

1 John Series

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Response to two questions

Interruption due to (1) a class participant who raised the question about promises of the Word being casually quoted to her when she was facing death from cancer which necessitated a diversionary excursus to review the Faith-Rest technique in applying Scripture; and to (2) a visitor who asked if John's phrase "of God" was talking about election in eternity past—which necessitated a review of Bible study method in interpreting Scripture.

A. Issue of Application of Scripture to our lives.

(pruning of grapevines deliberately causes "stress" on the vine to stimulate better fruit production—analogy to Christ and His Body]

(Slide 2) The three steps in the Faith-Rest drill.¹

Step One: Grasp a portion of Scripture that pictures God's protecting love in an actual historic situation. Rely here on the "Framework approach" to the Bible so you can "re-live" the event going on when the promise was given.

Step Two: Take the time to dwell upon this portion of God's revelation until you sense that it reaches beyond the size of your immediate crisis. Slides 3 & 4 illustrate the battle for your mind and heart and show what a grasp of the Biblical Framework can do for you. You need to have assurance in both heart and mind that the truths of God's Word being claimed are more comprehensive and far-reaching than your immediate fear, anxiety, and/or depression.

Example: The oft-quoted promise of 1 Cor. 10:13 must be understood in the context of Paul's admonition for the Corinthians to recall the history of the Exodus event and subsequent trials in Israel's desert wanderings (1 Cor. 10:1-12). This history Moses summarized in Deuteronomy 8 and elsewhere in the Torah that Corinthian Jews had available. Note how Paul gives them the promise of 1 Cor. 10:13 *within the historic context that his readers can recall and "re-live."*

Israel was being trained after the Exodus a millennium-and-a-half before the gospel arrived in Corinth to be God's priestly nation to the humanity. In a similar fashion God the Father trains New Testament believers in Christ. He gives us tests to challenge our faith, including options to disobey. But it is the training of our "Divine Parent" who is

¹ I am indebted to Pastor Thieme of Berachah Church in Houston, Texas, for his repetitive teaching of how to claim God's promises that he entitled "Faith-Rest" during my exposure to his ministry throughout the 1960s and early 1970s.

preparing His children for maturity. Or in John's vocabulary it is "pruning" us to produce fruit instead of merely existing as a big vine!²

(Slide 5) Step Three: With practice you will eventually be able to enter an inner rest to replace the frenzy that goes on in our minds when facing various challenges. The Bible insists that the heart has a central role in our spiritual life that is distinct from that of our brain. It's as though our heart has its own pace and can be a calming sense of stability amidst the turmoil of life.

B. Issue of Interpretation of Scripture.

At the systematic theology level of study there is the issue involving the Calvinist/Arminian controversy. How do we understand how God "causes" things to happen while preserving human responsibility? Remember what we are dealing with here is "causation" across the Creator/creature boundary so we cannot reason up from the creature level to the Creator level (Slide 6). We need to understand "causation" as God works in only an analogous sense to how "causation" works on the human level.

Both Calvinism and Arminianism distinguish between Faith and Assurance, the Calvinist because unless one perseveres to the end of his life, his faith can't be viewed as genuine and can't therefore be offered genuine assurance; and the Arminian because he can't say he won't lose his salvation. We believe that faith is assurance and that believers who disobey the Lord are in danger of physical discipline, including death, as we read every time we have Communion and serve the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:27-32).³

Exegetical level issue: what about John? We need to go to the text to answer the question of how John uses the expression "of God" not just relying upon a theological system. Biblical texts show again and again the divine appeal to human responsibility.

John 1:1-7 John the Baptizer was an Old Testament prophet who was therefore obviously "of God." He appealed to the Jews to accept Jesus as Messiah thereby showing that God appeals to human choice.

John 3:18-21 the basis of condemnation is clearly rejection of the revelation in Jesus Christ because to come to it would expose one to his sin in the light of God's holiness. Jesus later argues that these people did the same with the revelation that came through Moses (5:45).

² Relying upon accurate history to manage many areas of life as the famous military strategist B. H. Liddell Hart advised leaders in his book, *Strategy* (2nd ed. rev. New York: Frederick Praeger Publishers, 1968). "Direct experience is too limited to form an adequate foundation either for theory or for application. 'History is universal experience'—the experience not of another, but of many others under manifold conditions."

³ This matter involves more discussion than I had time for during this lesson because it involves a portion of Church history involving the first and second generation of Protestant reformers and how they tried to defend Protestantism against the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation. Instead of utilizing the revelation of God concerning physical discipline of believers to answer the Roman Catholic objection that assurance of salvation incentivized licentiousness, they chose to introduce the concepts of fake faith (Calvinists) and loss of salvation (Arminians).

So, however God controls all things after the counsel of His will, it is by a method that personally interacts with individual people.⁴ The phrase “of God” in John no more focuses upon whatever occurred in eternity past than the parallel phrase “of the devil” in 1 John 3:8 looks at some sort of eternal sovereignty of the devil.

⁴ Exodus 32:7-14 shows how the sovereign God interacts with Moses as a Levite whose tribal position is that of an intercessory priest but who is not of Judah and therefore cannot be the source of a new Israel. Nonetheless, God comes to him and proposes an absurdity, a clear repudiation of the Abrahamic Covenant (Ex 32:7-10). Discourse analysis helps us recognize that God intends by such a proposal to provoke Moses into responding as a true Levite. He does so, and God changes His proposal (33:14). Now didn't God attain His sovereign will of continuing the Abrahamic Covenant? But somehow He used human discourse with a responsible human to secure His purpose.