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Noticing Dead Dogs Like Mephibosheth Building an Active Identity of People with Disabilities in the Church Community

Ana Paula Rodrigues

As the concept of disability is modern, there are no words in the Bible that refer to this idea the same way the term is currently used. Scripture categorizes people with physical differences as "the blind," "the deaf," and "the lame." Mephibosheth, the starting point of this research, was lame. A superficial reading of his story places him as an object of pity. However, a deeper analysis of his narrative throughout 2 Samuel reveals his resilience, loyalty, and gratitude. Although David showed kindness to Mephibosheth in 2 Sam. 9, this unstable relationship culminates in unfairness. David did not succeed in maintaining his kindness to Mephibosheth; similarly, the church has failed in its approach to people with disabilities either by inadequately addressing them or by neglect.

Disability is an impactful condition, but part of this fallen world. "Based on the broad measure of disability used in the SSA Supplement, 27.2 percent, or 85.3 million, of people living in the United States had a disability in 2014."¹ This statistic reveals that nearly one third of America's total population is disabled. As the population ages, these numbers increase. Given that disability can affect people of different ages, in several ways, people with disabilities should be part of most Christian churches. "But even a casual survey of most American congregations shows that these weaker, indispensable, and especially honorable members are, for the most part, simply not there. Or, if they are present, too often they are either separate from others or they hide their brokenness behind masks of false happiness and superficial normality."²

The four chapters of this present work attempt to use the story of Mephibosheth, fragmented in different chapters in 2 Samuel, to point out that identity cannot be shadowed by labels. People with disabilities can be active in ministry at church, and diversity in the congregation is a healthy and essential feature.

The first chapter concentrates on 2 Samuel 9:1-13 revealing Mephibosheth's trajectory and his first encounter with King David. This event changed Mephibosheth's life. Special attention is given to the expression "dead dog" used by Mephibosheth in the presence of the king, and how this

¹ "Census.gov." *United States Census Bureau*. November 2018, accessed March 03, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2018/demo/p70-152.pdf>.

² Michael S. Beates, *Disabilities and the Gospel* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2012),

term reflects Mephibosheth's view of himself. Another aspect is the recurrent use of "lame" which intensifies the idea of a powerful king in contrast with a poor, crippled man, raising the issue of labels that shadow identities.

The second chapter elucidates the correlation between *Imago Dei* and disabilities. God's image is manifested in man even if the body is not fit to socially-accepted models. This chapter also analyzes different biblical references through a disability perspective, and how physical differences were understood in distinct periods of time.

Chapter three highlights the tension involving Mephibosheth, David, and the servant Ziba in 2 Sam. 16:1-4 and 2 Sam. 19:24-33. As the narrative unfolds, the essence of Mephibosheth's identity is revealed. Conversely, King David, whose attitudes once were kind, eventually acts unfairly. David was unable to keep his oath to Jonathan yet Mephibosheth remained loyal and grateful to the king.

Finally, chapter four emphasizes the existing gap in Christian communities regarding people with disabilities. If these people are not easily seen in the church, the body of Christ is incomplete. Thus, it is imperative to reach out and connect people with disabilities and their families with the church. After all, the different members of the body need each other and depend on each other.

From Lo Debar to the King's Table

The passage in 2 Samuel 9:1-13 contains a remarkable trace of King David's kindness; it is also a striking portion to address disabilities in biblical context. Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, is the only one remaining from the house of Saul. Due to an accident in his early childhood, he was crippled on both feet.

Scholars commonly highlight two themes in this narrative: David's oath to Jonathan and the illustration of God's kindness. Berger notes the covenantal value of this passage, "Through this narrative the biblical writer portrays David as the supreme Israelite example of covenant faithfulness (Hb. *Hesed*), the highest virtue in Hebrew society."³ W. Pink highlights David's favor to Mephibosheth as a picture of God's saving mercy, "David as a monarch over Israel suggests to us God upon His throne in heaven: David showing kindness to the family of his archenemy foreshadowed God's dealing in grace with sinners."⁴

King David recalls his promise. When he asks if there were any descendants of Saul to whom he could show kindness (v1 and v3), the servant Ziba answers that there is still a son of Jonathan who was crippled on both feet. (v4). Ziba reveals Mephibosheth's location, in the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar. The only survivor from the former royal family had

³ Robert D. Bergen, *1,2 Samuel*. Vol. 7, (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 54.

⁴ Pink, Arthur W. *The Life of David*. Vol. 1. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1998), 361.

departed to reside in a land located east of the Jordan River (Gaebelein 1992, 917).

The meanings of some proper nouns from this narrative found in a Hebrew lexicon show some interesting information. Also known as Merib-Baal, the name Mephibosheth means *destroyer of shame or idols*. This man was in the house of Makir, *trader*. The name of the location is spelled in different ways in several passages, which suggests certain difficulty in defining its accurate meaning (Gaebelein 1992, 917). The name of the town Lo Debar is composed by the negative particle Lo which is equivalent in English to *No* and Debar means *thing, cause, reason or pasture*. “Although the exact location of Lo Debar is uncertain, a likely identification is with modern Umm ed-Debar ten miles south-southeast of the Sea of Galilee.”⁵

Mephibosheth’s View of Himself

Although Mephibosheth’s fate was about to change, the way he saw himself indicated he was ashamed of his physical condition. “There he lived so privately none of David’s people knew whether he was alive or dead. Perhaps the savage practice of Eastern monarchs, who are wont to get rid of rivals by killing them, led the cripple son of Jonathan to ‘lie low’.”⁶

So, while the events in this story spotlight King David’s bold attitude, Mephibosheth’s speech in verse 8 draws attention to the brokenness and stigma carried by people who struggle with physical limitation. “The only one left is a man who considered himself on par with a dead dog.”⁷ According to Cook, in the East the wild dogs (Psalm 22:16-21, Psalm 59:1-14, Isaiah 56:9-12.) which exist in large amounts in towns are objects of dislike and insult humiliation (Cook 1981). Even though he belonged to the former royal family, there is a tendency to undermine his potential. As Steussy highlights, Mephibosheth meant no threat to David’s throne, kingship would be out of reach because of his lameness.

The passage contains 13 verses, and the term “lame on both feet” is present in verses 3 and 13. The text depicts a hopeless and undervalued man in opposition to a kind and virtuous king. “Mephibosheth’s humility of expression is painful. It was perhaps in part the result of his helpless lameness, and the other misfortunes of his life.”⁸ It seems that the author’s intention is to draw the reader’s attention to David’s qualifications, whereas Mephibosheth is less than an animal, he is a dead dog. His identity is totally defined by his physically abnormal appearance.

⁵ Frank E Gaebelein, ed. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vols. 3 (Deuteronomy - 2 Samuel). 12 vols, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1992), 917.

⁶ Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of the Holy Scripture.*, Vol. 2 Deuteronomy to II Kings 7, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House), 45.

⁷ Beates, *Disabilities and the Gospel*, 36.

⁸ F. C Cook, ed. *The Bible Commentary*, Vol. II Joshua to I Kings, (Grand Rapids Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981), 400.

The term "dead dog" in verse 9 was present in all Bible versions used in this research. Most biblical scholars give Mephibosheth's biography three marks: the accident that brought limitations to his body, that he was the last heir of Saul, and David's kind attitude fulfilling his oath to Jonathan. But, very few scholars bring to light the possibility that David's compassion might have been a modality of political strategy. "The story telling of David's generosity, however, makes no mention of the oaths, perhaps thereby implying that David's magnanimity was motivated not only by his oath but also by a plan to keep the descendants of the preceding dynasty under observation and to impress upon his own monarchy the stamp of continuity and legitimacy."⁹

Brueggemann also holds that David's political power might have been reinforced by this encounter with Saul's grandson. According to him, this event could have worked as a market campaign for David's kingship. "He is a no-name. He really does not matter, but he is entitled to the promise of David. No doubt he is also useful to David, rather like a White House media event with a poor family, to show that the government has not forgotten the politically powerless."¹⁰

One thing that is particularly intriguing is the fact that in several ancient Jewish writings Mephibosheth's trademark is not his lameness, but his noticeable knowledge of the Law. These writings place him at an honorable position; the king would listen to Mephibosheth's teachings. The Ha-Aggadah (sections of the Talmud with homiletic expositions, stories and legends of the Bible) refer to Mephibosheth as a wise man. The fragment that follows shows that his words were of great relevance to the king. In passage 86, which contains one of King David's prayer, verse 4 says, "In all that I do, I consult my teacher Mephibosheth. I ask him, 'Mephibosheth, my teacher, have I judged correctly?'"¹¹

The Complete Jewish Bible, in the comments section about 2 Samuel 9, notes that *Lo Debar* can be translated as *Not a Word* meaning lack of understanding of the Torah. The situation described asserts that Mephibosheth deeply comprehended the Law. "When David inquired about Mephibosheth, with a view to a royal appointment, the treacherous and disloyal Ziba said the prince is so unqualified that he possesses not a word of Torah knowledge. When David later met Mephibosheth, he discovered that this was untrue; the young man was a scholar of note (Shabbos 56a)."¹²

Still placing emphasis on Mephibosheth's knowledge of the Torah, an explanation for his name associates the word shame to the discomfort his wise words would cause those in contradiction or infraction with the law. "Why

⁹ Yishai Chasidah, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Personalitie*, (Shaar Press, 1994), 331-332.

¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1990), 267.

¹¹ Hayin and Yehoshua Ravnitzky, ed., *The Book of Legends Sefer Ha-Aggadah*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), 119.

¹² Barry Rubin ed., *The Complete Jewish Study Bible*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers), 2017.

was he called Mephibosheth [lit., *shame from his mouth*]? Because he put David to shame in *halachah* [by pointing out his errors] (Berachos 4a).”¹³

So, when Mephibosheth uses depreciative elements in his speech, is it the way he sees himself or the way he is socially noticed in his community? The term *dead dog* is also used by David in 1 Samuel 24:14, “Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Who are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea?” In this passage, David preserves Saul’s life because he was still the one anointed by the Lord. Schipper argues that the expression *dead dog* was commonly used as a sign of reverence when in the presence of an authority. “Furthermore, when one considers other ancient Near Eastern texts the use of the term ‘dead dog’ in Mephibosheth’s response to David suggests that he is following court etiquette by doing obeisance and asking a seemingly self-abasing, rhetorical question. The equivalent Akkadian term for ‘dead dog’ (*kalbu mitu*) appears in several correspondences with Ashurbanipal as an expression of severe self-abasement.”¹⁴

Stigmatized Labels and Identity

Either as a conventional use in the presence of kings and authorities or as a derogatory comment, the expression “dead dog” has pejorative and disapproving connotation. Mephibosheth’s identity is featured by a limitation that disqualifies him. The content in Leviticus 21 assigns specifications for the priests, not necessarily for a king. “It remains difficult to discuss this matter because, while biblical laws prohibiting “lame” persons from serving as fully functional priests exist (Lev 21:18), no biblical law prohibiting them from serving as kings exists.”¹⁵ Yet, one would hardly expect to have a lame man as a king in the Jewish context. This is still valid for current societies, especially here in America where the powerful, strong and culturally-accepted as beautiful are considered the standard and crowned with the best opportunities.

Former U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt’s story greatly exemplifies how hard it is to manage disability and political power. After being infected by the polio virus, President Roosevelt became crippled, and deliberately avoided being seen in his wheelchair. James Tobin points out that while Roosevelt was in the hospital, media speculated whether he would become crippled or not. Tobin added, “If the answer was yes, it would be highly newsworthy. It would affect not just the fortunes of a famous family but

¹³ Yishai Chasidah., *Encyclopedia of Biblical Personalities*, (Shaar Press, 1994), 330.

¹⁴ Jeremy Schipper, *Disability and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story*, (New York: T & T Clark, 2006),111.

¹⁵ Schipper, *Disability and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story*, 80.

the future of the Democratic Party in the state of New York, perhaps even the national ticket in 1924.”¹⁶

Breaking the stigma of disability is hard. The point here is not that as the only one remaining from Saul's lineage, Mephibosheth, should claim his entitlement to the throne. It is clear that his physical impairment would impede his engagement in wars or other royal duties. Second Samuel 19: 25 and 26 states one of these impediments. Because of Ziba's betrayal Mephibosheth's necessity was not attended; without a donkey he could not follow King David when he left Jerusalem.

Neither is the central idea of this study to analyze if King David's attitude was an act of real kindness or a political strategy to assure his monarchy. Instead, one of the aims is to give attention to the duality established by biblical texts which pose opposition. The most common opposites to "clean," "blessed," "non-defective" and "beautiful" are "unclean," "cursed," "defective" and "ugly." "When deployed by the writers of our texts, these oppositional discourses function to create unequal categories of persons. For example, those whose bodies are understood by the text as lacking 'defects' are privileged in any number ways over those whose bodies are cast as 'defective'"¹⁷

Valorization and stigmatization of groups have been present in society and displayed in many ways. Although accessibility to buildings and several rights have been incorporated in defense of the disabled in recent years, Beates argues that the church has not learned God's role for disabilities; therefore, it is not a fully welcoming place for people and families who struggle with disability. "This lack of understanding leads to closed doors for people with disabilities even after the handicapped spaces are painted in the parking lot, dipped curbs are cut, and ramps are built to the front entrance of the church. But the more vital problem is that the Christian community generally tends to keep people with disabilities marginalized in the church."¹⁸

Normally, people (including Christians) view the disabled as "dead dogs," these people are not directly despised; however, they are often ignored and /or inadequately assisted by Christian communities. "Rather than being a structure for empowerment, the church has more often supported the societal structures and attitudes that have treated people with disabilities as objects of pity and paternalism. For many disabled persons the church has been a 'city on a hill' – physically inaccessible and socially inhospitable."¹⁹ But the biblical account of Mephibosheth can be the starting point to trace possibilities for awareness and change.

¹⁶ James Tobin, *The Man He Became, How FDR Defied Polio to Win the Presidency*, (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2013), 91.

¹⁷ Saul M. Oylan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), introduction, Kindle.

¹⁸ Beates, *Disabilities and the Gospel*, 19.

¹⁹ Nancy L. Eiestand, *The Disabled God*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 20.

Dead Dogs vs. The Crown of Creation

In the first chapter of this research, there was emphasis on the biblical character Mephibosheth, and how his identity is built in the narrative of David. Special attention was given to his comparison to a "dead dog." Whether a common expression of self-abasement used to show respect to kings or not (as discussed in the previous chapter), the term carries a negative connotation that contrasts with the idea that man was created by God to steward and manage the earth's resources, as well as to rule over the birds, fish, livestock and wild animals which move along the ground. This chapter is aimed to show how this opposition relates to the concept of man created in the image of God through a disability perspective.

The separation between humans and the rest of creation is clearly stated in Gen. 1:26 and 27. Man should mirror and represent God on earth. This honorable position in Creation is not perceived by spirit and soul only, the physical aspect is also important. "If it is true that the whole person is the image of God, we must also include the body as part of the image."²⁰ Then what is to be said of bodies that cannot function well or that are deformed? Common sense associates the image of God with a non-defective body' so, comparatively, it may be challenging to conceive of non-normative bodies as a reflection of God's image.

Three major models explain how the *Imago Dei* is manifested in man. In the Substantive model, reasonable thought and ability to understand and deal with ideas or information characterize God's image in man. Yong notes that although this view elucidates, it does not completely define the concept of *Imago Dei*. Moreover, it marginalizes some categories of disabled people. Intellectually disabled who cannot fully show these features would be excluded in this model. Thus, this is a discriminatory and even oppressive view.²¹

The second model, the Functional view, claims that the primordial feature of the *Imago Dei* lies in how man functions, that is to say what man does. There is emphasis on the dominion over the other elements of Creation. "Having dominion over the earth, therefore, is essential to man's existence."²² In opposition to this view, Yong raises the question of discrimination. "Again, however, this view perpetuates a bias against people with disabilities who are oftentimes less physically and intellectually capable than others. Worse, it underlies the claim that 'the mentally retarded are without the image of God' since the *Imago Dei* is based on responsibility."²³

²⁰Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986),68.

²¹Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disabilities in Late Modernity*, Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007,174.

²² Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 79.

²³ Yong, 173.

The final view, Relational, places the essence of the *Imago Dei* on the ability to relate to God, oneself, and Creation. Karl Barth, as the representative of this model, ignores anthropological aspects between God's image and man. Barth advocates that the *Imago Dei* involves relationship of mutuality instead of a characteristic.²⁴ In respect to this view, while Beates in defense of the Substantial view suggests that focusing the relational aspect is insufficient and inadequate, Yong uses the Relational view to elaborate his claim. "This relational and Christological view seems to hold the most promise for a theological anthropology informed by disability perspectives."²⁵

The three traditional views do not fully provide room for disabilities. Beates holds that what, in fact, happens is an integration of all models. Still, the way Christian communities see disabled people is inadequate. He highlights that the three perspectives are present in society in a blended mode which is observed at church as well. "The views and practices of the Western culture and, too often, the church continue to span a wide range. There are those who persist in seeing deformities and disabilities as evidence of sin, something to be condemned and rejected. Others see people with disabilities as pitiable subjects to be patronized yet not fully accepted in society or the church."²⁶

Differently from Beates, Yong proposes a fourth view which would be less exclusive. He suggests that God did not make humanity in a homogeneous body form, instead genetic diversity also reflects His image. Therefore, people with disabilities with mild or severe limitations in their bodies and/or brains are valued members of the human family.²⁷ "My thesis is that the *imago Dei* is less about some constitutive element of the human person and more about God's revelation in Christ and in the faces of our neighbors; yet the life of Jesus provides a normative account for what it means to be human, and the Holy Spirit creatively enables and empowers out full humanity in relationship to ourselves, others, and God, even in the most ambiguous of situations."²⁸

Beates also elaborates that in a sense all individuals experience weakness and brokenness. Even those who possess an abled body face challenges that show human limitation toward the perfection of God. "While we are made in God's image, we are all weak and broken, and only in admitting and embracing that reality in ourselves and in others more overly and existentially afflicted will we come to know most fully the liberating and transforming power of the gospel of redemption in Jesus Christ."²⁹

In another volume, Yong reiterates that people with disabilities are created in the image of God because God does not make mistakes. They might

²⁴ Beates, 2012, 98.

²⁵ Yong, 174.

²⁶ Beates, 99.

²⁷ Yong, 182.

²⁸ Yong, 180.

²⁹ Beates, 119.

have to face very peculiar difficulties on a daily basis, but so do those whose bodies are fully capable. All people struggle with their different challenges, so the disabled ones should not be a target for bias and prejudice of non-disabled people. Additionally, Yong advocates that disabled people have an identity that is not limited to their physical or intellectual condition. "People with disabilities are people first who shouldn't be defined solely by their disabilities. More particularly, people with disabilities are agents in their own right. Of course, some are more capable of independent agency than others, but we now realize that our historical perspectives that pitied such people are misinformed."³⁰

In practical terms, dissociating someone who struggles with any sort of disability from their physical or intellectual differences constitutes a shift of paradigm. Mephibosheth's words in 2 Sam. 9:8 draw an image of a person who was not active; his disability seems to overridingly label other aspects of who he is. A "dead dog" in a normative standpoint implies that he depended on other people. Nevertheless, there are other aspects in Mephibosheth's narrative that show, from a disability perspective, his activeness rather than his passivity. "For example, the very passage that emphasizes Mephibosheth's impaired mobility (2 Sam 19:26) also says that he 'came down to meet the king' (2 Sam 19:24). Whereas other parts of this story recognize his needing assistance in order to get around, this text emphasizes his initiative instead."³¹

Conceiving of a person as a "dead dog" is a social construction, note that here the term "dead dog" refers to a disabled people in a general sense. Though living in a fallen world, man is the masterpiece of Creation and valued by his Creator. Scripture teaches that man has the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27, 9:6); it also reveals that He is the one who creates disabilities (Exodus 4:11). God is the Potter and decides how He works the clay, and in which shape each unique person should be (Isaiah 64:8). "God is not only the Creator of man and we are made *Imago Dei*, but we have seen that God is declared to be the Creator of disabilities. He is also, in some profound sense, the source of brokenness and the one who has ordained to use such brokenness for His purposes, and ultimately, for His glory."³²

Physical Differences in Ancient Israel

Disability is not a favored scholarly motif in theology. Schipper has pointed out that there are few studies in the field. He holds that other biblical characters have gained importance in the studies of social marginalization.

³⁰ Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: a New Vision of the People of God* 2011, chap. 1, Kindle.

³¹ Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: a New Vision of the People of God* 2011, chap. 2 Kindle.

³² Beates, *Disabilities and the Gospel*, 77.

Mephibosheth's disability is isolated in himself and not seen as a product of social ideologies. In addition to that, Schipper highlights that "by isolating disability in the individual, the medical model downplays the social, political, and architectural structures that also contribute to the disablement of people."³³

Yong claims that historical perspectives on disabilities are misinformed. In this same direction, Beates reinforces that the way the church sees disabilities is greatly molded by what historical voices have said. "As you read through the history of thought regarding disabilities, you may be shocked, disappointed, amused, encouraged, even confused."³⁴ Although History is part of the present, the voices from the past might echo inadequately, then it becomes necessary that the sound voices in the present promote improvement.

In ancient Israel disability was often related to sin and judgment. Israelite society posed some social, political and religious restrictions to those afflicted by physical impairment. One of the most debated and commented by scholars is the priestly requirements stated in Leviticus 21:16-23. Although these pre requisites suggest a certain type of discrimination, in those times it probably did not have the same meaning as current days. For society at that time, the notions of clean and unclean were more important than current inclusion and exclusion. "Ancient Israel was less concerned with what we late moderns would call discrimination against people with disabilities and more concerned with ordering an impure world through proper rituals, a recognizable symbol system, bodily hygiene, and social practices."³⁵

Conversely, Bruce suggests that disability characterizes relationships which involve power, in this sense families impacted by this issue would have fewer chances to advance in different types of dispute. "Although the evidence about disability is meager, it is easier to hear the voices of those with religious, political and social power than it is to access the views of people with disabilities, and those of their families and friends."³⁶

Beates engages in this conversation saying that although the early writings in the Mishnah connect disability to sin and judgment, there are later references in the Tosefta which bring a different perspective on disability. There, the disabled should receive a blessing. This shows that the rabbinic tradition recognized that all humans in whatever body shape were a creation of God. "The Talmud further refined this thinking to distinguish between those born 'normal' but later disabled and those born with some disabling condition. However, superseding the different nuances of the various strains of rabbinic

³³ Schipper, *Disability and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story*, 7.

³⁴ Beates, 83.

³⁵ Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disabilities in Late Modernity*, 23.

³⁶ Patricia Bruce, "Constructions of Disability (Ancient and Modern): The Impact of Religious Beliefs on the Experience of Disability," *Neotestamentica* Vol 44, no. 2 (2010): 254, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43048759>.

interpretation was a unanimous affirmation of life in whatever form it took. Though a condition may be deemed as a judgment, still a person was valued as a creation of God.”³⁷

Previously shown in this research, the text in Exodus 4:11 states that God creates disabilities. Additionally, in Deuteronomy 32:29 God declares Himself to be the source of affliction and healing at the same time. These contrasting ideas do not depict God as a puppeteer yet they show that His sovereignty and His purposes are beyond the limits human understanding can access. “It is abhorrent for some that the Judeo-Christian God of the Scriptures might be one who wounds and in his sovereignty 'afflicts' some with disabilities. However, if there is hardness in the one side, there is profound comfort in the other. He proclaims Himself the one who heals.”³⁸

In Isaiah 35:5 and 6 the tone of the passage is also hope. Yahweh clearly demonstrates that He cares for the weak and broken. The prophet proclaims healing, and this metaphor for the nation frequently uses the representation of the blind, the deaf and the lame. “But while it is important to note that such pronouncements have been the source of hope to many people with ‘disabilities’ throughout centuries, they also reinforce an ableist notion of embodiment that suggests both that people with disabilities are less than whole, and that bodily disabilities must be cured before such persons can be fully included in the kingdom of YHWH.”³⁹ It is also relevant to point that the association of disabled people to the broken, weak and other marginalized groups suggest that disabled people are always dependent on a third party assistance.

The vulnerability of certain categories of disabled people at the same time that suggests passiveness also reflects that YHWH provided assistance to them by institutionalizing protection laws. In the arena of protection laws, YHWH displayed his concern for the poor, the alien, the orphans and widows in a variety of biblical texts. “Yet, similar materials contesting the stigmatization of disabled persons are much rarer, although they do exist (e.g., laws protecting persons with disabilities in Lev. 19:14 and Deut. 27:18, or Ps. 146:8 on Yahweh’s special concern for the blind as well as other dependent sufferers.”⁴⁰

In ancient Israel, a physical difference, especially ones visible to the eye, were considered defects. Their sacrificial system which often required animals without any blemishes endorsed the assumption that a physical difference was a consequence of sin or a curse. Oylan highlights that biblical defects are socially-negative labels. “Persons with ‘defects’ are frequently stigmatized by biblical authors, who also assign them marginal social

³⁷ Beates, *Disabilities and the Gospel*, 87.

³⁸ Beates, *Disabilities and the Gospel*, 32.

³⁹ Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disabilities in Late Modernity*,

24.

⁴⁰ Oylan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible*, Introduction.

positions.”⁴¹ Oylan adds that the only alteration in the body that is regarded as positive is the circumcision. This exception alters the body but it does not change social status. Different from other alterations that are imposed as a punishment like the cutting off a lip or an eyelid, circumcision is not a disabling sign, it is enabling instead.⁴²

The Hebrew Bible does not clearly define mental disability. Biblical texts do not use technical vocabulary to refer to this condition. “To speak of mental disability in the Hebrew Bible and related literature is fraught with difficulty, given our rather limited understanding of the technical vocabulary used by texts to identify persons who might suffer from a mentally disabling condition.”⁴³ Yet mental disability is also seen as a punishment, “mental disability, like blindness, is cast as a covenantal curse in Deut. 28:28.”⁴⁴

Physical Differences during Jesus’ Earthly Ministry

It is out of the scope of this work to investigate a variety of passages that relate to disabilities in the Hebrew Bible. Nonetheless, the ones mentioned are essential to explain major approaches to disability in society and in today's church. Since Jesus' incarnation, the contact with people with disabilities became an important branch of His ministry. He set higher standards as he walked among those who were marginalized.

The deaf, the mute, the blind, and the lame are frequently mentioned to be among the crowds that followed Jesus. A traditional reading of the four Gospels highlights Jesus’ power to heal and His compassion for those who were stigmatized by society because their abnormal bodies did not function properly or appear “normative.” “The space between them and other humans seemed to represent the space of rejection. But there in Luke 5, God the Son showed compassion for this rejected man, broken in body, by first offering emotional healing through touch followed by physical healing through his divine power.”⁴⁵

At one hand, these healing events served to ensure that people with disabilities are common recipients of God’s favor; on the other hand, they also contributed to the perpetuation of the patient, suffering posture adopted by the disabled while they await healing in this present life or in the eschatological sense. Yong adds that during Jesus’ ministry, evil spirits sometimes appeared in association with disabilities. This new element added to the previous connections with sin and punishment reinforce the marginalization of people with disabilities.

While Creamer holds to the importance of the body in the healing accounts found in the Gospels, Yong focuses on the perpetuation of

⁴¹ Oylan, Chapter 2.

⁴² Oylan, 26.

⁴³ Oylan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible*, chap. 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Beates, *Disabilities and the Gospel*, 49.

stigmatization. Creamer supports that “From the point of view of the Gospels, the Christian message focuses on a particular body, the body of Christ that takes away the sins of the world and brings redemption to the world and to each believer.”⁴⁶ She also highlights that several accounts in the Gospels show Jesus touching the outcast and his body; Jesus broke a paradigm in Hebrew society.

Yong’s emerging view claims that “Jesus’ healing narratives served to perpetuate, at least implicitly, the ancient Hebraic beliefs regarding the connections between ‘disability and sin, impurity, and disorder.’”⁴⁷ Yong ponders that although Jesus affirmed in the account of the man who had been born blind that his blindness was not an outcome of his ancestral sinful attitudes, yet it was an opportunity for the Glory of God to be manifested. In John 5:14, the paralyzed man after being healed is instructed by Jesus to stop sinning. Alternatively, Beates suggests, “Perhaps his sin was the comfort he took in his position as an invalid to play on people’s emotions for help and assistance. It may be that he did not want to be well, because then he would become responsible for his situation and would be accountable to live well.”⁴⁸

Physical Differences in Early Christianity

When it comes to the Acts of the Apostles, very few passages refer to healing or disabilities. The most prominent account is in Acts 3 where a crippled man was healed at the temple. This passage is evidence that the church empowered by the Holy Spirit carried out Jesus’ ministry toward the outcasts and needy. Beates notes that this account indicates that in the covenant community of Israel the disabled were kept at the religious sites so that they could find attention and assistance from the faithful.

The same scene could not be easily seen today. “While this is still a practice in many places around the world, in the West we find that people with disabilities are generally absent among God’s covenant people in their gathering places. Rather, such people are carefully hidden in homes and care facilities, seldom ever gracing temples and churches with their presence.”⁴⁹ To illustrate this truth, Brock selected a simple quotation, “The times that ‘I have asked ministers and pastors about members of their congregations who are disabled, ‘writes the Dutch theologian Hans Reinders, the most frequent response is ‘We don’t have them’.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Deborah Beth Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 54.

⁴⁷ Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disabilities in Late Modernity*, 25.

⁴⁸ Beates, *Disabilities and the Gospel*, 55.

⁴⁹ Beates, *Disabilities and the Gospel*, 60.

⁵⁰ Brock, Brian. "Introduction: Disability and the Quest for the Human." In *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Brian Brock 1-23. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 01.

In this connection, drawing an analogy between Mephibosheth's account and disabled people in American society today, a parallel exists: Lo Debar versus the land of his family. Most disabled people are kept aside from the church gathering places. The truth is sad. Congregations do not have people with disabilities because the church does not provide a welcoming environment for them, so they keep themselves away.

Mephibosheth's Restoration

Mephibosheth's story in 2 Samuel is not limited to chapter 9. There are other chapters that refer to him. In this study some verses in chapters 16 and 19 are of great importance given the argument of this investigation. The chapters focus on different moments of David's kingship, and Ziba's interference changes the course of the king's previous decision. Thus, the intricate narrative of Mephibosheth undermines some important traits of his personality, either because of King David's prominence or because Mephibosheth's physical impairment becomes the strongest representation of himself. In other words, Mephibosheth is a character who is remembered for his lameness, and not for other valuable characteristics that gain evidence in the progress of the narrative in 2 Samuel.

An isolated reading of 2 Samuel 9 certainly leads the reader to commend King David's act of kindness to Mephibosheth. However, as instability surrounds David's kingship, the words that once revealed nobleness, in the end showed unfairness (2 Sam. 16:1-4). "David's long-standing promises to Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:14-17) and to Saul (1 Sam. 24:21-22) are roughly superseded by his own need for self-preservation. To be sure, David has not violated the letter of his earlier promises, but he has come very close to a violation of *hesed* against Saul's family."⁵¹

As Absalom's conspiracy took place, in 2 Samuel 16:1-4 the narrator points out that servant Ziba's mischievous plan against Mephibosheth was successful. David ordered that Ziba possessed everything that belonged to Jonathan's son because, according to Ziba, Mephibosheth had stayed in Jerusalem in order to betray David. Later in 2 Sam. 19:24-30, when the rebellion was over and David returned to Jerusalem, Mephibosheth's uncleanness showed that he had been loyal to David throughout the period the king had fled from Jerusalem. "Mephibosheth's defense is that, whereas it had been his intention to join David, Ziba had taken advantage of his physical disability. But now that both sides of the story are known to the king, whose discernment in such matters is preternatural, justice will be done."⁵²

Ziba's articulated wording in chapter 16 led David to react against his act of kindness in response to his promise made to Jonathan. Ziba is introduced by the narrator in 2 Sam. 9 as a minor character, and his

⁵¹ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 307.

⁵² Robert P Gordon, *I & II Samuel: a Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1986),228.

manipulative language is not only biased against Mephibosheth but easily convinces the king to reconsider his act which restored Jonathan's son with Saul's land. "In both Ziba's and the narrator's words we find considerable emphasis on Mephibosheth's lameness. He does not give his name, thus implying belittlement and denigration of his master's son,... referring to his incapacity."⁵³ The emphasis given to Mephibosheth's disability berefts him of agency; a careless reading of his narrative undermines rich aspects of his identity that are only noticeable when the reader deeply analyzes the instable dynamics of the triangle David-Mephibosheth-Ziba.

The King and the Crippled

David's verdict is an attempt to please both parties. But dividing Mephibosheth's land with Ziba favored more the second. Mephibosheth was loyal and lost fifty percent of his property, Ziba was a liar and ended up with half of the land. Impatience is noticeable in David's speech, and his decision may be an indication that he still doubted which version of the story was the right one. "His compromise solution suggests that he is not entirely sure about Mephibosheth."⁵⁴

Conversely, Bergen holds that although Ziba's intention was deceit, his deed provided supplies in a time of great need. David's decision was, then, fair and sensible. "David decreed a compromise that permitted Ziba to retain a reward for his service to the crown and yet permitted the king to keep faith with commitments made to Jonathan many years before. Mephibosheth and Ziba were to divide the field that had once made up Saul's estate. In a return to his role as supreme judge in Israel, David had successfully divided the 'child' with the sword of justice."⁵⁵

Vargon adds that in 2 Sam. 5:8 it is clear that King David did not show affection for disabled people; therefore, he did not require any sort of investigation in Ziba's discourse (2 Sam. 16:1-4). Then the king would have a reason to interrupt and cancel Mephibosheth's presence at his table. "It seems that the key to understanding these points of emphasis, as well as the substance of the passage as a whole, is supplied by the author in the stress he lays on the blind and lame motif in the conquest of Jerusalem episode (2 Sam. 5) and the remark that David detested them therefore forbade their entry to his house."⁵⁶

The complexity of David's position regarding the crippled and the blind can explain this favoritism to Ziba. "Mephibosheth's continuous presence had weighed heavily on David who found cripples repulsive."⁵⁷

⁵³ Shmuel Vargon, "The Blind and the Lame." *Vetus Testamentum* 46, no.4. (1996): 504. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1584962>.

⁵⁴ Gordon, *I & II Samuel: a Commentary*, 228.

⁵⁵ Robert D Bergen, *1,2 Samuel*. Vol. 7. (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 431.

⁵⁶ Vargon, "The Blind and the Lame," 504.

⁵⁷ Vargon, 507.

The Essence of Mephibosheth's Identity

The end of this trial is stated in 2 Sam.19:30. This verse also reveals the essence of Mephibosheth's identity: his loyalty. Few scholars comment on his attitude, but in this work his decision of renouncing his rights over the land demonstrates tremendous strength in his character. "Mephibosheth has won the argument; he is the descendant of Saul; he no longer requires personal income; and he has the last, and grandest – and apparently most gracious – word (v.30): 'Your return is enough for me; let Ziba take all.'"⁵⁸

Although the narrator in 2 Samuel stresses Mephibosheth's lameness by stating this information repeated times in the passages that describe his story, the narrative also centers attention on Mephibosheth's commitment to David. "The narrator leaves us in no doubt as to Mephibosheth's loyalty to David. At the beginning of the story, the narrator describes the mourning customs adopted by Mephibosheth (xix 15), thus Mephibosheth's adherence to visible form (visible also to David), at the same time quoting Mephibosheth's report on Ziba's betrayal during the uprising."⁵⁹

Another commendable aspect of Mephibosheth's identity is his gratitude clearly expressed in 2 Sam. 19:29. Schipper notes that Mephibosheth recognizes that he survived because of King David's covenant made with Jonathan. "While he makes this point to emphasize David's graciousness towards him and to flatter the king, he creates a sharp distinction between his fate and the fate of the other members of Saul's house, a distinction which one sees hints of in 2 Sam. 4 and 21. While they are dead men, he survives."⁶⁰

Schipper also highlights that interpretations of Mephibosheth's character are often imbalanced because they place greater attention on his physical limitation. "Throughout this study, I have criticized the interpretative tendency to reduce Mephibosheth to his disability and reduce the 'meaning' of his disability to powerlessness, personal or political collapse, and so on."⁶¹

It is hard to separate identity and disability. Still, this research is aimed to provide elements in Mephibosheth's account that can surpass his lameness. The "dead dog" survived, and his response to the king's final decision made him stronger. Although his restoration in a material sense has been decreased after David's decision, Mephibosheth's attitude at the end of this complex trial is virtuous. This present work claims that his identity should not be remarked by his physical limitation, but by his loyalty and gratitude to the king.

⁵⁸ Graeme A. Auld, *I & II Samuel, a commentary*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 559.

⁵⁹ Vargon, "The Blind and the Lame," 507.

⁶⁰ Schipper, *Disability and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story*, 121.

⁶¹ Schipper, *Disability and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story*, 125.

Transforming the Church's Approach to People with Disabilities

In the previous chapter, the relationship between Mephibosheth and David described in 2 Samuel revealed a hybrid connection. The former had been graciously restituted and would always eat at the king's table. However, David re-evaluated his decision after servant's Ziba interference, and Mephibosheth lost all the land that had been restored to him. Later, when David accessed both versions of the story, he decided to equally divide the land between master (Mephibosheth) and servant (Ziba).

The outcomes of the king's decision materially damaged Mephibosheth. Nonetheless, Mephibosheth's reaction surpassed common sense, and his loyalty and gratitude is evident. In opposition, David confirmed his discomfort with the blind and the lame. "David was thus initially highly successful in his internal struggle to overcome his weakness regarding the lame Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, but gave way later to his inclinations and failed the final test."⁶² This account mirrors the reality in the majority of churches in America today. The church fails in the business of keeping people with disabilities connected to the Christian community. If it is not part of their routine for people with disabilities to simply go to church, it is unlikely they will become active members in the community.

The first step to transform how the Church approaches people with disabilities is awareness. Christians need to understand the biblical foundations for disabilities. Fear of the unknown is one of the main causes for avoidance. Many people of faith address people with disabilities as being abnormal, but Yong advocates that the Church must be guided by the vision that the image of God is full in every person regardless of his capacities or abilities.⁶³ Thus, many Christians (most of the time unintentionally) keep people with physical or intellectual impairment away because they ignore them or treat them inadequately. "Unable to reside in the ambiguity created by encountering the different and strange – that which does fit into the alleged ordered scheme of things – communities judge according to basic fears. The different is frightening because it mirrors the weakness and vulnerability of a community's sense of itself, its identity."⁶⁴

Fear can be replaced by knowledge. Beates suggests that preaching and teaching leads to understanding how human weakness displays the strength of God's grace. "It is vitally important to maintain a biblical perspective toward God's goodness and his sovereignty while also recognizing

⁶² Vargon, "The Blind and the Lame," 512.

⁶³ Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: a New Vision of the People of God* 2011, 1452.

⁶⁴ Thomas E. Reynolds, "Invoking Deep Access: Disability Beyond Inclusion in the Church," *Dialog: a Journal of Theology* (September, Fall 2012): 216.

the reality of evil and suffering in this world that impacts both Christians and non-Christians.”⁶⁵

Consequently, as Christians acknowledge the power of brokenness, the church becomes stronger. Man is the crown of creation yet living in a broken world. For this reason every individual experiences brokenness in this or that way. It is sometimes hard for Christians to admit this truth, especially in American culture that poses strength and power as its mainstream paradigm. However, the power of God finds its way in human weakness. “In weakness his plans unfolds. Through human weakness his purposes are accomplished. When churches as a whole grasp this concept, understanding its full implications, individuals affected with disabilities should be seen as essential in the body of Christ.”⁶⁶ It is a fact that very few people with disabilities take part of Christian congregations. Consequently, the body of Christ is incomplete.

For this reason it becomes imperative that some action is taken to mitigate the effects of this gap. According to Beates, the main challenges to build an effective disability ministry lie on three facets. First, rarely will this kind of ministry flourish unless a person or family with a special need serves as a catalyst. Second, the process of breaking the stigma and eliminating fear from both sides may not achieve its completeness in a short span. Third, a disability ministry faces constraints with regard to viability because it is time consuming. “Church leaders and lay people rightly understand that, in all likelihood, making a commitment to ministry among the disabled will be time- and labor-intensive. It will never be convenient and will seldom have a return on investment that shows up in tangible ways.”⁶⁷

Thomson ponders that one of the biggest challenges of implanting a disability ministry is adequacy of the age and the cognitive level. Too often, churches offer a great support for children, while adults are unassisted. Thomson adds that a disability ministry should serve its participants different necessities and expectations. “This aspect of the ministry can be a key available resource to reach out and meet real needs while promoting healthy integration within the church and its ministries.”⁶⁸

Lastly, a great start in changing the church approach is education about common limitations. In this sense, everybody will experience some kind of disability with the aging process or an unexpected accident or disease. Creamer advocates that limits are intrinsic to the human nature. “Limits may then be compared and considered, but they are not seen as abhorrent or abnormal.”⁶⁹ So, church members who are equipping themselves to serve

⁶⁵ Daniel R. Thomson, "A Biblical Disability Ministry Perspective." In *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, ed. Larry J. Waters and Roy B. Zuck, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2011), 26.

⁶⁶ Thomson, "A Biblical Disability Ministry Perspective," 24.

⁶⁷ Beates, *Disabilities and the Gospel*, 135.

⁶⁸ Thomson, "A Biblical Disability Ministry Perspective," 30

⁶⁹ Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology*, 104.

those with limitations in the present might be the ones who will need the same kind of service in the future. Education should be an on-going process. "Often the ministry needs first to reach 'in' to the nondisabled congregation and church staff to educate them about common disablements and appropriate etiquette rooted in unconditional love, a nonjudgmental approach, and mutual respect."⁷⁰

Welcoming and Including Families Impacted by Disabilities

Families impacted by disabilities rarely go to church. The claim is that the church is not a welcoming place. As part of the transformational process, after nurturing the congregation with education and proper manners toward people with disabilities, the church should foster access and inclusion in a meaningful way.

Real access goes beyond painted spots in the parking lots or reserved seats. Access happens when the congregation understands that the possibility of disruptive noises, movements or behavior can be part of a service. "Unfortunately, Sunday morning remains one of the most segregated times in American culture. The local reflections of the body of Christ are too often homogeneous with respect to race, economic class, and people with disabilities."⁷¹

Meaningful inclusion is achieved when deep access and a real sense of togetherness become part of the church culture. Reynolds holds that deep access is attitudinal. In light of this, a welcoming and including environment is only possible when stigmatization and exclusion are overcome. As a consequence the "us" and "them" concepts are replaced by the concept "we all" are part of the body of Christ. "Hence, genuine access means cultivating a barrier-free communion of vulnerable and caring mutuality that is created by all and for all, in which people with disabilities are valued among others as contributing members."⁷²

Reynolds suggests that the inclusion process is disruptive because it challenges the visions of "normal bodies," being human involves sameness and diversity at the same time. The church's role is to encourage and support this transformative disruption. Another interesting aspect is that genuine access is never completed. This dynamic suggests that failing, learning, adjusting, and spiritually maturing together characterizes the work of God in the church. "Inclusion involves the participation of all, which depends upon access by and for all. Participation is not a paternalistic 'doing for' but an equitable 'being with' in a fulsome community of vulnerable sharing life. Access is not a one-time minimalist achievement, but an ongoing welcoming accommodation to make such participation possible."⁷³

⁷⁰ Thomson, "A Biblical Disability Ministry Perspective," 30.

⁷¹ Beates, *Disabilities and the Gospel*, 132.

⁷² Reynolds, "Invoking Deep Access: Disability Beyond Inclusion in the Church," 213.

⁷³ Reynolds, "Invoking Deep Access: Disability Beyond Inclusion in the Church", 221.

Baldrige poses that genuine inclusion aims the spiritual growth of the entire family. In practical terms, the family should be assisted, listened and loved. She suggests, "Make it easy for families to be active in church. Welcome all to be safe and feel safe, valued, respected, understood, appreciated, and accepted as God's creation."⁷⁴ Baldrige also points out that the use of adequate language makes a difference. When the language focus on the limitation, the personality disappears. Labeling undermine other traits and features that compose personhood. "In conversing with a person who has a disability, do not make the disability the focus. View the complexity of the total individual. Labels can only describe a fraction of that person. Perhaps we have simplified and dehumanized people by using labels."⁷⁵

Genuine access and attitude transformation are crucial to promote effective inclusion of people with disabilities. As disablement affects people in diverse ways, it is understandable that not every church is able to fully assist and meet every individual's particular need. Still, as disability is present in every community the Church cannot idly sit and allow these people First, hardly ever this kind of ministry will flourish without a person or family whose special needs serve as a catalyst. o be absent from the congregation. The church must transition from a non-disabled gathering place to a place that embraces people with disabilities, not to patronize or pity them, but to worship, serve, communicate and relate together "like the church itself points forward to the eschatological horizon of God's future banquet where all will be welcome."⁷⁶

Scriptural Encouragement for the Impaired for Participation

Disability is about different bodies. Through a medical perspective these bodies are defective and need to be mended. While as a consequence of social construction, these bodies are rejected or considered abnormal because they do not follow the accepted model of normality within the frameworks of place and time. Both, the medical model and the social model have affected the way Christians relate to people with disabilities. As previously pointed out in this study, too often these people are treated as objects of pity, or seen as inferior.

Nevertheless, different bodies are not abnormal or inferior. They represent the diversity that should compose the Church. Paul's use of the body metaphor to describe the Church shows how essential it is to cultivate and benefit from the interdependency of each body part. "Certainly on one level Paul is describing people with disabilities, broken people, as part of Christ's body, the new community. And his description of the Christian community

⁷⁴ Jessica James Baldrige, "Church-Based Disability Ministry" In *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, ed, Larry J. Waters and Roy B. Zuck, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2011), 40.

⁷⁵ Baldrige, "Church-Based Disability Ministry", 43.

⁷⁶ Reynolds, "Invoking Deep Access: Disability Beyond Inclusion in the Church," 214.

should be understood as normative, as what we should see when we walk into church.”⁷⁷

First Corinthians 12:21-26 emphasizes the importance of unity and diversity in the Body of Christ. The text originally addressed the Church in Corinth to eliminate Church divisions. These divisions were the product of the tension between different social classes. “There was an allusion here to the divisions in the Church of Corinth. There must not be the contrast between parts beautiful and ugly, glorious and vile, in the masterpiece of creation.”⁷⁸

Kenneth holds that Paul was warning against self-sufficiency in the individual and collective levels. At that time many Christian communities were being planted, and as they developed their own tradition, they isolated themselves and transitioned from dependent on each other to self-sufficient. “By the time Paul was writing, Christian congregations had sprung up in a wide variety of places around the eastern Mediterranean. Those communities needed each other. As the Church grew and spread, in a very few years there were Greek, Latin, Jewish, Syrian and Coptic expressions of the Church, each with their own language and culture.”⁷⁹

Collins and Hays state that the human body was a very useful literary image at that time. In many speeches orators used this linguistic resource to imply that as some members of the body were subordinate to others. Similarly, weaker people were subordinate to stronger ones. “The comparison between the body and human societies was a rhetorical commonplace (topos) in the ancient world, particularly in speeches calling for social concord.”⁸⁰

Interestingly, the Apostle Paul replaces the idea of political and social subordination by diversity and interdependence in the Body of Christ. “Thus, he employs the analogy not to keep subordinates in their places but to urge more privileged members of the community to respect and value the contributions of those members who appear to be their inferiors, both in social status and in spiritual potency.”⁸¹ In light of this, different individuals can contribute for the good of the community in different ways, this should include people with disabilities.

As mentioned earlier in this research, a church which develops a disability ministry should promote meaningful inclusion. “Having groups just for adults with disablements can also be considered (and may be preferred by some with a disablement), but unity in the body of Christ is the goal.”⁸² Not every person affected by disablement is intellectually impaired, for this reason they can develop an active identity in different sorts of ministry. Although these body parts are weaker and less visible, they are indispensable. “This

⁷⁷ Beates, *Disabilities and the Gospel*, 17.

⁷⁸ Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians*. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977), 646.

⁷⁹ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2011), 343.

⁸⁰ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 213.

⁸¹ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 213.

⁸² Thomson, "A Biblical Disability Ministry Perspective," 36.

means that the church can and should view people with disabilities as ministering agents in their own right so that the church's mission is carried out not just to people with disabilities but also with them."⁸³ Michael Justice suggests that these people have also received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and they can be involved in teaching, several types of organization, and also in evangelism.

Considering those with intellectual disabilities, Yong holds that they can be engaged in ministry, and rather than mere objects of the Church's mission, they can be collaborators. He suggests a partnership with organizations that gives assistance to those with cognitive limitations so that the intellectually impaired can be active with non-Christians who are impacted by the same issue. "I urge the church [sic] to find partners in the wider community whom they can support and learn from."⁸⁴

Some individuals are severely impacted by intellectual and physical disabilities. These people are generally institutionalized, and sometimes even abandoned. In most cases the church is able to provide the family with assistance and spiritual support. However, little is done to reach these individuals with profound disabilities and minister with them. Yong points out that, given the extreme limitations these people have, the only way the Church can approach these people is by means of friendship - a different yet precious kind of friendship.

Though not easily attainable, this possible friendship flourishes in sharing simple parts of a daily routine like sunbathing or having a meal together. "People with profound disabilities are not agents of ministry in the normal senses of that notion, but they are conduits of the revelatory and transformative gifts of God's Spirit for those who will slow down enough to befriend them, to see, hear, and touch in faith, and to receive God's presence into their own lives."⁸⁵

Disability is a common thing which is part of a fallen world. It may come abruptly after an accident; it may contradict the expectations of parents at the birth of a child; it may slowly develop when typical milestones are not achieved; and, lastly, it may come as a natural result of the body's aging process. Disability impacts, brings limitations, and physical or intellectual differences. Nevertheless, these differences cannot overshadow personhood and identity. People with disabilities bear God's image and are essential in the Body of Christ.

Conclusion

Ch.4. ⁸³ Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: a New Vision of the People of God*,

Ch. 4. ⁸⁴ Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: a New Vision of the People of God*,

chap. 4. ⁸⁵ Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: a New Vision of the People of God*,

The starting point for this research was Mephibosheth's relationship with King David. As the narrative develops, the king's attitudes lead to a failure. A careful reading of this story revealed that the king's kindness and favor to Mephibosheth turned into unfairness. David kept his oath to Jonathan in 2 Samuel 9, then in 2 Samuel 16:1-4 all the land that had been restored was transferred to Ziba. Finally in chapter 19:24-30 this dispute ends, David decides to equally divide the land between both parties. Mephibosheth remarkably gives away his part because the safe return of the king is enough.

Mephibosheth was granted the right to sit and eat at the king's table. But, eventually, he was not welcome anymore. The "dead dog" was noticed, invited to sit at the king's table, and then kept at a distance. So it was that King David made a promise, but, eventually, failed to keep it. Similarly, the Church has a spiritual pact with the disabled yet has failed people with disabilities connected with the Christian community.

Mephibosheth's loyalty, gratitude and resilience are frequently shadowed by his lameness. Physical or intellectual differences become stigmatized labels which are hard to break. However, people with disabilities generally have their identity hidden because all society can see is their abnormality. But, what is the true meaning of being normal? Society often defines a pattern of normality and marginalizes the unfit models.

Scripture teaches that, regardless of the appearance or ability, every individual bears God's image, even those with profound physical and/or intellectual disabilities. Disability is part of the fallen world. The Bible also says that God is the one who allows people to live in these severe conditions for His sovereign purposes and for the manifestation of His Glory. However, many Christians understand disability as an outcome of sin or as punishment. People with disabilities are too often treated as objects of pity or are patronized. Hardly ever are these people seen in church.

The church is not a welcoming place because of fear of the unknown, inadequate attitude/use of words, and self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, in 1 Cor. 12: 21-26 Paul teaches the importance of diversity and interdependence within the Body of Christ. Then, if people with disabilities are not part of the Church, the body is incomplete. The Church must find ways to fill this gap by transforming the approach toward disablement.

The last chapter of this research considers possible solutions to implement access and inclusion of people with disabilities in a meaningful way. First, the Church should become welcoming and accessible when the people of faith understand that even if they are abled-bodied they will experience brokenness and weakness in this life. Limitation is a feature of human nature. Second, Christians need to acknowledge the importance of the weak ones by means of real relationships.

Finally, implementing a disability ministry is walking the extra mile. It is time-consuming and tiring, but it is modeling Jesus. "Disability ministry was a daily, normal component of Christ's ministry while he walked on earth. He routinely ministered to and through those with disability of all ages, of all

types of disabilities, and at all levels of cognitive understanding."⁸⁶ Disability ministry is challenging yet achievable, and definitely an honorable feature a congregation should pursue.

⁸⁶ Thomson, "A Biblical Disability Ministry Perspective," 37.

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Religious Pluralism in the Military Serving the Call of God in the Chaplaincy of the Armed Forces

Jeremy Scott

For over two centuries, the chaplaincy of the United States military has served a noble tradition of stewardship over the spiritual and ethical wellbeing of soldiers and commanders. Many chaplains, however, have struggled to balance two biblical principles: the call of the Great Commission and the call to honor governing authority. Since the military has adopted a policy of religious equality purposed to uphold the constitutional rights of American citizens, an atmosphere of pluralism has prevailed that can present challenges for Christian chaplains. Specifically, it is a fundamental principle of Christianity that adherents are to “go and make disciples.” However, in answering this call there is an inherent risk of violating military regulations that hold all belief systems to be equal, and since these mandates have been established by governing authority the Christian chaplain may also face a perceived dilemma between honoring the Great Commission and honoring authority.

Despite this potential hardship, thousands of Christians have devoted years of service to the soldiers of the U.S. military since the inception of the chaplaincy. It is conceivable that at least some have succeeded in honoring both biblical principle and military code. If they can do it, then it can be done. The purpose of this paper, therefor, is to analyze and understand these principles to inform aspiring or currently serving chaplains and provide practical actions to honor God while serving in the armed forces. It is most certainly possible that God can work through military chaplains to reach the lost even amid religious pluralism, and this can be done while honoring both God and the statutes of the U.S. military.

Philosophical Pluralism

Before exploring how to interact with, and thus work through religious pluralism, it is vital to understand exactly what pluralism is. Dr. D.A. Carson, a noted evangelical scholar and co-founder of the Gospel Coalition, wrote that “pluralism” in general can be difficult to define unless refined into categories. For the purpose of this paper, a sufficient definition falls into the category of “philosophical pluralism,” which Dr. Carson defines as, “any notion that a particular ideological or religious claim is intrinsically superior to another is

necessarily wrong.”¹ Such a principle is a contradiction to many belief systems that consider the tenets of their ideology as accurate to the exclusion of others, namely the monotheistic faiths such as Islam and Judeo-Christianity.

Monotheistic worldviews, as a result, are by no means immune to heated criticism of their principle claims of truth, which are often labeled on platforms like social media as exclusivist, even elitist. The aversion to such views is primarily as a result of significant movements toward individualism that has increasingly permeated Western culture over the last two centuries. While this cultural shift is a topic for another time, for the intent of this paper it should help establish an understanding of the playing field in which not only Christian chaplains operate, but Christian ministers of any kind.

The growing emphasis of individual rights and freedoms that helped form the constitutional bedrock on which much of the Western world was founded have gone to such extremes that any worldview or belief system that threatens them is, at the very least, considered outdated, offensive and narrow-minded. This extreme is particularly visible in the younger generations who have reached adulthood since the turn of the millennium, and since this age group encompasses a large majority of the current military population it should come as no surprise that these pluralistic leanings have found their way into military regulation.

Military Regulation and Religious Freedom

In the most recent iteration of the Army regulation that outlines the responsibilities and code of conduct for chaplains (AR 165-1, revised June 2015), clear directives are given such that, “Chaplains will minister to the personnel of their unit and/or facilitate the free-exercise rights of all personnel, regardless of religious affiliation of either the chaplain or the unit member.” This does not seem to leave much room for argument from the Christian chaplain who holds the Bible and its tenets to be authoritative above all other religious texts or beliefs. Thankfully, there is some relief later in the same regulation, “Chaplains will not be required to perform a religious role in worship services, command ceremonies, or other events, if doing so would be in variance with the tenets or practices of their religion.” Although this may serve to release the chaplain from engaging in activity that would violate their faith, it still leaves a generous amount of “gray area” regarding how the chaplain may, or may not, propagate the Christian faith as they are commanded in the Great Commission.

This “gray area” is what gives many chaplains pause as they engage in their daily routine. Given that the American political landscape seems to always be in motion, shifting and changing on a near constant basis, some may feel uncertain what specific practices are acceptable. Additionally, there is hardly

¹ D. A. Carson, “The Challenges of Contemporary Pluralism,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 7–8..

a lack of supposition and gossip regarding chaplains who have faced consequences as a result of failed adherence to the seemingly endless amount of military regulations. One supposed example of this is the story of former Navy Chaplain Lieutenant Gordon Klingenschmitt, of whom John D. Liang wrote an article concerning the matter. Liang records how Chaplain Klingenschmitt has come by the title, “the chaplain who prayed in Jesus’ name.” However, there is speculation that the title was self-acquired, “the suggestion being that he is one of the few who has dared utter the name of Christ in the course of executing his duties as a military chaplain.”² Liang states further in the article that Klingenschmitt had even claimed persecution and eventual court-martial simply for praying in the name of Jesus Christ. While these claims have never been substantiated, the resulting apprehension from stories like this is significant, especially for chaplains wrestling with broader issues such as honoring the Great Commission.

The Call to Evangelize

While the topic of the Great Commission and its implications for evangelism could encompass numerous articles, papers, essays and other literary works, the purpose of addressing the issue here is to answer the question, “if the military mandates respect for religious equality among all belief systems, where is the point of contention for the Christian minister?” This question is answered mainly by a look at Matthew 28:18-20 in which Jesus Christ instructs his followers to, “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” The text has often been cited as the core principle behind all forms of Christian evangelism, and since the teachings of Christianity hold Jesus Christ as *the Way*, *the Truth* and *the Life*, it stands to reason that there may be a tension between honoring this command and honoring the mandate of military code that considers all beliefs systems to be valid.

Following this line of thought, some chaplains might conclude that the call of Jesus Christ to go and make disciples is superior to any man-made regulation or law. Acts 5:29 even provides a record of the Apostle Peter exclaiming that, “we must obey God rather than men!” This might seem to answer the question for the Christian chaplain and indicate that they are not only released to evangelize as they see fit but are obligated to do so. However, another biblical principle must be considered as well, that of submission to authority. Romans 13:1 instructs believers to honor governing authority since it, and all other authority, is established by God himself. If this principle is true, then the chaplain who disregards military regulation would not only be dishonoring the military itself but also God by proxy. It thus becomes

² John D. Liang, “Praying in Jesus’ Name,” *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 14.

necessary for the chaplain to find balance between honoring God and military code since the former requires both. The next section will hopefully provide a clearer understanding of submission to authority via proper exegesis of the text itself.

A Brief Exposition of Romans 13:1

The call to honor authority as given by the Apostle Paul has a long and sometimes sordid history among theologians, clergy and laity alike. Much like the marital model of a wife's submission to her husband as given in Ephesians 5:22-23, the principle of submission to governing authorities has, on more than a few occasions, been taken as an absolute. When Paul states that, "every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities," the assumption is made that in all situations, in every context and to every type of authority should there be unwavering submission, loyalty and reverence by all who are subject. The subsequent text would also seem to reinforce this idea, "for there is no authority except from God, and those who exist are established by God." However, assuming this principle is absolute regarding all authority and in every circumstance is indicative of a superficial understanding of this passage and its implications for the Christian's obedience to authority.

In a work that restates James M. Wilson's *Civil Government: An Exposition of Romans 13:1-7*, Dr. Raymond W. Boeche takes great lengths to explain the original Greek of this passage, placing special emphasis on the authority as described in verse 1 as "civil government," at least within the context Paul wrote. Additionally, the character of said civil government is expected to be one that serves as God's servant to the people. Because of this, Dr. Boeche states, "Christians must, ultimately, only yield obedience to the 'higher law' of God, to which every human soul is subject. Even the most benevolent, masterful government, can expect obedience to extend only as far as God's law allows."³ It would seem, then, that submission to authority in the context of this verse is limited specifically to civil government, and then only insofar as this government operates under submission to the Law of God.

Having stated this, it is imperative that the Christian understands the scope of this passage and not take lease to interpret the actions of civil government as biblical or otherwise according to their own notion. The Bible itself only records a handful of occasions in which godly men and women directly disregarded the law of the land in favor of the Law of God. Some examples of these instances are:

- A) Daniel 6, where the Prophet Daniel continued to offer his prayers to God despite a decree from the king that prohibited such practice.

³ Raymond W. Boeche, *A Time to Stand: When Government Turns Its Back on God* (Philadelphia, PA: Lux Et Veritas Books, 1995), 14.

- B) Acts 5:29 when Peter and several of the Apostles refused to cease teaching in the name of Jesus Christ.
- C) Exodus 1:17 when two Egyptian midwives neglected to obey Pharaoh's command to kill all male Hebrew children.

It is key to note that in each of these instances the law of the land (whether an actual decree or simply a command given by governing authority) came into direct contradiction with the Law of God. Daniel's case is a primary example in which King Darius' decree to worship no other gods but himself was an absolute violation of the first commandment of Mosaic Law not to have any other gods before the Lord himself. This realization should limit the freedom one may take in deciding whether a civil law or regulation should be followed or not since a good understanding of the Law of God is necessary before making such a judgement. This is important when the Christian chaplain weighs following military regulation or following the Law of God.

Military Code and the Law of God

At this point it is important to examine the actual codes of conduct the military has established regarding the chaplaincy and their practices. Among their many functions, chaplains primarily serve the spiritual, ethical and moral needs of soldiers and commanders while also representing the chaplain's own faith group to the best of their abilities. Some might rightly predict these two functions would, at some point, be at odds with one another. A question of emphasis comes into play when the responsibilities of one role, that of ministering to the spiritual needs of soldiers, comes into contradiction with representing a certain faith group. As an example, a Christian minister who is asked to perform a same-sex marriage ceremony for two soldiers in their unit would be faced with either compromising their role as caregiver or compromising their doctrinal beliefs in a faith that does not endorse homosexual relations. Thankfully, as mentioned earlier, the regulations that mandate respect for religious freedom also prevent the chaplain from engaging in activities that would compromise the principles of their faith.

However, while these regulations are present at this time, there is a growing concern that with the rise in postmodern thinking and relative truth prevalent in the young adult generation, chaplains may see increased pressure toward honoring the "collective good" more than honoring sound doctrine. Page Brooks, who serves the Louisiana National Guard as Brigade Chaplain for the 139th Regional Support Group, has voiced such concerns, "I do envision the role of the chaplain changing. The chaplain will be seen more as a spiritual advisor or guide rather than a pure minister representing his or her faith

group.”⁴ This concern is relevant to the current situation since many chaplains who are currently in service to the military, or who are applying to do so, may in their own time see such changes as those Chaplain Brooks mentioned. Therefore, it is even more vital for the aspiring or current chaplain to be well grounded in Scripture and their own doctrinal theology in order that they may, as Chaplain Brooks puts it, “cooperate without compromise.” This will be explored in the next section by outlining several key steps the chaplain can take in this endeavor.

The Foundational Doctrine

Prior to addressing the plethora of nuances in theology, the Christian chaplain should have a firm foundation in the core of the gospel, namely the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Millard J. Erickson once stated that, “correctly understanding the doctrinal teachings of Christianity is the solution to the confusion created by the myriad of claimants to belief.”⁵ For the Christian, it is from the core belief in the person and work of Jesus Christ that all other doctrine is derived. Although many chaplains will have already studied this thoroughly, it is still important to reinforce this point.

Knowing the Audience

In many ways, evangelism in the military is no different from evangelism in the civilian world. Soldiers struggle with the same questions of, “who am I?” and, “what is my purpose?” The answers to these questions are in the same gospel message, but conveyance of that message differs from person to person. Ineffective delivery will have the same consequences in the military as it would anywhere else. Greg Laurie, pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in California, said of gospel delivery, “many times, unbelievers are not rejecting the gospel as much as they are rejecting the way it is presented.”⁶ Masterfully evangelizing soldiers is a skill that is both Spirit-driven and time-honed, especially given that soldiers sometimes face horrors found in no other walk of life. In these dark hours, the importance of sharing the message of Jesus Christ in effective ways relevant to the person cannot be overstated.

⁴ Page Brooks, “In Affirmation Of ‘Cooperation Without Compromise’: The Chaplaincy in a Pluralistic Society.” *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2012).

⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2015), 5.

⁶ Greg Laurie, *Making God Known* (Dana Point, CA: Allen David Publishers, 2007), 93.

Preparing for Hard Questions

Typical resistance to the gospel message often includes rebuttals centered around hard topics. Suffering, addiction and war are all unfortunately common within the military, and simply avoiding these topics will not only undermine the chaplain's ministry, it could permanently repel those who are in desperate need of these answers. One example subject, that of homosexuality, is very likely to be broached more than a few times in the duration of a military chaplain's career. William Lane Craig, the noted theologian and author of several books focused on Christian apologetics, remarked about the importance of the clergy addressing homosexuality, "one of the most volatile and important issues facing the church today is the question of homosexuality as an alternate lifestyle. The church cannot duck this question."⁷ Craig goes on to comment on his concern for the many churches who affirm this lifestyle as legitimate, "some churches have even endorsed the homosexual lifestyle and welcome those who practice it to be their ministers."

While the topic of homosexuality is not the focus of this paper, the reality is that chaplains will face this and many other difficult issues during their ministry and must be prepared with answers that are biblical, relevant and ultimately purposed to bring the salvation of God into the life of those asking the questions. The chaplaincy is a calling for those equipped to cope with hardship with poise, professionalism and grace. This serves not only to set a good example but also to maintain a sense of wellbeing in the chaplain's own life.

Respect for Diversity

This is, perhaps, one of the greatest challenges for the Christian minister within the military. As stated earlier, the military has increasingly adopted an attitude of pragmatism regarding spiritual diversity. While most of the military spiritual leadership was once Christian, recent decades have seen chaplains from many other faith groups joining its ranks. Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, and even secular humanist worldviews are now represented in chaplain offices across the United States. Donald F. Carter, a retired Army chaplain, shared some of his career experience on the matter, "there are many deeply spiritual people in the service whose lives have been a great inspiration to me. However, the military establishment is definitely a secular organization. There is no particular sympathy for the spiritual realities that mean so much to us."⁸ When engaging members of other faiths, it is important to remember the overall military stance toward spirituality in general.

⁷ William Lane Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 130.

⁸ Donald Carter, "The Military Chaplain: The Framework within Which He Serves," *Grace Journal* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1969):

While the above can be challenging, there is also great opportunity in having an open dialogue not only with military commanders but also with chaplains of other faiths. Ministers that shy away from debating other perspectives run the risk of having a shallow answer to the “why” of their faith, whereas discussions with differing, even opposing viewpoints can bring the chaplain to new levels of wisdom that not only benefit them but also those they minister to. This study, if nothing else, should make it clear that while pluralism is a reality that is here to stay, this should be taken less as a disheartening obstacle and more as an opportunity to let truth speak for itself in actions as well as words. This, in the end, is the chaplain’s greatest asset: the story that their life tells.

The Balance of Submission

There is a dire need for chaplains in service of the U.S. military, but an even greater need for chaplains who represent their faith in both word and deed. Christianity truly shines when the onlooker sees hope amid suffering, faith amid hardship, and compassion amid a world in turmoil. It has been shown that, while current military regulations may restrain some practices of the Christian faith, they by no means make it impossible to effectively evangelize. There are practical steps that the chaplain can take to prepare for ministry in the military and to cooperate with military code without compromising core doctrinal beliefs. These steps include respecting diversity, preparing for the difficult questions, getting to know those who are in need of the gospel message, and being grounded in the core principles of that message.

There is no denying that ministry to soldiers who have dedicated their lives to the defense of the United States is a difficult task. Douglas L. Carver, Major General U.S. Army (retired), shared his heart on this matter,

Ministering the Gospel of Jesus Christ within an institutional setting comes at a great cost. It requires incalculable sacrifice, an ineffable compassion for people who often have little to no use for God or religion, and an irreproachable respect for the structured authorities that govern our lives. Chaplains constantly manage a tension between the sacred and the secular, often finding themselves as the sole champion of religion’s “place” in their respective organization.⁹

The challenge may seem daunting, but the fruit this ministry can produce is far worth the effort. While every life is precious to God, there is something truly special about leading a soldier to Christ. It should, therefore, be encouraging

⁹ Douglas L. Carver, “Reflections of a Retiring Chaplain,” *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2012): pg. 58,

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to know that it is most certainly possible that God can work through military chaplains to reach the lost even amid religious pluralism, and this can be done while honoring both God and the statutes of the U.S. military.

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The Marks of Cain: Archetypum non Gratia

Diana Cox, M. Ed.

"Murder most foul..." decries the ghost of Hamlet's father-King, not unlike the words of God unto Cain. The Torah recounts the story of humanity's first murder: "Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him."¹ Yet, this famous first murder had no trial, no jury, no criminal proceedings whatever. Traditional social norms view this act as a crime deserving capital punishment or at least life imprisonment. But that judgment never came. Despite God's decision not to take Cain's life and, furthermore, to provide him with a protective mark for the rest of this life, scholars still brand Cain with the traditional "evil-seed" stereotype. But as the biblical version of the story is a bit cryptic and quite succinct, some of the previous presuppositions about the plot and characters involved may be errant. Certainly, due to the brevity of the text, more people have inferred information that does **not** appear in it than have interpreted that which does.

In the midst of the historic commentary lies an age-old debate about Cain himself. Who was he? Why did he do what he did? Why would God protect such a criminal? And what should humanity learn from the biblical account? Although these basic questions have sparked dialogue and speculation for millenia among the Jews, the early opinions unwittingly created a concrete concept of Cain that has confused critics and Christians alike. Regina Schwartz, author of *The Curse of Cain*, commented thusly:

A murderer, an outcast, a man cursed by God and exiled from his people - Cain, the biblical killer of Abel, is a figure of utter disdain. But that disdain is curiously in evidence well before his brother's death, as God inexplicably refuses Cain's sacrifice while accepting Abel's. Cain kills in a rage of exclusion, yet it is God himself who has set the brothers apart. We ignore the dark side of the Bible to our peril. The perplexing story of Cain and Abel is emblematic of the tenacious influence of the Bible on secular notions of identity - notions that are all too often violently exclusionary, negatively defining "us" against "them" in ethnic, religious, racial, gender, and nationalistic terms.

This view of God, Scripture and Christianity has pit non-Christians against Christians for two millennia, and her concerns are valid. Traditional

¹ *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary*, translated by Rev. M. Rosenbaum and Dr. A.M. Silbermann, *Bereishit* IV:8, (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co.), n.d.

interpretations of the Cain story have created an evil Cain of "utter disdain." When the story reveals that God lets him live and then protects him from retribution, it is understandable that people question God's justice, especially in light of God's own Law. Schwartz has a point; the story in its traditional interpretation is "perplexing." The "dark side of the Bible," as she notes it, and the legacy of Christendom for millennia has been responsible for the denigration and decimation of demographic populations throughout history.

Furthermore, non-Christians are not alone in their sense of confusion about the Cain story. Replete in Christian commentaries are the queries of why God would protect such an evil being, allow him to live and do so apparently profitably. Christians have inevitably concluded that God's protective mark demonstrated His marvelous mercy. And while God's love is spectacular, that answer exemplifies a shallow explanation that ignores a deeper reality about Cain, the man. Little thought in Christendom has been given to resolving the following questions: Did Cain repent? Why did God protect him? How did he live the rest of his life? And can any good come from his story? Jewish dialogue, speculation, and conclusions have provided deeper declarations that clarify and correct Christendom's oversimplification. Once a few corrective suggestions on the verses preceding Cain's mark illuminate the narrative, the story's perplexing contradictions easily resolve.

Included is a modern suggestion for one unspecified detail that has generated a multi-millennial conundrum: What exactly was the mark of Cain? Everyone knows the story: Cain and Abel submit their offerings unto God. God favors Abel's and Cain pouts. God advises, warns, and encourages Cain to improve. Instead, Cain kills his brother. God exiles Cain, but instead of instituting "an eye for an eye" which the Scriptures command, He institutes a mark of protection staying with him for seven generations. Whereas the Torah says only "mark," rabbis, early church fathers and historic clerics have offered multiple hypotheses regarding its specific identity. Through etymological exegeses, historical reports, recent discoveries in genomics and hereditary science, and clear logical reasoning, a new perspective on Cain the man and a tantalizingly sufficient identity for the elusive mark reveals that God's sovereign plan for man runs farther, wider, and deeper within man than anyone expected.

CAIN: REPROBATE OR REPENTANT?

As the story of Cain and Abel predates Moses and any written records, no extra-scriptural contemporaneous documents exist, yet that stopped no one from theorizing about the plot or the characters. According to Ruth Mellinkoff, author of *The Mark of Cain*, early Jewish thought viewed Cain from one of two stereotypes: "a sinner who sincerely repented and was therefore rewarded with a token of forgiveness; or the opposite, an unregenerate, unredeemable

murderer whose sign advertised his shameful deed."² The targums, Aramaic translations of the *Tanach* with rabbinic interpretations, were first circulated in the first century AD. According to Mellinkoff, "The origin of targums is intimately associated with the early synagogue which in those days (before the fall of Jerusalem AD 70) was primarily used for reading or reciting the Hebrew Scripture."³ The targums are some of the oldest complete and currently cited documents that refer to Cain. As these were the Scriptures that existed during Christ's lifetime, their content may have been read in the Temple where He preached. Throughout the centuries, respected rabbis added their ideas and applications to those targums making it a living, interactive document for the Jewish people. But these writings, according to Bowker, editor of *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, are "half-way between straight-forward translations and free retelling of the biblical narrative."⁴ Consequently, three concepts are important to keep in mind: Ideas in the targums are post-sinaitic, sometimes by a thousand years or more; their thoughts are neither inspired nor canon; and their purpose, in an oral tradition, was to relate the stories in such a way as to make them memorable and didactic for the next generation. Therefore, the ideas presented are not "Truth" per se but educated discussion from which elements of truth may be gleaned. These theories that follow herein are presented to show three concepts. First, there existed two ideologies regarding Cain. Second, one of them was quite literally "lost in translation." And third, that lost ideology could resolve the perplexing contradictions of the story.

Of particular note is that two conflicting views of Cain's stereotype occur within the targums themselves. The interpretation expressed in *Targum Onkelos* is that Cain was a reprobate. Regarding Genesis 4:13 it states, "And Cain said before the Lord: Great is my guilt, more than to be forgiven."⁵ This phrase was declared to be Cain's belligerent response to God's curse exiling him. It hardly sounds belligerent, but that interpretation was reflected in both the Septuagint and the Vulgate which were translated from *Targum Onkelos*. Thus, expectedly, they both render the same idea of a belligerent Cain. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew *אִיָּא* as *ἡ αἰτία* which means *accusation* or *guilt*. The same expression is used in Matthew 27:37 at Christ's Crucifixion, "And set up over his head his accusation written: This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." According to Robert Gonzales, Jr., author of *Where Sin Abounds: The Spread of Sin and the Curse in the Primeval History*, the same translation occurs in Luke 23:4, John 18:38, 19:4 and 6, Acts 13:28, 23:28, and 28:18

² Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain*, "Cain and Repentance," (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 1.

³ John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1969), 3-14.

⁴ Bowker, 8.

⁵ John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1969, 135.

which substantiates the meaning.⁶ The Septuagint translates the active Hebrew verb *סָלַח*, meaning *to bear or to forgive* into the passive verb *ἀφεθῆναι*, meaning *to be forgiven*. Gonzales continues, "The Vulgate translates the noun with 'iniquitas' and the verb with the phrase 'ut veniam merear' ('to merit pardon')." ⁷ He uses the Douay-Rhims Bible translation which states, "My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon" and concludes from those supposed-evidences that Cain believed his sin was too great to be forgiven and, therefore, he made no attempt at repentance. Cain's words, thus, gave rise to a rigid, one-sided interpretation that not only translated into Greek and Latin but into the minds of everyone who read it for two future millenia.

Some scholars, like Umberto Cassuto, however, author of *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah*, see the definitions of the terms differently. He explains, "as a rule' the terms *סָלַח* and *יָצַח* when used together refer to the idea 'to forgive iniquity'." If Cain's words meant that, then he may have been expressing, "My iniquity is great, yet you are greater to forgive it." This yields the interpretive possibility of Cain's repentance and, thus, justification for God's mark of mercy.⁸ But Gonzales contends, "the terms *יָצַח* and *סָלַח*, when used together, do not always... mean, 'to forgive iniquity,'" and more often, he says, indicate "bearing guilt." He cites many Old Testament sources to support his judgment: Ex. 28:43; Lev.5:1, 17; 7:18; 17:16 and more. Gonzales is so stalwart on his stereotype of the unrepentant Cain that he proclaims,

Nowhere in the surrounding context does Cain appear to reflect genuine contrition and a desire for forgiveness. In light of the fact (1) that Cain defies God's punishment by settling down and building a city (4:16-17), (2) that there appears to be no trace of true religion preserved in Cain's lineage (4:17-24), and (3) that Cain's descendants manifest his evil recalcitrance to a greater degree (4:23-24), the depiction of Cain entreating God's forgiveness is tenuous.⁹

These two learned men share different but impassioned conclusions. Most scholars interpret Cain's words as unrepentant amid the debate, even when that choice of interpretation creates an inherent contradiction in the story's plot. But

⁶ Robert Gonzales, Jr., "Where Sin Abounds: The Spread of Sin and the Curse in the Primeval History," *Reformed Baptist Theological Review*, Vol 5:1, (Jan. 2008), 44.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978), 222.

⁹ Robert Gonzales, Jr., *Where Sin Abounds: The Spread of Sin and the Curse in the Primeval History*, *Reformed Baptist Theological Review*, Vol 5:1, (Jan. 2008), 46.

when a sinner confesses his sin, he **should** see it as unworthy of being forgiven. That exemplifies the very contrition with which one should approach the throne of God. Yet the Septuagint, Vulgate and all consequent traditional Christian perspectives that used those translations, completely ignored that there existed another possibility, thus paving the way for the "perplexing" perspective that persisted.

Mellinkoff presents that the Cain story is incomplete and contradictory when interpreting Cain as a reprobate. Why would God allow an evil murderer to live, create a family and allow his descendants to prosper? Furthermore, why would He protect the reprobate and punish one who would slay him? Trying to answer those questions with the "reprobate" presupposition leads a reader only to contradiction. But when the repentant Cain interpretation is presupposed, the story's ostensible contradiction suddenly becomes a natural cause-effect relationship. Cain repented; God relented.

In the Palestinian *Cairo Geniza Fragment*, the text suggests that Cain's words showed anguish over his act and, thus, repentance. "And Cain said before the Lord: Many are my sins, more than to be defended, and they are many before you to be absolved and forgiven."¹⁰ The second example of this interpretation appears in the Pseudo-Jonathan Targum, a Babylonian version. "And Cain said before the Lord: Severe indeed is my rebellion, more than to be borne, and yet it is possible with you to forgive it."¹¹ That text further asserts Cain's repentance in its rabbinic commentary of Genesis 4:24, "Now Cain who had sinned and turned in repentance had seven generations [of life] extended to him."¹² Seeing Cain as a repentant sinner makes more sense in light of God's response to him in the biblical text. Moreover, it may solve a few other seeming contradictions.

CAIN'S SO-CALLED CRIME

Most interpreters view Cain's fratricide as sin. They presume that murder forbidden in the Mosaic Covenant must also have been forbidden in God's previous covenants with Adam, Abraham, and Noah. All interpreters agree that each covenantal relationship had its own parameters, yet most cling to the presupposition that murder was a violation in all of them. Yet nowhere in Genesis does God actually specify murder as a "thou shalt not." In fact, one could speculate that the very reason it was specified in Mosaic Law in Exodus was precisely *because* it had not been previously forbidden.

When governments make laws, they do so because one did not exist previously. Article 1, sections 9 and 10 of the United States Constitution

¹⁰ John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1969), 135.

¹¹ Bowker, 133.

¹² Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain*, "Cain and Repentance," Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981, 7.

prohibit the legislature from enacting ex post facto laws, stipulating that one cannot be tried for an activity "that was legal when it was performed."¹³ So, following that and noting the absence of any direct or particular specification in Scripture stating that fratricide was forbidden, the conclusion that "murder" even existed as a concept is possibly erroneous.

Furthermore, God does not repeat a law to Cain when He addresses him. This is quite different from God's response to Adam and Eve. God was particular about asking Adam if he had disobeyed. "Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I have commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?"¹⁴ God knew there was a law; Adam knew there was a law; and they both knew the law had been broken. Consequently, God addressed the law and the disobedience. Yet, in Cain's situation God did not do this. Assuming precedent, if there had been a law forbidding fratricide with a consequence stated by God, He surely would have addressed Cain's disobedience directly, just as He did with Adam and Eve. In light of such evidence, it may be legitimate to conclude that God had made no commandment against, or provision for, fratricide.

Finally, the Covenant of Moses specifies a life for a life. Exodus 21:12 states, "He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death." The decree is repeated in verse 14, "...if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile, thou shalt take him from mine altar that he may die." God clearly requires the death of a murderer. Yet God does not take Cain's life. If the law against murder had existed in the Adamic Covenant, then God's action would have contradicted His own law. While God is God, and He can give Grace where He wills, acting against His own law would be a poor example of justice. So, as there is no evidence of an existent law, no direct address from God specifying a law, and no action taken by God following such law, there is no legitimacy to the idea that the Covenant of Creation or the Adamic Covenant even addressed fratricide let alone forbade it.

CAIN'S SO-CALLED "CURSE"

One man's trash is another man's treasure summarizes the idea that perception is reality. That rule may ring true in the story of Cain as well. "Curse" may be defined as "any expressed wish that some form of adversity or misfortune...befall...one or more persons... [or] a wish or pronouncement made effective by a supernatural... power, such as a god..."¹⁵ The "curse" concept is a traditional interpretation, but from a parental perspective, it makes

¹³ Legal Information Institute, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/ex_post_facto.

¹⁴ Genesis 3:11 (KJV).

¹⁵ Wikipedia, "Curse," updated January, 2020, accessed January 17, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curse>.

no sense. That God would want some form of adversity to befall Cain throughout his life would be unjust, unhelpful, unnecessary, and unlike God. First, the curse would be unjust because there may have been no law forbidding fratricide in the first place. It follows that it would be unjust for God to punish Cain for murder if the crime did not exist. Next, it would be unhelpful because cursing Cain would neither teach him that pummeling one's brother with a rock (for instance) was wrong, nor would it model for him how to treat others in the future. Additionally, the curse would be unnecessary because exiling Cain from his home, family, and livelihood was quite sufficient. He was tasked with finding a new method of survival beyond agriculture in a land strange to him with the constant, impending torment of imminent death from unknown external factors. Surely that was consequence enough for God to teach Cain a lesson. A just and loving parent wants to send an effective, memorable message that a certain activity is unacceptable in order to train him not to repeat negativity, but a loving parent does not want to irreparably hurt the child or the child's progeny. While temporal punishment may be physically painful, child abuse is not of God, and he certainly does not employ it with Cain.

In fact, God, showing the best example of parenting, meets out Cain's consequences without rage or abuse. Just as He instructs Cain to control his own anger, resentment and jealousy, God, too, models justice not vengeance in His response to Cain's action. Reviewing the definitions of various terms clarifies God's perfect parental example. "Punishment" is "the infliction or imposition of a penalty as retribution for an offense."¹⁶ "Retribution" is "punishment inflicted on someone as vengeance for a wrong or criminal act."¹⁷ Finally, "vengeance" is the "infliction of injury, harm, humiliation, or the like on a person by another who has been harmed by that person; violent revenge."¹⁸ These inflammatory words bear no reflection to the direct tone with which the Scriptures treat this event. While it is a natural, human

¹⁶ Yahoo, "Punishment," updated December 2019, accessed January 18, 2020, <https://search.yahoo.com/search?fr=mcafee&type=E211US550G0&p=Define+punishment>.

¹⁷ Yahoo, "Retribution," updated December 2019, accessed January 19, 2020, https://search.yahoo.com/search;_ylt=A2KIbMk.liReKWUA3FVXNy0A;_ylc=X1MDMjc2NjY3OQRfcgMyBGZyA21jYWZlZQRmcjIDc2ItDG9wBGdwcmlkAzVsczNaRV91U0xLSnl5Y3RTSzc5YkEEbl9yc2x0AzAEbl9zdWdnAzEwBG9yaWdpbgNzZWYyY2gueWFob28uY29tBHBvcwMwBHBxc3RyAwRwcXN0cmwDMARxc3RybAMxOARxdWVyeQNEZlZpbmUIMjByZXRYaWJ1dGlvbGROX3N0bXADMTU3OTQ2NDEwOA--?p=Define+retribution&fr2=sb-top&fr=mcafee&type=E211US550G0.

¹⁸ Dictionary.com, "Vengeance," updated January 2020, accessed January 15, 2020, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/vengeance?s=t>.

response to associate feelings of anger in the case of murder, evidence of those feelings does not appear in the text. The verses do not specify or insinuate God's anger, wrath, vengeance, retribution or punishment. God simply does not act out of anger here. It was, in fact, God who warned Cain that uncontrolled emotions including anger would cause his undoing. "If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."¹⁹ As uncontrolled passions like anger and jealousy began Cain's path toward fratricide in the first place, God's display at this juncture of such vengeance would not only be unjust but counterproductive. God is neither of those.

While perceiving that God cursed Cain creates a reasonable image of Cain as evil, people rarely ask whether it presents God in a logical light. Traditional interpreters use the concept of a curse because the text does use the term, but the contemporary definition of that word does not positively or accurately reflect God's character. If Scripture is consistent, and God's character is loving and just, then the interpretation of a curse in the traditional sense must be errant. As the initial maxim in this section noted, perception is reality. But if the maxim itself is true, then one man's curse is another man's blessing. So, if seeing God's actions as a curse creates a character conflict, perhaps seeing God's actions as a blessing corrects that conflict.

THE SOURCE OF THE CURSE

Both Christian and Hebrew scholars have traditionally interpreted the source of the curse to be God, but the Greek tense creates some uncertainty about that. Genesis 4:11 in the Septuagint reads, "καὶ νῦν ἐπικατάρατος σὺ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς..." which translates to "and now under a curse [are] you from the ground."²⁰ The phrase uses "ἐπικατάρατος" as a participle describing a noun not as a verb done by a noun. While God is clearly telling Cain that he is cursed, there is no grammatical evidence in the Greek that God originates that curse. In fact, the phrase insinuates passive construction. "You are cursed" fails to say by whom. Generally, passive construction can be used to heighten mystery in a story where the audience is encouraged to deliberate over who is actually doing the action. Additionally, passive voice is used by attorneys who wish to withhold the identity of a perpetrator (usually their client). But Moses would have had no reason to want the Israelites to wonder who the active agent was, and presumably, neither would God. But the original *Torah* was not written in Greek; maybe the issue arises from a mistranslation. Did the Hebrew use the same passive construction as the Greek?

¹⁹ Genesis 4:7b, New American Standard Bible.

²⁰ Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece, 28th Revised Edition, "Dictionary," Münster Westphalia, Germany: Institute for New Testament Textual Research, 2016, 70.

The *Pentateuch* with Rashi's commentary states, "And now cursed be thou from the ground ..." ²¹ The Hebrew clause for "cursed be thou," is written in Qal participle passive. Rabbi Zirkind, of the Coral Springs Rohr Bias Chaya Yeshiva, explains, "I believe, it [translates] the same as 'you are doomed' which is present indefinite, passive voice." ²² While "in all other cases, the passive... meaning is determined by the stem formation and the specific verb... only the Qal stem has a distinct passive form for the participle." ²³ So, that makes this usage particularly identifiable. Consequently, the tense may have been chosen for a specific reason. While traditional interpretations of this passive construction credit God with the curse (because He is the one speaking), the actual grammar remains conspicuously quiet about the active agent. Rabbi Zirkind believes that the voice in this passage is not particularly important anyway. "Here," he says, "the point is... that [Cain] is getting a curse, and not who is giving the curse." ²⁴ Indubitably. It seems that all the commentaries in rabbinic history have focused on the curse itself and the one getting the curse but never on the curser. In fact, even the choice of the Qal stem in passive construction fails to directly reveal the curser. Since there is no direct active indicative account where God acknowledges being the originator of the curse, it may be that the passive construction indicates that another interpretation for the identity of the curser is valid. Given that possibility, a different curser could resolve the contradiction of God cursing Cain and then immediately protecting him.

As God does not act out of raw anger in this situation and is not unjust, illogical, or counterproductive, the logical question remains: "If God didn't curse Cain, who did?" The passage clearly states in both languages that Abel's blood is the entity which cries out from the ground to God. But Abel is dead. How can his "blood" cry out at all?

In normal Christian tradition, animals, blood, and the voices of dead people do not rise from the ground (except in horror films). That, however, is not true in Judaism. Rabbi Zirkind noted that Jews readily accept *Tanach* passages where animals speak. "[Animals] simply do," he says. "There is even one story about trees talking. We can't hear them in our time, but on the other side [of time], God hears them, and we will be able to, too, in the future." ²⁵

²¹ *Pentateuch* with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary, New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., n.d.

²² Interview, Meir Zirkind, Rabbi at Rohr Bias Chaya Day School, Coral Springs, FL, Interview, 1/31/2020.

²³ unfoldingWord Hebrew Grammar, "Participle Passive," updated 2019, accessed 2/17/2020, https://uhg.readthedocs.io/en/latest/participle_passive.html.

²⁴ Interview, Meir Zirkind, Rabbi at Rohr Bias Chaya Day School, Coral Springs, FL, Interview, 1/31/2020.

²⁵ Interview, Meir Zirkind, Rabbi at Rohr Bias Chaya Day School, Coral Springs, FL, Interview, 1/31/2020.

Animals like the serpent in Eden spoke, and neither Adam nor Eve showed surprise. In fact, neither Jews nor Christians find that story odd: Jews take it literally while most Christians interpret it as personification. Nonetheless, the passage directly says Abel's voice after his death "crieth out" from the ground. Providentially, the *Tanach* is not the only Scripture to assert that. Even a New Testament verse "cries out" about Abel. Hebrews 12:24 states, "And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."²⁶ The author of Hebrews, and those in Jesus' time, believed Abel spoke from the ground and, inferentially, what he spoke must not have been good. That begs the question: Has no one yet pondered what Abel said to Cain as Cain "slew him" and, thereby, what Abel's blood cried out in the first place?

In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* Tybalt slays Mercutio during a fight with Romeo. Realizing his own death is imminent, Mercutio curses both Tybalt and his friend Romeo, "A plague on both your houses." His curse comes to pass but is mollified by the governing magistrate who works the event such that the two houses mend their differences and live at peace.²⁷ It is doubtful that Shakespeare had the story of Cain and Abel in mind, but the plots bear a few striking resemblances: a curse, a curser, and a mediator. It would surely take no stretch of imagination to believe that one being attacked would call out curses upon his attacker. Humanly-speaking, the obvious interpretation is that the one being killed is the one cursing the killer. Returning to the definition of "vengeance," as "the infliction of injury, harm, humiliation, or the like on a person by another who has been harmed by that person; violent revenge," it makes sense that Abel was the one who cursed Cain. Perhaps it sounded somewhat Mercutio-like: "A plague on the ground you till - that it never yield for you again." God merely pronounces the curse that Abel previously proclaimed.

Although no traditional interpreters have proposed theories of what Abel's blood must have been crying out, logical reasoning leads to only one conclusion. Since both the Old and New Testaments declare that Abel spoke, since the New Testament notes that he spoke not well, since God says Abel's blood spoke from the ground after his death, and since human nature would naturally manifest a vengeful response to being attacked, it only makes sense that Abel, not God, was the one who cursed Cain. But that puts God between "Scylla and Charybdis": honor the cries of one beloved grandson Abel or honor the repentance of his other beloved grandson Cain. How God arbitrates that conundrum demonstrates His wisdom, compassion and justice.

²⁶ KJV.

²⁷ Romans 8:28 (KJV).

GOD'S PERFECT RESOLUTION

Alan Hauser, associate professor of religion at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, writes, "Abel's blood, which bears his ravaged life, cries out from the ground in protest against the murder."²⁸ While Hauser stops short of saying Abel cursed Cain, he alludes to the obvious protest that Abel must have made. God hears Abel's cries and, agreeing that Cain's actions deserve a response, He institutes Abel's curse. Then with that inception, the ground, which previously yielded her strength to Cain, producing for him and nourishing him, would do so no longer. Thus, indeed, if Cain had remained there where that curse had been pronounced, Cain would surely have starved to death. While that end may well have been what Abel wanted, God did not. He had already determined a means by which He could honor Abel and protect Cain simultaneously: exile. To save Cain from starvation, God sent him to other ground. Hence, Cain's exile was not a curse but a blessing. Although Cain felt it was too much to bear, the concept reflects one theme from the story of Joseph: "what man meant for evil, God meant for good."²⁹ As Romans 8:28 declares, "...all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose." This means that even Cain was called to God's purpose and was worth saving and protecting.

Hauser further notes, "...Cain has been alienated from his former world... never able to sink his roots anywhere... [not literally, but] a metaphor for the perpetual alienation that has become his lot in life due to his offense. The metaphor is developed further in v16, where the place of Cain's dwelling is said to be the land of 'wandering' ('Nod')."³⁰ But Cain and his wife do find a home in the land of Nod; in fact, through God's providence and Cain's ingenuity, God's second chance enables a new social order: city-building and metal-working among others. These acts were not, as Gonzalez asserts, "aggressive disobedience to God's will."³¹ No one can actively thwart God's ordinations. The newly-invented skills and social order were, in effect, the very accomplishment of God's provision.

Gonzalez and others oversimplify both Cain, the man, and God, the Father. They presume that every act of Cain beyond the fratricide must also have been equally wicked. This woodenly-strict archetype of evil may work well as a didactic tool for children, but it is an unfair and unrealistic measure

²⁸ Alan J. Hauser, "Linguistic and Thematic Links between Genesis 4:1-16 and Genesis 2—3," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 23:4 (Dec 1980), 302.

²⁹ Paraphrase of Genesis 50:20.

³⁰ Hauser, 303.

³¹ Robert Gonzales, Jr., *Where Sin Abounds: The Spread of Sin and the Curse in the Primeval History*, *Reformed Baptist Theological Review*, vol 5:1, Jan. 2008, 17.

of a man. Instead of seeing Cain as a multi-faceted, human character from which humanity can learn about the frailties that imbue and pervade human nature, these traditionalists promulgate a stereotype that creates inconsistencies between the characters of Cain and God. By doing so, they practically invite the very criticism Schwartz presents without providing atheists or maturing believers any means of resolution.

In light of the evidence that an early interpretation of Cain's character existed in the commentary of Hebrew Scriptures which reflected a repentant Cain, one should consider that interpreting Cain's ambiguous words to be repentant does resolve the question of why God protected him. Therefore, in the absence of commanding evidence to the contrary, it is more beneficial to the whole story to see Cain's words in a light which unifies Cain's actions and God's intent.

It was not God's intent to subvert His own law nor abuse one of his children. God's response to Cain is both just and merciful. It honors both Abel's cry for consequence and Cain's cry for consideration. While traditional presuppositions and stereotypes about Cain's character cause contradictory images of both Cain and God, accepting reasonable and logical corrections to those traditionally-held concepts resolves those contradictions.

Several modern scholars agree that seeing Cain as a "real man" instead of an archetype, enhances scriptural truths. Deacon Keith A. Fournier, a writer for *Catholic Online* and the president and founder of the Common Good Foundation in Virginia, elucidates, "God's response to Cain's choice to murder his brother revealed both the consequences of every wrong and His extraordinary mercy in spite of our errant exercise of our capacity to choose. Cain lost his very identity...yet, even in all of this, God 'marked' [him] for protection. He never stopped loving him."³² Additionally, a voice from the Protestant sector, R. Kent Hughes, author of *Genesis: Blessing and Beginning*, agrees. "By all estimates God's mark, whatever it was, was an amazing grace. Cain was cursed and separated from God, yet guarded by God. Cain's life still belonged to God. He bore God's image, however disfigured that image was. This was the utmost mercy that God could do..."³³ Even Dr. J.H. Hertz, the late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, explains, "According to the Rabbis, Cain was a repentant sinner. God, therefore, reassured him that he would not be regarded as a common, intentional murderer. God's mercy to the guilty [one] who repents of his sin is infinitely greater than that of man. The popular

³² Kevin Fournier, "Solidarity, the Mark of Cain, and the Christian Mission," updated 2020, accessed February 4, 2020, <http://www.catholic.org/featured/headline.php?ID=68>.

³³ Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Blessing and Beginning*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, Good News Publishers, 2012), 106.

expression 'the brand of Cain,' in the sense of the sign of the murderer, arises from a complete misunderstanding of the passage."³⁴

Given all the evidence, it stands to reason that God intended readers to learn more from the story of Cain than a mere archetype. As God forgave Cain and chose a future for him, Cain's further suffering was not necessary, so God protected him - mentally and physically. Enter, the mark.

HISTORICAL PROPOSALS FOR THE MARK

While the Torah does not specify what the mark was, Eva Mroczek, Department of Religious Studies professor at Indiana University, says, "This lack of scriptural information did not...prevent fertile imaginations from filling the gap with a fascinating and contradictory panorama of conjectures, reveries, legends, and questionable traditions."³⁵ Because of this, both Christians and non-Christians have been filled with mixed messages about the story; and confusion never creates unity. Ruth Mellinkoff, herself, did not personally believe the Cain story to have been a historical event because, she asserts, it is "a fragmentary mixture of myths...both incomplete and contradictory."³⁶ Although her vast research took her to a panoply of cultures, she reasoned that most of the commentaries were "worthless



9. "God cursing and marking Cain." English thirteenth-century psalter. Cambridge, St. John's College Library MS K. 26, folio 6 verso. Photo. Courtesy of St. John's College Library.

20. Detail of fig. 19.

interpretations [that] nourish the needs of fanciful imaginations."³⁷ Clearly from such "fanciful imaginations" come no good doctrine. So for her and many others, the story is no more than a whimsical tale of ancient lore. But regardless of her unbelief, her wealth of research may derive resolutions to those "worthless interpretations."

³⁴ Dr. J.H. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, (Brooklyn: The Soncino Press Limited, 1992).

³⁵ Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain*, "Introduction," (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 2.

³⁶ Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain*, "Preface," (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), i.

³⁷ Mellinkoff, xii.

She categorized the myriad of commentary in twain: those who believe the marks were *on* Cain versus *with* Cain. Those rabbis who purported that the oth (mark) was on Cain noted, "...Some of the earliest interpretations stressed [the mark's] security features."³⁸ The first century tannin (teacher) Abba Jose' ben Hanan³⁹ asserted in his commentary of the Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit XXII.11-13, that Cain's sign was on his forehead and that it was a horn.⁴⁰ Rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra, a distinguished Jewish philosopher during the Middle Ages (a thousand years after Rabbi Hanan)⁴¹ - repeats the words of Abba Jose' saying, "And some say the sign was a horn."⁴² Historically, "[horns] symbolized kingship [and] deity."⁴³ This regal symbol of power could have been viewed as a protective mark saying that Cain was powerful and protected by someone of power; thus, if harmed, that power would avenge his murder. Plainly, since God did give Cain the mark and He noted "seven-fold vengeance" against Cain's killer, that part would be true. Additionally, a horn could have provided both defensive and offensive protection, but it would be hard to imagine Cain getting a wife with such an irregularity, let alone many people willingly working with one of such a visage. Finally, as icons go, the horn, at some point, became a beastly symbol, representing the beastly nature of Cain which, thereby, distorted the original intent of both the text and the Midrashic commentary. But it played well into the idea of Cain's evil stereotype. Thus, medieval images exist with Cain having horns which was then misinterpreted as a sign of his beastly, devilish nature. The following depiction from an English thirteenth-century psalter shows God giving Cain a set of horns. As a picture is worth a thousand words, that picture's "words," unfortunately, have lasted a thousand years.

Other hypotheses siding with the "on" Cain idea suggest that it was some form of tattoo. That is neither unreasonable nor unprecedented in Scripture. For example, the prophet Ezekiel was told to put a "mark" on the foreheads of certain people. "And the Lord said to him, 'Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark on the foreheads of men that

³⁸ Mellinkoff, 60.

³⁹ "Abba Jose' ben Hanan," *Wikipedia*, updated 2020, accessed February 22, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abba_Jose_ben_Hanan.

⁴⁰ *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos*, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary, translated by Rev. M. Rosenbaum and Dr. A.M. Silbermann. "Bereshit IV:8," (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co.), n.d.

⁴¹ "Rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra," *Wikipedia*, February 2020.

⁴² *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos*, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary, translated by Rev. M. Rosenbaum and Dr. A.M. Silbermann. "Bereshit IV:8," (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co.), n.d.

⁴³ Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 60.

sigh and that cry over all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof.'⁴⁴ Even the New Testament book of Revelation (Chapter 13) speaks of a mark being given on the forehead or the right hand. So, many Jewish scholars suggested it in one form or another. French Rabbi Isaac Israeli ben Solomon, (circa 1000-1100 AD),⁴⁵ known popularly under the name Rashi, wrote, "He inscribed His name on Cain's forehead."⁴⁶ Similarly, Isaiah ben Mali de Trani, a prominent medieval Italian rabbi,⁴⁷ posits, "God gave Cain a ' from His name so that no one would attack him."⁴⁸ Mroczek notes that *oth*, the Hebrew word for *mark*, while non-specific, did have a post-facto protective meaning that appeared in midrashic texts like Pirke Rabbi Eliezer's *Genesis* which says that God inscribed the letter on Cain's arm as a mark of protection. "Thus the mark of Cain becomes a sacred sign."⁴⁹ Furthermore, a rabbi who commented in *Tanhuma* Genesis 10 says the word *Sabbath* was inscribed on Cain's face after the personified Sabbath day itself begged God to forgive Cain's sin. Mroczek also reports that one targum says that God himself wrote His name, the tetragrammaton, on his head.⁵⁰ Each of these marks would serve as a measure of protection, but each has its limits.

The protective "taw" to which Isaiah ben Mali de Trani refers would have been effective in the midst of Ezekiel's Jerusalem, but it could not have benefitted Cain. First, there is no evidence to suggest that a written language existed with only 3 people on the planet. But if there were more people "out there," and they could read, how would a tattoo on his forehead protect him at a distance? The attacker with an arrow would not be able to see it. Also, the mark would have to be easily seen through underbrush and recognizable even in low light. No tattoo has those abilities. Additionally, even as intricate as

⁴⁴ Ezekiel 9:4, KJV.

⁴⁵ "Rabbi Isaac Israeli ben Solomon," *Wikipedia*, updated February 14, 2020, accessed February 17, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Israeli_ben_Solomon.

⁴⁶ *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos*, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary, translated by Rev. M. Rosenbaum and Dr. A.M. Silbermann. "Bereishit IV:8," (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co.), n.d.

⁴⁷ "Isaiah de Trani," *Wikipedia*, updated October 17, 2019, accessed February 17, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaiah_di_Trani.

⁴⁸ Mi Yodeya, "What Literally Was the Mark of Cain?" accessed 1/21/2020, <https://judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/98445/what-literally-was-the-mark-of-cain>.

⁴⁹ Eva Mroczek, "Mark of Cain," *Bible Odyssey*, accessed January 16, 2020, <http://www.bibleodyssey.net/en/people/related-articles/mark-of-cain>.

⁵⁰ Eva Mroczek, "Mark of Cain," *Bible Odyssey*, accessed January 16, 2020, <http://www.bibleodyssey.net/en/people/related-articles/mark-of-cain>.

tattoos can be, it is unlikely that any depiction on Cain's skin could have communicated that a killer would suffer seven-fold vengeance if he harmed Cain. Furthermore, the mark would have to be understood by everyone wherever he wandered throughout Nod, not just in one city as for Ezekiel. As Scripture notes that people lived half a millennia or more during Cain's time, it seems hard to imagine that one sign would conjure similar ideas of foreboding in every culture he contacted or that the tattoo could have lasted hundreds of years. Even modern tattoos fade after only a few decades. God's protection surely must have been better than a symbol that could be seen only at close range, culturally misinterpreted, and would fade within only a few decades. Consequently, logic demands that realistically, a tattoo would not do.

Most rabbis surmised that the important issue was the effect the mark had on Cain and not the actual mark itself. Rabbi Ibn Ezra states, "God made a sign for Cain that would cause him to trust God, but it is not identified in the text." He adds, "God gave Cain courage and removed his fear." The twelfth century Rabbi David Kimchi, known as Radak, agrees and asserts, "God gave courage to Cain so he wouldn't fear that anyone would strike him, and He made the animals and other people afraid to attack Cain."⁵¹ Finally, a modern comment comes from Rabbi Ralbag, Rabbi of the city of Amsterdam and its Beth Din (ecclesiastical court) from 1975-83.⁵² He says, "What the sign was is disputed by the Sages, but whatever it was it convinced Cain to trust God."⁵³ Indeed, Cain's expressed fear of being killed preceded God providing the mark, and whatever the mark was must have helped Cain overcome that fear. These opinions show that the rabbis understood the mark to be protective because it gave Cain emotional/psychological comfort to survive through whatever anguish and struggles would befall him. But the most accurate commentary on the identity of the mark comes from Rabbi Joseph Ben Abba Mari Ibn Kaspi, a French exegete, grammarian and philosopher living circa 1279 - 1340 AD. "The text doesn't say what the sign was."⁵⁴ End of story.

While the rabbis' ideas were often unrealistic or impractical, they were never malevolent as some early Christian church fathers' ideas were. Basil the

⁵¹ *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary*, translated by Rev. M. Rosenbaum and Dr. A.M. Silbermann. "Bereishit IV:8," (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co.), n.d.

⁵² Triangle K - About Us, "Rabbi Jehoseph H. Ralbag," accessed 2/6/2020, <https://trianglek.org/kosher/about-us/>.

⁵³ Mi Yodeya, "What Literally Was the Mark of Cain?" accessed 1/21/2020, <https://judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/98445/what-literally-was-the-mark-of-cain>.

⁵⁴ Jewish Virtual Library, "Kaspi," accessed 2/6/2020, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/kaspi-joseph-ben-abba-mari-ibn>.

Great, in a letter to Bishop Optimus,⁵⁵ "unequivocally underscored the denigrating aspects of the mark...listing it as the seventh and worst of seven punishments."⁵⁶ St. Jerome, stated, "God protected Cain only so that he could be more severely punished."⁵⁷ "Little interest in the precise characteristics of Cain's mark was evidenced by the early church fathers... [but they saw] substantial significance in its symbolism."⁵⁸

These Christian leaders used Cain's evil stereotype to vilify an entire race. St. Ambrose, for example, makes a case against the Jews in his work *Cain and Abel*. He compares the Jews who crucified Christ to the "murderer Cain." Though he realizes the Jews have no genetic link to Cain, he summarizes that Cain was the "prototype" of the Jews: allegorically, the "murderer Cain" was the Jews; the innocent Abel was Christ. St. Augustine followed with

Abel the younger brother was killed by the elder; so too Christ, head of the younger people, is killed by the elder people - the Jews; Cain's ignorance when questioned by the Lord was pretended; likewise, the Jews deceive in their refusal of Christ; just as Abel's blood accused Cain, so the blood of Christ accuses the Jews; as Cain was cursed from the earth, so the unbelieving Jews are cursed from the Holy Church.⁵⁹

These comments in St. Augustine's *Contra Faustum* (12.13) follow Ambrose's "Cain as protoJew" idea declaring that circumcision marked Cain.⁶⁰ Likewise, Isidore of Seville (560–636),⁶¹ two hundred years later, also links Cain with circumcision in *Patrologia Latina* 83:226.⁶² Clearly, no evidence of this appears in Christian Scriptures; none exists in Hebrew writings either.

⁵⁵ Saint Basil, *Collected Letters*, translated by Roy Joseph Deferrari, Loeb Classical Library, (London and Cambridge, Mass.) vol. 4, Letter 260, 49-73.

⁵⁶ Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 17.

⁵⁷ St. Jerome, "Lettres," *Ad Damasum*, section 2, Letter 36, edited and translated by Jerome Labourt, Paris: n.p., 1951, p. 53.

⁵⁸ Mellinkoff, 92.

⁵⁹ Sancti Aureli Augustini, *Contra Faustum*, CSEL (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum), 342.

⁶⁰ Eva Mroczek, "Mark of Cain," Bible Odyssey, updated 2019, accessed January 16, 2020, <http://www.bibleodyssey.net/en/people/related-articles/mark-of-cain>.

⁶¹ "St. Isidore of Seville," *Britanica.com*, updated 2020, accessed January 18, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sevilla-Spain>.

⁶² Isidore of Seville, *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum: In Genesis* 6.16-18 [on Gen 4:15].

Nonetheless, they manage to link the Jews, allegorically, to the evil Cain archetype. These blatantly anti-Semitic comparisons propagated a hatred of the Jews which still plague the race. According to Mellinkoff, "Augustine's ideas reverberated through the Middle Ages and, in fact, they increased with vigor as the centuries passed, finding a solid place in Christian exegesis."⁶³ Indeed, even a cursory reading of Catholic church history exposes the subsequent generations of priests who spewed the same anti-Semitism. Extrapolating from these motifs, other Christian readers imagined Cain according to offensive stereotypes of Jews—with a hooked nose or horns, distinct in appearance and condemned to endless wandering. These racist readings show how biblical interpretation has been used to support existing prejudices, with devastating consequences for marginalized people.⁶⁴

Beyond the degradation of the Jews, another divergent theory furthered racist doctrine. Merely a century and a half ago, the founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, who died before he was 40 years old, managed to disseminate his Cain misinformation to tens of thousands who believed it. It, too, engendered social division and racial subservience. "...all Canaanites were blackened,... they were the seed of Cain, and from them sprang the Egyptians via Egyptus (a black Canaanite married to Ham), preserving a black race descended from Cain and Ham."⁶⁵ This entirely unfounded theory subjugated blacks for centuries and attempted to justify slavery. Josiah Priest, author of *Slavery as it Relates to the Negro or African Race*, purports that the Negro is inferior to other races because of a connection to the evil seed of Cain. "...Cain, who was cursed for murdering his brother Abel, was placed in servitude and turned black (the mark set upon Cain - Gen. 4:13-15)."⁶⁶ No evidence whatsoever exists for this in the original text.

Ironically, however, the concept of blackness for Cain did not begin with slave traders or Joseph Smith; it began with the Jews themselves. "Blackness of skin and negroid features... appeared earliest in the Genesis Rabbah. [It] turned up in one of the versions of the Armenian Adam book,... in a thirteenth-century English psalter..."⁶⁷ While there may be an element of Karma in that, it was only an outlying idea for the Jews. The horrors perpetrated in its shadow, however, should remind scholars to carefully consider the possible effects of their conjectures.

⁶³ Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 94.

⁶⁴ Eva Mroczek, "Mark of Cain," Bible Odyssey, accessed January 16, 2020, <http://www.bibleodyssey.net/en/people/related-articles/mark-of-cain>.

⁶⁵ Mellinkoff, 79.

⁶⁶ W.S. Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 119.

⁶⁷ Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 101.

Mellinkoff summarizes, "...the varied interpretations [of Cain's stories] do enlarge our view of mankind; they disclose the remarkable creativity of men, who, structuring concepts on slim or no evidence, reveal to us their resourceful talents and determined minds."⁶⁸ Her commentary is diplomacy at its best! The "creativity of men," of which she speaks, has often revealed the utter malice of men who embellish a story reinterpreting it in order to malign a person, society, or race - the exact opposite of what God intended in the Cain account.

Beyond the ideas of a horn, tattoo, or circumcision are those who believe that the phrase "set a mark upon Cain" does not necessarily mean that the mark appeared **upon** his person. They argue that it could have been **with** him instead. One possible solution is a dog. Babylonian Talmudic commentator from the early third century Abba Arika, known as Rav, sides with the Mishnah Genesis Rabbah 22:12 which states, "To protect Cain from being killed, a dog was given him, who accompanied him and protected him against all comers."⁶⁹ Presumably, a dog would have provided protection against enemies, both defensively and offensively. It would also have provided friendship. But there is no evidence that dogs had been domesticated in Cain's time, and given the longevity of humans, even if that of dogs was comparably longer, it is unlikely that one could have protected him for his entire life. Additionally, says Rabbi Chaim of Chaim Ben Torah, "There has been a sort of love/hate relationship between the Jews and dogs throughout the centuries...We find dogs are often referred to in a negative light in the Bible...In some Jewish circles they will not even own a pet dog because of the negative light..."⁷⁰ Attributes of the dog were often invoked to insult and to redress foolishness. Proverbs 26:11-12 reads, "As a dog returneth to its vomit is a fool who returneth to his folly"⁷¹ - not complimentary imagery. Isaiah 56:10 paints no pet picture either. "The leaders who are to guard the people... are like quiet dogs that don't know how to bark. They lie down and dream and love to sleep. They are like hungry dogs that are never satisfied." King David's Psalms speak no better of them. "Show no mercy to those wicked transgressors. At night they return like howling dogs; they prowl around the city."⁷² Finally, 22:16 characterizes the wild beast. "An evil gang is around me; like a pack of dogs they close in on me; they tear at my hands and feet." If God had used a dog to protect Cain, it seems likely that Scripture would speak well of them. As it does not, it seems unlikely that one would have been used for protection.

⁶⁸ Mellinkoff, 102.

⁶⁹ *Mishnah Genesis Rabbah* XXII. 12.

⁷⁰ Chaim Ben Torah, *Biblical Hebrew Studies*, "Hebrew Word Study: The Mark of Cain," created Oct. 17, 2014, accessed 2/6/2020, <https://www.chaimbentorah.com/2014/10/hebrew-word-study-mark-cain/>.

⁷¹ Proverbs 26:11-12, (KJV).

⁷² Psalms 59:5 and 6, (ASV).

Even if the Scriptures had a positive view of canines and Jews readily welcomed them to the dinner table, one question remains: Why the mystery? A dog is a dog - a definite, concrete noun. It is not a *mark*, a *sign*, or any other ambiguous word. If the mark were a dog, the Scripture would probably have said *dog* and not *mark*.

Finally, others have offered a staff, a weapon, and even Cain's wife. While that last suggestion might have been reasonable in a Viking community, Jewish women have never been stereotyped as sturdy protectors of their "menfolk." Consequently, none of these ideas pose any realistic or adequate solution to what the mark must have been to protect Cain physically, comfort him emotionally, and communicate ubiquitously.

But a slightly different interpretation is one which identifies it not "on Cain" or "with Cain" but "within Cain" -- more specifically, a mark **within** Cain that could manifest a visible mark on Cain. In the Midrash Rabbah Bereishit XXII.11-13 a discussion occurs among many rabbis.

And Hashem set a sign for Kayin. Rabbi Yehudah said: He caused the sphere of the sun to shine on his account. Rabbi Nehemiah said: HaKadosh Baruch Hu caused the sphere of the sun to shine on account of the wicked!? Rather, He caused tzara'at [leprosy] to break out on him, as you read, "And it shall be, if they will not believe you, or listen to the voice of the first sign, etc." (Shemot 4:8) Rav said: He gave him a dog. Abba Yosei ben Keisari said: He caused a horn to grow from him. Rav said: He made him a sign (example) to murderers. Rabbi Chanin said: He made him a sign (example) to those who do teshuvah (repentance). Rabbi Levi said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish: He postponed his judgment until the Flood swept him away, as it is said, "And he wiped out everything on the surface of the earth, etc.

Rabbi Nehemiah suggests the mark was leprosy. Clearly, that would have been a disease within Cain with a marker on Cain and which surely would have kept others from him, thus preserving his life...but all onlookers would have had to know that leprosy was deplorable. Moreover, leprosy is a disease which would have diminished his ability to produce and, therefore, survive. It is hard to imagine success in city-building or seven generations of any work if he had been stricken with such a malady. Finally, it is also difficult to imagine that such a disorder would have given him emotional comfort. As much as Rabbi Nehemiah would like to have cursed Cain himself, that mark would not suffice for the destiny Hashem planned for Cain.

In the same exchange among the rabbis one lone voice, that of Rabbi Chanin, reminds the rest of them of the possibility of Cain's repentance. It is the teshuvah about which Rabbi Chanin speaks that forms the core of the High Holy Days before Yom Kippur. Crucial to Kabbalistic philosophy in the

Tikkunei Zohar are the very basic commentaries on the *Torah*. This passage shares a drastically different bent on Cain. Its first printing was circa 1558, so it is a commentary from the Middle Ages. The *Tikkunei Zohar*, originally written in Aramaic, is a separate document from the *Zohar*, but written essentially by the same Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.⁷³ In *Tikkunei Zohar* 118.2 Rabbi Shimon asserts that Cain repented.

Kayin regretted killing Hevel with a full heart and Hashem gave him a sign that his Teshuva was accepted. This was the Bris Mila which is called an אֵז (Bereishis 17.13) that Yisro who is called יִסְרָאֵל (same letter as יִשְׂרָאֵל) fulfilled upon himself when converting to Judaism. Yisro who was a Gilgul of Kayin, fully atoned the sin of Kayin. It is not for nothing that Kayin is brought as an example to emulate when we supplicate to Hashem to atone for our sins on Tzom Gedalia during Selichos in the Pizmon.⁷⁴

This statement is particularly remarkable because Rabbi Shimon notes that this variant version of Cain's story has been used in the Kabbalah community for sinners to emulate Cain's sincerity of repentance when asking Hashem for forgiveness. They have taken the story of Cain and Abel and used Cain's sin, repentance and God's forgiveness as an example for personal contrition and growth.

Additionally, in Kabbalah doctrine "The *Zohar* states that while Cain and Abel had aspects of the right column it was the weaker [column] of the two in Cain, who was dominated by the left column."⁷⁵ The idea in Kabbalah is that each human, made of the dust of the earth on the outside, has two elements of the earth on the inside, represented by two columns: water and fire. The right column, water, represents character traits like obedience, submission, kindness, compassion, love, etc. (predominantly "other-oriented" emotions) while the left column, fire, represents passion, motivation, control, growth

⁷³ "Tikunei haZohar," Wikipedia, updated December 10, 2019, accessed February 5, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tikunei_haZohar.

⁷⁴ Mi Yodeya, "What Literally Was the Mark of Cain?" updated 2019, accessed January 21, 2020, <https://judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/98445/what-literally-was-the-mark-of-cain>.

⁷⁵ Rav Philip Berg, *Kabbalah for the Layman*, Vol. 1, (New York/Los Angeles: Kabbalah Centre International, Inc. 1981), 105.

(predominantly "self-oriented emotions").⁷⁶ In a sense the idea is similar to a mother explaining to her child that he has both good and evil within him. She teaches him to choose the virtuous, positive characters traits rather than those seen as negative. Despite her teaching, however, the child has within him the power to choose which of the two columns he will build and manifest, thus dominating his character. According to Kabbalah teaching, Cain had both columns and made a choice from the left column when he killed his brother. But Cain still had both columns within him, and his choices consequent to that could re-establish balance in his character, and further choices from the right column could even re-establish a right-dominant character. The point here is that Kabbalistic teaching did not consider the Cain character as a static, "woodenly-interpreted" figure of evil.⁷⁷ It viewed him in a realistic, human perspective. While he provided a convenient "archetypum non gratia" for teaching young children in the concrete developmental stage, Cain was a man with both elements within him.

It is unfair and unhealthy to bind his humanity to the restrictions of one choice within a life of seven generations. This oversimplification spiritually starves adults who do have the capacity to understand repentance and forgiveness. Interpreters must not leave readers with Cain in his grief, anger, jealousy, and suffering when millions of people today could benefit from the rest of his story. Even pastors leave Cain as a murderer incapable of being forgiven for his sin. But there are thousands in prison today for the same offense as Cain's who are dying to hear the end of his story.

Cain was a sinner, sure, but he was so much more. Cain's is the story of triumph after sin's consequences because Cain's is the story of God's forgiveness after sin's consequences. That is the end of the story that the last thousand years of Christendom has entombed. Seeing Cain merely as the Seed-of-Satan stereotype has raped the story of its inspiration. The end of Cain's story must be resurrected. His story has a plot twist, an inspirational spin that can give divine hope to those suffering from the self-destruction of uncontrolled anger, the pangs of vengeance, and the mental and physical confinement consequent to murder.

CAIN THE MAN

Richard Hester, Professor of "The Psychology of Religion" at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, reminds the reader that Cain "...did something very rash, very cruel, and... very human. He killed his brother. And to Cain's great surprise...God still had plans even for the

⁷⁶ The Kabbalah Centre, "Three Steps to Finding Balance," (July 2018), accessed February 27, 2020, <https://kabbalah.com/en/articles/3-steps-to-finding-balance/>.

⁷⁷ Dr. Esa Autero's expression

murderer."⁷⁸ Mid-twentieth Century British Old Testament scholar, Derek Kidner explains, "God's concern for the innocent is matched only by His care for the sinner. Even the querulous prayer of Cain had contained a germ of entreaty; God's answering pledge, together with His *mark* or *sign*... [is] not a stigma but a safe-conduct... almost a covenant, making Him virtually Cain's *Gō 'ēl* or protector."⁷⁹ Those are concepts that the rigid stereotype misses; those are concepts every sinner needs.

Cain was not born an evil seed. He was born into the same spiritual existence as all other born humans. He had choices to make like all humans. He made at least one very bad choice, like all humans. By God's grace he was given opportunities to repent, like all humans. Cain, therefore, should be seen as the stereotype for all humans. God had to change him from the inside out; He provided forgiveness for the sin on Cain's head and protection for the rest of his life. God further gave him opportunities to control his emotions, repent of his sins, and turn back to Him. In that, the story of Cain becomes less about the first murder and more about God's sovereign design for grace to all sinners. The Sovereign Designer of man still loves and protects and wants a relationship with him despite his sin.

CONCLUSION

Interpreting Cain as an unregenerate reprobate causes conflict within the plot of the original text and between Christians and non-Christians. Non-Christians find it absurd that people believe the Bible is the inerrant Word of God yet cannot explain seemingly contradictory elements within it. Non-Christians denounce the cognitive dissonance that results, and, thus, have every right to expose another Achilles' heel of Christendom. But the contradictions need not exist. Once the reader understands that a few presuppositions may not be valid, he experiences several revelations: society has attributed an *ex post facto* law where it ought not be; God may not be the originator of Cain's curse, and the so-called curse turns out to be a blessing in disguise. In fact, God's actions exemplify perfect parenting, justice and mercy.

Holding, however, to the manufactured "evil Cain" stereotype has caused rabbis and early church fathers to reduce the intricacies of human life to an archetypal design that oversimplifies and undermines the deeper benefits of the story. Clearly, a stereotypical figure may be helpful in teaching young children in the concrete stage of mental development, but leaving Cain in that state deprives adults of a deeper appreciation for the story and the man. Instead of passing down a story rich in lessons about sin, repentance and forgiveness,

⁷⁸ Richard Hester, "On Being a Marked Person," *Faith and Mission*, Vol. 4:1, Fall 1986, p. 82.

⁷⁹ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 76.

the story has been denuded and manipulated to justify despicable acts worse than the fratricide scholars claim to despise.

Finally, while imaginative ideas about the mark can add interest and depth to the original text, no proposed solution adequately suffices. Whether the protective mark was on Cain, with Cain, or within Cain matters less than that God gave him one. The application of seeing God's protection "while we were yet sinners"⁸⁰ changes lives. Few stories in Scripture so potently address forgiveness of sin and God's love thereafter than does Cain's.

Viewing this story as a logical, unified work resolves several objections from non-Christians and the general confusion of most readers. Re-analyzing traditionally-held presuppositions reveals early-held ideas that transform the impact of the characters and plot. These perspectives enable future readers to appreciate the story for both its intriguing plotline and its revelation of God's justice, forgiveness and intentional plan for man even after sin.

⁸⁰ Romans 5:8 (KJV).

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WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

LOVING OUR IMMIGRANT NEIGHBOR IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Samantha B. Dias

A two-year-old separated from his mother and kept in what many people consider a cage. Other children separated from their parents for weeks and months on end. Families moving together from place to place, seeking an escape from gang violence and poverty. Others flee wars and persecutions. These situations describe just a few of the scenarios that some immigrants and refugees around the world are facing today as they try to escape their current circumstances and seek a better life outside of their home country. Many of these immigrants see the United States as a beacon of liberty and where the "American Dream" is still achievable. Some perceive the United States as their last chance of survival. Others see this country as the land of opportunity and economic advancement. The American news cycle is filled with horrific stories describing how immigrants are "invading" the United States and taking American jobs without describing the reality of what immigrants go through in order to legally immigrate into the U.S. The highly dramatized media fails to mention the number of immigrants who follow the laws and immigrate with the correct documentation required by the U.S. Government. Amid this political chaos, Christians encounter difficulties discerning how they should be living out their faith and how the Bible should be guiding their actions in light of this nuanced controversy. This paper seeks to address how God ultimately shows that he cares for and loves all people, regardless of their immigration status and how Christians should react and demonstrate God's love for immigrants. Specifically, by explicating the parable of the Good Samaritan, found in Luke 10:25-37, this paper seeks to examine the meaning of Jesus's answer to the question, "who is my neighbor?" We will explore what the Bible says about immigrants, we will consider a brief overview of the current status quo of U.S. immigration, and we will evaluate potential ways Christians can actively practice demonstrating "love" to our neighbors. God cares about the immigrant, his creation, and therefore all his creation should follow His example in loving our immigrant neighbor in the 21st Century.

The Good Samaritan

The parable of the Good Samaritan is known worldwide for its lesson of doing good unto others, even if they are considered your enemy. It is unique to the Gospel of Luke, found in Luke 10:25-37, and addresses a lawyer's question to Jesus on how someone can inherit "eternal life."

According to Mark Bailey, a parable may be briefly defined as "a figurative narrative that is true to life and is designed to convey through

analogy some specific spiritual truth(s) usually relative to God's kingdom program."¹ Jesus often used parables as a pedagogical strategy to motivate hearers to make the right decision or to reveal new truths about God's kingdom.² What better way to start looking at how to treat immigrants or our neighbors than through Jesus' direct words and instructions?

According to Howard Marshall, the passage in Luke 10:25-37, is part of a greater teaching section of Luke's Gospel that deals with various aspects of the life of the disciples.³ Specifically, there are three sections (10:29-37; 10:38-42; 11:5-8) where the disciples' relation to their neighbors, to Jesus, and to God are respectively addressed. There is a similarity found in the Gospel of Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-34 in relation to Luke 10:25-28 since the double love commandment is presented in all three passages. However, in Matthew and Mark, the dialogue is introduced by a question concerning the "great" or "first" commandment, and Jesus cites the double love commandment without following it with a parable.⁴ The parable is peculiar to the Gospel of Luke. By looking at each verse in this section of Luke, we will explicate Jesus' instructions and the answer to the question, "who is my neighbor?"

Analysis of Luke 10:25-37

*And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying,
"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Luke 10:25
NASB*

Verse 25 begins with a lawyer who stands up and "tests" Jesus by posing the question of what should be done to gain eternal life. According to Leon Morris, lawyers at that time would not be concerned with secular studies, "but with the Law in the Jewish sense, the first five books of the Old Testament."⁵ The lawyer was a man who might "be expected to be both interested in and knowledgeable about religious affairs."⁶ He "tests" Jesus, or he asked a question, not really in search of the answer but in order to see how Jesus would respond to the inquiry. In this situation, the lawyer was seen as a recognized religious authority who was "testing" the "unofficial teacher"

¹ Mark L. Bailey, "Guidelines for Interpreting Jesus' Parables," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155, no. 617 (1998): 30 accessed April 18, 2020, https://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_parables_bailey.html#3.

² Ibid.

³ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 439.

⁴ Robert Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville: Abington, 1996), 181.

⁵ Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 3 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988), 206.

⁶ Ibid.

(Jesus) to see whether he gives the right answers.⁷ His question, "*what shall I do...*" according to Morris, shows "that he was thinking of some sort of salvation by works and had no understanding of divine grace."⁸

And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" Luke 10:26 NASB

Jesus answers the lawyer's question (v.25) with a simple counter-question, asking the lawyer in verse 26 what is written in the Law, directing the lawyer to the Old Testament. Jesus says, "how does it read to you?" By saying this, Jesus shifted the question from his own teaching to "how the lawyer understands the law, and it is his view which is tested by Jesus."⁹

And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself. And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." Luke 10:27-28 NASB

The lawyer answers in verse 27 by combining Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, citing "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." According to Robert Tannehill, the words from Dt. 6:5 have "a central place in Jewish piety, being used in daily prayer."¹⁰ Howard Marshall states that this is a central concept in Deuteronomy and reflects the sincere loyalty that should be displayed between covenant partners and the totality of mind and will that must be brought to the worship of God.¹¹ This love must be all-consuming, whole-being, sort of love. The words from Lev. 19:18, "love your neighbor as yourself," is found in a passage that forbids the oppression of the poor.¹² The Lord commands that Jews must love not only everyone in their own culture, but they should also love the stranger or foreigner as well (Leviticus 19:34). According to Marshall, the same obligation of love is extended to the resident alien, but "Jewish usage excluded Samaritans and foreigners from this category." The Jewish interpretation perverted the phrase used in Luke for "neighbor" or "one who is near" to translate as a "person with whom one has something to do" or someone who is

⁷ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 442.

⁸ Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, 206.

⁹ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 442.

¹⁰ Tannehill, *Luke*, 182.

¹¹ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 443-444.

¹² John Stevenson, *Luke: In the Footsteps of the Savior* (Hollywood, FL: Redeemer Publishing, 2008), 355.

"part of the same people and religious community, fellow Jews."¹³ They twisted the meaning of the passage to say that they should love their neighbors (who are like them) and hate their enemies (Matthew 5:43), contrary to the Scripture commandments of love.¹⁴

Jesus answered the lawyer in verse 28, essentially agreeing that he was correct. They stand on the common ground of the Law, agreeing that following both commandments will lead to eternal life. Leon Morris states that Jesus is not commending a new system of legalism that is different from an old one, but he "is pointing to the end of all legalism."¹⁵ The lawyer wanted strict instructions or a set of rules he could keep so as to merit eternal life. Jesus is telling him that to "live in love is to live the life of the kingdom of God...if we really love him [God], we love our neighbor too."¹⁶ Jesus first agrees with the lawyer prior to introducing something that is different than what the lawyer was expecting.

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Luke 10:29 N.I.V.

In the next verse, the lawyer is not conformed with just agreeing with Jesus. He probably realized that he failed in following the Law he had just described, so he wanted to "justify himself" and asked Jesus the now-famous question, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus responds to the lawyer's question by telling him a story:

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³²So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'³⁶ "Which

¹³ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 444.

¹⁴ Stevenson, *Luke: In the Footsteps of the Savior*, 355.

¹⁵ Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, 207.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"³⁷ The expert in the Law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:30-37 NIV).

Jesus describes a man, most likely a Jew, who was making his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. This road has been known "for centuries as a place where robbers all too often attack travelers."¹⁷ It runs down a "steep descent through desolate country...the distance is about 17 miles, and the road descends more than 3,000 feet."¹⁸ The treacherous terrain made it a "safe" place for robbers to attack. Jesus describes that the man was attacked by robbers, stripped of his clothes, beaten, and left "half dead." He was in no shape to help himself and was in desperate need of assistance. Tannehill describes that the focus on the traveler's need alone would create "sympathy for him and a desire for a helper to appear."¹⁹ Jesus continues the story by presenting potential helpers for the injured man. Tannehill states that the narrative device of the "folkloric triad" is used in the story, where "a series of three in which the third instance will either be the strongest form of the pattern established by the first two, or contrast with it."²⁰ The first two potential helpers were people of religious importance in the Jewish circles; however, they both failed to provide the help that the desperate man needed. The first was a priest who Luke mentions was on the way down, meaning that he had most likely completed his week of service in the Temple and was returning home.²¹ The priest avoided the man and went on to the other side of the road without providing help. He could have feared becoming the robbers next victim if they were still nearby. Or it could be that he was afraid of incurring ceremonial defilement forbidden by the Law in Leviticus 21:1-3; however, this is not an adequate excuse since the man was not in fact dead.²² The only way the priest could have been sure would have been to stop and see what could be done. Tannehill describes that the Mishnah views a "neglected corpse (such as a body abandoned by the road) as a special case, and even a high priest is permitted to contact uncleanness because of a neglected corpse."²³ However, the priest avoided even the possibility of contact and left the man behind

¹⁷ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 311.

¹⁸ Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, 207.

¹⁹ Tannehill, *Luke*, 183.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Stevenson, *Luke: In the Footsteps of the Savior*, 357.

²² Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, 208.

²³ Tannehill, *Luke*, 183.

suffering even though he probably had the time and the means to rescue or aid him.

After the priest, came the Levite, who also passed on by the other side of the road. Howard Marshall explains that in New Testament times, the Levites were inferior to the priests but were definitely a part of a privileged group in Jewish society since they were responsible for the liturgy in the Temple.²⁴ Both of these men held important ministerial functions in Jewish society and were responsible for helping those who are in need, but both of them ignored the man on the side of the road who was in desperate need of help. They possibly did not want to be inconvenienced by stopping to help. The next logical character that the audience may have expected to come to the man's aid would have probably been an Israelite layman, giving an "anti-clerical" point to the story.²⁵ Jesus, however, introduces a shocking development to the story when he says that a Samaritan, a member of a community hated by Jews, was the one who saw the man and took pity on him or felt compassion towards him (verse 33). According to Tannehill, the Samaritan is "a surprise because it indicates a jump in the categories – priest, Levite, and a Samaritan do not make a logical sequence – and because hatred between Jews and Samaritans would not lead a Jew to expect a Samaritan to show compassion."²⁶ Fred Craddock explains that "Samaritans were descendants of a mixed population occupying the land following the conquest by Assyria in 722 B.C.E. They opposed rebuilding the Temple and Jerusalem (Ezra 4:2-5; Neh. 2:19) and constructed their own place of worship on Mount Gerizim. Ceremonially unclean, socially outcast, and religiously a heretic, the Samaritan is the very opposite of the lawyer as well as the priest and the Levite."²⁷ The hatred or enmity between both groups was mutual, and it would have been especially shocking to the audience to hear that the one person who stopped to help the ailing man was a Samaritan. He was the one who kept the Law, showed compassion, and took concrete action to help the man.

Verse 34 describes how the Samaritan attended to man as best as he could with the resources he had on the road by pouring wine on his wounds to clean them and oil to ease the pain. This combination was widely used by both Jews and Greeks at the time.²⁸ The Samaritan then placed the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn and took care of him. The Samaritan didn't simply provide first-aid treatment, but he also took the man to a place where he could care for him properly and where he could leave the man with the proper care since he needed to continue his journey. He probably had to walk

²⁴ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 448.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 449.

²⁶ Tannehill, *Luke*, 183.

²⁷ Fred Craddock, *Luke: Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 150.

²⁸ Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, 208.

to the inn since he placed the injured man on top of his donkey. His actions all come at a personal cost to him, his time, his resources, specifically, his money was used to pay the innkeeper for the continued care for the injured man. He did not mind the inconvenience that this most likely caused him. He takes the necessary actions to make sure that the man would be properly cared for until he made a full recovery by paying the innkeeper "two-denarii" to care for the man and by promising to pay for any additional expenses the innkeeper may incur (verse 35). Marshall hypothesizes that if the daily rate at the inn cost one-twelfth of a denarius as proposed by J. Jeremias, the Samaritan's advance payment was enough for several days, and it made the innkeeper obligated to care for the injured man as long as he needed it.²⁹ The Samaritan also gave his word to the innkeeper that he would reimburse him for any additional expenses he may incur caring for the injured man on his way back from his journey. He did absolutely everything he could do to meet the injured man's need, not the bare minimum.

In verses 36, Jesus asks the lawyer which of the three men proved to be a neighbor to the injured man. Jesus essentially does not answer the lawyer's question in the way he probably expected it to be answered, but he deliberately alters the original question. The question is not "Who is my neighbor?" but it is "Do I behave myself as a neighbor to those who have need of my love and help?"³⁰ When looking at what Jesus asks in verse 36, Brendan Byrne states:

"At the end of the parable it is not a question of where and how far I should draw the limits of the notion "neighbor" – to see how far my obligations of "love" extend. It is a question of imitating the hospitality shown by the despised alien who broke through the barriers of ethnic and religious prejudice to minister to a fellow human being in need. The concept of "neighbor" shifts from being a tag that I may or may not apply to another, to being a quality or a vocation that I take upon myself and actively live out."³¹

Jesus answers the lawyer's original question by telling him the story of how one Samaritan undeniably acted like a neighbor. It is not a matter of defining who can be considered a neighbor, but how is it that you will act as a neighbor to everyone you encounter. In verse 37, the lawyer has no choice but to answer Jesus's question and state that of the three who encountered the injured man on the road, the one who showed him mercy is the one who acted

²⁹ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 450.

³⁰ Geldenhuys, *Commentary on The Gospel of Luke*, 311.

³¹ Brendan Byrne, *Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2015), 101.

like a neighbor. Jesus then commands him to go and do likewise. The double-love commandment found and adhered to by the religious scholars in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 still stands, but it is not limited to only the neighbors in one's own people group or just those who are Jewish. Jesus commands the lawyer to act neighborly towards all who need a neighbor, just like the Samaritan in the story.

Brendan Byrne says that the way to inherit eternal life is to follow Jesus's commandment:

"The God whom one is attempting to love with all one's heart is the God who reaches out to the world in compassion in the same way as the good Samaritan did. In the ministry of Jesus, which the Church has to continue, God offers extravagant, life-giving hospitality to wounded and half-dead humanity. The way to eternal life is to allow oneself to become an active instrument and channel of that same boundary-breaking hospitality."³²

The Samaritan did not pay attention to the injured man's ethnic identity or status. Since he was stripped of his clothes and beaten, it was probably impossible to determine if the injured man was a Jew or a Samaritan or even if he was someone of high status. This did not matter to the Samaritan. He saw someone in need of help and let his actions demonstrate his compassion for the man regardless of how they would have normally expected to behave towards one other under normal circumstances or by the stereotypes propagated between their communities. The Samaritan also did not contemplate or know the nature of the injured man's character, if he was a respectful member of society or a criminal. This did not stop him from helping. The question posed by the lawyer is completely turned upside down by Jesus and explicated to show that love for one's neighbor knows no bounds of nationality or of anything else, no matter what.³³ The lawyer recognizes that to act as a neighbor means to show mercy. Marshall details that "the giving and receiving of mercy transcends national and racial barriers."³⁴ The one who is able to observe the Law perfectly will gain eternal life by loving God and loving his neighbor; however, no one is able to accomplish this by their own merit. One is still obliged to obey Jesus's command in verse 37, but in Geldenhuys' words Christ says:

"I have given you eternal life through grace, and this new life in you will enable you to have real love towards God and your fellow-men and to carry it out in practice; so go

³² Brendan Byrne, *Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*, 101-102.

³³ Geldenhuys, *Commentary on The Gospel of Luke*, 312.

³⁴ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 450.

forth and live a life of true love to God and to your fellow-men, though the power I give you."³⁵

The Parable of the Good Samaritan brings in the Spirit of the Law and a deeper understanding of the morality of looking at the treatment of immigrants through a Biblical Christian Worldview. Samaritans and Jews were known enemies, and yet Jesus used the parable of the Good Samaritan to highlight how his followers or those who want to have eternal life should love God above all and outwardly express their love of God by loving others as well, regardless of their race, nationality, or character. This command does not only call Christians to love each other, but it is a call to love everyone. According to Daniel Carroll, Jesus "models a new and different way of looking at persons who are outside the circle of the known and beyond acceptability."³⁶ Robert Heimburger states that the parable critiques love that only extends to "insiders, to friends, family, race, class, nation, or religious community."³⁷ It combats a notion that mercy is only due to an "in-group."³⁸ The parable does not explicitly address immigrants, but since it does not set a limit as to who should be treated with neighborly love, it is clear that it can also be applied to the current times and treatment of immigrants by the Christian world.

Treatment of Immigrants in the Old Testament

To build a Biblical Perspective on immigration requires looking at the entirety of the Bible to see God's guidance on the treatment of immigrants, not just at a single Biblical passage. An important starting point is the creation of humanity outlined in Genesis 1:26-31. God, as the ultimate Creator, created all things in the world and finished by creating humanity in His image:

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27 NIV).

³⁵ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 312.

³⁶ Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2013), 110.

³⁷ Robert W. Heimburger, *God and the Illegal Alien: United States Immigration Law and a Theology of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 195.

³⁸ *Ibid* 197.

Daniel Carroll argues that the creation of all people in the image of God "must be the most basic conviction for Christians as they approach the challenges of immigration today."³⁹ This is because immigration is not just an abstract issue that can be dealt with in the theoretical realm. It is fundamentally about immigrants, so it directly deals with humans who are made in God's image. Every single immigrant is a part of God's creation and, as such, their lives "have an essential value and possess immense potential to contribute to society and to the common good through their presence, work, and ideas."⁴⁰ God created mankind to rule over his creation and to bring glory to his name. Genesis 1:31 declares that after God created mankind, he saw that "it was very good." God values his creation and even made way for reconciliation with his creation after the Fall (Genesis 3) by sending Jesus to pay the ultimate price for the sin of humanity so that those who have faith in Him can be reconciled with God. As God's representatives here on Earth, we should also give value, respect, and dignity to all creation, "irrespective of whether they are here with or without the documents the government might mandate."⁴¹ Carroll writes that to turn away or mistreat someone who is made in the image of God is a sin or violation towards God. Consequently, the issue of immigration, "at some level needs to be considered from a human rights perspective and not be defined solely in terms of national security, cultural identity, or economic impact."⁴²

Old Testament Migrations

Since immigration deals with the movement of people, the Old Testament contains a plethora of stories about people on the move, whether that movement happens in a voluntary manner or not. God, many times used the movement of people to accomplish his greater purposes. Many of the Patriarchs of faith left their homelands and migrated to other lands for varying reasons. Abram, later called Abraham, journeyed from Ur to Haran, to Canaan, and even passed by Egypt as well as he followed God's promise to him (Gen 12:1-5). He faced difficult decisions during his migration. Michael Soerens and Jenny Yang highlight that when a border stood behind Abram and the "sustenance he and his family needed in the midst of a famine" stood before him, he urged his wife, Sarai, to mislead the Egyptian officials regarding the nature of her relationship with Abram.⁴³ Sarai told the officials that she was

³⁹ Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 47.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴¹ Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 47.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Michael Soerens and Jenny Yang, *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: INTERVARSITY Press, 2018), 86-87.

Abram's sister, rather than his wife (Gen 12:10-20). Soerens and Yang write that under U.S. immigration law, that would be considered a "material misrepresentation of the facts."⁴⁴ Regardless of whether it was wrong or right, Abram's action was done in order to protect himself and provide for his family.

Abraham's great-grandson, Joseph, forcibly became a "sort of immigrant" when he was sold into slavery by his brothers and brought into Egypt (Gen 37). Through God's miraculous plan and fulfillment of the purpose he had for Joseph's life, Joseph's status was raised from slave to the second-most-powerful man in Egypt. God elevated Joseph and fulfilled the prophetic dream he had given him by using his life and status in Egypt to save his family and his "host" country, Egypt (Gen 45:5).⁴⁵ After Joseph reconciled with his brothers, his family immigrated to Egypt and lived there as foreigners for many generations. As their population grew, the Egyptians began to oppress the Hebrews, and God raised up Moses to free his people from the oppression and slavery that they were subjected to in Egypt. God's people under the leadership of Moses, became refugees as they fled from Egypt and wandered the desert with the promise that God would be leading them and giving them a "good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex 3:8).

The Old Testament demonstrates different accounts of how the people of Israel or God's people are found in foreign lands as a minority group. Luis Rodriguez states:

*"They are represented experiencing different social conditions in relation to majority groups in the receiving country (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Rome). Israel and Israelites are pictured as oppressed minorities settled in one place (Exodus; Jeremiah, Ezekiel; Esther; Lamentations); or as wandering and welcomed sojourners in a region or as resident aliens at peace or in conflict with local groups (Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph); or as members of foreign elites serving in the court of gentile kings (Nehemiah; Esther; Daniel)."*⁴⁶

Throughout the Old Testament, the different stories of God's people migrating illustrate the "troubles, plights, and hardships of immigrant and minority groups in foreign lands."⁴⁷ However, there are also other biblical passages that present Israel as the receiving country or host country, found in

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Michael Soerens and Jenny Yang, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 86-87.

⁴⁶ Luiz R. Rivera Rodriguez, "Immigration and The Bible: Comments by a Diasporic Theologian," *Perspectivas: Occasional Papers* (Hispanic Theological Initiative), no. 10 (Fall 2006): 25, accessed June 20, 2020, <http://perspectivasonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/2006-Fall.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

the laws presented in Deuteronomy and in some passages in the book of Joshua. God reminds the Israelites about their own history as strangers in a foreign land, and he commands them to welcome the immigrant and to be fair to all people.

God Loves the Vulnerable

The Book of Leviticus instructs and commands God's people to keep the covenant with God by being holy as God is holy (Lev 19:2) and abhorring anything immoral or sinful. R.K. Harrison writes in this commentary on Leviticus that while God was the "One who cared for the enslaved Israelites in Egypt to the point where He had ransomed them and restored their liberty, He demanded that they should observe the requirements of the covenant."⁴⁸ Scholar Walter Kaiser notes that the Old Testament warns "no fewer than thirty-six times of Israel's obligation to aliens, widows, and orphans."⁴⁹ The Hebrew word *ger* – translated variously into English as *foreigner*, *resident alien*, *stranger*, *sojourner*, or *immigrant* – appears ninety-two times in the Old Testament.⁵⁰ Textual, historical, and archaeological evidence suggests that *ger* (in the context of Hebrew Scriptures) refers to a foreigner who settled in Israelite territory, "has minority status, is expected to conform to the internal regulations of an Israelite community, does not have kinship ties, is most likely landless, and lacks basic resources and full benefits in the host community."⁵¹ According to Soerens and Yang, this same term is used "to refer to the Israelites when living (whether as welcomed guests or resented laborers) in Egypt."⁵² One of the multiple passages that shows God's command to care for the foreigner is found in Leviticus 19:33-34:

"When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. ³⁴ The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God" (Lev 19:33-34 NASB).

God's people are commanded to not oppress or exploit the stranger in any way because this behavior does not exemplify God's holiness.⁵³ They are

⁴⁸ R.K. Harrison, *Leviticus, An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 31.

⁴⁹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Leviticus," *The New Interpreter's Bible: Genesis to Leviticus*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abington, 1994), 1135.

⁵⁰ Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Dr. Issam Smeir, *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis...*

⁵¹ Rodriguez, "Immigration and the Bible," 27-28.

⁵² Michael Soerens and Jenny Yang, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 86.

⁵³ R.K. Harrison, *Leviticus*, 202.

called to remember their own history as foreigners in Egypt and that only through God's power, they were freed. They are told to love immigrants as themselves because they knew firsthand what it is like to live in a land that was not their own. Daniel Carroll suggests that the laws God established to care for the vulnerable or foreigners among the Israelites were to help them "not do to others what had happened to them in Egypt...the people of God were not to repeat the ruthless attitudes and actions of the Egyptians."⁵⁴ They were not supposed to become like the Egyptians by oppressing other peoples. They are to love the foreigner, even if they did not share the same social status. They need to love them even if they are vulnerable and not commit any injustice or wrong towards them. Samuel Balentine states:

"Because every human being bears 'the likeness of God,' the failure to love others is equivalent to saying that neither they nor we have value in the eyes of God...it may be likened to saying that in the decision to invest human beings with the divine image, God has made a terrible mistake."⁵⁵

The omnipotent and omniscient God of Israel does not make mistakes. He loves and cares for all His creation and continually shows signs of that love through the guidance he gives to his people. God's love is a "deep love for the needy and disenfranchised, whoever they are and whatever the cause of their situation...His is not a selective mercy."⁵⁶

Scholar James K. Hoffmeier highlights God's care for the vulnerable by explaining that in God the Creator's eyes "there was parity among peoples," and this divine perspective is reflected in the Law found in Numbers 15:15-16:

"The community is to have the same rules for you and for the alien living among you; this is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. You can the alien shall be the same before the Lord..." (Num. 15:15-16 NIV)

The same laws given to the Israelites were to be applied equally to Israelite and strangers alike. The implied reason is that they are considered "the same before the Lord."⁵⁷ God does not show partiality among peoples. The same benefits and obligations applied to both groups even when a crime is unintentionally committed and lesser penalties are imposed: "One and the same law applies to everyone who sins unintentionally, whether he is a native-

⁵⁴ Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 90-91.

⁵⁵ Samuel E. Balentine, *Leviticus: Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002), 166.

⁵⁶ Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 53.

⁵⁷ James K. Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens and the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 76.

born Israelite or an alien" (Num. 15:29).⁵⁸ This principle of equal justice is something that is particular to the Israelites. Hoffman states that in the Ancient Near East, "the Code of Hammurabi and other Mesopotamian legal traditions show that penalties for the same crime differed depending on one's social or class status."⁵⁹ Foreigners were not considered a "legally protected group" in the law codes for that region, with the exception of Israel. Daniel Carroll writes that "Israel's stance toward the foreigner was part of the larger fabric of its ethical life...it was part of the ethos of what is meant to be the people of God."⁶⁰ Some of the same legal protections God commanded Israel to extend to the immigrants included the right to a sabbath rest (Deut. 5:14; Ex 20:10), fair labor treatment (Deut. 24:14), and prompt payment for their labor (Deut. 24:15). God also called for social solidarity and promoted moral responsibility to provide for the needs of strangers in conjunction with providing for the needs of the other most vulnerable group in Israel: the fatherless and the widows.⁶¹ Deuteronomy 10:18 states that God "executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing." Psalm 146:9 reiterates this same concern of the Lord:

*"The Lord watches over the foreigner
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked" (Psalm 146:9 N.I.V.).*

Other laws that demonstrate God's care for the immigrants are found in Deut. 14:22-29; 16:9-12, 13-15; 24:17-18, 19-22; and 26:12-15. In all of these, God commands the Israelites to make special provisions for the needs of the foreigners, and many times the widow and the orphan as well:

"When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.²⁰ When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.²¹ When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.²² You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this." (Deut. 24:19-22 ESV)

⁵⁸ Ibid., 77.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 82.

⁶¹ Michael Soerens and Jenny Yang, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 90.

God also uses various prophets to call his people to care for foreigners and to condemn those who disregard his instructions to care for the vulnerable groups (Ezek. 22:7; Zech. 7:10). Daniel Carroll states that the prophets "thundered against those Israelites who did not accept the responsibility for these people," because it was a "breach of their faith in the Lord" and God would not "tolerate this disobedience."⁶² Jeremiah 22:3 says:

"Thus, says the Lord, "Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor. Also, do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow; and do not shed innocent blood in this place." (Jeremiah 22:3 NASB).

Malachi announces God's judgment against those who oppress the vulnerable by putting them in the same position as sorcerers and adulterers:

"So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the Lord Almighty" (Mal 3:5 N.I.V.).

Anyone who does not obey God will be judged or cursed by him as Deuteronomy 27:19 states:

"Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" (Deut. 27:19 N.I.V.).

The New Testament and Immigrants

The New Testament opens with the Gospels containing the ministry of Jesus Christ, his life, death, and his resurrection. Jesus himself was at one time a refugee when his family was told by an angel to flee to Egypt in order to keep Jesus safe from Herod (Matt. 2:13-15).⁶³ Although the Gospels do not provide direct teaching on the treatment of immigrants, Jesus' teaching does demonstrate a practical example of how all vulnerable people should be treated and loved. Specifically, like already analyzed and explicated, the parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37 shows how one should

⁶² Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 89.

⁶³ Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Dr. Issam Smeir, *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis...*

act neighborly or one should love others as oneself in practical ways without limiting the definition of "neighbor." God's love for the vulnerable and His commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself is reiterated in the Gospel's multiple times. This can be applied to the treatment of immigrants.

Aside from the parable of the Good Samaritan, the text found in Matthew 25:31-46 is also relevant to the discussion regarding immigration and the treatment of immigrants. In this passage, Jesus speaks about the final judgment of the nations of the world. The divine decision regarding who deserves eternal blessings and eternal judgment is based on how people have treated the Son of Man/King and the "least of these brothers and sisters of mine" (Matt. 25:40).⁶⁴ Daniel Carroll points out that this passage is relevant to the treatment of immigrants because of the use of the Greek word "*xenos*" in Matthew 25:35, 38, 43, and 44 which is the word for "stranger" or "foreigner."⁶⁵ The term for stranger is included amongst other marginalized people, the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and imprisoned, all of whom are called the "least of these brothers and sisters of mine" (25:40, 45). Carroll explains that some people believe that:

*"this listing of those who suffer along with the stranger, shows the breadth of Jesus's concern for the needy and emphasizes the ethical demand placed on all humankind...to ignore any of these people, these "little ones," is tantamount to refusing Jesus himself. Since the stranger is one of them, here we have the imperative to take care of the immigrant."*⁶⁶

Although this interpretation is appealing to use as a reason to advocate for immigrants, in reality, various biblical scholars point to the phrase "the least of these my brothers and sisters" (25:40, 45) as using language that refers in the Gospel not to all marginalized people but to Jesus' disciples (cf. Matt. 10:40; 12:46-50).⁶⁷ Scholar Warren Carter writes that meeting the needs of disciples in mission is a way of receiving Jesus (Matt 10:40-42), and this welcoming action is only "the beginning of a way of life marked by similar acts."⁶⁸ Jesus modeled and taught his disciples to perform the six actions described in Matthew 25:35-36 as the disciples "carry out their mission of manifesting God's reign/empire...in Isaiah 58:6-7, these actions counter injustice and break the yoke of oppression enacted by wicked empires."⁶⁹ Carter details that these acts of mercy reflect the disciples'

⁶⁴ Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 112.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 112-113.

⁶⁷ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 492.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 495.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

commitment to Jesus, and it is the "greater righteousness" (Matt. 5:20), the "doing of God's will which results from encountering God's saving righteousness."⁷⁰ The passage of Matthew 25:31-46 could very well speak of the hardships the disciples faced as they traveled as messengers of the Gospel. Carroll writes that to scorn the disciples and their message is equivalent to rejecting Jesus, the "one who is the essence of that message and who sends the disciples."⁷¹ The disciples' future mission travels would make them "strangers" wherever they go.⁷² Matthew 25:31-46 "sets the stage" for Jesus's pronouncement of the Great Commission to go out to all of the world in 28:16-20. Carroll makes a note to mention that although the "stranger" mentioned in this passage of Matthew is technically a disciple who is in another land for ministry, it is logical to speculate (based on data) that many of the immigrants who come to the U.S. of Hispanic origin are actually believers in Christ. Of the immigrant believers that come to the U.S., many of them are needy. Therefore, according to Carroll, it could be pertinent to apply this passage to their treatment since the Christ dwells among them and in them too, so the Christian church of the host culture would have some responsibility to help them as the "least of these" in the name of Jesus.⁷³

The greatest way that we see God's love for humanity and, therefore, the immigrant, is in the salvation story or the Gospel. God's love for creation was so great that he sent his only son to die on the cross so that all who believe in him can have eternal life and be reconciled with God (John 3:16). The text of John 3:16 is one that most believers can recite verbatim word for word. The verse says that God loved the world. He did not love just one group of people. He loves his entire creation and wants to be reconciled with ALL his children. No man-made label can diminish the love God has for people. Illegal, undocumented, immigrant, minority. These labels do not determine the value or the love that the Father has that he would send Jesus to pay the price that humanity could not afford or accomplish to pay for itself. The Apostle Paul writes to the Gentiles in Ephesus that at one time, they were separate from Christ, "*excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world*" (Eph. 2:12 N.I.V.). The promises of God to the Israelites in the Old Testament excluded all others who were not part of the covenant people. But because of God's love, now in "*Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ*" (Eph. 2:13 N.I.V.). By God's grace, we have been adopted into his family and "naturalized" into God's kingdom through the blood of Jesus Christ.⁷⁴ Christ has also:

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 113.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 114.

⁷⁴ Michael Soerens and Jenny Yang, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 92.

"destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the Law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (Eph. 2:14-16 N.I.V.).

Through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, everyone who believes and has faith in him are now *"no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household"* (Eph. 2:19). Time and time again, God demonstrates that he is not partial amongst people; he loves his creation the same. God does not mandate that Gentiles become Jews in every way, but he makes them part of the single body of the church (Acts 15:10; 1 Cor. 12:27).⁷⁵ Paul states in his letter to the Galatians:

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:26-29 NASB).

In God's Kingdom, everyone who has faith in Jesus is accepted and saved by him. Now that we are a part of Christ's body, it is important that we love and demonstrate Christ's love to everyone around us. Both the native-born citizen and the marginalized immigrant. Christ paid the price for their lives too. Tommy Casarez writes, "Human beings reflect God-likeness and that kind of love that God is when they love others as God loved humanity on the cross in Christ."⁷⁶

Hospitality in the New Testament

Just as the Ancient Near East cultures value hospitality, and we see it modeled in the Old Testament, Christians are also told to be good hosts in the New Testament. Showing hospitality is another way that Christian can model Christ's love for immigrants. The author of Hebrews advises Christians to care

⁷⁵ Michael Soerens and Jenny Yang, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 93.

⁷⁶ Tommy Casarez, "The Spirit of Christ, Identity and the Undocumented in Our Midst: Toward a Space-Making Theological Ethic," in *The Holy Spirit and Social Justice Interdisciplinary Global Perspectives: Scripture and Theology*, ed. Antipas L Harris and Michael D Palmer (Lanham, MD: Seymour Press, 2019), pp. 128-147, p.143.

for and welcome strangers with hospitality because, in doing so, some people may "have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2). In describing practical ways to show love, Paul writes to the church in Rome to "share with the Lord's people who are in need" and to "practice hospitality" (Romans 12:13). Hospitality demonstrates care and concern over the condition of others. Its practice makes people feel welcomed and valued, demonstrating in a practical way, the care that God has for all people. According to theologian Orlando Espín, "Welcoming the stranger...is the most often repeated commandment in the Hebrew Scriptures, with the exception of the imperative to worship only the one God."⁷⁷ By welcoming immigrants in our community, we can continue to follow the New Testament mandate of showing hospitality.

Immigration in the United States

The United States is often described as a "melting pot" of people from all over the world who immigrated to this country to fulfill the "American Dream" of achieving a better life. Matthew Soerens and Jenny Yang state that it is important for all Americans to remember that more than 99 percent of the population – "everyone except for those few whose ancestry is entirely Native American – has an immigrant story."⁷⁸ Another important fact is that the first immigrants to this continent:

"did not come to a land undiscovered but to a land already inhabited by Native Americans, who were forcibly displaced, disenfranchised, and sometimes killed for their land. It took the systematic and targeted displacement of Native Americans and their subsequent dehumanization for the first European immigrant pilgrims to inhabit a land that was deemed 'free' for the taking."⁷⁹

Daniel Carroll writes that immigration is neither a new phenomenon nor only a recent political concern. The internal issues caused by immigration have always been influenced by the greater global backdrop. That is, "each major period of immigration to the United States has been part of larger migrations happening simultaneously around the world and, therefore, has been inseparable from the political, social, and economic conditions of other nations."⁸⁰ The "collective image" of the immigration of a century or two ago

⁷⁷ Orlando O. Espín, "Immigration and Theology: Reflection by an Implicated Theologian," *Perspectivas: Occasional Papers* (Hispanic Theological Initiative), no. 10 (Fall 2006) 46-47.

⁷⁸ Michael Soerens and Jenny Yang, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 44.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 5.

has become more romanticized over time with images of Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty coming into mind.⁸¹ Many Americans do not have the same warm regards toward contemporary immigrants. Soerens and Yang write that most Americans hold a dualistic opinion about immigration, on the one hand, "reveling in the nation's immigrant past and on the other, rejecting much of its immigrant present."⁸² Today's immigrants come to the United States primarily for the same reasons as past immigrants. Although laws and policies towards immigrants have changed dramatically over the last two hundred years, the immigrants themselves are still "pushed out of their countries of origin by poverty, war, and persecution, and are still drawn to the United States by promises of jobs and economic advancement, freedom, and family reunification."⁸³

21st Century Legal Immigrants

Immigration in the United States today continues to be a hotly debated issue with nuanced layers of complexity from all sides of the political spectrum. According to the 2018 American Community Survey (A.C.S.), over 44.7 million immigrants live in the United States.⁸⁴ Immigrants comprise about 13.7 percent of the total U.S. population of 327.2 million people.⁸⁵ This percentage remains "below the record-high 14.8 percent hit in 1890, but is a very significant increase over the record low 4.7 percent marked in 1970."⁸⁶ The Pew Research Center estimates that around 77 percent of the foreign-born population in the United States are in the country legally, meaning that they entered through official ports of entry and according to the rules of the admissions policies established by the U.S. government.⁸⁷ Based on this same research, around 45 percent were naturalized U.S. citizens in 2017.⁸⁸ Almost 12.3 million or around 27 percent of these people are Lawful Permanent Residents or green cardholders. Although there are many in the U.S. that

⁸¹ Michael Soerens and Jenny Yang, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 45.

⁸² Michael Soerens and Jenny Yang, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 45.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Jeanne Batalova, Brittany Blizzard, and Jessica Bolter. "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States." *Migration Policy Institute*, February 14, 2020. Accessed July 3, 2020. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states>.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Jynnah Radford. "Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants," *The Pew Research Center*, June 17, 2019. Accessed July 3, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/17/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

support and welcome legal immigration, there has recently been an increase in the racism and hate crime rates experienced by immigrants after the election of President Donald Trump.⁸⁹ Many legal immigrants are being treated with prejudice or as if they were undocumented because of the way they look or sound.

Undocumented Immigrants

Although the majority of immigrants are residing in the U.S. legally, the one group that receives most of the media attention are those who are here as undocumented immigrants, often given the pejorative label of "illegal aliens." It is estimated that around 23 percent of all immigrants are undocumented or around 10.5 million people.⁹⁰ It has already been established that all human beings are created by God and have inherent value, so the term "undocumented immigrant" is preferred rather than "illegal alien" since the latter suggests, that the person is guilty of some act, has few scruples, and is prone to civil disobedience.⁹¹ This is not the case with a majority of undocumented immigrants. Most of them would gladly regularize their status with the government but have no appropriate avenues to do so with the existing system and laws. They are also not all "violent criminals" as the popular anti-immigrant rhetoric indicates. Research shows that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than US-born Americans.⁹² An analysis done by *Governing* magazine found no link between unauthorized immigrants and violent crime, rather it indicated:

"concentrations of unauthorized immigrants were associated with marginally lower violent crime rates...A statistically significant negative correlation was also shown for property crimes. For every 1 percentage-point increase in the unauthorized immigrant share of a metro area's population,

⁸⁹ Brendan Campbell, Angel Mendoza, and Tessa Diestel, "Rising Hate Drives Latinos and Immigrants into Silence," *The Center for Public Integrity*, August 22, 2018. Accessed August 5, 2020. <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/rising-hate-drives-latinos-and-immigrants-into-silence/>.

⁹⁰ Jynnah Radford. "Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants," *The Pew Research Center*, June 17, 2019. Accessed July 3, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/17/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>.

⁹¹ Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, xxix.

⁹² Michael G. Vaughn and Christopher P. Salas-Wright, "Immigrants Commit Crime and Violence at lower rates than the US-born Americans," *Annals of Epidemiology* 28, no.1 (January 2018): 58-60. Accessed August 7, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2017.10.016>.

average property crime rates dropped by 94 incidents per 100,000 residents."⁹³

Matthew Soerens and Jenny Yang describe the inadequacies and shortcomings of the immigration regulations since they have been "ignored" by politicians for years in favor of the economic benefits undocumented immigrants provide through their labor. They state:

*"The (American) economy has created many jobs, particularly in sectors that do not require extensive formal education such as agriculture, hotels, and restaurants, but the American immigration visa quotas, many of which were set in 1965, do not provide enough visas to meet the demand of the labor market. Rather than change the visa system, administrations of both parties effectively looked the other way for decades as desperate people overstayed visas or crossed the border unlawfully. Because the consequences of fully enforcing the Law—deporting all those who are unlawfully present—would be cataclysmic both on an economic and humanitarian level, few political leaders seriously support mass deportation of all undocumented immigrants, but they have also not found the consensus to create the mechanism to remedy their status."*⁹⁴

Not all undocumented immigrants entered the U.S. by illegally crossing the Mexican-U.S. Border through the desert. Almost 42 percent of the undocumented population actually entered the U.S. with a valid visitor visa but overstayed the allotted time given to them by U.S. Customs.⁹⁵ Undocumented immigrants account for 3.2 percent of the nation's population.⁹⁶ According to a study done by the Migration Policy Institute, the unauthorized immigrant population in the U.S. is a "long-settled group."⁹⁷

⁹³ Michael Maciag, "The Mythical Link Between Immigrants and High Crime Rates," *Governing*, March 2, 2017. Accessed August 6, 2020. <https://www.governing.com/topics/public-justice-safety/gov-undocumented-immigrants-crime-pew.html>

⁹⁴ Michael Soerens and Jenny Yang, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 99.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹⁶ Jynnah Radford, "Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants," *The Pew Research Center*, June 17, 2019. Accessed July 3, 2020.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/17/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>.

⁹⁷ Julia Gelatt and Jie Zong, "Settling In: A Profile of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population in the United States," *Migration Policy Institute*, November 2018. Accessed July 5, 2020.

During the period analyzed by their study, 2012-2016, about sixty-two percent of unauthorized immigrants had lived in the United States for at least ten years, and 21 percent had been in the country for 20 years or more.⁹⁸ Aside from living in the United States for over a decade, a great part of these undocumented immigrants have strong family ties in the United States. Of those who are 15 years and older, about forty percent were married and living with a partner during the 2012-2016 period analyzed. Within that group, 29 percent were married to a U.S. citizen, 17 percent to a legal permanent resident or green-card holder, and 53 percent to a temporary visa holder or unauthorized immigrant.⁹⁹ During the same period studied by the Migration Policy Institute, 5.1 million U.S. children under the age of 18 resided with at least one unauthorized immigrant parent. The study goes on to say:

“Approximately 80 percent (4.1 million) of these children were born in the United States and had U.S. citizenship at birth; 1 percent (33,000) were naturalized citizens; 3 percent (167,000) were legal immigrants; and 16 percent (809,000) were unauthorized themselves.”

This brings another angle to the delicate issue since many times one undocumented immigrant has multiple familial ties to the United States that would cause emotional turmoil and damage to all involved if deportation ever occurs. Many immigrants brought into the U.S. as children by their parents, when they had no choice in the matter, have lived their entire lives here in this country. They have studied here, completed their K-12 education in the U.S., and don't even remember a time when they lived their birth countries. These children are brought up as if they were born in the United States and many times are heartbroken to find out that they do not have the proper documentation to give them the same rights and opportunities as their best friends and classmates that have grown up beside them. These young people, often referred to as "Dreamers," were brought into this country at an age where they had no way to choose for themselves. They have been patiently waiting for years for a possible legislative avenue to legalize their status in this country. Some of them have benefited from the executive order enacted by President Obama in 2012, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA.¹⁰⁰ This program provides these young people with temporary

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/profile-unauthorized-immigrant-population-united-states>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Jens Manuel Krogstad, "Americans broadly support legal status for immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children." *The Pew Research Center*, June 17, 2020, accessed July 8, 2020,

employment authorization and relief from deportation. In a recent survey done by P.E.W. research shows that around 74% of Americans favor a law that would provide permanent legal status to immigrants who came to the U.S. illegally as children.¹⁰¹ Although most Americans are in favor of legalizing Dreamers, Congress has failed time and time again to reach a consensus on how to accomplish this. The Trump administration has tried multiple times repealing DACA, but no permanent provision has been made to resolve this issue without leaving the lives of over 800,000 thousand people in limbo. This continues to be a complex issue since countless of those who fall into this category have either already contributed or have the potential to contribute greatly to the American society as teachers, health care workers, or in other honorable professions if they are allowed to remain in the U.S.

Family Separations at the Border

Another difficult issue that has developed recently is the separation of minor children from their parents at the southern U.S. border with Mexico. Between 2018 and 2019, there was a dramatic increase of apprehensions of migrants at the southern border by Customs and Border Patrol agents, including over 11,507 unaccompanied children.¹⁰² In the 2018 fiscal year, 92,959 people were "deemed to have made claims of 'credible fear' and asked for asylum at the border" an increase of over 39,000 people from the previous fiscal year.¹⁰³ These migrants who were seeking asylum were often women and children who were fleeing violence, gang recruitment, and sex trafficking in their home countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.¹⁰⁴ Most of these migrants were not attempting to sneak into the U.S., but they actually were presenting themselves to border agents in order to legally seek asylum.¹⁰⁵ This presented a complete shift from the "common undocumented immigrant" demographic of the past who used to be Mexican men sneaking into the U.S. in order to seek work. The enactment of a "zero-tolerance" immigration policy introduced in April 2018 criminally charged and jailed adult undocumented migrants who crossed the US-Mexico border instead of treating the crossing as

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/17/americans-broadly-support-legal-status-for-immigrants-brought-to-the-u-s-illegally-as-children/> .

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Micah Luxen, Jessica Lussenhop, and Rajjini Vaidyanathan, "Is there a crisis on the US-Mexico border?" *BBC News*, July 11, 2019, accessed July 27, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44319094> .

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Raul A. Reyes, "Taken from their parents: There is nothing right about this." *CNN*, April 23, 2018. Accessed July 27, 2020.

<https://us.cnn.com/2018/04/23/opinions/taken-from-their-parents-there-is-nothing-right-about-this-reyes/index.html> .

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

civil violations as in the past.¹⁰⁶ Since the children of prosecuted migrants were not charged with any crime, they were not "jailed" with their parents but were placed in shelters or foster care, effectively separating them from their parents.¹⁰⁷ Children of asylum seekers were also separated from their parents, causing undue traumatic stress and consequences that will be felt for years to come.

A group of lawyers who were granted access to a border facility in Texas where children were being held told the B.B.C. of horrifying conditions inside, including that children were "locked up in horrific cells where there's an open toilet in the middle of the room where they ate and slept."¹⁰⁸ The image of these children in what looks like "cages" brought a public outcry with advocates calling for the end of family separation. After the introduction of the "zero tolerance" policy, the Attorney General at that time, Jeff Sessions is reported to have said: "If you don't want your child separated, then don't bring them across the border illegally."¹⁰⁹ This viewpoint ignored the violence, fear, and possible death these migrants would be facing if they chose to remain in their home country and also ignores the fact that many of the migrants were not crossing illegally or sneaking into the country but were presenting themselves to C.B.P. officers requesting asylum.

President Trump signed an executive order in June 2018, reversing his administration's policy in order to "keep families together" and a court order also ended the separations and mandated that families be reunited.¹¹⁰ However, hundreds of children remained in government shelters waiting to be reunited with their family while others continue to be separated from their families because of loopholes in the court order.¹¹¹ The Trump administration continues to use "deterrent measures to limit illegal entry and asylum seekers from entering the U.S. by making asylum seekers wait in Mexico for adjudication in their case, decreasing the number of asylum cases processed each day, and announcing that claims of domestic and gang violence would no longer qualify as grounds for asylum."¹¹² Courts later ruled that domestic and gang violence can be considered for asylum claims, but the situation is still

¹⁰⁶ Reality Check Team, "US Border: Who decided to separate families?" *BBC News*, June 26, 2019. Accessed July 27, 2020.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44303556> .

¹⁰⁷ Reality Check Team, "US Border: Who decided to separate families?" *BBC News*, June 26, 2019. Accessed July 27, 2020.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44303556> .

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Micah Luxen, Jessica Lussenhop, and Rajjini Vaidyanathan, "Is there a crisis on the US-Mexico border?" *BBC News*, July 11, 2019, accessed July 27, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44319094> .

vastly complicated for various asylum seekers. The changing policies and politics involved in the current immigration system in the U.S. continue to bring heartbreak and confusion as lives are put on hold, in danger, or families are separated while trying to navigate these complicated times.

Recommendations - Ways to "love" our Immigrant Neighbors

A recent LifeWay Research survey of American evangelical Christians found that just 12 percent of those surveyed "think about immigration issues primarily from the perspective of the Bible."¹¹³ When asked about what "most influenced their thinking on this topic, the Bible, the local church, and national Christian leaders combined" were reported less often than the media.¹¹⁴ It is alarming to think that Christians are turning more to the news, social media, and the current cultural opinion rather than to the Bible to form an opinion regarding such an important issue that impacts society today. Having a biblical perspective regarding immigration and using it as a foundation on how to treat others is one of the most important steps in practicing "love" towards our immigrant neighbors. Christians should respond to any crisis with biblically sound truths rather than fear. Immigrants are a part of God's creation, and the greatest way to demonstrate our love for our neighbor is to actively share the Gospel of Jesus with them by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20). The Joshua Project states that there are approximately 82 unreached people groups in the United States.¹¹⁵ Many of these are part of the immigrant community who are from difficult to reach countries. With immigrants being our neighbors, there is no need to travel further than the neighborhood supermarket, job, or school to reach people who we normally would never have the opportunity to meet had they not immigrated to the United States. Although the majority of immigrants are Christians, the Pew Research Center estimates that since 1992 the U.S. has admitted around 1.7 million Muslim immigrants and about one million Hindu immigrants.¹¹⁶ Imagine the potential in reaching Muslims and Hindus without needing to travel across the globe. This opens doors for evangelism and for potentially reaching even representatives of countries where the Gospel is currently banned.

¹¹³ Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Issam Smeir, *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016), 29.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ <https://joshuaproject.net/countries/US>

¹¹⁶ "The Religious Affiliation of U.S. Immigrants: Majority Christian, Rising Share of Other Faiths." *The Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life*, May 17, 2013. Accessed July 7, 2020.

<https://www.pewforum.org/2013/05/17/the-religious-affiliation-of-us-immigrants/>

James 2:14-17 reminds Christians that faith without works is not enough. The love demonstrated to immigrant neighbors is not just demonstrated in having a biblical worldview but also in practical actions. Welcoming new immigrants to the local church, running a food pantry or clothing closet, and offering free English Classes, are all ways that the evangelical community can actively demonstrate love and engage in relationships with our immigrant neighbors.¹¹⁷ Churches can run outreach programs such as health clinics or legal workshops to assist the overall community and also reach immigrants.

Additionally, Christians can also practically demonstrate their love for our immigrant neighbors by advocating for fair legal reform within the United States' democratic system. Daniel Carroll states that the U.S. government itself recognizes that it must change its immigration legislation in order to address the current immigration challenges this country is facing.¹¹⁸ God is vehemently against the oppression of vulnerable groups; he loves all of His creation equally. As his representatives here, as image-bearers of Christ, we can use our voice and political agency to reach out to our government officials and advocate for legal reform of a system that is not meeting the needs of this country and is causing so much turmoil in our society. Many Christians have a difficult time dealing with the topic of immigration, especially when considering undocumented immigrants because of the text found in Romans 13, where Christians are told to submit to governing authorities. However, simply looking at one verse to discuss legality is not adequate when there is so much more involved in considering what the Bible has to say about immigrants. Daniel Carroll argues that Christians should search the Scriptures for guidance in "evaluating the development of immigration policy and engaging its multifaceted set of problems" and then move towards the "legal issues."¹¹⁹ He writes:

*Discussion on legality cannot be limited just to questions about complying with the present laws. If the laws are problematic theologically, humanely, and pragmatically – and since everyone agrees that reform must come—the call to submit to the authorities in Romans 13 can be processed in fresh and constructive ways. Respect for the nation's present laws is coupled with and informed by the move toward a new set of laws.*¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Michael Soerens and Jenny Yang, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 96.

¹¹⁸ Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 126.

¹¹⁹ Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 126.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

Christians should not advocate or incentivize people to break the Law but should actively recognize that the current system is broken. Regarding undocumented immigrants, Matthew Soerens and Jenny Yang state:

"We can exercise the responsibility inherent within a democratic system of government to advocate for changes to Law such that individuals in this circumstance could make things right, paying a fine or completing whatever restitution might be necessary for having overstayed a visa or entered the country without inspection, but stay with their families, where so many are also contributing to our local churches and to our national economy. Ultimately, the Scriptures guide Christians to respect the rule of Law, but our current immigration legal system actually makes a mockery of the Law."¹²¹

To actively love our immigrant neighbors does not mean we will have the answers or the perfect solutions about how to reform the national immigration policy in the United States but it should be the guiding principle to our personal interactions with them as well as shedding a light as we reflect on the structural issues immigrants face in this country.¹²²

Conclusion

"The religious life of faith must have ethical outcomes if it makes a claim to authenticity. The people of God today, like the nation of Israel, are not completely defined by land borders or common language. It is their demonstration of ethics and holiness that characterizes their corporate identity."¹²³

Immigration remains an important issue today and an area that Christian's actions should demonstrate Christian ethics and love. It is also an opportunity for sharing the Gospel in the 21st Century and reaching those who we otherwise might not have reached without the need to travel across the world. Globalization makes it unrealistic to think that the demographics of the United States will remain the same as they were fifty years ago, but this is not something to fear. Immigrants have a lot to contribute to this nation, especially those who are revitalizing our churches and are now becoming the missionaries to the United States' secularized society. Although we do not

¹²¹ Michael Soerens and Jenny Yang, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 98.

¹²² *Ibid*, 100.

¹²³ Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*. Vol. 3A. The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 264-265.

have a clear solution to the different legal issues that surround this topic, as Christians, our behavior in every area of our lives should reflect the love of Christ, even within this nuanced and complicated issue. Our lives should reflect the light of the Gospel, making a difference, and pointing others to Christ with our actions and our words. Showing love to our neighbors is not limited to only our "Christian" neighbors. Jesus commands us to love our enemies and show his love to the world. Our collective citizenship in heaven brings us closer to those who belong to the family of Christ here on Earth regardless of their nation of origin, their language, or immigration status while they are here. Our final destination, heaven, will have believers from every nation, tribe, people, and language worshiping together (Revelation 7:9). The image of this great multitude of people from different backgrounds and ethnicities reminds us of God's love for all of his creation as well as our responsibility to love our neighbor. There is no room for racism, hatred, or discrimination in the Kingdom of God (1 John 4:20). The image of everyone worshipping God together in heaven reminds us that we are not permanent residents here on Earth, and diversity is part of God's creation and plan. There is dignity in all human life. It falls on Christians to make a difference and show everyone the practical love of Christ.

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The Tongue as an Analogy in James 3

Lorena Matias

The tongue is a small part of the body, yet it can be very harmful. It can heal or hurt, bless or curse, love or hate, bring life or death, sweetness or bitterness. In the mouth of God, words had the power to *create* all things. Through the command of His voice everything came into being. In the mouth of mankind the right words have the power to *save* “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). They also have the power to *forgive* mankind, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Several times Scriptures prophesy that every *tongue* will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, (Isa. 45:23, Rom. 14:11, Phil. 2:11).

In James’ epistle, which this paper seeks to explore the theme of the tongue, it is introduced in the opening chapter (1:19 and 26). Then, the author dedicates chapter 3 (1-12) to explain and exemplify his exhortation. He associated the believer’s control of speech with becoming perfect, that is, complete and approved by God (James 3:2). However, since the Fall, mankind sinned, and it caused separation from God. Humanity inherited the Adamic nature, therefore they cannot be perfect, because only God is perfect. In other words, taming the tongue is impossible for sinful mankind. Although James exhorts Christians to a holy speech, fallen human beings cannot achieve God’s standards of holiness. Hence, what can the Christian do to live in holiness, in light of the impossibility of taming the tongue? This paper seeks to answer this intriguing question considering Scriptures, based on James’ approach concerning the use of the tongue with tamed speech.

THE TONGUE

The Greek word **γλῶσσα** – *glossa* (Strong’s G1100) is translated as *tongue* and it has two different nuances. The first one is a member of the body, or an organ of speech. In other words, it is literally the instrument of licking, eating, or speech. The second one, it is a language or dialect. The word **γλῶσσα** appears 50 times in the Concordance of the New Testament in the King James Version of the Bible.¹ In the Septuagint, **γλῶσσα** is present in 35

¹ Accessed on February 19, 2020.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?strongs=G1100&ot=KJV&t=NIV#lexSearch>

verses, mostly within the books that belong to the Wisdom Literature (24 times) and a few verses amidst the books of the prophets (11 times)².

The deeds of the tongue that James analyzes in his epistle are not a new subject in Scriptures. Quite the opposite, only in the books that belong to the Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament, the theme of speech is written through its relevant glossary. The word “mouth” occurs 160 times; “words” 92 times, “lips” 83 times, and “tongue” 65 times in the King James Version³. All those passages are associated with words spoken that express truth or lies, wisdom or foolishness, righteous or wicked testimony, good or evil. Those are the fruit that one’s speech can bear.

In the New Testament, different authors use **γλῶσσα** while quoting Old Testament Scriptures. In Acts 2:26, Luke quotes David, “my heart is glad and my **γλῶσσα** rejoices”⁴. Likewise, the apostle Paul quotes David’s wisdom concerning the **γλῶσσα** in Rom. 3:13⁵. Paul also quotes the prophet Isaiah in Rom. 14:11, when he says that every **γλῶσσα** will confess that Jesus Christ is God and rephrases it in Phl. 2:11⁶. Furthermore, the apostle Peter also quotes David’s wise advice about the dangers of the **γλῶσσα** in 1 Pet. 3:10⁷. In James’ epistle, **γλῶσσα** appears four times: 1:26, 3:5, 3:6, and 3:8. All of them are cross referenced either with the wisdom literature, the prophet Isaiah, or Jesus’ own words.

Scholars show that the entire epistle of James is a paraphrase of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.⁸ Porter Jr. says, “Similarities abound between James’s epistle and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. These include some of the same words, references to the same Old Testament characters, similar statements, and parallel themes.”⁹ It may have been the case that James wrote about the things he heard from Jesus by memory, since the Gospel of Matthew was written before 70 A.D, while James’ epistle was written in the 40’s A.D.¹⁰ Only concerning speech, Porter Jr. parallels the sub-themes in both New

² Accessed on April 5, 2020.

https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/search.cfm?Criteria=%CE%B3%CE%BB%E1%BF%B6%CF%83%CF%83%CE%B1&t=LXX#s=s_primary_0_1

³ Accessed on February 19, 2020. www.blueletterbible.com

⁴ Ps. 16:9

⁵ Ps. 5:9

⁶ Isa. 45:23

⁷ Ps. 34:13

⁸ John Stevenson. *General Epistles – The Sermon on the Mount and the Epistle of James*. Accessed on April 05, 2020. Available at <https://youtu.be/Pl0ji55IF7E>

⁹ Virgil V. Porter Jr. *The Sermon on the Mount in the Book of James, Part 1*. *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Vol. BSAC 162:647 (Jul 2005): p. 344 -356, accessed April 05, 2020, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/bsac162-647-06>

¹⁰ Ibid

Testament books: swearing (James 5:12 with Matt. 5:33-37); false evil sayings (James 3:9; 4:11; 5:9 and Matt. 5:11); one shall be judged by his speech (James 2:12; 3:1; 5:9 and Matt. 5:22); hypocritical speech (James 1:26 and Matt. 7:4-5); James used figures from the nature as an analogy for his point that curses and blessings should not come out of the same mouth (3:9-12), and so did Jesus (Matt. 7:15-16).¹¹

Moo says that “James often jumps quickly and without explanation from one aspect of his topic to another. This manner of moving from topic to topic is reminiscent of the wisdom books of the Old Testament and Judaism (e.g., Proverbs, Sirach)”¹². Evidences like that seem to claim the author’s Jewish background. He knew the Old Testament Scriptures very well; his teachings were very similar with Jesus’ own teaching; the theme of wisdom as well as the dangers of speech was present both in the epistle and the Wisdom Literature; and his teachings were grounded in the Jewish law and culture. Concomitantly, on the other hand, he was well educated in Greek, because the letter was written in perfect Greek grammar, which proves his knowledge of the Greek culture as well.

In the Apocalyptic Literature, John revealed the agony of those who will gnaw their **γλώσσα**, because of their condemnation on the Day of the Lord (Rev. 16:10). Jesus himself warned, “I tell that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word that they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37). Great agony awaits those who do not repent, for there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 12:50; 22:13; 25:30; Luke 13:28). John also warned several times that all people, from every nation and every **γλώσσα** will bow before the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; and 17:15). Therefore, taming the *tongue* is a warning of wisdom throughout the whole Scriptures.

In the Gospels, **γλώσσα** refers to the physical body part. In Mark 7:33 and 35, Jesus healed the deaf and mute man by touching his **γλώσσα**. In Luke, on the birth of John the Baptist, his father Zechariah’s **γλώσσα** was miraculously loosed, after the Angel Gabriel muted him nine months before, because he doubted God’s calling (1:20; 1:64). In the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luk. 16:24), the former cried out for Abraham’s mercy when he was in hell, agonizing by fire, asking him that the latter would cool his **γλώσσα** with the tips of his fingers damp in water.

On the Day of Pentecost in Acts, however, the power of the Holy Spirit blended the physical **γλώσσα** with the Spirit, which enabled the people to speak other languages. In other words, the Holy Spirit supernaturally

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Moo, Douglas J. *The Letter of James*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 16

transformed actual **γλῶσσα** (*tongues*) into γλῶσσαί ὡσεὶ πυρός (*tongues of fire*), “they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them” (2:3). Foreigners heard about the wonders of God in their own **γλῶσσα** (*language*), and all people were astonished (verse 11). Hence, not only Jews, but people from many different nationalities were filled with the Holy Spirit and praised God (10:46). In Acts 19, the apostle Paul spoke about the baptism of John in water, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The first was a baptism of repentance; the latter enabled the men to speak in **γλῶσσα** (*tongues*) (19:6). Besides that, most of the times when the New Testament Scriptures mention **γλῶσσα**, it refers to a language given by the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul dedicates three chapters from his letter to the Corinthians to explain to the believers how to discern it and how to use speaking in tongues to edify the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:10; 28; 30; 13:1; 8; 14:2; 4; 5; 6; 13-14; 18-19; 22-23; 26-27; and 39).

JAMES’ AUTHORSHIP AND RELEVANCE

There is a lot of debate between scholars concerning the authorship of James’ epistle. Josephus (37/38 – 101 C.E.) defended that “James was ‘the brother of Jesus’ and leader of the Jerusalem church.”¹³ Among the many James in the New Testament Scriptures, James, the brother of Jesus is accepted by most scholars as being the writer of the epistle. McArthur says that only two James could have written it: “James the son of Zebedee and brother of John, and James the Lord’s half-brother. But James the son of Zebedee’s early martyrdom (Acts 12:2) eliminates him as candidate, leaving James the half-brother of the Lord as the author.”¹⁴ Although initially Jesus’ brothers rejected Him (John 7:5), James converted and believed that Christ was the Messiah. He became the leader of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 12:17; Gal. 2:9) until his martyrdom in about A.D. 62.

The canonization process of the epistle started with Origen and finished by the end of the fourth century with Jerome and Augustine in the Council of Carthage.¹⁵ Those were the greatest defenders that the letter had Scriptural authority. In opposition to them, in the sixteenth century, Erasmus and Martin Luther questioned its apostolic authorship. Although Luther said

¹³ Patrick J. Hartin. *James*. Sacra Pagina Series. Vol. 14. (Minneapolis, Liturgical Press, 2003), 20

¹⁴ John McArthur, *The McArthur New Testament Commentary – James*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 146, 3

¹⁵ Peter H. Davids. *The Epistle of James*. (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 2

the letter “has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it”¹⁶, many of Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon of the mount are found in that epistle. As for Luther, the epistle of James should not be in the Bible. Despite that, James’ paraphrases from the wisdom literature and his theo-centric vision of perfection are rooted in the Judaism, says Hartin.¹⁷ Albeit Luther’s early misgivings, it is fair to point out that he included James in his translation of the New Testament. The name “James” is *Ἰάκωβος* in Greek and *יַעֲקֹב* *Ya`aqob* in Hebrew. According to Hartin, “The author presents himself in the role of Jacob in the Hebrew Scriptures as he addresses the letter to the new twelve-tribe people on how they are to live.”¹⁸

Some evidences for James’ authorship are his Jewish background explicit in the epistle; the lack of references to the Gentiles; the way he introduces the letter, expecting his audience to know his identity; and the similarity with Jesus’ teachings.¹⁹ Furthermore, it is written in excellent Greek, therefore scholars conclude it was not originally written in Aramaic and later translated to Greek. It was rather written by someone whose mother tongue was Greek²⁰. Those who argued against its Christian Theological importance “Are influenced by an ideological perception that wishes to see everything in the New Testament as related to Paul and his thought.”²¹ The epistle of James urges Christians to put their beliefs into practice, to be wise through the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and to be holy in deeds. Its similarities with Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom mindset in the Sermon of the Mount show its theological importance.

JAMES’ THEOLOGY

The central theological theme in James which is present throughout the entire epistle is the exhortation that Christians must exercise their faith. For James, faith that cannot bear fruit is worth nothing. The one who hears the Word of God but does not practice it is cheating himself (1:22-23). James’ theology resides in the fact that Christians are called to show their faith through their deeds, guided by God’s wisdom. Richardson explains, “Active trust, like Abraham’s or Rahab’s, is a matter of performing deeds – deeds never without faith, of course, but most importantly, never faith without deeds. The faith of believers will be judged by God, and in James’ view God will not

¹⁶ *Luther’s Works: Word and Sacrament I*, vol. 35, ed. E. T. Backman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 362

¹⁷ Hartin, 5

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 16

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 24

²⁰ *Ibid*, 22

²¹ *Ibid*, 22

accept anyone with an empty, useless faith, one where no deeds are present.”²² He urges that Christianity must be a dualism between God’s grace, which is freely given, and human response through obedience to God’s will. In other words, rather than living a comfortable Christian lifestyle, which means, going to church on Sundays and eventually reading Scriptures; James urges that true believers must be willing to obey whatever God asks of them. The relationship with God must be sought by the believer through prayer and wisdom (1:5).

Scholars in Church History over the centuries have debated that James has no theology. Figuring within the general epistles, this is the one and only epistle written by James in the New Testament Bible, hence there is no theological pattern to be assessed with by comparison, as it is true for Paul’s theology. Luther thrilled that discussion saying what James’ theology is not, for he compared and contrasted it in light of the Pauline theology. Moo says, “It was because Luther gave to justification by faith central importance in defining NT Theology that he had difficulties with letters like James that were silent, or even appeared to be critical of, this doctrine”²³. However, James focuses on the three areas of the Christian’s character – moral, practical, and spiritual. He emphasizes that faith must be concrete, rather than an abstract belief system. In other words, he exhorts Christians to have a mature faith that is proved, refined, and testified through actions.

A great debate among scholars concerning the apparent theological controversy between James and Paul is due to the fact that James’ theology defends the Mosaic Law (1:25; 27; 2:8; 12), while Paul’s theology is against legalism. However, the two apostles of Christ did not contradict each other. The matters of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, or through the works of the Law, are rather two sides of the same coin. Davids explains that Paul is against “The use of the Law as a way of salvation – that could only lead to death – but when it came to the ethical life of the Christian, it was another matter. On that topic Paul draws on the earlier Christian tradition in terms similar to James (Gal. 5:13, which combines freedom and law; Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:21; 7:10, 25).”²⁴

The tension that raises that discussion is based on James’ declaration concerning justification by faith and works, rather than by faith alone (2:24), and Paul’s declaration that justification is by faith, not by the works of the law (Rom. 3:28). Moo solves that equation by saying, “Resolution of the tension can come only when we recognize that James and Paul use ‘justify’ to refer to different things. Paul refers to the initial declaration of a sinner’s innocence before God; James to the ultimate verdict of innocence pronounced over a person at the last judgment”²⁵. Hence, Paul is addressing a new believer, one

²² Kurt A. Richardson. *James*. (The USA: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997), 44

²³ Moo, 5

²⁴ Davids, 100

²⁵ Moo, 141

who declares faith in Jesus Christ and inherits eternity. James is addressing one who is already a Christian, so that he expresses his faith through the deeds of the law, becomes a saint, seeks holiness, and is himself a good testimony to unbelievers, for his award will be greater on the Day of the Lord (Rev. 22:12).

The Law of Moses is a topic of great matter in James' theology. As an authentic Jew, James defended that the law was good, and Christians would be judged by its observance (2:12). Jesus taught that a tree is known by the fruit it bears (Luke 6:43-45; Matt. 7:15-20), likewise Christians should bear the fruit of the faith they profess. According to Davids, the Jews saw their law as perfect (Ps. 19:7; 119; Rom. 7:12), they rejoiced in performing it (Ps. 1:2; 19:7-11; 40:6-8), and they even saw it as a law-giving freedom²⁶. Therefore, James does not abolish the law because of the grace revealed to mankind after the death of Christ. Rather, he reinforces that the new covenant demands even more commitment than the old (2:8; 12). Jesus himself reinforced the Law of Moses in the Sermon of the Mount, and James paraphrased Him over his whole epistle. In fact, citing only the issue of speech, James said that one who judges a brother, or the law, thinks he is better than them, and acts like a judge (4:11). Jesus, on the other hand, said that one who judges others will be judged likewise by God, the supreme judge, on the final judgment (Matt. 7:1-2). James commanded "do not swear" and "Let your 'Yes' be yes, and your 'No', no." (5:12), as well as Jesus did (Matt. 5:34-37).

James' epistle is a Christian manual, i.e. it is a compilation of the Jewish wisdom literature and Jesus' teachings on the Sermon of the Mount. Chaffin Jr. says that "James gives to wisdom the same prominence that Paul gives to faith, John gives to love, and Peter gives to hope."²⁷ James' Pneumatology is evidenced in the role of wisdom, James' Christology is evidenced in his Jesus' quotations, and his Eschatology is evidenced in his exhortation to patience and endurance through trials (1:2, 12; 5:7-11). In summary, James urges Christians to live in holiness, to endure trials, to persevere in faith, to live in prayer, and to rely on the only true source of wisdom: God. James' epistle is filled with direct commands; it has more imperatives than any other book of the New Testament.²⁸

WISDOM THAT PRODUCES HOLINESS

In both Testaments, holiness means to sanctify, to set apart; that is, to be separated from sin and to be consecrated to God. God's very essence is holy (Lev. 10:10; 19:2). Beeke compares, "The Old Testament stresses ritual and moral holiness; the New Testament stresses inward and transforming

²⁶ Davids, 99

²⁷ Robert F. Chaffin Jr. The Theme of Wisdom in the Epistle of James. *Ashland Theological Journal*. Volume: ATJ 29:0 (NA 1997). Accessed on April 7, 2020. Available on <https://www.galaxie.com/article/atj29-0-03>

²⁸ Moo, 1

holiness.”²⁹ On one hand, the old covenant needed an outward expression of holiness through sacrifices that propitiated sin; on the other hand, the new covenant demands willingness within the self to be a saint. That does not mean that God did not look inside the heart in the first covenant. That does not mean either that in the new covenant one is expected to be holy by his own strength. Quite the opposite, the believer’s whole being – his spirit, soul, and body, should be separated from the sinful world and consecrated to God (Jer. 29:13; Deut. 6:5; Mark 12:33; 1 The. 5:23; Rom. 12:1). For the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The holy power lives within the self and enables Christians to be blameless before God.

Wisdom from God is a pillar in James’ theology. Evidences show that show that James was very much influenced by the Jewish wisdom literature, as literature, as well as extra biblical sources (Sirach, Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon), where wisdom was closely related to God’s Spirit. Wisdom was seen as a God grace given gift (Gen. 41:38-39; Is. 11:2). Wisdom is the narrator in Proverbs 8. The narrative written in first person identifies wisdom with God’s very essence. In other words, God’s character is wise. Wisdom was present in creation (8:22-31).³⁰ In the book of Job, when God finally breaks the silence, he speaks about his amazing wisdom that knows and controls all creation (38-41) and explains that it is high above human wisdom. Davids also cites Wis. 7:22; 8:1, 6; Sir. 24:3-5³¹ which reinforce wisdom’s role in creation, evidencing its connection with the Spirit of God.

James cites Job’s perseverance through trials (5:11). Chaffin Jr. explains that “James instructs his readers that tribulations, no matter how severe, cannot undo God’s plan for both the believer and the unbeliever. James asserts that in life a believer must rely upon God’s wisdom to have the capacity to live in an obedient and moral fashion in order to promote good, restrain evil, and do away with all things that displease the Almighty.”³² In other words, although there are trials, God’s plans can never be frustrated. No matter what circumstances, God is always in control. Hence, it is up to us to trust and obey God in a complete surrender to him, denying ourselves, and offering our bodies as living sacrifices to Him. Spiritual wholeness is believing that God is who he said He was and that He is going to finish what he started in us, that is, He will give us the strength needed to overcome temptations. Therefore, holiness is not achieved by human efforts (3:15), but by the power of the Holy Spirit acting through the believer (1:17).

²⁹ Joel R. Beeke. *Cultivating Holiness*. Journal: Reformation and Revival. Volume: RAR 04:2 (Spring 1995), 81-82. Accessed on April 7, 2020. Available on <https://www.galaxie.com/article/rar04-2-07?highlight=holiness%20and%20perfection>

³⁰ Davids, 52

³¹ Ibid

³² Chaffin Jr., 25

Wisdom from God is the key to live a Christ-worthy life. James does not blame Satan for the believers' temptations; rather, he warns them to resist the desires of the flesh (1:14). Moo says, "Christian maturity is not indicated by the infrequency of temptation but by the infrequency of succumbing to temptation"³³ For temptation comes from within the self (1:14). Hence, resisting temptation is the believer's decision towards holiness. The battle against sin is a daily challenge in a Christian's life. The good news is there is hope for those who wait on the Lord, for wisdom is a gift of God's grace. James exhorts believers to bear the fruit of wisdom: humility (3:13), purity, peace, gentleness, consideration, it is full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere (3:17).

God's wisdom produces good behavior and fine conduct (3:17); contrarily to demonic wisdom that produces bitter envy and selfish ambition (3:14-15). Furthermore, meekness is a sign of wisdom (3:13). Jesus is the greatest example of both meekness and fine conduct. A Christian should be perfect as Jesus is perfect (1 Cor. 11:1; 1 John 2:6). Nevertheless, perfection obviously cannot be achieved by mere human beings, for only God is perfect. On the other hand, James teaches that a true Christian who intentionally seeks wisdom, through faith and deeds, is perfect in God's sight. New Testament Scriptures confirm that in Christ we are perfected before the Lord (Eph. 1:4; 1 Cor. 1:30b). Beek concludes "Thus, true believer, holiness is both something you have in Christ before God and something you must cultivate in the strength of Christ. Your status in holiness is conferred; your condition in holiness must be pursued."³⁴ Therefore, we should die for our old selves, have our minds renewed, be disciplined by God's love, and live confidently that in Christ we were made righteous (Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 12:10b).

THE TONGUE AND HOLINESS

When the prophet Isaiah saw the glory of God, he looked within himself and realized how miserable he was, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). While he beheld God's holiness, he realized his wretchedness; the fear of the Lord took hold of him, and he felt unworthy of staring at God's glory. Then, one of the seraphs touched his mouth with a blazing coal from the altar and purified him from his uncleanness, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for" (6:7b). In that passage, the lips are associated with sin, guilt, filthiness, and iniquity. Such awareness exposed the prophet's need for forgiveness. If he who was a prophet, a God's spokesman, realized his incapacity to be as holy as God is, because of his filthy lips, how much more should mere Christians beware of the filthiness of the tongue? God's holy standards are much higher.

³³ Ibid, 76

³⁴ Beeke, 85

In James, holiness leads to wholeness, that is, perfection. One who tames his tongue can also have his whole body in submission (3:2-4). One who seeks to please God should become spiritually mature by asking for God's wisdom, through prayer (James 1:5; 3:13, 17). James' teaching emphasizes the need of holiness, that is, the outward of faith. Pure speech is essential to a Christian in the process of sanctification. James commands believers to watch the way they communicate, because communication skills, such as listening, speaking, keeping silent, and slow to anger (1:19; 22) are signs of holiness. Taming the tongue only comes through wisdom from above, therefore one who is perfect in speech is also perfect in God's sight (3:2). The author associated taming the tongue as a pre-requisite for holiness. He reinforced it throughout the whole epistle (1:19, 26; 2:12; 3:5, 6 (twice), 8; 4:11; 5:12). Furthermore, chapter 3:1-12 is dedicated to present the author's arguments concerning the need of taming the tongue, associating that with wisdom. James emphasized that the Christian's speech and deeds must be in concordance. Similarly, 1 John 3:18 instructed believers to love one another not only in speech, but in action and truth.

Believers should be perfect as their God is perfect (3:2). That means, they should not curse their neighbors with the same tongue that they praise God (3:10). One is not a religious if he does not bridle his tongue (1:26). If that is the case, his religiosity is in check. James exhorts Christians to practice the faith they profess. Throughout the letter, the author urges believers to be saints: They should endure temptations, be doers of the Word of God, love one another with impartiality, refrain their tongues from evil sayings, seek God's wisdom, submit themselves to the will of God, and do not oppress the poor. Yet, mankind is weak, sinful, and inherited the Adamic nature that separates them from God's holiness. Because of that, humanity cannot be holy through their own strength, but as Scriptures testify, by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in them, they can achieve such holiness and become perfect in God's sight. Cedar agrees that "God is the authentic source of any person being able to control his or her tongue. We need God's help through the empowering of the Holy Spirit"³⁵

THE TONGUE IN JAMES 3:1-12

(Jam. 3:1) Μὴ πολλοὶ διδάσκαλοι γίνεσθε ἀδελφοί μου εἰδότες ὅτι μεῖζον κρίμα ληψόμεθα

My brethren, do not be many of you teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgement.

James starts chapter 3 with a negative imperative, advising believers to be careful in choosing the ministry of teaching. In the early church the role

³⁵ Paul A. Cedar. *The communicator's Commentary – James, 1, 2 Peter, Jude*. (Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1984), 44.

of a teacher was a position of authority, therefore it was highly esteemed. It seems to be the case that some people were seeking that ministry because of its social status. McArthur explains that the Greek word διδάσκαλοι (teacher) was often used of rabbis who had a teaching or preaching role in the Synagogues³⁶. Therefore, James must be speaking of the teaching office in the church. The apostle Paul exhorted the brethren about their roles in the church “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?” (1 Cor. 12:29) and explained, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11). Hence, such a choice to be a teacher of the Word should be only for those who were anointed with that gift by the Holy Spirit and were called according to that purpose. James’ intention is not to restrain the so called teachers; it is rather to admonish those who have that calling to take great care in their teaching, to be committed with the truth, and to ask the Holy Spirit to help them to teach in humility and wisdom.

James advises believers about the seriousness of the teacher’s office. Several times Scriptures warn about the great responsibility of declaring God’s Word. For instance, through the prophet Ezekiel (3:17-19; 33:7-9); the author of Hebrews (13:17); Paul instructed Timothy concerning false doctrines (1 Tim. 1:3-7, 3:6, 6:3-5); Peter and Jude as well were very strict against teachers of heresy (2 Pet. 2:1-3; Jude 8, 10, 16); Jesus said that the teachers of the law would be judged more strictly (Luke 20:46-47; Matt. 23:1-33; Mark 12:38-40), for “to whom much is given, from him much is required” (Luke 12:48).

Contrarily to that conclusion, Duane F. Watson³⁷ proposed a quantitative evaluation of speech rather than qualitative in James. He says that because the teaching ministry is based on speaking, then teachers are more likely to stumble than others, since they speak more. However, that assumption is not clear in James’ text. Instead, it is more prone to say that teachers will be judged by the quality of their teaching. In other words, they must be committed with the truth of Scriptures in speech and deeds, and should not stumble, for their failure influences others who trust in their wrong teaching.

The use of the first-person plural pronoun “we” indicates that the author of the epistle considered himself a teacher. Furthermore, his eschatological statement shows that he had a proper humility concerning that position. Therefore, from his own experience and wisdom, he instructs others in the body of Christ to not be hasty in choosing to exercise this ministry, for they bear a greater responsibility and will receive a greater punishment. James also uses the first person in verses 2 and 9 “With great delicacy of feeling not separating himself from those whose conduct he denounces”³⁸. He was not

³⁶ McArthur, 146

³⁷ Cited in Hartin, 182

³⁸ H. D. M. Spence & Joseph S. Exell. *The Pulpit Commentary*. Vol. XXI (Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers), 42

only humble, but also self-conscious of his humanity. He did not assume he was above others for being in a position of authority.

(3:2) πολλὰ γὰρ πταίμεν ἅπαντες εἴ τις ἐν λόγῳ οὐ πταίει οὗτος τέλειος ἀνὴρ δυνατὸς χαλιναγωγῆσαι καὶ ὅλον τὸ σῶμα

For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man and he is able to bridle his whole body.

When James says that *we* (including himself) *all* (includes everyone else) *stumble* (to err, make a mistake, to sin³⁹), he is saying that it is impossible to not sin. For as Rom. 3:23 says “All have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God”, Wolmarans rephrases James, “Nobody is capable of controlling the tongue and therefore nobody is perfect”⁴⁰. If on one hand there is a dogmatic doctrine of mankind’s imperfection, for only Jesus is able to not sin; on the other hand James said that if one can bridle his tongue, he can control his whole body and be considered a perfect one. The use of the conditional *if* in this verse leads to that conclusion.

The idea of *fall* or *stumble* here is not physical, but moral fault or failure. It was commonly spread in the Hebrew Scriptures (Job 4:18-19; Prov. 10: 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 19, 31, 32; 11:11-13; 16:27-28; 20:9); in the LXX (Sir. 19:16, 20:1-8)⁴¹. Furthermore, the Stoic Philosophy taught that the one’s lower part (the body) was controlled by one’s higher part (the reason)⁴². Similarly, in James the simile is that one’s lower part (the tongue) can control one’s higher part (the body), as well as the bits control the horse (*verse 3*), the rudder controls the ship (*verse 4*), and a small spark sets on fire a great forest (*verse 5*). It is noteworthy that in all analogies used by the author a small part controls the whole being/thing.

As for the use of the word *perfect*, Hartin says “Wholeness and integrity are the dominant idea here. To tell the truth means that one’s thought and speech are in harmony and one conforms ‘to the way God has created them’ (Hartin [1999] 152)”⁴³. McArthur completes that perfect also means complete or mature⁴⁴. In that sense, one with a pure speech demonstrates spiritual maturity, wisdom, and single mindedness, rather than the double

³⁹ Accessed on March 15.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G4417&t=KJV>

⁴⁰ J. L. P. Wolmarans. *The Tongue Guiding the Body: The Anthropological Presuppositions of James 3:1-12*. (South Africa, Neotestamentica, 1992), 523. Accessed March 21, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/43048056.

⁴¹ Hartin, 173-174

⁴² Wolmarans, 525

⁴³ Hartin, 173

⁴⁴ McArthur, 151

minded summoned by James in 1:8. Since the mouth speaks what is in the heart (Luke 6:45), if one's speech is full of edifying words that honor and glorify God, and thanksgiving; it is a proof that his heart is sanctified, and his spiritual life is healthy. Such a perfection is possible for believers with the help of the Spirit of Christ, who is perfect. Hence, He is the one who perfects us.

(3:3) ἰδοῦ, τῶν ἵππων τοὺς χαλινοὺς εἰς τὰ στόματα βάλλομεν πρὸς τὸ πείθεσθαι αὐτοὺς ἡμῖν καὶ ὅλον τὸ σῶμα αὐτῶν μετάγομεν

And if we put bits in the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, then we are able to control their whole body also.

James' fatalistic statement on verse 2 that it is impossible to tame the (apart from God, who is perfect) is now illustrated by a series of analogies on 4, and 5. In every analogy a small thing controls a bigger thing. Repetition metaphors is a pedagogical technique used by James, the teacher, here. He point by using similes: the tongue controls the body (verse 2); the bit controls (verse 3); and the rudder controls the ship (verse 4). The bit in the horse's enables us to direct his whole body. Similarly, the man who can govern his tongue, can also have his whole body with its passions and desires submitted to his will. Jesus agrees that "The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean'." (Matt. 15:18) Therefore, wise words indicate a pure heart that cleanses the whole body. Reicke associates Paul's use of σῶμα with the church and concludes that if the tongue of the church, that is the teacher/preacher is controlled, then the whole church will be properly guided. Although Davids affirms that there is no textual evidence that James' use of σῶμα (3:2, 5, 6; 2:16, 26) suggests Pauline usage.⁴⁵

(3:4) ἰδοῦ, καὶ τὰ πλοῖα τηλικαῦτα ὄντα καὶ ὑπὸ σκληρῶν ἀνέμων ἐλαυνόμενα μετάγεται ὑπὸ ἐλαχίστου πηδαλίου ὅπου ἂν ἡ ὀρμὴ τοῦ εὐθύνοντος βούληται

And also the ships, though they are so great and driven by fierce winds, yet they are turned about with a very small helm whithersoever the helmsman wants to go.

Scholars in Church History have been saying that James' similes are inspired in the Hellenistic Literature. Hartin says that the analogies of a charioteer controlling horses with a small bit and the pilot directing the ship with a small rudder were common in Greco-Roman world, for example in Plutarch and Plato⁴⁶. However, Davids says that none of the parallels cited by James have exactly the same

⁴⁵ Davids, 139

⁴⁶ Hartin, 174

imagery⁴⁷. Nevertheless, James' use of those similes prove he was well acquainted with both Greek language and Literature, as well as proverbial sayings.

Richardson says, "The ship would be tossed and driven about like the about like the waves that bear it along (cf. 1:6). But with the rudder, the mere the mere will of the pilot is sufficient to direct the ship."⁴⁸ Similarly, a Christian's body would be tossed and driven by the desires of the flesh, should flesh, should not he have the Holy Spirit indwelt in him. For it is God, whose God, whose will is good, pleasing, and perfect (Rom. 12:2), who helps helps believers to will what He wills.

Graybill says that human free will is naturally more inclined to do evil than to do good. But God's justification through Jesus freely given grace, requires God and humanity working together towards salvation⁴⁹. Therefore, it is the power of the Holy Spirit in the Christians what enables them to will good as their Father in heavens does. In other words, they are empowered to will righteousness, despite their feelings, thoughts, or emotions through faith in God's Word. Hence, they submit their bodies as a living sacrifice to please God (Rom. 12:1). When the Holy Spirit convicts one of sin, righteousness, and judgement (John 16:8), he becomes a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17) and now He is given a new heart (Ezek. 36:26) which purifies his words and finally sanctifies his whole body.

(3:5) οὐτως καὶ ἡ γλῶσσα μικρὸν μέλος ἐστὶν καὶ μεγάλαυχεῖ ἴδου, ὀλίγον πῦρ ἠλίκην ὕλην ἀνάπτει·

Even though the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. And also, how great a forest a small fire sets ablaze.

Daids emphasizes the evidence of the negative tone in the first sentence. The alliteration (μικρὸν - μέλος - μεγάλα) expresses the evil power of the tongue and its need for proper control.⁵⁰ Though the tongue is a small organ, its boast is great. Richardson associates control, present in each one of James' simile, with a chain of action, "From desire, to movement of the body, and then to fulfillment of deed."⁵¹ According to that author, the tongue precedes the action, rather than the self. Therefore, the tongue, not the self, is the behavior's ruler. In other words, according to Richardson's chain of action, one must desire to do good, then he shall tame his tongue, and finally his deeds shall reflect his good will. As for boasting, Hartin says that in the New Testament times it was opposite to faith, for boasting means trusting in one's self-

⁴⁷ Ibid, 140

⁴⁸ Richardson, 150

⁴⁹ Gregory B. Graybill. *Evangelical Free Will*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 25

⁵⁰ Davids, 140

⁵¹ Richardson, 150

glorying, while faith means trusting in God as the source of all things. Paul exhorts Christians, if they boast, it should only be about the cross of Jesus Christ, their Lord and Savior (Gal. 6:14)⁵².

The second sentence depicts the destructive power of the fire and with the tongue. Indeed, the imagery of the flame compared with the passions known at James' times. Yet in James, the fire is compared with the tongue, passions. Therefore, it is more likely that his source was the Jewish Wisdom (Ps. 39:1-3; 83:14; 120:2-4; Prov. 16:27; 26:21; Sir. 28:13-26; Isa. 30:27)⁵³.

(3:6) καὶ ἡ γλῶσσα πῦρ· ὁ κόσμος τῆς ἀδικίας οὕτως ἡ γλῶσσα καθίσταται ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ἡμῶν ἡ σπιλοῦσα ὄλον τὸ σῶμα καὶ φλογίζουσα τὸν τροχὸν τῆς γενέσεως καὶ φλογιζομένη ὑπὸ τῆς γεέννης

And the fiery tongue is a world of iniquity set among our members, so it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is itself set on fire by hell.

This verse is considered by many scholars textually corrupt. That is because there are five nominative expressions connected with only one verb (καθίσταται)⁵⁴, which means to make, make ruler, ordain, be, appoint, conduct, set⁵⁵. In other words, the tongue is the author of iniquity and it defiles the whole body. James emphasizes the destructive evil power of the tongue. Despite the corruption discussion among scholars, Davids⁵⁶ and Hartin⁵⁷ agree that the best approach to the text is to take it as it stands, considering the context and the chain of rhetorical effect that precedes it. As for James' use of κόσμος, it means opposition to the kingdom of God (1:27; 2:5; 4:4). καθίσταται in 4:4 refers to those who make friendship with the world; hence they are God's enemies⁵⁸.

Finally, Hartin explains that the Greek word for hell in the last sentence “γέεννα” comes from the Hebrew *ge Hinnom* (the Valley of Hinnom, see Josh. 15:8) refers to a place used for pagan sacrifices. Furthermore, the prophet Jeremiah described it as Jerusalem's place for divine judgement, which is the same meaning found in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 5:22, 29–30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,

⁵² Hartin, 175

⁵³ Davids, 141

⁵⁴ Hartin, 176

⁵⁵ Accessed on March 26.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G2525&t=KJV>

⁵⁶ Davids, 144

⁵⁷ Hartin, 176

⁵⁸ Ibid, 177

33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5). James' metaphor here associates the evil that comes direct from γέεννα with the tongue's fiery destructive power⁵⁹. The word γέεννα appears twelve times in the New Testament. All of them were spoken by Jesus, except the one in James 3:6⁶⁰, explains Porter Jr.

(3:7) πᾶσα γὰρ φύσις θηρίων τε καὶ πετεινῶν ἑρπετῶν τε καὶ ἐναλίωv δαμάζεται καὶ δεδάμασται τῇ φύσει τῆ ἀνθρωπίνῃ

For every kind of beasts, birds, serpents, and sea animals is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.

James reminds mankind's rulership over the rest of creation assigned assigned by God in Genesis (1:26; 28). James quotes Moses by using the same the same animal kinds' citation sequence (9:2). The animal kingdom classification as animals – birds – reptiles – sea creatures was traditionally traditionally cited in the Hebrew Scriptures (Deut. 4:17-18; 1 Kings 4:33; Ps. 4:33; Ps. 8:6-8; Acts 10:12; 11:6)⁶¹. Mankind's superiority over the animals was part of the Greco-Roman's mindset. For reason was a divine gift greater than strength or speed⁶². Verse 7 is a bridge between 6 and 8. It starts with γὰρ, which justifies the tongue's iniquity affirming that mankind have the capacity to master every wild creature, except the tongue. The wordplay with δαμάζω (*tame*) in the present and perfect tenses reinforces what was a universal truth to James' audience, that is, mankind's uniqueness among the animals.

(3:8) τὴν δὲ γλῶσσαν οὐδεὶς δύναται ἀνθρώπων δαμάσαι ἀκατάσχετον κακὸν μεστὴ ἰοῦ θανατηφόρου

But the tongue no man can tame, it is an unruly evil full of deadly poison.

Mankind's superiority declared in the previous verse is now in check. He started verse 8 with δέ which is an adversative conjunction that expresses opposition or contrast between two sentences. Now the tongue is the direct object of the negative nominative οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων. In other words, James emphasized mankind's incapacity of taming the tongue. Hartin says, "He demonstrates a pessimistic attitude: the tongue alone, among all created things is impossible to control".⁶³ Here is the climax of the intriguing problem presented by the author. If on one hand one who controls his speech is perfect in God's sight (verse 2), on the other hand, speech cannot be tamed. Then, how can a Christian be holy, since holiness means perfection, which is to be in

⁵⁹ Ibid, 178

⁶⁰ Porter Jr., 355

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Davids, 144; Hartin, 178.

⁶³ Hartin, 179

right relationship with God, to be spiritually whole, mature, and unblemished? James answers that question in the following verses.

(3:9) ἐν αὐτῇ εὐλογοῦμεν τὸν Θεὸν καὶ πατέρα καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ καταρώμεθα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς καθ' ὁμοίωσιν θεοῦ γεγονότας
With the tongue we bless our God and Father and with the tongue we curse men, who are made in God's likeness.

Here James states that with the same tongue we bless, and Would he be denouncing the doublemindedness he exhorted the members against in 1:6? Or the dangers of religiosity in 1:26? If the commandment given by Jesus is to love God above everything and neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37-39), then how can a Christian love God and curse his neighbor? God's love is perfected through us in our relationships. God states His perfect and single minded standard "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse" (Gen. 12:3). James also quotes Gen. 1:26 reminding the believers that men are made in God's likeness, hence they are God's representatives on Earth, the masterpiece of creation. That is the reason why Christians should not curse mankind. The theme of the tongue's contradictory speech was well known both in Greek and Jewish literature.⁶⁴

(3:10) ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ στόματος ἐξέρχεται εὐλογία καὶ κατάρα οὐ χρὴ ἀδελφοί μου ταῦτα οὕτως γίνεσθαι
Out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things must not happen.

Once again, James reprimands his audience against the evils of speech. Furthermore, he commends it cannot be, that is, Christians should not act like that. They should control their tongues. The phrase "*these things must not happen*" only occurs in the book of James in the New Testament.⁶⁵

(3:11) μήτι ἡ πηγὴ ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς ὀπῆς βρῦει τὸ γλυκὺ καὶ τὸ πικρὸν
Can a spring send forth both fresh and bitter water from the same hole?

Now James introduces a series of metaphors from the nature. The analogy is well used here, since in that geographic Mediterranean region, springs quenched the thirst of people from the surrounding areas.⁶⁶ Hence, they knew that a fountain only produced fresh or

⁶⁴ Ibid, 179

⁶⁵ Ibid, 180

⁶⁶ Davids, 147-148

bitter water. That picture explains how impossible the instability of the tongue should be to a Christian. Extra biblical sources of that time also used that analogy (Philo, Pliny, and Antigonus).⁶⁷ Hartin explains that “The interrogative participle *mēti* expects a negative answer”.⁶⁸ Davids goes further saying that μήτι introduces rhetorical questions elsewhere in Scriptures (Matt. 7:16; 26:22; Mark 4:21; 14:19).⁶⁹ James plays with the synonyms πικρόν *bitter* (verses 11 and 14) and ἀλυκός *salt* (verse 12) which is more commonly used to describe water. According to Hartin, the author did it on purpose, for πικρόν has more a moral connotation.⁷⁰

(3:12) μὴ δύναται ἀδελφοί μου συκῆ ἐλαίας ποιῆσαι ἢ ἄμπελος σῦκα οὕτως οὐδεμία πηγὴ ἀλυκὸν καὶ γλυκὺ ποιῆσαι ὕδωρ
My brethren, can the fig tree bear olives, or a vine bear figs? So, no fountain can bring forth both salt and fresh water.

Researchers show that James borrowed the images of the fig tree, the olives, and the vine from both the Stoic literature (Plutarch, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius Antonius to name a few)⁷¹ and the Jewish tradition. On one hand, the stoic influence shows the author’s familiarity with the Greek culture. Hartin says, “James borrows these metaphors from the world with which he is familiar to express the idea that inconsistency in human speech should be just as inconceivable for a believer as it is for a tree to produce a fruit different from its type or species”⁷². Furthermore, those trees were typical in the Mediterranean and Palestinian weather. On the other hand, Jesus also used that metaphor in the synoptic gospels Matt. 7:16-20 and Luke 6:43-45; Matt. 12:33-35 and 6:45. Jesus seems to have borrowed the image of the vine from Isaiah 5:1-7, which demonstrates that the plant was part of the Jewish tradition. Therefore, that idea was common to both Jewish and Greek world.

By reminding that the nature is perfectly designed to bear what it was created to be (Gen. 1:11; 24-25), James reinforces God’s perfection on creation, for everything God created was good. Christians should also bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), who is dwelt in themselves. Therefore, there should be no room for gossip, lies, curses, or evil in a believer’s speech. In other words, one who is born again, has a good nature, and a pure heart cannot produce evil. A fig tree does not make any effort to produce fig, for that is its nature. On the same way, it should not be difficult for a Christian to say only good, lovely, and praiseworthy words, for that is the Holy Spirit’s

⁶⁷ Ibid, 147

⁶⁸ Hartin, 180

⁶⁹ Ibid, 147

⁷⁰ Ibid, 180

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid, 180-181

nature. God himself is the fountain of goodness and righteousness. Hence, Christians should say good words not by their own strength, by worldly philosophy, or by human wisdom; but by the wisdom of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, who enables them with pure speech.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown over this paper that the evil speech is part of the fallen human nature. Both the Jewish and Greek Literature describe the destructive deeds of an unruly tongue. Advised throughout the whole Bible, taming the tongue was needed for ancient eastern men as much as it is needed for Christians today. Evil speech is an organic human impulse that denounces the weakness that mankind along history have faced. If on one hand that is true, on the other hand it is also true that James said that one who can tame his tongue is perfect in God's sight. That means he is complete, whole, finished, his human integrity and virtue are consummated, he is spiritually mature, lacking nothing. That is only possible through wisdom from above. When he is born again, he is a new creature. The Holy Spirit makes a Christian's body His home. Hence, it is the Holy Spirit's power that enables mankind for holiness in speech and deeds. After all, Christ is the vine, we are the branches (John 15:5). God himself provides the remedy for the issue, that is, the impossibility of taming the tongue. Believers are cleansed from their fallen nature, they have their sins forgiven through the blood of Christ and became perfect as Jesus is perfect. As James demonstrates, wisdom from God is the source of perfection. A prayer life allows the Holy Spirit to lead his vessels, which is reflected in the Christian's speech and deeds. The relationship between mankind and God through prayer makes the joint effort necessary for the wisdom from God to bear fruit in the Christian's life.

In every analogy James used, the bit and the horse, the rudder and the ship, the spark and the fire, the small part conduces the whole thing or being. On the same way, this small body part, the tongue, directs the whole body. Following the same logic, a teacher of the Word guides the whole church, which is the body of Christ. A Christian should impact his family, neighbors, and society through his testimony since he is the branch from Jesus' vine. After all, a vine can only bear grapes, never olives, for bearing grapes is its nature. In God's perfect creation, each specie only produces the fruit of its own kind. Once the Christian died for his old fallen nature and became a new creation in Christ, God himself shall bear the fruit of the Spirit in him, while the former shall bear the fruit of wisdom in his life.

That is an achievement that only Christians can make. For there is no science, philosophy, false gods, or human wisdom that can

change God's perfect nature. Only those who are partakers of His nature have the power for holiness, according to His holy standards of goodness and righteousness. He is the Creator of all things and through His power, Christians can become holy, hence they can be perfect as their God is perfect. Taming the tongue is one sign of God's wise work on a believer's life.

In James, words and deeds must be aligned in the Christian's life. He calls attention to the need of becoming single-minded, that is, coherent with the faith that believers profess in Jesus Christ. Despite the apparent theological controversy with the Pauline theology, both authors' theology are rather two sides of the same coin. Paul speaks about justification in the life of a new converted to Christianity, while James speaks about justification in the life of a mature believer. Once one is born again, he needs to grow in his Christian walk towards eternity. Holiness should follow him in that journey. James exhorts believers to have a close relationship with God through prayer, to ask for wisdom, and to be doers of the faith they profess. They should not live a naïve Christianity, but their speech and deeds should testify their Christian character.

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A Christian Response to Immigration Issues

Lara Ferreira

Immigration is often defined as “moving to a foreign country to settle or reside there.”¹ Immigrating or migrating is not something new. People have migrated from place to place since biblical times often as a means for survival, whether it be to escape famine, wars, or to seek a better life in a new land. History confirms that outside factors have, in some ways, always contributed to the people of God migrating from place to place. Today, this scenario plays out again with refugees seeking a safe haven around the world or others fleeing from violence or poverty in their home country. As a result of this ongoing migration pattern among God’s people, the Lord left precise instructions in his Word, addressing how his people should treat immigrants. Based on the history and the commandments given by God, can it be said that our God is a God of immigrants? That is a question that all Christians should ask themselves before taking a stand or choosing a side in this delicate issue.

This paper will explore the biblical approach to dealing with the effects and consequences of immigration on families and children of immigrants by surveying multiple Biblical passages and looking at the role of the Church, the government, and Christians overall when dealing with the issue of legal and illegal immigration. This subject is always controversial, no matter where it is brought up. However, especially in the Christian milieu, depending on the interpretation that each denomination or religious order makes, it can lead to heightened emotional reactions. Therefore, as good stewards of the Word of God, one should look at what the Bible teaches about this.

The Biblical approach

Starting with the New Testament, one can assume that Jesus was, at least, a migrant, as well as his parents. Just remember, for example, the famous passage about Jesus, Mary, and Joseph going to Egypt to escape the persecution of King Herod. If they had remained in Judea, Jesus would probably be killed. Going back a little more in the biblical time, by checking the Old Testament, there is also the trajectory of the people of God, the Israelites, who found themselves in the condition of migrants in Egypt and captivity in Babylon.

¹ Perez, Ramoncito. "Effects of Immigration During Adolescence on Mental Health and Social Well-Being." *Issues on Mental Health Nursing*. January 10, 2016. Accessed May 05, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.3109/01612840.2016.1142032>.

Whether in the Old or New Testament, the theme of migration or immigration, forced or not, is much more present in their stories and teachings than one can imagine. This situation is no different from that of thousands of refugees today. To support what this research will explore, we will use biblical passages that talk about migration and immigration and indicate actions to be taken concerning that. Also, topics, including illegal immigrants and refugees, will be covered.

The Old Testament books emphatically teach how to treat foreigners. Several verses emphasize the importance of loving them as yourself, feeding them, making them feel part of the people, as well as treating them fairly. That is, treating immigrants the same way you treat your people.² Starting with the Pentateuch, you can see the laws established by God to protect the less fortunate; this is recorded in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, for example:

"Do not mistreat or oppress the foreigner, because you were foreigners in Egypt." (Exodus 22:21)³

"Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners because you were foreigners in Egypt." (Exodus 23:9)⁴

"When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner." (Leviticus 19:9-10)⁵

"When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt." (Leviticus 19:33-34)⁶

"He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt." (Deuteronomy 10:18-19)⁷

² Jesse Carey. "What the Bible Says About How to Treat Refugees." RELEVANT Magazine, November 7, 2019.

<https://relevantmagazine.com/god/what-bible-says-about-how-treat-refugees-update-new-headline-ie/>

³ Holy Bible – NIV

⁴ Holy Bible – NIV

⁵ Holy Bible – NIV

⁶ Holy Bible – NIV

⁷ Holy Bible – NIV

"Do not deny justice to the foreigner and the orphan, nor take a widow's mantle as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God has set you free, so I command you to do all this." (Deuteronomy 24.17.18)⁸

It is noticeable the care of God for the minority. He makes it evident in books like 1 Kings, and also in the major prophets, such as Ezekiel, and the minor prophets, as in Malachi. It is not only the care of God that it is evident but also the judgment of God, which promises punishment for those who do not heed his commands.

"As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name, for they will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm, when they come and pray toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name." (1 Kings 8:41-44)⁹

"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed, and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy." (Ezekiel 16:49)

"So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the Lord Almighty." (Malachi 3:5)¹⁰

Continuing in the New Testament, the commands remain the same, but now even more focused on the love and merciful grace of God. Jesus himself describes in Luke 10: 29-37 that we cannot distinguish between a foreigner and a native, because God does not see it, He sees the heart. Moreover, people do not know whom God will use to bring relief or help to them in times of need.

"...Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:29-37)¹¹

"For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:14)¹²

"For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger, and you invited me in, I

⁸ Holy Bible – NIV

⁹ Holy Bible – NIV

¹⁰ Holy Bible – NIV

¹¹ Holy Bible – NIV

¹² Holy Bible – NIV

needed clothes, and you clothed me, I was sick, and you looked after me, I was in prison, and you came to visit me.” (Matthew 25:25-36)¹³

“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so, the body is not made up of one part but of many.” (1 Corinthians 12:12-14)¹⁴

Based on the passages above, one can conclude that the Lord has specific laws to protect foreigners. Furthermore, those who do not obey His commands will consequently be penalized. Nevertheless, how can one know to what extent one can help, protect, and welcome, without also hurting other laws and principles that are equally important to God?

Everyone agrees that this is a topic that generates much controversy and opinions diverge. As a basis for this study, we will analyze legal and illegal immigration in the United States, and how it affects the lives of thousands of families and their children—in everything, seeking a biblical foundation and a Christian look at the subject.

Immigration challenges

There are always side effects and consequences when one is changing the environment of families and children, and these issues cannot be overlooked. This study explores the tension of acculturation and the amelioratory opportunities of the church to help families and children. It also comments on how immigration conflicts can prevent, interrupt, and inhibit the word of God from being propagated to different nations.

The issue of immigration has become more and more frequent in the news in recent years. Every day, the internet, newspapers, and TV report situations where an individual or even groups of people are trying to leave their country to enter a different one. The United States has historically been the most desired destination, mostly because of the wages offered and the large job market.¹⁵ These individuals are often looking for a better quality of life, or just for the possibility of keeping themselves and their families alive. Many are looking for the well-quoted and never outdated, “American Dream,”

¹³ Holy Bible – NIV

¹⁴ Jesse Carey. “What the Bible Says About How to Treat Refugees.”

RELEVANT Magazine, November 7, 2019.

<https://relevantmagazine.com/god/what-bible-says-about-how-treat-refugees-update-new-headline-ic/>.

¹⁵ Alejandro Portes, and Ruben Rumbaut. *Immigrant America - A Portrait*. 4th ed. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014. Pg. 32.

a dream that has different meanings for each person; it all depends on where and what one is trying to escape.¹⁶

The Children and the Challenges of Immigration

The reasons for immigration include hunger, war, security, religious persecution, or even to follow an old dream, but the consequences of this decision to immigrate to a different country can be harmful, and dealing with them requires effort. The problem is that every day, all over the world, parents make this decision. Nevertheless, only a few parents will think about the social and psychological consequences of this action, towards the development of their family as a whole. Parents, sometimes without alternatives, along with their immediate families, face this challenge, a new continent, a new culture, a new language, without the proper preparation, and without evaluation of risks, only with the hope that things can and will improve. However, how to face this culture shock?

Today “an increasing number of researches are recognizing the critical role of culture in shaping all psychological processes, including children's cognitive and social development. Human development is a cultural process and varies considerably according to the cultural traditions and circumstances of different communities. The transmission of culture to children occurs through the related process of enculturation and socialization.”¹⁷

Culture is something that one is familiar with, it is part of the way people are raised and educated, and it is very integral to the place where a person is born.¹⁸ Nevertheless, culture is more easily perceived when the person moves away from their country of origin. People will hardly notice their habits when they are immersed in their environment. The culture of the individual becomes visible when a change of environment is provoked. This change brings awareness of who the person is and what traditions they carry.

¹⁶ Alejandro Portes, and Ruben Rumbaut. *Immigrant America - A Portrait*. 4th ed. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014. Pg. 32.

¹⁷ Dina Birman, and Addae, Dorothy. In C. Suárez-Orozco, M. M. Abo-Zena, & A. K. Marks (Eds.) “Acculturation. Transitions: The Development of Children of Immigrants.” January 2016. Accessed June 5, 2019. pp. 122-141 (NYU Press)
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281451003>

¹⁸ Dina Birman, and Addae, Dorothy. In C. Suárez-Orozco, M. M. Abo-Zena, & A. K. Marks (Eds.) “Acculturation. Transitions: The Development of Children of Immigrants.” January, 2016. Accessed June 5, 2019. pp. 122-141 (NYU Press)
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When parents immigrate to another country, they leave their homelands behind, but not necessarily their culture. Most of them will keep or try to maintain their traditions, language, fashion, and food. When it comes to raising their children, many agree that they want to raise them with the same values and costumes that they grew up with back in their homeland. However, what are the expectations of these parents carry for their children? How can culture affect the way children learn, act, or think?

"Two years ago, when Andre was ten years old, he was excited about coming to the United States from Haiti. Because he did not speak English initially, he struggled at school and was very isolated, going straight home after school to watch his younger sister while his mom went to work. During the first year, the family joined a Haitian church and got to know other families, and Andre made friends with some of the other kids. Now he spends much time hanging out with them, he speaks fluent English, listens to American music, and plays basketball. Andre admires rappers and basketball players so much that he wonders if he can become one. But he is concerned about his mother, Laurette, who does not approve any of these interests. She thinks that Andre is becoming 'too American.' Andre is also concerned about his 17-years-old sister, Nadege, who is having even more arguments with their mother than he does. Nadege wants to go to college and become a professional, a task that she is handling independently since Laurette does not know enough about the U.S. college admissions process to help her. At the same time, Laurette argues that Nadege is too young to decide for herself how much time to spend with her friends and when to start dating; besides, Nadege's social life is taking time away from her studies. Andre's younger sister, Marriette, just started school and loves it. She picked up English quickly and no longer speaks Creole, a source of more worry for Andre's mother. Laurette had believed that moving to America would change her children's lives for the better, but she had not anticipated how much America would change them."¹⁹

The experience, reported by Andre's family, is a great example of how parents (because immigration is a parental decision, not children) do not

¹⁹Dina Birman and Addae, Dorothy. In C. Suárez-Orozco, M. M. Abo-Zena, & A. K. Marks (Eds.) "Acculturation. Transitions: The Development of Children of Immigrants." January, 2016. Accessed June 5, 2019. pp. 122-141(NYU Press)
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anticipate the problems that this decision may create in the family routine. When side effects are not observed and evaluated with due care, they can be disastrous. Just like Andre's family, thousands of families arrive in the United States daily and will experience the same difficulties that this family has experienced. The economic issue is resolved in time after families immigrate to another country; however, what about the psycho-social problems that only appear over the years, how can they be solved?²⁰

In observing the text, Andre's concern with his mother is remarkable; on the one hand, he is worried that his mother is stressed by the changes that are happening in her children. On the other side, there is a stressed mother because the children are becoming "too American." However, the question remains, who decided to come to America? These are the effects that are never evaluated at the time of need, but that carry most problems. Parents end up putting a lot of pressure and burden on their children because the new culture is foreign to them. Children cannot understand parents because the new culture is already part of them.²¹

Raising children in a culture different from the parents' is a real challenge that is continuously overlooked. Economic need overcomes the psycho-social assessment that parents should have before considering any change, which is understandable if analyzing the social context, mainly of violence and misery that these parents want to leave behind. One cannot blame or judge parents for seeking a better future for their children; This is indisputable.

This process in which this cultural mixture happens is usually better accepted by children than by parents. Because they are more embedded in the new culture, it becomes natural for them to absorb this new model, and yet they try to maintain the culture of their parents to please them. It is essential to observe that many family traditions that are important and valued by the parents do not make sense for most children and adolescents who are raised in a culture different from that of their parents. Because they were not raised in the same environment, it is not and was never part of their lives. However, there is a great stipulation of the parents for the children perpetuate certain traditions.

²⁰ Dina Birman and Addae, Dorothy. In C. Suárez-Orozco, M. M. Abo-Zena, & A. K. Marks (Eds.) "Acculturation. Transitions: The Development of Children of Immigrants." January, 2016. Accessed June 5, 2019. pp. 122-141(NYU Press)

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²¹ Dina Birman and Addae, Dorothy. In C. Suárez-Orozco, M. M. Abo-Zena, & A. K. Marks (Eds.) "Acculturation. Transitions: The Development of Children of Immigrants." January, 2016. Accessed June 5, 2019. pp. 122-141(NYU Press)

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281451003>

Furthermore, this can become conflicting and confusing, especially for teenagers.²² Parents, on the other hand, have to devote more time to work and end up not mixing in the new society. The work available for immigrant families is usually guaranteed by people from the same country from which they came. This is mainly because most immigrants do not have legal documents that allow them to work in the United States, so this support from the community is vital for them. However, this hinders them from learning English, resulting in a stagnant move towards the new culture. They are among their peers all the time, involved in the same culture. They speak the same language; they go to the same churches, they shop in the same market. So, even though they are in another country, the country of origin is still inserted in their lives.

“Luis is eleven years old. He is the eldest of Ana and Felipe's sons; both parents are undocumented immigrants from Mexico. Felipe works in a clothing factory for an hourly wage as the family's sole breadwinner; Ana has not worked since her youngest son was born two years ago. Both parents have had limited employment options in part because of their unauthorized residency status, but also because they, like many of their contemporaries, cannot speak, read, or write proficiently in English. The focus of this family is not the toddler tugging at Luis's pant leg, angling for his brother's attention. Luis's seven-year-old brother, Julio, is severely epileptic. His condition was initially misdiagnosed when he was an infant, resulting in two untreated, grand mal seizures that left him, so brain-damaged that he will never be able to speak. So Luis speaks for Julio – and their parents – when they go to many doctor appointments that Julio needs. Luis, a straight-A student, routinely misses school or forgoes completing his homework to help his parents communicate with English-speaking staff at the emergency room, at scheduled doctor visits, and at Julio's rehabilitation services, for which Luis helped his parents complete the required paperwork.”²³

²² Dina Birman and Addae, Dorothy. In C. Suárez-Orozco, M. M. Abo-Zena, & A. K. Marks (Eds.)“Acculturation. Transitions: The Development of Children of Immigrants.” January, 2016. Accessed June 5, 2019. pp. 122-141(NYU Press)
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281451003>

²³Vikki Katz S. *Kids in the Middle - How Children of Immigrants Negotiate Community Interaction for Their Families*. 1st ed. Series 1. New Jersey, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014. Pg.1.

Like Luis, thousands of immigrant children function as a kind of “broker” for their parents. They facilitate the connection between their immigrant parents when they enable a conversation between them and an English-speaking person, like a neighbor or service provider, for example.²⁴ It happens because children are exposed more quickly to the English language and culture when they are immersed in a local school. Most of them are embedded within a classroom, so the language and local standards of conduct are well-defined and clear for them. Moreover, this is not the case with adults. The adult community usually undergo extended workdays to have their end means, with no spare time to dedicate themselves to the study of the new language.²⁵

Observing the cases proposed in these studies, as well as so many others witnessed and observed over the years, it is visible how the cultural tensions of the immigration process weigh upon a child or adolescent. It is much more complicated for them than for an adult, and this is what many parents, leaders, and Christians do not comprehend.

Firstly, they were never the authors of that decision. They were probably only communicated the facts, thus meaning that for them, it was never an option. Secondly, they have not yet defined a personality since that process occurs over the years with natural maturing. They are more easily shaped by the culture of the place where they grow up. Thirdly, they face this process with a fear of the unknown. This is mainly because they overhear many stories from their parents or peers in the community about tragedies that happen to immigrants. Fourthly, and this is also very relevant for teenagers, is the fact that they leave behind their friends, their school, their language, everything they know to follow their parent’s dream, which is not easy for them. Adolescence is a critical phase of life. There are extreme changes in both the body and the mind of the child. The psychological and emotional sides undergo profound changes in this phase, leaving the child more sensitive and vulnerable. Anyone who works or has a teenager at home can testify to this.²⁶

The Role of the Church

²⁴ Vikki Katz S. *Kids in the Middle - How Children of Immigrants Negotiate Community Interaction for Their Families*. 1st ed. Series 1. New Jersey, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014. Pg.1

²⁵ Vikki Katz S. *Kids in the Middle - How Children of Immigrants Negotiate Community Interaction for Their Families*. 1st ed. Series 1. New Jersey, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014. Pg. 6.

²⁶ Cendrine Burztein Lipsica, and Ilkka Henrik Makinen. "Immigration and Suicidality in the Young." May 1, 2010. Accessed June 5, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1177/070674371005500502>

What society, government, and especially the church do not see is that the immigration process is more like a grieving process than a simple legal process. There is a significant loss for those who leave their origins behind, to try to start life again from the ground up. Acquiring a new language, a new culture, and a new model of norms. It also means a new family because, for many, it is precisely what the body of Christ represents - a new family in a new land. The object of this research is to give an overview of the impact this change can have on families, on children, especially the children who are already in a delicate phase of life, as well as how the immigrant church can be prepared to help in this transition.

As much as Christians try to push this responsibility for the government, they must understand that the church is central to this process. A church that deals with immigrants need to be prepared to guide, advise, teach, and help with the problems that arise as a result of the immigration process. After all, for much of the immigrant population, the church in the new nation represents the family they left behind. The church is the only place with help to survive this new beginning. Later on, this subject will be further explored.

Mankind as the Image of God

There are sound theological reasons for a person to commit, understand, and appreciate other cultures wherever is possible. Making that commitment will unfold new and wonderful dimensions of the character of God, for God can only be revealed through diversity.²⁷ The final piece of the handiwork of God is the creation of man and woman (Gen.1:26-27).²⁸ Moreover, when God finished creating the world, he announced that 'it was very good' (Gen. 1:31).²⁹ "To celebrate creation is to celebrate diversity, including diversities of people."³⁰ Furthermore, one cannot celebrate out of ignorance. The genuine celebration comes from genuine appreciation; this requires learning and understanding, and these are incompatible with egocentrism and superiority.³¹

Genesis 1:26-27 teaches us that God made mankind in its likeness so that they could dominate over all things, but not overall people; it is important to underscore this. However, what does the fact that every man and woman were made in the image of God means? It means that mankind is the living

²⁷Duane Elmer. *Cross-Cultural Conflict – Building Relationships for Effective Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993. Pg.13.

²⁸Carroll R. M. Daniel. *Christians at the Border - Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2013.Pg. 46.

²⁹ Holy Bible – NIV

³⁰Duane Elmer. *Cross-Cultural Conflict – Building Relationships for Effective Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.Pg. 13.

³¹ Duane Elmer. *Cross-Cultural Conflict – Building Relationships for Effective Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.Pg. 13.

image of God on earth; they are designated to represent Him here. “This representation is not to be passive; men and woman are to preside over all things as God’s vice-regents and take care of His creation (Gen. 1:26,28,2:15,19-20).³² This dominion requires wisdom, creativity, and care.”³³

It is crucial to remind Christians that “we are all the image of God” (Gen.1:26).³⁴ There is a tendency to separate the spiritual part of life from the legal part when it comes to immigration. “God gives people the ability to adapt and respond to the immigrant situation to accomplish his greater purposes. If we identify with the Kingdom of God first, we often find that human distinctions fade in importance because ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’³⁵ (Gal. 3:28).³⁶

Throughout the Bible, as shown at the beginning of this study, one can follow the narratives of people who are migrating and immigrating to different regions. There are specific passages where God commands men of faith to leave their relatives and move to another country. That is what happens with Abraham in Genesis 12:1-4: “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.’ I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you.”³⁷ All the commandments of the Lord in respect to the alien shows the care and appreciation that God had and has with the immigrant. The law teaches the believer how to treat foreigners with justice, using the same rules for all people, regardless of their citizenship. So, if it is a command, Christians should not discuss whether to follow or not, but rather how to follow it so as not to harm any party involved in the conflict.

The Ancient Church

They love everyone but are oppressed by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death and gain life. They are poor and yet make many rich. They are short of everything and yet have plenty of all things. They are

³²Kenneth L. Barker. *NIV Study Bible*. Zondervan Pub. House, 2011.

³³Carroll R. M. Daniel. *Christians at the Border - Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2013. Pg. 47.

³⁴Kenneth L. Barker. *NIV Study Bible*. Zondervan Pub. House, 2011.

³⁵Kenneth L. Barker. *NIV Study Bible*. Zondervan Pub. House, 2011.

³⁶Matthew Soarens, and Jenny Yang. *Welcoming the stranger- justice, compassion, and truth in the immigration debate*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009. Pg. 175.

³⁷Kenneth L. Barker. *NIV Study Bible*. Zondervan Pub. House, 2011.

dishonored and yet gain glory through dishonor. (Anonymous letter to Diognetus, 150)³⁸

“The end of the first century saw a saturation of Christianity to all of the major cities of the ancient world. There are give characteristics about Christianity that attracted people to its ranks. Christianity was the most inclusive group in the Roman World: Its members cared for the poor and the imprisoned. There was mutual help among the congregations. The book of Acts tells of offerings from churches in one locale being collected for the welfare of Christians in other areas. The unity of the saints brought a person friends and family no matter where one traveled.”³⁹

Since the beginning, Christianity has always been known for its love for the poor, orphans, widows, and foreigners. Like orphans and widows, foreigners are separated from society's natural protection net, which makes them more vulnerable to danger and abuse. The lives of these people are not easy; they go through difficulties, which for many, is difficult even to imagine. Both in the past and today, they are still part of the most unfortunate part of the population. They are generally the exploited, ignored, and marginalized labor force in society. Unfortunately, this reality has not yet changed.

The Immigrant Church

Like the ancient church, the immigrant church faces challenges very different from those of a regular church. They provide a safe space for the collective affirmation of national identity, making it possible for people to relate to the sacred through services in their mother language. Furthermore, the primary motivation for immigrants to attend churches is that they believe that they can find in the church a space characterized by solidarity, trust, and mutual help. People seek churches for numerous reasons, but also because they need to socialize.⁴⁰ “The welcoming environment of churches stands in

³⁸ John T. Stevenson. *The First Five Hundred Years of the Christian Church*. Hollywood, FL. Redeemer Publishing, 2008. pg. 20.

³⁹ John T. Stevenson. *The First Five Hundred Years of the Christian Church*. Hollywood, FL. Redeemer Publishing, 2008. pg. 20.

⁴⁰ Phillip J. Williams, Timothy J. Steigenga, and Manuel a. Vasquez. *A place to Be – Brazilian, Guatemalan, and Mexican Immigrants in Florida’s New Destination*. Florida: Rutgers, The State University, 2009. Pg. 41.

contrast to the situation experienced ‘out there,’ which is perceived as competitive and with low solidarity and community spirit.”⁴¹

As seen, the church is a type of safe haven for immigrants. Nevertheless, much more than promoting the socialization of the immigrant community, the role of the church is to promote the teachings of God. Moreover, this demands much more wisdom from the leaders of these churches. Because they will not be able to unify a church serving only one-half of the family, so to speak, the parents. It is necessary to analyze the family as a whole, also looking at the needs of children and young people, without letting tradition and customs be more important than the commandments of love and care of others.

The challenges for an immigrant church are many, but some problems concerning them need to be thoroughly studied so that practical solutions can be put into practice. To reach clarity on the subject, it is worth exploring some of these problems.

First, there is the language barrier. Immigrant churches try to keep the same language spoken in the country of origin. To make it easier for all who have not learned English, especially the adult community. But for children and teenagers, this becomes a problem. It is notorious that most of the children who arrived in the United States at a very young age or who were born here can speak their parent’s mother tongue, but in a broken way, there are only a few exceptions to that. They are being educated in English; the language they speak is predominantly English. So absorbing everything in a language that is not their official language is very difficult, and dangerous – what are they learning? Are they learning? That ends up limiting their participation and involvement in the church, and even delaying the call of God in their lives. The language barrier can take away their confidence.

Second, how are children and teens being taught in church and Sunday schools? If children and adolescents have a limited understanding of the language of their parents, it should be right for them to receive this teaching in English. The church would make sure they are learning the sound doctrine. However, the reality is that as the parents themselves are usually the teachers, this does not always happen.

The third, and also very relevant point, is pastoral counseling. How will pastors who are unfamiliar with the local culture, who do not seek to interact with American society, and who are closed in their communities know how to guide young people? The problems about the United States are not the same as the countries they came from, and the solutions will not be the same either. Being aware of this need is the role of the immigrant church. Because we can not love only by saying that we love, we need to take care: "Dear

⁴¹ Phillip J. Williams, Timothy J. Steigenga, and Manuel a. Vasquez. *A place to Be – Brazilian, Guatemalan, and Mexican Immigrants in Florida’s New Destination*. Florida: Rutgers, The State University, 2009.Pg. 41.

children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:18)⁴²

The purpose of this research is not to diminish the importance of traditions. Much less the importance of speaking a second language. "The knowledge of a foreign tongue represents a valuable resource; the efforts of immigrant families to maintain this part of their cultural heritage and to pass it on to their youths is worth supporting."⁴³ It is more than proven that this benefits the child in several ways. However, the goal is to seek balance; tradition is as important as the partnership with the new culture. Acculturation is very important to the family as a whole. And the church plays a crucial role in the lives of these families. The church works for the adult as the school for the child; it is the place of learning, of correction, of encouragement, and especially the means of socializing with the new culture.

The immigrant church ends up being very silent on the social side. And this is serious. There are many activities that the church can promote that would help the immigrant in the process of acculturation. Like for example, English classes for adults, American culture classes, help with assistance to local benefits, Sunday services with simultaneous translation for English, Sunday school in English for children and young people, and these are just a few examples. Immigrant churches very little explore this connection with the social aspect of immigration. It must be understood that the church cannot only be a replication of the church from their home country. Since the situation is different, the needs of the people are also different.⁴⁴ "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction." (2 Tim. 4:2)⁴⁵

The Government Role

The immigration system, which in recent years has been so prominent, is undoubtedly the most broken system in the United States. Even with all the policies of the current government, to try to inhibit immigration, more than 76,000 migrants crossed the border without authorization only in one month last year,⁴⁶ It has been the highest number in eleven years. This is "a strong signal that stricter procedures, new asylum controls, and tougher

⁴² Kenneth L. Barker. *NIV Study Bible*. Zondervan Pub. House, 2011.

⁴³ Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut. *Immigrant America - A Portrait*. 4th ed. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014. Pg. 256.

⁴⁴ Kenneth L. Barker. *NIV Study Bible*. Zondervan Pub. House, 2011

⁴⁵ Holy Bible – NIV.

⁴⁶ Caitlin Dickerson. "Border at 'Breaking Point' as More Than 76,000 Unauthorized Migrants Cross in a Month." *The New York Times*. March 05, 2019. Accessed June 15, 2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/05/us/border-crossing-increase.html>.

detention policies have not reversed what remains a powerful attraction for thousands of families fleeing violence and poverty."⁴⁷

Furthermore, the immigration scenario has changed over the years. Before, only men were crossing the border in search of work. However, due to the global political scenario, what happens today are whole families trying to cross borders illegally. "Fathers from Honduras with adolescent boys they are pulling away from gang violence, mothers with toddlers from Guatemala whose farms have been lost to drought. They arrive with children and claim protection under asylum laws."⁴⁸ The problem is that the government is not prepared to receive this amount of people at one time. And usually, they need to count on the help of the church to shelter, feed, and host these families, which is not always easy.⁴⁹

Unfortunately, the ones who suffer the most are children and young adults. According to the latest measures proposed by President Donald J. Trump, children placed in immigration detention will no longer have access to English classes, recreation, or legal aid.⁵⁰ One can ask, what fault do these children have for being involved in a political and social problem, which is much deeper than they can understand?

"The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) has begun to end funding for programs for the unaccompanied minors, according to a report by The Washington Post. U.S. Health and Human Services spokesman Mark Weber, whose department includes the ORR, told the Washington Post that the programs being cut were "not directly necessary for the

⁴⁷ Caitlin Dickerson. "Border at 'Breaking Point' as More Than 76,000 Unauthorized Migrants Cross in a Month." The New York Times. March 05, 2019. Accessed June 15, 2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/05/us/border-crossing-increase.html>.

⁴⁸ Caitlin Dickerson. "Border at 'Breaking Point' as More Than 76,000 Unauthorized Migrants Cross in a Month." The New York Times. March 05, 2019. Accessed June 15, 2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/05/us/border-crossing-increase.html>.

⁴⁹ Caitlin Dickerson. "Border at 'Breaking Point' as More Than 76,000 Unauthorized Migrants Cross in a Month." The New York Times. March 05, 2019. Accessed June 15, 2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/05/us/border-crossing-increase.html>.

⁵⁰ Michael Gribosky "Trump Admin Cuts English Classes, Recreation, Legal Aid for Migrant Kids". Last modified June 5, 2019. Accessed June 12, 2019.

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/trump-admin-cuts-english-classes-recreation-legal-aid-for-migrant-kids.html>.

protection of life and safety, including education services, legal services, and recreation.” The decision was sent to licensed shelters by the HHS via email last week, with lawyer Carlos Holguin telling the Washington Post that the defunding move may face legal action. “We’ll see them in court if they go through with it,” stated Holguin. “What is next? Drinking water? Food? . . . Where are they going to stop?” Author and Southern Baptist minister Alan Cross denounced the decision by the administration, taking to his Twitter account on Wednesday to call the situation “Beyond frustrating.” “While Evangelicals are debating Trump’s 16 min. visit to McLean Bible Church and David Platt’s prayer, Trump’s WH cuts education and recreation to thousands of migrant children in detention. WAKE UP PEOPLE!!! The total blindness is ridiculous. Intentional?” tweeted Cross. “After a Sunday of Prayer for Trump by many Evangelicals, all education/recreation is cut for migrant kids in detention. What if all of that Evangelical access to Trump turned into us counseling him on what the Bible says about how to treat the sojourner?” According to the Office of the Administration for Children and Families, unaccompanied minors apprehended by the Department of Homeland Security are transferred to the care of ORR.”⁵¹

As seen in the article above, this debate remains current and heated. Unfortunately, the parties involved are far from reaching an agreement. However, what would be the role of the true Christian in this war scenario? It is vital to think about it.

Legal and Illegal immigration

“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do

⁵¹ Michael Gribosky “Trump Admin Cuts English Classes, Recreation, Legal Aid for Migrant Kids”. Last modified June 5, 2019. Accessed June 12, 2019. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/trump-admin-cuts-english-classes-recreation-legal-aid-for-migrant-kids.html>.

what is right, and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor." (Romans 13:1-7)⁵²

This verse from the book of Romans states that God expects us to obey the authorities since all are somehow allowed to occupy this position, by God Himself. People are entitled to not comply with them only when the laws of these authorities violate the word of God, as seen in the book of Acts 5:29: "Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings!"

Anywhere in the world, illegal immigration is undoubtedly a very controversial issue. Immigration laws are usually highly criticized. Some support the government but wishing they should be more stringent, and some reject the government, for considering them to be very unfair, or even discriminatory. "People are on both sides of the issue, which has made this a heated debate. In the meantime, we have forgotten that these refugees are people, and they need us."⁵³

It becomes complicated to question Paul's command when we think about the time in which he lived, considering that he was under the authority of one of the worst emperors we know in the history of mankind, Nero. To be clear about the context of the time in which Paul lived, one should look back into the history of the church.⁵⁴

"Christians were first, and horribly, targeted for persecution as a group by the emperor Nero in 64 AD. A massive fire broke out in Rome and destroyed much of the city. Rumors abounded that Nero himself was responsible. He certainly took advantage of the resulting devastation of the city, building a lavish private palace on the part of the site of the fire. Perhaps to divert attention from the rumors, Nero ordered that Christians should be

⁵² Holy Bible – NIV

⁵³ Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Issam Smeir. *Seeking Refuge: on the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016.

⁵⁴ John T. Stevenson. *The First Five Hundred Years of the Christian Church*. Hollywood, FL. Redeemer Publishing, 2008. pg. 21.

rounded up and killed. Some were torn apart by dogs, others burnt alive as human torches.”⁵⁵

“Among those who were put to death during this persecution were the Apostles Peter and Paul. The excesses of Nero eventually grew too much even for the bloodthirsty Romans, and rebellion finally broke out in the empire. Nero fled the city and committed suicide in 68 A.D.”⁵⁶

Yet, Paul still taught and preached about obedience to the authorities. However, this is where the greatest challenge for the Christian is. The question is not whether or not one should obey the authorities; the question is the extent to which the authorities can act, that they are not going against the teachings of God.

There is also the question of dangerousness. Unfortunately, as in any other situation, there are well-intentioned and malicious people, all seeking help. However, according to the available data, there is no evidence that immigrants are more or less dangerous than any other group. The greatest danger is when they are excluded from society and are marginalized. When people are excluded from society, they are more likely to commit crimes. Some people will commit crimes to survive and have a source of income; others will be exploited and abused because they have no one in society to protect them.

As a consequence of this, prejudice, hate, and fear cause suffering that leave marks for a lifetime, leading to depression, pain, and feelings of hostility. It cannot be forgotten that prejudice and hate can become a currency of reciprocity in society.

The reality is that the majority of the illegal immigrants in the U.S came to offer a better life for their families. They are usually escaping poverty or fleeing from war. These are legitimate motivations; however, it is not also biblical to motivate someone to break the law to achieve his purposes. As seen, there is a fine line between right and wrong, and what one can best do is to find the middle ground between these two.

"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves." (1Peter 2:13-16)⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Lunn-Rockliffe, Dr. Sophie. "History - Ancient History in Depth: Christianity and the Roman Empire." BBC. BBC, February 17, 2011. http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/christianityromanempire_article_01.shtml.

⁵⁶ John T. Stevenson. *The First Five Hundred Years of the Christian Church*. Hollywood, FL. Redeemer Publishing, 2008. pg. 21.

⁵⁷ Holy Bible - NIV

Conclusion

“Several theories attempt to explain the causes and process of international migration... Immigration is neither a new phenomenon nor only a recent political concern. It has been a topic of national interest since the colonial era. The internal issues, however, always have had a global backdrop. That is, each major period of immigration to the United States has been part of larger migrations happening simultaneously around the world and, therefore, has been inseparable from the political, social, and economic conditions of other nations.”⁵⁸

The way new generations of immigrants integrate into American society can decisively determine the future of families and, consequently, of the nation. Therefore promoting social welfare, family welfare, health, psychosocial, and professional adaptation is an essential part of the immigration process.⁵⁹ This work must be a joint effort of the community, church, and government. After all, immigrant individuals are already here and will most likely remain here. The next generation of immigrants can potentially become future politicians in power, as we have seen happen in the past with earlier generations in the political arena.

The way American society treats immigrant children today will impact the way they contribute to society in the future. This generation that is being mistreated in the immigration detention centers today will eventually reintegrate into American society. What can be expected from a generation of children who have had their fundamental rights revoked, been mistreated, and abused? It is precisely for these children that Christians should not stop fighting for in order to ease their adjustment into society. Entire generations of immigrants will benefit and have their stories changed. However, it will not just be them who benefit. Still, American society as a whole will profit from an immigrant population that has been accepted and loved from the moment they stepped onto American soil.

“History demonstrates a recurring tension principally between economic concerns and different expressions of nativism - Nativism consists of a feeling of fear and hatred toward a foreign minority that is believed to threaten what is assumed to be the national culture.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸Carroll R. M. Daniel. *Christians at the Border - Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2013. Pg. 5.

⁵⁹Matthew Soarens and Jenny Yang. *Welcoming the stranger- justice, compassion, and truth in the immigration debate*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009. Pg. 174.

⁶⁰Daniel, Carroll R. M. *Christians at the Border - Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2013. Pg. 6.

When the church understands its leadership role as an advocate and mediator, assisting in the process of acculturation, the church grows, and the Kingdom advances. American Christians should ask themselves, “what will it take to further the Kingdom?” If this means putting aside the American flag and raising the Kingdom flag, that is what they should do.”⁶¹ In the same vein, immigrants should ask themselves, “how can I collaborate with this country without isolating myself, but genuinely contribute to the betterment of the country?”⁶²

“The American evangelical church’s role in welcoming and speaking out on behalf of all people groups will be pivotal in providing a kingdom perspective on the immigration debate and moving people closer to the day Scripture promises, when ‘a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language will be standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb’”⁶³ (Rev. 7:9).⁶⁴ May the church (remember: we are the church) rise from inaction to fulfill its role in society according to God’s word.

The truth is that we often place our trust in worldly things, and we forget that our trust must be in God alone. If today we are in a privileged situation, tomorrow, we may be facing a different reality. The Bible shows us various examples of peoples, cities, and nations that have had their stories changed in the blink of an eye, and yet we often think we are immune to these changes. Life is but a vapor. (James 4:14).⁶⁵ Putting yourself in the other's shoes may be the best way to look at life with God's eyes.

The purpose of this research is not to give a definitive prescription on how Christians should act in all circumstances dealing with immigration. It is impossible to reach a consensus with a 100% agreement on all sides. The main objective is to insight reflection, to seek common ground, and to draw out the answer to the question: what would Jesus do? The best approach will always be to obey the Word of God and live out our faith by loving the Lord with all our hearts, souls, and minds as well as loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40)⁶⁶

⁶¹Matthew Soarens, and Jenny Yang. *Welcoming the stranger- justice, compassion, and truth in the immigration debate*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009. Pg. 175.

⁶²Matthew Soarens, and Jenny Yang. *Welcoming the stranger- justice, compassion, and truth in the immigration debate*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009. Pg. 175.

⁶³ Matthew Soarens, and Jenny Yang. *Welcoming the stranger- justice, compassion, and truth in the immigration debate*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009. Pg. 175

⁶⁴ Kenneth L Barker, *NIV Study Bible* (Zondervan Pub. House, 2011).

⁶⁵ Holy Bible – NIV

⁶⁶ Holy Bible – NIV

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