

Finishing the Race

Paul's Final Words

XL MINISTRIES, INC.
Conference 2011

November 2-6
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Finishing the Race - Paul's Final Words

Books have been written recording the last words of hundreds of people. In most cases they are of little value and simply add to the sadness of a departing soul that is at enmity with God. Not so with the apostle Paul. On the contrary, his final words are filled with instruction and hope.

Paul's life was not one of wealth and ease. He endured incredible challenges during the course of his life. He faced hostility from those in religious society. His travels to different parts of the world involved a wide variety of challenges. Through the course of his life he maintained confidence in God's purposes and plans regardless of the ongoing challenges. He was not deterred by beatings, shipwrecks, rejections, apostates, etc.

In November we will enjoy the opportunity to reflect together on Paul's last words. We will consider carefully the clarity of Paul's purpose in life, how he faced death with anticipation, the personal challenges he gave to those who would carry on the ministry after his departure, how to balance the joys and sorrows of ministry, and many other related topics.

Please prayerfully consider coming for this time of teaching and fellowship. We would love to have you join us!

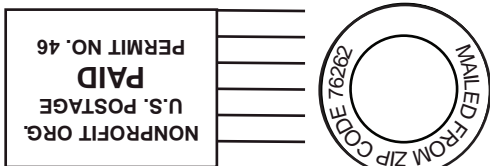
There are always folks in ministry who would benefit from participating in the conference, but simply have no resources to do so. If you would be able to help with such scholarships, you can send your tax-deductible donation to PO Box 1173, Roanoke, TX 76262, or use the "Donate" link on the web site and indicate "conference scholarship." Thank you!

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XL'ENT NEWS

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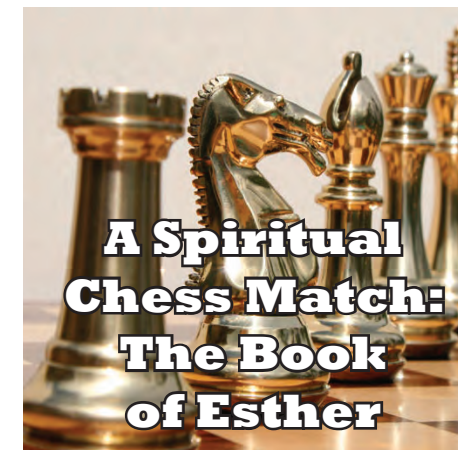
2 Timothy 2:2
And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

In the movie *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, a young boy, Josh, living in New York City is discovered to possess a gift for the game of chess and, as a result, his parents seek to nurture that gift. They hire a strict instructor who aims to teach the boy to be as aggressive as the infamous chess player, Bobby Fischer.

The title of the film is a metaphor about the character's quest to adopt the ideal of Fischer and his determination to win at any price. Josh is also heavily influenced by a character by the name of Vinnie who is known as a "speed chess" hustler who makes a living hustling players in Washington Park. The two instructors differ greatly in their strategies, and the hired instructor is upset that Josh continues to learn from Vinnie.

Throughout the movie there is a metaphorical chess match going on between the two instructors and it is not until the end that you find out how young Josh is going to approach playing the game of chess.

Our collegiate Sunday school class has been studying the book of Esther, and in one sense, when you approach this book you can liken it to a chess game between two invisible players. Those players are Satan and God. As you read this book you can see Satan and God



moving real kings, queens, and nobles in order to carry out their ultimate purpose of the match. And what is that ultimate purpose? It is the ultimate purpose of the entire Bible...God is at work redeeming a people by His Son, through His Son, for His Son, and for His glory.

A quick survey of the Book of Esther shows how it plays out like a chess match:

- ♦ Chapter 1 – King Ahasuerus dethrones Queen Vashti.
- ♦ Chapter 2 – This opens the door for Esther, who is a Jew, to become Queen as she finds favor with the king. At the end of this chapter Mordecai reveals to Queen Esther a plot to assassinate the king.
- ♦ Chapter 3 – Haman is promoted and issues a decree to exterminate all the Jews.
- ♦ Chapters 4 & 5 – Esther is made aware of the decree and puts into action a plan to approach

the King. Haman has a 75-foot gallows made in order to hang Mordecai.

- ♦ Chapter 6 – Mordecai's intervention in the assassination attempt on the king is rewarded and Haman is humiliated.
- ♦ Chapter 7 – Haman is hung on the gallows intended for Mordecai.
- ♦ Chapter 8 – Mordecai is promoted to Haman's place, and because of his authority issues an edict so that the Jews can now not only protect themselves, but also "destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people...that would assault them..."
- ♦ Chapter 9 – The Jews carry out their authorization to annihilate those who are in opposition to them.

- ♦ Chapter 10 – Mordecai advances his position to "second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews..."

Throughout this book when Satan makes a move it is as if he was telling God, "Check," only to have God respond with His own move to put Satan into "Check-mate." The book of Esther demonstrates God's love for His people and His continual purpose of redeeming a people for His own possession.

In one sense we can view all of biblical history as Satan and God playing a game of chess.

This analogy of a Spiritual Chess Match between God and Satan, in reality, falls short because the outcome of the game is never in question ...

Continued from Page 1

Ever since the fall of man Satan has attempted to spiritually sever God's relationship with His human creation and disrupt God's covenant promises with Israel. For example, we read in 2 Chronicles 22 that Christ's line through the tribe of Judah had been murderously reduced to Joash alone, but he was rescued and preserved. Later, we read of Herod in Matthew 2 slaughtering the infants of Bethlehem, thinking Christ was among them. Also, we read of Satan's temptation of the Messiah to denounce God and worship himself. Satan even used Peter as a pawn to try to block Christ's journey to calvary. Finally, Satan entered into Judas who then betrayed Christ to the Jews and Romans. At the point of Christ's death, Satan thought that the chess match was over and he had won. However, the game was not over and ultimate victory belongs to our God and King, the risen Messiah – Jesus Christ.

This analogy of a Spiritual Chess Match between God and Satan, in reality, falls short because the

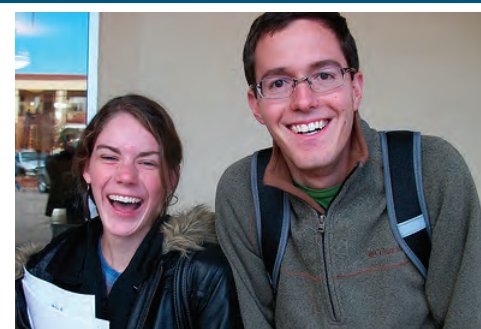
outcome of the game is never in question and God is never surprised or unaware of Satan's moves. The Bible is very clear that Satan cannot act without the permission of God, and our God is completely, undeniably and sovereignly in control. Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes." The passage below clearly speaks of God's ultimate sovereignty in the affairs of men and is a good reminder to us that God is continually at work redeeming a people by His Son, through His Son, for His Son, and for His glory.

Psalm 33:6-22 (NASB)

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He

frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance. The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men; from His dwelling place He looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, He who fashions the hearts of them all, He who understands all their works. The king is not saved by a mighty army; a warrior is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a false hope for victory; nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength. Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope for His lovingkindness, to deliver their soul from death and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield. For our heart rejoices in Him, because we trust in His holy name. Let Your lovingkindness, O LORD, be upon us, according as we have hoped in You.

Bryan Ryan



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Book Nook

Sinners in the Hands of a Good God: Reconciling Divine Judgment and Mercy
by David Clotfelter

As the title hints, David Clotfelter's book *Sinners in the Hands of a Good God* is a book that addresses the same subject

as Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." The message of the book is that the God who is indeed angry with sinners is not *only* characterized by anger but also by his goodness, and, even beyond that, his mercy.

The book begins autobiographically as the author retells his journey from believing George MacDonald's teaching on hell to identifying with Jonathan Edwards' view of the subject. Because of his own previous personal objections to God's judgment, Clotfelter comes to the subject with a great deal of graciousness for those who disagree.

Clotfelter's quest to reconcile divine judgment and mercy starts with an analysis of MacDonald's view of God and of Scripture. MacDonald's view of God is restricted to seeing him as "Father," then interpreting everything about God through that lens alone. Clotfelter shows that this is typical of MacDonald's approach to Scripture, allowing only certain passages to speak for themselves, and ignoring or distorting others to match his pre-formed ideas of God.

The result of this method of interpreting Scripture is that there is no room for the doctrine of hell as believers throughout church history have understood it. The author sees the flaws of this method of interpretation, or *hermeneutic*, and shows why it cannot work.

Clotfelter tackles much more of MacDonald's theology of judgment and expands his scope to include others who hold related positions. He skillfully addresses such difficult questions as why God allowed sin, and whether God enjoys punishing people. He identifies the various reasons *behind* the arguments for universalism, annihilationism (the teaching that unbelievers simply stop existing), and others, including their assumptions, their approach to interpreting Scripture, and their expressed motives. In short, he addresses what almost seems like every

possible question from every possible angle related to the doctrine of divine judgment.

The next section of the book is the author's defense of the doctrine of divine predestination and the "doctrines of grace," or "Calvinism." He shows why other views that attempt to reconcile God's choice and man's choice all fall short of the logical conclusions they were invented to seek, and that they do not do justice to biblical data.

Finally, he explains various aspects of the doctrine of Christ's atoning work on the cross and how the exercise of divine justice being poured out upon Christ is necessary if salvation is to be possible for anyone. He shows the great privilege of knowing and believing the truths of Scripture on these subjects, and the grace of God toward believers that is beyond description.

The highlights of the book begin with the author's view of Scripture: every argument he makes is captive to the word of God. Well before the book is over, it is clear that the issue goes beyond different *interpretations* of Scripture to a different *view* of Scripture. One cannot make a consistent case that there is no hell, or that no one is going there, by submitting to the word of God. Only by exalting human wisdom above God's can such a view be possible.

Another highlight is the fairness with which Clotfelter treats opposing views. He is not afraid to deal with the actual positions opposite his, working through them until he shows good reasons for why he disagrees biblically. Straw-man arguments are thankfully absent from this book; in reading it, the reader is confident that the author has treated the other positions fairly.

This book is, by the author's own words, especially suitable for those who are struggling with the justice of hell. However, the book will be greatly helpful to others who have no such difficulty. The reader will be blessed by the sound biblical answers to the wide range of questions addressed. Hopefully, he will also be stirred to compassion for those living under the wrath of God this very moment, and will take the gospel to them that they may be saved.

by Greg Pickle



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