understanding. He welcomes Philip’s assistance.

32. This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

**“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.”**

Again, we see the providential hand of the Lord working in preparation for this encounter. The Ethiopian is reading from [Isaiah 53](#) and is stuck on [verses 7](#) and [8](#). Being at that point means he is about 80 percent through the scroll.

Surely by this point he has encountered texts such as the prediction of a virgin conceiving a son to be called Immanuel ([Isaiah 7:14](#)) and the prophecy of a coming “Everlasting Father” ([9:6](#)). Such texts also must be inexplicable to him. He likewise would have read by this point the marvelous inspirational passage of [Isaiah 40:31](#), which promises strength to those who trust in the Lord.

[Isaiah 53](#) is one of several Servant Songs in that book. They speak of a coming servant of the Lord who will be called as a leader of the people but suffer many abuses and much pain for his service. For Christians today, these are obvious prophecies about the coming Messiah that have been fulfilled in Jesus. But for Jews of Philip’s day, the Servant Songs are very difficult to understand,

because they portray a coming leader who is humiliated rather than victorious.

[Isaiah 53:7](#), quoted here, pictures something Jewish people have at least a yearly experience with: slaughtering a lamb. The Passover lamb submits silently to being killed; not expecting death, it yields passively. Although quite aware of the cross ahead, Jesus remained silent before his accusers ([Mark 14:61](#)).

33. “In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.”

This “death without a fight” is a great *humiliation* for the servant of the Lord. To be *deprived of justice* means he is denied due process of a legal system. No one stops his unjust death. Just as the lamb is silent during its preparation for slaughter, so is the servant of the Lord. No one speaks of *his descendants* as his life is taken, meaning his death will be the end of his family line.

34. The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”

The Ethiopian realizes the paradox in the verses. Why would the mighty Lord of the people of Israel send a sheep-like leader to end up humiliated and deprived of justice? Isn’t the God of the Jews both powerful and just?

The man reasons that Isaiah must be *talking about* a specific and identifiable person—either *himself or someone else*. The first option is possible given that Isaiah sometimes speaks of his own experiences (compare [Isaiah 6](#)). But the Ethiopian probably realizes the passage under consideration does not quite fit the prophet. Therefore he likely suspects *someone else* to be in view. His careful reading of Scripture has brought him to the place where he is open to hearing about Jesus.

B. Invitation to Interpretation ([v. 35](#))

35. Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Philip does not miss this great opportunity, orchestrated by the Spirit and made possible by Scripture. Sometimes the most effective sharing about Jesus is done in one-on-one situations. In

Samaria, Philip had preached to crowds ([Acts 8:5, 6](#)). Here, his target audience is a single man (and perhaps his retinue of servants and guards).

LIFE-GIVING COMMUNICATION

Three ships crossed the Atlantic to help establish Jamestown colony in May of 1607. Preparedness was essential for the colony to survive and thrive. Supply ships from the other side of the Atlantic arrived irregularly, leaving the colonists responsible to ensure they had provisions.

Key to this was achieving good cross-cultural communication and relations with the local Powhatan Indians. When the colonists reached across cultural divides to establish and maintain communication, many problems were averted.

Tragically, communication broke down a couple of years after the colony was established. The result was the “starving time” winter of 1609-1610. Indians laid siege, and about 80 percent of the colony’s 300 settlers died before spring arrived.

Successful cross-cultural communication is also a vital part of taking the gospel to “all nations” ([Matthew 28:19, 20](#)). Not making the effort to reach across cultural divides is to deny the gospel to those who may otherwise be open to it.

Many of us do not need to travel far in order to witness to people of other cultures and subcultures. They are all around us! Expect opportunities to share the gospel with someone whom the Holy Spirit puts in your path. Are you prepared for “the Ethiopian” you may encounter today? —C. M. W.

III. Outcome

([Acts 8:36-39](#))

A. Belief and Baptism ([vv. 36-38](#))

36. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?”

Although the Gaza road goes through a sparsely populated and semiarid landscape, there are nevertheless several places for water. It is impossible to pinpoint the site of the *some water* that is *along*

the road, since courses and sources of water change over the years. Some research suggests the location to be an ancient spring near what is today the archaeological site of Tell el-Hesi, which is about 15 miles east of Gaza.

Although the specific elements of Philip's gospel presentation are not recorded, the man understands his need for faith in Jesus, repentance of sin, and *being baptized*, for this is the New Testament pattern ([Acts 2:36-39](#); etc.). Jewish customs of the day involve ritual cleansings with water (compare [John 2:6](#)), so the Ethiopian probably already has some idea about what his pending baptism involves. Because of his physical situation, he may not have been allowed to experience Jewish ceremonial cleansings during his Jerusalem visit (see [Leviticus 21:18-20](#); [Deuteronomy 23:1](#)). But he eagerly desires baptism now, and his physical condition cannot disqualify him if he has faith (compare [Isaiah 56:3](#)).

What Do You Think?

When, if ever, would it be unwise to agree to a request for immediate baptism?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering need to count the cost ([Luke 14:25-33](#))

Considering degree of conviction ([Acts 2:36-41](#))

Considering ability to understand baptism's significance ([Galatians 3:27, 28](#); [Colossians 2:12](#); [1 Peter 3:21](#); etc.)

Considering precedents ([Acts 10:47, 48](#); [11:17](#); [16:31-33](#))

37, Footnote. [Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."]

This verse does not appear in the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament. But the fact that it repeats teaching on confessing Christ as found elsewhere indicates that its content is genuine. (See [Matthew 16:16](#); [John 6:69](#); [9:35-38](#); [11:27](#); [1 John 4:15](#); [5:5](#).) And before baptizing the Ethiopian, it only makes sense for Philip to check the man's faith situation with regard to Jesus, whether or not that inquiry is recorded in the text. Baptism without faith is

meaningless.

38. And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. The description of the baptism is simple and beautiful. The fact that they both go *down into the water* implies full immersion, the baptismal practice of the church in its earliest days.

B. Rejoicing and Relocation (v. 39)

39. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

As they leave the pool of baptism, a most surprising thing happens. We may have preconceived notions about how *the Spirit of the Lord* removes Philip from the scene (science fiction dematerializations, etc.). In the ancient world, however, this more likely is understood in terms of Philip's body being carried into the sky as if by an unseen hand.

The main thing is that Philip is gone. The Ethiopian is surely astonished, but his reaction is not one of puzzled paralysis (compare [Acts 1:9-11](#)). Instead, he continues his journey home with joy in his heart and on his lips.

We might ask why Philip is not allowed to accompany the eunuch to Ethiopia, where there may be a ready audience for the gospel. We are not told, but we must assume that Christ has more things for Philip to do in Palestine. That his name appears later in [Acts 21:8](#) as "Philip the evangelist" hints at many successes in preaching the gospel over the coming years.

Conclusion

A. Divine Appointments

Philip was prepared for this encounter because he knew not just the book of Isaiah, but the gospel as well. The exposition of Scripture is a powerful way to present the gospel to those who seek truth. We can fumble our own divine appointments if we cannot answer basic questions. A Christian should love the Bible not just for the marvelous encouragement it is personally, but also as the true sword of the Spirit to be used in fighting unbelief among those

who need the gospel ([Ephesians 6:17](#); [Hebrews 4:12](#)).

There is no mention in the text of Philip's being a trained rabbi or scribe; he probably was quite ordinary, not unlike Peter and John ([Acts 4:13](#)). Lacking a formal theological education is no excuse for us today! Having been chosen as one "full of the Spirit and wisdom" ([6:3](#)) implies Philip's love for Scripture, since it is the ultimate source of wisdom ([Psalm 119:105](#); etc.).

God used Philip's self-preparedness to good effect. That preparedness was likely the reason the Lord selected him for the divine appointment with a foreigner in the first place. And it took place on Philip's home turf! Opportunities to cross cultural lines with the gospel are all around.

B. Prayer

O God, give us divine appointments to share Jesus. May you use our preparation to say the right things at the right time in the right way. We pray for this in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

People of all cultures need Jesus.
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