

Walking Upright in a Fallen World

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A Sabbath School teacher was instructing her kindergarten class regarding reverence in the sanctuary. She had them memorize Habakkuk 2:20, "For the Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him." As the children were leaving to join their parents in the main sanctuary for divine worship, this gifted teacher, wanting to remind them of the lesson of reverence, asked them, "Now children, why is it important to keep silent in the sanctuary?" A bright little girl raised her hand, "Because people are sleeping." I trust that if someone is sleeping as we reflect on walking upright in a fallen world, you will wake him or her up.

We are living in a fallen world. Just yesterday they found a car in Times Square with a defective explosive device, a reminder that we are living in a fallen world. Ephesians 6:12 says, "We wrestle against principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high places." We live in a fallen world. 1 Peter 5:8 says, "Our adversary, the devil, walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour."

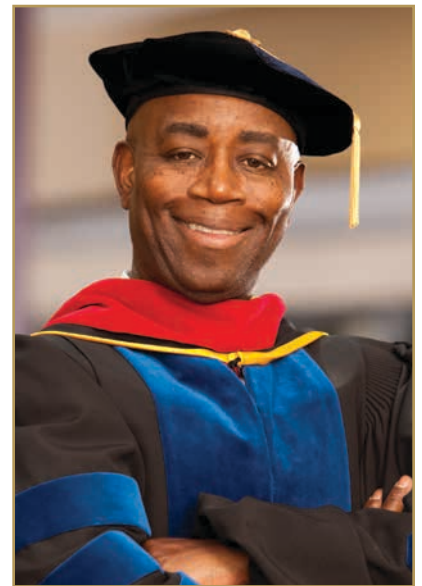
When I became a military chaplain, I had to attend chaplain school in Newport, Rhode Island. The instructors told us, "Now, sailors use very colorful language, particularly when they are at sea. If you're going to minister effectively to them, don't be so prudish that every time someone uses profanity, you act like it's the end of the world." Well, I left, and a few weeks after chaplain school I was deployed to the Mediterranean, and I discovered that the fact that sailors use colorful language was an understatement. I had to wrestle with

something that was in my spirit. I knew what I had been told to do, but I also know that if someone said something degrading about one of my parents I would not keep silent, even if that individual outranked me. How then could I keep silent if someone said something about my God? I had to learn to walk in a fallen world.

Our blessed Lord, when He encountered the devil in the wilderness of temptation provided us with a strategy for walking upright in a fallen world. Jesus had just had a graduation of sorts, that great baptism, 30 years of preparation. Now the voice of God was heard from heaven, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." Then, Matthew 4 says, he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. This last Adam, as First Corinthians calls Him, is in a wilderness, not in a garden like the first Adam.

If you're going to walk upright in a fallen world, respect God's Word. Jesus could have used syllogistic reasoning, Jesus could have used philosophy. Jesus could have used history. But He used what Ephesians 6 calls the sword of the Spirit: the word of God. It is written—each time defending himself with scripture. Paul says in 2 Timothy 15 of Timothy as a child, "You have known the holy scriptures which are able to make you wise until salvation."

In my pilgrimage since leaving Andrews University, I have discovered the truth of what David said in the 119th Psalm, verse 99, "I have more wisdom than all of my teachers because I meditate on your word." Then in the 105th verse of the 119th Psalm, "Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."



I was visiting a Senator and I noticed in his living room a large family Bible and I began leafing through the family Bible. Each page I turned to was marked and underlined...I asked him, "Senator, I see you love God's word." He said, "Every evening, my wife and I sit down and read the Bible together. We've read the Bible through several times." Respect for God's Word. There will never come a day on the planet when you will not need the guidance and direction of God's word. If you're going to walk upright in a fallen world, you need living power within and the word of God, says Hebrews 4, is "Sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing the dividing asunder to bone and marrow and is a discernor of the thoughts and the intent of your heart." You do not so much search the scriptures, the scriptures search you. Respect God's word.

If you're going to walk upright in a fallen world, value the spiritual more than the physical. Man shall not live by bread alone. Jesus said in Luke 12:15, your life does not consist of the things you possess. When I got out of the military, I received three job offers: one for \$40,000 a year, one for \$60,000 a year, and the third for \$200,000 a year. The problem was I didn't have any peace about those offers...Well, the people who offered the \$200,000 a year became impatient. They flew me to Atlanta..."Dr. Black, we really want you to come, but we have to give you 24 hours." I went back to the airport to fly back to D.C. I'm standing in the e-ticket line and I start praying, "Lord, you know I don't like to be pushy. I like to wait on you. You said in Isaiah 40 if I wait on you I will renew my strength." My cell phone started vibrating. I said, "Excuse me, Lord, I'll get right back to you." Took out my cell phone and I heard a southern gentleman on the phone. He said, "This is Mr. Bill Frist, Senate majority leader. I'd like to extend to you the opportunity to be the 62nd chaplain of the United States Senate." Had I accepted the [other] job when I was asked, I would have been under contract so that when my dream job—that God was working on all along—came along, I would not have been able to accept it. Value the spiritual more than the physical.

There is a final thing that you must do if you are going to walk upright in a fallen world. Refuse to compromise in order to make your dreams come true...When I first joined the Navy, I had planned to stay for only a few years, but I enjoyed ministry there so much that by the fifth year I knew I was going to stay for the long haul. One of my mentors came to me and said, "Barry, God has given you enormous favor. Let me give you just a little advice. I believe that one day you could be an admiral in the Navy. There has never been an African-American admiral in the Navy Corps before, but I believe that you could become one. Let me make a suggestion. I know you're a Seventh-day Adventist, but on paper, change your denomination. People appreciate your ministry, but there is no way that you will ever become an admiral as a Seventh-day Adventist. There has never been, and never will be a Seventh-day Adventist chaplain in the Navy chaplain

“Refuse to compromise in order to make your dreams come true.”

corps!" he said. I said, "I respect your wisdom, but I don't select my denomination like I select my ice cream. It's not a Baskin-Robbins phenomenon. I worship because I am convicted by Scripture that this is the way I am supposed to worship." "Ok, Barry, I didn't mean to offend you. I'm sorry."

The years went by, and I went from Lieutenant Commander to Commander and Commander to Captain and finally, from Captain, the Admiral Board met and I got a call from this friend. He said, "Barry, I told you you should have switched your denomination, but let me give you nine other reasons why there's no way you can be selected for Admiral." You see, with friends like that, you don't need enemies. He said, "You've never had a joint assignment...You've never had a Washington assignment...You haven't had the Pacific Fleet assignment...When he finished the nine other reasons, I said, "Are you done?" He said, "Well, yeah, I think that's pretty exhaustive." I said, "You missed one significant fact." He said, "What is that?" I said, "You don't know my God." He said, "I'm a minister,

ordained. I talk to the same God you talk to!" I said, "No you don't. Because the God that I talk to every day likes it when the odds look bad because then He gets the glory." The board met. They were looking at 168 Captains and were only going to select one for Admiral. Lineally, and in terms of seniority, I was number 167...When it was announced that I was an Admiral—I'll show you how God gets the glory—I was the selectee...I picked up my telephone and my friend was on the other line. He said, "Barry, I'm sorry I missed you. I guess I was wrong about the ten reasons. And by the way, when you get a chance, could you please introduce me to your God?"

Walk upright in a fallen world. Because the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice... Behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadows, keeping watch over his own. Walk upright in a fallen world because Galatians 6:7 is right—you will reap what you sow.

Walk upright in a fallen world and face the sentiment of Tennyson—"Tis not too late to build a better world...To

