

# The Talmid



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

*Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)*

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 10

OCTOBER 1, 2014

STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDED NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY  
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



**Dr. Eddie Ildefonso**

*West Los Angeles Living Word Christian Center  
Los Angeles, California*

*Professor, Covington Theological Seminary  
Honduras, Pakistan, Zimbabwe Extensions  
International Dean, Covington Theological*

## DISCIPLESHIP IN AN EVIL DAY (Part 8)

### The Great Announcement

“All authority in heaven and on earth has  
been given to me.” [Matthew 28:18](#)

(Continuation from last edition)

### Exodus and Conquest

*The Gospel and the Kingdom*

The Big Map: Exodus and Conquest

Exodus and Conquest in the Old Testament

Exodus and Conquest in the New Testament

The Kingdom (Conquest) They Were

### Expecting

### The Kingdom (Conquest) That Came

In the Meantime Jesus Opens Up a  
Crack in History

Pentecost: The Sending of the Spirit

*The Holy Spirit's Long and Fruitful  
Career*

*The Spirit at Pentecost*

Intermission: “You Are Here”

### Is the Kingdom Here Now?

(We have been on a very long series  
of teaching and I truly appreciate your  
patience and ability to persevere.)

How we define the kingdom will  
have a lot to do with whether we think it  
is already here and, if so, to what extent.  
Forgiveness of sins and the new birth are  
not the only things that God promised  
through the prophets. As we have seen, it  
includes a sweeping cosmic renewal,  
with the kingdoms of this world under  
the domain of Christ. It is the salvation  
not just of souls but of bodies, and not  
just of human beings but of the whole  
creation.

Yet the New Testament teaches that  
this kingdom arrives in two phases. Like  
its head, the church suffers now in hu-  
miliation, under the cross, in order to  
reign in future glory with Christ  
([Romans 8:17](#)). “And if children, heirs  
also, heirs of God and fellow heirs  
with Christ, if indeed we suffer with  
*Him* so that we may also be glorified  
with *Him*” ([Romans 8:17 \(NASB\)](#)). In  
this intermission, the kingdom is the gos-

pel and the gospel is the kingdom. Wherever Christ is forgiving and renewing sinners by his Spirit through the ministry of the gospel, the King is present and his kingdom is expanding.

This view focuses most clearly on the character and message of the kingdom that we find in the prophets and the Gospels. In both alternative accounts of the kingdom mentioned above, the emphasis falls on a geopolitical regime, whether it is in terms of a revived theocracy in Israel (including sacrifices) or an ever-expanding, global influence on nations and cultures.

Both views identify the kingdom with visible power and glory, overlooking the fact that what we have now is a kingdom of grace that is present wherever the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered. The preoccupation, in both views, seems to be analogous to the expectation of Jesus's contemporaries (even his disciples) prior to Pentecost.

Jesus and Paul explicitly invoke the distinction between **"this age"** and **"the age to come"** ([Matthew 12:32](#); [Matthew 24:3](#); [1 Corinthians 2:6](#); [Galatians 1:4](#)). However, the contrast isn't as observably cut-and-dried as many had expected. With his triumph over the demonic forces, culminating in his death and resurrection, Jesus has inaugurated the age to come. And yet it is breaking into this present evil age. There is a clash between the realities of the age to come and the bondage of this age. There is an **"already"** and **"not yet"** aspect to the kingdom.

John the Baptist announced that **"the kingdom of heaven is at hand"** ([Matthew 3:2](#)), and Jesus announced that it had arrived as he healed the sick, raised the dead, and declared after the return of the seventy disciples from their mission, **"I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning"** ([Luke 10:18](#) (NASB)). **"But if I cast out demons by the finger of God", Jesus said "then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are undisturbed. But when someone stronger than he (strong man-Satan) attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied and distributes his**

**plunder"** ([Luke 11:20–22](#) (NASB)).

Above all, sinners and outcasts are being forgiven directly by Jesus, without any connection to the temple machinery. With Satan bound, the apostles are called to go into all the world and unlock the prison doors and free the captives. They are given by Christ the keys of the kingdom, to bind and loose on earth what has been bound and loosed in heaven ([Matthew 16:19](#); [Matthew 18:18](#); [John 20:23](#)). The exodus is past, but now is the era of conquest through the witness of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Only when Jesus returns will the conquest be consummated as the kingdoms of this age are made the kingdom of our God and of his Christ.

In [Matthew 24](#), part of Jesus's Olivet discourse, Jesus taught that he will come on the clouds of glory with all of his elect, but there are stages to be realized before this final event. First, the temple then standing will be completely destroyed ([vv. 1–2](#)), as indeed it was in AD 70. Then the disciples asked, **"...Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"** ([v. 3](#), *emphasis added*). Jesus replied that there will be imposters coming in his name, leading many astray, along with wars, **"You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs"** ([vv. 6–8](#)).

There will be persecution and martyrdom for his followers, with many deserting Christ's flock. **"But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come"** ([vv. 13–14](#), *emphasis added*). On the last day, Jesus will return on the clouds of glory to **"gather his elect"** from the whole earth and to judge the living and the dead ([vv. 29–31](#)). **"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone"** ([v. 36](#)). It will come when people least expect it ([vv. 36–44](#)).

Contrary to the expectations of most of Jesus's contemporaries (including John the Baptist and his own disciples), this single event will not happen all at once. It will unfold in a series of fulfillments, and the era that

we now occupy is the parenthesis in which the final judgment is postponed so that the gospel of the kingdom can be proclaimed to the whole world.

So we must be careful not to fall into the same misunderstanding of the kingdom that was shared by Jesus's contemporaries. Tasting morsels of that day, with various healings and victories over the demonic forces in the ministry of Jesus and his apostles, we want to see fully realized here and now the consummation to which these signs point. If necessary, we will bring about the consummation of this kingdom ourselves! We must resist this temptation, because it misunderstands that the most crucial vocation of the church in this present age is the proclamation of the gospel. **"Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He [Jesus] answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!.' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst'" (Luke 17:20–21 (NASB)).**

The kingdom of God in this present phase is **primarily audible, not visible**. We hear the opening and shutting of the kingdom's gates through the proclamation of the gospel, in the sacraments, and in discipline. Taking no notice of the kingdom of God, the nations will be going about their daily business, engaging in violence and immorality as in the days of Lot, **"...they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building" (Luke 17:28 (NASB))**, when Jesus will return suddenly. Jesus warned,

**"Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matthew 24:23–27 (NASB))**

Like the disciples, the church today has to get used to the fact that Jesus is absent in the flesh and there is no substitute. The church cannot fill that gap or seize the glories of Christ's consummated kingdom until his return. In the meantime he carries on his heavenly work for us in his priestly and royal office, with his Spirit leading the ground campaign. Our works cannot fill up this gap between Christ's two advents. Our activity cannot compensate for his return in glory to consummate his kingdom. Rather, we are called to repent and believe in Christ, to make disciples, to be disciples, and to proclaim this gospel to the ends of the earth. The kingdom is *present*, but not yet *fully present*.

Only if we hold in slight esteem the forgiveness of sins, rebirth into the new creation, justification, sanctification, and the communion of saints can we fail to revel in these present realities of Christ's reign. In his resurrection, Christ has inaugurated the final resurrection of the dead. Already the verdict of the last judgment is being rendered in the present. Those who believe in Christ are already declared righteous, and those who do not are already condemned (**John 3:16–19, 36**). **"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1 (NASB), emphasis added)**. The decisive verdict of the last day is already known for all who believe the gospel.

Furthermore, the renewal of the whole creation has already begun with the new birth, raising us from spiritual death and seating us with Christ by grace alone (**Ephesians 2:1–7**). The Spirit's indwelling presence in our hearts is the down payment on our final resurrection and the renewal of creation (**Romans 8:20–23**), **"For in hope we have been saved..." (v.24)**. Yet we do not yet see these full effects of Christ's kingdom, Paul reminds us. **"But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it" (v.25)**.

Everything that was promised through the prophets (including John the Baptist) is indeed part of the kingdom that Christ brings. In fact, it is true that they belong to *one and the same event*. However, it becomes clearer as the Gospels unfold that the manifestation of this kingdom occurs in *two phases*. **At present**, the Spirit is raising those who are spiritually dead and giving them faith, uniting them to Christ for present justification and sanctification as well as future glorification. Yet believers, like unbelievers, still suffer common ills as well as blessings. They eventually die, but believers die with

the hope of the resurrection in a renewed heavens and earth. By his Word and Spirit, Christ is now gathering a people for himself. Only when he returns, however, will the angel proclaim with a loud voice, “...**The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever**” ([Revelation 11:15](#) [\(NASB\)](#)).

Similar to Jesus’s Olivet discourse, Paul describes this new creation as occurring in two phases:

**“For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead... But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death”** ([1 Corinthians 15:21, 23–26](#) [\(NASB\)](#))

In a sense, the resurrection of the dead has already begun—with Jesus as the firstfruits. Nevertheless, there is a delay between his resurrection and ours. And in this delay, the harvest multiplies, grows, and ripens.

Until Christ returns, the kingdoms of the world—and our daily callings in them—are common, not holy: working alongside non-Christians **“east of Eden.”** Whether performed by Christians or non-Christians, these works are not a means of cultivating, guarding, and keeping God’s holy sanctuary. These activities do not create, build, and expand Christ’s kingdom of saving grace.

Nevertheless, they are essential means through which our Lord preserves society through common grace. Thus, the Great Commission is qualitatively different from the mandate that God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden and to Israel in Canaan. In fact, the Great Commission is given to the church only because *the Last Adam* has fulfilled that creation mandate, fulfilling all righteousness, bearing the curse, driving out the serpent, and being raised as the firstfruits of the new creation. Now the command to **“be fruitful and multiply”** is fulfilled by

the Spirit through the raising of a worldwide spiritual family, the true offspring of Abraham. This is God’s holy commonwealth in this age ([1 Peter 2:9–10](#)), the **“Israel of God”** ([Galatians 6:16](#)).

When we return to Jesus’s teaching and actions in the Gospels, we can see this already/not yet tension. No longer **“at hand,”** the kingdom is **“here,”** Jesus announces ([Matthew 11:5–6](#); [Matthew 12:28](#); [Matthew 13:1–46](#); [Mark 1:15](#); [Luke 11:20](#); [Luke 15:4–32](#); [Luke 17:20–23](#)). The King is present, inaugurating his kingdom. At the same time, he speaks of its full realization in the future ([Matthew 6:10](#); [Matthew 16:28](#); [Mark 9:1](#); [Luke 6:20–26](#); [Luke 9:27](#); [Luke 11:2](#); [Luke 13:28–29](#)). The kingdom is coming but also has come ([Matthew 12:28–29](#); [Luke 11:20](#)).

The manner in which the demons respond to Jesus shows his authority over them, but not just a raw power: it is his coming in his kingdom of grace and forgiveness that they fear most. Satan and his emissaries are busiest not with plotting wars and oppression; these are symptoms of the sinful condition that human beings are capable of generating on their own. However, Satan knows that if the Messiah fulfills his mission, the curse is lifted, his head is crushed, and his kingdom is toppled.

Through his earthly emissaries, the devil tried repeatedly to intercept the seed of the woman. Cain murdered Abel, but God gave Seth. Pharaoh slaughtered the Jewish male infants, but Moses was secretly rescued. The wicked Queen Athaliah had the whole house of David killed, but young Joash was secretly hidden away. Upon hearing the wise men announce the birth of the king of the Jews, Herod massacred the male infants, but Jesus was carried away with his parents to Egypt.

Now there is nothing Satan can do to keep the Messiah from being born, so he throws all of his energies into seducing him away from his mission. All of his forces are deployed in this last battle for **“all authority in heaven and on earth”** ([Matthew 28:18](#)).

All of Jesus’s miracles are pointers to this saving announcement; they are not ends in themselves. The kingdom comes with words and deeds. In the miracle stories it is said that Satan has bound these people (see for example [Luke 13:11, 16](#)). Christ is breaking into Satan’s territory, setting history toward a different goal, bound to his own rather than to demonic powers. This is why Paul’s call to spiritual battle in [Ephesians 6](#) identi-



fies the gospel, faith, the Word, and Christ's righteousness as the armor and weapons. Satan's energies are now directed against the church and its witness to Christ. The devil knows his house is being looted and his prisons are being emptied as the gospel is taken to the ends of the earth.

Whatever the salutary effects of this kingdom on the wider society due to Christians living as salt and light, this age cannot be saved. It is dying. Through his apostles, Christ declares to the churches, **"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen"** ([Galatians 1:3-5 \(NASB\)](#)).

To be sure, the Spirit is also at work in *common grace*, restraining the spiritual entropy of this present evil age. However, the Spirit's *saving* mission is not to improve our lives in Adam, under the reign of sin and death, but to crucify us and raise us with Christ. Paul reminds us that **"the time has been shortened"** ([1 Corinthians 7:29 \(NASB\)](#)). We marry, live, and work in the world, but without anxious attachment to this present age, **"for the form of this world is passing away"** ([1 Corinthians 7:31 \(NASB\)](#)).

Like God's counsel to the captives in Babylon, Peter exhorts believers to **".....conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ"** ([1 Peter 1:17-19 \(NASB\)](#), *emphasis added*). Fully involved with the common life of our neighbors, we are nevertheless pilgrims who, with Abraham, are **"for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God"** ([Hebrews 11:10 \(NASB\)](#)).

The Sermon on the Mount is not a generic set of timeless principles for individuals and nations, much less a basis for a **"Jesus love ethic"** over against the supposedly violent God of Israel. Jesus spoke of his coming judgment as something far more sweeping

and everlasting than any of the holy wars that God commanded under Joshua. Rather, the Sermon on the Mount begins with the blessing from the Covenant Lord on his people and inaugurates a new regime of peace that is to be modeled by the citizens of his kingdom as they endure persecution and live together in the love that only Christ can give through his Spirit.

In [Exodus 20](#), God gave his law at Sinai on the basis of his saving work: **"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery"** therefore the Lord said, **"You shall have no other gods before Me"** ([vv. 2-3 NASB](#)). Summarizing what it means to love God and neighbor, the Ten Commandments are written on the human conscience in creation and remain perpetually binding on all people. However, the civil and ceremonial laws attached to the Decalogue were given uniquely and exclusively to Israel as God's holy nation. Similarly, in [Matthew 5](#) the gospel in the Beatitudes is the basis for the law in the Sermon on the Mount, and the love of God and neighbor is stipulated in a new constitution given uniquely and exclusively to the Israel of God.

Instead of calling down God's judgment and driving out the Gentile nations, Jesus commands us to pray for our enemies. **"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' [Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21]. '...But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also'"** ([Matthew 5:38-39 \(NASB\)](#)).

God no longer sends plagues among the godless but **"makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust,"** and expects us to imitate his kindness ([Matthew 5:45](#)). This is not the time to judge our neighbors, but to take the log out of our own eye ([Matthew 7:1-5](#)), to diligently seek God's good gifts ([Matthew 7:7-11](#)), to enter through the narrow gate ([Matthew 7:13-14](#)), and to bear good fruit ([Matthew 7:15-27](#)).

In fact, when Jesus went to a Samaritan village to preach the Good News and was rejected, James and John wanted to call for fire to fall from heaven in judgment upon them, **"but he turned and rebuked them"** ([Luke 9:51-56](#)). Nicknamed "sons of thunder," James and John were clearly looking for a kingdom of glory all the way to the very end.

They even asked Jesus if they could be seated at his right and left hand at the presidential inauguration, but Jesus told them that they had no idea what they were asking for: namely, crucifixion with Jesus ([Mark 10:35–40](#)). Unlike rulers of Gentile kingdoms, Jesus said that he will reign by sacrificial service on behalf of his subjects, and anyone who wants to be a leader in that kingdom will choose service over power ([Mark 10:41–44](#)). **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”** ([Mark 10:45 \(NASB\)](#)). In this episode Jesus is simply repeating the themes of the Sermon on the Mount.

There is no holy land over which to fight. There aren’t even holy places, shrines, or sanctuaries, since Christ and his people together form the end-time sanctuary. Jesus was announcing the arrival of the new covenant, which he would inaugurate in his own blood ([Matthew 26:28](#)).

All human beings are still obligated to the moral law, and by that law they will be judged ([Romans 1:18–19](#); [Romans 2:12–16](#)). Even the ungodly rulers of the Roman Empire enforce the remnants of this civil justice as **“God’s ministers”** by maintaining a relative order, justice, and peace in this in-between time ([Romans 13](#)). However, the church is the fruit of Christ’s ever-expanding reign, where the fellowship of the age to come is already anticipated in this present age.

Confusing Christ’s kingdom of grace with the Sinai theocracy was precisely the error that Paul addressed especially in Galatians. The kingdom of God in its present phase simply is the announcement of the forgiveness of sins and, on this basis, entrance into the new creation. The signs that Jesus performed were evidence that the age to come had indeed broken in on this present evil age. That is why he told John’s disciples to return with the news of healings, but especially that **“the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM”** adding, **“And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me”** ([Matthew 11:5–6 \(NASB\)](#)). In other words, this is his mission in his earthly ministry, and blessed are those who are not put off by it, expecting something other than

this salvation of sinners. God’s kingdom is all-encompassing, yet it arrives in two stages with Christ’s two advents.

When Christ returns in power and glory, there will be no need for the proclamation of the gospel, no need for faith or hope. There will only be love, since the reality will be evident and fully realized for everyone to see ([Romans 8:19–25](#); [1 Corinthians 13:8–13](#)).

It’s not that the horizon of Jesus’s contemporaries was too broad but that it was too narrow. While they were settling merely for a messiah who would restore geopolitical theocracy, Jesus Christ was bringing a universal dominion—not just overthrowing Gentile oppressors but casting out the serpent from heaven and earth forever: **“...For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst”** ([Luke 17:21 \(NASB\)](#)). In the present era, his kingdom of grace is a reprieve for repentance and faith in Israel and throughout all nations before Christ’s return. It is a new creation at work in the world, a new covenant yielding new relationships with God and with each other based on forgiveness and fellowship rather than on judgment and exclusion.

## CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)

### 7 Ways to Keep From Killing Your Message

Carey Nieuwhof, Pastor at Connexus Community Church north of Toronto Canada

Every week, gifted communicators kill the messages they bring by making at least seven predictable, fixable mistakes.

If you’ve ever spoken in front a group, tried to motivate a team, or if you prepare messages almost every week like many of us do, you’ve probably wondered what makes for a great talk.

In fact, you’ve probably asked questions like these:

- What’s the difference between a talk that flops and a talk that people still buzz about years later?
- What’s the difference between a merely good message and incredibly great message?
- What’s the difference between a sermon that changes someone’s life and one that no one can remember even as they drive out of the parking lot?

If you’re like me, those questions might even bother

you. I hope they do. They haunt me. And yet every week gifted communicators kill the messages they bring by making at least seven predictable, fixable mistakes. The good news is that once you identify the mistakes, though, you can address them.

## 7 Ways Communicators Kill Their Messages

I'm writing from the perspective of a Christian who speaks. And as I wrote about here, I realize that the Holy Spirit is involved in a special way when we speak. He redeems terrible talks and converts people through his power, not our persuasive words. I get that.

But that shouldn't be your fallback week after week. The Holy Spirit's work is not an excuse for laziness. It's also no excuse for failing to develop a skill set that supports your gifting. So if you're at all interested in honing your gift set, identify and then address the seven mistakes communicators make that almost always kill a message:

### 1. Inadequate Preparation

Here's a tension every communicator faces: people will only ask you to do things that take away the time you've set aside to prepare your message; then they'll criticize you for not being prepared. I'm not slamming people. It's just human nature. That's why you have to be exceptionally self-disciplined in setting aside time free from interruption to work on your talks. Yes, your inbox will fill up. Yes the people who want to meet with you will be disappointed. And no, nobody is ever going to email you and ask you, "Did you take eight hours today to work on your message?" So grow up. And take responsibility for becoming an excellent communicator. Eventually, people will thank you and understand you are making a valuable investment.

### 2. Poorly Constructed Introductions

Too many sermon introductions begin with a "Good morning," and then maybe a weather report and some banter that's supposed to create rapport. I used to do this too, until I realized that as natural as it is, it's not nearly the best way to connect with your audience (unless maybe you're a guest preacher and need to connect with people you don't know).

You've got about 30 seconds to capture people's interest or lose them.

The best way to do this is to establish common ground. Tell a story. Talk about a tension or problem everyone faces.

Introduce the subject in a way that establishes why it matters. Orient people to your topic (talk about the series, where you're at and why it matters). The truth is that too many communicators actually don't think about how they will start. Change that. Even the mere act of intentionally thinking through your introduction will make it better.

### 3. Stories That Go Nowhere or Everywhere

Stories are among the most powerful and memorable devices a communicator has. But there's an art to storytelling. I am not a natural storyteller, so I have to work on ensuring I have enough stories to support a message. Some of you have the opposite problem. You have so many stories that you could fill 30 minutes with stories without even trying.

I know my challenge is to find a story that supports the point I'm trying to make ... otherwise I will end up telling a story that goes nowhere just so I have a story in my talk.

If you're a story person, your challenge will be to cut the number of stories you tell down to the level where each one supports a key point in your message. Otherwise, your stories will end up going everywhere and people will completely lose your point (assuming you have one).

### 4. Too Many Points

Every topic is a jungle. There are so many things you could say when you give a talk. A great talk focuses on the one thing you must say. That's really your job: to take a vast subject and zero in on the essence of what is most important. And it's incredibly hard work. It takes far more work to be clear than it does to be confusing. When pressed for time, here's what most of us do: We take five or six points that are interesting and staple them together, and we call it our talk. The more difficult thing to do is to distill all your learning into a single sentence around which you build the entire talk.

### 5. No Clear Call to Action

Most messages focus on what people need to know. As a result, most communicators fail to answer a crucial question: what people are supposed to do with what they've heard? Are people supposed to think different-

ly? Well, that's good. But it's so vague. Here are two recent calls to action at Connexus, where I serve. During the "Climate Change" series, Jeff Henderson challenged people to ask three people (and God) this question: "What's it like to be on the other side of me?" I did, and it generated several hours of amazing conversation.

During "Skeptics Wanted," I told people it kind of lacked integrity to dismiss a book they hadn't read, and challenged people to read the Gospel of Luke in 24 days, one chapter each day. Because the calls to action in those messages were clear, people did something as a result of being in the room. Doing is almost always more powerful than simply hearing.

## 6. Crash Landings

I've been guilty of this too many times: crash-landing a message. In the same way communicators don't pre-plan their introduction, many of us fail to think about how we'll end a message. So we crash-land it. Better to think it through. These days, I usually close by reminding people of the call to action, reflecting on what will happen if they do it (some inspiration) and then often repeating the bottom line of the message. You can create your own pattern for endings, but the point is to have an intentional ending, not an accidental ending.

## 7. Resistance to Feedback

I realize how terribly painful it is to listen to a talk you've given, or worse, to watch a video of you giving the talk. After decades of public communication, I still don't like the sound of my own voice. And I think I look like a complete geek on video. It's painful to watch and listen to myself. You know what most communicators do because of this? They never watch or listen to themselves.

Question: why would you expect people to watch you speak if you won't watch you speak? You have to become methodical about evaluating yourself. Watch. Listen.

And create a system for feedback. Every Tuesday, six of us meet to review the weekend service. And everyone gets a chance to critique my message. Yes,

it hurts sometimes. But I want to get better. I have to get better. Read your inbox, too. Don't be defensive, but humbly ask God to let all feedback grow you as a person and as a speaker. The more open to feedback you are, the better you will become.

*Continued in next edition...*



**Pastor Gary C. Fleetwood**  
*Chime Bell Baptist Church*  
*Windsor, South Carolina*

*Professor, Covington Theological Seminary*  
*Aiken, South Carolina Extension*  
*Dean, Covington Theological Seminary*  
*Country of Romania*

## Hebrews 9 Overview – Part 2

If I were asked to make a personal assessment of what is lacking in the average church today, I think that I would make two observations. **First, the church lacks overall discernment.** It simply has no meaningful discernment. It has allowed an enormous multitude of false teachers and false teachings to invade and penetrate how it thinks. On top of that the church has become very pragmatic. Pragmatic simply means what is practical, logical, rational, or sensible. In other words, what works? If it does not work, then it must not be from God. What draws a crowd, what do they want, what does it take to get them in a church? That is pragmatic



thinking. However, Scripture is the standard by which the church must test all biblical claims. Scripture is both absolute and exclusive, and most people do not like that. For me personally, that is exactly what I do love about the Bible. I love that it is the authority on life and everything meaningful for life. I love that the truth that it declares is non-negotiable. I love that it is absolutely exclusive in what it says. Literally, the Bible is God speaking. **Secondly, not only does the church lack discernment, but it does so because so many Christians have little to no meaningful interest in what it says and that is identified by the simple fact that most Christians never really study the Bible on their own.** Our culture has so many distractions that it is mind-boggling. There are so many activities that people are engaged in that they literally have no time for God. He is just a little part of their very big world.

As a pastor, what I want for those that I shepherd is really very simple. First, I want them to have an enduring commitment to Christ. From now until their last breath, I want them to be a fully devoted follower of Christ. Secondly, I want them to have what I call “biblical fidelity”. The word “fidelity” means faithfulness, devotion, loyalty, and conformity to something or someone. I want them to be faithful to the Word of God and to live in complete obedience to it. Thirdly, I want them to have moral integrity. Spiritually, a believer will never rise above their personal morals, and apart from personal moral integrity and honor, they cannot and will not be used by God. Fourthly, I want their life to make a meaningful and lasting contribution to the kingdom of God. There are so many professing Christians whose life has never made any kind of significant spiritual impact in the lives of other people. There may be multiple contributing factors as to why not, but from God’s perspective He is more than able and more than willing to use anyone who will yield themselves to Him.

Now, having said all of that and bringing it back in to focus with Hebrews 9, I want it to be perfectly clear that every church is to be totally committed to the absolute authority, centrality, and sufficiency of God’s Word relative to its people’s personal lives and to the corporate life of the church. The Scriptures are without any debate the single most im-

portant source that informs us about life and it is what shapes our view of God and the world that He has created for us to live in. If believers are not personally committed to these sacred issues, then in all likelihood their life does not have the capacity to have any meaningful spiritual impact. Unfortunately, for many Christians it appears that they simply do not care whether it does or not. As long as they can find their own level of personal fulfillment and personal satisfaction apart from God, then who really cares that much about making a spiritual impact. We live in what is called a “postmodern” world, and the influence of that cultural mindset is constantly advocating to us in every area of life – schools, books, movies, music, work etc. – that there are no absolutes and that everyone’s opinion is of equal value. I humbly, graciously, and completely disagree. The Bible and its message is absolute. Everyone will stand before God and give an account of their life and what they did with Christ and with God’s Word. **THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS.** Men will live eternally with God in a place of unbelievable worth and value or live eternally without God in a place of torment that is not able to be described. This is an absolute that no one can escape – no matter what they may personally believe or think.

Please appreciate that at a very personal level that our opinions are important to us, but when it comes to spiritual matters our opinions do not have any value. What someone may personally think about God’s Word has no impact on what the Word of God actually means. My opinion makes no contribution whatsoever to what God has said and what God will do. There are so many diverse opinions about the Word of God that are absolutely worthless. They will make no difference whatsoever on what God does. So, the goal is to simply let God’s Word say what it says. We do not want to tamper with it, manipulate it, change it, or use it for personal gain. We simply want to let it say what it says and then yield ourselves to it. In the Christian culture in which we live, there are so many pastors and churches that have displaced the Word of God as a steady diet for their people, and have supplemented and exchanged biblical teaching with entertainment and ideas that have no eternal value whatsoever. They apparently do not believe that studying, teaching, and applying the Word of God is sufficient to meet people’s spiritual needs. Personally, my conviction is that if a pastor or leader in a church takes that approach to the ministry that they are completely disqualified to be in a pastoral or preach-

ing role. The church culture today is not what could be called “God-driven”. To the contrary, it is media driven, and many churches are presenting a message that they believe must be supplemented by music, drama, comedy, and all kinds of extrabiblical motivational talks. Many pastors do not even see the Bible as being relevant. Pastors who are true Bible teachers who carefully, systematically, and thoroughly feed their people with a deep, clear, and convicting understanding of God’s Word are becoming increasingly rare and very unpopular to say the least.

Now, as we begin to look at [Hebrews 9](#), what we want to first notice is what it does not have. First of all, it does not have any repeated phrases. If you remember in [Hebrews 3](#) and [4](#), it talked constantly about “rest” and not entering into it, about hearing His voice and not hardening your hearts. In [Hebrews 5](#), it talked repeatedly about Christ as a High Priest, and specifically one who was a high priest “forever”. Secondly, there are no exhortations, no reproofs, and no warnings (which is one of the primary elements of Hebrews). Thirdly, there is only one promise in [Hebrews 9:28](#), and some would not even consider it to actually be a promise, but just a statement of fact. Fourthly, there are no historical narratives such as you would find in the gospels or Acts. And then fifthly, there is only one Old Testament quotation. Now, what all of that communicates is that this is a very doctrinal passage. In passages where there are exhortations, reproofs, and promises, it means that the doctrine has already been given. In other words, the exhortations, reproofs, and promises are built on doctrine. The Scripture exhorts believers based on truth. The Scripture reproofs believers based on doctrine. Biblical promises are based on what has been accomplished for the believer. So, if none of these elements are existent in the passage, it simply means that most of what is going to be stated is doctrine. Unfortunately, most Christians find that doctrine is the most difficult portions of Scripture to actually read or study. Why? It is simply because it takes much more thinking to understand. I can easily understand an exhortation, a reproof, or a promise. However, doctrine makes us think much harder and think through the implications of what is being said. Being perfectly honest, it is not always that easy to think through certain portions of Scripture. In these studies we spent a great deal of time in [Hebrews 6](#) de-

termining if that severe warning applied to believers or unbelievers, or both. When we finally arrive at [Hebrews 10](#), we will be faced with another strong warning and the issue will be how to apply it to our life. It will not necessarily be that easy. So, what needs to be understood in all of this is that [Hebrews 9](#) is highly, highly doctrinal – and those kinds of passages require more effort to both understand and to then apply to our life. Developing application from doctrine is much more difficult than doing it from a promise, a reproof, or an exhortation. Those are normally very easy to do and the practical application is generally very easy to develop. For instance, if we took the exhortation in [Hebrews 10](#) of “**not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together**”, the development of the application of that would be very easy. However, if we took the doctrinal statement in [Hebrews 9:12](#) that Christ entered the Most Holy Place “**with His own blood**” we will find that developing an application for that will not be easy. So, that is why in [Hebrews 9](#), I personally have only developed two applications – (1) what it means to reflect the greatness of Christ in our life, and (2) what it means to offer ourselves to God.

Personally, I would say that [Hebrews 9](#) is one of the foundational chapters in the Bible. Without overstating the issue, doctrine is generally more difficult to study, more difficult to understand, and certainly more challenging to teach. Doctrine does not initially provide a lot of practical application. It is easy to develop application from exhortation, from reproof, or from God’s promises, but applying doctrine seems much more difficult. However, it is the application that flows from doctrine that generally will have the greatest impact on a believer’s life. Why is that? It is because doctrine is centered on the great foundational truths of the Christian life. These are not secondary issues for a believer, but rather they are the very basis for their faith and for their practice. They are the very basis of what it even means to be a Christian. They may often seem a little challenging to some believers and therefore they may have a tendency to casually by-pass them for other passages of Scripture that seem a little easier to understand. However, in so doing they are actually forfeiting the great truths that God has provided to change their life. [Hebrews 9](#) should become a life-transforming passage of Scripture for every believer’s life. These are the foundational truths that provide the deepest meaning to the Christian life. So, a passage like [Hebrews 9](#) is not

one that a believer can just simply overlook or casually ignore.

The next important observation is that the word **“blood”** is used ten times – twice as much as any other word in the chapter. Now, what that should immediately tell us is that this entire chapter is most likely developed around the concept of **“blood”**, and specifically the blood of Christ. So, if we want to have a meaningful and purposeful understanding of [Hebrews 9](#), then it means that we must have an understanding of the importance of the blood of Christ. Without any question, it is one of the most sacred elements of Scripture. Nothing in the entire universe has more value than the very life blood of Jesus Christ. As we will see as we survey this chapter, it is not just the blood that is important, but what Jesus Christ did with His blood that gives it even more sacred importance. We may never study any one specific event that is as sacred as when Christ in [Hebrews 9:12](#) **“with ‘His own blood...entered the Most Holy Place once for all’**. In some ways, this almost obscure event in the Scriptures is as critical and as important as the actual crucifixion and death of Christ. If there was one, then of necessity there had to be a second. Christ presenting His blood to the Father was that event that actually completed what is called the “atonement”. Without this event and the Father accepting the death and the sacrificial blood of Christ as complete satisfaction for our sins, we could never be saved. This was a monumental event in Scripture – and for the most part it is only mentioned here in [Hebrews 9](#) and is rarely if ever even understood by the average Christian. In my estimation, what [Hebrews 9](#) presents could rightly be called “holy ground”, and as we study it, it needs to be given the reverence, worship, and veneration that it alone deserves.

Another observation is that in [Hebrews 9](#) there are five infinitive phrases and four of them relate directly to the work of Christ and what He did on our behalf, and they all fall within [Hebrews 9:24-28](#). Christ appeared **“in the presence of God for us”**, He **“suffered”** for us, He **“put away sin”** for us, and lastly, He **“bore”** our sins. This is the author’s conclusion to what He has presented in [Hebrews 9:1-23](#), and it is a staggering picture of the amazing sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. If we miss this, if we do not appreciate this, if we fail to see these conclu-

sions, then in reality we will find ourselves actually demeaning the Person of Christ through our personal ignorance and lack of appreciation for His atoning work.

[Hebrews 9](#) is without question one of the most monumental chapters in all of the Word of God. Specifically, it deals with an aspect of the atonement that is not dealt with anywhere else in Scripture – Christ offering His blood to the Father in the throne room of heaven. What the high priest did on the Day of Atonement when he took the sacrificial blood into the Holy of Holies was a picture, a type, and a foreshadowing of the real atonement that would take place when the Son presented His blood to the Father at the heavenly throne. It is very important to appreciate that on the Day of Atonement that the atoning sacrifice had to be accepted by the Father in order for the atoning work of that day to be meaningful. In some ways, what happens in [Hebrews 9](#) almost appears as a somewhat obscure and ambiguous event and therefore not one that is readily appreciated. However, in this offering of Christ’s blood to the Father, the atonement for believers’ sins was completed.

There is absolutely no detail as to how all of this actually took place. What is read in [Hebrews 9](#) is fairly minimal in its detail and its explanation of the spiritual enormity of what was actually transpiring. What Christ was doing and what He was presenting to the Father was a spiritually staggering moment in redemptive history and in the securing of our salvation. There was no one else, nor would there ever be anyone else, who could do what Christ was doing. His amazing sacrifice on our behalf was voluntary, it was divinely agonizing because He suffered in both His human body as well as His divine nature, and yet in the sovereignty of God it was the only way possible to secure our salvation. The more that someone understands all that Christ actually did in His sacrificial work, the more meaningful their salvation will be to them. Those individuals who just seem to take Christ so casually and so indifferently, they have no idea as to what Christ actually did. They see His life and His sacrifice as just some kind of surreal blip in the overall historical narrative of mankind’s existence. In reality, however, it is the very cornerstone and the foundation on which all of life is based. The decisions that the Trinitarian God made before time began were the very basis of God’s creation. They were not some kind of addenda or stop gap measure that God needed to implement because His overall plan had gone painfully awry - not at all. Never! Rather, they were the very

basis for human life – this amazing opportunity that God has given to each of us so that we can be a part of His family. The wonder of it all is that what took place in the Atonement as described in [Hebrews 9](#) is the crowning event that brought it all to God's redemptive conclusion. Obviously, there is much more to come. There is the forming of the New Testament church, the rapture of the church, the Judgment Seat of Christ, the marriage of the Lamb to His bride, the Second Coming, the wedding feast, the millennium, the Great White Throne Judgment, and eventually the eternal state. There is much to come, but it is all based on these amazing events that are presented in [Hebrews 9](#).

In God's redemptive work on the believer's behalf, one of the major elements that is inscribed in the that work is the necessity for God the Father to be fully satisfied with the saving sacrifice that was completed by Christ. Ultimately, the sacrifice of Christ was as much for the Father as it was for the believer. God's acceptance of the redemptive sacrifice was actually the ultimate and necessary goal, and in some sense the believer's salvation was secondary. Obviously, it is not secondary to us, but if for some reason the Father had not accepted Christ's sacrifice, then salvation would have been a moot point. Just consider the ramifications of that. Just think if Christ had actually sinned against God in some way and His dying on a cross no longer had any sacrificial value for sin. If the Father, for whatever reason, had not been willing to accept Christ's sacrifice, then salvation would never have been attainable. There was no one else who could make the sacrifice, it had to be an absolute perfect sacrifice, and it then had to be accepted by the Father. If at any point, any of those elements had gone amiss, then we would all die in our sins.

So, what we want to do is see this event described in [Hebrews 9:11](#) and following as the very pinnacle of the redemptive process. This was a moment like no other. In reality, God could not fail, Christ could not fail, and the Holy Spirit could not fail. There was no way that they would ever have initiated this entire redemptive work if they knew that Christ would not endure to the very end and that somehow His sacrificial work would become tainted by some obscure personal sin that disqualified Him from being the perfect sacrifice. That is one of the reasons

why it is so important to study the Incarnation so that we can better understand that even though Christ took on the form of a man, He still fully remained as the eternal God. It was His "Godness" that was the guarantee that what He began in the Incarnation would be completed in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Now, the verb that is used more than any other verb in [Hebrews 9](#) is the verb "offer" or "offered". Once again that should provide some level of understanding of what [Hebrews 9](#) is about. It is about something being "offered", and in three of the four uses (v14, 25, and 28) it specifically identifies that Christ "offered Himself". The Greek word for "offer" is "*prosphero*" with the prefix "*pros*" which means "toward" and "*phero*" which means "to bring". It has the primary idea of offering things to God in worship. The writer will talk about this some more in [Hebrews 10:12](#) when he says,

**<sup>12</sup>But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,**

Obviously, it is one thing to offer our time, to offer our resources, or to offer some advice, but what does it mean to offer ourselves to God? How does a committed follower of Christ actually offer themselves so that they become what [Romans 12:1](#) calls a "living sacrifice"? It is certainly one thing to give God some token of our time, or some token of our resources, but is that what He really desires from a believer – just token responses? Christ gave Himself, and that is what God desires from each believer as well.

It is also important to see how the writer is constantly talking about a "place". Notice how many times he identifies a place – the "sanctuary" (2), the "tabernacle" (6), the "Holiest of All" (2), and the "Most Holy Place" (4) for a total of 14 references to this special place. Then you can add a phrase like "the second part" in v7 to provide even more references to this special "place". Please do not lose sight of the fact that the earthly sanctuary was simply a type of the heavenly sanctuary. What the author is doing is showing us what happened with the "blood" in this "place". For instance, [Hebrews 9:7](#) speaking of what the earthly priest did, says,



<sup>7</sup>But into the second part the high priest *went* alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance;

[Hebrews 9:12](#), speaking of Christ, says,

<sup>12</sup>Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

There is this unique connection between the “blood” and the “place”.

There are many key phrases” in [Hebrews 9](#) – “not without blood”, “the way into”, “purified with blood”, “without shedding of blood”, “copies of the true”, “the presence of God”, “but after this”, “to bear the sins”. This is a virtual encyclopedia of theology in one chapter. Just as an example, relative to “time” it talks about something being “symbolic for the present time” (v8), “the time of reformation” (v10), “good things to come” (v11), and “the end of the ages” (v26 - a phrase that speaks of the time when Christ died and therefore a period of time in which we are presently in). Every one of these key phrases has a specific question associated with them that should be answered. For instance, v8 talks about “the way into the Holiest of All”. So, the question would be “what is the way into the Holiest of All, and how does that specifically apply to my life”. Today, right now, is there something about entering into the Holiest of All, about entering into the presence of God that I need to know. I would say that there is. Probably one of the most neglected areas of people’s Christian lives is the simple fact that much too often they never really spend any meaningful time with God. So many other things in their life seem to take priority over their spending personal time with God. It could be anything – anything at all. It could be watching television, deer hunting, soccer practice, cutting the grass, taking care of the household chores, eating out, reading books, studying for school, working all the time, etc., etc., etc. I know that some things are just a normal part of life – and they should be a part of a person’s life. Working is good, studying is good, and eating is good. However, the observation is not that we have other things to do in our life, but simply the fact that neglecting a meaningful time with

God can become a very bad habit. Just doing “normal” activities should never cause believers to neglect having a meaningful time with God, and of their setting aside a regular and essential time so that as a believer they can literally enter into “the Holiest of All”.

In 28 verses there are 13 exaltations of Christ – nearly one exaltation for every two verses. That is an extremely important observation. Just from a high level, I would say that this is ultimately the message – the person of Christ. Notice all of the different things that the author says about Christ. He is a “**High Priest**”, He “**came with His own blood**”, He “**entered the Most Holy Place**”, He “**obtained eternal redemption**”, He “**offered Himself**”, He “**cleanses our conscience**”, He is the “**Mediator**”, He “**appears in the presence of God for us**”, He has “**put away sin**”, and He will “**appear a second time**” just to mention some of the things that He is and has done and will do. The magnitude of the sacrificial work of Christ is simply staggering.

Lastly, there are five key doctrinal issues in [Hebrews 9](#). There is the high priestly ministry of Christ. This is an ongoing ministry that will never cease – not even in the eternal state. As has been stated previously, there will never be a time in which we no longer have a need for Christ. We will never be independent little gods with our own universes and worlds that we control as some cults teach. What a ludicrous and demeaning view of Christ that erroneously imposes on His Word and His Person. Probably the key doctrine in [Hebrews 9](#) and in Hebrews itself is that of the atoning work of Christ and what it involved and what it has done. Included in that is His mediatorial work on our behalf. He is the Mediator, the One who goes to God the Father on our behalf. Fourthly, there will be a judgment. It is an inescapable judgment and one in which everyone will participate whether they are willing to acknowledge Christ or not. The judgment of God for the lost sinner is without question the most horrifying event imaginable. Nothing in all of eternity can compare to someone’s eternal judgment. There are no words that can effectively describe the horrific and dreadful experience of standing at the Great White Throne Judgment of God and your name not being found written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. No matter how much someone may choose to ignore the consequences of completely ignoring and denying God’s salvation through Christ, they have absolutely no say whatsoever in the final consequences, and there will

be absolutely no reprieve of any kind. The “finality” of God’s judgment has to be the most awful, terrible, frightful, shocking, and ghastly experience that anyone could ever face. Yet in spite of all of the clear and meaningful truth that God has given relative to salvation and how someone can be saved, men still choose to completely ignore it and go about their way as if nothing is going to happen. For some false and terrifying reason, men just seem to think that in the end everything is just going to work itself all out and that they will be okay. Nothing, absolutely nothing could be any further from the truth than that horrible misconception about God, about Christ, and about salvation.

#### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, 23.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

MacArthur, John. *Think Biblically*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003.

*Continued in next edition...*

***The Talmid is published by:***



***West Los Angeles  
Living Word Christian Center***

6520 Arizona Avenue  
Los Angeles, CA 90045 USA  
(310) 645-2522 or (310) 665-0137

Email: [admin@wlalwcc.org](mailto:admin@wlalwcc.org)  
Web Site: [www.wlalwcc.org](http://www.wlalwcc.org)

**Covington**  
Dr. Steve Sullivan, President  
**Theological Seminary**  
*Conservative in Theology : Liberal in Love and Service*

Quality education through home study for those who cannot attend a campus setting.

Associate, Bachelor, Master and Doctorate Degrees offered

Areas of study Available:  
Theology  
Bible  
Pastoral  
Christian Education  
Counseling  
Music  
Ethnic Studies  
Accredited by ACI

**Training Leaders  
Impacting Eternity**

For more information contact us today: P.O. Box 176, Rossville, GA, 30741  
Located at 1168 Cross St, Fort Oglethorpe, GA, 30742  
Ph: 706-866-5626 Fax 706-861-3550 Email: [registrar@covingtonseminary.org](mailto:registrar@covingtonseminary.org)  
To request a catalogue give us a call or email: [info@covingtonseminary.org](mailto:info@covingtonseminary.org)

## International Extension Schools

The North Andros Bible Institute  
Barbados, Bahamas  
The Covington Theological Seminary of Brazil  
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
The Covington Theological Seminary of Chile  
Talagante Santiago, Chile  
The Ghana Baptist Institute & Bible College  
Accra, Ghana  
The Covington Theological Seminary of Honduras  
Tegucigalpa, Honduras  
The Covington Theological Seminary of Gudiwada  
Krishna-Andhrapradesh, India  
The International Extension of Indonesia  
Jakarta, Indonesia  
Blue Mountain Baptist Bible College  
Ogbomosho, Oyo State, Nigeria  
The Covington Theological Seminary of Pakistan  
Lahore, Pakistan  
The Covington Theological Seminary of Romania  
Lugoj Timas, Romania  
The Covington Theological Seminary of South Africa  
Johannesburg, South Africa  
The Covington Theological Seminary of Zimbabwe  
Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe