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THE REVIEW

Keep Looking Up!

By Dr. Bob Payne, Moderator IBFNA

A man who was one of my deacons for many years had a habit of saying when he parted from another believer: "Keep looking up!" The expression was meant to remind other Christians that Christ could come at any moment and that they were to keep looking for Him with expectation. What an excellent daily reminder for each one of us!

Peter communicated this same message to his readers when he wrote, "hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). The readers of this epistle were to set their hope (or confident expectation) completely on the great blessings that will come when Christ returns in the air for His saints. They were to expectantly "keep looking up" since Christ could return at any moment to snatch His church away. In his commentary on the book of Revelation, Allen Johnson wrote, "The church in every age has always lived with the expectancy of the consummation of all things in its day. Imminency describes an event possible any day, impossible no day."¹ There is no prophecy that needs to be revealed before He catches up His church, and because of this, just as Peter's readers needed to be alert and watching with anticipation, so do we.

Today, so many professing believers live as if this earth is all that there is, and that the Rapture of the church is nothing but a fairy tale. After all, hasn't it been 2,000 years? Someday soon these Christians may find themselves sorely disappointed that they were not ready for His return.

It is vital that we are ready and waiting expectantly for that day when the trumpet of God sounds. Harry Ironside emphasized how important it is to "love his appearing." He stated, "[If] I put anything in my thinking between the present moment and the return of the Lord, I am losing what is of infinite value in connection with my personal walk and Christian experience."² Why is this constant expectancy of the any-moment return of Christ such an important thing for those of us who know Christ as Savior? What will it do for us as believers?

It Will Bring Joy to the Heart

Paul wrote to Titus that we as believers need to be "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." The word translated *blessed* could also be translated *happy*. Fixing our minds and attention on the coming of our Lord will give us great happiness and joy, even during difficult times.



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It Will Give Us Hope, Comfort, and Courage to Persevere for Christ

1 Peter 1:13 encourages the reader to “hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Concerning this verse, William Baker reminds us that “the trials ahead will be daunting at times, and a reminder of the ultimate victory will give the believer courage.”³ For those who live faithfully for the Lord Jesus Christ, the way is difficult, but a constant focus on His imminent return will bring strength and courage.

The comfort provided by the doctrine of the Rapture is also mentioned in that well-known passage concerning the coming of Christ in 1 Thess. 4:13-18, where Paul closes the passage with “Therefore comfort one another with these words.” These dear Christians, who were bothered by and uninformed about what would happen to their dead relatives and friends at the Rapture of the church, no doubt found great comfort from the sound doctrine that Paul supplied. A daily focus on this doctrine can also give us great hope and comfort no matter what comes our way.

It Will Encourage Purity of Life

The Apostle John penned these God-breathed words: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope [the hope of being like Christ at any moment] in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

The thought that Jesus Christ could come back at any moment will keep us “on our toes”

spiritually. When His return is always at the forefront of our minds, it will prevent us from living careless, selfish, unprepared lives. Our goal needs to be to live as good stewards of the wonderful things that God has so graciously entrusted to us: our time, our talents (and spiritual gifts), our finances, and our possessions. As stewards, God makes plain that “it is required...that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2). With our minds and hearts fixed on that day when we will see Christ, it will motivate us to be faithful and pure so that we will “not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28).

The Word of God promises reward for those who “love [or long for] His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). Where is your focus today? Are you “looking up?”

Why live ye for the things of earth--
The things which truly have no worth?
For some day, Heav’n thy home shall be;
That bright land where Jesus we’ll see.

For when we gaze upon His face,
And gladly praise Him for His grace,
The things of earth will fade away,
On that blessed and happy day!

Endnotes

1 Allen F. Johnson, “Revelation,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), p. 417.

2 Harry Ironside, *Not Wrath But Rapture* (<https://www.raptureready.com/not-wrath-rapture-harry-ironside/>; accessed 4/23/19).

3 William Baker, *The Books of James & First and Second Peter: Faith, Suffering, and Knowledge* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002), p. 112.

Scripture on “The Equality Act”

By Pastor Kevin Hobi

On March 13, 2019, Representative David Cicilino (D-RI) and Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) introduced companion bills (H.R. 5 and S.788), titled “The Equality Act,” to the 116th Congress. The stated purpose of the Act is “to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation, and for other purposes.”¹

Our Creator God is the sovereign legislator of the universe, and His laws are found in Scripture (Gal. 3:21-22). The longest of the psalms of God’s people, Psalm 119, magnifies the God of heaven as the inerrant author of law. God’s laws are a blessing. The psalm begins, “Blessed are the undefiled

in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord" (Ps. 119:1).

One stanza prays, "Remove from me the way of lying; and grant me thy law graciously" (v. 29). This psalmist sings many related prayers with his song, that he might "behold wondrous things out of" (v. 18), "keep" (vv. 34, 44, 55, 136), "not forget," "decline," or "forsake" (vv. 51, 53, 61, 109, 153), "delight in" (vv. 70, 77, 92, 174), and even "love" (vv. 97, 113, 163) God's law.

God's law is worthy of the psalmist's devotion, because it is the truth; it is what he can trust (v. 142). His confidence in God's truth readies him to respond with security to the challenges of life's many falsehoods. "Great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them [make them stumble]" (v. 165). So what has this Lawgiver legislated when it comes to the concerns addressed by bills H.R. 5 and S.788?

Scripture on Discrimination

As their chosen title suggests, sponsors of The Equality Act promote their cause as an ethical concern. Advocates introduced the Act to prevent discrimination, which it describes in part this way: "Forms of discrimination include the exclusion and denial of entry, unequal or unfair treatment, harassment, and violence. This discrimination prevents the full participation of LGBT people in society and disrupts the free flow of commerce." So what does God's law say about discrimination defined this way?

Jesus confirmed that God's law can be summarized with two commandments: love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 13:28-31). The Ten Commandments are another summary of God's law. The first table defines man's love for God, and the second man's love for his neighbor. To love our neighbor as ourselves is to not commit murder, to not steal, to not lie, to not commit adultery, and to not covet. As the tenth commandment illustrates and as Jesus explained, God's laws concern attitudes of the heart as well as actions of the hand. Hateful anger and murder are both sinful (Matt. 5:21-22).

So God's law clearly forbids all "unfair treatment, harassment, and violence" toward our

neighbors, but what does it say about the other aspects of discrimination prohibited by the bill? What does God's law say about "exclusion and denial of entry" or "unequal . . . treatment"? Are these attitudes and actions towards one's neighbor also always violations of God's law? Not at all.

The ethical demands of Scripture recognize that there is a difference between treating your neighbor unequally and treating him unfairly. In fact, the Bible teaches that in order to be fair, unequal treatment of two different neighbors is often necessary. One neighbor may be wise, and one a fool, and so Solomon teaches, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Prov. 13:20). The unequal treatment of the wise man and fool is a major theme of Proverbs (3:35, 10:8, 10:14, 11:29, 14:3, 14:16, 17:10, 26:12). Not only must God's people treat wise men and fools unequally, we also must make proper use of "exclusion" and "denial of entry" when necessary. Once we have determined that the neighbor in question is not a wise man, but a fool, we must not walk with him nor be his companion. The wisdom and foolishness Solomon refers to are specifically religious sentiments. This wisdom is God's wisdom, and this foolishness is the rejection of God's wisdom.

Consideration of the difference between a wise person and a fool brings us to the central theme that concerns H.R. 5 and S.788. The Equality Act would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination in many areas of life on the basis of "race, color, religion, or national origin." Section 703 of the current law prohibits discrimination in the form of "Unlawful Employment Practices," and in that section the protected groups listed are the four above with the addition of "sex" after "religion." The amendment would insert a parenthetical after "sex," so the list of protected groups becomes: "race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity), or national origin," and it then would make this phrase the list of protected groups in every other Section of the law.

This placement of the parenthetical phrase means that the goal of these bills is to make discrimination because of "sexual orientation" or "gender identity" illegal in the same way that discrimination on the basis of "sex" would be. The goal is based on the conclusion that questions of

“sexual orientation” and “gender identity” have more to do with sex than they do with the other protected categories, like religion.

But what if this conclusion is mistaken? What if “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” are religious doctrines, instead of part of what the current law means by its “sex” protected category? What if the meaning of “sex” in the current law actually depends upon maintaining a heterosexual distinction between man and woman, the anatomical one biology tells us about? What if the parenthesis, if inserted at all, must be inserted after “religion” instead of after “sex,” as a protected religious view of anthropology? If these terms refer to religious views, it changes everything.

Discrimination and the Nature of Religion

The Bible teaches that discrimination is an essential function for the maintenance of a religion. A lack of discrimination between wisdom and foolishness, truth and falsehood, right and wrong, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and spirit and flesh (to name only a few of Scripture’s religious antitheses) yields the loss of one’s religion. Consider Paul’s warning to the Corinthian church regarding the potential failure to discriminate against unclean religious influences:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, “I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate,” saith the Lord, “and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters,” saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

So to maintain their Christian faith, Corinthian church members needed to discriminate against opposing religious persuasions. Every faith must do so. The Bible teaches that religion is necessarily

discriminatory toward contradictory forms of religion.

In addition, the Scriptures teach that religion is by nature the conclusion of faith. The author of Hebrews put the axiom this way: “But without faith, it is impossible to please Him. For he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). So with this scriptural understanding of the nature of religion, the question before us is whether “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” are religious categories, belonging to the protected category “religion,” or biological categories, belonging to the protected category “sex.” Two facts favor the former category.

First, most would agree that “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” are psychological and behavioral rather than physiological and anatomical. Therefore, it is difficult for a court of law to determine beyond a reasonable doubt that any man is really female or that any woman is really male, or that any man or woman, each of whom possesses our highly complex heterosexual procreation anatomy, is really homosexual. The court must simply take the plaintiff’s word for it. It favors psychological and behavioral claims over physiological and anatomical characteristics to reach this conclusion.

The dependence of the court on psychology and behavior in this regard mirrors its inability to decide with objective force in favor of one religion over another. How does a court of law decide what religion is best or most true? It does not. Instead, it follows the sage decision of Gallio, “But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters” (Acts 18:15). That conclusion has always served religious freedom well. Similarly, how can a court of law conclusively determine that an anthropological dogma is correct, which teaches that a man with male anatomy who claims to be a woman really is a woman? It cannot in any objectively truthful way, because such a claim is also religious in nature.

Second, “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” are categories that invite discrimination from opposing religious positions as do other religions. Biblical religion never calls membership in a certain race, color, sex, or national origin a sin. It does

condemn membership in false religions (albeit while affirming religious freedom for all), and it does condemn illicit sexual behaviors and religious doctrines that contradict biblical anthropology. "Sexual orientation" and "gender identity" are dogmas that invite this kind of religious discrimination, because Scripture has much to say about God's design for human sexuality.

Scripture on "Sex"

The Bible teaches that God designed sex. He made man, but knew that it was not good for man to be alone. He then made a helper corresponding to man in his need, a woman. Moses summarizes God's creative design for humans: "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it'" (Gen. 1:26-28).

The scriptural implications of God's design for human sexuality are simple and straightforward. This design means that a man is a male from birth to death, a woman is a female from birth to death, and neither man nor woman, with their anatomical design for heterosexual procreation, is homosexual. This is the view of biblical religion. It necessarily discriminates against the anthropology of religions it views as false, or it loses its character as a distinctive religion. Advocacies of opposite views of the doctrine of man are no less religious. They are held by faith, often in direct conflict with obvious science, and their relationship to the biblical view is one of mutual discrimination as religion vs. religion.

Amend "Religion" or "Sex"?

We can see how religion vs. religion discrimination works in our daily application of the Civil Rights Act to the religious part of our lives. No Jewish synagogue would want a Baptist pastor like this author on staff, and this is perfectly legal, the protections of the Civil Rights Act against discrimination on the basis of religion notwithstanding. The Jewish congregation would conclude that

I bear some characteristics of a fool when it comes to religion, and they would be free to refuse to be my companion as they apply the inspired advice of Solomon according to the dictates of their faith.

In the same way, the Jewish baker may find religiously foolish the request of an anti-Semite for a cake celebrating the holocaust. Finding it so, he may refuse to bake the cake. These exclusions, denials of entry, and unequal treatments of employment candidates and bakery customers are legal, and rightly so. Although protecting against discrimination on the basis of religion, our courts have known to give due recognition to the need for a religion to discriminate on religion in order to be a religion at all. The society completely free of discrimination is necessarily void of religion. Religions must discriminate against one another in religious matters, or they cease to exist.

So as legislators seek to protect some who have faith in the anthropological dogma at the heart of categories like "sexual orientation" and "gender identity," they must do so recognizing the religious nature of these doctrines. The terms do not refer to indisputable biological realities, like "race", "color", "sex", and "national origin." They are religious beliefs, which actually require their adherents to ignore important anatomical facts. If a parenthetical phrase is necessary to amend the Civil Rights Act in this cause of discrimination prevention, the phrase must go after "religion" rather than after "sex." But then again, no one else's religious viewpoint is given explicit support with a parenthetical phrase in the law. Why should preference be made for this religious viewpoint?

Scripture on Human Legislators

The choice between God's law in Scripture and man's law in Congress could not be clearer than it is with the decision demanded by due consideration of H.R. 5 and S.788. God's law tells us that human legislators are ordained by God and so their laws should be followed (Rom. 13:1-2). But as those who receive their authority to make laws from the ultimate Lawgiver, human legislators are held responsible by Him to be "not a terror to good works, but to the evil" (v. 3).

Human laws that are a terror to good works and supportive of evil works have proliferated

with the rise of the LGBT agenda in our nation. The good works of running a profitable bakery, a florist shop, or a photography studio in agreement with a proprietor's conscientious sense of religious propriety have been terrorized in spite of our country's tradition of religious freedom.

The Equality Act promises more of that same terror, because it fails to recognize the religious nature of the doctrines it seeks to promote and protect. The proposed law as currently conceived threatens houses of worship and business owners who differ on anthropology. Laws that prefer one religious dogma over another persecute conscientious objectors governed by them, invite God's judgment if mistaken, and consequently forfeit the consent of the governed. Our response to laws like this must be what Peter and the apostles told their oppressors, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

In summary, should The Equality Act become the law of the land, the federal government will have departed from its duty of protecting the con-

stitutional freedom of religious citizens and institutions to discriminate in matters of religion while undermining the "religion" protection of the current law, and it will have established a new religious anthropology as a state-church dogma, which has already been used to persecute differing religious viewpoints in U.S. courts.

However, it will not have changed God's law on these matters. "The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law" (Ps. 119:85). "It is time for thee, Lord, to work; for they have made void thy law" (v. 126). The Lawgiver of creation sees the pits dug by H.R. 5 and S.788, and He will respond with His work of judgment in time, unless Congress puts a stop to their digging. Give your Congressman a call to let him know.

Endnotes

1 Text of the legislation is available online at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/5>, and <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/788>.

The World and the Last Time—Part 1

By Pastor John Ashbrook

[Editor's note: Pastor John Ashbrook was the pastor of Bible Community Church for over forty years. This article, which appeared originally in the Ohio Bible Fellowship *Visitor*, is reprinted here with permission from Here I Stand Books (www.hereistand.com).]

When I arrived in Mentor in 1952, there were two doctors in town. Both were general practitioners. They set bones, removed gall bladders, treated sore throats and delivered babies.

A pastor is a general practitioner. He preaches the Word, calls on the sick, teaches Sunday School, comforts the sorrowing, does the work of an evangelist and leads a mission program. Sometimes, however, he becomes kind of a specialist. Over the years I can see that I have specialized in ecclesiastical separation—separation from apostasy and disobedient believers. I did not intend to have a specialty; but, in an age of apostasy, ecumenical evangelism, and new evangelicalism someone had to write about it. I began to do articles for the

Visitor and write booklets. Now, when I get invitations to speak, it is frequently on that subject.

However, the matter of separation is a two-pronged subject. There is ecclesiastical separation. That is where I have done my writing. There is personal separation. That is something needed in the life of every believer. A lack of ecclesiastical separation destroys the church by merging it with unbelievers and disobedient believers. A lack of personal separation destroys the church by merging it with the world.

God's Command

I would like you to think with me about the familiar passage on personal separation in I John 2:15-18. We will divide our thoughts under three headings.

First, God gives us a command to separate from the world. It is plain enough. "Love not the world." The word *world* is used six times in the course of

verses 15-17. The Greek word *kosmos*, which is here translated *world* is used in our New Testaments in three ways.

It is used for the physical world. Our patriotic hymn says, "I love thy rocks and rills, thy woods and templed hills." God has not forbidden that love. It is also used for the world of men. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son." God has not forbidden us to love the world of men in the sense of giving the gospel to it. However, in our paragraph the word is used for the secular world system, without God, and presided over by Satan, the prince of this world. It includes this world with its governments, its factories, its malls, its sports, its pleasures, its heroes, and its goals.

You will notice that the verse specifies the world and the "things which are in the world." The latter phrase makes us think of possessions. They are certainly included, but they are not all of it. There are also the positions, pleasures, philosophies, and other intangibles of the world.

A Rational Decision

The church today is more worldly than anytime during my lifetime. There is not one of us who does not have trouble with loving this world. None of us can duck this passage.

On the evening of July 17, 1505, the gate of the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt, Germany clanged shut behind a young law student. Martin Luther had decided to enter the monastery to get away from the world. That was the medieval answer, but Luther found that the world followed him right through the iron gate.

Scripture commands no such thing. Rather, it makes the matter of the world a decision our own heart. God said, "Love not the world," and so made it a rational decision. I did not just happen to love Mrs. Ashbrook. In my youth I dated a number of young ladies; but, I came to a point where I made a conscious decision to "love not" some of them, and to "love" and spend forty years with her. The decision to love not the world must be equally definite. God gives us a command to make a conscious decision and to carry it out. "Love not the world."



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