

Why and How is the LORD God Able to Maintain His Righteousness

Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn *yourselves* from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. (*Ezekiel 18:29-30*)

Why is it that the LORD God is able to maintain His righteousness, or the equality of all His ways in and of Himself.

To begin with, the LORD God is omniscient, that is, He knows all things. This is not merely having all knowledge, (which we typically think of as mere information) but includes all understanding of that information, and all wisdom to properly apply that information.

We must understand that having knowledge, which is information, is not merely enough, but one must know the significance of that information, which is understanding. One must also know how to apply the information to everything that concerns them. The ability to properly apply the information and understanding one has, is called wisdom. The Scripture is express that the LORD God's understanding is infinite, which of necessity, means that His knowledge is infinite, or omniscient.

Great *is* our Lord, and of great power: his understanding *is* infinite. (*Psalms 147:5*)

Understanding in itself is a kind of knowledge. It does not simply deal with information, but deals with the significance

of that information: that is what that information means and how it relates to everything else. Understanding is essential to wisdom, for without understanding, there is simply no way to determine the weight, or significance of one thing versus another: whether something is to be of concern, or whether it can be ignored, or is of lesser significance.

Hence, we are led to wisdom, which is essential for the construct of things. Wisdom in itself is a kind of knowledge. It is the knowledge of how information is to be applied and how it will work out as things interact. Without it, it would have been impossible for the LORD God to create anything that worked. And yet, so wise is the LORD in His creation that even in a corrupted state, it still is a wonder to behold and works quite well.

To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy *endureth* for ever. (*Psalms 136:5*)

The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. (*Proverbs 3:19*)

Thus, when we say the LORD God is omniscient, it, in practical terms, means that the LORD God knows all that exists, and knows all the significance of everything, and is able to properly weight that information and thus apply it properly and correctly to every situation that exists or could exist, for all eternity.

In sum, the LORD God knows all things, and all out-workings that are and can be of those things and their interaction with all other things, for all time and eternity. Moreover, He knows that He knows all things which are, and knows that He knows all out-workings that are and will be. Additionally, the LORD God knows there is nothing else to know that can be known.

Without this knowledge and understanding, maintaining His righteousness would be impossible as He must know the end, and

possible ends of everything that is or could be. Else, there exists the possibility of any action made by the LORD God that would be unequal in its end. This would yield unrighteousness, which is impossible with the LORD God.

But omniscience is not enough to maintain righteousness. It is not sufficient to merely have all knowledge so that in all workings accomplished, the end of all is known. Rather, one must also love equity or equality:

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the rich *man* glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that **I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight,** saith the LORD. (*Jeremiah 9:23-24*)

The LORD *is* in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne *is* in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. The LORD trieth the righteous: **but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.** Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: *this shall be* the portion of their cup. **For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness;** his countenance doth behold the upright. (*Psalms 11:4-7*)

(Here I speak as a man, from man's perspective): Without a love for righteousness, there is no motivator to be righteous, though one may know all things which are, or could be, and the outworking of them all,

The LORD God delights in equity in all things, and in all His ways. It is His greatest pleasure to see things which are equal, balanced and true. Whether that equity, which is righteousness, is from the things He makes directly, or from His creatures, it is a delight to His soul to behold them.

Without this love for equity, righteousness and truth, which

is in and of Himself, coupled with His omniscience, which is in and of Himself, righteousness would not be maintained.

This post updated and expanded – 07/21/2014

Changes

Back in 2003-4 time frame, I penned a statement of faith that was based upon the statement of faith of the first true New Testament church I was in. What I did was essentially corrected and amended their statement as there were (and to this day still are) typographical errors, citation errors, and statements which were either nonsense, or were arcane enough so the average person could not actually understand what was expressed. Primarily, I did this to more fully express what I believed, and to solidify in my own mind how best to do that. Nothing accomplishes those purposes quite like writing.

In 2009, Ebenezer Baptist mission undertook the task of writing its statement of faith, which resulted in some changes to my statement, as I am under the authority of the mission. Most of the changes were not significant or substantial, but clarifying of held doctrines. A couple of articles were split for clarification, and one new was added ([Of Liberty of the Conscience](#)). With those basic changes the statement of faith was pretty much complete.

However, that was four years ago, and much teaching has gone on since then. There is a far better understanding of certain doctrines, and for the first time, an valid, defined, testable understanding of iniquity, transgression and sin. There is also a far better understanding of how man is made in the image of God. These things and others warranted looking again at the statement of faith to see what needed to be changed

and/or clarified. This time, there are significant changes.

Do these changes alter the doctrine? Actually, no, they do not. What they do is clarify the foundations of the belief and add significant information to the doctrine, which strengthens the doctrine. Additionally, gaps and ambiguities are removed so there is no misunderstanding as to what is believed. To illustrate what I mean, article six (VI) is set forth below. First is the statement from 2009, and below it is the newly agreed to statement.

VI. Of The Creation (5/31/09)

I believe in the Genesis account of creation, and that it is to be accepted literally, and not allegorically or figuratively; that man was created directly in God's own image and after his own likeness. I hold that all of creation was not, and is not a matter of evolution or evolutionary change of species, or development through interminable periods of time from lower to higher forms; that all animal and vegetable life was made directly, and God's established law was and is, that they should bring forth only "after their kind." Moreover, that the earth is approximately 6000 years old, and that the creation of the entire physical universe occurred in six, twenty-four hour days, and that on the seventh day the LORD rested.

Some things to note in the original statement from 2009 are a lack of specificity as to where everything came from, and whether the twin errors of the Gap theory and day/age theory are allowed. Moreover, only the minimum is mentioned about the creation of man. Since the majority of the rest of the statement of faith deals with man and the LORD's provision of salvation in Christ, it is rather odd that so little is mentioned about man and how he was created, and why he is accountable.

You are free to judge, but I believe that is fixed with the

following statement:

VI. Of The Creation (9/25/13)

I believe in the Genesis account of the creation of the physical universe; that it is to be accepted as factually and literally true: That all things which are, were created ex nihilo, or out of nothing, by the infinite knowledge and power of the LORD God. I reject any assertion that the account is allegorical or figurative as pertaining to the events of creation and their sequence. I reject as spurious both the "Gap" theory and "Day/Age" theory of the creation account. I hold that all of creation was not, and is not, a matter of evolution or evolutionary change of species, or development through interminable periods of time from lower to higher forms. I believe, as Scripture plainly expresses, that all animal and plant life was made directly, and God's established law was, and is, that they should bring forth only "after their kind." I believe that all of creation was formed fully functional, or "in-process," as if it had always existed; that all life was created in a mature state. I hold, in accordance with the Biblical timeline, that the earth is approximately 6000 years old; that the creation of the entire physical universe occurred in six, twenty-four hour days, and that on the seventh day the LORD rested.

I hold as true, that man was created directly by the LORD God, and in the similitude of God. That this likeness is found in five distinct aspects: That man is a tri-unity of parts: soul, spirit, and body; That man has the innate ability to judge; That man has free-will within the parameters of his given existence; That man is creative, being able to bring forth out of that which exists; That man has the moral imperatives of mercy, compassion, forgiveness, grace, and love. Accordingly, man is the pinnacle of the LORD's creation. I believe that the LORD God, having bestowed upon man such attributes, holds every individual accountable for the conduct of his existence.

It is my prayer that the updated articles in the statement of faith are a benefit and a blessing as they are intended to clarify and answer why certain things are as they are. Additionally, there are three (3) new articles which are identified as necessary:

[Of Righteousness and Iniquity](#)

[Of the Penalty for Sin](#)

Of the Father

Two have already been added, and the third will be shortly. These articles are necessary as these subjects are prone to error and very little is taught and/or understood about them.

May you be blessed,

Paul W. Davis

Stupidity – Writ Large

Of late, my time is consumed by many things which have prevented me from posting and writing the way I would like. However, the time is spent preparing lessons, conducting those lessons, and preaching. Between those things and working full-time, and trying to fix my house, my time to write is non-existent. Nonetheless, in researching and attempting to write, one of the subjects I am studying is the issue of righteousness: what constitutes it, what destroys it, et cetera, et cetera. In my apologetics research on righteousness I came across the following:

Fundamentally, there are two opposite errors regarding original sin. One is an error of deficiency, in which original sin is treated as less damaging to human nature than

it actually is. That is the error of Pelagius. The other is the error of exaggeration, in which original sin is treated as more damaging to human nature than it actually is. ([Protestant Objections to the Catholic Doctrines of Original Justice and Original Sin, Bryan Cross, Oct. 16, 2011; NOTE: It is unclear here whether Mr. Cross is quoting Professor Lawrence Feingold or simply building off his material.](#)))

So the Catholics mean to say that the effect of Adam's fall was/is a nuanced thing in which we have to understand precisely the effect it had, else we will either:

A.) Not go far enough in assigning the effects of the fall.

or

B.) Go too far in assigning the effects of the fall.

I am sorry, but this sounds like something I would shovel out of my neighbor's barn.

Why?

Because the Scripture could not be more plain:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, **and death by sin**; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. *(Romans 5:12-14)*)

And again:

For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. **For as in Adam all die**, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. *(I Corinthians 15:21-22)*

And yet again:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (*Hebrews 2:14-15*)

I really do not know how you can “go too far in assigning the effects of the fall” as it were. After all, this death includes the following:

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And **whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.** (*Rev 20:12-15*)

I suppose there is something out there worse than eternity in the Lake of Fire, but nothing ever describes it or even alludes to it.

So then, how is it that one can “go too far” in holding that the effect of the fall upon man was utterly devastating, warping man’s perception and distorting man’s ability to understand?

I suppose it could be that most Baptists and Protestants hold that man is utterly depraved and incapable of righteousness at all.

Well, not quite:

Here we find the opposite error with respect to original sin, namely, an exaggeration of original sin.

Martin Luther

Luther's two principal errors with respect to original sin are as follows:

(1) Treating original sin as the complete corruption of human nature, rather than as the loss of the preternatural and supernatural gifts.

(2) Treating concupiscence (i.e. the involuntary disorder in the lower appetites) as original sin. ([Protestant Objections to the Catholic Doctrines of Original Justice and Original Sin, Bryan Cross, Oct. 16, 2011](#))

Without going into all the convoluted arguments, let us examine what the Scripture declares about man's fallen state:

And you hath he quickened, who were **dead in trespasses and sins**; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; **and were by nature the children of wrath**, even as others. (*Ephesians 2:1-3*)

The fool hath said in his heart, *There is* no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, *there is* none that doeth good. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, *and* seek God. They are *all* gone aside, they are all together become filthy: **there is none that doeth good, no, not one.** (*Psalms 14:1-3*)

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. (*Psalms 51:5*)

Well now, if we are all the children of wrath by nature, dead in trespasses and sins, and exist in iniquity prior to coming

to Christ, and there in nothing we can do about it outside of coming to Christ for salvation... How do you exaggerate that?

I find it hard to believe that anyone could think, especially after the evidence of Scripture, that the depravity of man could be worse.

No, if you are borne with a nature to do wickedness, and the LORD God accounts you as dead in trespasses and sins, bound to do every evil work, it is kind of hard to top that. No, there is no exaggeration when it is stated that man is utterly depraved and incapable of any righteousness. That is, if you evaluate what the LORD God evaluates – the soul.

If, on the other hand, you ignore the soul and concentrate on the flesh, and concentrate on sin, rather than iniquity, then you could claim that declaring the soul utterly corrupt is in error and excessive. However, since it is the LORD God who is the sole determiner of who righteous and who is not, it really matters little what the Catholic Church believes and teaches.

The sad part is, the Catholic Church has had over 1500 years to get this teaching right – and they have not. Instead, they cling to a doctrine that is provably wrong.

That is the very definition of Stupidity – writ large.

Examine Yourself

This message addresses the issue of salvation and whether we are honest with ourselves about what we have believed. Salvation is more than merely assenting to the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior. Salvation is also very much different from simply asking Christ to come into your life.

I pray it is profitable for you.

For those who cannot use the embedded player, wish to use a different player, or want to save the file, the following link is provided:

[Examine Yourself](#)

Please note: This is a 67MB file. Depending upon your connection, downloading may take a while.

In Christ,

Paul W. Davis

Sin Unto Death

This lesson addresses an issue that is of interest to many. It is about the meaning of the statement “There is a sin unto death:” in I John 5:16. May it be profitable for you.

In Christ,

Paul W. Davis

For those who want to download the file or the podcast does not work, the following link to the mp3 file.

Refusing the LORD's Blessing

Without realizing it, the LORD's children frequently refuse His blessings. Unfortunately, the complaint of those same children is frequently to the effect the LORD does not bless like they think He ought. This message addresses how it is that we refuse the blessings the LORD does desire to bestow upon His children. May it be profitable for you.

In Christ,

Paul W. Davis

For those who want to download the file or the podcast does not work, the following link to the mp3 file.

[Refusing the LORD's Blessing](#)

Spiritual Maturity?

From time to time I receive notifications of the surveys Barna Group does relating to religion, and specifically Christians and Christianity. The title of the latest survey is "[Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual](#)

Maturity”

((<http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/264-many-churchgoers-and-faith-leaders-struggle-to-define-spiritual-maturity>))

The results, though distressing, are not surprising. The sad truth is the results should not surprise anyone familiar with the study the Barna Group released on the 10th of April titled [“Most American Christians Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist”](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/260-most-american-christians-do-not-believe-that-satan-or-the-holy-spirit-exist)

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It is an essential and integral part of Scripture that the Holy Ghost exists, is a real person, and the third Person of the Godhead. It is also clear from Scripture that Satan exists and is a real person as well. Thus, without having a basic trust in the Scripture and what the Scripture teaches, how could anyone ever understand what spiritual maturity is, let alone try to get there?

When the study on the existence of the beliefs of “Christians” demonstrates the following:

Four out of ten Christians (40%) strongly agreed that Satan “is not a living being but is a symbol of evil.” An additional two out of ten Christians (19%) said they “agree somewhat” with that perspective. A minority of Christians indicated that they believe Satan is real by disagreeing with the statement: one-quarter (26%) disagreed strongly and about one-tenth (9%) disagreed somewhat. The remaining 8% were not sure what they believe about the existence of Satan.

Although a core teaching of the Christian faith is the divinity and perfection of Jesus Christ, tens of millions of Christians do not accept that teaching. ((If you DO NOT accept this teaching and doctrine, you are NOT SAVED, and NOT

a Christian – END OF STORY!)) More than one-fifth (22%) strongly agreed that Jesus Christ sinned when He lived on earth, with an additional 17% agreeing somewhat. ((The same note applies here.)) Holding the opposing view were 9% who disagreed somewhat ((And the same applies here. Why? Because if Christ Jesus sinned, then he had his own sin to pay for, and could not pay for our sin. Secondly, if Jesus Christ could sin, then God could sin. If Jesus Christ did sin, then Jesus Christ, who is Almighty God in the flesh, is not Holy and Righteous, and thus God is not Holy and Righteous. And just what religion are these folks now?)) and 46% who disagreed strongly. Six percent did not have an opinion on this matter ((Christian? Really?)).

Much like their perceptions of Satan, most Christians do not believe that the Holy Spirit is a living force, either. Overall, 38% strongly agreed and 20% agreed somewhat that the Holy Spirit is “a symbol of God’s power or presence but is not a living entity.” Just one-third of Christians disagreed that the Holy Spirit is not a living force (9% disagreed somewhat, 25% disagreed strongly) while 9% were not sure.

Can we then really expect the following findings to be any different:

5. Pastors are surprisingly vague about the biblical references they use to chart spiritual maturity for people.

One of the reasons churches struggle with making disciples may relate to the lack of clarity that pastors have about the underlying biblical passages that address the process of spiritual maturity. This is most clearly reflected in the huge proportion of pastors who give generic responses when asked to identify the most important portions of the Bible that define spiritual maturity. In fact, one-third of pastors simply said “the whole Bible.” Other generic responses included “the gospels” (17%), the New Testament (15%), and

Paul's letters (10%). In all, the survey showed that three-quarters of pastors mentioned some type of generic answer to this query. In addition, one out of every five pastors gave a semi-generic response, such as "Romans" or the "life of Christ."

As for verse-specific responses (mentioned by just one-fifth of pastors), the most common passages included: Galatians 5, John 3:16, Ephesians 4, Matthew 28, and Romans 12:1-2. Just 2% of pastors specifically identified the Galatians 5 passage relating to the "fruits of the Spirit," which includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. Theme specific answers represented just 7% of responses, including the Sermon on the Mount, the Great Commission, the Great Commandment, and the Beatitudes. ((There is not a one of these passages and verses mentioned that have to do with spiritual maturity. All the references given either apply to the church, or to attributes that are given to every believer at salvation. Spiritual growth is beyond just having attributes that you begin to use. Rather, it is about changing, not just the very way you act or your attitude, but your entire concept of existence, and the way you think about everything. In short, to be spiritually mature is to look at everything, including yourself, the way the LORD God knows everything to be, and letting that knowledge drive everything about your life.))

The thing that is highlighted most prominently in both studies is the lack of Biblical knowledge and understanding – especially among Pastors. If pastors cannot properly identify spiritual maturity, how in the world are their congregations supposed to grow and be more spiritual? Simply put – they can't. They are limited by the knowledge and understanding of the under-shepherds who are supposed to feed them.

It is amazing, yet it is not. The amazing part is that they continue to call themselves Christian, yet have little to no

idea of what a Christian is, because they won't read the Scriptures. One of the most important things a child of God must do, is read the Scriptures. This is not go read a book someone wrote about the Scriptures, but actually read the Scriptures themselves.

Why?

Because the Scriptures are the heart and mind of the LORD God toward man. In the 49th Psalm, the 107th Psalm, Isaiah, and many other places in Scripture, the heart of the LORD God toward man is plainly revealed, as it is here:

Hear this, all ye people; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world: Both low and high, rich and poor, together. My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding. I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp. Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about?

They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever:) That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption. (*Psalm 49:1-9*)

And here:

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him

for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. (*Isaiah 55:1-11*)

And again here:

Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (*Ezekiel 33:10-11*)

Additionally, there are many other passages that speak to the very same thought and desire of the LORD God that every single soul be saved and reconciled to Him. The LORD God would that every person repent and believe in Christ as their Saviour.

In like manner, the LORD God has published the standard for

spiritual maturity. However, if one never reads the Scripture or only reads their "pet" books, or their pastor only preaches from certain books, and on certain subjects, then what do we expect? I would certainly hope that we would not expect spiritual maturity to appear out of thin air and without extensive instruction and admonition from the Scripture. The LORD God has provided in Scripture both the standard for spiritual maturity, and how to get there. He expects us to read the Scripture, be taught by it, and walk in its instruction. It is amazing how very easy it is to find both the standard, and how to get there. In fact, the standard for spiritual maturity ought to be obvious:

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (*Romans 8:29*)

Moreover, the LORD gave indicators and markers so that we could know and understand how we are to work toward that maturity in Christ:

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (*II Peter 1:5-11*)

And He expects all His children to work toward the end of being conformed to the image of Christ:

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. ((You know, these really are the “first things.” Yet, how many truly born again believers actually get beyond these?)) And this will we do, if God permit. (*Hebrews 6:1-3*)

Knowing that the end of it all is charity, the love of God being continually expressed in everything we do:

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. (*I Corinthians 13:4-13*)

Understanding that the love spoken here is not the world's kind of love, but the love of God in which we are rebuked, chastened, challenged and tried so that we may know of our witness and testimony, whether we are growing or not, and be reassured that we are indeed the children of God:

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And

ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. (Hebrews 12:4-11)

The problem is, most American “Christians” are without any chastisement at all. Hence, they cannot grow and be spiritually mature. How can this be said? The proof is in the surveys referenced and quoted above. How can one be a Christian when one does not even believe what the Scripture, which is the word of God, states? And how can one be a Christian when one does not honor the LORD and His word? After all, it is plain in the Scripture how high a position of honor the LORD God gives His word:

I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name. (Psalm 138:2)

Thus, spiritual maturity begins in the word of God – the Scripture. Without the message of the gospel from Scripture, salvation in Christ and subsequently staying in the Scripture and learning, no spiritual growth can or will occur. The problem with American “Christians” is not that they are not growing spiritually like they should. The problem is that the

express conditions for spiritual growth are simply not there. It is no wonder they can't "put a finger" on spiritual growth and how to achieve it.

Who Do You Worship?

In the Scripture it is made very clear that worship is to be directed to the LORD God and Him alone. Nowhere in scripture are we given to understand that worshipping anything, or anyone else is acceptable in the sight of God. The passages that state this are succinct and to the point, and are as follows:

And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (*Exodus 20:1-5*)

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. (*John 4:21-23*)

And he (the angel) saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: **worship God:** for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. (Revelation 19:9-10)

To be certain, it cannot get much, if any, plainer than the above. This being the case, what are we to make of the following:

1. Queen of Peace, pray for us!

*On the feast of your Immaculate Conception,
I come to venerate you, O Mary,
at the foot of this effigy, which from Piazza di Spagna
allows your maternal gaze to extend over this ancient, and
for me very dear, city of Rome.*

*I have come here, this evening, to render you the homage of
my sincere devotion.*

*It is a gesture in which I am joined in this Piazza by
innumerable Romans,
whose affection has always accompanied me
in all the years of my service to the See of Peter.
I am here with them to start on the path
toward the one hundred fiftieth anniversary
of the dogma that we celebrate today with filial joy.*

2. Queen of Peace, pray for us!

*We turn our gaze to you with intense trepidation,
we take recourse to you with insistent trust
in these times marked by not a few uncertainties and fears
over the present and future fate of our planet.
To you, the first of humanity redeemed by Christ,
finally liberated from the slavery of evil and sin,
we raise a heartfelt and confident supplication:*

*Listen to the cry of pain of the victims of war
and of so many forms of violence
that bloody the earth.
Dispel the darkness of sadness and solitude,
of hatred and vengeance,
Open the minds and hearts of all to trust and forgiveness!*

3. Queen of Peace, pray for us!

*Mother of mercy and of hope,
obtain for the men and women of the third millennium
the precious gift of peace:
peace in hearts and in families,
in communities and among peoples;
peace especially for those nations
where every day combating and dying continue.*

*Help every human being, and all races and cultures,
to encounter and accept Jesus,
who came on earth in the mystery of Christmas
to give us "his" peace.*

*Mary, Queen of Peace,
give us Christ, true peace of the world!*

Delivered by Pope John Paul on 8 December, 2003

Do the words **venerate**, **homage** and **devotion** mean anything? Yes, they certainly do, and they are all synonyms for worship. I don't care what one chooses to call it, worship is worship, regardless of the label applied to it.

This puts the Pope in direct violation of the clear and express command of the LORD God, Who the Pope claims to serve. Moreover, this is not an isolated incident, but is well known despite the denials of some Catholic apologists. In fact the following excerpts from the Catechism of the Catholic Church show plainly the worship of Mary as a equal with Christ:

969 *"This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix."*

970 *"Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. But the Blessed Virgin's salutary influence on men . . . flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely on it, and draws all its power from it." "No creature could ever be counted along with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer; but just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by his ministers and the faithful, and as the one goodness of God is radiated in different ways among his creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source."*

*** II. DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN**

971 *"All generations will call me blessed": "The Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship." The Church rightly honors "the Blessed Virgin with special devotion. From the most ancient times the Blessed Virgin has been honored with the title of 'Mother of God,' to whose protection the faithful fly in all their dangers and needs. . . . This very special devotion . . . differs essentially from the adoration which is given to the incarnate Word and equally to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and greatly fosters this adoration." The liturgical feasts dedicated to the Mother of God and Marian prayer, such as the rosary, an "epitome of the whole Gospel," express this*

devotion to the Virgin Mary.

I have to ask, if Mary was so special, why then did the Lord Jesus Himself make the following statement when His mother and brethren came to get Him one day?

While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. (Matthew 12:46-50)

Or, answer her in the way he did at the wedding feast of Cana?

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. (John 2:1-3)

Or even at age 12, where the Lord Jesus Christ had to remind Mary and Joseph that He was to be about His Father's business?

And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake

unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. (Luke 2:46-51)

No, plainly, to the Lord Jesus Christ, other than the fact that Mary physically bore Him, as far as He was concerned, she was no different than anyone else on the earth – a sinner who needed the salvation He provided on the cross. Mary was not to be worshiped, and the Lord Jesus Christ did not accord her that honor, nor did He direct anything to be done through Mary. Instead, His instruction to the Samaritan woman at the well stands pre-eminent, and in perfect accord with the rest of Scripture – worship God, and God alone.

Anything else is blasphemy and idolatry.

What Constitutes Worship?

There are many answers to the above question. Some are correct, some have elements of truth to them, and other answers one would receive are simply in error. Of course, it is this way with every subject from Scripture one might bring up. However, we would expect the answer from the head of a theological school to be more exact, and accurate than the average person. We certainly would expect their answer to be more centered around service to God than politics. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and it is certainly not restricted to the individual that came to my attention late last week. Now, to be fair, the subject at hand was not worship, but the addressing of the subject intruded into the arena of what constitutes worship, and the individual drew no distinctions.

Before getting going on this, it is only fair to give a brief

background of the individual so their qualifications can be duly noted and kept in mind. The following is extracted from the brief bio posted with her column at the Newsweek/Washington Post website, Faith section:

Rev. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite is president of Chicago Theological Seminary and senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. She has been a professor of theology at the seminary for 20 years and director of its graduate degree center for five years. Her area of expertise is contextual theologies of liberation, specializing in issues of violence and violation. An ordained minister of the United Church of Christ since 1974, the "On Faith" panelist is the author or editor of thirteen books and has been a translator for two translations of the Bible. (http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/susan_brooks_thistlethwaite/2008/03/is_nothing_sacred.html)

I won't even get into all that is in error in the writeup. Not that it is not her history. It is. It is that her endeavors run so counter to the express commandments of God. Perhaps that is why it never impinged upon her conscience to address the issue of "note takers" during the time of the sermon somewhat differently. Some quotes of what she wrote follow:

"A member of Trinity United Church of Christ, the church once led by Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright and where Senator Obama is a member, told me there are "spies" among them in the pews, strangers who take notes during the service and try to record the message.

Check it out for yourself. Go to the Trinity UCC website, select "Why The Black Church Won't Shut Up!", and listen to Rev. Otis Moss politely ask that there be "no recording equipment." He repeats over and over, "We are in worship. We are in worship." When visitors are asked to stand, you can see those with paper and pencil in hand. Are these folks members of the press or political operatives? Impossible to

know if they don't, as Rev. Moss requests, sign in. This is what happens when politics intrudes into the sanctuary of the church, a sacred space."

"Challenging your pastor's freedom in the pulpit is bad. Spying on people at prayer is reprehensible. Is this what the assaults of the past decades on the wall of separation between church and state has led us to? Is there no such thing as sacred space anymore?"

"A church is sacred space and to violate that space by engaging in "Swift-boat" type distortions and even spying is un-American. This is not us, this is not the bedrock principle of our founders and those leaders we have most respected. Our churches and our faith commitments are out of bounds in the tumult of political contests."

*"Let us pull back from this disastrous course of mixing religion and politics before we destroy something so unique and precious it has been the envy of the whole world."
([ibid](#))*

Notice something odd about her response to the issue at hand? In reading all the comments about her column, I noticed something missing there as well. What is it? It is the acknowledgement of a major component of worship – learning. Now, it is not necessary to take notes to learn, but it sure helps retain what was spoken. Moreover, we have the express invitation of the Lord Jesus Christ to learn of Him.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
(*Matthew 11:28-30*)

You know, when you don't care about someone or something, you don't bother learning about them, or it – at all. To me, it is telling that Hannah of ancient Israel knew far more of what the LORD God is about than the head of a theological school.

Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by his actions are weighed. (*I Samuel 2:3*)

Somehow I don't think the Lord Jesus Christ would have been at all upset if someone had sat in front of Him taking notes while he preached and taught. What mattered to the LORD was the heart of the person, and their desire to learn of God. After all, since He was preaching the truth, He had no concerns about what they wanted to do with His words, as He knew the effect the words would have upon them.

The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him. (*John 7:32*)

So there was a division among the people because of him. And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him. Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. (*John 7:43-45*)

No, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke openly because He knew the time was not yet, and He knew that it was necessary that the word be preached openly. Moreover, since the LORD God is a God of knowledge, it is essential that people learn. I don't see the Lord being displeased with this at all.

Knowing this, we can come forward to our day and time and understand that if people have to take notes, or record the message to recall what was said later, then there ought be no problem with that. If one preaches expressly from the Scripture, then all that need be done in defense of what was

said is point to chapter and verse, and show that the Bible does indeed say that.

The problem here is that worship, and what constitutes worship is not at all understood. When someone is a “fan” of an actor, or performer, they try to learn everything they can about that person. If someone is a fanatic about golf, fishing or guns, we find that they always take notes, record, or otherwise preserve a record of the things said about the subject they worship. We also find they are devoted to their particular interest, almost to the exclusion of everything else. It is like some popular television shows – there are some who can never get enough information about a particular show (*Star Trek and M.A.S.H. come to mind*), and they record or otherwise obtain every scrap of information they can about the series.

Funny how that is not the case when people come into the house of God. Instead, they are discouraged from taking notes and recording the preaching, and are told they need to have a “worshipful” attitude. It makes one really wonder why doesn't it?

You know, we needn't worry what man will do with the words spoken from the pulpit. No, we need to be concerned about what God has determined about the words spoken from the pulpit.

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (*Matthew 5:19*)

O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account

thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. (*Matthew 12:34-37*)

Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite misses the point.
