

CHRISTIAN WORKER

"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Corinthians 6:1)

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RUNNING FROM GOD

Bill Burk

The Book of Jonah, well known in the Old Testament, is often remembered for the great fish. However, it also emphasizes God's grace, mercy, and love. The story shows God's sovereign control over creation and His mercy toward pagan sailors, Nineveh, and His reluctant prophet (Ps. 145:9).

Jonah, whose ministry occurred during the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23-25), received an unusual commission. Rather than preaching to Israel, God commanded him to travel to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and proclaim God's judgment on that wicked city (Jon. 1:1-2). Instead of obeying, Jonah boarded a ship for Tarshish, attempting to flee "from the presence of the Lord" (Jon. 1:3; cf. Ps. 139:1ff.). Why did Jonah refuse?

Jonah's reluctance stemmed from his understanding of God's character. Some assume Jonah fled because he feared the Assyrians. The book itself offers a different explanation. After Nineveh repented, Jonah confessed, "For I know that You are gracious and merciful... God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness..." (Jon. 4:2). Jonah did not doubt God's existence or His ability to save. He knew God too well. He feared that if Nineveh repented, God would forgive them.

Assyria was Israel's bitter enemy. The late gospel preacher Johnny Ramsey was right to call Jonah "a superpatriot, yet a sorry prophet." His love for his nation was commendable, but it had eclipsed his concern for people created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27). He desired justice for his enemies while expecting mercy for himself. The irony is not lost. Jonah loved God's grace when it benefited Israel but resisted it when it benefited Nineveh.

God's response shows His sovereignty and patience. Instead of abandoning His prophet, He pursued him with a storm, a fish, a plant, a worm, and an east wind, demonstrating His control over creation. Each act teaches Jonah, highlighting that God's story is about His grace and refusal to give up on His servants, not His anger.

Chapter three beautifully illustrates that our God is a God of second chances (cf. John 21:15-19). "The word

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FROM THE EDITOR:

ATTEMPTING TO FOOL GOD

Ross Haffner

Pretending to be faithful isn't enough. Have you ever seen a child trying to cover up something they've done wrong with a lie? Perhaps they took a chocolate chip cookie when they knew was supposed to wait until after dinner. With chocolate smeared all over their hands and face they will still tell their mother they didn't eat the cookie to try and avoid punishment.

We must appear like little children to God when we attempt to fool Him and those around us into thinking we are faithful Christians. Believing we can fool God in this way is really self-deception. Psalm 139:3 says, "Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways." In other words, God knows everything that we do. He is omnipresent and omniscient, so we should know that we cannot fool God into believing we are being faithful to Him when sin still rules our lives.

Galatians 6:7-9 teaches the law of sowing and reaping. Paul wrote, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." To attempt to fool God is as good as declaring that we don't believe we will reap what we sow. This scripture does not leave wiggle room to escape the consequences of sin. Sinful behavior brings about destruction; spiritual, righteous behavior is rewarded with eternal life. Paul implored the Galatians to continue in their well-doing because the reward is worth it.

The destiny of the one who continues to "sow to his flesh" is one that is not to be envied. Concerning the punishment for the wicked, Jesus said three times in Mark 9 it is a place "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." He wanted to emphasize the nature of Hell. It is a place with no hope and everlasting

punishment. A desire to avoid eternal damnation is a powerful motivator.

Many don't want to admit that they have to do something to live the Christian life. They act as if any talk concerning works eliminates the need for grace. Without God's grace, man would have no hope of avoiding the fires of Hell. However, it cannot be denied that the concept of sowing found in Galatians 6 requires action on our part. Some will be saved, many will be lost, and the works that are done will distinguish between the two. Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Later Paul wrote, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

We can continue pretending we are faithful before God in attempt to sneak into Heaven, but that will only bring about eternal punishment. Our only good option is to do the will of the Father and reap life everlasting. What choice will you make?

CW



IGNORING GOD

Mike Bonner

The word “ignoring” is the present participle of the verb “ignore,” which means to deliberately pay no attention to, overlook, or refuse to acknowledge something according to Collins Dictionary. Unfortunately, many in our day and time believe they can ignore God, His Son, and His word and live a life worthy of imitation. Furthermore, we have some among the people of God who say they are faithful to the cause of Christ but their lives demonstrate something different. The apostle Paul would say it this way as it relates to those living hypocritical lives: *“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will... have a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”* (2 Tim. 3:1-5). Tragically, these only look the part but are not living the life of a Christian.

This practical atheistic idea saturates the minds of some in the church and it would do all well to take heed of such thinking and behavior. The Psalmist said, *“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good.”* (Ps. 14:1). The Psalmist is not only describing the atheist but also the one who believes they can live an immoral life before God and not give an account for such behavior. This should remind everyone of the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 11:9-10. God will bring everyone into judgment for their behavior and words. Jesus spoke of our words meeting us in the judgment and for this reason we should choose our words carefully (Matt. 12:36). Everyone claiming to be under the direction of Christ should speak as He spoke and live as He lived (Luke 6:46).

The atheist lives according to his own moral compass and therefore affirms himself to be the moral standard for his life. The major problem here is man did not create himself (Ps. 100:3). God is the One who gave man moral and spiritual laws to govern himself and therefore man does not have the authority to become a law unto himself (Rom. 2:14-15). Those who become a law to themselves do not mind operating according to their own wisdom and authority. This is seen in individuals not offering spiritual sacrifices to the Lord our God through His beloved Son (1 Pet. 2:5). Some of these individuals believe they can

worship God wherever, whenever and however they want and propose there is no moral code or standard of living.

However, the one who has named the name of Christ has given gospel allegiance to Him and therefore submitted to the reign of the Father through Him (Luke 17:20-21; Matt. 28:18). When one obeys the gospel in baptism, contacting the blood of Christ, and having their conscience cleansed from dead works to serve the Living God, they are making the claim to follow Jesus with their lives (Heb. 9:14). The new life in Christ is now imposed upon them and living according to the Spirit’s teaching is commanded and therefore necessary (Rom. 6:1-18). For this reason the child of God needs to strongly consider being consistent and making sure the Christian walk and talk are in sync.

So if one is going to be right with God they must live for the one who died for them (2 Cor. 5:14-15). When one claims to hold fast to the commands of God but lives a life of rebellion and sin, this is ignoring the will of God and thus rejecting it for their own will like the religious leaders did during the time of Jesus (Luke 7:29-30). Christians must not only recognize God, but see the seriousness of doing His will from the heart and not mere lip service (Eph. 6:6). Let us work out our salvation before God and man; whether people are watching or not (Phil. 2:12). Let us not claim to be holy, spiritual, and righteous while living lives worthy of eternal damnation (Matt. 7:21-23). Brethren and friends, bear with the word of exhortation and do not ignore God.

CW

DISAGREEING WITH GOD

Ronnie Scherffius

Habakkuk is unique among the prophets. His message is neither an appeal to the people nor an announcement of judgment against the nations. Habakkuk’s cry is not on behalf of God to a wicked people, but rather a plea to God on behalf of the faithful among a corrupt nation.

The prophet initially inquires as to why God seemingly turned a blind eye to the wickedness among His own people: “O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!”

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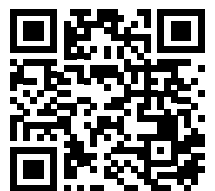
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(Hab. 1:2). The violence and spoiling was not from a foreign nation, but the wicked of Judah and Jerusalem (Hab. 1:3). The law was disregarded, and justice had ceased (Hab. 1:4). Why had God not taken action?

Next in the book, God revealed that a nation has been prepared to punish the people for their iniquity. True to His merciful nature, He had given the people time to repent. But the nation was so corrupt that a purging was needed (cf. Isa. 1:21-27). The Chaldeans, a “terrible and dreadful nation,” who even at that present time were enlarging their borders and spoiling the nations, would soon “march through the breadth of the land” and take possession of it (Hab. 1:6). Habakkuk was taken aback! How could Jehovah, eternal and omnipotent, a God of justice and righteousness, hold His tongue “when the wicked devoured the man that is more righteous than he?” (Hab. 1:13b).

Jehovah’s reproof was plain and simple: “And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Hab. 2:1-3). In essence, God replied, “I have said what I have said. Write it down in the clearest terms. My words will not fail.”

A statement that rings throughout time followed: “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4). Even though God will use the arrogant and dishonorable Chaldeans for His purposes, and even though Habakkuk and the faithful of Judah may not understand or agree with God’s decision and will to work in such a fashion, the just people should simply lean on their faith in God. He will always do right.

Christians today may find difficulty reconciling the Scriptures to their own logic or feelings. One clear example of this is God’s law of marriage. Jesus affirmed that an adulterous marriage is sin (cf. Matt. 19:1-9). That such is the force of His teaching is made evident by the disciples’ response: “If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry” (Matt. 19:10). Nevertheless, many cannot receive God’s law of marriage (Matt. 19:11). They reason with God, seek to justify unrighteousness, and question God’s will. “What if they repent, can they not remain married?” (a clear misunderstanding of repentance!) Because some disagree with God, many have turned from the truth and

“changed their view” on truths they held for years.

Some, trying to cope with personal tragedy, question God’s purposes and ask, “Why would God allow this to happen to me?” We live in a world where pain, suffering, and death seem to prevail. That the people of God must endure the shared trials of humanity should not hinder us but strengthen and embolden our faith. God has not promised heaven on earth, but heaven after earth to the just who live by their faith.

Ultimately, the prophet realized he should not disagree with God. Consider Habakkuk’s closing words: “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab. 3:17-18). We may not always “agree with God” or understand the circumstances of this life, but if we abide with him and walk in His ways, salvation will be our reward and peaceful rest will be our end.

CW



DOUBTING GOD

Jim Word

In John chapter 20 there is a familiar story of one of the disciples, Thomas by name. This passage is so well known it is all Thomas is ever remembered for. This

particular instance is when Thomas doubted whether Jesus had risen from the dead. When the other disciples told him they had seen the risen Lord he said, "...except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). Eight days later he got his chance. Jesus appeared to them again, and gave Thomas the opportunity to test the wounds in His hands and His side; however, Thomas did not seem to need confirmation when seeing the Lord, he exclaimed; "...My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Today we do not call him believing Thomas because he said "My Lord and my God" we call him "Doubting Thomas" for his skepticism. It should not surprise us when non-believers doubt anything in the Bible, after all people doubt historical events all the time, even when there is documented proof of those events. But what about Christians who doubt the miracles or the resurrection, or anything in the Bible for that matter? We are disciples like Thomas, right? When Peter attempted to walk to Christ on the water, but began to sink he cried out "...Lord save me" (Matt. 14:30). Jesus caught him and said: "...wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt. 14:31). Even the closest of Jesus' disciples sometimes struggled with their faith.

It is no wonder Christians today may struggle sometimes as well. It is interesting we do not seem to have a problem believing Jesus walked on water or even rose from the dead, but we have a tendency to doubt God when He asks us to put our trust in Him. In Matthew 11:22-34, Jesus said have faith in God to move mountains! Do we have that kind of faith? Do we pray for rain but leave our umbrella at home? For Christians, faith is not a blind leap in the dark, it is a confident stepping out on the limb knowing God will bear us up (Jas. 1:5-7). Today we look at examples such as the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Surely, he had every reason to remain a Pharisee, he had earned respect and prestige, yet he converted. He was not just some guy who decided to change his religion. He walked away from everything he had worked for his whole life. It is unreasonable to think one would do that to promote a lie. The modern skeptic does not take the Bible as his source of evidence to produce faith. He digs into the historical evidence. Be it happenstance or providence, there were writers around during Bible times recording historical events. Jewish historians, such as Josephus, wrote extensive, unbiased accounts of many events which corroborate biblical accounts. Roman historians, such as Tacitus, wrote of the existence of a man from Nazareth named Jesus who was crucified by a Roman Governor named Pilate. The historian Thallus confirms an event of darkness during the crucifixion, explaining it

as an eclipse. Then there is the fact the tomb was empty and no one could ever account for His body, except those disciples who all saw and had interactions with him after His resurrection. Obeying the gospel is our profession of faith (Heb. 10:23). Reading the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus gives us all the evidence we need. The fact the apostles were willing to walk away from their careers to be Jesus' disciples is one thing, but to stand behind their testimony of His resurrection to the death, solidifies the message even more. John testifies of Jesus for the very reason we may believe. 1 John 5:13 says, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

CW

LYING TO GOD (ACTS 5:1-11)

Jeremy Sprouse

Each lied. Each died. Few events in Scripture are more startling. As God's long-promised kingdom was taking shape, He made an unforgettable statement about the holiness of His church. In Acts 2-4, thousands were converted, and believers voluntarily sold possessions to care for one another (cf. Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37). Then Acts 5 records an event that filled the church with fear. Ananias and Sapphira sold their property, but kept back part of the proceeds. Then, they presented the remainder as though it was the full amount. Peter confronted Ananias: "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?" (5:3). Ananias died immediately. Three hours later, Sapphira repeated the lie and also died. It is a shocking story, and it raises real questions. What was their sin? Why such a severe judgment? And what does it mean for us?

What they actually did wrong. Notice what was not the problem. Peter says the property belonged to Ananias, and even after selling it, the money remained under his control (5:4). There was no command requiring believers to sell their possessions or to donate the entire amount. Keeping back part of the money was entirely within their rights.

Peter named the deeper influence: Satan had filled their heart. In Scripture, to be filled with something often

means to act in accordance with it. This matches Jesus' own teaching of sin originating in the heart before it results in action (Mark 7:21-22). Ananias and Sapphira were not helpless victims. They chose to give place to Satan's influence rather than submit to God's Spirit. Their outward gift said one thing; their heart held onto another—the gap between their speech and reality is what Peter called lying to the Holy Spirit.

Why the timing matters. This judgment came during the church's infancy, after a remarkable season of unity and generosity. Had hypocrisy taken root unchecked, the community God intended to display His holiness could have been corrupted from within. Like leaven, hypocrisy spreads (cf. Luke 12:1). God's response established a lasting principle for His church.

Scripture shows this pattern at other pivotal moments. When the tabernacle priesthood was first established, Nadab and Abihu offered unauthorized fire and died on the spot (Lev. 10:1-3). When Israel first entered the promised land, Achan's hidden sin brought swift judgment on the nation until it was exposed (Josh. 7:1ff). When the ark was being restored to prominence under David, Uzzah's irreverent touch cost him his life (2 Sam. 6:6-7). In each case, God acted decisively at a beginning point to establish a lasting principle of holiness for what followed.

This helps explain why Ananias and Sapphira met swift judgment while other do not. Peter's own denial of Christ and David's sin with Bathsheba were grave, but they were private failures met with private repentance, not public deception threatening the integrity of a newly founded community. Ananias and Sapphira's sin was a calculated act of hypocrisy performed before the whole church, at the very moment its identity was being formed. Peter later wrote that the Lord is patient, not wanting any to perish (2 Pet. 3:9). Ananias and Sapphira are the exception, not the rule. God briefly made visible what is usually hidden: deception before Him is never a small matter, even when He patiently delays judgment.

The lesson for us. Their temptation is ours as well—the desire to appear more devoted than we really are, managing our reputation while quietly holding something back from God. Jesus warned against practicing righteousness merely to be seen by others (Matt. 6:1ff).

The lesson is not that God is looking for an excuse to strike us down, but that He desires hearts that match our words. He sees what others cannot and values integrity far more than appearances. The great fear that came upon the whole church that day (Acts 5:11) was itself a mercy—a reminder,

before the church could drift into complacency, that His presence among His people is not to be treated lightly.

CW

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of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time" (Jon. 3:1). Throughout Scripture, God delights in restoring those who genuinely repent. Through Christ, Christianity truly becomes the land of beginning again (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:3-4; 1 John 1:7-9).

Jonah's struggle is still seen among God's people. Christians aren't called to preach in Nineveh, but they face similar temptations. They may resist forgiving, believing others don't deserve it (Eph. 4:32; cf. Matt. 5:44-48). Like Jonah, they appreciate God's mercy yet struggle to extend it (Matt. 5:7; 18:21-35). Some avoid difficult tasks, hoping others will take responsibility, whether teaching, encouraging, confronting sin, or sharing the gospel.

Still others run because God's will conflicts with their preferences. Jonah's greatest problem was not ignorance but reluctance. He knew exactly what God required (Mic. 6:8), yet his heart resisted God's purpose. Christians likewise may understand Scripture yet struggle to submit to it when obedience is costly, uncomfortable, or personally undesirable (cf. Luke 14:25-33).

Finally, Jonah reminds us that we can rejoice more in personal comfort than in the salvation of souls (cf. Luke 15:28-32). The prophet mourned the loss of a plant while showing little concern for an entire city. God's gentle question, "Doest thou well to be angry?" (Jon. 4:4), continues to challenge every generation.

The book of Jonah reveals more about God than Jonah. It shows a merciful God whose word transforms (Heb. 4:12), and whose patience extends even to reluctant servants. It also invites readers to reflect on whether they share God's concern for the lost or, like Jonah, are tempted to run away (John 6:60-68).

CW



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From the Director's Desk



Trent Kennedy
Director
SWSBS

Most of the SWSBS staff were blessed to attend PTP Branson in July. This event brings together Christians from Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and other states for a week of study and fellowship. Some of our staff were asked to give lessons, and all of us were afforded the opportunity to sit in on classes to learn and grow.

On Friday night, our own Steven Lloyd was honored with the "Lifetime Service" award. This award is given annually by the PTP directors and overseeing elders to someone who has dedicated a life of service to the cause of Christ. I can think of no better man to honor than brother Lloyd. Before coming to SWSBS, Steve worked with the Chino, California, congregation for nearly forty years. In a time when many preachers measured their tenure in months or years, Steve measured his in decades.

Steve and Val Lloyd and their family have been cornerstones of the School and Southwest congregation since their arrival. Steve has served as faculty, director, and now, associate director of SWSBS. In whatever role he occupies, brother Lloyd gives his humble best to a cause that he knows is greater than any of us. His continued reading and learning model an attitude of lifelong learning; his patience with students reminds us all of God's patience with us; and his quiet zeal makes our school and our congregation better.

With a brother like Steven Lloyd, it is easy to give honor where honor is due (Romans 13:7)!