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THE WRONG WAY

Ten years after Charles Lindbergh made history by flying solo across the Atlantic Ocean, Douglas Corrigan, who had been a mechanic for Lindbergh, made his own aviation history. He bought a trashed airplane and modified it for distance flight. He flew it from California to New York, surprising many people that the plane would make it that far. He intended to fly it across the Atlantic, but the authorities denied permission for safety concerns. They would allow him to fly back to California. He took off heading west, made a turn and disappeared into a cloud bank. Twenty-eight hours later he landed in Dublin, Ireland, and asked, "Where am I?" His claim was that his navigation equipment failed and he lost his way in the clouds, ending up going the wrong way. He has been known since as "Wrong Way Corrigan."

Christopher Columbus was a fair sailor, but a terrible geographer. He thought Europe was larger than it was, that Japan was farther off the coast of China, and—most importantly—that the circumference of the earth was much smaller than it is. Hence, in trying to find a shorter route to the Orient, he ended up unwittingly going the wrong way and discovering the Bahamas.

Many times people end up going or doing things the wrong way. Sometimes it works out well, as in the above examples. Sometimes, it is a disaster, as it should be.

In recent years there have been a number of political issues that have garnered the attention of Christians. Abortion, marriage rights (particularly among gays), gun rights. As a rule, Christians have approached these issues as political. It is possible that Christians may use laws and courts to deal with these hot potato issues. They may even be successful in accomplishing some of their goals. This may be the wrong way, even if it achieves right things.

One problem is that in meeting their goals, some Christians alienate many non-believers. That has especially been true in the gay rights debates. Christians are branded as narrow-minded (which is not necessarily a bad thing), hateful (which is bad), and even violent. Some opponents of abortion have gone so far as hypocritically

killing abortionists. Regardless of the rightness of their positions, some have brought discredit on God.

Passing laws and winning in the courts can sometimes be effective. Several states have laws limiting when a woman may get an abortion. Most states have limitations on the type and age of gun ownership. Every state has limitations on the use of alcohol and certain other drugs. Christians may have been able to get these laws passed. But that is not the right way.

What have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. (1 Cor 5:12-13)

The proper way for Christians to deal with issues of sin is to convert the sinner. Few are naïve enough to believe that will solve all the world's problems. There will still be unbelievers. But if you want to stop killings, passing a law is only a temporary fix. Convincing a person that killing is a sin and that God forgives, but demands obedience, is a permanent fix for that one person. Teaching a person that homosexual acts are sin, but that "such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified" (1 Cor 6:11) will cause a person to stop sinning. This is true, regardless of the sin.

Passing a law to prevent sin may reduce it. Some people will follow the law, whether they believe in it or not. "Locks are not to keep bad people out; they are to keep honest people honest." The one thing that law cannot do, however, is remove the guilt of sin. It can only identify sin. People don't need laws; they need Christ. It is much better to do things the right way. Convert a sinner into a saint. Accomplish sanctification rather than mere compliance.

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PSALM 18

Peter Mark Roget (1779-1896) was a physician, mathematician, and chess master, among other things. He is not known for his knowledge of physiology, his invention of a pocket chessboard, or his role in the early development of what became modern movies and television. Instead he is noted for his work *Roget's Thesaurus of English Words*, the first draft of which was written in one year at age 26, and which was published in 1852. The most familiar part of this work is its list of synonyms, substitutes, replacements, and alternative expressions for English words. The concept is so important that it is built into every word processor. What began as a coping mechanism for depression has become a vital tool for every writer.

David did not have access to *Roget's Thesaurus* when he wrote Psalm 18. Nevertheless, he used the concept. In one verse alone he uses eight separate words to describe God's protection. Throughout the psalm he uses the Hebrew technique of repeating an idea in

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different words, which is essentially the same as the use of a thesaurus.

The problem

The introduction of the psalm shows David's reliance upon God's shelter in the time of trouble. This is where he first uses a list of words.

I will love thee, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. (Ps 18:1-3)

If God is all those things (rock, fortress, tower, etc.), no wonder David will call upon Him. No wonder he puts confidence in salvation from God. But why did he need that salvation? He explains the problem.

The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death confronted me. (vv. 4-5)

When I was in high school, I was required to do a research paper accompanied by a survey. I chose to do it on the topic of fear. My research said the top two fears people experience are public speaking and anything to do with death. My survey bore that out. People don't want to talk about death. They don't like funerals. They delay pre-planning their own funerals. They especially do not want to be in the presence of a dead body. I had a supervisor who had been sent to the Recruit Training psychiatrist because during a swim test a recruit (draftee) had died of a heart attack in the pool. He climbed out of the pool and disobeyed direct orders to get back in. The psychiatrist let him continue boot camp, saying, "I wouldn't have gone back in the pool with a dead body, either."

David needed God because he feared death. He was particularly frightened by death at the hands of ungodly men. It is one thing to die a natural death. It might even be acceptable to be killed by someone who believed as he did, if that were possible. It would be a different matter entirely to die defending your faith against unbelievers. To a godly person, that might be the best way to die, protecting the honor of God. But it is still a fearful way to go. David felt he had more to do for God, so he feared death.

A fearful response

Death might be the number one or number two fear, but the way God responds to support David might cause fear in itself. Even nature fought on David's side.

Between verses eight and fifteen God uses the following: earthquake, fire and smoke, darkness, fearsome angels, wind, clouds, bright light, hailstones, burning coals, thunder, lightning, and receding water so that the land below the rivers and oceans was revealed.

Any one of those things can cause fear. With all twelve at once, what was fear among David's enemies would develop into terror.

Fear upon fear upon fear. When that happens, the result is not just cumulative, it is multiplicative. Pharaoh was able to survive nine out of ten plagues because they came one at a time over a period, according to some, of two years. Had they come all at once, he might have let Israel go earlier.

When there is a massive forest fire, containment must be achieved at great cost. One way to do that is to set smaller fires around the big one. This destroys the fuel the fire would need to spread. In a sense, this is what God has done for David. If the problem is fear of death, God ignites other fears around it, and starves the original fear of its fuel.

Deliverance

To deliver. The verb has different meanings to different people. For someone who ordered a product online, waiting for it to be delivered can take a while. (Even longer, if waiting for a baby to be delivered.) To someone like David, when God delivers, he takes a person out of harm's way. The first idea is summed up in the word delivery; the second in deliverance.

David was faced with many enemies in his life. This psalm was written when he was fleeing from King Saul. Later in his life he faced the Philistines, and even two of his own sons. His was not a life of ease. And yet, even this early in his life, he has experienced God's deliverance.

He compares it to being saved from drowning. Instead, God planted his feet on a wide plain. Not just a narrow cliff edge, but a secure place. "He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me." (vs 19)

Some people have enemies at work. Coworkers may be jealous of one's ability or position. God will deliver his people. Sometimes it doesn't look like deliverance, if it means leaving that job to find a better one.

Some people have enemies in their own families. It may be harder, they think, for God to deliver them from family members. But God has ways. Has that family member been transferred to a new city? Have they, or you, gotten married and had to move away? God doesn't tell us how he will deliver; he just does it.

Motivation

Verses 23-29 give God's motivation for helping David. God doesn't really need a motivation; He is His own motivation. Nevertheless, David explains his concept of why God helps him.

Simply put, he avoids sin. He is not sinless. He just tries harder than most not to sin. Then David posits that God will treat man the way man approaches God.

With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful;
with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright;
With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with
the crooked thou wilt shew thyself twisted. For thou
wilt save the afflicted people; but wilt bring down
high looks. (Vv 25-27)

This is similar to what Jesus said in Matthew 6:15. "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." The way we live is reflected in the way God deals with us.

Most of us have seen comic book superheroes. Superman was "able to leap tall buildings in a single bound." God makes us superheroes. "By thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall." (vs 29) Stronger than an enemy army. Able to leap

walls in a single bound. Because we follow God's way, we have superpowers.

God gives

Finally, David describes the God upon whom he relies. He describes the way God has given him the deliverance he desired.

Some people have problems with the descriptions of what God does to David's enemies. Others realize that God is dealing out just punishment for opposing his righteousness. David's verses about what God does, giving the enemy over into slavery and death, are pretty graphic sometimes. Here he talks about beating them into

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dust or enslaving them. God has given him the necks of his enemies. It is not uncommon in the Bible to describe the conquering king as putting his foot on the necks of the conquered peoples. How easy it would be to crush the breath out of a person that way. Symbolically, the conqueror has taken their lives, and given it back again if they will submit to him.

The God who can give David the necks of his enemies is a powerful God. David confidently expresses his belief in God's existence and his deliverance. "The LORD liveth; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted." (vs 46) How similar this is to what the book of Hebrews says about faith. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb 11:6) David exemplifies that kind of faith.

God has delivered David from those who would kill him. The fear of death is no more. David would face other times when death was imminent. He would face other enemies. In spite of this, David is not worried or afraid. He knows, as did Job, that his redeemer lives. This requires a special response; one that even the enemies cannot mistake.

Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O LORD,
among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name.
(Ps 18:49)

GOG AND MAGOG

When it comes to prophecy, especially the similar books of Ezekiel and Revelation, some things can get confusing. Those two books, particularly, are full of symbolism. Since we are living thousands of years after they were written, we have lost some of the meaning of the symbols. Nevertheless, we can still understand the overall meanings of the books (God's victory and the elevation of his people). Some people are especially confused by the names Gog and Magog.

We first encounter Magog in the genealogies of the Old Testament. "The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras." (Gen 10:2; 1 Chron 1:5) In these cases, Magog is a man after whose name a territory or nation would eventually be called. He was a grandson of Noah, and is often associated with Tubal and Meshech. Magog is generally associated with the current country of Azerbaijan. Tubal is associated with Cappadocia, which is in eastern Turkey on the southern shore of the Black Sea. Meshech is often associated with Armenia, between Cappadocia and the Caspian. These three nations make up the area north of Damascus, which would be considered by the people of Israel as far north.

We meet Gog in Ezekiel 38. He is the ruler of the three territories mentioned above.

Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. (Ezek 38: 2-3)

Ezekiel also mentions many other nations surrounding Israel. They will be held back at one point, but eventually all will be brought to punish God's wayward people. Ezekiel later prophesies (chapter 39) that Gog and his armies will be defeated and buried in a valley

to be named Hamon-Gog.

The next mention of Gog and his land is in the prophecy of Revelation. Two things to remember about this prophecy. First, it is highly symbolic, often using the same symbols as Ezekiel. Second, the prophecy was to be fulfilled in its entirety shortly after it was written, possibly within one generation.

Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. (Rev 20:7-8)

Here, John equates the land of Magog with the whole earth; with everyone who opposes the church. By describing them as gathering for battle, he is showing his symbol to be the same as that in Ezekiel: nations attacking God's people. He is also hinting that they are to be defeated and buried. There is a similarity in sound between Hamon-Gog and Har-Meggido (Armageddon, Rev 16:16)

People talk about the "battle of Armageddon," but there is no battle. The armies of the devil are destroyed quickly, just as those of God in Ezekiel. It is less a battle than a momentary blip on the radar of time.

So did Armenia ever attack the church? Remember that the prophecies of the book are in our past. The physical nation of Magog did not attack Israel. The symbolic Magog, the enemies of God have been attacking the church for hundreds of years. (The Armenian Apostolic Church is the oldest state-recognized Christian group in the world, so in fact the land around Magog is very strongly for God.)

Gog and Magog. Even after 700 years, the prince and his land had a bad reputation. Knowing this, perhaps these names are less confusing.

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