



Glenn Brown

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441 ½ Lark Drive

Grand Junction, Colorado 81504

970-434-1377

BIBLICAL VALUES IN A TIME OF CULTURAL CHAOS

(From an article by Robert Whitlow in The Morning Star Journal)

“I grew up in Cartersville, Georgia, which lies in the path of General Sherman’s march to Atlanta in the summer of 1864. If someone in my youth mentioned “The War,” they weren’t referring to World War II or Viet Nam - they meant the Civil War, which ended one hundred years earlier.

My family attended the First Presbyterian Church, and every Sunday morning the children’s assembly sang: *Jesus loves the little children, All the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.* At home, my parents had a zero tolerance policy for negative racial or ethnically based comments or jokes. As a small child I knew that anyone who said such things was ignorant, but I would hear racial jokes on the school playground.

Fast-forward over fifty years to August 12, 2017, in Charlottesville, Virginia, where a gathering of white supremacists, neo-Nazis, and others resulted in death and chaos. Ignorance, when translated into action, can be deadly.

The Bible tackles this issue without apology. Jesus, as a Jew, rebuked the ethnic superiority of His Jewish listeners. Peter had a vision in Joppa in which God destroyed the apostle’s paradigm of distinctions within humanity. As a result, the Gospel was preached throughout the world. We should search our hearts and ask God to expose and expel every evil, prideful root wherever it’s hiding. We should be willing to speak the truth to others when given the opportunity to do so.

One other perspective on this issue is worth sharing. After the battle of Chickamauga in 1863, a Confederate Army under the command of General Joseph Johnston spent several months in northwest Georgia. During the winter of 1863-64, there was a major religious revival among the 50,000 Confederate troops bivouacked in the area. Local churches were packed and soldiers crawled through the windows to hear the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Multitudes were baptized in freezing cold streams and creeks. Generals came to faith in God. It was a time of tremendous spiritual renewal.

The Confederate cause was wrong. Slavery was a wicked, evil institution. Arguments that the Civil War was primarily about issues such as state’s rights and regional self-determination are unsupportable. Everyone knew then and now what was the issue. So what did God do? He poured out grace upon the undeserving. He opened the doors of salvation for men who others would consign to eternal punishment. He showed that even when people are wrong, He would extend mercy because that is His nature. Many of the soldiers who came to faith that winter died within months while fighting for an unrighteous cause. They are in heaven today. Are you okay with that?

This brings us back to our time. What can we do? We can pray that God’s grace will be poured out on the wicked, proud, arrogant, deceived, and ignorant – the white supremacist and neo-Nazi, those marching under banners of racial pride and a myriad of other groups. That’s what God does and what we should do, because in the end, God’s message of hope and love will triumph.”



THE MOST IMPOSSIBLE SERMON

Years ago I heard about a man who had memorized the Sermon on the Mount and who went around reciting it in churches. He was invited to a large church, and after his presentation a man went up to him and said, “That was really a remarkable sermon. I think that you should have it put into print.”

Yes, it is a remarkable sermon, and it is also the most impossible sermon the world has ever heard. The Jews had been given the Ten Commandments through Moses, and they couldn't keep them. (Neither can you or I.) So rather than water them down and give the people hope that they could please God, Jesus made them a hundred times harder. He took the commandments from impossible to preposterous. He said, *God commanded, 'You shall not murder' but I say, 'If you are even angry at someone or call him an idiot you are subject to judgment, and if you curse someone you are subject to the fires of hell!.....You must love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you!'*

He said, *The commandment says, 'You must not commit adultery,' but I say to you, 'If you even look at a woman with lust you have already committed adultery with her in your heart....therefore, poke out your own eye if it is causing you to sin.'*

“Well, thanks a lot, Jesus. If what you say is true, we are all doomed.” That is exactly the response that Jesus wanted from us. Because Jesus came to provide another way for us, the way of faith in what He did, not in what we do. Then are we to dismiss the Sermon on the Mount as if it were impossibly idealistic?

Oswald Chambers said in his Notes on the Sermon on the Mount: “Beware of placing our Lord as teacher first instead of Savior. That is a dangerous tendency today. We must know Him first as Savior before His teaching can have any meaning other than that of an ideal that leads to despair.”

In John 13, following the occasion when Jesus washed the disciples' feet, He said: *You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right because that is what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet.* Did you see it? Jesus reversed the order from Teacher and Lord to Lord and Teacher. Remember that Jesus' teachings, and all the teachings in the New Testament, apply only to those who are His disciples, those who have been born from above and have received the Holy Spirit as a living reality in their hearts. Even after that has happened, we do not automatically and effortlessly live according to the Sermon on the Mount. Being born again is not the end but the beginning of the Christian life, then we have to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. This happens as a process when we continually hear and obey the words of the Lord.

According to Oswald Chambers, there is another extreme of which we must beware: “There are teachers who argue that the Sermon on the Mount supersedes the Ten Commandments, and because ‘we are not under law but under grace’ (Romans 6:15) it does not matter whether we honor our fathers and mothers, whether we covet, whether we practice immorality, etc. These teachers say, ‘There is no need nowadays to observe giving the tithe to God since we are in a new dispensation and everything belongs to God.’ This is simply a way to twist the Scriptures in order to be disobedient.”

“None can make themselves pure by obeying laws. Purity is not a question of doing things rightly, but of the doer on the inside being right. Purity is not innocence; innocence is the characteristic of a child. Men and women ought not to be innocent, they ought to be tested and tried and pure. No one is born pure: purity is the outcome of conflict. The pure individual is not the one who has never been tried, but the one who knows what evil is and has overcome it. I can always deceive others. Jesus Christ has undertaken by His redemption to put in me a heart that is so pure that God can see nothing to censure in it. There is only one way in which a disciple will know that Jesus has altered your disposition, and that is by trying circumstances. When circumstances put you to the test, you will suddenly realize that He has altered you within.”

“Every habit is purely mechanical, and whenever we form a habit it makes a material difference in the brain. The material of the brain alters very slowly, but it does alter, and by repeatedly doing a thing a groove is formed in the material of the brain (today we call this ‘neural pathways’) so that it becomes easier to do the thing again, until at last we become unconscious of doing it. Never form a habit gradually; do it at once, do it sharply and definitely, and never allow a break. We have to learn to form habits according to the Spirit of God. When we fail it is because we have not practiced, we have not brought the mechanical part of our nature into line. If we keep practicing, what we practice becomes our second nature. The practicing is ours, not God's, and the crisis reveals whether or not we have been practicing. The reason we fail is not because of the devil, but because of inattention on our part arising from the fact that we have not disciplined ourselves.”

THE MYSTERY WRESTLER

(From The Book of Mysteries, by Jonathan Cahn.)

“Israel is the name of God's people. Do you know where it came from? From a wrestling match...in the night. It is recorded that *Jacob was alone and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of dawn. Finally the man said to Jacob, 'What is your name?' He answered, 'Jacob.' The man then replied, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel. For you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.'* That's how the name Israel came about and the name of God's people and nation. It all came from a wrestling match. But the man who wrestled with Jacob wasn't just

any man. Jacob called the ground on which it all took place *Peniel*, which means the face of God, *for he had seen God face-to-face*.

What happened that night was a prophecy. No nation has ever wrestled with God and man in this world as has the nation of Israel. They are called Israel because they wrestled with a man who turned out to be God. That is their prophecy. And so they have wrestled for ages with one particular man, whose name means Messiah, and who, in the end, turns out to be God. But they aren't the only wrestlers. The Scripture says that everyone who is born again becomes a citizen of Israel.

It is not a bad thing to wrestle, even with God, as long as you come to the point that Jacob came to...to the end of your strength...where you can do nothing else but cling to Him and ask Him to bless you. In fact, that's how most come to the kingdom...at the end of a wrestling match.

And what about His people Israel?

They will come so as well...at the end of the night, at the breaking of dawn."

BAD FRUIT AND BAD ROOTS

You are a tree. That is one of the metaphors that God consistently uses in His book. You are either a good tree or a bad tree according to the Bible, and it is pretty easy to figure out what kind of tree you are by simply examining your fruit. So let's look at a few of the things that God tells us about this subject.

- **Matthew 7:15-20.** In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns about wolves (false prophets) that pretend to be sheep, and He says, *By their fruit you will recognize them. Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.* Then Jesus says, *Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.* Oooh! I don't like that at all, but there it is.
- In **Galatians 5**, God delineates what is good fruit and bad fruit. *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.* While bad fruit, which are called acts of the sinful nature, are listed as, *sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like.* The words "and the like" indicate that this is just a representative list.
- **John 15:5-6.** Jesus declares, *I am the vine, you are the branches.*
- **Romans 11:16** says, *If the root (the vine) is holy, the branches are too.* (Jesus is the root, we believers are the branches.)
- **John 15:16**, Jesus says to His disciples (you and me): *I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last* (or remain).
- **Ephesians 3:17** says that *we should be rooted and grounded in love.*
- **Colossians 2:6-7** says that *we are being rooted and built up in Him (Christ).* So Scripture teaches that only when our life is rooted in Christ, in His love, will our tree yield good, life-giving fruit.
- **Matthew 12:33-37** – Jesus says, *Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad...For out of the heart the mouth speaks...For by your words you will be either justified or condemned.* So Jesus expands our understanding of good fruit and bad fruit by stating that every word we speak is either good fruit or bad fruit, and that our very words determine (or indicate) our eternal destiny.

BAD FRUIT

Many teachings about the heart throughout the Bible demonstrate that bad fruit is anything negative or destructive in a person's life. I believe this includes bad habits, bad attitudes, addictions, destructive emotions, and mental, emotional and physical sickness. This would certainly include: fear, anxiety and stress; anger, hatred, bitterness; addictions to alcohol, street drugs, prescription drugs; gambling; sexual sins, including pornography, fornication and homosexuality; abuse of one's spouse or children, including verbal, emotional, physical and sexual abuse.

It is obvious that “acts of the sinful nature,” described in Galatians 5, are those evil, selfish acts that dominate every person before he or she is born again and receives a new nature. So, after we are born again we no longer have any problem with the old sinful nature, right? Wrong! Since you became a Christian, have you ever struggled with anxiety, fear, anger, resentment, jealousy, lust, selfish ambition, etc.? God tells us we have to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind,” “reckon yourself dead” to that old nature, “set your minds on things above,” “resist temptation,” “put on Christ,” and all the other teachings telling us how to live a victorious life.

When a Christian is sincerely trying to be a faithful disciple but continues to fall into old patterns and be defeated, what is the problem? I believe the problem is that the bad roots haven’t been cut; the wounds, sins and lies in the heart haven’t been exposed and destroyed. In Matthew 3:10, John the Baptist said “the ax is laid at the root of the tree” that is not producing good fruit. That is the how I understand the ministry of inner healing and deliverance that is a part of the process of becoming a mature Christian. The examples from Scripture and from my own life and ministry are endless. A few follow.

EXAMPLES

- Carol and Kevin had only been married six months, and Kevin was already at the end of his rope. Carol was suffocating him with control and jealousy. If he was a few minutes late getting home from work, she questioned him as if he had been unfaithful. Kevin demanded that she get some counseling or else. It quickly came out during counseling that Carol’s father had abandoned her mother for another woman. In her heart was an unhealed wound, and unforgiveness, and a lie that men could not be trusted and would always abandon their wives. Until that bad root was cut, there would be no peace in her marriage.
- A family moved to Colorado from Pensacola, Florida, where they had been in a church where a great revival had taken place. They had great stories of healings, salvations, and miracles. They moved here because the husband had been hired in a job that seemed perfect for him. He held the job for only a few weeks before he was fired. The problem was that his superior was a woman, and he could not tolerate taking orders from a woman. He had exploded in anger at her, and exploded himself right out the door. In conversation, he admitted that this was the fourth job he had lost because of his attitude toward women in authority. In spite of spending years in a wonderful revival atmosphere, there was a bad root in his heart that had never been healed. I learned that his mother had been cold, critical and dominating. He would not allow me to minister to him. He said he was saved and filled with the Holy Spirit and didn’t need any of that psychological junk I was offering. Okay.
- A couple seemed to have a great marriage, but every time the wife got sick, even with a cold, the husband would get furious at her. His attitude was irrational and frightened his wife. During ministry I learned that during the man’s childhood his mother had suffered a broken leg and spent four years in bed, claiming she was in pain, filled with self-pity, and demanding that her family wait on her. Ministry involved lots of forgiveness, repentance, and renouncing of lies in this husband’s heart.
- We ministered to a young woman in Mexico whose infant had been colicky and cried ever since she had been born. I felt that the Lord was showing me that fear came into the baby in utero. I asked the mother if something traumatic had happened to her when she was pregnant. She said no. Her sister, who was sitting beside her, said, “Wait! Don’t you remember the time when you were eight months pregnant when you fell, stepping off a moving bus, and nearly rolled under the wheels of the bus?” She had been terribly traumatized. We cut that bad root through forgiveness, renouncing the spirit of fear and death from her and the baby.
- A couple brought their little 1-1/2 year old boy for prayer. They said he had always been sick and fearful. In interviewing the mother, we learned that she tried to abort her baby twice during her pregnancy. We led her in repentance, renounced the spirit of fear and the spirit of death from the little boy, prayed for his healing. (In these ministry situations, we do what we feel led to do and the things we have learned from past experience to do. The results, of course, are in the hands of God.)

PLEASE TAKE ME BACK

(From my Ancient Files: A story told by Evangelist Ruell Howe about a family he knew.)

A couple were going to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary on a certain Saturday night, and their teen-aged daughter had promised to stay at home on that night and baby-sit her younger sister.

But as the date approached, the teen-ager was invited to a party, and she tried to back out of her agreement to stay at home. She went into the bedroom where her mother was working on a new dress that she was making for herself for her

anniversary. She started whining and arguing, but her mother insisted that it was too late to get anyone else to baby-sit and that she would have to stay at home.

The daughter became resentful and furious, and when her mother left the room, she took a pair of scissors, picked up her mother's new dress and slashed it to pieces. Then she ran to her own room and slammed the door.

The mother came back in a few minutes and saw what her daughter had done. She was shocked and horrified. She threw herself down on the bed and started sobbing, not because of the dress but because her heart was broken that her daughter could do such a thing to her.

Pretty soon the daughter slipped quietly into the room. With tears on her face, she called out, "Mother, Mother, please!" Her mother stopped sobbing and asked, "Please what?" The daughter cried, "Please take me back!" Her mother rose from the bed and took her daughter into her arms.

There comes a time when we realize who we really are
before God, and all we can do is go to him and cry out, "Father, Father, please! Please take me back!"

And in Jesus' story of the prodigal son, the father ran to his son and threw his arms around him.

Jesus' arms were stretched wide on the cross, proclaiming clearly and unmistakably that He yearns to take you and me back. All we have to do is ask.

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

As I understand it, there is only one issue. The issue is not, "Is there a God?" Everyone knows there is a God because of the existence of the cosmos - its majesty, wisdom, beauty and order...and because of an inner intuition (Psalm 19, Romans 1:18-19).

The issue is not, "Does the Bible reveal the one, true God?" That, of course, is a crucial question, but if we are serious about knowing God He will reveal Himself to us. God said through the prophets, "If you seek me, you will find me." And Jesus said, "If you truly want to know whether my teachings come from God, you will certainly be shown the truth." (paraphrase)

The issue is, "Will you surrender your will to Him? Will you believe in His love and love Him in return? Will you trust Him? Will you worship Him? Will you obey Him? Will you set aside your agenda and serve Him?"

That is the issue. That is the only issue. Will you?

**God Bless
Glenn**

e-mail address casabrn441@gmail.com

WEBSITE: www.glennbrownministries.com

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736 24 ½ Road Grand Junction, Co. 81505