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Essential Texts for a Biblical Approach to Apologetics (10) Hebrews 11:3

By P. S. Nelson

Hebrews 11:3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

Hebrews 11:3 is an important text in apologetics because it establishes a crucial relationship between faith and knowledge. This text lends itself to a simple outline: 1) *How We Understand*, and 2) *What We Understand*. In this article, we will only address the first part regarding how we understand, and deal with what we understand in a latter issue.

How We Understand

Heb. 11:3 begins with the statement, “*through faith we understand*.” In the Greek, the noun “faith” (πίστει) is in the instrumental case.¹ It denotes that by *means of faith* we understand. The verb for “*understand*” is νοέω, which relates to use of the mind (νοός). It means to perceive with the mind, and signifies an intellectual apprehension.² Grammatically, it is in the present tense (νοούμεν) indicating continual action. By means of faith, we continue to understand. Faith is the means, and understanding is the result.

There is a Latin phrase that conveys accurately the meaning of “*through faith we understand*.” *Credo ut intelligam*, “I believe in order that I may understand.” This became the motto of Anselm (c. 1033-1109) and was based on the teaching of Augustine (c. 354-430). It summarizes the proper relationship between faith and knowledge. Faith in the triune God, and the revelation of his inspired and infallible Word, precedes the understanding of every-

thing else. We believe the Word of God in order that we might understand this universe and all of reality. Belief precedes understanding.

In our text, the writer to the Hebrews assumes that human reasoning is insufficient to provide a right understanding of the created universe. Human reason is not, and has never been ultimate for man. Mere human reason can never fathom that “*the things that are seen are not made of things that do appear*.” Without the light of divine revelation, the question of the origin and meaning of the universe will never be resolved. Solving this problem does not lie in the scope of experience, empiricism, or the scientific method. It is revealed in Scripture and apprehended by faith.

God created man as a “faith-creature.” Being made in the image of God, every man is by nature religious. This is what the apostle Paul appealed to in his great defense of the faith on Mars Hill, “*Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious (extremely religious). For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you*” (Acts 17:22-23). Paul appealed to the religious nature of man, and his innate sense of deity (*sensus divinitatus*). Then he declared unto them the Creator as revealed in Scripture. Man, as a faith-creature, was made to depend upon divine revelation as the absolute standard and ultimate authority for all knowledge and truth. It is the grand presupposition of Christianity. When Adam and Eve doubted God’s word, and autonomously divorced human reasoning from God’s revelation, it resulted in the fall of man. The human race plunged into the depths of sin. The fact that natural man seeks autonomy, exalting human reasoning

as ultimate, reveals his utter rebellion against God.

Heb. 11:3 is a foundational text that asserts the proper relationship between faith and knowledge. It asserts that faith precedes understanding, and thus is a precondition for true knowledge. Man is by nature a presuppositionalist, that is, he thinks and acts from his presuppositions.³ They are the spectacles by which man interprets and evaluates the world he lives in and everything contained in it. The sum total of the presuppositions man espouses forms a belief-system (world-view) by which he attempts to understand the meaning of the universe and all of reality. Therefore, the defense of the faith is unavoidably a presuppositional issue.

Presuppositions are a matter of faith⁴. We know the universe was created, not because the evidences prove it, but because the Word of God declares it. The knowledge of God the Creator is to think in terms of faith.⁵ It cannot be apprehended without a faith commitment to the triune God of Scripture. The opening verse of the Bible begins with, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The Bible never seeks to prove the existence of God, nor creation. It is presupposed. Evidences can never be used to prove creation, because man can never come to know the Creator by rational argumentation outside of God's revelation. At best, evidences can only be supplemental to the Word of God. Scientific evidences are only valid when God's Word is presupposed as ultimate.

The fundamental presupposition of apologetics is the existence of the triune God who has revealed himself in Scripture. The Word of God is held as ultimate *by faith*. As the absolute standard of Truth, it cannot be verified by anything external to itself because there is no higher authority to credential it. It is self-attesting, because God is its author, and God alone is the only adequate witness to himself. Therefore, the starting point of all reasoning must begin with God's Word. The presuppositionalist is committed through faith to reason *FROM* the Word of God, and never *TO* the Word of God as the evidentialist does. Reasoning *TO* the Word of God assumes a higher authority than

God, which is tantamount to holding man's reasoning as ultimate. Every Christian is obligated to presuppose the Word of God in every area of thought (2 Cor. 10:5).

As a creature, man can never think of his mind as autonomous, but must recognize total dependency on the Creator for true understanding. No fact in the universe exists independently of God. God defined and gave meaning to his creation. Every fact has its meaning by virtue of its relationship to the Creator. All truth is God's truth. We can only know the true meaning of something because God has previously interpreted it (from eternity) and revealed it to us in Scripture. For us to understand, or have true knowledge of something, is simply to think God's thoughts after him. *By faith we understand*. Human reasoning must serve faith.

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¹ Each example of faith in Hebrews 11 is formally introduced by πιστει. It is used linguistically as an *anaphora* and occurs 17 times in succession after v. 3.

² BDAG, p. 818.

³ Downing, William R., *An Introduction to Biblical Epistemology* (Morgan Hill, CA: Pacific Institute of Religious Studies), 1998, p. 59.

⁴ By definition a presupposition is not something you prove; it is an assumption in one's reasoning. It is the starting point from which one begins his reasoning. It is assumed to be true by faith.

⁵ TDNT, IV:951.

And Paul "So Spake" *Acts 14:1*

By J. A. Billings

During Barnabas and Paul's first missionary journey they traveled to Antioch (Pisidia). Their common method of evangelism was to go into the Synagogue of the Jews and Paul would preach. Through Paul's preaching many Jews and proselytes were converted. While in Antioch, the people wanted to hear more so they asked them to stay the week and preach again the following Sabbath. On the following Sabbath Day almost the whole city came to hear the Word of God, but the Jews, out of envy, spoke against Paul's preaching, blasphemed God and sent them away. Paul and Barnabas shook off the dust

of their feet against them and then traveled to Iconium. When they arrived at Iconium they again, as their manner was, went to the Synagogue of the Jews.

Acts 14:1 And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.

This passage of Scripture teaches us that Paul "so spake in such a manner" that a great multitude both of Jews and Greeks believed. Paul "so spake" with plainness of speech, he "so spake" with clear and logical arguments, he "so spake" with boldness, he "so spake" with passion, he "so spake" with authority and he "so spake" with power and with unction from the Spirit of God. Paul's method of preaching was to get to the heart of the matter and to arrest the attention of his hearers. The result was a great multitude believed on Jesus Christ.

The question is, how did Paul know to preach in that manner? Did he just happen upon a formula that worked? Was he endowed with natural abilities? Was he a good public speaker? Was he attractive and in possession of a winning personality? The answer is NO to all of the questions. Paul reminded the church at Corinth that he was a man that lacked many of the conventional and suitable qualities people looked for in a man that lived in the public eye.

I Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

This statement from Paul tells us that the conversion of the people at Iconium had little to do with Paul's pedigree. Instead, their salvation was the crowning result of Paul's many years of intensely arduous spiritual, doctrinal and theological training.

Paul's Preparation

Before Paul's conversion he was a well respected Rabbi. Saul was also a Roman citizen who was raised among the ruling class of the Jews. It is possible that he was educated in his home town of Tarsus at the great Greek University before he went to Jerusalem to continue his training. His teacher, Gamaliel, one of the most brilliant men in world history, prepared Paul unknowingly for the world-wide propagation of the Gospel. Paul declared, "...I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city (Jerusalem) at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God,..."¹ Paul was a Jew, a Hellenist and a Roman citizen, which meant he could freely travel throughout the Roman Empire as a Gospel missionary.

Paul's Salvation and Further Training

God saved Paul on the Road to Damascus and on that day his training as a Minister of the Gospel began. God sent him to the Arabian desert and Paul spent the next three years being trained by God. When his early training was completed he traveled to Jerusalem to see Peter. Then the church at Jerusalem sent Paul back to his childhood home of Tarsus where he continued his studies in preparing for the propagation of the Gospel. All the while he was at Tarsus he was ministering to his own people and developing his skills as a Gospel preacher. After five to seven years had passed Barnabas went to Tarsus to see Paul and he brought Paul to his church in Antioch, Syria. Saul and Barnabas then ministered at the church at Antioch together for one year.

The biblical record reveals that after the conversion of Paul, God invested the next ten years equipping him for the Gospel ministry. After all those years in Arabia, Tarsus and Antioch, Syria Paul's training was completed. Then and not until then did the Holy Spirit say "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

Paul was Thoroughly Prepared for the Gospel Ministry

Paul became a master theologian and preacher during that period of his life. During that time Paul studied all of the intricacies of Calvary. He formulated and correlated all the doctrines which had to do with the eternal redemptive purpose of God in saving those whom He loved. When we finally see Paul on his missionary journeys we see him as a mature Christian in his early forties. He was a godly man of passion, of courage and of purpose. B.H. Carroll said, "As a Hebrew he faced all Jews. As a Hellenist he faced all Greeks. As a Roman citizen he faced the world."² When Paul finally began his missionary labors he was thoroughly prepared for the work that God had called him to.

His Preaching

Paul would not have been a qualified minister of the Gospel if he had not prepared. Yet, preparation is only part of the Gospel ministry. It is not very difficult to study a passage of Scripture, outline it, and make practical observations on it. Many men in any given church, that have some abilities and common sense, can do a satisfactory job of this with a few standard books to guide them along. If that is the case, then what separates Paul and all called Gospel preachers from the rest of men? The difference is that the man of God prepares for a message knowing that the intellectual and theological preparation is only a part of the necessary means to being a faithful and successful preacher. Equally important is that Paul walked with God. His power, as a preacher, came from his holy day-to-day walk with God. Power in the pulpit can only happen from a holy life. There was a meeting held on theological subjects and many of the preachers were utilizing Power-Point presentations to outline their lectures. At the end of the meeting an elder pastor stood in the pulpit and said "I do not have Power-Point but I pray my points will have power." He understood that the end result of our intellectual and spiritual preparation must be that the preacher can "so speak" in a way that it will take root in the mind and heart of the hearers. That is the issue.

Paul was prepared theologically, but he was also a man of passion and pur-

pose. He counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. When he preached to these people they perceived that it came from his heart, not only his head. Because of his sincerity, holiness and passion the Holy Spirit gave Paul unction and made use of his means and the end result was the salvation of sinners!

Conclusion

As a preacher and a man, Paul was no different from any man that enters into a pulpit to preach. Our generation of preachers needs what Paul had. We need to be able to "So Speak" and if we Cannot Speak then we Must Not Speak. May we all pray that the Preached Word would go forth from the preachers of our generation, not only from the mind but also from the heart and soul accompanied with the unction from the Holy Spirit of God. This is what distinguished Paul as a Gospel minister and this is what still distinguishes all true Gospel preachers from the rest. Let us pray that that God would raise up another man of courage like Luther, a man with unction like Whitefield, a man of holiness like M'Cheyne, a man of faith like Muller, a man of passion like Spurgeon and a man of faithfulness like Nettleton.

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¹ Acts 22:3

² B. H. Carroll, *An Interpretation of the English Bible*, Vol. 5, Book 12, p. 176.

An Introduction to Islam Part 2: Shariah Law

By Dr. Arthur L. Mellon

"Islam is generally acknowledged, as a 'complete code of life' and at the core of this code is the law of Islam."¹

One hears or reads repeatedly of the beheadings, stonings and the cutting off of hands or feet under Islamic law. Islam, being a state religion, is governed by what is called: **Shariah Law**. Literally the term *Shariah* means "a way to the watering hole, the right path or highway."

Muslim scholars define *Shariah* as:

“the body of those institutions which Allah has ordained in full or in essence to guide the individual in his relationship with God, his fellow Muslims, his fellow men and the rest of the universe.”²

Dr. Mohammad Muslehuddin writes:

“It may be recalled that Shariah is a complete scheme of life and an all embracing social order which takes into its sweep not only this world but also the Next. It deals with all the departments of life and provides directives therefore. To function successfully the whole scheme of Shariah is to be applied to human life, and then alone it demonstrates its merits.”³

The sources of *Shariah* are the *Quran* and the *Sunnah* (traditions of Muhammad). The *Quran* and the *Sunnah* are emphasized in Muhammad’s last sermon:

“O people bear in mind, what I am saying, for I might not see you again. I have left you two things. If you hold fast to them, never will you go astray from me. They are God’s Books, and His Prophet’s Sunnah.”⁴

Islam’s legal system is called **Figh**. *Figh* deals with law alone and embraces all the spheres of life — ethical, religious, political and economic and is a “human product”; whereas according to Islam, *Shariah* is of Divine origin and deals with both law and religion.⁵ The goal of *Shariah* is to reconstruct society.

Shariah in many countries has been mixed with English common law and European law; into a system which has caused a rift with Islamic jurists. The “Old School” or “Traditionalist” agenda is to revert back to the *Shariah* of the seventh century; to the period of the Prophet and his Companions.⁶ This was the Islamic “golden age” when it was at its zenith, and when it controlled the Middle East, Egypt, parts of India and Spain. They believe that this age can again be restored with even greater glory if they purify Islam by using the fundamentals of *Shariah* of this earlier age. This was a period of Islam by the SWORD. The problems encountered are the differences between the civilizations of the seventh century and

those of the twenty-first century. Applying these old laws to modern times just does not work, but A.Q. Oudah Shaheed believes it can. Shaheed argues:

“In fact academic research and logical arguments lead to the conclusion that Islamic law is specifically different from all human laws and is applicable to the conditions of every age.”⁷

Under *Shariah* there can be only one religion-Islam and one State, the Islamic State, and the only others who are allowed to practice another religion are those who are under the protection of the Islamic State—**Zimmi**. A *Zimmi* is a non-Muslim person or religion who is under the protection of the Islamic State. The *Zimmi* pays a special pool-tax—**jizyah** and have limited rights under Islamic law. What is recommended is that the Muslim tax collector sits, having the *Zimmi* stand before him, head bent and his body bowed, while putting the tax upon the scale. The collector is to hold the *Zimmi* by the beard and to strike him on both cheeks to show disdain.⁸

A *Zimmi* cannot practice his religion in public nor can he repair a place of worship. To speak out against Islam or Muhammad or fail to pay the pool-tax is to lose the protection of the State and this is a death sentence. Recommended reading is *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide*, by Bat Ye’or, Associated University Press, Cranbury, NJ, 08512.

There is no such thing as freedom of religion in Islam for a Muslim or a non-Muslim, nor is there freedom of conscience under *Shariah*; they claim there is, but in reality there is not. When it comes to freedom of speech, we have seen the signs; “*Behead those who speak against Islam.*” In Muhammad’s days in Medina, he had those who spoke against him murdered.

In a *Shariah* court, a non-Muslim has limited witness or no witness at all. The same holds true of Muslim women. A Muslim woman’s witness has only half the value of a Muslim man. Where a Muslim man needs two witnesses to support a claim; a Muslim woman needs four. Over 70% of Muslim women

in Muslim prisons are women who reported of having been sexually assaulted, but were unable to provide four male witnesses to the crime. Therefore, they were imprisoned for making false charges. This has led to Muslim women no longer reporting sexual assaults or rape from fear it may cost them prison time or even their lives under *Shariah*.

Under Islamic law, a man may beat his wife and even kill his wife and yet be protected under *Shariah*. Here in the United State this past November; it was reported on the news that a Judge dismissed the charges against a Muslim man who beat and sexually assaulted his wife. The Judge stated the man was within his rights under *Shariah Law*.

There are only disadvantages for a non-Muslim under *Shariah*. It is a system designed by a Muslim man for Muslim men even though women are included in it. The only place where there is some equality for a Muslim woman is in the area of civil law when dealing with divorce, inheritance, support and children.

Our nation and system of laws cannot co-exist with *Shariah Law* nor should *Shariah* be allowed in this country. *Shariah* is the product of a totalitarian religious State, and it is against every principle given us by our Founding Fathers in both our Constitution and in the Declaration of Independence. To Islam, constitutions are manmade and should be done away with, because they believe *Shariah* is Divine. “...*Nothing have we omitted from the Book...*” (Surah 6:38).

In a number of states in these United States, overt attempts have been made to introduce and enforce *Shariah Law* and some of these attempts have met with success. Even now there is a fight in Arizona over a Bill to outlaw *Shariah Law* in this state. Every state should have such a law on the books. France, Germany and the United Kingdom are feeling the impact from the efforts to introduce *Shariah Law*. Let us not keep our eyes closed to the loss of our freedoms, but let us be an informed people to the dangers of *Shariah Law*.

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¹ Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee, *Theories of Islamic Law*, (Adam Publishers &

Distributors: New Delhi, India), 1996, p. 50.

² Al Haj A.D. Ajjola, *What us Shariah?*, (Adam Publishers & Distributors: New Delhi, India), 2002, p. 14.

³ Dr. Mohammad Muslehuddin, *Judicial System of Islam: It's Origin & Development*, (Islamic Publications (Pvt) LTD.: Lahore, Pakistan), 1991, p. 73.

⁴ Al Haj A.D. Ajjola, *What is Shariah?* (Adam Publishing & Distributors: New Delhi, India), 2002, p. 53.

⁵ Prof. Ahmed Hasan, *The Early Development of Islamic Jurisprudence*, (Adam Publishers & Distributors: New Delhi, India), 2003, p. XIII.

⁶ The Prophet's "Companions" were the Prophet's "Successors" after his death; Abu Bakr, Umar, Ultman and Ali.

⁷ A.Q. Oudah Shaheed, *Criminal Law of Islam*, (International Islamic Publishers: Delhi, India), 2000, Vol. 1, p. 11.

⁸ M. Abu Zakaria Yahya Ibn Sharif En Nawawi, *Minhaj Et Talibin: A Manual of Muhammadan Law*, (Adam Publishers & Distributors:, New Delhi, India), 2001, p. 467.

An Observation on Contemporary Music

By Dr. W. R. Downing

Gen. 4:3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.

Lev. 18:21 And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

1 Kgs. 18:26, 28 And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.....And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.

Lev. 10:1-3 And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.

1 Pet. 1:15-16 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.¹

1 Jn. 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.²

"Contemporary worship," usually characterized by "praise services" of singing choruses, various bodily movements, clapping and free expressions of personalities, etc., is sweeping evangelical Christianity. Even some Reformed congregations have imported such into their worship. Some who would otherwise be considered as strongly orthodox now hold to the non-cessationist view of the various gifts of the Holy Spirit which characterize Charismatic Christianity. Centuries-old distinctions have become blurred. Distinctions once considered necessary because grounded in biblical and doctrinal truth have been increasingly set aside.

Some churches have gone to the extreme of modern "Rock 'n Roll" and "Heavy Metal" music to keep or increase their congregations. "Worship teams" have replaced the simple congregational hymn-singing of our godly forefathers. Music in itself, it is stated, is neutral; only the lyrics are significant.³ Thus, many incorporate the music of the world with all its characteristics into the church's worship. But such music is the expression of an immoral drug culture with all its debauchery, social rebellion, occultism⁴ and anti-Christ philosophy. So-called "Christian Rock Groups" look to their counterparts in the world as their mentors and idolize them! This is nothing less than the world's invasion of the church; the apostasy of Christianity in our time. No other term can describe this sinful, demoralizing, seductive trend. Many reasons and excuses have been and are being given, but none can hold up to scriptural scrutiny.

There is a principle which stands at the root and foundation of worship. It is determinative of any and all worship, whether it be true or false: the nature of the God necessarily determines the nature of his worship. This is logical, necessary and determinative—and scriptural.

Cain understood that the Lord had instituted the principle of blood-sacrifice, but he ignored it, and sought to worship God on his own terms. He sought to approach the Lord with his own rebellious ideas, and thought that the Lord had to accept what he offered from his own imagination and self-will. The Lord refused. He demanded simple obedience, not pragmatism, innovation or the free expression of one's sinful personality—such was rebellion and apostasy.

Molech, the Canaanitish and Ammonitish god, demanded the human sacrifice of the first-born by fire. Nothing else and nothing less would satisfy this pagan deity. Israel was prohibited in the most stringent terms not to become involved in such debauchery and apostasy.

Ba'al was the sun-god, worshipped throughout the Middle East. He was worshipped as the god of fire, the god of storm and the god of rain, etc. His followers were given to all forms of sexual immorality and perversion, dervishes, ecstasies and blood-letting, and, at times, to human sacrifice. The word "Ba'al" meant "Lord," and was used also of the God of Israel—but the two were distinguished by their natures and the mode of worship each demanded. One was *Yahweh*, the one true God; the other, the false "god" of pagan superstition.

As no one could attempt an admixture of pagan or self-will worship with the worship of *Yahweh*, so one cannot combine the music of the world—a music grounded in unsanctified emotions, sexual immorality, drug abuse, social rebellion, occultism and an Anti-Christ philosophy—with the worship of our self-revealing, triune God who has declared, "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me." Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire—they worshipped from their own free expression, on their own time and with their energies and hearts—an anthropocentric worship—but they did not offer in obedience. God killed them. The nature of the God necessarily determines the nature of his worship. Our worship must reflect the nature of the Lord God of Scripture—it must be scriptural, sanctified, obedient, holy and reverent. Modern, contemporary worship is more

akin to that of Cain, Molech and Ba'al than the pure and obedient worship of *Yahweh*.

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¹ The biblical concept of “holy” in both Testaments [שׁוֹבֵר, ἅγιος] is that of separation. Separation from all false worship and worldliness is certainly essential to gospel holiness and worship. The Divine command is stringent for an ever-increasing holiness in every area of our lifestyle [ἅγιοι ἐν πάσῃ ἀναστροφῇ γενήθητε]

² 1 Jn. 2:15 would certainly prohibit the importation of the world into the church, especially in its worship.

³ John Blanchard and Dan Lucarini, *Can We Rock the Gospel?* pp. 71, 200.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 75–103.

Through the Eyes of a Pastor

By M. A. Bailon

The job of a Pastor is one of the toughest a man can undertake. The position not only has many demands placed upon it, the requirements for success are stringent. God gave to the Church the pastor/teacher to lead her (Eph. 4:11). The pastor's goal is the perfecting of the saints, the rendering of each church member a fit and complete saint. He is called to the work of the ministry and the building up of the body of Christ. The pastor must lead all

believers under his care unto the unity of the faith and the attainment of the full and complete knowledge (ἐπίγνωσις) of the Son of God. Last, and certainly not least, he must lead the flock unto the perfect man; that is, unto the measure of the maturity suitable for receiving the fullness of Christ. One should pause and reflect upon these goals of a pastor. The passage from Ephesians 4:11-13 should be well-known and understood by most Christians. Other passages are no less clear, even on the surface of the text, but a more careful study is required of other scriptures to gain a full understanding of the writer. 2 Corinthians is one such scripture.

That the Apostle Paul and the Corinthian believers were dealing with several serious issues is attested by even a cursory reading of the Corinthian epistles, especially 1 Corinthians. Their problems were serious and numerous. The gravity of their issues presented profound obstacles to their well-being as a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The nature of the obstacles would in turn require an especially strong rebuke and severe instruction from the apostle, closely akin to, what we call today tough love. Paul wants the Corinthian church to thrive, similar to what the Kaiser-Permanente Health Care provider wants for us. Paul also wants his relationship with them to be a healthy one. He wants a cordial relationship rather than the current tenuous one.

In order, to meet these two desires on his part he changes his plans and postpones a promised visit with them (2 Cor. 1:24; 2:1). Paul is sensitive to both of these objectives, and profoundly so.

He wants the church to understand why he didn't visit them as he had hoped. Paul tells them that he calls upon God Himself as witness upon his own soul, that he came not to the Corinthian church so as to spare them (1:24). Noting that Paul would never lightly call God as a witness, it is pretty clear that he felt strongly about postponing his visit.

But this notion of “sparing” sounds like he is an upset tyrant who is not unwilling to chastise and berate them if opportunity affords it. His enemies

within the congregation portrayed him as such a man. At best, it is as if he is showing how great a friend he is by skipping an awful meeting with them. To quickly dispel this idea and show that it would be wrong-headed to think that of him, he immediately tells them that it is not that he is lording it over their faith. He insists that he is not sparing them from having to submit to his command; rather he wants them to be a healthy church. Implicit in this argument is that the apostle Paul knows what it takes to attain a robust assembly of saints, and that he is just trying to get them there. Today we would say that he knows what a New Testament Church looks like.

He is truly motivated out of love for the church. He writes, "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy:" The word translated helpers is co-workers. He is working with and for them in the matter of their joy. For him, joy in the congregation is a result of an orderly and faithful church. Conversely, the lack thereof is a direct consequence of their inability to discern sin and discipline the sinner. To be sure, there are other problems. We know enough from the epistles to realize that they were never going to have joy with the status quo.

To strengthen the point that he is solely concerned with their spiritual welfare he adds an explanatory statement by affirming that he believes they have, in fact, taken up their stand in the faith (1:24b). They are grounded in the faith. They are a body of true believers. On this basis the apostle is working with them to establish the church on a firm foundation. In his wisdom, Paul has decided to give the Corinthian church more time to resolve their problems before he comes to see them.

In light of the calling of the pastor and the challenges of the ministry the question must be asked: how are you bringing joy to your pastor and the brethren? Is your pastor putting off a visit with you hoping that you will right your ship? Does your pastor have confidence that he can lead you to the stature of the fullness of Christ?

Follow your pastor as he follows the Lord and attain the joy of being a Christian as you serve the Lord in the context of the ministries of your church.