

Colectime in Winter



Bible-based Reflections for Each Day of the Season

MY COFFEE-CUP



MEDITATIONS

Colectime in Winter



Bible-based Reflections for Each Day of the Season

ROGER ELLSWORTH

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Purpose

My Coffee Cup Meditations are short, easy-to-read, engagingly presented devotions based on the Bible, the Word of God. Each reading takes a single idea or theme and develops it in a thought-provoking way so that you are inspired to consider the greatness of God, the relevance of the good news of the life, death, resurrection, and coming-again of Jesus, and are better equipped for life in this world and well prepared for the world to come.

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We hope you will enjoy these Bible-based meditations. We would love to hear from you, so please send us a note to tell us what you think—which ones you liked most, and how they made a difference in your life or in the life of a family member, friend, or work associate.

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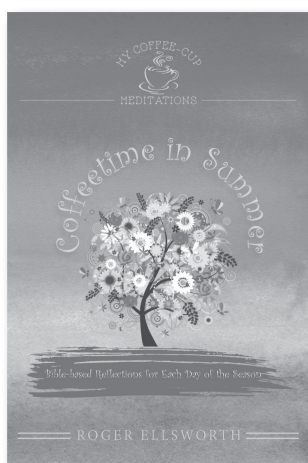
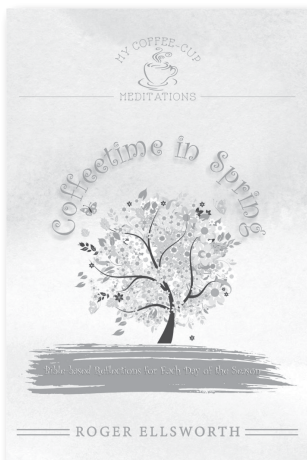
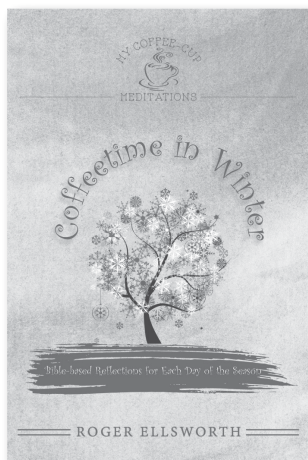
Be sure to collect each of the four volumes in this series!

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About the Authors

Roger Ellsworth is a retired pastor, active in ministry and writing, who lives in Jackson, Tennessee. He and his wife, Sylvia, love the message of the Bible, and they enjoy sharing the wonderful counsel of the Word of God in language that ordinary people can understand and appreciate.

Roger has written numerous books on the Christian faith, and has exercised a preaching ministry for over fifty years.

Roger and Sylvia have two sons, Tim and Martyn, who have also contributed devotions to this volume.



Introduction: All About this Series

FROM GOD'S WORD, THE BIBLE...

*Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.*

.....

PSALM 1:1-3

What you have here is the first part of what was produced as a big book—twelve books all in one, in fact. The idea of connecting enjoying coffee and reading the Bible devotionally happened early in 2017 when I wrote the first book in what became a series of *My Coffee-Cup Meditations*.

Early mornings are very predictable for lots and lots of Christians. Roll out of bed, turn on the coffee pot, pour a cup, settle into a favorite chair and enjoy what is called “the daily devotional.” This usually consists of reading a passage from the Bible and a selection from a devotional book. It concludes with prayer.

Christians who follow this pattern can go through a good bit of devotional material as the years go by. So they are always looking for new material—something to go along with their Bible and their coffee.

Hoping that I could be helpful in supplying the need for more devotional material, I gathered up some articles I had written and put them in a book—*A Dog and a Clock*. The idea was to supply brothers and sisters in Christ with enough devotions to carry them through one month. That quickly led to another book—*The Thumbs Up Man*—to carry “devotion-doers” through another month and then another.

You can guess what happened after three or four books came out. There are twelve months in the year. So why not provide enough books to cover a year? So off we went and out the books came until there were finally twelve books, each with thirty-one readings! Since these books were designed to go

with the Bible and a good cup of coffee, it seemed right to call them *My Coffee-Cup Meditations*. Thanks to my good friends Jim and Sue Holmes for that suggestion! And thanks to my wife, Sylvia, and my sons, Tim and Martyn, for contributing some chapters along the way.

Then came the idea of producing the books together, so that there would be enough readings for a whole year, and with some left over, as not all months have thirty-one days. So the result is that we combined all twelve of the books into one big one: *The Big Book of Coffee Cup Meditations*! That way, people would be able to read from whichever month they wished to at any time in the year—and never have too few days in the month, because there would always be thirty-one readings in each month!

We thought and prayed about how to present these books in yet another format, the idea of Bible readings for each of the seasons of the year came to mind: Coffeetime in Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall. And so it is that you are holding the first of the set of four books in your hand!

One of my main concerns in writing these books was to cause the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to shine. It's wrong to think that the gospel is for unbelievers only. Believers need the gospel! We need to be reminded again and again of the greatness of what our Lord Jesus Christ did for us in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. The more we ponder the gospel and the more deeply we ponder it, the more we will find our hearts flooded with gratitude, and the more willing we will be to faithfully serve Him.

My Coffee-Cup Meditations are published for you with the hope that you will read the devotions, enjoy them, and, most of all, find that you are inspired to consider the greatness of God, the relevance of the good news of the life, death, resurrection, and coming-again of Jesus, and are better equipped for life in this world and well prepared for the world to come.

And don't forget to pour that cup of coffee!

THE MONTH OF JANUARY

A Dog and A Clock

... And 30 Other Bible-Based Meditations

The dog of Angelo del Plato watched intently as his master was lowered into the grave. Eight years later, friends of the family acknowledged that they could not remember a day when that loving dog did not visit his master's gravesite, usually sitting a while on the turf over his master's body. . . Even those who are not dog lovers must admire and commend the faithfulness of that dog to his master. It is a sharp rebuke to many Christians for their lack of faithfulness to their Master!

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January 1



A Dog and A Clock

FROM GOD'S WORD, THE BIBLE...

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

.....
REVELATION 2:10

Being a lover of dogs, I was moved by these lines I came across from an old issue of a Christian news magazine that I was reading:

The dog of Angelo del Plato watched intently as his master was lowered into the grave. Eight years later, friends of the family acknowledged that they could not remember a day when that loving dog did not visit his master's gravesite, usually sitting a while on the turf over his master's body.

Even those who are not dog lovers must admire and commend the faithfulness of that dog to his master. It is a sharp rebuke to many Christians for their lack of faithfulness to their Master!

Yes, all Christians have a Master—the Lord Jesus Christ! Tell me that you do not regard Jesus as your Master, and I will not hesitate to tell you that you are not a Christian! I do so on no less authority than that of the Apostle Paul: “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. . .” (1 Cor. 16:22).

I'm sure that Angelo del Plato did much to win the affection of his dog. He undoubtedly fed him, talked to him, played with him, walked with him, and cared for him when he was sick.

The question I have for my fellow-believers is simply this: Has your Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, done less for you than del Plato did for his dog? Every Christian must immediately utter a resounding “No!” to that question. The Lord Jesus has done infinitely more for us than del Plato did for his dog! The Lord Jesus has rescued us from the wrath of God by receiving that wrath in our stead. He has forgiven us of our sins. He has made us part of the family of God. He has given us countless blessings and benefits to make life more comfortable and pleasant. And He has promised to eventually take us home to Himself to share in His eternal glory. What more could the Lord Jesus do for us?

We should frequently remind ourselves of these words from Jesus: “But why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

The issue facing each of us is whether we will be as faithful to our Master as del Plato’s dog was to him. Or will we commend in a dog that which we refuse to practice ourselves?

My wife and I have moved a lot in our years together. One item always receives special attention when we move. It is our Seth Thomas clock. I awoke a few minutes before four o’clock the other day and heard the steady ticking of that old clock. I listened as it sounded four times. I thought for a while about what I was hearing. That clock is well over a hundred years of age, and it is still faithfully ticking and sounding.

I cannot say how many moves I have left before my final move. But I know I must emulate that clock. I must faithfully tick until my last moving day comes.

I know I cannot do this apart from the gracious help of the Lord. So these days I find myself saying:

*Change and decay all around I see,
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.
(HENRY F. LYTE)*



January 2



Whenever I am Afraid

FROM GOD'S WORD, THE BIBLE...

*The LORD is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?*

*The LORD is the strength of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid?*

*I sought the LORD, and He heard me,
And delivered me from all my fears.*

*In the multitude of my anxieties within me,
Your comforts delight my soul.*

.....
PSALM 27:1; PSALM 34:4; PSALM 94:19

In Psalm 56:3, David admits to being afraid. To be afraid is to be “filled with fear or apprehension.” That word “afraid” is all too familiar! We are often filled with fear and apprehension.

Most of our fears have to do with our lives or the lives of those we love either being lessened in quality or coming to an end.

Many things can lessen the quality of our lives or the lives of our loved ones—sickness, financial reversals, family discord, world conditions, and many other things. There is no shortage of things to bring about apprehension!

And the biggest one of all is death itself! How many people have proudly marched through life as if they were in control and as if they were sufficient for everything, only to tremble and cower when they came to death's door! Haughty and proud in his disdain for Christianity, skeptic David Hume whimpered at death: “I am affrighted and confounded with the forlorn solitude in which I am placed by my philosophy. . . I fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environed in the deepest darkness.”

The David who wrote Psalm 56:3 was the man who stood fearlessly before Goliath. But he was “very much afraid” when he took up his pen to write this psalm. He was in the land of the Philistines, where he did not belong, and it seemed to him that King Achish would soon snuff out his life (see 1 Sam. 21:12). But David collected himself, looked to God, and wrote: “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.”

“Whenever” means “at whatever time,” or “at any or every time.” In Psalm 56:3, it is a beautiful word! At whatever time or at any time David finds him-

self gripped with fear, he will trust in God. Every time he is afraid, he will trust God. Trusting is always the great antidote for fearing.

Are you, like David and so many others, frightened by the thought of death? Trust in God! He has both made glorious promises regarding death and has shown Himself to be utterly faithful to His promises.

What has God promised about this matter of death? He has promised His people will not face it alone, that He Himself will meet them in the “valley of the shadow” and will shepherd them safely through (Ps. 23:4). He has promised that at the very moment of death, the souls of His people will go immediately into His presence (2 Cor. 5:6-8). And He has promised that the bodies of all those who belong to Him will finally be raised from their graves, rejoined to their souls, and will forever be with Him in eternal glory (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

What promises! But please note that these are promises God has given only to His people! Not all are His people. Those who are not in a right relationship with Him have His promise that they will face Him in judgment and will be driven forever from His presence (2 Thess. 1:8-10). That will cause any thinking person to really be afraid! (Luke 12:4-5).

Are you afraid of that immensely sobering time when you will have to stand before God in judgment? God has given a promise for you to trust. He has promised that He will forgive all those who trust completely in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in what He did on the cross for sinners like you and me (John 3:16,36; 5:24; 6:47; 1 John 5:11-12).

Those who believe in Jesus can rejoice in these words from the Apostle Paul: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...” (Rom. 8:1).

Afraid? Don't be! Trust God's promise to save sinners and then trust His promises to take care of His people. Make it your policy to say to God: “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.”



January 3



“He, to Rescue Me from Danger, Interposed His Precious Blood”

FROM GOD’S WORD, THE BIBLE...

And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.

.....
1 PETER 1:17-20

*Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood. . .*

(COME, THOU FOUNT OF EVERY BLESSING, ROBERT ROBINSON, 1758)

These words take us to the heart of Christ’s saving work on behalf of His people. It was a matter of Jesus interposing His blood! That act of interposition makes His blood precious to every believer.

More about that in a moment! First, let’s think about that word “danger.” Frightening word! When we hear the word “danger,” we tend to think of the people and the things that threaten our wellbeing and happiness in this world. There is no shortage of them.

There is, however, another type of danger which is much worse than any posed by this temporal realm. It is the danger of experiencing the wrath of God in eternity. People these days like to play down that danger, but no fair reading of the Bible will allow us to do so. All are agreed that the Old Testament places a heavy emphasis on the matter, but we must not think that the teaching of God’s wrath is confined there. The same teaching is evenly distributed throughout the New Testament. It is in the Gospels (Matt. 3:12; 7:13-14; 22:13-14; 23:33; 25:30,41,46; Mark 9:42-29; Luke 16:19-31; John 3:36), in the epistles of Paul (Rom. 1:18-19; 2:5; 3:5; 4:15; 12:19; Eph. 2:3; 5:6), and in the other epistles as well (Heb. 10:27; 12:25-29; James 5:9; 1 Peter 4:17-18; 2 Peter 2:4-9).

It is the dominant theme of the book of Revelation (Rev. 6:16-17; 11:18; 14:10,19; 15:1,7; 16:1,19; 19:15; 20:11-15; 21:8; 22:11,15).

And for those who blissfully say: “Just give me the loving God of John 3:16,” the wrath of God is powerfully present in the word “perish” which is mentioned in that very verse.

We will never understand Christianity until we realize that it is all about rescuing people from this danger! Jesus came to this world for the express purpose of dealing with that danger.

God is holy. He cannot merely ignore our sins as if they never happened. He has to pronounce a sentence on them and also has to carry out that sentence. What is His sentence on our sins? It is His wrath, which is eternal separation from Himself in hell.

The glory of Christianity is that Jesus on the cross took the wrath that we deserve for our sins. There He “interposed” or inserted His blood between the wrath of God and guilty sinners. The word “blood” means that He poured out His life in death. To say He interposed His blood is to say He interposed Himself. On the cross He took the position between the wrath of God and guilty sinners. The wrath fell on Him, and there is now no wrath left for all who repent of their sins and trust in Him. John 3:36 puts it perfectly: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

But how could Jesus in the space of the six hours that He was on the cross (from 9:00 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon) receive an eternity’s worth of the wrath of God for all sinners who believe in Him? The answer lies in the special nature of Jesus. He was no ordinary man. He was the God-man, fully God, fully man at one and the same time. As God, He was an infinite person, and as an infinite person, He could receive in a finite length of time an infinite measure of wrath. In other words, Jesus as an infinite person could receive in a finite measure of time what we as finite people would receive in an infinite measure of time.

When we truly understand what Jesus did on the cross for sinners, we gladly respond to Robert Robinson’s phrase “precious blood” with a hearty “Yes!”



January 4



Tell Me What You Think You Owe...

FROM GOD'S WORD, THE BIBLE...

"Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves,

"Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

.....

FROM LUKE 7:36-50

Tell me what you think you owe the Lord, and I will tell you how much you feel like serving Him. If you think you owe a great deal, you will gladly serve and worship Him. If you think you owe very little, you will not be much interested in service or worship.

The truth of the matter is every Christian owes the Lord the same amount. He has done no less for one than He has for others. We all come into this world in a very sad and sorrowful condition. We come in with a sinful nature that causes us to be alienated or separated from God.

The piercing question is this: How can sinful human beings ever hope to enjoy fellowship with the perfectly holy God? To put it another way, how can guilty sinners ever stand acceptably in the presence of the holy God?

The answer is that sin must be taken out of the way, and there is only one way that sin can be removed from between God and us. Its penalty has to be paid! What is the penalty for sin? It is eternal separation from God or the eternal wrath of God!

There are only two ways for the penalty for our sins to be paid: we either have to pay it ourselves, which means we must be separated from God and heaven forever, or someone has to pay it on our behalf. In order for someone else to pay the penalty for our sins, such a person must, of course, be free from sin. We see the logic of this. If someone has sins of his own, he would have to pay the penalty for those and could not, therefore, pay the penalty for anyone else.

Jesus is the only person who ever lived without sin (John 1:14; 1 Peter 1:19; 1 John 3:5). Because He had no sins of His own, He could pay for the sins of others.

This is what His death on the cross is all about. There He received the wrath of God in the place of sinners. Because He was God in human flesh, He could receive in a finite length of time an infinite measure of wrath. This

is the reason He cried out from the cross: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46).

The cost of sin is God-forsakenness in hell, and, on that cross, Jesus endured God-forsakenness for sinners. All who realize the depth and guilt of their sins and entrust themselves fully to Jesus in the work He did on the cross are released from the sentence of God's wrath (John 3:16,36; Rom. 5:8-9; 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Peter 2:24).

What do Christians owe the Lord? A debt that can never be paid! We have been delivered from the wrath of God and given eternal life through Christ. In referring to a debt we owe, I am not suggesting that we must work for our salvation. Not for a moment! The Apostle Paul says: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

We do not work *for* our salvation but *from* our salvation. Because we have been saved by the redeeming death of the Lord Jesus, we work to show our love and gratitude to Him.

It is not easy to show gratitude to the Lord by worshiping and serving Him. There are always a thousand things to occupy us. Some people excuse themselves from worship and service because they feel that they don't have the time. Other people do so because they have been offended or hurt. Yet others do so because they don't agree with the direction the church is going.

The answer to each of these excuses is the same: What do you owe? If you say that you owe nothing less than deliverance from the wrath of God to Christ, you must surely go on to say that He is worthy of your time and energy and that no hurt or disagreement is great enough to offset the debt.

What I have been saying is pointedly expressed in these words from Isaac Watts:

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God;
All the vain things that charm me most –
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small:
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*



January 5



The Passing of a Celebrity

FROM GOD'S WORD, THE BIBLE...

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

.....

HEBREWS 9:27-28

Michael Jackson is dead. At one time, he had great wealth. He still had great fame when he breathed his last. But now he is gone.

In reporting his death, one newspaper continued to express shock that this famous man had died at age fifty. It was as if he, the newsman, was assuming that one has to be a certain age to die!

But death is all around us all the time. We are reminded of it when we drive by a cemetery, hospital or nursing facility, or when we see an obituary column.

Death takes young and old, rich and poor, the well educated and the illiterate, conservative and liberal. The greatest fact of life is death. Martin Luther was right in saying the following words: "Life is a constant and daily journey toward death. One after another dies, and the living must merely engage in the miserable business of carrying one another to the grave. All of us are traveling the same road together."

The Bible tells us that the wise man thinks about what lies ahead and makes prudent preparation for it (Prov. 22:3). The fool never does.

If death is inevitable, is it not wise to think about it and prepare for it?

But how many there are who seem to think life is sure and death is uncertain. Just the opposite is true!

Many people, these days, would argue that there is nothing for which to prepare because death is the end. Really? Isn't there something inside you that screams that it is not so?

The Bible tells us that we were made by God and for God and we must meet God. It flatly says: "Prepare to meet your God. . .!" (Amos 4:12).

But how do we prepare for death? The Bible has the answer for that as well. It tells us to repent of our sins and to take the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. Why take Jesus? He has demonstrated His authority over death by rising from the grave.

If you don't know how to handle something, the best thing to do is go to someone who does know how to handle it. You and I are not able to handle death and what lies beyond it, but the Lord Jesus is able. If we place ourselves in His hands, we have nothing to fear about death or the hereafter.

But we must truly take Jesus as our Savior and not just go through the motions of doing so. If we really trust Him, it will show up in our lives. We will not try to govern our lives with no regard for Him, for His Book (the Bible), for His day (the Lord's Day), or for His church. Many who think they have received Christ have only deceived themselves.

I have come to love a song that urges people to come to Jesus and "laugh on glory's side." There is indeed a glory side for those who receive Christ. It is called heaven. And Jesus is the way! If you want to take the fear out of death and "laugh on glory's side," turn to Christ now.

Because we never know when death will come, sooner is always better than later for fleeing to Christ.



January 6



Two Questions Most Church Attendees Dare Not Ask Themselves

FROM GOD'S WORD, THE BIBLE...

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

.....

REVELATION 2:10

Practically every church in my city of Jackson, Tennessee, cancelled services on May 2, 2010, because of the flood that brought about fifteen inches of rain to our area. My church was among those that canceled. So I sat at home that day and watched a lot of religious TV programming. As I viewed program after program, I was astonished at how little of the gospel I heard. Most of the messages focused on how to make life in this world more enjoyable and comfortable. It was much like watching Oprah or Dr. Phil!

I admit that the Bible does say a good bit about living in this world, but it is always does so in connection with the gospel and as a consequence of the gospel. It was a clear statement of the gospel that was so noticeably missing in most of the programs I viewed. So I found myself thinking about two questions that most church attendees dare not ask themselves. The first is this: Is what I am getting from my church real Christianity? Christianity is not just a successful living technique. It is the declaration of what God has done in and through Jesus to rescue sinners from their sins and the wrath to come and to give them right standing with God and eternal glory.

There is no Christianity without the gospel, and if you are in a church that doesn't emphasize the gospel, you are not really in a church at all.

That led me to a second question: If I am not getting real Christianity from my church, why am I supporting it?

Some would say it is because there is so much "energy" in the services. However, the prophets of Baal had lots and lots of energy, and they were horribly wrong (1 Kings 18:25-28).

Some would say it is because the church offers so many activities for the children. The Bible says parents are to bring their children up in the teaching of the Lord! No parent can discharge this responsibility if he has his children in a church that does not preach the gospel.

Some would say it is because the crowd is so large. But the Bible tells us not to follow a crowd to do evil (Exod. 23:2).

On the rainy day as I sat at home, I also found myself thinking about another day—the day of God’s judgment. How sad it will be for many so-called Christian pastors to stand in the presence of the Lord and be faced with the enormous realization that they had never really preached Christianity at all! (1 Cor. 3:10-17). And how very sad it will be on that day for the multitudes of professing Christians to realize that they had spent most of their lives going to churches where they never really heard the Christian message at all!

If you had asked me on that day if we needed the flood, I would have said: “No way!”

But if you were to ask me today if I can think of a flood that we do need, I would answer with an emphatic yes. We need a spiritual flood, the flood depicted in these words:

*Rain down, you heavens, from above,
And let the skies pour down righteousness;
Let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation,
And let righteousness spring up together.
(ISA. 45:8)*

Such a flood would sweep away that which is false and flimsy, and restore the gospel to the priority it deserves.



January 7



Christianity or “Ianity”?

FROM GOD’S WORD, THE BIBLE...

God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

.....
GALATIANS 6:14

The Apostle Paul was not in doubt about what he should preach. He put it very clearly: “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

It’s obvious that Paul was a preacher of Christianity. The word “Christianity” has Christ in it, and Paul preached Christ.

Many preachers these days cannot echo the words of Paul. They are not preachers of Christ, and if we take Christ out of Christianity, we have something called “Ianity.”

Isn’t it interesting that “Ianity” begins with “I”? Much of what we call Christianity these days has very little to do with Christ and a lot to do with us. Our worship is not about Christ and His great deeds. It is about us and how we feel about things. And our great concern is not serving God. It is rather getting God to serve us. We don’t want to fall before Him as our Sovereign. We want Him to be our helper with all the little aggravations and challenges that life brings our way. These are the days of the “troubleshooter” God. We don’t want much to do with Him, but we want Him to be ready to spring into action if we need Him!

Maybe He can keep our children from spilling their milk or keep the dog from coming into the house with muddy feet!

We don’t want a God who talks about sin. That would make us feel bad! And we aren’t all that interested in heaven. We want our best life now!

The thing we so often fail to see is that the smaller we make God, the more unnecessary we make Him! Many these days are starved for the greatness of God. If they were to speak to our churches, they might very well say: “We will take care of the milk and the dog; give us a God that can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.”

What is it we cannot do for ourselves? We can’t rid ourselves of sin, lift from ourselves the sentence of God’s condemnation, or prepare ourselves to stand acceptably in the presence of a holy God. But through the Lord Jesus Christ, God forgives sinners, cancels the sentence of condemnation, and declares those sinners to be guiltless. While so many pursue the God who specializes in trivia, the Bible calls us to pursue the God who specializes in salvation. This is Christianity!

Some time ago, Michael Horton, a professor in California, wrote a book entitled *Christless Christianity*. Some undoubtedly responded to that title by saying: “That’s nonsense. You can’t have Christianity with Christ!” And that is the sharp point of the book! When you take Christ out of Christianity, you have something, but it is no longer Christianity. Let’s just call it “Ianity,” which, by the way, is only one letter, the letter “n,” away from “inanity,” that is “a lack of substance” or “shallowness.”

There you have it! Christianity without Christ is shallow and empty.

While it professes to be profound, it is far from it.

There are two things that every true believer in Christ should dread above everything else. One is a Christless Bible and the other is a crossless Christ. “Ianity” offers us both! It takes Christ out of the Bible and makes it some sort of miscellaneous collection of tips and guidelines for living better, and when “Ianity” does give us one of its infrequent mentions of Christ, it is not the Christ who endured the wrath of God on the cross for sinners. It is, rather, the Christ who helps us implement the tips! Christianity, on the other hand, rightly sees Christ as the subject of the whole Bible (Luke 24:27,44) and rightly emphasizes that Christ came to this earth to die on that cross, and that there is no hope for salvation except in that redeeming death.



January 8



The Danger of Snapshot Theology

FROM GOD'S WORD, THE BIBLE...

*Do not fret because of evildoers,
Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.
For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,
And wither as the green herb.
Trust in the LORD, and do good;
Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
Delight yourself also in the LORD,
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.*

.....

FROM PSALM 37:1-11

The Christian life is not easy! Anyone who tells you that it is, doesn't know what he's talking about. The Lord Jesus tells us that following Him means denying ourselves and carrying a cross (Matt. 16:24). The Apostle Paul tells us that the Christian life is a warfare (Eph. 6:10-20).

Sometimes, however, we make the Christian life harder than it needs to be. Living for the Lord is much easier when we trust the Lord to always have our best interests at heart and to always be with us in every difficult circumstance. It becomes immensely more difficult when we doubt these things.

Sadly enough, many Christians do doubt that God really cares for them. They are disappointed with Him. He has not lived up to their expectations.

One thing that inevitably leads to disappointment with God is what I call "snapshot theology." What is snapshot theology? It is drawing conclusions about God on the basis of the circumstances in which we find ourselves at this moment.

How easy it is to do this! We often find that our circumstances are a lot less desirable than we would have them to be, and on the basis of those circumstances we conclude that God has failed us. We can be sure that the devil is ever eager to help us draw that conclusion. He is very quick to speak along these lines: "If God truly loved you, you wouldn't have these problems."

I have often said that if we begin with the wrong job description for God, He will always fail in our eyes. If we assume that it is God's job to make life as comfortable for us as it can possibly be, we are bound to think ill of Him when our lives are not comfortable. But the problem is not with God; it is rather with our wrong thinking about Him. God has never told us that His purpose is to make life easy for us.

What is His purpose? It is to conform us to the image of His Son

(Rom. 8:29). In other words, it is to bring us to spiritual maturity.

Thank God, the trials of this life will someday come to an end. The tide of time will wash up on the shore of eternity. There, in the glory of God's presence, we will have a new and different perspective on the problems of this life. There we will not simply look at one snapshot from our lives, but God will rather show us the whole movie. As we are made aware of all that God was accomplishing in our lives, we will certainly find that our disappointment with Him has vanished and we will be lost in "wonder, love and praise."

It may be hard for us to believe now, but the truth of the matter is this: when God's people get home to glory and there see how He worked in their lives, their testimony will be: "He has done all things well."

The business before us is to simply trust even when we do not understand. We must trust God's *heart* even when we cannot trace His *hand*. No Christian should ever be in doubt about the heart of God. He put it clearly on display when He nailed His Son to the cross to die for our sins. As hard as it is to believe, the fact is our difficult circumstances do not mean God's heart has changed. Those difficulties come from that same heart of love.



January 9



Cookie the Christmas Dog and the Repackaging of Christmas

FROM GOD'S WORD, THE BIBLE...

Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

"Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

.....

FROM LUKE 2:8-14

Years ago, Sylvia and I had a dog named Cookie. She was a delight. I still miss her. Cookie was our Christmas dog and she loved Christmas.

One year Sylvia and I returned home to find that Cookie had opened some of the Christmas presents! Suffice it to say, it was necessary for us to do some repackaging.

But there is some Christmas re-packaging these days that is not necessary. Let me explain.

Most church leaders want to see their churches grow in membership and in attendance. I say "most" because I have met a few folks down through the years who preferred for the church to stay small. In one of my previous pastorates, a deacon got upset because our church was growing so much! Imagine that! I think he had a Diotrefes problem (see 3 John 9).

The other extreme consists of those who are willing to do anything to see their churches grow. This is the explanation for much of modern-day Christendom, which is in the grip of what may be called a sinister sequence.

This sequence begins with church leaders asking this question: "What can we do to get our church to grow?"

The answer to that question often amounts to this: We must get people to like us! The reasoning here is that if people like us, they will want to be around us, and if they want to be around us, they will come to church.

That, of course, leads to yet another question: What can we do to get people to like us?

And the answer to that is often along these lines: We must give them what they want and stop giving them things they don't want.

It doesn't take a lot of research to determine that people these days don't want to hear about sin, judgment to come or a man dying on a cross. So we must get rid of these things! Out with them! We must not allow ourselves to be troubled by the fact that for centuries these very things were considered to be the essential, non-negotiable core of Christianity! We must repackage Christianity into something that is marketable today!

When the repackaging is done, we have a Christianity that is more like a successful-living philosophy. We tell people to believe in Jesus so they can be happy in this life. The one fact that the re-packagers seem to be unwilling to face is this: there are plenty of non-Christians who are very happy with their lives! So when we tell them to accept Jesus to be happy, they simply smile and say, "No, thank you. We're already quite happy without Jesus. You may need Him, but we don't. So keep Him to yourself."

The truth of the matter is that many people today are presenting the Christian message in such a way that they are giving others a perfectly good reason for rejecting it.

But do we not run into the same problem when we tell people that they need Jesus because they are sinners? Can they not merely say that they don't feel like they are sinners and, therefore, do not need Jesus? Yes, they can say it, but the evidence is against them, and the voice of conscience tells them that the evidence is against them!

The church today finds herself in the peculiar position of telling people they need Jesus as their Savior after she, the church, has removed from her teaching any reason for people to need a Savior.

When we next approach the Christmas season, we would do well to reflect deeply on the words the angel spoke to Joseph: ". . .you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

Only sinners need saving. Since we are all sinners (Rom. 3:23), we all need saving. The good news of Christmas is that the Savior has come into the world. His name is Jesus. And He will save all those who see the reality and enormity of their sins and come to Him for saving.



January 10



And the Award for “Best-Dressed” Goes to...

FROM GOD’S WORD, THE BIBLE...

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

.....

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

Part of the silliness that surrounds the Oscar Awards each year is the prolonged discussion about the way in which the actors and actresses are dressed.

I recently came across this discussion on the TV Guide Channel. I was checking the listings, and there it was—two men and two women discussing, for the most part, the way in which the actresses were dressed. I didn’t stay watching it for long, but it did get me to thinking again about the shallowness of this age.

It also got me to thinking again about how people are so absorbed with things that are passing that they give absolutely no thought to those things that last.

Take this matter of dress, for instance. The Bible teaches us that we must all leave this world and stand before God. It tells us that before we can enter into heaven we must be dressed in perfect righteousness.

It further tells us that we do not possess this righteousness ourselves. Because of our sinfulness, we are clothed in filthy rags.

But the good news of the Bible is this: we do not have to stand before the holy God in our filthy rags. By His righteous living, the Lord Jesus provided the garment that God demands. That garment of perfect righteousness can and will be ours if, while we are still in this life, we come to God and ask Him to grant us the perfect righteousness of Christ.

Eternal dress is far more important than temporal dress, but how very, very many people there are who concern themselves exclusively with the latter. They remind me of the Roman soldiers at the crucifixion of Jesus who gambled for His garments. Shockingly, they were gambling for temporal garments while being completely oblivious to the garment of salvation that Jesus was providing on that cross.

Those who go all through life thinking only about temporal things are in for a rude awakening. This is pictured for us in Matthew 22:1-14 which tells us that there will come a day when those who are not clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ will be discovered and cast out of God’s kingdom forever. May God help you to see the importance of receiving the righteousness of Christ.

As I listened to the boring discussion about the best-dressed actresses, I could not help but say: “The award for best-dressed goes to . . . Christians.” They are dressed in the righteousness of Christ. Their award is heaven itself.

I hope these lines make you stop and think about how you appear—and not how you appear to your friends but how you appear to God. It is also a good idea for you to begin thinking about how you will be clothed when you stand before God in judgment.

Those who, by faith, are clothed in the righteousness of Christ take as their own these words:

*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
My soul shall be joyful in my God;
For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments,
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
(ISA. 61:10)*