

You're listening to What Does the Word Say, a series of podcasts on biblical theology produced by Grace and Glory Media, and I'm Dr. Spencer. Our usual host Mr. Roby is not with me today because we are both still obeying the stay-at-home order issued as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. We are also still taking a break from our continuing series on systematic theology.

In our session last week we discussed how to make your calling and election sure since being born again is a prerequisite to thinking biblically. All of our thinking is done within the context of our worldview and at the core of everyone's worldview we find either faith in the God of the Bible, or a rejection of God. As we read in 1 Corinthians 2:14, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."¹

But those who have been born again have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. In speaking about the difference between regenerate and unregenerate people, Paul wrote in Romans 8:9, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." And, in 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul wrote, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" But to avoid drawing improper conclusions from the fact that the Holy Spirit dwells in believers, we must balance this teaching by the fact that the Holy Spirit is also the primary author of the Bible as we read in 2 Peter 1:21, "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Now, since God is unchangeable and cannot lie, the Holy Spirit will never lead you to believe anything that contradicts his written Word. He gave us the objective revelation of his Word to guide us. And so, to think biblically requires first, that we be born again, and second that we train ourselves in God's Word, which is why Paul told Timothy, as we read in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." And then, being led by the Spirit and knowing God's Word, we must also strive daily to put our sin to death and to walk in the truth. We must deny ourselves. All three synoptic gospels record an important statement of Jesus. He said, as we read in Matthew 16:24, that "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

To take up a cross was a clear reference to being crucified, since the condemned criminal was required to carry his own cross to the place of crucifixion. And Paul also wrote, in Romans 6:6-7, "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin." We are also told in Colossians 3:5 to "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs

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to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” And we are told in Galatians 5:24 that “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”

This is hard language. No one can live the Christian life if he has not been born again. Jesus said, in Luke 14:26, that “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.”

Brothers and sisters, our flesh rebels at this part of the gospel message, but it is a clear teaching of the Bible. Our purpose in life is to live for God’s glory and to do the work he has assigned. His purpose for us is to make us holy, not to give us the most pleasant life possible here on earth. As Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” If we have been born again, our sins are covered by the blood of Christ. We have been forgiven because Jesus bore our sins on the cross and paid the penalty we owed. We are his blood-bought people and we cannot live for ourselves.

And so, biblical thinking requires that we be born again, that we train ourselves in the Word of God, and that we crucify our old nature and live for God, not ourselves. The only question we need to ask in every situation in life is, “What does God want me to do in this situation?” And the answer must be based on the Word of God, not our subjective feelings. And, if our thinking is based on the Word of God, it will always take into account the Creator/creature distinction. In other words, we will realize that God is the Creator. His promises are true. His threats are true. He cannot change. And he is not limited by our lack of power.

And now we are ready to look at some examples of proper biblical thinking. I first want to examine Abraham, the father of all believers as we are told in Romans 4:11-12. Because of his uniquely important role in the history of redemption, God gave him a test that is the hardest test any human being outside of our Lord Jesus has ever been given, and Abraham passed the test with flying colors because his thinking was biblical.

Hopefully, you remember the story. God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. We read in Genesis 15:5 that God told Abraham, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them ... So shall your offspring be.” Then Abraham and his wife Sarah waited so long that they despaired of God’s promise being fulfilled and sinned. Sarah gave her handmaid Hagar to Abraham to have a child for her, as was the custom of the time. Hagar bore Abraham Ishmael. But this was not the child through whom God’s promise was to be fulfilled and so years later the pre-incarnate Christ came to Abraham to announce that Sarah would bear him a son. We read about this in Genesis 18 and, at the time, Abraham was 99 and Sarah was 89 years old, so when Sarah heard the Lord say that she would bear a son, she laughed. We read in Genesis 18:14 that the Lord then said to them, “Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.”

And this is exactly what happened. So, when Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90, Isaac was born. The name Isaac very appropriately means “he laughs”. God then makes it clear to Abraham that

the promise he had been given would be fulfilled through Isaac.² And this leads to the incredibly difficult test that God gave Abraham. In Genesis 22:1-2 we read, “Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.’”

I remember struggling with this a great deal the first time I read it as a young Christian. I had a young son myself at the time and I couldn’t imagine God giving Abraham such a command. But we have to remember two things: first, Abraham was a unique person in the history of redemption and this unique test was necessary to fulfil God’s plan and as a symbol of what God would do for his people; and second, and most important, God knew that he was not going to require Abraham to go through with this command.

But Abraham didn’t know that, and yet he responded with immediate obedience. We are told he got up early the next morning and headed out for the mountain. It was a three-day journey, so Abraham had time to think on the way. When they arrived at the mountain, we are told in Genesis 22:5 that Abraham told the servants who had accompanied him and Isaac on the trip, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

This shows that Abraham had been thinking as they traveled and had come to the conclusion that God was going to solve this problem somehow. Notice that he told the servants “we will come back to you.” Oh what a glorious plural pronoun! *We* will come back. Isaac was not to be permanently destroyed. God had told Abraham that it was through Isaac that his promise would be fulfilled, and Abraham knew that God cannot lie. And yet, if Abraham sacrificed Isaac, how could the promise be fulfilled through him? Abraham realized that God had created all things, and so it was entirely possible that even if Isaac were burned up, God could raise him from the dead.

To finish the story, Abraham builds an altar, ties Isaac up, places him on the altar, and raised the knife getting ready to kill him. But before he brings the knife down, God stops him. God then also provides a ram for the sacrifice in place of Isaac.

And we aren’t left to simply deduce for ourselves that Abraham reasoned this way. We are told in Hebrews 11:17-19 that “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.” Friends, this is biblical thinking. Our problems may look insurmountable when we only consider our own resources, but when we take God into consideration, the whole picture changes.

And this event provides a glorious example of God’s love for his people. James Boice wrote that “this incident is also a pageant of how much more God would do as an expression of His love for

² Gen 21:12

fallen men and women. Abraham was only *asked* to sacrifice his son; he did not actually have to do it.”³ But God did sacrifice his Son to pay for the sins of his chosen people. As we read in 1 John 4:10, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” And so, by using proper biblical thinking, Abraham became the father of all who believe. He saw God do mighty things and was greatly strengthened in his faith. In fact, James Boice and others believe that God gave Abraham a great vision of how he would ultimately bring about the redemption of his people by offering his eternal Son, Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice on the exact same mountain, and then raising him from the dead.⁴ We will have more to say about this in a few minutes, but for now let me move on to another example of biblical thinking.

Consider the patriarch Joseph. His brothers were jealous and sold him into slavery. He was carried down to Egypt and enslaved there. There he was falsely accused of molesting his master’s wife and was put into prison. But then, God miraculously moved to not only secure his release from prison, but to cause Joseph to rise to be second in command in all Egypt. Later, when there was a severe famine, Joseph’s brothers had to come to Egypt to buy food for their families. What a shock when they found out that Joseph was the one from whom they had to buy food! And then the entire family moved to Egypt and lived under Joseph’s protection. Years later, when Joseph’s father, Jacob, died, his brothers were worried that he would exact revenge on them. But Joseph was able to think biblically about the situation. He knew that God is sovereign over everything and he realized that God had sent him ahead to Egypt in order to save his family during this great famine. And so we see him tell his brothers, in Genesis 50:19-21, “‘Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.’ And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.”

By thinking biblically, Joseph avoided feeling sorry for himself, he had success in extremely difficult circumstances, and he was prevented from sinning by getting revenge against his brothers.

Now let’s take a short look at the apostle Paul. When he was imprisoned in Caesarea and was giving his defense before King Agrippa, we are told in Acts 26:8 that he said, “Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?” What a marvelous example of biblical thinking this is! And it provides the perfect answer to use anytime anyone claims that believing in miracles is irrational. The real question simply is, do you believe in God? And, of course, I mean the God of the Bible. The God who created all things, The God who sustains all things. If you believe in this God, then why on earth is it at all incredible to believe that he can raise the dead? Or do any other miracle? He created everything! Surely, if he chooses to, he can change creation as well. It would, in fact, be completely irrational to believe that a God capable of creating this universe would not also be able to perform miracles, which, after all, as Wayne Grudem says are simply a “less common kind of God’s activity in which he arouses people’s

³ James Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, Zondervan, 1982, Vol. 2, pg. 222

⁴ *Ibid*, pp 229-231

awe and bears witness to himself.”⁵ And so we find that once you accept as true the first four words of the Bible, “In the beginning God ...”, you should be able to believe everything else the Bible says. I could give other examples from the Bible, but let me tell you a far more recent example of biblical thinking.

In 1912 John Harper was 39-year-old Scottish preacher coming to America with his six-year-old daughter. His wife had died shortly after the girl’s birth. They were travelling on the Titanic. When the ship hit the ice berg and it was obvious it was going to sink, Harper is reported to have given his daughter to one of the deckhands with instructions to get her into a lifeboat. And he then turned to help others. He is reported to have shouted, “Let the women, children, and the unsaved into the lifeboats!” And he gave his own life preserver to another man. Survivors of the tragedy tell of his speaking to people in the water after the ship sank urging them to trust in Christ. There is even a report that one man was saved. Harper called out to him, “Are you saved?” And when the man replied, “no”, Harper quoted Acts 16:31, which says, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”.⁶ And, by God’s grace, this man believed and was saved, both eternally, and from drowning.

Imagine being able to respond to a disaster like that with such an attitude. Harper obviously thought biblically as a matter of habit, so that even in the midst of a crisis his thinking was correct. He reasoned that he was saved and would go to heaven, but there were others around him who needed time. Perhaps God would save them! And he spoke about the only thing truly important as he was dying. What else matters when the people around you have only have a short time to live? I have no doubt this man had a glorious welcome in heaven that very day.

And let me close with the greatest possible example of biblical thinking, that of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are to be made into his image and we are to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ we are told in 2 Corinthians 10:5, so how did Christ think? Let’s look at the most important example possible, which is also the one to which the example we examined from Abraham points; namely, Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross.

Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. But he did not use his divinity to somehow make it easy for him to obey the father in his humanity. This is clear from his answering the temptation of the devil in the desert. He would not give in to the temptation to use his divine power to turn the stones into bread even though he had been fasting for 40 days. And so we see Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before his crucifixion, deeply troubled at the prospects of what was about to happen. He took Peter, James and John, his inner circle, and left the others to go pray. We read in Matthew 26:39, “Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’” The cup he was speaking of was the cup of God’s wrath as we read in Revelation 16:19 and elsewhere. People often focus on the physical pain of the flogging and crucifixion, which were incredibly horrible. But the worst thing facing Jesus was not the physical pain, it was the spiritual pain of taking our sins upon himself and bearing the wrath of God that we deserve.

⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, p. 355

⁶ See the book *The Titanic’s Last Hero*, by Moody Adams

We can't even imagine that pain. When Jesus took all of the sins of all of his people upon himself, he became an object of wrath. So, why did he say, "Yet not as I will, but as you will"?

He said that because he thought biblically. Jesus began his high priestly prayer in John 17:1 by saying, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you." Jesus knew that the purpose of life is to glorify God and he was completely obedient to that purpose, which demonstrates biblical thinking. He knew the true purpose of human life. And so he also prayed, as we read in John 17:4, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do." And then, later in the prayer, we read in John 17:24 that he said, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." Jesus was motivated by love for the Father and for his chosen people. We are told in Hebrews 12:2, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Friends, Jesus knew that there would be great joy in accomplishing all that the Father had ordained. Biblical thinking requires that we humble ourselves before the almighty God and seek to know and do his will, not ours. We must believe that our greatest joy and satisfaction will come through obedience.

And we must know the Word of God to know God's will, but then the Word of God will also give us strength to endure whatever trials God has ordained for us. We know that Jesus himself was meditating on God's Word while he was on the cross because he quoted from Psalm 22:1, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

I pray that all of us will learn through this current pandemic to trust in God and to think biblically. May we seek to bring him glory and to complete the work he has given us to do. Then we will be able to join with the apostle Paul and say, as he wrote in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

May God bless you all, and remember that you can send your questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We'd love to hear from you.