

# PREACHER'S

M A G A Z I N E

*"Speaking the truth in love . . ." Eph. 4:15*

Hymn Story  
of the Month  
—Part One—

Life in the  
Family of God

Interview with  
Tom Nees

*"I resolved to know nothing . . .  
except Jesus Christ and him crucified."*

*1 Cor. 2:2*

# PREACHER'S

M A G A Z I N E

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# Pastors and Parishioners Really Do Need Each Other

Doctors, nurses, lawyers, professors, dentists, scientists, psychologists, and counselors are usually judged on their knowledge and skills apart from who and what they are off duty. Not so for pastors. We preach in public, but we serve people and live close to our people day after day, year after year. We become a part of people's ongoing lives.

Joining a family around a deathbed, responding to calls for help, meeting with the distraught at midnight, counseling with fractured families, standing on the platform watching young men and young ladies march down the aisle toward matrimony, calling in homes of strangers, comforting people in emergency rooms and intensive care units, looking through hospital nursery windows at a couple's newly born baby, cheering with moms and dads as their youth play sports and perform in concerts—all these and more give the pastor a sense of ministry to others. In many ways, parishioners depend on the pastor.

The reverse is also true—we pastors depend on our parishioners. We get so used to giving out that we probably appear quite awkward at receiving from their hands. Yet we depend on them day after day and year after year. I discovered of myself that I need to belong to someone. I cherish my parishioners' friendship and support over the years.

Preaching through 1 Corinthi-

ans, I came upon chapter 9. It became a strange and difficult chapter for me. Paul worked as a missionary in Corinth for 18 months, from about A.D. 50 to 52. He talked about refusing financial support to which he was entitled for those 18 months, but then he moved on. I have lived and worked with parishioners for 39 years—and have depended on their support. So how does 1 Cor. 9 apply to me and my parishioners? I had to dig it out!

New converts to Christ apparently criticized Paul as just another money-grabbing teacher like other pagan teachers in Corinth. They assumed he only preached for money. Paul responded in this letter that he had refused money from them and supported himself as a tentmaker. Then his Corinthian critics insisted that Paul must not be a real apostle after all—because genuine apostles of Jesus had been supported by the Christian community. How could he win?

So Paul says, "This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me" (v. 3). His phrase "sit in judgment" refers to a close examination of him by his critics. Every pastor lives in the glare of the searchlight, accepting close scrutiny of his life and ministry by people in and out of the church. It goes with the territory.

Paul built an argument for his rights as an apostle but declared his freedom to give up those rights. What are those rights and responsibilities from which Paul has voluntarily declared his inde-

pendence? Those principles underline the fact that pastors and parishioners really do need each other. These principles remain applicable today:

**I. Pastors have a right to a normal life (vv. 3-5).**

**II. Pastors deserve support (vv. 6-14).**

**III. Pastors must be motivated by God's call (vv. 15-18).**

**IV. Pastors must reach out to all people for Jesus Christ (v. 19).**

My payday is not receiving a check twice a month. My greatest paydays come when I see people step down the aisle, kneel at the altar, and give their hearts to Jesus. My paydays come when I see wounded people and pastors come to our church and find spiritual healing and refreshing and then watch God equip them for service again. My paydays come when I stand in the baptismal waters and hear the glorious testimonies of new Christians. My paydays come when people like Jan and Sheryl Weisen and Keith and Ruth Jackson respond to God's call to be missionaries. My paydays come when little children in our Sunday School finally graduate, go off to school, and return as maturing, Spirit-filled Christians. My paydays come when I watch former staff members succeed as pastors of growing churches. My paydays come when I watch God's saints move on up into the beautiful city prepared by Jesus Christ in the presence of Almighty God.

I used to think how wonderful it would be if I were independently wealthy so I could be free to serve without support. However, I have observed a few who were—and I decided it is much better when parishioners can depend on me and when my parishioners know I depend on them. After all, pastors and parishioners really do need each other. A big, heartfelt "thank you" to all my parishioners for allowing me the joy of serving as their pastor. **PA**

BY RANDAL E.

DENNY  
Editor

SPOKANE, WASHINGTON





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# Aaron M. Hills

(1848—1935)

**T**he 87 years of A. M. Hills's life spanned the most vigorous days of the Holiness Movement in America, reaching back to the time of Charles G. Finney and Asa Mahan down to the days of the Holiness denominations.

He first became a seeker for heart holiness as a student at Oberlin but did not succeed in his quest until 24 years later. Soon thereafter he became a central figure in the burgeoning full salvation movement, and he remained so until his death. The famous Holiness General Assembly, held in Chicago in 1901, was opened with an address declaring the doctrinal position of the assembly. This document carries the name of A. M. Hills, as a coauthor, along with Bishop Hogue, E. F. Walker, Hiram Ackers, M. L. Haney, L. B. Kent, and W. E. Shepard.

From his original goal of law, Hills surrendered to a long-haunting call to ministry. He was for at least 16 years a successful pastor in Congregational churches. Educated in Oberlin and Yale, he possessed a first-rate mind, together with thorough orthodoxy and a deeply serious piety. Naturally a careful scholar, he became after his own "Jordan crossing" one of the Holiness Movement's most

able and articulate exponents. As one of its most effective educators, he trained such leaders as J. B. Chapman and R. T. Williams Sr.

The classic most commonly associated with Hills's name is *Holiness and Power*. It was originally published by Martin Wells Knapp in 1897, though written in 1896, the year following Hills's own Canaan experience, December 7, 1895. In readership and influence the book swept the country and is still in print. Written in only 14 weeks during hectic travels as a busy evangelist, the book is perhaps the most comprehensive collection of arguments, exposition, and documentation produced during that time. With great skill Hills organized a massive array of material to create an irresistible avalanche of argument. The book reflected the months of arduous research on the subject before December 7, as well as Hills's wide reading after coming into the experience.

The breadth of the man's interests is indicated by the scope of his Christian writings, from theology to homiletics and evangelism. He also developed a special ministry to children, represented by his widely used book *Food for Lambs*. As an

educator, he was the pioneer president of three Holiness colleges and spent some time teaching and evangelizing in the British Isles. For the last 16 years of his active life he was professor of theology at Pasadena College, Pasadena, California.

Hills's other books include *Pentecost Rejected* and *Whosoever Gospel*. His largest works and in some respects the climactic achievement of his long life were written in his 70s and 80s: *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology*, and a two-volume work, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, published by C. J. Kinne, 1931.

A. M. Hills is a sharp, clear thinker and a gripping writer. Even his theology is marked by simplicity and clarity. His special interest is Holiness doctrine, though not narrowly conceived. The Hills Holiness doctrine is rooted in every branch of theology; therefore he does battle with his razor-edged verbal sword on every theological front. His special antipathy is toward Calvinism because of its antiholiness implications. As a polemicist he is a formidable foe, at times drawing blood when balm might have been better. However, this weakness should not be exaggerated or permitted to spoil the student's appreciation for an outstanding thinker and excellent writer. While there is rigor and sharpness, there is also warmth, intense devotion, and love of people.

#### How to Be Sanctified Wholly

Hills here draws on F. B. Meyer, Wilbur Chapman, William and Catherine Booth, Andrew Murray, and Samuel Keene, among others. The position taken in this chapter is that there must be a definite, deliberate act of appropriating

Do you  
believe that  
what God  
says is  
true?

AARON M. HILLS  
(1848—1935)



with for the heart cleansing and the fullness of the Spirit, before the witness of the Spirit can be reasonably expected.

**1. Believe It Is God's Will**

Do you, reader, believe that what God says is true? He says, [The promise [of the Spirit] is into you, and to your children, and to all . . . even as many as the Lord our God shall call" Acts 2:39, κτλ, emphasis mine]. He says your sanctification by the Holy Spirit is His will. Do you believe it? He says He hath called you to sanctification. Do you believe it? Do you hear the call of the Holy Spirit in your heart now? Will you respond to Him and rise up and claim the blessing? Is this inestimable blessing for one man out of thousands—for Edwards, and Finney, and Moody, Fletcher, Bishop Simpson, and a few other favored souls, or is it for every regenerated child of God, and so for you? . . .

I wish the readers of these pages would pause a moment and think. Don't hurry. Can you solemnly say with a prayerful heart, "My God, I believe this baptism with the Holy Spirit is for me"?

**2. Be Willing That God's Blessed Will Should Be Done in You—to Your Sanctification and Holiness**

Are you willing to pray the Lord's Prayer and mean it? "Thy kingdom come (in my heart), thy will be done in earth (in me, and by my will), as it is in heaven (by the angels of God)." Or are you willing to be made willing about everything," as F. B. Meyer puts it, "at any cost to yourself?" . . .

**3. Said an evangelist: "We should be willing to forsake every sin that we know, and also the sin that we do not know. . . ."**

"No matter what it may be, if there is a touch of sin about it, will you abandon it now? As God searches your heart, if He shall show you anything sinful and impure, will you make this

pledge to Him, as though you stood in the white light of the Judgment, that you will give it up? Can you, reader, say, 'I will?'"

**4. We Should Be Willing to Give All Our Good Things to God**

A soul winner said,

I believe a man may forsake every known sin, and pledge himself to give up every unknown sin as well, and still not be qualified for the filling of the Holy Spirit. Oh, so many fail here. There are what we call the neutral things—the *friends*, and the *ambitions*, and the *money*, and the *time*, and the *talents*—all to be turned over to God. Here many fail. When God calls to bring out Isaac, there they hesitate. Let us bring out the last good thing and lay it on the altar of God.

I preached six years before I was willing to consecrate the things that were good. Are you willing to do it—to give Him the known things and the unknown? the things that are good—the *money* and the *time*, the *talents* and the *friends*, the *husband* or *wife* or *child*, the *wisdom* and the *ignorance*, the *wealth* and the *poverty*, the *strength* and the *weakness*, all that you know or may know, all that you *have* or *may have*, and say, "Lord God, it is mine no longer."

General Booth says,

Thus consecration has in it the nature of a REAL SACRIFICE. It is the presentation or giving away of all we have to God; a ceasing any longer to own anything which we have hitherto called our own, but all going over into God's hands for Him to order and arrange, and our taking simply the place of servants, to receive back again just what He chooses. This is no easy task, and can only be done in the might of the Holy Spirit; but, when it is done, when all is laid on the altar—body, soul,

spirit, goods, reputation, all, all, ALL—then the fire descends and burns up all the dross and defilement of sin, and fills the soul with burning zeal and love and power. Consecration is being crucified with Christ; it means dying to all those pleasures and gratifications which flow from the undue love of self, the admiration of the world, the ownership of goods, and the inordinate love of kindred and friends which go together to make up the life and joy of the natural man. This may be painful, but we must be crucified with Christ if we are to live with Him.

Mrs. Catherine Booth said in an address on "Hindrances to Holiness,"

A lady a short time ago was brought to the very edge of this blessing, but there was something she felt she ought to do. She had a sum of money which she felt ought to be given up to a certain object. She prayed and struggled and attended prayer meetings, and prayed long into the night; but, no, she would not face the difficulty. She said, "Oh! no; I am not satisfied in my own mind. How do I know God wants it for that purpose?" She might have struggled till now if she had not made up her mind to obey; but, the moment she did, alone, up in her bedroom, the blessing came.

A gentleman came to the penitent form after one of my West end services, last season, and told me: "I am a preacher; I have been laboring in the gospel for eight years, but I know I am utterly destitute of this power."

"Do you want it?" I asked.

"Oh," he said, "I do," and he looked as though he were sincere.

"Then," I said, "what is it? There is a hindrance. It is not God's fault. He wants you to have it. He is as willing to give

Consecration has in it the nature of a REAL SACRIFICE.

you the Spirit as He was [to sanctify] Peter or Paul, and you want to have it. Now *will you have it?* Have you understood the conditions?"

"Ah!" he said, "that is the point."

"Now you know I should be a false comforter if I were to try to make you believe you were right when you had not yielded that point."

"Well," he said, "you see, it would be cutting loose from one's entire circle."

Ah! he was led, you see, by Christian friends. I said, "Did not the Lord Jesus cut loose from His circle to save you? And, if your Christian friends are such that to live a holy life you must cut loose from them, what are you going to do—stop in that circle, ruin your soul and help to ruin them, or cut loose and help to save them? Oh! there is no profounder philosophy in any text in the Bible than that—'How can ye believe, wh[o] receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?' [John 5:44, KJV]. You will have to come to God not caring what anybody thinks" (*Godliness*, 147).

Are you, who read these lines, willing thus to consecrate all to belong to God? Can you say, from the depths of your soul, to God in prayer, "I will make the sacrifice?"

**5. There is Just One More Thing**

The Lord says, "Ye receive the Spirit through faith." "I believe," said one to the great convention, "If we have been honest with God in these acts, every one of us has a right to rise up and say, 'I am going out now as one filled with the Holy Spirit.' 'Lord, I do receive the Spirit now.'"

Reader, will you say in faith, "Yes, Lord, I do receive the Holy Spirit for my sanctification now?" Do not turn away from this blessing and make yourself a legalist and say, "I will be sancti-

fied by WORKS AT SOME FUTURE TIME WHEN I HAVE MADE MYSELF BETTER." God would have you say, "I will be sanctified"; nay, He would have you say in faith, "I AM SANCTIFIED BY MY SANCTIFYING SAVIOR AND HOLY SPIRIT, NOW AS I AM."

President Mahan says,

The Scripture reveals Christ as an "uttermost Savior," who has made provision for our complete "redemption from all iniquity," and our perfect moral and spiritual cleansing. Sanctification, complete and entire, therefore, is the object of rational faith and prayer and hope. Both blessings, justification and entire sanctification, stand distinctly revealed in the Word of God as available on the same condition, and as, for the same identical reasons, objects of faith and expectation, and the individual who professes to have received the one blessing makes a no more incredible profession, than he who professes to have received the other.

Through faith it is the revealed privilege and duty of every believer to be "saved unto the uttermost," "sanctified wholly," and in "his spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless." After regeneration there awaits the faith of the believer, "the promise of the Father," for which he is to tarry in prayer and supplication until he is "filled with the Holy Spirit."

By faith, dear reader, be filled NOW.

F. B. Meyer says,

As once you obtained forgiveness and salvation by faith, so *now* claim and receive the Spirit's fullness. Fulfill the conditions already named, wait quietly but definitely before God in prayer; for He gives the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him: then reverently appropriate this glorious gift, and rise from your knees, and go on your way reckoning that

God has kept His word, and that you *are filled* with the Spirit. Trust Him day by day fill you and keep you filled. There may not be at first the sound of rushing wind, or the coronet of fire, or the sensible feeling of His presence. Do not look for these, any more than the young convert should look for feeling as an evidence of acceptance. But BELIEVE *in spite of feeling* that YOU ARE FILLED. Say over and over, "thank thee, O my God, that thou hast kept thy word with me, though as yet I am not aware of any special change. And the feeling will sooner or later break in upon your consciousness, and you will rejoice with exceeding joy, and all the fruits of the Spirit will begin to show themselves.

**A TESTIMONY TO ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION**

This is a fair description of the author's experience, and so he might as well take the witness stand and testify here. As far back as when I was a student in Oberlin College, my beloved classmate, the now well-known faith missionary in Bulgaria, Mr. Anna V. Mumford, had received the baptism with the Spirit and urged me to seek it. She presented me a volume of President Mahan's *Baptism of the Holy Ghost*. The book has inspired many another to seek and find the blessing, but somehow it did not make the matter plain to me *how* to take the blessing in simple faith. I went to President Finney who tenderly prayed with me, but gave me no light. I was thoroughly persuaded that there was such a blessing for men. Indeed all these years I have felt that a dozen unanswerable arguments could be made that would satisfy any logical mind of the attainability of holiness.

I soon after went to Yale Seminary to study theology, and there, I confess if now with shame and sorrow, like many another theological student does, I suffered a decline in spirituality

Believing is  
our part,  
and is  
antecedent;  
saving is  
God's part,  
and is  
consequent.



and lost much of the heart-hunger for holiness. I have deserved all I have received, and much more, of sorrow and disappointment at the hands of a grieving and patient God, who lovingly chastised His child that he might become a partaker of the divine nature.

God gave me revival after revival in my pastorates, gracious harvests of souls, and I had more calls to help pastors in revival work outside of my own pulpit than I could fill. But I was a slow, dull pupil of grace, and God permitted my pride to be wounded, and my ambitions to be crushed, till I cried out in agony, "Oh, my Father, dost Thou not care for Thy child?" But through it all, He was bringing me to himself, driving me, I might say, by a whip of love, to His very bosom, and awaking again the deep and abiding heart-hunger for holiness and Spirit-power.

After two long pastorates, lasting 16 years, followed by two short pastorates—short, as a doctor of divinity kindly wrote me, through no fault of mine—and nearly 2 years' service as state evangelist of Michigan, I moved to Oberlin to enter general evangelistic work, with my humbled soul hungering for God. My constant reading, outside of the busy work of preaching 15 times a week and writing *The Life and Labors of Mary A. Woodbridge*, was all on the precious theme of the Holy Spirit.

In such a frame of mind I was invited to lead a revival in Oberlin in January of 1895. I preached in the afternoon meetings a full salvation; I dared not preach anything else. Months afterward the leader of the holiness band of Oberlin . . . loaned me some books of Wood and Garrison and Steele and Mahan that fed all the more the consuming flame of my soul.

I was providentially invited to assist Rev. G. S. Butler of Three Rivers, Massachusetts, who with his wife had received the bap-

tism with the Spirit, and who had much literature on the subject in his library. Among other things I there found an address by Brother Torrey, of Chicago, and the address of another man already referred to. I took down the outlines of them in my notebook. On the famous hilltop back of the parsonage, overlooking 11 cities and villages, under a tree I knelt in prayer and gave myself away to God anew for the baptism with the Spirit, and wrote in my book, "Oh, my God, Saviour, sanctifying Spirit, I receive Thee. Come in now and fill my soul. A. M. Hills, May 29, 1895."

The influence of that act was a refreshing blessing to my soul all the summer through, and had I then believed with all my heart, I might have received the blessing at once; but I retained a lingering doubt. However, in the month of December in that same dear parsonage, I read an address of Varley on "The Sin of Unbelief," that went to my heart. I determined not to be shut out of the blessing any more by a wicked unbelief so cruel and so dishonoring to Jesus. I went to the Thursday evening meeting and publicly confessed my sin, and declared I would take God for a full salvation.

I had read previously in Keene's *Faith Papers*:

Are you a child of God seeking FULL SALVATION? Seize upon some declaration of God's Word, such as "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin"; apply it to your heart; confess to yourself, to Satan, and to God, that it is true to you, because the Lord hath spoken it; refuse to listen to the lying voice of Satan that it is not so. Let no inward feeling or outward sign dissuade you from your voluntary choice to count God's Word true to yourself. And according to such faith it shall be done unto you. Have you given all to Christ? Are you now longing to be fully saved? Are you persuaded that

*'Tis the promise of God full salvation to give*

*Unto him who on Jesus, His Son, will believe?*

You may at once begin to sing:  
*I CAN, I WILL, I DO, believe,  
That Jesus saves me now.*

The next day I said over and over again, "I will believe; I will believe." At night I walked the park in the darkness, saying:

*I CAN, I WILL, I DO believe,  
That Jesus saves me NOW.*

With such determination of faith I retired. The next morning (December 7) before I rose it occurred to me to thank God for the blessing as a thing received, just as F. B. Meyer advises. I began to do it, when speedily the Spirit came to bring the witness that God is true. A tide of joy swept into my soul, and I cried out, "O bless the Lord! praise the Lord! He does come and fill my spirit!" From that hour my life has been consciously changed.

O that Christians would learn this simple lesson of *believing*, of simply taking God at His word without evidence! We should soon have "the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness," and the Church, no longer bowed down in weakness and sorrow and doubt and sin, would "arise" and "shine," her "light" having "come, and the glory of the Lord" having "risen upon" her [Isa. 61:3; 60:1, both *KJV*]. "The method of faith," says Dr. Keene,

is for the soul to recognize that *it can believe* God's word, then *choose to believe it*, which always carries it over to the consciousness: *'I do believe.'* Believing is our part, and is antecedent; saving is God's part, and is consequent. All the blessed effects of faith—pardon, adoption, entire sanctification—are the Lord's doings, and are marvelous in our eyes; and they are all possible to him that believes on the Son of God.

Dear reader, as you lay down this paper, say: "Lord, I believe." *Thou doest this moment save,  
With full salvation bless.* **PM**

O that  
Christians  
would learn  
this simple  
lesson of  
*believing*  
—taking  
God at His  
word  
without  
evidence!



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# Life in the Family of God

Text: Lev. 19:1-18 (37); Matt. 23:43-48

Purpose: To call members of the NTS community to the holy life as portrayed in Lev. 19.

I was born into a strong family. They were stronghearted, strong-minded, and strong-willed. They were strong physically too. As a small child I can remember my dad lifting heavy pieces of farm machinery to align and repair them. The Hahns had a strong sense of identity. Every Memorial Day my dad's brothers and sisters came home to the old homestead where my dad still farmed. We all went to the service at the cemetery and then came home for fried chicken, potato salad, baked beans, chocolate cake, watermelon, homemade ice cream, and stories. Oh, those stories. The stories of my aunts and uncles and dad growing up in the Frenchman Valley—hunting, fishing, plowing the fields, shucking corn, making wood, and going to school stories. Then every Thanksgiving the whole clan went duck hunting up on the Platte River and told those stories again.

It wasn't just stories either. There were rules at our house too. When an attitude or an action of mine got out of line, one of the things my father disciplined me with was, "You're a Hahn; Hahns don't act like that." "Hahns pay their bills." "Hahns don't lie." There were rules to being a Hahn. The rules were

There were rules to being a Hahn. The rules were strict, but love was the overarching rule.

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PREACHED IN CHAPEL  
SEPTEMBER 1995  
KANSAS CITY



strict, but love was the overarching rule. Each aunt and uncle expressed it in a different way, but I knew I was loved. My brother, my sisters, and I grew up proud to be Hahns. Our sense of identity was strong. We had been shaped by the stories and by the experiences of our family. We took on ourselves the characteristics that we knew characterized Hahns. Hardworking, competitive, generous, laughing, loving were the words that described us because they described any Hahn.

George Knight, in his *Daily Study Bible* commentary on Leviticus, describes Lev. 19 as the family guidebook for Israel. It took me a while to understand what he was saying. Some of the older commentaries describe this chapter as a hodgepodge of unconnected regulations. This is Old Testament Law at its worst. But careful study reveals that this chapter is not hodgepodge rules and regulations. Its logic is not the logic of German scholarship, but there is structure in this chapter. The great stories of Israel—the stories that gave identity to Israel—do not appear in Leviticus. These are the family rules—this is a chapter in which YHWH describes the attitudes and actions of the Canaanites and then says to His family, "Israelites don't live like that." It is a chapter in which YHWH reveals a part of His own nature and will and says, "Israelites do live like this."

And yet, the great story of sal-

vation history—the story of the Exodus and the covenant of Mount Sinai—is not far in the background if you know this family. Interwoven throughout Lev. 19 are all 10 of the Ten Commandments. No Israelite could hear the Ten Commandments without remembering the introduction: "I am YHWH your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. You shall have no other gods before me."\* The Ten Commandments are the echo of Israel's greatest family story—the story of the big move out of Egypt. Yes, Knight is right. Lev. 19 is a family guidebook. This chapter is about what it means to be part of YHWH's family. The defining characteristic of this family is holiness. That's the subject of chapters 17–25. It is the subject of the whole Book of Leviticus. This chapter deals with holiness as order—the rules and structure of the family. It describes holiness as love—the relational style of the family. It describes holiness as imitation of God—the regenerative system of the family.

Let's look at

## I. Holiness as Order—the Rules and Structure of the Family

Every family has a structure. Every family has rules. Those rules reflect the values of a family. One of the main rules of my family was that you get your work done before you play. Playing was valued at our house; but work was valued more. Another rule was no TV on Sunday. One's family's rules may seem like nonsense to another family. The issue is not really the rules. The issue is how a family structures itself to accomplish its values.

The laws of Lev. 19 seem like nonsense to a lot of modern people. Beyond the text we have read, verse 19 forbids crossbreeding of animals; it forbids the planting of more than one kind of seed in a field; and it forbids the family of Israel to wear clothing made of two different kinds of material. Nonsensical

rules to many of us. But modern sociological analysis that has been done on Leviticus by Mary Douglas and others is helping us understand the values behind those rules. Holiness is order—not confusion. Holiness must reflect the character of an orderly and ordering God. The priestly interest in keeping seeds and fabrics separate in their own place is the same priestly interest that noted in Gen. 1 that God separated the light from the darkness. He put the darkness in a place and called it night, and He put the light in another place and called it day. Then God separated the waters from the firmament. And He put the waters where they belong and the firmament where it belonged. I suppose that it was from that God that my wife learned her favorite speech to me, “A place for everything and everything in its place!”

Israel learned from that God that holiness doesn't mix things that aren't supposed to be mixed. Holiness doesn't blur the boundaries that are supposed to remain clear. Holiness is not confusion, it is not mixing, it is not perversion. Holiness is order. That is why Lev. 19 upholds rectitude and straight dealing as holy and rejects contradiction, deception, and double-dealing as contrary to holiness. Lying, false testimony, cheating in the weights and measures, insulting deaf people while smiling at them, and tripping up blind people while solicitously urging them to be careful are a contradiction between what seems to be and what is. It confuses appearance with reality.

Friends, one of the things that is wrong with contemporary Christianity, in all its forms from the left to the right wings, is that we have forgotten the importance of holiness as order. The holy God who gives us our family identity is neither simpleminded nor simplistic. However, some simple truths are still true about Him. He is not the God of confu-

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own nature  
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this.”

sion. He does not blur the boundary lines between right and wrong, between good and evil, between reality and illusion. Most of the rules of Holiness people across the centuries were not the perverse inventions of legalistic killjoys. They were expressions of the simple fact that every family has a structure and rules that reveal its values. Both our secular culture and our religious subculture are majorly messed up nowadays. Disorder and confusion are tearing the fabric of our families to pieces. Part of the reason is that we thought rules had been invented for rules' sake; and when we rejected legalism, we rejected rules and structures. When that happened, we had no way to maintain the values that had created the rules. If we want to be part of God's family, we must rediscover that holiness is order—the rules and structures of the family.

Second,

#### II. Holiness Is Love—the Relational Style of the Family

In the last few years sociologists have discovered something my mother was telling me 30 and 40 years ago. Strict rules and love are not contradictory descriptions of a family system. Strict rules may be a significant expression of love, but they cannot be the only expression. The environment—the relational style of God's family—is love.

The actual word “love” only appears twice in Lev. 19. It appears in verse 18: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”; and in verse 34: “You shall love the alien as yourself.” However, most of the chapter is a commentary on love. Verses 9-10 command the Israelites to not harvest to the edges of their fields, nor strip the vineyard bare when gathering the grapes. Love for the alien and love for the poor is not an abstract emotional state. Love for the poor and love for the alien expresses itself in practical ways by seeing to it that these

marginalized people in society have the basic necessities of life. The command to not steal in verse 11 is not the early Hebrew legal expression of property rights. It is simply respecting the gifts that God has given to other people. It is the acknowledgment that someone else is valuable to Him. Love for any other person respects the material expression of blessing that God has given them. The command in verse 13 to not keep a laborer's wages overnight is an expression of God's concern for that laborer who needed the day's wage to pay for his daily bread.

The love of Lev. 19 isn't poetic or philosophical. It is a way of relating with other people that respects them as also children of God and that keeps the lines of communication open. Verse 14—you don't mistreat the handicapped among you. God loves them as much as He loves you. In a family everybody belongs—it doesn't matter how good-looking you are, or how smart you are, or how talented you are or aren't. In the family you belong and you are loved. Verse 16—you don't gossip about the family—it is contrary to the respect that love gives to anyone who is loved. Verses 17-18 are also insightful. “You shall not hate in your heart anyone in the family; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself.” Holiness as love understands that conflict happens. God has created us different, and He does not expect us to agree all the time. What He does expect is that we handle our differences and our disagreements with the holiness of love. You reprove your neighbor when he or she has done wrong or you join in both the guilt of the wrongdoing and in responsibility for a festering relationship of resentment that you feel toward that person. Verse 18 forbids bearing a grudge. In the family of God you forgive. It is the rule of love.

The impression of a hodge-

podge of laws in Lev. 19 is the result of so many examples of love being crammed into one chapter. Once love becomes a relational style, there is no human being that lives outside the compass of love. If you love your neighbors and all the strangers—as verses 18 and 34 indicate—there isn't anybody else left in the world.

Lev. 19 also has a word about loving God. It took me awhile to find it, since it doesn't use the word love. The prohibition of idols in verse 4 is one expression of love for God. But look at verses 5-8. These are the kind of Old Testament laws that seem so mysterious and nonsensical to us. These verses are about "a sacrifice of well-being" (NRSV) or "a fellowship offering" (NIV), depending on your translation. This kind of sacrifice was the only sacrifice in the Old Testament where the worshiper got to eat part of the meat. The symbolism was that of God and the person presenting the offering sitting down at the table together for a meal and fellowship. It was designed to express love and thanks and closeness to God. The instruction is that the worshiper eat his or her share on the first or second day. To leave it uneaten to the third day profanes what is holy to the Lord. It would be like a man taking his wife out to eat at a special restaurant for their anniversary. A special expression of love and a celebration of their commitment. Then in the middle of the meal the man goes off to the bar to watch the ball game. When the game is over, he wants to come back and finish the meal, and he expects his wife to believe that he really loves her with all his heart. That's not love—it's cause for justifiable homicide. Love for God means respecting His expectations.

Lev. 19 interweaves love of God and love of neighbor and love of alien and stranger. But holiness as love—the relational

style of the family—is the fabric of this chapter.

Finally,

### III. Holiness Is Imitation of God—the Regeneration System of the Family

The foundational statement of Lev. 19 comes in verse 2: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." In Matt. 5:48 Jesus paraphrases it this way: "Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect." The ultimate success of a family is the transmission of its defining characteristics and values to the children. In a family, children learn by imitation. You never get too old for it.

The holiness that is imitation of God is also learned in the family. I used to be afraid of the idea of imitating God. It seemed such an impossible goal. Then an experience I had about 23 years ago helped me understand. My wife and I were living in Bethany, Oklahoma, while I worked on my M.A. there before I came as a student to seminary. We had been out to Boulder, Colorado, to visit my parents. This was in the days before we had kids and before I learned to respect my wife, so we drove the 650 miles back to Bethany with only two stops. I was a bit stiff when we got home, but not too bad. As we were unloading the car and carrying all our stuff into the house, my wife asked me, "What's wrong with your leg?" "Nothing," I replied in my highly sensitive male style of communication. "Then why are you limping?" she asked. "I'm just a little tired, that's all," I replied. "You've been hanging around your dad!" she exclaimed. Her observation was obvious: of course—we had just spent a week with him; but both of us recognized the significance of her observation. A horse had fallen on my dad's leg when he was in high school. Then, during my childhood, he tried to jump across a 10-foot-wide irrigation ditch. He made it 8 feet but tore up his knee. Normally he was OK, but when he got tired, he

would limp—sort of dragging that leg.

I love my dad. I like to be around him. I don't try to imitate him—it just happens. And still, when I have spent several days with him, I'll limp when I'm tired because he limps when he is tired. Now I understand about imitation of God. It is not a matter of gritting my teeth and saying, "I'll be like God if it kills me." If you love Him, if you spend time with Him, you'll begin to imitate Him. And the holiness that is imitation of God comes from loving Him, from spending time with him, from hearing His story, from buying into the rules He uses to communicate His values.

As we come to the close of this chapel service and this week of services, I am wondering if any of you really would like to be part of the family—so much a part that you begin to take on the defining characteristic of God's family—holiness. There is a hymn, No. 490, that is a prayer to that effect: "O to Be like Thee." Let's sing it together, praying it as we sing. If you need to come to the altar for your prayer, it is open for you. **PM**

\*Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are the author's own translation.

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Every family has a structure and rules that reveal its values.

# Is This Epochal?

Design in the cells of living things is tending to undermine Charles Darwin's theory, still basically accepted by most scientists. Darwin "demonstrated" that life as we know it evolved naturalistically from less complex forms of life—and that, earlier, the living cell, with all its complexity, evolved without an intelligent agent.

Just when some Evangelical scientists have felt free to express at least an awkward agreement with Darwin, some scientists are seriously putting Darwin's *Origin of Species* of 1859 to a live-or-die test.

Phillip E. Johnson, a University of California (Berkeley) law professor, considered the leader of the "design movement," published in 1991 a seminal volume, *Darwin on Trial* (Washington, D.C.: Regency Gateway). Johnson's book supports the view of a designer in nature so convincingly that even leading evolutionists such as Stephen Jay Gould of Harvard are openly and vigorously debating the matter.

Added to Johnson's work has been a popularizing one by Michael Behe (pronounced bee-hee) titled *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996, by early 1997 already in its eighth printing).

These two books seriously threaten the Darwinian theory in a basic way.

Behe shows that, for example, in a mousetrap, all its parts must

be in place before it can catch a mouse—and that a designer must have made the living cell, since a cell cannot work unless all its parts are present all at once. He says that, as we know, a mousetrap has several parts, and all must be present, or it does not work at all. It needs a platform, a spring, a hammer, and so on, all at the same time. A platform will catch a few mice, a spring a few more, and a hammer more still.

He says there is an "irreducible complexity" that is necessary for a mousetrap or a cell to work—and that an intelligent agent must have designed both. They did not evolve into their complexity without a designer.

The *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and several of the world's leading scientific journals are reporting "strange tremors in the world of evolutionary biology" (*Christianity Today*, April 28, 1997, 15).

Darwin admitted in his well-researched and seminal influential *Origin of Species* that if it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed that could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, his theory would absolutely break down.

In our science of molecular biology, we now know that in the cell there is an irreducible complexity, Behe says—the cell having been a "black box" to Darwin.

Behe says it does not matter that there are usually in-be-

tween-species gaps in the fossils. Even if all the gaps could be found, it would not matter. Why? Because in the lilliputian details of the molecules of cells, which Darwin did not consider because microscopes were not available to him as they are to us, there is such irreducible complexity, and it is so ramified, that an intelligent designer would have had to be at work—instead of simply natural evolutionary processes, as Darwin thought. For molecules in cells to work together as machines to produce life itself, and the capabilities of animal life such as vision, there had to be a designer.

Behe says, "Until recently . . . evolutionary biologists could be unconcerned with the molecular details of life because so little was known about them" (p. 22). Now the black box [what was mystery earlier] of the cell has been opened, and the infinitesimal world that stands revealed must be explained (p. 23). Behe hesitates to say that God created the intricate mechanism of molecules and cells, but says that an intelligent designer had to be back of such irreducible complexities—instead of natural evolutionary processes.

Behe also says, "Yet for the Darwinian theory of evolution to be true, it has to account for the molecular structure of life. It is the purpose of this book to show that it does not" (p. 25).

It is possible that a breakthrough is happening, or has happened, which is epochal; that indeed, Darwin's "theory" breaks down "absolutely." If so, this would be similar to when Copernicus began to teach the world that the sun, and not the earth, is the center of our solar system.

Let's wait and see. Let's pray for our scientists and see.

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# A Theology of Reminder

Her handshake was firm. Her grip lingered a split second longer than the others I greeted that morning. Her eyes seemed to study me as I welcomed her at the back of the sanctuary after the morning service. She was visiting her son who attended our church. The telltale signs that something different had happened in her life that morning caught my attention. A few days later her son told me, "My mom said that she heard you say things last Sunday morning she had never heard before in her life."

Instant praise filled my heart. But praise to whom? Suddenly I recalled that she had been a long-standing member of a church I considered a fine place. As quickly as had come the feeling of pride came the questions. "What did I say last Sunday morning? Was this *new* to her because she had not yet come to grips with what the Bible teaches on this subject? Or was it *new* because I genuinely said something new—new, as not even in Scripture?"

As proclaimers of God's Word, we face many temptations. Distractions, hindrances, and stumbling blocks are legion for those who dare to speak a word from God. One temptation seems as pervasive and subtle as any we face—the temptation toward novelty.

Exhortations for us preachers to be fresh, relevant, and current in our proclamation are plentiful. We need those exhorta-

tions. Barbara Streisand sounds good singing "The Way We Were," but God forbid that we, who are called to proclaim God's Word to this generation, should deify the past. However, lest we lose our bearings, we must remember that our message is one rooted in the past. The Word we proclaim is anchored in historic acts. The words of God inscripturated for us are settled. We must pray and work toward freshness in our preaching. However, in our well-intentioned efforts to be relevant, it is possible to jump the track by seeking to say something new, or perhaps even by trying to say something old in a new way.

May God protect our pulpits from becoming nothing more than Athenian soapboxes, places where "strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing" (Acts 17:21, KJV).

That brief encounter at the back of the sanctuary left me unsettled. Have we wrestled longer trying to find that "new" and "fresh" title for our latest series of messages than we have with the messages themselves? Who among us has not felt a twinge of carnal pride when a starry-eyed young believer compliments us on our sermon?

I returned to my study and began to pore over the Scriptures again. I recalled Saturday afternoons in that study when I would look at my sermon and mumble to myself, "They have

heard all this before!" God, however, began to open my eyes to see from the Scriptures the validity and value of "reminder." As I began eagerly tracing down other scriptures, I found an abundance of teaching concerning the place "reminder" is to hold in God's work. He began forging within me a theology of reminder.

George Orwell noted, "We have now sunk to a depth at which the restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men." This is true today. It was also true, however, in the Early Church. Listen to the words of Peter:

So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body. . . . And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things (2 Pet. 1:12-13, 15).

Perhaps we proclaimers of God's Word need a reminder of the value that God himself has placed upon the ministry of reminder.

## The Ministry of Reminder Is God's Work

Jesus told us, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John

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14:26). Whatever our opinion about the work of reminding people of what they may already know, we must remember that this ministry of reminder is first of all God's work. God sent the Holy Spirit for this very ministry. Reminder is His work, and we participate in it as we become His channels for reminder in another person's life.

Because the ministry of reminder is first and foremost God's ministry, we can thus go with confidence and authority as He leads us into the ministry of reminder. Notice how this confident assurance characterized the apostle Paul's ministry of reminder. He said, "I have written you *quite boldly* on some points, as if to remind you of them again" (Rom. 15:15, emphasis mine). To Timothy Paul said, "Keep reminding them of these things. *Warn them before God*" (2 Tim. 2:14, emphasis mine). To another young protégée, Paul urged a confident ministry of reminder: "These . . . are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke *with all authority*. . . . Remind the people" (Titus 2:15—3:1, emphasis mine).

In fact, Paul considered reminder such a vital part of God's work through him that he linked it with God's very call on his life. Paul told Roman believers that he reminded them "because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles" (15:15-16).

**The Ministry of Reminder Is Priority Work**

If the ministry of reminder is God's work, it should be a priority in the lives of His servants. Yet I was amazed at how prominent a place the ministry of reminder received in the Scriptures. Two of the New Testament letters were written as a ministry of reminder. Paul told the Romans at the close of his letter, "I have written . . . as if to remind you" (15:15). Peter also saw the importance of reminding God's people of the key truths of the

faith. He said, "Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking" (2 Pet. 3:1). We can also see the extreme importance of the ministry of reminder as we realize that Timothy's purpose for being sent to Corinth by the apostle Paul was that he might be a reminder to them (1 Cor. 4:17).

Let us never consider a message, Bible study, or Sunday School lesson "just a reminder" of the familiar truths of God's Word. Let us never underestimate the power of God's truth as the Holy Spirit applies it again to the hearts of His people!

**The Ministry of Reminder Is Inclusive Work**

I am amazed at the broad spectrum of people that Scripture represents as in need of the ministry of reminder. The ministry of reminder, as we might guess, is appropriate for those who are struggling in their faith. In 1 Cor. 4, the apostle Paul confronts the sin and waywardness of the Corinthian believers. Verse 17 tells of Timothy's presence among them for the purpose of reminder. In 2 Tim. 2:14, the problem is people who argue about needless issues. Timothy's God-given ministry was to remind them of proper conduct.

The ministry of reminder is also for those who are growing and advancing in the things of Christ. Paul said the Romans were "full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another" (15:14). Yet even these fine folks were prime targets for the ministry of reminder. Likewise, Timothy, who is faithfully serving Christ and has come out of a godly upbringing at the knee of his mother and grandmother, is confronted by Paul with the ministry of reminder for these very reasons. Paul said, "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you" (2 Tim. 1:6).

Reminders of God's revealed truth are also for those who already have a firm grasp of those truths. Jude said, "Though you already know all this, I want to remind you" (v. 5). Peter also addressed his hearers and said he reminded them "even though you know them, and are firmly established in the truth" (2 Pet. 1:12).

The ministry of reminder is even appropriate for those whom we may never before have met. Paul had never met the Roman Christians to whom he wrote, yet he took it as a God-given responsibility to refresh and build them up by way of reminder (15:15).

As we share God's truth, there is no one to whom the ministry of reminder is off-limits. The struggling rebellious sinner, the faithfully maturing saint, the older Christian who is well established in the Scriptures, even those we have never met, all are prime opportunities to apply a loving and faithful ministry of reminder as God leads us.

**The Ministry of Reminder Is Hard Work**

Notice the words of intensity associated with the scriptural descriptions of this ministry of reminder. As Paul urged Timothy not to drop the ministry of reminder, he also closely linked it with a charge to be faithful in searching the Scriptures himself. Immediately following a charge to the ministry of reminder, Paul told Timothy, "*Do your best* to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, emphasis mine). We must put forth significant effort to assure our understanding of Scripture prior to a ministry of reminder. The Saturday afternoon feeling that "they have heard all this before!" does not give us license to slack in preparation. On the contrary, the ministry of reminder calls us back to faithful, diligent work in the text all over again.

Never underestimate the power of God's truth as the Holy Spirit applies it to the hearts of His people!



Notice how the emphasis on the intensity of the work continues:

So I will *always* remind you of these things . . . I think it is right to *refresh your memory*. . . And I will *make every effort* to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things (2 Pet. 1:12-13, 15, *emphases mine*).  
 Whatever a ministry of reminder is, it is hard work. It necessitates preparation in the quietness of our study to assure we know of what to remind people. It necessitates speaking to people who will not want to hear. It will require laborious effort to stand with struggling, but genuinely determined, believers in their fight against sin. Reminder is not a shot from the hip or a shotgun blast of chapters and verses. Our ministry of reminder must be bathed in the sweat of the study, anointed with the unction of the Holy Spirit, bounded by the wisdom of God, and delivered in the fruit of the Spirit.

The chances are that you are currently in a ministry of reminder. Have you grown weary? Is the temptation toward something novel or new subtly pulling at your coattail? Yes, we must constantly strive to be relevant. However, relevance is not born in novelty, but in faithfully doing the hard work of bridging the timeless, enduring truth of Scripture to the ever new, ever old problems and situations of today.

Someone may object: "But I feel as if I am nagging, not preaching, when I present truth again and again." The ministry of reminder is not sanctified nagging. Someone has said that being nagged is like being nibbled to death by a duck. Most assuredly there are preachers who leave people feeling that way as they ride their pet doctrine week after week. Do not, however, equate that with the ministry of reminder. You know you are being nagged when someone keeps chipping away again and again

with one point that serves his or her agenda. Reminder, however, is accomplished when you are approached by someone with the unselfish agenda of pointing you back to Jesus and His grace for your need.

Be assured of the value and centrality of the ministry of reminder. Bill Hull was right: "In today's church, the obvious is revolutionary." And he adds, "The obvious restated and applied shakes the church at its foundations" (*The Disciple Making Pastor*, 13).

Alfred North Whitehead once said, "Apart from blunt truth, our lives sink decadently amid the

perfume of hints and suggestions." Selfishness prods us to spray perfume from the pulpit as we dance about the text, tossing about hints and suggestions of truth, hoping somehow people will catch what God is saying. Love keeps prayerfully, diligently, sacrificially, faithfully, and repeatedly coming back to the multifaceted jewel of scriptural truth. Love holds that truth in awe and wonder before a congregation of hurting people and invites them once again to come and discover the unfathomable beauty of a clear look at that which we will spend eternity investigating. **PM**

The ministry of reminder is also for those growing and advancing in the things of Christ.



I don't think that's what Paul meant when he said "Become all things to all men."

# Interview with Tom Nees

**NCM:** Tom Nees, you've rendered a great service with your book, *Compassion Evangelism*. I'd like to ask a few questions about the book and your interest in compassionate ministry. What influences in your life led to your interest in compassionate ministry?

**TOM NEES:** Certainly the culture of Holiness denominations preserved the essence of the 18th-century Evangelical Revival. While its focus on poor people was muted in the middle 20th century, it was always there. So I think it came from within the biblical-historical tradition of which I'm a part.

In addition, I graduated from seminary in 1962, and my formative years in ministry were during the '60s. I started out on the West Coast, in California. My own consciousness was shaped by so many things—the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, the free speech movement, urban riots. All these things were going on in the tumultuous '60s.

I often felt that Thomas Merton, in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, expressed what I felt about myself. I was hearing that it was wrong for preachers to march and take public stands on the critical social issues of the day—that we shouldn't mix church and society. Our definitions of ministry were confined and

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INTERVIEWED BY  
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Nazarene  
Compassionate  
Ministries Editor  
KANSAS CITY

focused narrowly on what happened inside the walls of the church buildings. I was increasingly unhappy about that. During that time, as I was being shaped by events, I began to be more curious about our own denominational history and wanted to learn

how others were dealing with the critical issues of the day from their own theological perspectives.

**NCM:** You mention in your book about wandering through the stacks of a seminary library in Washington, D.C., and discovering John Wesley, who you were introduced to as a student, but discovering him anew as a social reformer.

**NEES:** That was a Josiah experience: the prophet discovers the buried treasure of the Scripture in the Temple and felt that here was this heritage that had [not been tapped]. I read Wesley but was totally uninformed about the extent of the social impact of John and Charles Wesley's move-



Tom Nees

ment. It was never taught in our Wesleyan studies at college and seminary at that time. We were never informed that the book Wesley wrote and published more than any book of sermons or theology was a book on health care. That aspect of Wesley was never discussed. We still are not followers of Wesley in his synthesis of evangelism and social action.

**NCM:** If Wesley is an intellectual and theological precursor to your interest in social action, what personal influences shaped your interest?

**NEES:** I grew up with a very rich heritage. My grandparents on both sides of my family were pioneers of Holiness ministry in the western states of Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. My grandmother was an ordained elder, as was Grandfather Nees. They started churches and worked in out-of-the-way, marginal places. I always thought of my dad as a compassionate evangelist because his preaching always had a soft edge to it. He gave an appeal with tears. He always offered an appealing presentation.

In our home, we always had somebody living with us. My parents took in people from my earliest days. I don't remember a time when we didn't have someone living with us. An orphan, Bill Griffin, who later became pastor of First Church in Indianapolis, was the first one I remember. Then came a number of people. The last one was a cousin whose mother died. One way or another, my folks always took in people. Not much was said about it. This was just the way of our home, a place where people in distress were welcomed.

**NCM:** Why did you decide to write *Compassion Evangelism*?

**NEES:** The title is intended to be quite specific. It's not "compassionate evangelism," another version of evangelism. It's really intended to redefine both "compassion" and "evangelism," so that the two words merge when you begin to understand them. Even within the Holiness Movement today, with emphasis on compassionate ministry, there still is a perception that compassionate ministry responds to the temporal, physical needs of people, while evangelism responds to the spiritual, eternal needs of people. That perception is based on a poor biblical anthropology—on a misunderstanding of the way these words are used in the context of the Gospels and all through Scriptures. We need to redefine our terms—not to promote compassionate ministries, but to help the church have a correct biblical focus. I've never thought of compassionate ministries as being outside the central focus or central mission of the church. It's not a tangent. It's not something you add on and do if you have time. It's right at the heart of everything we do.

**NCM:** So you're saying that compassionate ministry is not just another means to do evangelism, but part of a broader picture.

**NEES:** Right. It is evangelism if it's rightly done. On the other side, some people are involved with compassionate ministries who have misunderstood Christian compassion. There is a kind of human altruism I would applaud, but it's unapologetically a response to temporal needs of people without any particular interest in their spiritual welfare.

As there is a definition of evangelism that is one-sided, so there is a definition of compassion that is secular. Some-

times even compassionate ministries practitioners have not understood that distinction well enough. In the name of compassionate ministries, they may have engaged in something that's purely secular compassion. I don't necessarily have a problem with that. We need more people doing it, but we need to understand the point I make in the book: Christian compassion is holistic. It is concerned as much with the spiritual welfare of people as with their temporal welfare.

Certainly in my experience of working with people in need, you deal with whole persons in every instance. You deal with their discouragement, their guilt, their remorse, their hunger, their homelessness. All of these things are wrapped up together in an individual. You can't separate the spiritual from the temporal when you're dealing with people in a context of Christian ministry.

**NCM:** You see compassion as central to the work of the church and not just a side interest.

**NEES:** Absolutely. If you go to Luke 6:36, the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, and elsewhere in the New Testament, the words "mercy" and "compassion" are virtually synonymous. A special word is used only in relationship to the compassion of Jesus, but the more common word is most often translated "mercy." However, they're virtually synonymous. In Luke, at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells His disciples to "be compassionate as your Father [in heaven] is compassionate" (6:36, JB).

Compassion is not a matter of what we do; it's who we are. Compassion is the most important part of our description of God. To the degree that we be-

Christian  
compassion  
is  
holistic.

"Do I  
belong?"  
and "Do  
you care?"

lieve our lives are to be godly, we should be compassionate.

**NCM:** Compassion is central to Jesus' message and mission.

**NEES:** Compassion is the nature of God replicated in His followers. Evangelism proclaims the nature of God. To evangelize is to proclaim the Good News. The Good News tells about a compassionate God.

**NCM:** You write in your book about the early Church of the Nazarene and about the vision of Phineas F. Bresee, the founder. In your opinion, did early Nazarenes understand this difference between compassion and evangelism and how they relate to each other?

**NEES:** I think Bresee and Wesley would find our notion of compassionate ministries very curious, because for them there was no separation. They didn't talk about evangelism *and* compassionate ministries. They just did it all. After Bresee, in the 1920s, the schism in American church life occurred between Fundamentalists and liberals. The social gospel movement emphasized the care of society, along with its liberal theological tendency. The Fundamentalists—who may have had some influence on the Church of the Nazarene—began to say, "We've got to be against anything that they're for!" So we got pushed into a backwater of reaction and forgot the keen edge of our own heritage.

We're trying to bring together the two sides of Christianity that were never separate for Wesley and Bresee. Wesley was never called upon to defend his interest in starting schools and the Foundery, a home for indigent widows in London, for starting little textile factories where people could earn some money. Holiness people down to Bresee's

time assumed that this was part and parcel.

**NCM:** In Wesley's time, would his school for orphans have been evaluated in terms of whether any of those children got saved? Or would that question even be considered?

**NEES:** That's an interesting question because we assume the Good News is attractive. Yet Wesley never gave an altar call. It would not have occurred to someone in Wesley's time to count people at the end of the service who had responded to the gospel. He simply announced the gospel, and people responded in all sorts of ways. The same was true in his work with orphans and widows.

Only in our technological, managerial era did we become interested in techniques of how to develop a presentation of the gospel to guarantee a response at the end. So we became concerned about the process, or as Marshall McLuhan says, "The medium is the message." Perhaps we're overly concerned about that.

Early Nazarenes didn't do compassionate ministry in order to accomplish something. They did it because this was the natural expression of their Christianity. This is what you do as a Christian. You assume that if you lift up Christ and if you are compassionate, people will be drawn into the Kingdom. Today we are so geared now to think about the how-tos in order to produce a certain result that we almost forget the primary motivation: if we are compassionate as our Heavenly Father is compassionate, that's attractive. People want to be cared for. People ask two questions when they come to our churches: "Do I belong?" and "Do you care?" People are looking for compassion and community.

**NCM:** Do you think that when the church has not understood a proper relationship between compassion and evangelism, and that compassion becomes simply a means to an end, and that compassionate ministry is just another hook to draw people into the church—is this another form of manipulation?

**NEES:** Yes, there have always been distortions like that. There are ways of manipulating people, with evangelism techniques and with compassion. We always need to be careful that we're not manipulating people, that we're ministering as an expression of our calling, and not with any ulterior motives.

**NCM:** What, in your opinion, is the cause for the Church of the Nazarene having a resurgence of compassionate ministries over the last 20 years?

**NEES:** Several things have occurred. Some occurred in my experience of which I wasn't even aware. I assumed, when began compassionate ministries in Washington, D.C., that I'd be excommunicated. And I don't think I was paranoid. I'd seen enough and witnessed enough people who had tried similar things to assume that there was no place for this kind of ministry in the church as I knew it. I couldn't have been more surprised because the response was just the opposite!

As I look back on it, I can think of two or three things. First, we are young enough as a denomination to have members in our churches who are not that far removed from the early days. They remember that the church in its origin was a string of city missions, on the West Coast, for instance.

Some people on the East Coast still remember that in Boston and Washington, D.C.,

People look  
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and  
community.

Don't  
reduce  
holiness to  
an inner  
emotional  
experience.

we started among the poor and disadvantaged. There's a historical memory among us. When I first began talking about my interest, I found that the older folks often were responsive. They could say, "Yes, I remember! That's where we got started." They had friends in mission work of one kind or another. We had orphanages and rest homes. This historical memory was always there, although we had backed away in midcentury from official church-sponsored ministries.

Among Nazarenes, you can appeal to John Wesley and Phineas Bresee and get no argument. People may not be doing compassion evangelism, but they have respect and commitment to this movement. Of course, the Salvation Army, with identical theology, identical spirit, is always there. Sometimes we've argued with them about what we thought may be their imbalance. Actually we are a part of a historical tradition that has produced the Salvation Army, the world's largest Christian charitable organization. We belong to a tradition that ties us to some very significant activity.

The '60s produced a critical consciousness among young people that increasingly made Nazarene young people want to be involved. About the same time, the Hunger and Disaster Fund was established, which became Compassionate Ministries. When news of natural disasters came in, Nazarenes called our headquarters and asked the question, "What are we doing about it?" It happens every time there is a national disaster. We've received dozens and dozens of calls from people, saying, "What are we doing about the burning of churches in the South?" The Board of General Superintendents made a statement and a financial commitment to respond, but we've been get-

Our biggest challenge is to keep our churches poor.

John Wesley lived on 10 percent of his income and gave the rest away.

ting calls constantly from the grass roots. That question rises from rank-and-file Nazarenes. Wherever there is human need, Nazarenes now generally assume that the church should be involved in meeting it.

**NCM:** The early Nazarenes saw compassionate ministry as a defining characteristic of the movement. Do you see this as one of our defining characteristics today?

**NEES:** We need to get back to our roots and to understand holiness as optimism about the possibilities for personal and social change, and to realize that holiness as we understand it was developed by Wesley in the midst of an urban ministry to the poor. Wesley's message wasn't an ivory-tower theology. He wrote on horseback, working with indigent people. When we take holiness out of that context, it becomes a cut flower, and we reduce it to an inner emotional experience that never gives a satisfactory definition of holiness in its total understanding.

Our synthesis of evangelism and social concern remains essential to our Nazarene identity. I believe the Wesleyan-Holiness biblical theological tradition is one of the finest modern syntheses of church and society, compassion and evangelism, that you can find.

**NCM:** Why should a local church do compassionate ministry? Do local churches have the resources to meet the needs of people who are economically disadvantaged?

**NEES:** It comes back to a church's understanding of its mission. I have concern about churches that start projects without going through the process of mission definition because a project can become conflictive and disruptive in a

local church if it's not regarded as a part of its overall mission. If a church defines its mission biblically and in line with the Wesleyan tradition, there's no way that a local congregation can avoid responding to needy people. That's who we are. That's what we do.

Read our historical documents. Wesley and Bresee very specifically took Luke 4 as their theme. They were called to preach the gospel to the poor. They didn't say this was the only thing to do, but there were others who could preach to the rich. They specifically saw themselves as giving direction to a movement that would respond to the poor.

It's not a matter of money. It's something much more important than an organized program. It's what people do on their own. It's in a thousand daily encounters in which we express compassion. It's sharing. It's making room for one more person around the table.

In every church we take the little bit that we've got and ask God to bless it; then we watch the miracles happen. Wesley had strong statements on stewardship. Part of compassion is understanding with Wesley that we don't own anything, that God owns everything, and that we are stewards of His resources. If He's given us more than someone else, then we have greater responsibility. Wesley had a strong emphasis on responsibility, and not just in tithing but in the total stewardship of our lives and resources.

I have a good friend who says that our biggest challenge is to keep our churches poor. He says that the problem is that our churches invest their resources in elaborate buildings and programs to the point that they can't afford poor people, that they need people who are rich in order to support these programs. Thus the

church turns away from the poor and needy. Maybe our task is to help keep the church poor enough that it can respond to the people to whom the church should be responding.

**NCM:** By becoming more middle-class, did we lose sensitivity to the needs of the poor?

**NEES:** There are some interesting sociological and theological things at work here. We've grown up with the gospel of affluence in our American society. Listen to the testimonies of God's blessing; it's always the testimony to affluence. We wouldn't know what to do with John Wesley today. He decided to live on 10 percent of his income and give away the rest. He took a voluntary vow of poverty. He would be out of place in our churches. We assume that the evidence of God's blessing is wealth. Wesley and Bresee, I think, understood it rightly, although neither were poor. Both had the capacity to generate income. They identified with the poor and needy, but both were aware that the biblical message is that wealth, more often than not, is gained by less-than-righteous motives and actions.

We cannot assume that material wealth is an evidence of God's blessing. It may be the reverse. Page after page the warnings in the Scripture tell about the destruction that can come from pride in material abundance. We've turned that around; often the poor are regarded as somehow less fit. A discussion ponders in our society about the deserving and undeserving poor. Who are the undeserving poor? The church has to say, "If we understand grace properly, we're all undeserving."

My wife grew up in a very poor family. She was the one, before welfare, that people

brought baskets to when she was a child. Her father died, leaving her mother indigent. Fortunately, a Nazarene church paid attention.

**NCM:** How has your understanding of being a Christian been altered by the poor? How have they helped you?

**NEES:** I used a Bible study book for a while with a group of people—*Looking at the Bible Through Third World Eyes*. I had to relearn the Scripture when I became acquainted with people whose Christianity had been hammered out on the anvil of suffering. The Bible reads very differently if you come to it as an oppressed people versus a privileged people. I learned that some things I had spiritualized—teachings that I'd spiritualized away—and I relearned the cutting edge of the Scripture by listening to people, particularly Afro-Americans in a poor community.

One of the most amazing stories in American history is how the children of slaves embraced the God of the slaveholders. Within minority poor people lingers a remnant of the gospel that is closer to the heart of things than some of us have grown up with. We really need to learn from that perspective about what it means to follow Jesus in the midst of oppression and rejection.

Most of us have no idea of what Isa. 63 speaks. Read that among a group of poor people or a scripture, as simple as Mary and Joseph going to Bethlehem and being told that everything is full. The scripture says, "There was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7). I never thought of that as particularly significant, but among Blacks—they all know what it means. There's room—but not for you. Maybe that's what was going on in that sto-

ry: Mary and Joseph were so poor that there was room for other people but not for them.

That had never occurred to me, but it came out in listening to a sermon in the Black community by the present pastor of Community of Hope. I don't think any of us appreciate how formative perspective is. We go into ministry to share Jesus but also to find Jesus. As Mother Teresa says, "Jesus comes to us in the distressing disguise of the homeless and the strangers and the imprisoned."

**NCM:** What do you say to a church with an interest in compassionate ministries, but no sense of where to begin or how to get started?

**NEES:** There are a number of practical things. First, some process needs to raise their theological consciousness. Then do a "needs assessment." There are needy people in every neighborhood. A congregation should develop the reputation in its neighborhood that it is the place to go when one is in trouble. The church might not have all of the resources to respond to every need presented, but it can be a place where someone will meet you, be sympathetic, and try to help you find an answer—whether an abused wife, or latchkey kids, or any range of problems in suburbia.

Churches can link up with other churches across town in a needy area. Some of us will have to deliberately go into those areas as Jesus did in Samaria. He didn't have to go to Samaria. Most people went around it. Yet He chose to go there. We must go out of our way to find the poor because most churches have secluded themselves in comfortable suburban surroundings and never see need. If you're going to get in touch with the poor, you will have to do so deliberately.

If you  
lift up  
Christ and  
you're  
compassionate,  
people will  
be drawn  
into the  
Kingdom.

You see in theology books references to things you wouldn't have seen a generation ago, but it's still not enough. We are living in troubling times. The trends look so foreboding that a lot of us would prefer to stick our heads in the sand and pretend the world isn't there. The church lives in the midst of the world, and we are going to be affected by what goes on. We will either retreat and try to hold what we've got, or we'll get out in the streets and begin to be aggressive in holding out this message of wholeness.

If we don't—if we try to protect what we have—we'll lose our real message. We need our theologians to give us the underpinnings. It's said that there are no revolutions without intellectuals. A lot of people are out there now doing various ministries. We've got over 600 Good Samaritan churches and 100 compassionate ministries centers and all sorts of things going on. Yet all of that interest has to be supported by a sound biblical, theological foundation. We need people writing about the history of it, so that people understand that what we're doing now is perfectly consistent with Jesus' teaching.

Holiness people seem to need permission to do things. When you talk to them about what Wesley and Bresee were doing, they're generally unaware of this. They need to be informed historically and the-

ologically. They need to know how compassion evangelism is being worked out around the world. Holiness people who have supported world missions through the years have not always realized that we've been doing compassionate ministries all around the world.

One of the most revered missionary types we've had is the missionary doctor. The whole notion of a missionary doctor is still out there. It begins with Albert Schweitzer. I can think of many missionary doctors in the Church of the Nazarene who've been highly revered. We don't have to defend starting clinics and hospi-

tals around the world and responding to natural disasters. But I think we're still not informed enough.

For instance, the Mennonites have a particular view of who they are as a people—as a peace church. Volunteerism is a big part of it. They expect their people to be involved. I think we need to work at what is unique and distinctive about the Holiness churches. And we need the help of writers, theologians, historians, and others to give us more good information.

**NCM:** Tom Nees, I thank you for your time today. **PM**

## FALLOWFIELD CHURCH



# Keeping the Church Alive

In upper New York State a white-clapboard colonial church stands amid a grove of maple trees on a small hill.

Founded in 1794, probably by God-fearing people, this church is now a historic landmark.

Renovated, this beautiful edifice still shows the architectural skill used in its building. Its slender pillars rise high, supporting the roof that once resounded with hymns of praise to God. But in 1932 this church died. Except for occasional services, regular meetings are no longer held.

What can kill a church? Dissension, gossip, sins on the part of its leaders—these first come to mind. But what leads to the carnal things that can hurt the church? Is it not the state of our spirituality?

First, we lose our first love for the Lord and each other.

Second, we fail to pray the way we should.

Third, we fail to worship the Lord from our hearts when we meet.

## The Bond of Love

God has a delightful recipe for maintaining vital church life. It is love, such as He has for us. The Bible tells us, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8).

Do we appreciate it when we're forgiven? Are we glad that God forgives us for our shortcomings and sins and that He hides them under Christ's blood? Do we rejoice that He gives us peace

in our hearts when we repent? Can any of us say we are perfect? And if the day comes that we think so, would we not be guilty of the worst sin of all—pride?

Certainly the church should deal with flagrant sin in its midst. God made it clear through Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that this is the responsibility of the church. If the church does not assume authority in such matters, then its death may come because of this failure. I know of one church that did not deal with internal sin. I saw it fragmented, scattered, decimated, until now it is a pale flicker compared to the lively lighthouse it used to be.

However, God does not want us to set ourselves up as individual judges (Matt. 7:1-5). He does want us to forgive each other an uncountable number of times for various trespasses (18:21-22). This is the essence of Christian love.

After telling the Ephesians that they were to put away all bitterness, anger, and evil speaking, Paul exhorted them, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (4:32, RSV).

The more we truly love our Lord, and the closer we walk with Him, the more we will truly love and relate to our fellow Christians. This relationship to Jesus Christ also impels us to live for Him and to serve Him faithfully.

## The Bond of Prayer

The best antidote to dissension in the church is prayer. Rather

than discussing the shortcomings of our fellow Christians with others, the best way we can use our tongues is in prayer for them.

One church that I have held in special esteem grew to the place where they needed more Sunday School classrooms as well as a larger sanctuary. The church board met and discussed matters at length. Half of its members, parents of teenagers, believed that a gymnasium with classrooms along the sides would be a good idea. Two services could be held on Sunday mornings. The other half disagreed strongly and suggested other ideas.

Before they submitted it to the congregation for a vote, the pastor prayed and urged the church board members to pray too. He also asked the congregation to pray for wisdom for him and the church board members. They also prayed at the midweek meeting.

At their next meeting, the pastor and other church leaders prayed together and decided to put off the building project and to keep praying for direction. Two months later they came up with building plans on which they could all agree, thus avoiding a church split.

The church board members and pastor of another church, however, do not conduct business this way. They seldom pray together, except for the usual generic prayer. This church board has again and again brought ideas before the church on which some members have strongly disagreed. The business meetings have been rife with dissension and even anger. Because of this, the church membership has periodically been depleted until now the church faces hard times and hard decisions. Part of this unfortunate situation may also be due to the fact that the midweek "prayer and Bible study" meeting includes only *one* generic prayer.

Churches need more than generic prayers! In these days we desperately need more heartfelt praying such as the early Christians did. "Pray without ceasing,"

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paul urged the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 5:17, *KJV*). "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective," James wrote (5:16).

#### The Bond of Worship

One time when I was in transition between churches, I visited a number of congregations. For some reason, I could not feel the presence of the Spirit during those services. Everything seemed to be automatic, as if we all were just going through the motions of the standard generic service. Finally I visited a church where I could feel the Spirit. My heart lifted in praise to the Lord. That is the way it should be when we meet for worship. If it isn't, something is wrong.

If we all come to church with the true desire to worship the Lord in praise, in prayer, in spirit, and in love, we will experience the oneness in the Spirit that our Lord decreed for us. But we humans tend to get in a rut, don't we? Then things get dull, dull, dull!

It begins with the church leaders—the pastor, the music director, the teachers. Enthusiasm for the Lord is contagious! Enthusiasm, mixed with prayer and dedication, will also inspire us to vary our worship as the Spirit leads. One thing that impressed me about that church where I felt the Spirit's presence was the pastor's sensitivity to the Spirit's leading during the services. When he felt so led, he veered from the program. It usually resulted in feelings of love and adoration for the Lord and for our fellow Christians welling up in our hearts. That is live worship.

The music director had the same sensitivity. He had a stock of praise songs. As led by the Spirit, he would suggest that we sing one or several during the service. Those praise songs lifted us all up to the heavens in true worship for the Lord. This kind of worship helps to keep a church strong and united.

#### How to Have a Live Church

In addition to true Christian

In these days the church desperately needs more heartfelt praying.

love, unceasing specific prayer, and heartfelt worship, a live church is built and energized by inspired, Spirit-filled, biblical teaching. According to Paul, God has given His Church prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph. 4:11). So we may assume some of these are available to every Evangelical church.

Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 12 that God has equipped His people with various gifts to edify the Body of Christ. Therefore, every Christian has some special contribution to the upbuilding of a lively body. Christians need to be encouraged to use their spiritual gifts.

Jesus Christ wants all of us to work together as a unit—building, encouraging, and reaching out to our community—and doing it all with the love of Christ and through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

As long as we Christians operate in the flesh, and "the devil [goes] about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8, *NKJV*), the church will have problems. This may be especially true of a church that is moving forward for Christ. Therefore, the apostle Paul warns us to be on our guard (Eph. 6:10-18).

Let's be ready to forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ, even as we want to be forgiven. Let's do all we can to preserve the fellowship of our church so that it may be a shining light to our community.

Paul advises the concerned church:

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. . . . Stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel. . . . If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose (*Phil. 1:27; 2:1-2*). **PM**

# True Stories

BY MARY LEGNER

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DAYTON, OHIO

The guest speaker for a church dinner in Versailles, Ohio, pulled into town and realized he didn't know whether Versailles was pronounced Ver-Sigh or Ver-Sales. Not wanting to embarrass himself by saying it wrong, he stopped at the first restaurant he came to and approached the waitress.

"Now, tell me very slowly," he instructed the obliging young lady. "Where am I?"

Her response: "Day-Re Queen."

A nurse was chatting with a new patient lying on the hospital bed. "They tell me you were rushed here from church this morning," she said.

"Yes," replied the patient. "It was rather embarrassing. We were in the middle of a healing service, and I passed out."

The nurse chuckled. "What did the pastor do?" she asked.

"I am the pastor," the patient replied. **PM**

# The Biblical Basis for Accountability Relationships

Pastor, what's all this talk about 'accountability'? Where in the Bible does it say I have to be accountable to someone? You're telling me I have to spill my guts to some other guy—where does it say that?" The question startled me! I was not prepared to answer it.

I had read all the men's books and was loaded with the logical and philosophical arguments. After spending seven years with Jim, my accountability partner, I was firmly convinced of the value of accountability. But what does the Bible say?

Is there a biblical mandate for accountability? Would I find accountability in the pages of Scripture? Or is it a contemporary Christian fad? These questions led to an intense study. The results thrilled me.

Not only is accountability in the Scriptures, but it permeates them! From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible encourages believers, men and women, to build relationships with each other that will strengthen the Body of Christ! The evidence is in, and the verdict is conclusive.

## 1. In a Perfect Environment, Man Needed an Accountability Relationship.

In the Garden of Eden, before

there was sin, when there only was one man, "the LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" (Gen. 2:18). When we read this verse, we see it fulfilled in the creation of Eve and the establishment of marriage and the home. However, this verse also reflects a fundamental principle about man—God didn't create us to be lone rangers! [Even *the Lone Ranger* had Tonto!]

Before the creation of mankind, the Godhead had enjoyed a rich, perfect, and completely fulfilling relationship—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Placed in the heart of man at creation was a yearning for companionship and accountability—reflections of our Creator. And if accountability was necessary in a perfect, sinless

environment, how much more is it necessary today!

## 2. The Wisest Man That Ever Lived Encouraged Accountability Relationships.

Although we might question a man married 700 times, Solomon excelled beyond all others when it came to wisdom. In Ecclesiastes he wrote: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" (4:9-10).

In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon wrote: "Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel. . . . As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (27:9, 17).

Solomon seemingly had it all—wealth, pleasure, possessions, fame—yet Scripture reveals a deep loneliness in him. But he learned from experience and observation that it is wise to

## Is there a biblical mandate for accountability?

BY DAVID E. DRYER  
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have a close friend that you can trust, rely on, and turn to for godly counsel.

**3. Old Testament Narratives Strongly Suggest the Need for Accountability.**

Often in the Old Testament, men and women that God chose for His purposes worked in pairs or established a mentoring relationship that fostered accountability. Moses started with Aaron but later developed a close relationship with Joshua. Elijah mentored Elisha.

In his early days, David had an accountability relationship with Jonathan. We can't help but wonder: if Jonathan had lived, would David's later years have been different? When he loses Jonathan, he never again finds a close friend.

Even Jeremiah, the most depressed prophet, had Baruch. All these great heroes of the faith modeled the strength and value of an accountability relationship.

**4. Jesus Christ Modeled Accountability Relationships.**

In the Gospels Jesus modeled both small-group accountability and one-on-one accountability.

"After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go" (Luke 10:1). Notice that our Lord not only trained men but also *never* sent them out alone—they always went out two by two. He knew the necessity of accountability. He required it of His followers. After He sent out the Twelve, at one point we read, "When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done" (9:10, emphasis mine).

**5. The Early Church Promoted Accountability Relationships.**

Having learned the lesson from Jesus' example, the Early Church continued the practice of sending teachers and missionaries out two by two. Indeed, the

Holy Spirit encouraged that practice! "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the *Holy Spirit said*, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2, emphasis mine). When disagreement caused the team of Paul and Barnabas to split, they did not simply go their separate ways alone—they sought a partner. "They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord" (15:39-40).

As a pastor, I knew I needed an accountability relationship like this Early Church model. I found it with Jim, and now I have a relationship that strengthens and protects me, my marriage, and my church.

**6. The "One Another" Commands of the New Testament Encourage Accountability.**

At the heart of our responsibilities within the framework of the church stand the "one another" commands: love one another, edify one another, admonish one another, care for one another, serve one another, submit to one another, comfort one another, confess your sins to one another, forgive one another, teach and admonish one another, and exhort one another.

Obviously, these commands require both relationships and a certain level of accountability. It would be impossible to be obedient to them in a vacuum.

My accountability relationship with Jim allows me to obey these commands within our relationship. As we learn obedience together, it is then easier to transfer the lessons learned to the wider fellowship of our church.

**7. The Illustration of the Church as a Physical Body Requires Accountability.**

Paul wrote to the church in

Corinth, "But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor. 12:24-26).

An expositor long ago astutely observed that "in the body all instruments of action are made by pairs; e.g., hands, feet, eyes, ears, legs." The very fact that you are physically coordinated speaks of physical accountability. What a vivid illustration of the need for spiritual accountability in the Body of Christ!

**8. The Illustration of the Christian Life as a Battle Logically Assumes Accountability Relationships.**

With the possible exception of Rambo, wars are not won on the exploits of one individual, but on the teamwork of an army. Further, the most disciplined armies are those where each soldier is accountable to his comrade and to his commander.

The Scriptures remind us that we are soldiers in an army fighting a very real and dangerous enemy. The battlefield is in the home, in the school, and at work. The context often springs from our relationships. To fight the battles alone is not only foolish but impossible. A good soldier covets and cultivates accountability. When I'm wounded, confused, or lonely, I'm grateful for Jim's presence in the trenches.

What does all this teach us? The concept of accountability permeates the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. It is not new! But, praise God, men are rediscovering something that God intended from the very beginning. God made us and saved us to be in relationship with a brother or brothers in Christ. So, why not consider to whom you can be accountable? **PM**

God didn't  
create us  
to be  
lone  
rangers!

# Pastor, Who Looks After You?

## Johannes Bugenhagenes: a Pastor's Pastor

*"Dear Doctor, I am not proclaiming my own message but God's. You must accept it as such."*

No doubt as a worker in the church, whether as a pastor, lay leader, church council member, deacon, teacher, or any other title you hold in the Lord's service, you have on occasion spoken a similar admonition. But what happens when it is the church worker who needs that admonition? Who is there to give comfort, advice, warning, and support to the pastor?

A friend of mine, a full-time, ordained minister of the gospel, suffered the loss of a loved one in his family. As we spoke about the loss later, he confided that the deceased's pastor arrived late to the viewing because of other commitments. The rest of the family members looked to my friend for support, hope, and encouragement. Needless to say, my friend was looking for those same things. He, too, needed someone to turn to in a time of sorrow.

For Dr. Martin Luther, God sent Dr. Johannes Bugenhagen to fulfill these duties. Bugenhagen was the Pomeranian-born pastor of the Castle Church in Wittenberg who was often called "Dr. Pomer." This man served as pastor to that famous Castle Church parishioner, Dr. Luther—theolo-

gian, Reformer, university teacher, and a human being weighed down by sin and needing the message and comfort found in the Word of God and the sacraments.

Johannes Bugenhagen is often buried in the footnotes of history as an organizer of Lutheran congregations. His skill as an organizer was evident in the congregations he helped organize in northern Germany, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Norway. His skills were also employed in the creation of an order of worship known today as the Bugenhagen order, used by many congregations in the Lutheran Church today. But history fails to tell us of Bugenhagen's official position as pastor of the church at Wittenberg. Bugenhagen is overshadowed by one of his parishioners—Dr. Martin Luther, theologian and Reformer.

Dr. Johannes Bugenhagen served the great Reformer as more than just a footnote. He was a trusted confidant of Luther and was present at the great events in Luther's life. Dr. Bugenhagen officiated at Martin and Katherine's wedding and preached one of three funeral sermons at the death of Dr. Luther. Luther honored his friend and pastor by giving his eldest son the name Johann ("Hans").

Bugenhagen took his role as pastor very seriously. He often

comforted Luther when the latter was depressed or despondent. At times he found it necessary to evangelically scold the Reformer, as when he reminded the Reformer of God's grace:

*Dear Doctor, I am not proclaiming my own message, but God's. You must accept it as such. Our God in heaven undoubtedly thinks, "What more can I do for this man? I have given him so many splendid talents, and still he despairs of My grace."*

When Luther suffered from an attack of gallstones in March 1537, he thought he would certainly die. He made confession to Bugenhagen and received absolution. Luther also told Bugenhagen his last will and testament and made funeral arrangements during this crisis. Fortunately, Luther pulled through, and these preparations did not have to be put into effect.

Bugenhagen was notorious for his lengthy sermons. Though Luther protested against being made a sacrifice to his pastor's homiletic ardor and endurance, Luther valued the simplicity of his pastor's sermons. As to the quality, Luther wrote in answer to a complaint about the preaching inadequacies of another pastor: "I cannot always send you a Luther or a Bugenhagen." Bugenhagen himself was modest about his preaching efforts:

*It is possible to still hunger by means of water and bread. When Luther preaches, you are served food roasted and fried. When I preach, you get water and bread.*

In 1545 Luther threatened to leave Wittenberg. The university asked Bugenhagen to gather a group to go to Luther and negotiate Luther's return to Wittenberg. Luther himself asked Bugenhagen to say farewell to the university on Luther's behalf. In this incident it is very evident that Luther's contemporaries viewed Bugenhagen as not only Luther's pastor but also a trusted friend and confidant.

BY JOHN L. HOH JR.  
MAUSTON, WISCONSIN



In Luther's many absences from Wittenberg, it was Bugenhagen who looked after the family affairs. In a letter dated July 26, 1540, Luther wrote on the outside addressed to his wife:

*If she is absent, the Doctor Pomer, the pastor, is to break [the seal] and read [the letter].*

During the Schmalkaldic War, Katie was in the company of Bugenhagen's family when they escaped from Wittenberg.

Luther held Bugenhagen in high regard. From his letters, we know that Luther trusted the judgment of his pastor and valued his organizational skills.

Luther often asked Bugenhagen to find candidates to fill vacancies, thus displaying a trust in Bugenhagen's assessment of character and talent.

The greatest contribution of Bugenhagen was not his ability in organizing churches or creating an order of worship. The greatest contribution by Dr. Bugenhagen was in fulfilling his role and duties as pastor of his church. Those duties included serving as pastor to the great Reformer. **Even the great Reformer needed a shepherd to feed him the meat of the gospel message.** And if Luther needed a pastor, no doubt we as Christ's shepherds need shepherding. The balance of this article will explore the areas where we also need shepherding.

#### Organization

What the chroniclers of history do tell us about Johannes Bugenhagen is his keen ability to organize and his instincts about people. Luther also saw these traits in his pastor and left the details of congregational organization and pulpit fulfillment to Dr. Pomer. In this we see that Luther did not attempt to do everything himself. He delegated authority. He relied upon his fellow pastors. He did not compete with the other pastors who proclaimed the true gospel of Christ.

Luther had enough to do without micromanaging the "Lutheran" movement. The bulk of his writings today comprise 55 volumes, and that does not include his sermons! He preached roughly 200 sermons a year. Also, he often traveled when disputes arose. He traveled to defend his position before Roman Catholic leaders. He taught full-time at the university, and he was both a husband and a father. It was indeed a relief for Luther to have qualified and competent men to assist him.

As we see in Luther's opinion of Bugenhagen's preaching, there were differences of opinion between the two men; nevertheless, Luther did not regard his methods and his way as the only way to do things. Rather, he saw a benefit from hearing Bugenhagen's sermons and held them in high regard.

#### Personal Friendship

God created men and women to be social creatures. Those working in the church are no different. We need to share our joys and triumphs, heartbreaks and trials with each other. We need to know that not one of us is alone; the devil is tempting and torturing and manipulating each one of us in many different ways. When we share our experiences, we are encouraging each other in our "trials of faith" here on earth.

Through our friendships we also realize that God does indeed also bless us. Our friends can celebrate our weddings and continue to give us encouragement during our marriages. We do not need to name our children after our friends, but our friends certainly can celebrate with us those joys that God has given to us.

#### Admonition

We may be pastors, lay leaders, upright citizens in the church, but we still need to hear the law as well as the gospel found in the Bible. If Jesus' conversations with the Pharisees

and Sadducees (the church leaders of His day) are any indication of the human condition, then we also need to remember that we are also vile sinners whose value in God's eyes is evaluated only with the blood of Christ.

Luther was prone to bouts of depression. We have letters from the doctor to others who were proud in the faith and needed to be reminded that they were still sinners and still needed Christ's blood for salvation. Whether we are at one of these extremes or somewhere in between, we still need to remember several things. Our fellow workers can remind us of those truths. Those truths are expressed in the following paragraphs, using Bugenhagen's admonitions to Luther as a guide.

**God's Word:** Bugenhagen reminded Luther that he was a messenger of God and that his words came from the Word of God. With this statement Bugenhagen reminds Luther of the ultimate authority—God and His Word. Even the great Reformer must humbly submit to the will of God. So, too, we are all to submit humbly to God's will and God's Word.

**God's totality:** In Bugenhagen's mind, God has gone above and beyond the call of duty, as if He had any duty toward us. Bugenhagen views God as saying, "What more can I do for this man?" Bugenhagen reminds Luther that God [in Jesus] set aside the riches of heaven for a miserable existence on earth. God set aside His power and became a powerless infant. God set aside eternity to die in our place and pay for our sins.

We need to also remind each other of the totality of God's sacrifice for us. There are times when we feel underpaid, overextended, overused, stretched to the limit, and underappreciated. In addition, Satan will lay land mines in our psyche about our sinfulness or deceive us to think that God cannot possibly love or forgive us. The truth is, there is

no more God can do for us. What He has done is thorough indeed.

**Our talents:** It is the Creator of all creation who bestows upon each one of us the talents and gifts we possess. It is that same Creator who distributes those gifts in varying degrees. Bugenhagen had to remind Luther of that fact when he theorizes what God might say: *I have given him so many splendid talents.* Paul himself writes this truth when he pens:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (*Eph. 4:11-12*).

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues (*1 Cor. 12:27-28*).

Our Lord also reminded Moses at the burning bush and the prophet Jeremiah that it was He who bestows talents and gifts upon each one of us. He expects us to answer His call and do His work with those gifts He has given us. Often we need to be reminded who dispenses these gifts and why our talents are given to us.

**Our salvation:** Bugenhagen opines that God is saying, *And still he despairs of My grace.* It is the grace of God to motivate us in our calls. I can still remember people asking me why I wanted to be a pastor. At first it was a vague: "I really don't know. I just want to help people." That vagueness and uncertainty can really bog us down when we experience down times and frustration. As I learned more about Scripture itself and what God

has to say to us, then my answer changed. I wanted to share this wonderful news of God's salvation for even the most vile of sinners. Bugenhagen reminds Luther of that very grace. We also need to hear, time and again, that precious nectar of God's forgiveness!

**Spiritual Nourishment  
from Another**

The fact that Luther comments on Bugenhagen's sermons gives us insight to the Reformer; this same insight comes from Bugenhagen's comments about Luther's sermons. These men treasured the hearing of God's Word and thirsted for that Word. Though these men had different homiletic styles, they edified each other with the message each proclaimed—the forgiveness of sins given to vile sinners from a holy God who paid the price of sin with His blood.

We can also take comfort in our colleagues' messages. As students in the seminary, we all had to take our turn conducting morning devotions. It can be very intimidating getting before the assembly and there, right before the student, sits the entire faculty of the seminary. But the fact is, these men did not see themselves as any better than the students. They saw their need of the Savior and valued the spiritual nourishment they received through the Word of God.

As sinners we still need to be reminded of our natural condition. As Christians we need to be reminded of that salvation won for us by our Lord. Treasure those times when your colleagues are in the pulpit, and you are the recipient of God's message. God works through our colleagues' style as well as through our style; His Spirit is at work in hearts regardless of whose lips are moving.

**Encouragement for  
Each Other's Families**

From Luther's letters we see

that Bugenhagen looked after Luther's family in Luther's absence. Katie escaped Wittenberg with Bugenhagen's family during the Schmalkaldic War. Luther addressed his letters to Katie with the disclaimer that the Dr. Pome should break and read if Katie were absent. In this we see that our families also need comfort, love, and social contacts as well as the message of the gospel.

A theological journal published an article some time ago about the wife in the parsonage. While Scripture has much to say about the qualifications of one aspiring to be a pastor, it remains silent about the pastor's spouse. The article sought to find a balance for the spouses in the parsonage.

When speaking and visiting with my friends, I find their wives are often lonely. Social contact must be monitored; too much time spent with certain people will alienate others in the congregation. Something said, even the seemingly trivial, may come back to haunt you. Often the wife feels as if she has no one to turn to when she has pains of guilt or doubt.

One area that can be rather difficult for the pastor's wife is marital counseling. How comfortable can she feel going to her pastor, who happens to be her husband, for marital advice? How comfortable can she feel going to her husband if she feels doubts about being in the parsonage? Her husband may be gung ho and may question his wife's doubts; or he may have those doubts and thus may not receive the support and encouragement he so desperately needs.

The pastor's wife also needs the strength and nourishment that is given to us sinners in the gospel. She needs that support, which is vital for her role in supporting and encouraging her husband. The pastor also needs to be reassured that his family

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# To Whom Does the Pastor Talk?

To whom do you talk when you really need to talk? To whom can you bare your soul or share your deepest thoughts and ideas? To

whom do you talk when you have some probing questions, perplexing situations, doubts, fears, or the need for an empathetic listener? To whom do you talk when you need to see the face of another person showing care, concern, compassion, and presence without fear of judgment?

I heard the story of a little girl who became frightened during the night by a very loud thunderstorm. She hid under her blankets as the lightning flashed through the skies and thunder rattled her windows. Finally she ran into her parents' room and jumped into their bed. Her dad asked her what was wrong. She explained about the storm and her fear.

He said, "Honey, you don't need to be afraid. God is present with you and will keep you safe."

"I know that, Daddy," she replied, "but I need to see a face!" There are times when all of us want to see a face.

To me the story is clear in its meaning. I may be in tune with the Lord, reading His Word, communicating in prayer, walking through the valleys with confidence, and even giving thanks in all things; but there are still those moments when I want to see someone eye to eye. I want to watch facial expres-

sions as I tell my thoughts. I want fingers that will touch my arm or a hand when I am struggling. There are times when I want an arm around my shoulder or even an encouraging hug when I am discouraged.

It wasn't long into my first pastorate before I learned that the pastor can't talk with just anyone. I learned that lesson the hard way. There are things learned in that local church that you don't learn in college or seminary—like roofing, plumbing, carpet laying, electrical work, packing the moving truck with the heavy stuff on bottom, the piano over the wheels, or whom you can trust and to whom you can talk.

Professors also didn't teach—or I was absent that day—what to do with these nagging little feelings about myself that kept coming to mind when I go about the work of ministry. I had these little doubts about my strengths, which seemed few and far between, and my limitations, which seemed many and near at hand. With whom do I share these thoughts?

I didn't have someone that I felt I could talk to about the thoughts, fears, anxieties, and questions. I spent hours in prayer, studying the Bible, reading the latest books to feel better qualified for the work I was doing. I needed someone who would understand my feelings, my concerns, my doubts. I needed someone with a face, expressions, arms, and hands. I need-

ed a close person who could walk with me through my journey of life as a pastor and minister.

I went to meetings for pastors on the zone and district, listening to other pastors share, and usually going home with the same feelings of loneliness. I met for monthly lunches, sharing together, doing what has been done for decades in the gathering of pastors: sharing about our church growth and programs. I don't remember any gatherings when pastors told of their personal struggles, which would have benefited me more than all the hype about doing more or producing more.

I now know that I wasn't alone in my feelings. I know pastors face greater emotional stress, depression, feelings of despair, even emotional disturbances, because they don't know what to do with the knot gnawing in the pits of their stomachs. Dr. William Greathouse referred to this knot as a tumor growing inside many pastors, as he spoke at a recent PALCON at Southern Nazarene University. I see this tumor being composed of feelings that contradict our theological understanding of salvation and holiness. Day by day, week in and week out, year by agonizing year, too many pastors try to find solutions for that cancerous tumor spreading in them without success. They heap shame and guilt upon themselves, thinking that a fresh experience with God will end the pain within. I believe in fresh anointing and fresh outpourings of the Holy Spirit. I also believe in the need to find a brother or sister with whom to share our inner load.

What keeps us from sharing? We have all shared what we "do" rather than who we "are" at district retreats and gatherings. The conflict of sharing with others evolves out of a misunderstanding of who we are. In my years of ministry, I have

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encountered so many people in ministry who would talk about themselves through their tasks or jobs in ministry or in relationship to their church. If you asked, "How are you doing?" they would reply: "Great! The church is growing; tithe is increasing; we are doing this, doing that, planning, etc." But that doesn't really answer the question that I asked. I have noticed how difficult it is for a pastor to share how he is personally. The conflict is identity that flows out of DOING versus identity flowing out of BEING.

Where does the pastor go to share what's eating away or nagging him inside? Many of my pastor friends say, "I share everything with my wife." Yet, when I have asked them, "Well, have you talked to her about these feelings or thoughts you're telling me about?" they consistently replied, "Why no! I couldn't do that. What would she think of me as her husband and her pastor?"

The question remains: What are the resources available to the pastor today who needs someone with whom to talk?

First, the best place to begin is with yourself. Are you a good listener? Have you been confronted by a hurting brother and turned away because of the unspoken pain within your own life? If you are willing to share yourself, you will discover a pastor who wants to share as well. Remember, you must learn to listen. You can't listen if you are talking. I would also recommend reading H. Norman Wright's book *Energize Your Life Through Total Communication*. It discusses how to listen with more than just your ears. The more willing I am to listen, without prejudice or judgmental attitudes, the more pastors have shared and want to hear my concerns as well.

Another opportunity is the small-group concert, which works well with pastors too. We use them effectively in the

Pastors face greater emotional stress, depression, feelings of despair, even emotional disturbances, because they don't know what to do with the knot gnawing in the pits of their stomachs.

church for studies and classes, so why not for pastors? Gather together and discuss why you are meeting, the guidelines you will follow, the concepts of confidentiality to which you will adhere, and how you will support one another. It will be the beginning of a rich and fulfilling experience. I have found that as I took the risk and opened myself to others first, they were looking for someone with whom to share, so they have responded with trust and friendship. I meet each week with pastors on Monday afternoons. We call our meeting "Lifesavers." We have shared some very difficult subjects and struggled with each others' burdens. That's biblical, isn't it?

In my work at the hospital, I meet pastors from the community almost every day. They have approached me for help and assistance in dealing with crisis situations, emotions around death events, how to minister to parents who have lost an infant, and how I handle my daily role. I have had pastors ask for my time for personal needs. One young minister said: "I wasn't taught about stillbirths at seminary. What do I do? Will you come into the room with me?"

We talked about his experience right then as well as previous death experiences that opened the door to some personal grief instances that he had never faced nor worked through. I helped him in the recovery work and offered practical helps for ministry to hurting people. Most chaplains make good resource people and serve as good listeners as well. Often pastors have said that I, as a chaplain, am a safe person. I'm not considered part of the district pastoral circle.

I offer a word of caution to those who would be listeners. While prayer is a wonderful experience to share with someone with whom you have built a relationship, I would encourage a

listener not to pray too quickly. The reason for this suggestion is this: when you offer to pray, you are cutting off the one who needs to talk. Prayer requested by a patient means, "I'm finished talking and want you to leave." The offer to pray about this "particular matter" with you makes the statement, "I don't want to listen to this," or "I'm uncomfortable with this," or even, "I don't have time." It's a way to close the door on the person who is talking. Keep your spiritual ears cleared, tuned, and ready for the one who approaches you. You never know when that person may be your listening friend.

Hopefully you can share your struggles and searching with your wife. I have found it strengthened my love for her, increased my appreciation of her insights, and it ended the fantasy that she wasn't aware of the struggles all along. I believe strongly that the best friend you have ought to be your wife. If that isn't so, you may want to develop a friendship with her that will grow into a best friend relationship. I have met very few women who were afraid of a man who is able to share his inner needs and struggles.

I encourage many pastors to work with a Christian counselor. I don't believe it is a sign of weakness to seek trained listening ears from a counselor or Christian therapist. I found great help in dealing with deeper needs of self-identity, struggles with authority and power, being overweight, my relationship with others, my dealing with church boards, and so much more. I found someone who listened without trying to tell me how and what to change. In the process of talking out my feelings, fears, fantasies, I began to see the reality of my own actions. I learned about boundaries, meeting my own expectations and those placed on me by others, and how to take care of my spirit.



I realize many self-help books on the market promise you another gold mine of quick fixes. I've read many of them. I have also discovered that reading in unfamiliar areas gives me opportunity to learn something new about human behavior, how adults learn (that answered many questions about some people not listening during the sermon), and how my theology determines how I preach, teach, and evangelize. I began reading psychology, renewed my work in theology, and struggled through the differing concepts of human development from Freud to the current psychotherapists. I can personally recommend an overall critique of psychotherapy by two Christians: Stanton L. Jones, chairman of the department of psychology at Wheaton College and Wheaton Graduate School; and Richard E. Butman, associate professor of psychology at Wheaton College. The book is titled *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal*. The book gave me a lot to think about and to grow with as I continue daily to listen to people in my work as hospital chaplain, secretary for the District Board of Ministerial Studies, and as a listener to many.

To whom do you talk? With whom do you share your innermost hidden thoughts and awarenesses? It is imperative that you find someone quickly to keep the tumor of your life from overwhelming or overpowering you. It helps if you find someone with a face to talk to, whether another pastor, an old college friend, your wife, a counselor, a small group committed to listening and sharing, reading and learning about yourself and others. My friend, if you find no one with whom you can share, call me. **PM**

# Today's Books for Today's Preachers

## **The Methodist Pentecost: The Wesleyan Holiness Revival 1758-63**

by Charles H. Goodwin  
A Wesley Fellowship paper  
(3 Merlin Close, Crannock,  
WS11 1J.B.), 38 pp.

On a number of bases, I appreciate Charles H. Goodwin's contribution in this carefully researched booklet.

Due to the fact that some American Wesleyan-Holiness scholars in recent years have taught a gradualness in entire sanctification, as well as an instantaneousness, it is heartening to read here a clear teaching of entire sanctification's instantaneousness—a clear teaching also found in Herbert McGonigle's *Scriptural Holiness: The Wesleyan Distinctive*, p. 18. Goodwin speaks of those believers at Otley "who experienced instantaneous" (p. 3) entire sanctification (see also p. 6). It is helpful that Goodwin points out that at the 1746 Conference "sanctification" was said to "denote the gradual death to sin" (p. 6) and that entire sanctification denoted "that instantaneous total death to sin and revival in the love and image of God." Over the years, I have attempted to make that same kind of distinction (see p. 15 of my *Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*).

The details in Goodwin's study are helpful. He speaks of the actual numbers in various local Methodist societies and of an occasional decrease in the numbers.

Goodwin seems to think that

we American scholars such as Melvin Dieter think that there was no Holiness revival until one began in 1835 in America and intensified two or three decades later (see fn., p. 2, etc.). I think, though, when our American scholars say that, they are thinking only of America. Surely all of us realize that a century earlier in England and Ireland, under John and Charles Wesley (and others), a Holiness revival occurred.

It is interesting that Goodwin says that in 1770, after the "decade of revival," there were "nearly 30,000" (p. 5) members of the Methodist societies. I have read that at Wesley's death in 1791 they numbered about 70,000 there. Methodism in America grew much more rapidly—as has, for example, the Church of the Nazarene also.

Interesting also is that, in the revival there, some extremes that Wesley tactfully tended to discourage were similar to practices in Pentecostalism's Faith Movement today: "faith-healing and speaking in tongues" (p. 8), and being "dead" in the Spirit—or "slain in the Spirit," as seems to occur so perfunctorily today, for example, under Benny Hinn.

Charles H. Goodwin recently received a Ph.D. degree from Wolverhampton University for a Methodist history study and has published several scholarly papers. I daresay he is not as familiar to Wesleyan-Holiness scholars in America as he will be as the years pass. **PM**

BY J. KENNETH

GRIDER

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# In a Time of Need

I saw him on *ABC News* tonight: Capt. John Testrake leaning out of the window of his TWA jet talking to reporters while a hijacker waved a gun out the window and around Capt. Testrake's head. Pictures that mesmerized the world some years ago. Pictures of a man who died of cancer today, February 6, 1996. I didn't see those pictures when the rest of the world did.

Hundreds of miles from a television set, I was at Korupun, a small valley tucked into the Snow Mountain Range of Irian Jaya, Indonesia. The people at Korupun, the Kimyals, knew nothing of world politics. Their world revolved around raising their pigs, growing their sweet potatoes, and gathering firewood and materials needed to build their thatch-roofed huts. They had bows and arrows, not guns.

I followed the news of the hijacking by shortwave radio, listening to the Voice of America and the BBC World Service.

But when I saw Capt. Testrake on the TV screen tonight, it wasn't the memories of the hijacking that those images invoked. My memories of him are much more personal of a few days five and a half years ago. The news story mentioned that after his retirement, John Testrake identified himself with a Christian flying service helping people all over the world. That was the John Testrake I remember.

My memories of John take place at Korupun. John Testrake

and his wife, Phyllis, were in Irian Jaya as part of a tour they were doing for Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF), seeing first-hand MAF's work so they could better describe it to MAF's friends and supporters. MAF asked me if the Testrakes could come to Korupun for a few days to see what a truly remote place was like and to experience what a lifeline MAF was to us. I was delighted to have them come.

For nearly a month I had been taking care of the 12-year-old triplet daughters of friends while the girls' parents visited in Java, brushing up on their Indonesian. These were not doll and tea-party girls. Oh, no. Even taking them on two-hour hikes around the mountains didn't use up all their energy. The Testrakes came toward the end of the month; I was glad not only to see them but also to have another diversion for the girls. My missionary colleague, a nurse, Jessie, was on vacation; so I was handling the girls on my own steam, which was losing more and more of its heat by the day.

Karen, Kristine, and Kelsie were delighted to help organize a pig feast for the Testrakes and to take them around the valley, showing them the sights of villages, rivers, waterfalls, and mountain paths. I was glad they had someone else with whom to go!

In only a week, the girls would leave for home on the north coast. Then I could rest. Why was I so tired? Sure, they were active girls, but I used to be able to han-

dle that kind of activity and more. What was wrong with me?

The Testrakes came on Wednesday and were supposed to leave on Friday. But we were fogged in. The same on Saturday. MAF only does emergency flights on Sundays, so they would have to wait until Monday for their flight out—and to hope weather allowed it.

Actually, it was the Lord, not the weather, that kept them there. After all of our hikes on the mountains, when I would silently pray that none of the girls would fall down a cliff and break something, it happened in my yard. At dusk Saturday, Karen was doing cartwheels on the grass, landed wrong, and broke a leg. I heard it pop. Immediately I sent out a call for Sabbil, the clinic worker that Jessie had recently trained in setting of bones. I sent a note up to Jessie's house at the top of the airstrip, where the Testrakes were staying. Could John please come down and help us with Karen? Sabbil, John, and Semia, the local pastor, all arrived. Sabbil confirmed that Karen's leg was broken. He told me he'd make a splint. Would John help? Sabbil measured Karen's leg, then the men went off to make a boxlike splint. Phyllis cooked supper. I couldn't handle that now.

I got on the communications radio and contacted a missionary doctor. All I could do was try to keep Karen comfortable for the night and call MAF as soon as it became light in the morning. Karen would have to be flown to a mission hospital at Mulia, 200 miles away. Dr. Buce and his wife, Janet, would be happy to keep Karen in their home after he cast her leg. Karen knew and liked Dr. Buce and Janet. Karen would be fine and well cared for. Kelsie, Kristine, and I would follow our original plan to fly out to Sentani on Wednesday. But I felt responsible; the girls were in my care. I really ought to stay with Karen; all of us should fly to Mulia in the morning. But I was exhausted; I knew I could not stay up half the

BY ELINOR YOUNG

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CHATTAROY,  
WASHINGTON





night getting myself and the girls packed and ready. I just couldn't do it. Why not? Last year I could have handled it. What was wrong with me? Why was I being so irresponsible? Why couldn't I do it?

John Testrake was wonderful. I suppose that next to the stress of the hijacking, this was small peanuts. But this time he wasn't captain—and didn't try to be. Sabbil, a simple man who didn't even have a grade school education, was in charge. John followed his instructions. With respect. They brought the finished splint in. John and Semia held Karen while Sabbil pulled her leg to align the bone up and bind it into the splint. John, the airline captain, a man who had seen the world and whose courage had been supremely tested, was impressed. He treated Sabbil like the equal he was in his world.

Karen experienced great pain through the night. Kristine, Kelsie, and I didn't get much sleep either.

In the morning I called MAF

*Last year  
I could  
have  
handled it.  
What was  
wrong with  
me?*

and told them of our emergency. The fog was gone, the sun was shining, and there was no wind. Perfect for the plane to come in. An MAF pilot's wife who is a nurse came along to take care of Karen during the two-hour flight. Karen's sisters cried. We waved good-bye and fell silent as the plane lifted off our little grass and gravel airstrip.

Later that day, Dr. Buce told me that Sabbil had done a perfect job. The X ray showed that the bone was aligned up perfectly. He didn't have to set it further, only cast it. It was so good to have the Testrakes there to share my relief and to comfort me.

But the guilty questions still echoed in my head. Over and over, every day and even on the flight to Sentani on Wednesday. "Why couldn't I have gone with Karen? What was wrong with me?"

A year later I was the one with legs in great pain. I couldn't walk without crutches now. I was being flown back to the

United States for medical evaluation. A year after that, I was well practiced in a scooter and in using a free-swinging arm support to hold my arm in order to brush my teeth and put on my makeup.

Now I knew what had been wrong with me. I had post-polio syndrome and was weakening fast.

The memory that tonight's news piece brought to my mind is not of a hijacking, but of a couple the Lord sent along to help me in a situation I did not have the strength to handle alone—and didn't know why. Part of it is melancholy, but part makes me smile—the part about how God knew and provided. And He still does. **PM**

The author is now a member of Polio Experience Network, a Christian organization seeking to give medical information, emotional support, and spiritual counseling to survivors of polio now faced with post-polio syndrome. For more information about PEN, write to 24104 N. Jim Hill Rd., Chattaroy, WA 99003, or E-mail at [elinor@mt.arias.net](mailto:elinor@mt.arias.net).

# A Christian Witness at Abortion Clinics

There are those claiming to be Christian who put bullets into doctors working at abortion clinics.

There are those who claim to be followers of Jesus who burn down clinics.

There are those who carry the banner of the Cross and scream at women going into abortion centers.

None of this is Christian. This is not the example that Jesus set.

The only time that Jesus "got physical" occurred in the house of His own religion. He turned over the money tables and sent doves flying because the place of prayer had been turned into a place of cheating.

Yet when Jesus left the sanctuary for the marketplace, He refused to knock into anything with fist or raised arm.

Even when His cousin, John the Baptist, was beheaded for scolding Herod for sleeping with a woman not his wife, Jesus did not stage a revolution of armed might. Instead He went into the next village to heal the sick.

Why did Jesus act this way? Because He would never have underwritten violence as a mode for building His kingdom. His weaponry was truth in love. Period.

Jesus knew that judgment would come from heaven upon those doing evil. In the meantime, He would leave the vengeance with heaven while continuing His mission of compassion.

This is the approach on mis-

sion stations globally. Missionaries would never think of burning down another religion's temple or putting a bullet into the devotees of another teaching.

Christian missionaries, working against awesome odds, go forth with truth in love. They win converts to Christianity by godly example and compassion.

How can those who represent Christ in America do anything other than what their counterparts are doing around the world? It is the same gospel, the same Cross, the same message.

Some within the pro-life movement are condoning violence. They work up the emotions to take vengeance into their own hands. They encourage one another to let loose with more hurt and maiming.

Of course, they conclude that this is right, since killing is going on in the abortion clinics. Yet two wrongs do not make a right. Jesus never confronted violence with more violence. He confronted violence—even His own death on the Cross—with truth in love.

Other pro-lifers conclude that truth in love is not combative enough, strong enough, forceful enough. In so thinking, they are playing the part of God.

Let God be God! Let Him bring the condemnation. Let Him see through His eternal vengeance. His way is far superior to any human, carnal battling. All that Christians are called to do is

love our enemies, do good to those who would malign us, and pray for those who spitefully use us (see Matt. 5:44, KJV).

Wimpy? Try it! It takes all the strength you can muster. It is far more courageous than simply walloping the foe in the teeth.

How can antiabortionists express their opinions outside abortion clinics?

They can stand in prayer. They can sing forth the songs of deliverance. They can hold signs of light, life, and love. They can invite dialogue with those entering the clinics. They can distribute literature.

Is this all? This is enough. Let the power of God settle upon such a witness. Let God carry the heavier weight of the cause. Let eternity honor your efforts.

When Christians act like Christ, then they can truthfully label themselves "Christians." However, when people who call themselves "Christians" act in an un-Christlike manner, they forfeit the title.

It is time for Christians to study again the methods of Jesus when dealing with societal issues. His way is the best way. His way is the only way if one calls oneself Christian.

BY J. GRANT  
SWANK JR.  
Pastor  
WINDHAM, MAINE



# What's Wrong with My Son?

## A Mother's Discovery of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

You are not nurturing your son," the psychologist informed me in his matter-of-fact tone. I didn't hear much after that; I just sat there—stunned. His piercing words kept echoing in my mind and driving the pain deeper and deeper into my heart. I cried all the way home and for many days after that. I was devastated.

We had adopted our children three years earlier, after unsuccessful attempts to have our own. We were prepared to expand the dimensions of our lives to include children—my husband and I were serving in our first pastorate, college and seminary were behind us, and we had read all of the parenting books! When we prayed about whether or not to adopt these two specific children, the Lord gave me Ps. 34:11: "Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD." What an answer! The verse even said "children," instead of "child"! I believed this verse bestowed on us the responsibility of raising these two children in the love of Christ. So I considered them a precious gift from

God. With all my heart, I invested myself in motherhood.

Our son, Mark, was bright and energetic when he came to live with us at the age of four. But he had a hard time settling down when he needed to. We thought he was just restless and insecure from being in 10 foster homes prior to his placement with us. Our daughter was delayed in speech but otherwise seemed to be a fairly typical two-year-old.

When Mark started attending school, his problems increased. He couldn't cope with the stimulation of so many other children and the new expectations to sit still and pay attention in class. By the time he reached second grade, his problems escalated; he was lying and stealing in addition to his previous misbehaviors. Teaching him the Ten Commandments didn't help! We decided to take him to the children's hospital to see what the "experts" could tell us.

Thus we arrived at the office of the psychologist who had decided that I was the problem. An apology from him the following week did not heal the gaping wound in my spirit and my

heart. I knew from a mother's deep instinct that there was something wrong with my son. I also knew that I was not responsible for it. But I had no other children who could "demonstrate" that I was a good mother. I did tell the doctors that, although I didn't claim to be perfect, I knew I was doing a lot of the right things, and there must be some problem with Mark's reception of my nurturing. They admitted that could be true, but didn't believe in counseling children on a long-term basis; so they counseled us—a pastor and a teacher who teach parenting classes—on parenting techniques. When this didn't change the situation, they finally agreed that there wasn't much more they could do for us.

The doctors did recommend that we try medication for Mark to see if it would help. We were hesitant to "drug" our son, but it became obvious in his third



grade year that he wasn't going to be able to stay in school without some kind of help. Medication doesn't benefit all the children who try it, but it was a major help to Mark. He still had behavioral problems, but he was more manageable with medication. We also pursued other possible remedies—allergy drops, chiropractic adjustments, neurotransmitters, vitamins and other natural supplements. Some of these didn't seem to help at all, while others had positive bene-

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Institute, assistant  
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fit; but they only provided a few pieces of the puzzle. We couldn't identify what else was wrong.

Mark was progressing academically; he tested in the normal-to-high range on the IQ scale, and he never failed a subject or grade. But he was still having major problems in relationships, obeying the rules, lying, and stealing. He was extremely manipulative, and there were repeated, covert power struggles. Mark was very impulsive. When we were not directly supervising him, our standards and rules didn't influence his behavior. He rarely admitted guilt. He sounded and looked so innocent that it was difficult not to believe him, but he left a trail of trouble, chaos, and angry victims. He didn't seem to connect past consequences with his current behavior, so we dealt with the same problems and issues over and over again. When I asked him why he did something wrong, he would answer, "I don't know." When I tried to "talk him through" a misbehavior, he just looked at me with vacant eyes. He was smart enough to guess what I wanted him to say, but I realized that he had no mental process to evaluate his actions.

It was exhausting. There was never enough time, love, and attention to fulfill his insatiable needs. I dreaded the ring of the phone for fear it was a school official with yet another crisis relating to Mark. I had to have my purse in sight all the time, or money would be missing. Any possession of ours that caught his attention was at risk of disappearing. His apparent love for us had no regulating effect on his behavior. I was embarrassed to ask friends to take care of him when we had to be out of town because I never knew what he might do.

The longer it was between crises, the worse the catastrophe was when it hit. Sometimes it wasn't that he was able to behave himself for a significant period of time, but that he was bet-

ter able to conceal his misbehavior. Then suddenly we would find out what all he had been doing. Face-to-face with us he was a happy, cooperative child—a major reason why his hidden offenses seemed so unbelievable and surreal. Yet an ominous wake of trauma and chaos grew ever larger and was evident everywhere he spent an extended length of time. Friends and relatives who had only short-term or infrequent contact with him did not understand our frustration and tension. He would innocently deny even misbehavior that I actually witnessed. At times I would think, "One of us is crazy, and I'm not sure who!"

I was investing all I had, while the situation continued to deteriorate. There was extreme conflict between the children. We placed our daughter in a private school to give her some space of her own. This helped during school hours, but the tension was still high at home. When Mark reached the sixth grade, I was so totally overwhelmed that I would cry whenever I thought about the kids. At times I found it difficult to even breathe, with the weight of frustration, pain, and anger pressing on my chest.

We eventually found a doctor who was a specialist in Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). He diagnosed Mark with ADHD and Conduct Disorder. At first we thought we had found the answer. But aside from increasing Mark's dosage of medication, the doctor could only sympathize and encourage us to keep doing what we were doing. Another piece of the puzzle fell into place, but we still didn't have the whole picture.

Two years later, when Mark was in eighth grade, he stopped trying (it appeared) to live by the rules at school and wasn't doing much better at home. He was in danger of expulsion from school. We also found out that

our daughter had bruises from his physical abuse. We gave him an ultimatum that if he did not make more effort to cooperate and live within the rules, he could not continue to live with us. We began gathering information about residential treatment.

Mark appeared to be doing better, but, as usual, it was an uneasy lull as we wondered when the next crisis would come and how bad it might be. Little did we guess just how devastating it would be. In September of that year, 1990, at the age of 14, he was arrested on two felony counts of attempted rape. Mark never returned to our home after the night of the arrest. His offenses were the last sign that his needs were far beyond our capabilities and resources to control or contain. Our consistent love, discipline, and Christian instruction had not changed this child we had taken into our family. His crash into this level of degradation wreaked havoc on all of us. My husband, my daughter, and I suffered through his trial, conviction, and sentencing. We reeled from the grief and pain; at times I wondered if I could survive, or if my family would fall apart. Mark, however, was conspicuously unperturbed about the whole process and his lengthy sentence in the juvenile justice system.

A few months after Mark's trial, my husband and I heard a TV program on fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). The behaviors they were describing fit our son—not connecting cause and effect, not learning from experience, not having remorse, and so on. He had been, and continued

His  
piercing  
words kept  
echoing in  
my mind  
and driving  
the pain  
deeper and  
deeper into  
my heart.



to be, small for his age, which is another diagnostic criteria of FAS. But the facial characteristics they described didn't match our son's. So he had two out of the three characteristics of FAS. The program also mentioned fetal alcohol effects (FAE) where some, but not all, of these characteristics are present. The problem was that both of these conditions were caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol. We did not know if our children had been prenatally exposed. Since we had adopted them through the state of Washington, we requested more facts about our children's medical and psychological history. The records we received in response documented their birth mother's use of alcohol and other drugs.

We subsequently found out that the pattern of facial characteristics associated with FAS are frequently outgrown during, if not before, adolescence. Researchers also estimate that approximately half of the individuals with this disability have normal-to-high IQ, as our son does. So we requested that Mark be evaluated. Since we were not able to be present for the exam, we sent the documentation of his birth mother's alcohol abuse and pictures of him at younger ages to assess his earlier facial features. As a result, in May of 1992, Mark was diagnosed with FAS. Finally, we had a full picture of Mark's problems—he has permanent brain damage caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol.

The relief at knowing the cause of the stress and trauma we had been through was tremendous. I could finally lay to rest the accusation that I was the source of Mark's severe problems. The diagnosis told us that he had critical, organic brain damage resulting in reasoning and judgment deficits, which he could not change. We were then able to set realistic expectations for him, which helped take the pressure off him too.

Our  
consistent  
love,  
discipline,  
and  
Christian  
instruction  
had not  
changed  
this child  
we had  
taken into  
our family.

But learning about FAS was also the beginning of our long journey of grief and pain in the realization that our son has a permanent disability for which there is no cure. It has only been by the strength and grace of God that my sanity and our marriage has survived. Ironically the same psalm (34) that the Lord gave me when we were considering adoption also says in verse 18, "The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." God has brought depth and dimension to our faith, trust, love, and commitment to Him and to each other.

The last few years have brought other redeeming values to our grief and pain. I am currently involved in FAS/FAE education, advocacy, and support on behalf of individuals and their families. Since there has been very little information about FAS/FAE in Christian literature, I believe there are many good Christian parents who still do not know what is wrong with their children and don't know where to turn. If we had been able to identify Mark's disability when he was 4 instead of 16, our family could have been spared a considerable amount of trauma and pain. If you would like more information about fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effects, please write to: The FAS Family Resource Institute, P.O. Box 2525, Lynnwood, WA 98036; or call 206-531-2878. In Washington State, you may call 1-800-999-3429.

Those of us who are truly committed to Christ can continue to walk in His strength, instead of being crippled by catastrophe. Each new crisis (yes, they continue!) gives us opportunity to utilize more of God's strength. "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. . . . They go from strength to strength [instead of crisis to crisis], till each appears before God in Zion" (Ps. 84:5, 7). **PM**

God respects  
not the arithmetic of our  
prayers,  
how many they are;  
not the rhetoric of our  
prayers,  
how elegant they are;  
not the music of our prayers,  
how melodious they are;  
not the logic of our prayers,  
how methodical they are;  
but the sincerity of our  
prayers,  
how heart-sprung they  
are.

—Anon.

# Don't Listen to Your Fears

Jack Hayford has written a delightful book, *Glorious Morning!* in which he takes his readers on a journey to the Resurrection moment. In one section he offers this advice:

Don't give a hearing to those shadows that come against you. Don't open the door to those fears that cause you to feel despair, discouragement, and defeat. And when those lying voices want to get you on the line and say, "You can't live with this anymore," hang up the phone! How often we listen to the bombardment of that garbage from hell rather than to our Lord who says, "I have high plans for you" ([Sisters, Oreg.: Multnomah Books, 1996], 126).

Every pastor welcomes such advice. In any ministry to people, regardless of size, salary, or staff, there are "shadows that come up against you." Some shout loudly. A few nibble in quiet, devastating ways. Most bring pain and frustration. Hayford advises that we not "open the door to those fears that cause you to feel despair, discouragement, and defeat." Good advice, but hard to do.

Ministering in human vessels means all the human factors are alive—fear, intimidation, frustration, anger, to name but a few. The enemy always knows which of these is ringing the loudest. He knows where we are vulnerable, hurting, weak, fearful.

Is there any hope? Must we be victims, always, to the "shadows that come against" us? There is hope!

Let me suggest three avenues of hope. One, "**talk with the Lord.**" We must communicate and commune with the One who has provided for our victory.

Prayer keeps alive our relationship with God. Prayer deters the fears that invade and the despair that lurks in the shadows. But prayer bathes the soul with "his incomparably great power for us" (Eph. 1:19), helping us to see the future, to grasp hope, and to move forward. Hayford makes a pertinent point: "How often we listen to the bombardment of that garbage from hell rather than to our Lord who says, 'I have high plans for you'" (ibid.). God's high plans more than compensate for any garbage people can throw our way. So, pastor, be encouraged—prayer is a great resource.

The second avenue of hope is "**talk to someone.**" Test the "shadows that come against you" by bouncing them off other people. Too often we take the word of one person as the final word. It may not be true in any sense of the word. Or, it may have a grain of truth from which one can gain knowledge. Whatever may be the case, it is good to get others' opinions. Share with someone who is objective, honest, and caring. The secret is to choose wise people with whom to share. Sometimes friendship is blind, defensive, and protective.

Seek someone who will be honest yet helpful, caring yet fair. The goal is not to ignore the shadows, but to ignore what is false.

The third avenue of hope is "**talk to yourself.**" Strange advice, perhaps, but one must know the inner heart if he or she is to win the battle against the "shadows" and against the "fears." We must be in constant dialogue with our heart and mind about our core values, our disciplines, our principles, our actions, our attitudes, to name a few. We must be searching for "truth North" on the compass of our souls. This no doubt happens in nearly every life. But what does not happen, too often, is a follow-through to our dialogue. Most of us know what we need to do to make life better, but often are not good at implementation and change.

Self-strategy is so important in our war against the enemy. Without discipline and a strategy for living, empowered by the Holy Spirit, one is prone to "open the door" and let the fears and criticisms splash their ugly venom on our hearts. Such venom leads to "despair, discouragement, and defeat" and all the other sad baggage related to the enemy. Unless we are prepared, strengthened against such invasions, and equipped to do battle, we will "open the door" at each visit. But, pastor, be encouraged—you are either your own worst enemy or your best friend. Do yourself a favor. Remind yourself that God has great "plans for you," and that He will be your greatest and strongest Companion in helping you realize those plans.

If you are going through the long night of the soul, take courage—God is walking with you. He will not abandon you but wants to help you even more than you want to help yourself. He has called you; He will strengthen you; He will see you through to victory. It all waits to be claimed by you!

BY C. NEIL STRAIT  
District  
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Michigan District,  
Church of the  
Nazarene  
GRAND RAPIDS,  
MICHIGAN





Perplexed by evolution, the monkey asked,

# “Am I My Keeper’s Brother?”

**Help for the Christian in the War over Creation: The Doctrine of Continuing Creation (*creatio continua*)**

These days many Christians find themselves in the midst of a crisis over how to understand the creation of the world. That so many find themselves in this crisis may come as a surprise. Modernists expected that the more-than-century-old debate between creationists and Darwinian evolutionists would have been won long ago by the last-named. These modernists assumed it was inevitable that the creation “myth” would be trampled, since other ancient stories about our world have been trampled in the “triumphant march of science.” Unexpectedly, these same modernists are now beginning to wonder if the Darwinian theory of evolution is in danger of being trampled in the stampede of anti-evolutionists galloping to expose the flaws in Darwin’s theory!

Many of the leaders in this bid to topple the edifice of evolution have embraced what has come to be known as “creation science.” To be sure, Christians are eager to embrace a theory of creation that finds a major place for the handiwork of God. However, some Christians find the method of biblical interpretation used to set the parameters for the creation sci-

ence program inadequate and narrow. Many of these Christians know of no alternative theory to these two. Consequently, these Christians find themselves in crisis, caught in the crossfire as both Darwinian evolutionists and creation scientists fire their volleys in this war over creation.

In what follows, I attempt to offer help for the Christian who desires peace of mind and heart in the midst of this creation war.

## Flaws in the Darwinian Theory of Evolution and in Creation Science

Although it is not my intent to delve deeply into the various flaws in both the Darwinian theory of evolution and creation science, allow me to note briefly a few so that the discussion that follows will illuminate rather than dim the already darkened war zone.

To begin, the **Darwinian theory of evolution is unacceptable** to a Christian if it is made to substitute for biblical and theological interpretations of existence. There is little doubt that a Christian will find any theory unsuitable that is atheistic. Although Darwin was probably a deist, the theory he propounds has no place for the activity of God, and proponents of it readily recognize its atheistic bent.

Second, the absence of purpose in Darwin’s evolutionary scheme presents a problem to those who believe there is a de-

gree of order and design in creation. The lack of purpose in the Darwinian theory leads to reductionism, in that it asserts that all things are finally explainable by bits of matter and the laws of physics that govern them.<sup>1</sup> A Christian is inclined to believe that the created order involves more than mindless mechanism.

Third, a major empirical obstacle still exists preventing the Darwinian theory of evolution from being confirmed. The obstacle: there are few if any fossils in the geological record to substantiate the theory that our world is the result of a gradual evolution. In spite of the fact that probably 99.9 percent of the paleontological work has been carried out since 1860, the fossil record is about as discontinuous as it was when Darwin was writing *The Origin of Species*.<sup>2</sup> Since Darwin’s theory is based upon micromutations, geologists ought to have found numerous intermediary species in the fossil record. They have found few if any.

Fourth, major complications exist in Darwin’s premise that evolution is gradual because of the micromutations that are its basis. In order for a mutation to be preserved, it must serve the survival interest of the organism. However, to suggest that the eye is the product of mutation, within an otherwise Darwinian framework, is to suggest that several million mutations would have to occur successfully, simultaneously, and at random.

It is difficult to explain how millions of micromutations toward a partial eye serves any purpose as an intermediary stage of the evolution of a species. After all, 5 percent of an eye does not offer 5 percent vision. So why should this series of mutations persist? Why should the mutations continue to the next 10 percent? In addition, the existence of both a male and a female with 5 percent of an eye, a necessity if the completed mutation is to be passed on to succeeding generations, is even less likely. Such a vastly complex set of mu-

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tations would seem to require God. Needless to say, the more the discussion of evolution turns toward how such macromutations could occur, the less it sounds like Darwin's theory of evolution!

In sum, Darwin's theory of evolution not only is unacceptable to the Christian believer on theological grounds but also has fallen on hard times for its failure to be substantiated empirically.

When discussing why **the creation science program is inadequate**, the discussion must center around what creation scientists believe to be the foundation of the work: the Bible. Two basic flaws in this regard are (1) the inadequate method of interpretation used by creation scientists and (2) the incorrect role the Bible plays for creation science.

One of the foremost spokespersons for the creation science program, Henry M. Morris, writes: "The biblical record, accepted in its natural and literal sense, gives the only scientific and satisfying account of the origin of all things."<sup>3</sup> He continues elsewhere saying that "the creation account is clear, definite, sequential, and matter-of-fact, giving every appearance of straightforward historical narrative."<sup>4</sup> These two statements make up the core of a creation scientist's objection to Darwin's theory and serve to demonstrate how creation scientists use and interpret the Bible.

Problems arise when anyone insists that the Bible always be interpreted literally. C. S. Cowles noted that God's truth is frequently communicated throughout Scripture by way of such literary devices as metaphor, simile, poetry, parable, personification, hyperbole, fable, apocalyptic, and all sorts of other symbolic and figurative language.<sup>5</sup> Why should the Genesis creation account be interpreted literally, especially since there could have been no human eyewitnesses?

For those who invariably inter-

pret the Bible literally, words mean one thing and one thing only. "They don't bristle with meanings and possibilities; they are bald and clean-shaven. Literal clarity and simplicity, to be sure, offer a kind of security in a world (or Bible) where otherwise issues seem incorrigibly complex, ambiguous, and muddy," writes biblical scholar Conrad Hyers. "Literalism diverts attention from, as well as flattening out, the symbolic depth and multidimensionality of the biblical texts."<sup>6</sup> Interpreting Genesis literally can mean that the celebration of God's creative and saving activity is neglected.

Creation scientists' insistence that Genesis, and other relevant passages of Scripture, be interpreted literally often means ignoring the most recent biblical and religious studies. Apparently creation scientists believe that the more recent and sophisticated interpretation of Scripture done by trained scholars is, for the most part, unnecessary. They are in conflict with the stance on biblical interpretation characteristically maintained by biblical scholars and theological schools in the mainstream of Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Judaism, by scholars labeled "conservative" and scholars labeled "liberal."

In addition, creation scientists err when they make the jump from asserting that the Bible has something meaningful to say about the origination of the world to asserting that the Bible is the ultimate science book. Ian Barbour writes, "By treating it as if it were a book of science ahead of its times, we tend to neglect both the human experiences that lie behind it and the theological affirmations it makes."<sup>7</sup>

What we call "science" has changed over time. What science is understood to be today is not the same as it was understood to be in the past, nor what it could have been understood to be by the author of Genesis. The Genesis accounts are theological affir-

mations not meant to be interpreted as 20th-century biological or geological facts. The Bible does not make statements that are of the same order and intent as modern scientific statements. Even if creation scientists somehow harmonized what scientists today are saying with a literal interpretation of Genesis, their work would reject the vast majority of biblical scholarship and theological reflection of the past, let alone put the Bible out of harmony with the scientific work of almost every other time and culture.<sup>8</sup>

The stories of Copernicus and Galileo, two famous astronomers, served as good illustrations of how Christendom can be humiliated as a result of treating the Bible like a science book. Since Ps. 104:5 (KJV) states that the Lord "laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever," the literal interpretation meant that earth does not move. Galileo's insistence that the earth was not the center of the universe, a discovery made by Copernicus earlier, resulted in Galileo receiving church discipline. His statement concerning the proper role of Scripture is now oft quoted: "The intention of the Holy [Spirit] is to teach us how one goes to heaven, not how the heaven goes."<sup>9</sup>

What, then, is the role of the Bible? Pope John Paul II repeats what has been an orthodox understanding of the role of the Bible: to bring us to salvation through right relationship with God. He writes, "The Bible itself speaks to us of the origin of the universe and its make-up, not in order to provide us a scientific treatise, but in order to state the correct relationship of man with God and the universe."<sup>10</sup> The Church of the Nazarene has a similar doctrinal statement emphasizing that the role of the Scripture is to reveal those things "necessary to our salvation."

In sum, creation scientists have chosen an inadequate, incorrect, and divisive approach to Scripture. If the intent of the Bi-

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volleys.

ble is to bring about the salvation of the world, then erroneous interpretation and use of the Bible will undoubtedly thwart that intent. Because of this, the creation science program is inadequate for many Christians.

What options are left for a Christian? The lack of a good theory for how the universe was/is created creates a real crisis for some Christians. It isn't a popular position to be in! On one side, Darwinian scientists are pressing a theory that simply does not have sufficient evidence to back it and is atheistic. On the other hand, creation scientists argue for an interpretation of Scripture that is not appropriate, and they use the Bible in a role for which it is not suited.

Alternative theories concerning the creation of the world, such as theistic evolution or progressive creation, are more adequate for many Christians. However, instead of spending a great deal of space developing one of these alternative theories thoroughly, allow me to emphasize a neglected doctrine of Christianity having to do with God's constantly creative action. My hope is that this often neglected doctrine will serve as a means of peace and lucidity for a Christian existing amid the volleys fired in the war over creation.

#### **Creatio Continua: a Neglected Christian Doctrine**

"When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void" is the *New Revised Standard Version's* marginal rendering of the opening passage of Genesis 1 (emphasis mine). The emphasis upon "began to create" is a reminder of the teaching found in Christianity that God is continually creating. It appears that both Darwinists and creation scientists largely ignore, dismiss, or neglect this Early Church doctrine.

#### **Continuing Creation**

Old Testament scholar Edmund Jacob claims that the old-

er biblical texts "draw much less distinction between the creation and the conservation of the world, and make it possible for us to speak of a *creatio continua*."<sup>11</sup> The biblical accounts are understood to describe God's activity within history, and that activity is often the creating, sustaining, and renewing of life as the "living God." The biblical image of God as Spirit helps when discussing His immanence in the world as continual creating: "When you send your Spirit, they are created" (Ps. 104:30). A key element in the early formulation of the continual creation doctrine was also the Jewish understanding of God's ability to periodically generate a new covenant with His people: "I will do a new thing."

In the New Testament, the doctrine of continuing creation is implied in the coming of Christ. Richard Overman explains that "everything is focused in Christ, through whom God creates, sustains, and saves his world."<sup>12</sup> The writer of Hebrews illustrates what Overman states: "[Christ] is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word" (1:3, NRSV). The Early Church expressed the doctrine in their talk about new creation and God making all things new.

Prominent historian Jaroslav Pelikan notes that the theme of continuing creation has been present, although subordinate, in the Christian faith throughout the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment. He agrees that it should assume greater importance today for a Christian considering the origin of the universe, theories of evolution, and contemporary science.<sup>13</sup>

Today, Arthur Peacocke emphasizes the importance of the doctrine, since "we must conceive of God as creating in the whole process from beginning to end, through and through, or he cannot be involved at all."<sup>14</sup> For, as H.

Ray Dunning asserts, "God sustains the creation so that its continued existence is moment by moment dependent upon His activity."<sup>15</sup> Finally, Jurgen Moltmann writes: "The whole creation is a fabric woven and shot through by the efficacies of the Spirit. Through his Spirit God is present in the very structures of matter."<sup>16</sup>

#### **The Immanence of God**

The doctrine of continuing creation brings to the forefront the theme of God's immanence and participation in the emerging universe. What both the Darwinian evolutionists and creation scientists have in common in their approach to the question of creation is an image of God that seems to deny radical immanence. A new stress is required upon the immanence of God in light of the scientific understanding of the world and in light of the ancient biblical and theological record. Albert Einstein, though far from affirming an orthodox Christian theology, expressed the relevance of a notion of God who is immanent and working in the natural order of things. He replied when asked if he believed in God, "I believe in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists."<sup>17</sup>

The biblical writers portray God as both transcendent and immanent relative to creation. For example:

I can *never* be lost to your Spirit! I can *never* get away from my God! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there. If I ride the morning winds to the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, your strength will support me (*Ps. 139:7-10, TLB*).

These Jews believed that God was involved personally in the "concrete details of life."<sup>18</sup> In the New Testament, Luke attributes to Paul the statement that God is immanent in Paul's address to the audience at Athens: "[God] is not far from each one of us,

"The Bible speaks of the origin of the universe and its makeup in order to state the correct relationship of man with God and the universe."

for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring'" (Acts 17:27-28, RSV).

In our own tradition, John Wesley emphasized the creative, immanent God: "God acts everywhere, and therefore is everywhere; for it is an utter impossibility that any being, created or uncreated, should work where it is not. God acts in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, throughout the whole compass of his creation."<sup>19</sup>

Philosophers of religion have called the immanent and transcendent nature of God "panentheistic" [not "pantheistic"]. By this they mean that God is in the world, but that God is more than the world. God transcends the world but is immanent in the world in each event. In this way, God is present in all nature, not just periodically or in an extraordinary fashion. Peacocke summarizes: "Because there is no part of the world where God is not active and present in the events and processes themselves, and because there is infinitely more to God's being than the world, we could say that the world is *in* God, that there is nothing in the world *not* in God."<sup>20</sup>

In reference to the philosophical objections to the Darwinian theory of evolution, a panentheistic notion of God's action in the world allows for a discussion of the state of existence based upon the freedom evident in creation. The language of both design and randomness, purpose and purposelessness, is appropriate to describe the action of creation. A Christian who affirms God's immanence, in conjunction with the limited freedom inherent to all, has a valuable tool in the discussion of the origin of life, God's continual creation, and why there is a rejection of God's purposes. In addition, the doctrine of God's immanence offers a Christian a theistic alternative to the materialistic belief that all reality is reducible to lifeless

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matter. It may be that at the inanimate level God's action is almost entirely as Sustainer or Maintainer. At the higher levels of complexity in nature God, as Wesley writes, "sweetly influences"<sup>21</sup> an entity and is affected by the entity.

#### Mechanism and Naturalism

An emphasis upon the immanence of God and upon His continuing creation compels us to reconsider what should be called "natural." Reclaiming naturalism from the primarily materialistic/atheistic/mechanistic manner in which it is used today can help us remember that God is immanent in all creation. In this naturalism, what is "natural" includes the presence of God.

Unfortunately, both Darwinian evolutionists and creation scientists appear to support a mechanistic conception of the world. Darwinism sees the world as a machine growing and running on its own, while creation scientists seem to see it as a machine that was created around 10,000 to 12,000 years ago by a shrewd Designer who now needs only to tinker with it periodically.

The Darwinian theory of evolution can be understood to be a product of the deistic impulse that arose in the Enlightenment. Deism arose in the 17th and 18th centuries as modern scientists became confident that God was not presently active in nature, since what was previously understood to be miraculous was given a scientific explanation. God's absence from the world was implied in the thought of Greek-influenced theologians who had insisted that God was unchanging, though the First Cause. In this way, the Greek vision of God was as an ultimate metaphysical principle, obscuring the biblical sense of a God creatively present at all times and in all events. This Greek formulation of Deity unfortunately became the common sense of many Christians in recent centuries as they sought to respond

to evolution. It also helped establish a philosophy of science based upon mechanism.

Isaac Newton was influential in the Enlightenment's shift toward a mechanistic conception of the universe. Most creation scientists see Newton as an advocate of their own supernaturalistic program. Newton expounded the belief that all of reality is reducible to lifeless atoms that operated mechanically. This belief led later Newtonians to believe God was rarely active in nature. This mechanistic conception is perhaps one reason creation scientists today underemphasize the doctrine of divine immanence. Ironically, Newton had apprehensions about his own mechanistic view, noting that it implicitly led to either atheism or deism!

It is possible to affirm a form of naturalism without also affirming materialism, atheism, mechanism, or Darwinism. Peacocke writes that "God's transcendence over the world in which he is immanent implies that he expresses his intentions within the causal nexus of the natural world."<sup>22</sup> In other words, the uniform divine causation is not an interruption of the natural but is a part of the natural. Elsewhere Barbour states: "God creates in and through the processes of the natural world that science unveils."<sup>23</sup>

This naturalism accounts for freedom and limits, chaos and order, and the activity of God in creation. God is in nature and its processes—even if His purposes must be regarded as not always fully implemented in a world of apparently partially free agents. Naturalism understood as based upon divine activity can also encourage us to treat creation more lovingly. Both Darwinists and creation scientists have implicitly advocated an attitude toward nature that has been destructive. Creation scientists talk about subduing creation, and Darwinians about the survival of the fittest. A more adequate ap-

proach to creation is necessary for the Christian concerned about the future of the planet.

### Two Alternative Theories

Although it is not the basic intent of this article to provide a comprehensive delineation of a more satisfactory theory than the inadequate ones already discussed, let me briefly outline two theories that are more helpful for Christians.

A conception of creation based upon the metaphysical system outlined by A. N. Whitehead provides an adequate basis for a theory of **theistic evolution**. It was Whitehead's own ambition to fuse religion and science into one rational scheme of thought and overcome the exaggerations on both sides.<sup>24</sup> This theory of theistic evolution involves a naturalism that requires the persuasive activity of God throughout all creation, at all times. Since God is persuasive and the world has a degree of freedom, the long and gradual evolution of our world to its present form can be explained by this theory. God, then, actively lures creation to accept superior possibilities so that the emergence of our present order is primarily His work, but partly based upon the decisions of creatures. God is a causal influence upon every event and is an essential factor becoming of creation.

Although a theistic evolutionary theory provides an adequate way to talk about God's activity in the world, it must still account for the missing intermediary fossils. One answer Whiteheadians suggest for this problem is that God may have initiated the jumps by persuading creatures to evolve at a rapid rate. David Ray Griffin suggests that these jumps or saltations could be explainable if God was the One luring the species to embody a new form. A big jump, where millions of mutations occurred at once, is possible when God works in the process.<sup>25</sup> However, some may find this particular theory hard to swallow if they insist on adhering

"God creates in and through the processes of the natural world that science unveils."

to the classically formulated notion of God's omnipotence.

A second theory providing an adequate means to talk about creation for a Christian is the theory of **progressive creation**. Proponents of this theory acknowledge that the work of scientists demonstrates the earth to be very old. The progressive theory of creation is based upon an understanding of God who periodically intervenes supernaturally, over a long period of time, to create new species. This theory, then, corresponds to the sudden appearance of new species found in the fossil record and the old age of the earth. The extended time gaps between the appearance of species is attributed to periodic activity of God.

Although a progressive theory of creation provides an adequate way to account for the fossil evidence, it still must account for God's action in nature today. Some scientists may find this theory unsatisfactory, since it fails to account for the overall uniformity of nature's present state. In addition, although it accounts for the sudden emergence of species at various times in history, the progressive theory of evolution emphasizes God's activity as a Sustainer who only periodically assumes the role of Creator. Those who find the traditional problem of evil to be a major obstacle to faith will probably regard the God who has unilateral power, as assumed by most progressive creation theorists, to be misconceived. In any case, the progressive theory of evolution can still be helpful for a Christian, since it allows for the immanent God who is continually creating, albeit in spurts.

In conclusion, an emphasis upon the doctrine of continuing creation and God's immanence does not force a Christian to choose between the Darwinian theory of evolution and creation science. A Christian can reject both and opt for an alternative theory that takes into account this important doctrine. *Creatio*

*continua*, based upon God as immanent in creation, provides a Christian with a meaningful way to talk about God's present and past action and a way to avoid a crisis amid the crossfire in the creation wars. **PM**

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# Marriage Preparation: The Ten Danger Signals of Faulty Mate Selection

Modern society has a well-known struggle with marriage. The divorce rate is 50 percent, and some estimate that as many as 70 percent of present marriages will end in divorce, with all its ramifications—custody fights, alimony, stepfamilies,” observes Rev. Richard Metzger, a Catholic priest. Another prediction declares that a white child born in the early 1980s will have only a 30 percent chance of living to age 17 with both biological parents at home, while a Black child has just a 6 percent chance.

While there are many reasons why marriages are terminated in such large numbers, one key factor could be faulty mate selection. Some individuals are able to make wise choices in a life-long partner, while others choose poorly. “It is not marriage that fails; it is people that fail,” noted Harry Emerson Fosdick, founding minister of the Riverside Church in New York City. Here are 10 danger signals of faulty mate selection that pastors, religious educators, deacons, and other spiritual leaders can present for engaged couples’ consid-

Marriage rarely satisfies when it becomes a solution for loneliness.

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eration during marriage preparation sessions.

## 1. The decision to get married is made too quickly.

Couples who have known each other for only a couple of months before declaring their intention to marry place their partnership at great risk. A study done by researchers at Kansas State University on a sample of middle-aged married women found “a strong correlation” between length of time spent dating their current spouses and marital satisfaction. Their research found that “couples who had dated for more than two years scored consistently high on marital satisfaction, while couples who had dated for shorter periods scored in a wide range from very high to very low.”

## 2. The decision is made at too young an age.

Statistics reveal these trends: the younger the age of couples at marriage, the higher the divorce rate. For example, the divorce rate for 21- and 22-year-olds is twice as high as it is for 24- and 25-year-olds. Those statistics

raise the fascinating question: “Is there an ‘ideal’ age for marriage?” An attempt to answer that question is made by sociologists Marcia and Tom Lasswell, who state: “Divorce rates are lowest for both men and women who marry for the first time at age 28 or later. The chances for a stable marriage increase as both partners reach the age of 30 and then the rates level off.”

## 3. Loneliness and desperation.

Marriage is rarely satisfying when it becomes a solution for loneliness. Beware if one person is too eager to be married, especially if that person is experiencing feelings of great loneliness and rejection. A lifetime decision like marriage requires clear thinking and an unhurried mind. Relationships need to pass the test of time. There is great truth in Prov. 19:2, “It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way.”

## 4. One or both may be choosing a mate to please someone else.

On the surface, it sounds preposterous that anyone would select a marriage partner to please

someone else. Yet most people want to make others happy. "I immediately begin to squirm when I realize one member of a couple has chosen his or her partner in order to please a parent or some other important person," writes Dr. Neil Clark Warren, former dean of the Fuller Graduate School of Psychology and author of *Finding the Love of Your Life*. "I've watched this strategy backfire so many times I can hardly contain myself. It simply won't work!" Building a solid marriage means making decisions based upon your needs, dreams, and life objectives, not those of someone else.

**5. One partner wants to be taken care of.**

"Some people get into a relationship not because they are ready to share the fullness of their own life with someone but because they want to be taken care of," writes Barbara DeAngelis, Ph.D., in her book *Are You the One for Me? Knowing Who's Right and Avoiding Who's Wrong*. "These men and women are trying to avoid growing up, so they find partners who will play 'Mommy' and 'Daddy' roles for them. These relationships are not about learning and growing together—they are about dependence."

**6. The experience base is too narrow.**

In the New Testament, Paul offers this prayer for all Christians: "That your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best" (Phil. 1:9-10). Some couples are unable to "discern what is best" because their experience base is too narrow. An example is the couple who say they are "so much in love that we have never had an argument." Usually a statement like that means the couple has not talked over many important matters essential for a successful marriage: finances, career goals, children, religious affiliation, and so on. It means

they may not know what the other person likes, expects, and needs.

**7. There are not enough similarities between the couple.**

Couples should assess their happiness potential in order to determine if they are making the profoundly right decision in a mate. One way to do this is by considering these conclusions of a landmark study done in 1953 by sociologists Ernest W. Burgess and Paul Wallin. In their book, *Engagement and Marriage*, they reported that couples destined for happiness were:

- similar in family background
- blessed with happy childhoods
- from homes where parents were married
- between 22 and 30 years of age at marriage
- associated with each other, either romantically or as friends, for a significant period of time before marriage
- socially active with friends of both sexes
- well educated
- securely employed (Stability of employment was a stronger factor than the actual amount of money a married couple had to live on.)
- similar in *perception* of intelligence (Married couples did not have to be equally intelligent to be happy; they just had to think they were.)
- perceived to succeed in marriage and be happy together by people who knew them
- united in confidence about their future together
- united in a strong desire to have children

**8. The couple has unrealistic expectations.**

Some couples get caught up in a feeling of "endless love." These couples believe that love by itself will solve all their problems, provide endless comfort, continuous pleasure, and alleviate all feelings of loneliness and emotional pain. Beware of idealistic love

that is not tempered by some understanding of reality.

**9. One or both may have unresolved significant personality or behavior problems.**

Obviously, if a partner has a drinking or drug abuse problem, marriage should be delayed. Less obvious, however, are personality traits that partners often believe will be corrected after marriage. Be careful about proceeding with wedding plans if a partner has questionable traits such as unreasonable jealousy, temper tantrums, dishonesty, irresponsibility, stubbornness, or lack of sexual integrity. These are issues that must be worked through *prior* to marriage.

**10. Age pressure.**

"If I dared to give advice, I would say to couples: 'Never rush—a lifetime is a long time,'" says Rev. Metzger. "There are things much worse than not being married." Unfortunately some individuals marry because they feel the pressure of age. "I was 31 when I married a man whom I dated for only a few months," confesses Andrea, who is now divorced. "I vividly remember these three thoughts constantly being in my mind: 'Most of my friends are part of a couple, but I'm still single.' 'There must be something wrong with me because I'm over 30 and unmarried.' 'Why am I the last person in my family to settle down and be married?'" Consequently, when I met Ted, we had a whirlwind romance and married 60 days later. It was a huge mistake, and one that I'm still trying to recover from."

Although careful mate selection alone does not guarantee marital bliss, finding the right partner greatly enhances the possibility that a man and a woman will indeed be happy together. In spite of the various challenges that confront every marriage, making the right choice in a life partner means those challenges can be faced in ways that further unite and strengthen the marriage rather than fragment and weaken it. **PM**

Relationships need to pass the test of time.

# Hymn Story of the Month—Part One

Many pastors and worship leaders seriously seek to be “doers of the Word” (James 1:22, AMP) as recorded in Ps. 98:1, “Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things.” God is great, and God is good, faithfully bathing the present with the Divine Presence. Mercy and grace are providential gifts bestowed each day. If God’s blessings are “new every morning” (Lam. 3:23), then our songs of thanksgiving and praise must have a dynamic freshness as well. Therefore the imperative: sing a new song!

The new song might be a recent creation. The new song might be one that I’ve sung for years, but I sing today with renewed vigor because of the Lord’s present work in my life.

Some pastors have tried to keep singing alive by expanding the congregation’s worship repertoire through a hymn of the month. The selected hymn is used several times during the month to familiarize the congregation with the text and tune. This practice is sometimes used by congregations with a new hymnal as a way to introduce the new songs it contains. The goal is to gain breadth.

To gain depth of appreciation for a hymn, worship leaders sometime share with the congregation how a person came to create the hymn. When singing “Amazing Grace,” for example, I often remember that at one time the author was the captain of a

slave ship. John Newton’s life demonstrated God’s marvelous grace. “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” takes on added meaning when I know that it was written to commemorate the first anniversary of Charles Wesley’s conversion. I appreciate the experience of praise more fully when I understand the spiritual experience that preceded it.

In this series of four articles I present 12 hymn stories, one for each month of the year. These hymn stories could be used for a single service of hymns if you wanted to sing “through the year” in one setting. Each hymn was selected because, in some way, it is connected with the month to which it was assigned. All hymns listed in this series of articles are found in the *Sing to the Lord* hymnal, and hymn numbers are listed in parentheses following the title.

After telling the hymn story, I offer ideas for creative worship, often linking the hymn story and hymn with other songs, Scripture, testimonies, or prayer. If a particular suggestion isn’t a good fit with your congregation, use it as a catalyst for your own creative thinking. If you like one of the ideas, use it with other songs of worship not discussed in these articles.

At the end of each monthly section, I list a few sources that may be consulted for more information on the hymn story. Full bibliographic citations of these resources appear at the end of the articles.

BY KEITH SCHWANZ  
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June

## “O Love That Will Not Let Me Go”

**HYMN STORY**—George Matheson sat alone on the evening of June 6, 1882. He was accustomed to the darkness, since he was blind; but this night was different. Isolated except for his thoughts, the moments were filled with the “most severe mental suffering.”

His sister had married that day. She had been a faithful helper, but now things were changing. For years she wrote down Matheson’s sermons as he dictated them to her. Later she would read the sermon to George a couple of times, and then he would preach the sermon to his congregation on Sunday. This weekly ritual would change.

He also remembered what may have been his own wedding. According to some hymnologists, more than 20 years before, his fiancée had broken their engagement when she learned he was losing his eyesight. She didn’t want to be married to a blind preacher.

Perhaps as George relived the pain of rejection that June evening, suddenly a poem came to his mind. The poem reminded him of God’s faithfulness. He wrote: “It was the quickest bit of work I ever did in my life. I had the impression rather of having it dictated to me by some inward voice than of working it out myself. I am quite sure that the whole work was completed in five minutes.”

**HYMN SINGING**—Tell the hymn story, then have a soloist sing “O Love That Will Not Let Me Go” (474). Then ask the congregation to sing the “Amazing Love” Worship Sequence (222), which includes “O How He Loves You and Me” (223), “My Savior’s Love” (224), and “And Can It Be?” (225).

**HYMN STUDY**—*Amazing Grace*, p. 49; *Songs in the Night*, pp. 83-84; *Songs of Glory*, pp. 204-5.



July

**"All Creatures of Our God and King"**

**HYMN STORY**—Francis of Assisi was known as a man of simplicity and service. Named Francesco Bernardone when born in 1182, he was the son of a wealthy cloth salesman. Following a serious illness when a young adult, Francis relinquished all rights to the family fortune so he might be free to minister the love of God to needy people. Soon others joined Francis in his itinerant ministry, and they became known as the Franciscan Order of Friars. Their mission aimed simply to "follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in His footsteps." Francis described this lifestyle in another hymn, "Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace" (734). Whether holding a sick child, comforting a grief-stricken woman, or caring for the animals (which he called his "brothers and sisters"), Francis of Assisi was a man whose own contentment in all circumstances became a source of serenity for others.

A year before his death, Francis lay in a straw shanty, blind and ill. The hut provided not only shade from the hot summer sun but also companions, since Francis shared the space with field mice. Always one to praise the Lord in all circumstances and one who loved God's creation, he wrote "All Creatures of Our God and King" on that hot summer day as the field mice romped around him.

**HYMN SINGING**—Read "Stewards of God's Creation" (76) responsively, using two groups within the congregation. Those seated on the left side might begin, with those on the right responding. Or ask the choir to begin the reading, with the congregation responding. Then tell the hymn story before singing "All Creatures of Our God and King" (77). Notice that this hymn alternates between

unison and harmony singing. Consider using the same two groups from the responsive reading to sing the hymn antiphonally. For example, those on the left side of the congregation would sing, "All creatures of our God and King"; then those on the right side would sing, "Lift up your voice and with us sing." Everyone would sing all of the "O praise Him!" and "Alleluia!" phrases throughout the hymn.

This hymn tune, LASST UNSERFREUEN, is also used with "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow" (6). The tune may also be sung as a two-, three-, or four-part canon (a round) if the fermatas are ignored. After completing the final stanza of the hymn, lead the congregation in singing the Doxology to this tune. Without telling the congregation what will happen, have the choir start the Doxology one measure after the congregation starts it. Or, if you really want a "surround sound" worship experience, ask four groups in four places in the sanctuary to sing the Doxology as a four-part canon.

**HYMN STUDY**—*Amazing Grace*, p. 138; *Songs in the Night*, pp. 146-47; *Songs of Glory*, pp. 16-17.

August

**"Precious Lord, Take My Hand"**

**HYMN STORY**—In August of 1938, Thomas Dorsey was helping with the music for revival meetings in St. Louis. While the congregation was still singing during the first service, Dorsey received a telegram on the platform. The message was devastating. A telephone call confirmed the news. Dorsey's wife died during the delivery of their first child.

A friend drove Thomas back to Chicago that night. He arrived in time to see his infant son, just hours before the baby died. Both mother and child were buried in the same casket.

Thomas felt depressed and despondent in the days that followed. The weight of his grief suffocated him. Seeking relief, he went to visit his friend, Theodore Frye, a music professor at Madame Malone's College. They walked around the campus as they talked about life and death. Stopping in one of the music rooms, Thomas sat down at a piano and began playing a melody he had not played before. As he played, Thomas began to say, "Blessed Lord, blessed Lord." Theodore suggested that he use the words "Precious Lord" with the first notes of the melody. Thomas tried it, and the remainder of the text quickly followed.

The following Sunday Theodore Frye used the new song with his church choir as Thomas Dorsey played the piano. "It tore up the church." So many people wanted a copy of the song that they hurried to get the song published.

**HYMN SINGING**—Tell the hymn story, then ask the congregation to sing "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" (102). Follow the song with a testimony from a person who has experienced God's comfort after the death of a loved one. Close this part of the service with prayer for those who have walked through the valley of death in recent months.

**HYMN STUDY**—*Amazing Grace*, p. 260; *52 Hymn Stories Dramatized*, p. 129; *Songs in the Night*, pp. 42-43; *Songs of Glory*, pp. 233-34; *Stories Behind Popular Songs and Hymns*, pp. 47-48.

**Hymn Study Resources**

*Amazing Grace* by Kenneth W. Osbeck (Kregel, 1990).

*52 Hymn Stories Dramatized* by Kenneth W. Osbeck (Kregel, 1992).

*Songs in the Night* by Henry Gariepy (Eerdmans, 1996).

*Songs of Glory* by William J. Reynolds (Zondervan, 1990).

*Stories Behind Popular Songs and Hymns* by Lindsay Terry (Baker, 1990).

PM

# Financial Questions Ministers Should Ask Themselves

As a minister, your most basic financial planning should answer the following five key questions. These questions represent both sound defensive financial planning and good offensive planning.

Even though the questions will force you to consider some unpleasant possibilities, a good overall strategy must include options for many contingencies. One consolation is that these difficulties cannot happen all at the same time. But ignoring any of them could leave you or your family in serious financial trouble.

## 1. "What if I die too soon?"

This question relates to your responsibility to provide for the needs of your family in the event of your premature death.

As a breadwinner, your premature death could present severe financial challenges to your family because they would have lost your income. A good financial plan includes replacing that lost income. Usually, this is the job of life insurance. Life insurance doesn't replace your lost life, but it replaces your life's lost income.

Logically enough, you're probably asking, "Then how much life insurance do I need in order to replace the loss of income for

my family?" The answer depends on your age, your income, and a number of other factors. But you probably need more than you think.

Suppose you had a \$100,000 life insurance policy. That benefit amount, invested at 7 percent *after* taxes, would yield \$7,000 annually for an indefinite period of time. If you used the principal in addition to the interest earnings, the investment would yield \$14,237 a year for 10 years, or \$9,439 a year for 20 years. Is that enough? Only you can decide.

Here are two things to keep in mind:

Since the primary purpose of life insurance is to replace lost earnings, projecting replacement of earnings beyond your anticipated retirement date may not be necessary.

Ministers who pay social security taxes are covered under the social security survivors benefits provision. Under this provision, your surviving spouse and minor children are paid a monthly benefit based on your average indexed monthly earnings. This payment will average approximately 40 percent of your covered compensation. This reduces the amount of life insurance you need because the survivor's ben-

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efit replaces some of your lost income. Information is available from your social security office.

## 2. "What if I live too long?"

Just as you can die prematurely, you can outlive your financial resources. You or your spouse (or both of you) may live as many as 30 or 40 years beyond the time you retire. Running out of financial resources during these years would be tragic.

Where does retirement income come from? Statistics released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services indicate that, for all persons over the age of 65, 38 percent of income comes from social security, 26 percent from investments, 17 percent from earnings, and 16 percent from private pensions. The remaining 3 percent comes from miscellaneous sources.

Some ministers have nothing beyond the twin resources of social security and a defined benefit pension. But these two represent only 54 percent of the average retirement income. You should consider other resources.

One of the best resources for ministers is the tax-sheltered annuity program as structured under Section 403(b) of the Internal Revenue Code. The provision allows you, as an employee of a nonprofit organization (i.e., your church), to have a portion of your current income deferred tax-free to a retirement plan. The deferred funds are allowed to accumulate interest tax-free as well. If administered by your denomination, funds can be withdrawn as tax-free housing allowance.

You should start making TSA contributions early so that the interest has a chance to compound and accumulate. Even small amounts contributed early and regularly can yield big dividends for retirement income if left to compound.

## 3. "What if I become disabled?"

Your sound financial plan should recognize that your earned income may cease while, at the

same time, your expenses continue. This is what happens when you become disabled. Because disability represents lost or diminished income but continuing expenses, it often is a more severe financial hardship than death. However, more people insure against income loss from premature death than from disability.

Extended disability income comes from three primary sources. One is the social security disability benefit, which covers you if you meet the disability qualifications. Another is your private disability insurance—which is relatively inexpensive for what it provides. Then there is the disability benefit of your private pension plan. Other sources may include your personal savings and the accumulated funds in your tax-sheltered annuity plan.

Becoming disabled is not a pleasant thought. However, it is a possibility that you should include in your financial planning.

#### 4. "What if I get sick?"

With today's health care costs, your financial plan must include coverage for the enormous expenses related to a catastrophic or extended illness. Very few of us have the personal resources to pay for the treatment of a severe or prolonged illness; yet such illness cannot be ignored; treatment must be undertaken.

Health insurance is a necessary and significant part of protecting your financial well-being. A family without health insurance today is very vulnerable to significant financial risk. Even if you can afford only minimal coverage, you should get it. Good financial planning is as much about *protecting* your resources as it is *multiplying* them. Health insurance is defensive financial planning.

#### 5. "What happens if I get paid?"

This question deals with com-

penetration structuring and how best to receive the money the local church has set aside in its budget for your pastoral support. It makes a difference how the money gets from the church to you. *How* the church pays you can be just as significant as how *much* the church pays you when it comes to determining how much discretionary income you really have.

Over the years, tax laws defining what money received from an employer is and is not taxable have become more complex. Ministerial employees have not been exempted from these details. Here are a few considerations for you, your church board, and the Salary Committee.

First, you should take full advantage of the provisions in the tax law that allow for a tax-free housing allowance. The tax code specifically states, "In the case of a minister of the gospel, gross income does not include—(1) the rental value of a home furnished to him as part of his compensation; or (2) the rental allowance paid to him as a part of his compensation, to the extent used by him to rent or provide a home." Furthermore, IRS regulations define the costs of "providing a home" as including all expenses other than food or maid service. Therefore, to the extent that they meet the limitations of IRS regulations, money used to meet any such housing expenses would not be subject to income tax. Taking advantage of this tax law provision may be as simple as having the church board declare as housing allowance a portion of your salary. Then make certain you spend the money within the IRS guidelines.

You also should make certain that all professional and business expenses are reimbursed dollar for dollar by your church. This would include church-related professional expenses for travel, entertainment, books, periodicals, gifts required because of

your role as a minister, and dues to professional organizations. These are expenses of the ministry of the local church—not your personal expenses as a minister.

Expenses must be reimbursed according to IRS guidelines. This means you must turn into the church receipts, mileage statements, travel logs, and other material documentation. Only the amount documented should be paid. If the church is simply giving you an "allowance" and not requiring an accounting of how you spend the money, then the "allowance" is extra salary in the eyes of the IRS. That means you must show it as income on your tax return and then try to deduct your professional and business expenses to the extent possible. Under the latest tax law changes, you cannot deduct 100 percent of such expenses. Therefore, if you're not being properly reimbursed, you're paying taxes on local church ministry expenses. You'd be better off having your compensation restructured in order to have your expenses reimbursed.

Proper compensation planning also means that the church employer pays the provider directly for all allowable tax-free employee benefits. This would include premiums for health insurance, group term life insurance for up to \$50,000 coverage, disability insurance, accident insurance, and tax-sheltered annuity contributions. If the church is simply giving you the money to pay for these benefits, the premiums may not be fully tax-free.

Sound financial planning needs both an offensive and a defensive strategy. Protecting yourself against financial catastrophe is defensive financial planning. Preparing for retirement and proper compensation structuring are offensive financial strategies. In order to be a winner at financial planning, you need both.

PM

# Getting Your Message to the Media

If your church wants more than the perfunctory weekly notice in your local newspaper about your outreach, or if you're having trouble getting anything published at all, it's time to revitalize your approach to the media.

As a former reporter who daily went through hundreds of press releases, culling the ones that would interest our readers and pitching the rest, it became apparent that most organizations know little about writing a press release, and less about what constitutes a story that would interest the media and the reading public.

If you want publicity for your church, it takes more than good intentions. Knowing how to write a good press release, and how to pick an interesting subject, can mean a story on the feature page that will generate more interest and reach a more diversified audience than one might think possible at no cost.

One pastor took to the newspaper a story of an upcoming dinner at his church. The editor told him, "This is not newsworthy. We'll announce the date in our religion column, but we won't print the whole story."

The newspaper followed up in their daily bulletin board by giving nothing but the time and location of the Thanksgiving dinner.

The pastor, still irritated, called the editorial department. He talked to a reporter, editor, and executive editor about doing

a separate article about the affair. All told him no.

He called the next day and again asked a reporter, who happened to be a battle-weary old-timer. "Holding a Thanksgiving dinner is just not newsworthy," she told him. "Lots of churches are having those right now."

"But the money we're collecting from the dinner is going to a mission school."

"Still not newsworthy."

Exasperated, the pastor said, "If I climb up on the roof and have my dinner up there, would that be newsworthy?"

The old-timer thought for a moment, and then replied, "Only if you fall off."

This illustrates the perception of what organizations believe is newsworthy, as opposed to media guidelines.

If you are sending in a routine press release, such as the times regular services will be held, or the time and date of an annual event, send it in, but do not expect it to appear in anything more than the daily or weekly bulletin.

If, on the other hand, you have something that might be of interest to the general public, such as a new program, or a member with an interesting story, make certain the press release is designed to catch the reporter's eye.

Many times, a person writing a press release for a newspaper will try to write the entire story, which isn't necessary and, in fact, may obscure information that a trained reporter would

find more relevant. Keep the press release brief with a lead paragraph that will catch the eye of a reporter or editor. If he or she is interested in the subject, a reporter conducts interviews and then writes the story.

Once a reporter is interested he or she is going to ask more questions than you can ever anticipate. So be prepared to know all the facts about the particular topic at hand, or to be able to direct the reporter to a source or the person who does know.

To generate the types of stories that make news on the community or feature pages of your local newspaper, look for the unusual among the staff or the congregation.

Here are some stories that made it to the feature page:

A member of a particular church, despite dyslexia, a troubled childhood, and years of turmoil, headed her own toy manufacturing company. I wanted to know what helped her overcome these obstacles. Had her faith helped?

The new pastor of a Black denominational church in a poor district had previously been on the city council in a wealthy, all-White city. Why had he made the move?

The guest pastor at a local church had once been a stand-up comedian and had worked with many of the well-known older comics entertaining today. It not only was an interesting story for the general public but also gave the church some much-needed publicity. An overflow crowd attended the services at which he spoke.

Such stories move the reader past the potluck, the weekly service, and the normal holiday messages. They let the community know that the church is alive and well with real people. These are the types of stories that not only interest readers but also make it unnecessary for the pastor to fall off the roof of his church during Thanksgiving to get publicity.

BY RITA ROBINSON

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# Picture Windows for Preaching

## Vision

Walt Kallestad in his outstanding book, *The Everyday, Anytime Guide to Christian Leadership*, tells about a visit to Strasbourg, France, where he delivered four lectures at St. Nicholas Church. It was in this church that John Calvin was a minister, Martin Luther preached, and Albert Schweitzer was the minister of music. He writes:

Wow—what a lineup! There had been people of great vision in this church, yet only five centuries after they opened, the church doors were locked. No one came any longer; only pigeons ever saw the inside. How did that happen? It happened because the vision or purpose for the church was lost. Without a vision, the church literally perished.

But that is not the end of the story of the St. Nicholas Church! Not by a long shot. In 1992 the local bishop requested that any pastor who had a vision for this empty, historic church building to submit a vision plan. It seems that one pastor was equal to the challenge of his bishop. Eventually permission was granted for the pastor to carry out his vision plan. When Pastor Kallestad delivered his four lectures in the church, he said he was excited to see approximately 350 people jammed into the building. He says that church has the largest attendance of any Lutheran church in France.

It really is true that with a vision people prosper, but “where

there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov. 29:18, *κλν*). God help us to catch a vision lest the people perish. God help us to catch a vision for our local church, whatever city, town, or village in which we minister today!

Walt Kallestad, *The Everyday, Anytime Guide to Christian Leadership* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1994), 25-26.

## Salvation

The first shock brought terror to everyone that December day in 1988. People weren't ready for the horror that befell them in Soviet Armenia. Susanna Petrosyan and her four-year-old daughter, Gayaney, lived in a 36-floor apartment building that was reduced to a mound of rubble. All of the brick, mortar, steel, and wood was flattened like a pancake on the Armenian ground. Hundreds of people were killed instantly, while others clung to life. Susanna and Gayaney were alive—spared, yet buried alive. They were squeezed in an 18-inch gap between the floor and the collapsed ceiling.

Susanna lay on her back for the first few hours of their tribulation, trying to calm her daughter's fears. In the deep recesses of her heart, she despaired of being rescued before they both perished. Yet she refused to quit her struggle for life. Confined to a small space, she groped for food or water. Her fingers discovered an object of hope: a half-filled jar of fruit jam. With her fingers, she fed the sweet stuff to Gayaney.

Gayaney later pleaded weakly

for something to quench her thirst.

Her mother hushed her crying for a little while. But—there was no water.

“Mommy, I'm thirsty,” repeated Gayaney.

Night came, then day, then a blending of each. There was no more food, no water, no help. Gayaney became too weak to plead for water. Dehydration would soon set in if something wasn't done and done quickly. Susanna did the only thing she could think of that would save her child. She broke the empty jar and used a broken piece to slit her finger. Then she placed her bleeding finger in Gayaney's mouth.

Repeatedly Susanna applied this process, sustaining her daughter's life with her own blood.

Eight grueling days of horror, boredom, hunger, and thirst until finally Susanna's husband and a band of rescue workers clawed their way into that narrow living tomb. Susanna had not only conquered her ordeal but also kept Gayaney alive with the sacrifice of her own blood.

Ron Lee Davis, *Becoming a Whole Person in a Broken World* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1990), 93-94.

## Marriage

A minister advertised for a man to help him with house chores. The following morning a nicely dressed young man rang the doorbell.

“Can you start the fire and get breakfast by seven o'clock?” inquired the pastor.

“I guess so,” answered the young man.

“What about the silver—can you polish them? How about the dishes? Can you keep the house neat and tidy?”

“Say, preacher,” said the young man, “I came here to see about getting married—but if it's going to be as much work as all that, you can count me out right now!” **PM**

King Duncan, *Lively Illustrations for Effective Preaching* (Knoxville, Tenn.: Seven Worlds Publishing, 1987), 264.

COMPILED BY  
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Pastor  
THREE RIVERS,  
MICHIGAN



# So You're the New Pastor!

**Y**ou and your family moved here a scant two weeks ago. You attend your first meeting with your new church board. When the meeting concludes over an hour and a half later, the secretary gives you the minutes. Somehow, the meeting didn't turn out quite as you expected.

**SECRETARY:** Our new pastor opens the board meeting with prayer. Minutes of the last meeting are read; reports are given. All minutes and reports discussed, voted on, and approved.

**PASTOR:** You have made us feel very much at home. You asked me to spend the last two weeks looking around in order to bring any concerns I have to our first church board meeting. I have done that, and I'd like to jump right in.

**BOARD MEMBER NUMBER ONE:** Please feel free. We are here to help in any way we can!

**PASTOR:** Well, the church lawn is looking pretty sad. The grass stands above my ankles.

**BOARD MEMBER NUMBER TWO:** Our last pastor always mowed it himself.

**PASTOR:** That's what he told me when I called him. He also said he doesn't want to do it anymore.

**BOARD MEMBER NUMBER THREE:** The teen boys can

take that over, then. They'll get some good exercise, sun-tans, and build character all at the same time.

**PASTOR:** OK, next. There is a huge family Bible in our lobby.

**BOARD MEMBER NUMBER FOUR:** Yeah, isn't that a big one? We bought that for our 25th anniversary 15 years ago. Everyone who came to the celebration signed it and wrote in comments about the history of our church.

**PASTOR:** I guess we can't set it aside, then?

**BOARD MEMBER NUMBER FIVE:** Take it out! Horrors! Why should we take it out?

**PASTOR:** It's moldy. It has been opened to the same page so long that the words to Ps. 23 can't be read. It looks like a mouse chewed one corner of it.

**BOARD MEMBER NUMBER SIX:** Wow, we hadn't noticed that. But how can we take it out, with all those great comments and signatures and all? That would be like forgetting part of our history!

**PASTOR:** On the other hand, a moldy Bible isn't a very good advertisement for our church!

**BOARD MEMBER NUMBER SEVEN:** Let the History Committee take care of this, Pastor.

**PASTOR:** Next item, then—how about our church sign?

**BOARD MEMBER NUMBER EIGHT:** What about it?

**PASTOR:** Well, our motto says, "The Alive Church with the Living Message!"

**BOARD MEMBER NUMBER NINE:** Yes. Catchy, don't you think?

**PASTOR:** The motto is, but the sign isn't. It's rusty, the wood is rotting, and the service times listed aren't accurate. It says our Sunday night service time is 6:30, but we meet at 6:00.

**BOARD MEMBER NUMBER ONE:** That's true. We used to meet at 6:30 to give the farmers time to milk their cows. All our farmers are gone now, and everyone knows we meet at 6:00. We'll have the Maintenance Committee look at that.

**PASTOR:** How about that closet full of junk under the baptistery?

**BOARD MEMBER NUMBER TWO:** That's not junk, that's our "Good Samaritan closet." We put used clothes in there after our garage sales. The poor people rummage through there and find things to wear.

**PASTOR:** Are the clothes sorted in any kind of order? Are they clean?

**BOARD MEMBER NUMBER THREE:** We can ask the "Good Samaritan" Committee and give you a report next time.

**PASTOR:** OK, next item: There are two big rocking chairs in the church nursery. No offense to anyone, but they are nasty, ragged, torn, and they smell bad.

**BOARD MEMBER NUMBER FOUR:** Yes, Pastor, we know that's true. Several people have asked us about them.

**PASTOR:** But has nothing been done about them?

**BOARD MEMBER NUMBER FIVE:** At least 20 babies over

the years have been rocked in those chairs. A couple of those babies are pastors now, one of them is a missionary, and several of them work at our church headquarters.

PASTOR: And those chairs had something to do with their success?

BOARD MEMBER NUMBER SIX: We figured that God had blessed those people—and surely our rocking chairs were a part of that blessing. We determined as God's will that we keep the chairs.

PASTOR: Well, if it's God's will, I guess that would be hard to overturn, huh?

BOARD MEMBER NUMBER SEVEN: Our bylaws specifically state that the will of God can only be overturned by a two-thirds majority.

PASTOR: District Assembly is only two months away. How are we coming on our budgets?

BOARD MEMBER NUMBER EIGHT: We are up-to-date on all the budgets that we have voted to pay.

PASTOR: I've never heard that phrase before. What exactly does it mean?

BOARD MEMBER NUMBER NINE: We voted to pay the pensions and missions budgets. We are current on those.

PASTOR: And the other two?

BOARD MEMBER NUMBER ONE: We voted not to pay anything on those.

PASTOR: Nothing? Not a dime? We have \$4,000 in the bank. We could pay all our budgets in full for less than \$3,000! What are we saving it for?

BOARD MEMBERS IN UNISON: Emergencies!

PASTOR: Emergencies? What kind of emergencies?

BOARD MEMBER NUMBER TWO: Tornadoes, fires, earthquakes, exploding toilets—

PASTOR: Don't we have insurance for that?

BOARD MEMBER NUMBER THREE: Sure, but you never know how that will work out! What else is on your list?

PASTOR: Well, we don't want to sound ungrateful, but the carpet is . . . uh . . .

BOARD MEMBER NUMBER FOUR: What's wrong with it?

PASTOR: The carpet is at least 20 years old. Our cat licks her feet after walking across the living room!

BOARD MEMBER NUMBER FIVE: You have a cat? I don't think we knew about that!

PASTOR: We have two cats—but they were born in parsonages!

BOARD MEMBER NUMBER SIX: Boy, this meeting is getting long.

Our last pastor never kept us over one hour. We should table all these issues until after assembly! Then we can come back together with our new hopes, new dreams, new budget allocations, and start all over again.

PASTOR: But some of these issues should be addressed before assembly time!

BOARD MEMBER NUMBER SEVEN: Have faith, Pastor! Let's table everything and call it a night. As a matter of fact, let's all go to the pie shop. Won't you join us, Pastor?

PASTOR: Go without me this time, please. I don't have too much of an appetite.

BOARD MEMBER NUMBER EIGHT: Well, maybe next time, Pastor. God bless you and your family. We look forward to great days ahead. As we said, "Make yourself at home. If there is anything we can do for you, just let us know!" **PM**



"PASTOR, WHAT DO YOU MEAN OUR CHURCH IS NOT GROWING BECAUSE WE ARE SET IN OUR WAYS?"

# Worship and Preaching Helps

## INTRODUCTION

The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians is a book for our times. Tensions between legalists and libertines of the first-century Church find ready expression in the Christian Church today. Present-day loyalties to the Law and to the past are constantly at odds with liberties taken and assumed by those who live under "grace." What is the Church to do? I believe this letter from Paul to the churches in Galatia holds some of the answers for us as we wrestle with matters that threaten the vitality of the Church.

My intentions have been to address the themes of the Epistle. Subsequently, some passages in the book receive more attention than others. Though based on exegetical and expository work, the sermons are not expository in the true sense of the word.

The suggested orders for worship are intended for use in congregations of 75 or so. They were "test-driven" in the worship services of Columbia Community Church of the Nazarene in Columbia, Missouri. The members of that congregation graciously followed these suggestions as we worshiped together from one Sunday to the next.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was the One to whom Paul directed the Galatian Christians as the Fulfillment of all their longings. I pray these messages encourage you and your people as you continue to move in His direction.

PM

In Christ,  
Alan Lyke

June  
July  
August  
1998

PREPARED BY ALAN  
LYKE



Continued from page 28

will be looked after if he should have to be away for an extended period.

Bugenhagen also made sure that he reminded Luther of his God-given duties as husband and father. These duties were just as important and vital as Luther's duties as pastor, theologian, teacher, and Reformer. Bugenhagen persuaded Luther to write to Katie about his attack of gallstones. Bugenhagen more than once had to remind Luther about the children God had placed in his care.

It was in the arena of the family that Bugenhagen played a significant role in his service as pastor. When Luther's daughter lay dying, Luther wrestled with this fact. Drawing from the strength of his faith, he bid his daughter go and enjoy eternal bliss in heaven. One does not overcome such tragedy without the wisdom, counsel, and advice of one's pastor. It is only with the comfort and reassurance of the Gospel promise of our resurrection that we can accept God's will and let our loved ones fall asleep in the Lord. Though we do not have extant records of Luther and Bugenhagen speaking or writing of this incident, Bugenhagen served his purpose as pastor to Luther just by the faithful preaching of the gospel to the great Reformer.

Luther felt fortunate to have a man like Johannes Bugenhagen as his pastor. Luther had high praise for the man God sent to him to serve his spiritual needs. God has given each one of us colleagues for this very purpose. Some of us have pastors assigned to watch over our souls. Others of us are part of a staff of two or more pastors. Still others may be isolated in rural areas or in mission settings and may have difficulty establishing and cultivating those contacts. Let us give thanks to God for those He sends to watch over our souls and guard our faith. May we see the same benefits as Luther found in his pastor.

PM



# Full-Strength Faith: Do Not Dilute!

by Alan Lyke

Gal. 1:1-10

## INTRO

**ILLUS.** Does anyone here know what “Swipe” is? I remember attending a camp meeting back in the ‘60s and seeing “I Like Swipe” bumper stickers on what seemed to be every other car in the parking lot. Yet it wasn’t until I moved to Kansas City in the ‘80s that I found out what Swipe was.

While attending Nazarene Theological Seminary, I worked for a man who had a painting/remodeling business. We had just finished a job and had to clean the windows before we could leave. My boss got out some razor blades, paper towels, and a spray bottle. However, the bottle was empty, so he reached for another bottle, and there was that name on the label, Swipe. Instead of switching the spray nozzle from the empty bottle to the full one, my boss took the bottle of Swipe, poured a capful into the empty spray bottle, and said, “There, that’s plenty. Go fill it with water, and get started on those windows.”

Swipe was touted as a miracle-working concentrate, guaranteed to clean almost anything and everything. It was so potent that only a capful added to a gallon of water was needed to clean away everyday dirt and grime. Swipe was rarely used full strength. It was almost always diluted.

In some ways people treat the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, like Swipe. Because the gospel is so strong, so powerful, some folks think that they need to dilute it, to water it down when they use it. “It’s not necessary to apply the gospel full strength to my situation because a little of it goes a long way,” they reason. So they apply “just enough” of the gospel to get the “job done” for them and to keep the rest in the bottle because it might sting if they apply its concentrated strength. Then they attempt to live as though their “capful” is all they need to keep their lives spiritually clean.

The gospel is strong. Powerful language in the Scriptures describe its potency. The reality behind its message is even more powerful. Paul states that Jesus “gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). Forgiveness is possible. Rescue is available to everyone willing to believe that Jesus “gave himself” for all.

In reality Swipe has nothing on the gospel when it comes to potency and strength. When the last drop of that concentrated miracle-working cleaner has finally been used, Jesus’ ability to rescue and forgive will still be

changing lives. It will still be strengthening everyone who puts his or her faith in Him.

Now, not only do folks sometimes attempt to dilute the gospel, but also some act as though what Jesus has done is not effective enough, that His life, death, and resurrection are insufficient to make them spiritually clean. These people want to add something to their faith in Christ to make sure that as Christians they have been forgiven of their sins and “rescue[d] . . . from the present evil age.”

The attempt to dilute the gospel by adding to it happened in the early days of the Church. We need to remember that many first-century Christians were raised in the strict Judaic tradition of law keeping and ritualistic worship. Those Christians naturally transferred parts of their old ways of worshiping God into their new faith in Jesus Christ. Methods of worship worked as long as their trust rested ultimately in Christ.

Other Early Church Christians were Gentile converts who had no notion of the laws and rules of the Jewish religion. Gentile Christians only knew that the apostle Paul told them Jesus “gave himself for [their] sins to rescue [them] from the present evil age.” They believed Paul’s message, put their faith in Christ, and attempted to live for Him. Their ways of worship were all right for them as long as their trust rested ultimately in Christ.

The rub came when some Jewish Christians said to the Gentile Christians of Galatia, “Listen, if you people were real Christians, you would do the things that we do and avoid the things that we avoid. Unless you change your ways, you will never know what it really means to be a Christian.”

Likewise, some Galatian Christians aimed at their Jewish brethren, “Listen, why don’t you leave all that pomp and circumstance behind? Why are you so concerned about this law and that law? This is a new day. All you need to do is accept the gospel as true and continue living as you please.”

Paul heard about the commotion and sent off this letter to the churches in Galatia. He desired to resolve the conflict and restore the Christians’ faith in Jesus Christ—faith in Christ alone. The first 10 verses of Gal. 1 contain Paul’s response to the situation in the churches and to anyone who thinks believing in Jesus is not enough, that some other ingredients must be added to bring one’s faith up to full strength.

## I. THE GOSPEL COMES TO US IN FULL STRENGTH

Paul insisted that Jesus himself initiated who believers are in Christ. Jesus gave himself (v. 4). Jesus rescues us. Jesus called Paul to convey that gospel to the Galatians and anyone else who would listen to him.

To suggest that we should or could add something to what Jesus has already done for us suggests His efforts were not enough. His ministry must be incomplete!

**ILLUS.** It’s like the painted figures on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel rising up with brushes in their painted hands in order to “complete” what Michelangelo didn’t get right the first time. It’s the creation telling the Creator: “You’ve got it right—almost! Here, let me add this and that to what You’ve done. Now that makes Your plan

complete. Now Your gospel can accomplish what You want it to."

**II. HUMANITY NEEDS THE GOSPEL'S FULL STRENGTH**

We would prefer to overlook the second part of Paul's response to the situation in Galatia. The human race needed then—and needs now—for Jesus to give himself if our sins shall ever be forgiven and if we would ever be rescued from the present evil age. Awash in a sea of utter helplessness, we need someone to come to our rescue and to save us. As much as we hate to admit it, both the sin in us and the sin in the present evil age lie beyond our capacity to cope with them. We cannot handle them on our own. We need Jesus to forgive and to rescue us.

**III. DILUTING THE GOSPEL WEAKENS US CHRISTIANS**

Paul responded to the situation in Galatia by reminding the churches that only one relationship truly matters. That is the relationship between us and God. Paul knew he had been singled out for special service, but he had the attitude of a servant. He followed only one master, and His name was Jesus. Paul exhorted the Galatian Christians to hold on to that kind of undiluted, full-strength faith.

Paul wasn't indifferent to those around him, but neither did he attempt to please everyone. As Dr. James Hamilton would often say to his students at Nazarene Theological Seminary, "Trying to be somebody to everybody will make a nobody out of anybody." That is true of every relationship, social and spiritual. Attempting to dance to every doctrinal drum that comes banging our way will wear us out. That will not necessarily make us any more like Jesus than we were before. Paul knew that to be so. He determined to stay true to Jesus.

It's possible that we're guilty of attempting to please everyone around us today. Have we added so much cultural or traditional baggage to our faith in Christ that we stand in danger of being pulled away from Him rather than being drawn closer to Him? Do we rely more on our past expressions of faith than upon the current reality of our faith in Him? Are we more American than Christian in our everyday lives?

Richard Foster quotes Mother Teresa of Calcutta as saying, "Pray for me that I not loosen my grip on the hands of Jesus even under the guise of ministering to the poor." Foster goes on to say, "That is our first task: to grip the hands of Jesus with such tenacity that we are obliged to follow His lead, to seek first His kingdom."\* Mother Teresa and Foster both recognize the danger of losing a relationship of faith and love to the dilution of old traditions and present-day works.

Does it mean traditions and works and ritual and form have no place in our relationship with Christ? Of course not, but we dare not trust in them more than we trust in Him. Does it mean we are free to do as we please, to employ only the portion of the gospel we think we need to be clean? Not at all! As Christians we determine, like Paul, to live as servants of Christ. Ultimately our freedom is best realized in our obedience to Him in every part of our lives.

**CONCLUSION**

God desires that all who profess to be His children know both His forgiveness and rescue as realities, not simply as religious words or ideas. We can have that kind of faith life if we apply our faith "full strength" to Jesus' love for us and not dilute it by adding to or taking from what He has already done for us at the Cross.

\*Richard J. Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, n.p., in Rueben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck, *A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1983), 93.

**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

- Announcements
- Invocation
- Congregational Singing ..... "Blessed Be the Name"
- Welcome
- Congregational Singing ..... "Honor the Lord"
- "Bless His Holy Name"
- "Lord, We Praise You"
- Offering
- Prayer Chorus ..... "Where the Spirit of the Lord Is"
- Pastoral Prayer
- Scripture Reading ..... Gal. 1:1-10
- Vocal Solo ..... "In Christ Alone"
- Message ..... "FULL-STRENGTH FAITH: DO NOT DILUTE!"
- Congregational Response ..... "The Solid Rock"
- Benediction

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Echoing the lyrics of the prayer chorus, invite the people to exchange their burdens for the peace, love, comfort, light, life, help, and power the Spirit of God has for them.

**CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS**

As natural extension of the praise being lifted to God through the singing, ask the people who want to testify to God's grace in their life to stand while they sing. Perhaps some will offer personal testimony following the singing.

# The Call of Jesus

by Alan Lyke

Gal. 1:11-24

## INTRO

It's awful when someone doesn't believe you. No matter how you try, there's no way you can convince the person that what you're saying is true. That's tough!

What's worse, though, is having someone who used to believe in you decide that you can't be trusted anymore. Trust is not easily given and even harder to restore once it has been broken. When we have broken someone's trust, we know it takes a lengthy time of forgiveness and healing before that trust can be restored if it can be restored at all.

That is exactly the situation Paul faced with the churches in Galatia. People in those churches didn't know Paul when he first came to town. Not certain at first what to make of the fiery little man with the strange new doctrine, the Galatians eventually learned to trust Paul. They came to believe what he said. Finally they trusted in Jesus for forgiveness of sins. Paul became the Galatians' spiritual father from that time on. The love and care that had developed between them continued to deepen as they matured together in Christ.

Eventually, Paul left the Galatian region, but he placed the churches in hands of capable leaders. He could not foresee the intervention of some Jewish Christians who wanted to add something extra to Paul's teaching.

These Jewish Christians insisted that Paul's message was incomplete; he had omitted a few things. Doubts developed and questions surfaced about whom and what the Galatians were to believe. Should they trust Paul, the tentmaker teacher who could never stay in one place very long? Or were the Christians from Jerusalem, some of whom had been believers longer than Paul himself, the ones whom the Galatians should trust? Whom should they believe?

Paul had his hands full. The controversy meant he had to establish himself again as trustworthy, his message as truthful, and the gospel as reliable—if people of Galatia would continue to know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

## I. JESUS MADE A CLEAR CALL TO PAUL

Notice what Paul points to as proof of his worthiness as a disciple: not to whom he knows or where he's been or how much he's learned or what he's accomplished. According to Paul, his trustworthiness does not originate with himself, but rather from an external source: the revelation of Jesus Christ. Paul's vision of Jesus transformed him from the Church's enemy to the Church's servant. It was not intellectual deduction nor logical reasoning but the vivid experience of seeing the Lord with his own eyes. Why should the Galatians trust Paul? Because he had seen and heard and obeyed the risen Christ!

Paul emphasized that his ministry for Jesus Christ was

not his own idea. Interwoven in verses 15 and 16 are the actions by God: *God set me apart; God called me; God revealed His Son in me.* God initiated everything. Paul had asked for none of it. Paul had not planned it. He claimed no credit for himself but continually pointed to the One who called him.

Paul responded to God's call. Paul "went immediately into Arabia" (v. 17). He did not hesitate. Instead Paul gave immediate obedience, instant participation with God. Paul served the Lord whose followers he had previously persecuted. Jesus' call to Paul was very dramatic, very specific: "Stop doing what you're doing, and declare the gospel instead of trying to destroy it."

## II. JESUS MADE A CLEAR CALL TO US

Most of us have not had that kind of experience. In fact, God does not typically work so dramatically in people's lives. However, some things in Paul's call apply to all of us.

First, it takes more than what we know or whom we know to provide answers to the questions life brings our way, to provide answers to the problem of our sin and our need for God's forgiveness. The word "gospel" means "good news." The good news is that Jesus Christ is all we need. He provides the potential for life with an eternal quality, life that will not end, life in the face of destructive forces in our world.

Richard Howard writes, "To be sure, Paul's experience was unique, but nonetheless, there is a personal experience of confrontation with Christ that provides spiritual reality to the seeking soul today. Not only is this necessary in terms of a call to the appointed minister of Christ, but it is no less essential to every follower of the Saviour."<sup>\*</sup>

Ask anyone who glows with Christ's love, and he or she will tell you: "I don't just know *about* Jesus. I *know* Jesus because He revealed himself to me!"

This reality, this vision, this experience of Jesus takes place, not because we find Him, but because He calls us. Paul's call to serve God (v. 15) also implies that God works in us, calling us to himself. [Read v. 15.]

God does not usually call us to go to Arabia or Jerusalem or Galatia, but He *does* call us to obey Him. Paul could have said, "No!" As spectacular as his vision was, Paul could have said: "Sorry, God, I've got too much at stake to accept Your call. I'm head Hebrew of the Hebrews. I get plenty of publicity. All my expenses are paid. My picture is on the front page of the *Jerusalem Gazette*. Thanks, but no thanks. I am going to pass on Your call!"

Everyone who says that he or she is a Christian admits to the following truths: (1) God loved me first. (2) I loved Him back. (3) He called me to do ———. (4) I obeyed His call. Our obedience reveals our love; our actions expose our priorities. "Walking the walk" always carries more weight than "talking the talk."

Is where we are in life, to the best of our knowledge and ability, where God wants us to be? If we can't answer in the affirmative, then we're compromising our relationship with God. We need to say with Paul, "I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven" (Acts 26:19). Other-

wise we muddle along, hoping not to get lost in the shuffle.

God has called us to something better. God has not intended for us to grope in the dark, hoping things will work out. For some of us, God's plan has been clear from the beginning. He waits for us to follow. If for you God's will is as clear as mud, there are two steps to take: (1) Make sure that you are as obedient as you know to be. (2) Wait for God to show you the next step in His will.

The second step may take some time. Remember, Paul spent three years in Arabia trying to discern and understand the change Jesus had made in his life. If you feel as if you've been led to the desert, believe that the same God who led you there will also lead you out.

We can learn from one other aspect of Paul's experience. People who used to be afraid of him changed their minds. Now they glorified God because of him. Not only had Paul's persecution of the Christians ceased, but also he now supported them, encouraged them, and brought others to the Jesus who had changed him.

In the same way that God has revealed himself to us and called us to a specific place in life, He waits to be glorified because of us. We are not to divide our lives into the "sacred" and "secular." We are not to have "church lives" and "work lives" and "home lives" and "school lives." Being a follower of Jesus means every part of life belongs to Christ all the time, everywhere. Our obedience will result in God being praised because people will see Him working in us. They will wonder how God can work in them also.

\*Richard E. Howard, "Galatians," in *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1965), 9:37.

**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

- Announcements
- Invocation
- Congregational Singing ..... "We Bow Down"
- Welcome
- Congregational Singing ..... "Our Great Savior"
- "Alleluia"
- "Thou Art Worthy"
- Praise Reports/Prayer Requests
- Prayer Chorus ..... "Spirit of the Living God"
- Pastoral Prayer
- Offering
- Scripture Reading ..... Gal. 1:11-24
- Vocal Solo ..... "He Chose Me"
- Message ..... "THE CALL OF JESUS"
- Congregational Response ..... "Lord, Be Glorified"
- Benediction

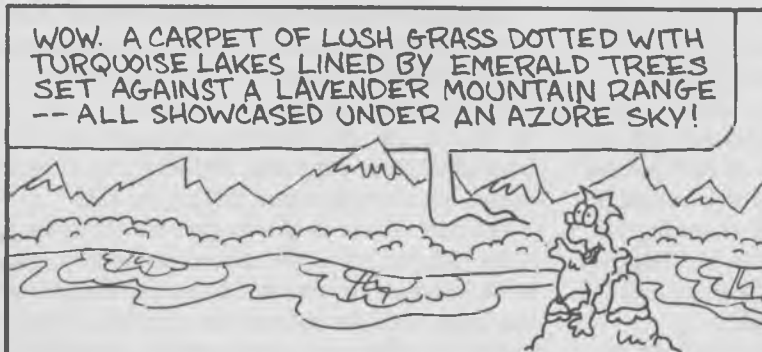
**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Ask the members of the congregation to take a prayer request card (assuming your church uses them) and write on the cards a praise report they would be willing to allow you to read next Sunday from the pulpit. This may give a voice to some who are too shy to speak in public.

**CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS**

Have the congregation read aloud a written invocation included in the bulletin as a corporate means of intentionally recognizing the presence of God in their midst.

 **Pontius' Puddle**



© Joel Kaufmann

# Different, Divided, or Devoted—in Christ?

by Alan Lyke

Gal. 2:1-10

## INTRO

"Well, we all know what *they're* like! You know, *those* people—the ones who are different from us. Can you believe that *they* are like that? I can never see *myself* doing the kinds of things that *they* do, can you?"

Whether it's Yankees or yuppies, Russians or rednecks, feminists or chauvinists, we all know what *those* people are like, the people who aren't like us. Or do we?

Being too quick to write off differences as deficiencies, we can be guilty of not getting to know the persons we so easily categorize. If we're not careful, our lack of intimate knowledge of *those people* can very well change our differences into dislikes—sometimes into hate.

## I. DIFFERENCES CAN LEAD TO DIVISION

Prejudice clouds our ability to see how similar we are to other people, because we focus on our differences. I heard Earl Lee say in chapel at Nazarene Theological Seminary, "I've never known a person I didn't love." Dr. Lee meant that people we hate are often the people we don't know. We haven't taken time to hear their hurts, share their joys, feel their pain. We have hated them instead of getting to know them.

It should be different for Christians, but it isn't always so. Whether the Crusades or the Ku Klux Klan or plain Christian folk, the gospel message that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16) has sometimes been reduced to an exclusive invitation based on race, wealth, education, or the lack thereof. Some Christians have changed the universal love of Christ from one of "equal opportunity" to a restrictive "for our kind only." Those people left standing on the outside ask, "Why?"

The apostle Paul called bigoted Christians "false brothers" (Gal. 2:4), "pseudo-Christians" (PHILLIPS), or "sham-Christians," as someone has paraphrased (Clarence Jordan in *Cotton Patch Version of Galatians*, n.p.). These people say they are one thing, but they live another.

In Galatia, these "pseudo-Christians" were Jews who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Yet they continued to hold on to the legal traditions of their pasts.

They understood that when Israel was identified as "God's chosen people," they thought Israel was "God's people exclusively." They would keep God all to themselves! As Gentiles believed in the same Jesus as Jewish Christians, it took the latter group a while to get used to the idea.

When they finally accepted the fact that God loved Gentiles, too, Jewish Christians insisted, "Well, if they're going to believe, then they're going to have to believe like us!" If those Judaizers had their way, we would have all been enslaved to the law instead of enjoying freedom in Christ.

Those Jewish Christians in Paul's time were mistaken.

**ILLUS.** Two ministers, given to arguing about their respective faiths, were in a very heated discussion. "That's all right," one said calmly. "We'll just agree to disagree. After all, we're both doing the Lord's work—you in your way and I in His."<sup>1</sup>

Of course, you and I must prayerfully work at keeping our hearts free of prejudicial thinking. We must guard against substituting our own expectations and stereotypes of others for the kind of Christlike love to which He calls us.

**ILLUS.** John Wesley challenged his followers: "I am sick of opinions. Give me a humble, gentle lover of God and man—a man full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality or hypocrisy. Bigotry is too strong an attachment to our own creed or opinion. How unwilling men are to allow anything good in those who do not agree with them in all things! We must not narrow the cause of God to our own beliefs, but rejoice in goodness wherever it appears."<sup>2</sup>

Paul states simply that "God shows no partiality" (v. 6, RSV) and intends for us to do the same.

## II. DEVOTION CAN LEAD TO DIVERSITY

While religious prejudice was an issue in the Galatian church, Paul had to address the greater, more important issue of God's work in the Galatian Christians. They had been changed, made "new creation[s]" in Christ (6:15). Paul didn't want anyone to take that away from them. The apostle tells of taking a trip to Jerusalem because God had told him to go there. While in Jerusalem, God spoke to Jewish Christian leaders and, in effect, said, "Paul's work is from Me. Don't fight against him. You stand on the same side, but you're working in different parts of My world."

If the early Christians hadn't preached the specific message that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19, NKJV), Christianity wouldn't have made it beyond the first century. The world was filled with religious cults. Christianity could have become another among many. Nevertheless, God worked among both groups, both Jews and Gentiles. Their message was a united one—Jesus Christ.

However, their missions were different, varied so that as many people as possible could respond to their one message.

**ILLUS.** My ministry began in Columbia, Missouri, as a church planter. During a conversation with Bob Smith as

a hospital administrator, who represented the University of Missouri Medical Center, he asked me, "Why another church?"

Looking back, I should have asked: "Why another clinic? Why another bank?" Hospitals want as many people as possible to use their facilities. The banks want as many people as possible to be their customers. Jesus wants everyone to believe in Him. That's at least one reason for another church.

Even another church is not enough. God asks Billy Graham to do crusades and Chuck Colson to work in prisons and Harmon Schmelzenbach to work in Africa. That's why God works through street ministries in Los Angeles and camp meetings in Arkansas, seeker-sensitive churches in Chicago and liturgical churches in Kansas. God is at work in all those ministries—and more!

Colson illustrates this point in his book *The Body*.

Kefa Sempangi came to the United States for training at Westminster Seminary, where he was not only well educated with orthodox theology but also with conservative, Western evangelical culture. When Sempangi returned to his own country after several years, he was horrified to see Ugandan Christians dancing in the streets, hands upraised. . . . At Westminster, at that time, the young pastor had learned that worship was solemn and reverent. Charismatic expression was distrusted.

As he sat in his room one night watching his exuberant countrymen dancing in the streets, it suddenly struck him: "These people could never identify with what I learned at Westminster. There's nothing unorthodox here. This is simply their natural means of expression, and they can use it to worship God just as I do." Colson concludes by saying,

Cultures may differ and individual expressions may vary, but the intent of the heart is the same. Ecuadorians may present in drama or dance the same biblical truth that conservative Scottish preachers exposit from the pulpit.<sup>3</sup>

So, who are we to question the differences? Division comes when we focus on our differences. Unity comes when we focus on Jesus Christ.

**III. DECISION TO FOLLOW CHRIST IS NECESSARY**

Beyond the legal expression of American jurisprudence that "all persons are created equal," and behind the message that prompted Peter's ministry to the Jews and Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, lies this one truth: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). It is here we have complete uniformity.

We don't need to take much time to confirm that truth. We have personally validated it all too well. If the "glory of God" is the measuring stick, it is obvious I don't measure up—and neither do you. The Bible says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

Yet John doesn't stop there—and I'm glad, aren't you? Not only have all of us sinned, but also we all can be forgiven: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (v. 9).

Yet at this point of hope we are not the same. I must confess if I'm to be forgiven. You must confess if you are to be forgiven. It is not that God loves one person more than another. The "inequity" or separation stems from one person accepting God's loving forgiveness and the other person rejecting it.

**IV. WE HAVE TO MAKE A DECISION**

Have you accepted the forgiveness of your sins that Jesus offers you? He desires for you to be united with Him and with those who have devoted their lives to Him. Don't allow differences and divisions to keep you from deciding to live for Jesus.

1. Paul Lee Tan, ed., *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations* (Rockville, Md.: Assurance Publishers, 1984), 1084.  
 2. *Ibid.*  
 3. Charles W. Colson, *The Body* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 107.

**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

- Announcements
- Invocation
- Congregational Singing ..... "I Will Call upon the Lord"  
 "We Have Come Into His House"  
 "I Love You, Lord"
- Vocal Solo ..... "Sincerely Yours"
- Welcome
- Congregational Singing ..... "Grace Greater than Our Sin"  
 "Amazing Grace"
- Offering
- Prayer Chorus ..... "Spirit Song"
- Pastoral Prayer
- Scripture Reading ..... Gal. 2:1-10
- Vocal Solo ..... "Undivided"
- Message ..... "DIFFERENT, DIVIDED, OR DEVOTED—  
 IN CHRIST?"
- Congregational Response ..... "My Desire"
- Benediction

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Prior to prayer, read aloud the praise reports you received last week during the service. The testimony of fellow believers will strengthen the congregation's faith in God.

**CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS**

Use the "welcome time" as a means of encouraging fellowship after service. Perhaps the "planned spontaneity" of invitations to dinner for guests on the part of some "regulars" you contacted earlier in the week will occur.

# One Life, One Source: Christ

by Alan Lyke

Gal. 2:15-21

## INTRO

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27).

God made me in His image. Our ancestors Adam and Eve were in His image; they were at one with God—until they decided to go their own way. We are intended to be in God's image. From the first obstinate moments of our "terrible twos" to our present-moment demands to take care of "number one," you and I too often have failed to find ourselves at one with God.

What is God like? He's like Jesus. Peruse the Gospels, and you will discover what God is like as you read how Jesus interacted with His world. That's the kind of God with which we are to be at one.

Who are "we"? We're the human race, the people responsible for Hulk Hogan and Fred Astaire, for Polish Solidarity and Tiananmen Square, for Disney World and acid rain, for laser surgery and AIDS. Yes, all of humanity is intended to be at one with God, the God who is in Christ reconciling the world to himself! God is holy and pure. God is just and righteous.

## I. WE HAVE NO LIFE WITHOUT CHRIST

To be at one with God means being righteous as He is righteous. However, given our list of accomplishments to date, it seems quite impossible, doesn't it? In the Scriptures Job knew how impossible our righteousness is without God:

Indeed, I know that this is true. But how can a mortal be righteous before God? Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand. His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed? He moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger. He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble. He speaks to the sun and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars. He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south. . . . If it is a matter of strength, he is mighty! And if it is a matter of justice, who will summon him? Even if I were innocent, my mouth would condemn me; if I were blameless, it would pronounce me guilty (9:2-9, 19-20).

Look at the things we've constructed to try to measure

up on our own. From the Tower of Babel to Heritage U.S.A., human attempts to reconcile ourselves with God always fall short. Human achievement cannot make us righteous; human ingenuity will not reconcile us to God.

This passage in Galatians focuses on Jewish Christians and their overemphasis on the law. Yet they are not the only ones at fault. Storyteller Garrison Keillor named one church in his fictitious hometown of Lake Woebegone, "Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility."<sup>1</sup> We are all too familiar with Christian groups who spend more time telling us what they are against than what they are for.

This matter of the law and legalism is simply deciding that if we do something good enough and long enough, then we can earn God's approval. We can shape ourselves into His likeness. We can make ourselves one with Him. One writer put it this way: "Law means the upward striving of human religion and morality, and therefore colours all human activity with sin, for it represents man's attempt to scale God's throne."<sup>2</sup> Attempting to raise ourselves to "God's level of acceptance," to scale "God's throne" on our own, are attempts to make ourselves as righteous as God is righteous. However, our text clearly warns, "If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (v. 21).

We are intended for righteousness but unable to get there on our own. Where do we go from here?

## II. LIVE IN CHRIST

Interwoven in Paul's response to Peter's hypocrisy is the answer we look for. [Read vv. 15-21.] The word "justified" can mean: (1) To be made right. (2) To be in the clear. (3) To be lined up with. (4) "Just as if I'd" never sinned. (5) "To be made righteous." We seek to be justified and reconciled with God.

How does that happen? "By faith in Jesus Christ . . . faith in Christ Jesus . . . by faith in Christ" (v. 16). "Be justified in Christ" (v. 17). I get the idea that it is by faith in Christ that we can be justified and made righteous. In Christ we finally realize what we are intended to be: at one with God.

F. F. Bruce says: "This new life in Christ is nothing less than the risen Christ living his life in a believer. The risen Christ is the operative power in the new order, as sin was in the old." Paul says, "It's not I, it's He, Christ, who lives in me. I have been made righteous because He is righteous. I am one with God because Christ is one with God" (see v. 20).

I think I hear Paul saying, "I'm alive because Christ is alive in me!" Righteousness and life—real life—are two sides of the same coin. Without faith in Christ, we have neither. To be sure we are alive physically, but there is no life in us spiritually. The apostle John said, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12). Righteousness and life—both come from faith in Christ. No other source will do.

## III. LIVE OUR LIFE IN CHRIST

How do we live this way? We get so used to doing things on our own, how can we truly express our faith in Christ without trusting in ourselves?

We begin by living life as Christ would live it if He were here visibly. Paul says, "The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). So we have the pattern to follow and the power to do so because Christ is in us.

However, difficulty comes when we start to believe that what Jesus is doing through us, we are doing on our own. Soon we have declared our self-sufficiency, effectively voiding the life of Christ operating in us. Or we get the idea that we do good things that make God love us. Thus we fall back into the clutches of legalism again, nullifying the grace of God.

Having once accepted Jesus Christ, how can we ensure that we stay with Him? The Bible provides the answer: "Let us throw off everything that hinders. . . . Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. . . . Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the [pioneer, rsv] and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:1-2). It is giving our all so that we can have His all. We give our lives so that we can have His life in us.

**CONCLUSION**

A familiar story tells of God's forgiveness. It provides a model of response for us to follow. [Read Luke 7:36-50.] "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Jesus' response to the woman who anointed His feet is His response to you who, by faith, know that the life you live you live in Christ.

1. Garrison Keillor, *Prairie Home Companion* broadcast on National Public Radio, n.d.

2. C. K. Barrett, *Romans*, 129, in F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 137-38.

**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

- Announcements
- Invocation
- Congregational Singing ..... "To God Be the Glory"
- Welcome
- Vocal Solo ..... "There Is Strength in the Name of the Lord"
- Congregational Singing ..... "We Will Glorify" "Majesty"
- Offering
- Prayer Chorus ..... "He Is Our Peace"
- Pastoral Prayer
- Scripture Reading ..... Gal. 2:15-21
- Vocal Solo ..... "Lamb of God"
- Message ..... "ONE LIFE, ONE SOURCE: CHRIST"
- Congregational Response ..... "Arise, My Soul, Arise"
- Benediction

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Remind the congregation of the process for prayer and the promise of peace found in Phil. 4:4-7.

**CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS**

Have three or four persons who are good public readers stand during the reading of the text for the message and repeat Gal. 2:20 with emphasis after you have read it.

**BEYOND BELIEF**





# For All We Are Worth

by Alan Lyke

Gal. 3:1-5, 13-14

## INTRO

Allow me to introduce Don to you. He's mentally and physically challenged. He's overweight and a chain smoker. He's on oxygen to help his lungs breathe, but he won't quit smoking and doesn't want to lose weight. He's on permanent disability, receives monthly welfare checks, but chooses not to earn wages when he can do so. Question: What is the worth of my friend, Don?

Let me introduce you to Sam. Physically aging but mentally quick, he lived a traditional lifestyle. He had the same barber for years. He drove an older model pickup truck and lived in his hometown in rural Arkansas. He also happened to own Wal-Mart and acquired personal wealth of about \$7 billion by the time he died. Question: "What was the worth of Sam Walton?"

### I. HOW DOES SOCIETY MEASURE WORTH?

Society measures who we are by what we have achieved. It measures our worth based on our accomplishments and acquisitions. Today some abortions are performed to reduce the possibility of giving birth to "imperfect" children. Children are ignored by parents too busy attempting to climb the corporate ladder. Seminars and clinics on "power moves" and "dress for success" are held so others can recognize the "true worth" of employees to their company, of students to their school, and of friends to their peers. Downsizing and "early outs" are imposed on those who near retirement age. There is no apparent appreciation for the wisdom learned or the loyalty shown by the employee. Euthanasia (mercy killing) is regularly suggested for those who have gotten too old and too expensive for society to support.

### II. HOW DO WE PERSONALLY MEASURE WORTH?

Question: What really determines my worth as a person? What determines yours?

Our consumer society says, "Consume or be consumed; produce or get out of the way." Given the ultimate end of consumerism, I trust there is more to you and me than "Buy now or forever lose your worth!" Hopefully my value isn't tied to what I own.

Perhaps our physical attributes determine how much we are worth. Once, while listening to a tape recording of a sermon by A. W. Tozer, I heard Tozer say something to the effect that an Arkansas mule is stronger than any weight lifter ever hoped to be. Age and gravity are irreversible forces that change bathing beauties into cuddly grandmothers. So much for trusting in how physically fit we are when calculating our value to others.

Perhaps human worth is measured by human effort, embodied by the self-determined, self-made person who thanks no one else for who or where he or she is because

of having done it all by himself or herself. The Donald Trumps and Bill Gateses of this world model energy and ingenuity and independence; but are they examples we should follow when trying to ascertain our value to humanity?

Our financial empires, our handsome looks, our self-sufficient accomplishments will bring us status and recognition in our community and maybe in our world. But human effort alone is not enough in the spiritual realm.

### III. HOW DID THE GALATIANS MEASURE WORTH?

[Read Gal. 3:1-5.] The apostle Paul is not too complimentary here. Calling them "foolish Galatians," or as J. B. Phillips paraphrases it, "Dear idiots of Galatia," is not normally the way people try to win friends and influence people. Paul reminds the Galatians of the contrast between the law and faith: "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?" (v. 2). "Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?" (v. 5).

Here is the key verse: "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (v. 3). Evidently, some Christians in Galatia were beginning to buy back into the idea of earning their way into good standing with God. They were moving back into trusting their outward observances and inward efforts to continue to enjoy God's favor.

Richard Howard summarizes Paul's question in verse 3 this way: "Is it possible that the new life that begins with the reception of God's Spirit, working in man's heart, can be brought to its fulfillment by a legalistic rite performed on his body? The answer must be *no*."<sup>1</sup>

**ILLUS.** My marriage to Marilyn made her my wife. What if one day she thought: "I know I'm your wife. I heard you say, 'I do.' But now I'm going to make sure that I'm your wife by walking three steps behind you. Then you'll know that I'm your wife."

Or take David, my oldest son. What if one day he thought to himself: "I know I'm your son. But now I'm going to make sure I'm your son by playing football for my high school. All the practice and effort I'll put into playing that game will let you know that I'm your son."

Ridiculous? Of course, but no more ridiculous than trusting in your human effort alone to cause a spiritual maturity begun by the gift of the Holy Spirit. F. F. Bruce warns that trying to attain perfection by human effort is to "return from maturity to immaturity."<sup>2</sup>

### IV. DOES HUMAN EFFORT EQUAL HUMAN WORTH?

If we believe human effort is enough, then let's practice "Christian consumerism"—that is, the one who dies with the most Bibles, or the most bumper stickers, or the most Christian recordings, or the most Sunday School attendance pins, wins! Or maybe we should sponsor "Christian beauty pageants" so we could crown fellow believers as "Queens of Christianity" or "Heavenly Hunks" or "Precious Princes and Princesses." Perhaps "Christian self-sufficiency" should be our ultimate goal, with the saying

from *Poor Richard's Almanac* as our motto: "The Lord helps those who help themselves." So, help yourself!

Does human effort equate with human worth? Of course not! Does human effort improve our value in God's eyes? Again the answer is no. [Read Gal. 3:13-14.] Listen to these key phrases: "Christ redeemed us . . . becoming a curse for us. . . . He redeemed us . . . we might receive the promise of the Spirit." Those phrases imply that we could not do it for ourselves. Something or Someone more than human effort is needed to bring us to God.

**V. TRUST FOR ALL GOD'S WORTH!**

How do we respond to what He has done for us? Jesus' conversation with the woman caught in adultery gives some insight:

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (*John 8:1-11*).

After all of her accusers had fled, Jesus said to the woman, "Go now and leave your life of sin." The woman's worth was already established by Jesus' act of grace toward her. She could not have accomplished what Jesus did for her by human effort alone. However, she would reveal it by human devotion, that is, her dedication to follow the way Jesus set before her.

Willard Taylor says: "In effect, Paul is asking, 'Tell me, at the beginning how did you become Christians? How

did you receive the transforming Spirit?'"<sup>3</sup> The answer is of course, "By faith."

Taylor goes on to say: "We Christians need frequent reminders of the unchanging truth that faith, and faith alone, is the condition for acceptance with God. But faith means for us to trust in God's Word and to render immediate obedience to it. When obedience is present and consistent, the deeds of the life of the believer will be brought into alignment with the eternal law of God."<sup>4</sup>

**CONCLUSION**

At the present moment, on what basis are you attempting to live as a Christian? By someone's external measure of your worth? By human effort alone? Or by your faith in Jesus Christ?

1. Howard, "Galatians," 55.
2. Bruce, *Galatians*, n.p.
3. Willard Taylor, "Galatians; Ephesians," in *Beacon Bible Expositions* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1981), 8:45.
4. *Ibid.*

**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

- Announcements
- Invocation
- Welcome
- Congregational Singing ..... "Praise Him! Praise Him!"  
"Let's Just Praise the Lord"  
"Jesus, Lord to Me"  
"He Is Lord"
- Offering
- Prayer Hymn ..... "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"
- Pastoral Prayer
- Scripture Reading ..... Gal. 3:1-14
- Vocal Solo ..... "More than Wonderful"
- Message ..... "FOR ALL WE ARE WORTH"
- Congregational Response ..... "My Faith Has Found a Resting Place"
- Benediction

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Recognizing that this is Independence Day weekend in the U.S.A., pray for the independence of those persons who live under totalitarian governments, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ.

**CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS**

If the worship leader is a strong vocalist, conclude the congregational singing of "He Is Lord" a cappella.

# Keeping His Promise

by Alan Lyke

Gal. 3:15-25

## INTRO

**ILLUS.** When I was a child, there was a saying I'd use to let someone know how serious I felt about something. If I really meant it, I'd use that "sacred" oath:

*Cross my heart and hope to die,  
Stick a needle in my eye.*

Rest assured no needle ever came close to my eye, but I meant what I said.

There was what seemed to be the best pact a person could make to prove his earnestness. Whether it was Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, or some black-and-white cowboy and Indian movie on Saturday afternoon, I was sure someone who did this was completely loyal: I'm talking about blood. The hero would sign his name in blood, or maybe become blood brothers with his friend, committing himself to a life of undivided loyalty. That was *the* way to prove you could be trusted.

As I grew older, other oaths and promises became important to me. I'd use words from popular songs to express them, such as: "You are the sunshine of my life"; "I love you just the way you are"; "I'll be loving you until the day that 8 x 8 x 8 is 4." Somewhere in between the first and last song I said, "I will" and "I do" to my wife, and I still mean those words today.

## I. WHAT IS GOD'S PROMISE TO US?

Understanding a little about how you and I make vows and prove our promises, I want to look at a promise God made to us. Actually He told Abraham about it first, but I'm convinced He had all of us in mind.

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (*Gen. 12:1-3*).

Abraham had a hard time seeing how this was going to happen. Being an old man without any children, with a wife too old to have children, Abraham said to God: "I hear what You're saying. I don't understand it, but I hear You."

God told Abraham more about what was going to happen. He then sealed His promise with a ceremony.

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat, and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away (*Gen. 15:1-11*).

This ceremony was familiar to Abraham. It was the way people did business in his day. In coming to an agreement between two parties, the weaker of the two would prepare the animals as we read. He then walked between the pieces, in effect saying, "May it be done unto me, as it has been done unto these animals, if I break our agreement."

Now remember, God has promised Abraham that through him all the world would be blessed. God wants Abraham to know He means business. He will insure that His promise will come to pass. Let's finish the story.

As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram (*Gen. 15:12-18*).

Do you understand what's happened? The Creator of the universe moved through the pieces of animals to confirm to Abraham that what He said was true. Our all-powerful God took the place as the weaker party, so that you and I, with our innate weakness, would be blessed and be strong in Him.

## II. WHAT IS OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S PROMISE?

God's actions didn't seem to be enough. Despite the irony of God moving through the pieces, His promise was ignored as humanity tried to bless itself rather than receiving the blessings of God. Finally, God again had to become the "weaker partner" in order for us to realize His promise was true.

At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (*Rom. 5:6-10*).

This demonstration is more than quickly spoken words. It is more than a rash act of pinpricked blood signatures. "God demonstrate[d] his own love for us" through Christ's death on a cross. He was saying, "I want you to have the blessing I intended. I want you to have eternal life. I have given myself to prove this."

Between the promise to Abraham and the death and resurrection of Jesus the law came. The law was never greater than God's promise and never sufficient to keep us from breaking it. [Read Gal. 3:15-25.]

With all that God has done, why was the law given? To help people keep God's promise. Everything was in place, except for us; every base had been covered, except for where we stood. With our tendency to forget the blessings in store for us, God's law reminded us that we couldn't live up to the promise without complete fulfillment in Christ.

Richard Howard says the law works for us in two ways:

1. Keeps us from hedonistic excesses.
2. Reveals faith as the only way to live in Christ.\*

Paul describes the law as a guardian (vv. 24-25, JB) watching over a child on his way to and from school, making sure he got to the intended destination. However, the law was never to be the destination itself. At best, it would point us to faith in Christ; at worst, it would reveal how sinful we really are.

**III. WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH GOD AND HIS PROMISE?**

- If we keep ourselves, we wind up with us.
- If we keep the law, we wind up with the law.
- If we keep God's promise, we wind up with God.
- God's promise of blessing has never been rescinded!

Christ's offer of life has never been revoked! He is continually keeping His promise. He is willing to rescue everyone who believes Him.

We know God is keeping His promise to us, but how do we keep this promise to Him? By making it our own:

We own up to the need of God to act for us to take the role of the weaker party so we could be strong.

We own up to the need of Christ's death for us, becoming sin, who knew no sin, so we could be forgiven.

If that hasn't happened in us, we're telling God: "I don't care what You've done. You can keep Your promise." And He will!

\*Howard, "Galatians," 65.

**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

- Announcements
- Invocation
- Congregational Singing ..... "Behold, What Manner of Love"  
"Thy Loving-kindness"  
"God Is So Good"
- Welcome
- Congregational Hymn ..... "Such Love"
- Vocal Duet ..... "Hosanna"
- Offering
- Prayer Chorus ..... "Be Still and Know"
- Pastoral Prayer
- Scripture Reading ..... Gal. 3:15-25
- Vocal Solo ..... "Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus"
- Message ..... "KEEPING HIS PROMISE"
- Congregational Response ..... "I Will Serve Thee"
- Benediction

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Remind the congregation that another translation of the phrase "Be still" is "Cease striving." Invite them to quit their struggling and acknowledge the Lordship of Christ.

**CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS**

It's time to use the teens as active participants in worship. Employ them in as many facets of the service as would enhance it and encourage them.

# Puzzling Pieces

## Perfect Fit

by Alan Lyke

Gal. 3:26-29

### INTRO

**ILLUS.** Most of the time they come in a box. Sometimes there's 500 of them, other times 5,000. No two of them are alike, even though they all belong together. By themselves they are meaningless, without purpose. Put them together, and they are complete, a perfect unit. They re-create masterpieces, recall stunning landscapes, or sometimes defy description. What are they? Pieces of jigsaw puzzles. Find one by itself, and you're likely to throw it away. Find the one you're looking for, and you grab it triumphantly, placing it where it belongs. Because it fits. Different? Most certainly! Divided? Never, because they have one purpose: the completion of the puzzle.

Given the variations within the Body of Christ, no wonder the fit is not always a good one. Unlike the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, we each bring with us histories that sometimes defy description. Parents, economics, locations, dreams, everyday living have been a part of making us who we are and color how we relate to one another.

However, much like those puzzle pieces, we Christians have a common purpose, a unifying goal. Because we have been forgiven of our sins, we are now sons and daughters of God. He who is our Creator has become our Father. We're all part of His family. Different? Indeed! Divided? We're not supposed to be. In fact, unity between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit *should* be the unity between members of His family. To quote that famous "theologian" Irving Berlin, "It ain't necessarily so."

### I. WE FIND PROBLEM PIECES

For the Jews, the problem seemed to be everyone but them. In fact, they had a prayer of thanksgiving that went something like this:

"Thank You, Lord, that You did not make me  
a Gentile,  
a slave,  
or a woman."

Free Jewish males had special religious privileges no one else possessed. Even if you embraced the Jewish faith, unless you were *born* one of the sons of Israel, you just didn't quite measure up.

Unfortunately, that attitude carried over into early Christianity. Jewish believers in Jesus the Messiah were sometimes partial against Gentile converts. In unmistakable terms Paul said, "That is not acceptable. That is not the way it's supposed to be. This 'status' of yours as the

sons of Israel has been overruled by a greater sonship. Christians are sons and daughters of God. That supercedes any human superiority."

As for any division, there is to be none. The caste system of religious privilege has been replaced by the common denominator of Christ's death for everyone's salvation. Differences may remain, but we are molded into one family because we belong to Jesus.

That idea was revolutionary in Paul's day. A slave became brother to his owner; a woman enjoyed acceptance into the family; a Gentile was no longer treated as unclean. All because they were one in Christ.

### II. WE FIND PRESENT-DAY PIECES

The past 35-40 years in the United States have made us aware of prejudice and discrimination. The color of a person's skin no longer serves as a valid means to determine his worth. A person's gender no longer keeps anyone relegated to one level of society. But for all our awareness, discrimination still exists:

1. A town in Missouri where you don't spend the night if you're a person of color.
2. A section of Chicago where you don't dare walk if you're white.
3. Certain "old boy" networks that keep women outside the system.

Even within the Christian community, prejudice still raises its ugly head from time to time. Denominational labels or the lack thereof, certain translations of the Bible, particular types of music—all have become fodder for firing shots at each other. We can get so involved fighting fellow Christians that we fail to see that our world has decided to ignore us.

Paul emphasized that we are all one in Christ.

### III. WE MUST PUT THE PIECES TOGETHER

What can be done to resolve apparently irreconcilable differences? How do we heal the division we've written off as "personality conflicts"? By confessing once again that Christ died for us. Now we are in Him, and He is in us.

The Christian life is more than imitating the life Jesus lived. Christianity is life that comes from Christ (Gal. 2:20).

Whatever separates us from someone else needs to be placed in the hands of Jesus. Impossible situations need the overcoming strength that only He can give. Irreconcilable differences need the love that flows from the heart of God to us. The words of a prayer by E. Stanley Jones embody that truth:

O Spirit of God, descend upon my heart and take out all that separates between Thee and me, and between me and my associates. For I cannot live with Thee unless I can live with them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Paul says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for [we] are all one in Christ" (v. 28).

Throughout this passage of Scripture Christians are called children of God, adopted into His family, redeemed by our sinless Brother and Lord, Jesus Christ, and heirs to the family fortune—eternal life. We belong! We've been accepted! We are loved!

Someone may need to know that there's a place where you *can* feel accepted, a place where you can *know* you belong. Perhaps you feel like you've been on the outside looking in. God is saying: "You don't have to feel that way any longer. I've taken steps to make sure no one has to be alone again. I sent My Son. His name is Jesus. He's taken care of all the arrangements for you. Would you like to be My child? Would you like to come home with Me?"

**ILLUS.** In her article, "Not like the Other Kids," Mary MacCraken tells of her experiences with learning-disabled children. MacCraken discovered that many times the children need a place where they feel safe, in order to overcome their disability.

MacCraken summarized a "safe place" as follows:

1. In a safe place people are kind. Sarcasm, fighting, backbiting, and name-calling are exceptions. Kindness, consideration, and forgiveness are the usual way of life.
  2. In a safe place there is laughter. Not just the canned laughter of television, but real laughter that comes from showing meaningful work and play.
  3. In a safe place there are rules. The rules are few and fair and are made by people who live and work there, including the children.
  4. In a safe place people listen to one another. They care about one another and show that they do.\*
- I am convinced that being "in Christ" is intended as a "safe place." According to Paul, we could substitute "in Christ" for "a safe place" in MacCraken's list and never miss a beat.

**CONCLUSION**

For the person who is prejudiced, there is a safe place of oneness.

For the person who's been discriminated against, there is a safe place of acceptance.

For the person who's on the outside looking in, there is a safe place to belong.

For the person who's separated from God by sin, there is a safe place of forgiveness.

It's "in Christ."

\*Mary MacCraken, "Not like the Other Kids," *Reader's Digest*, March 1990, 205 ff.

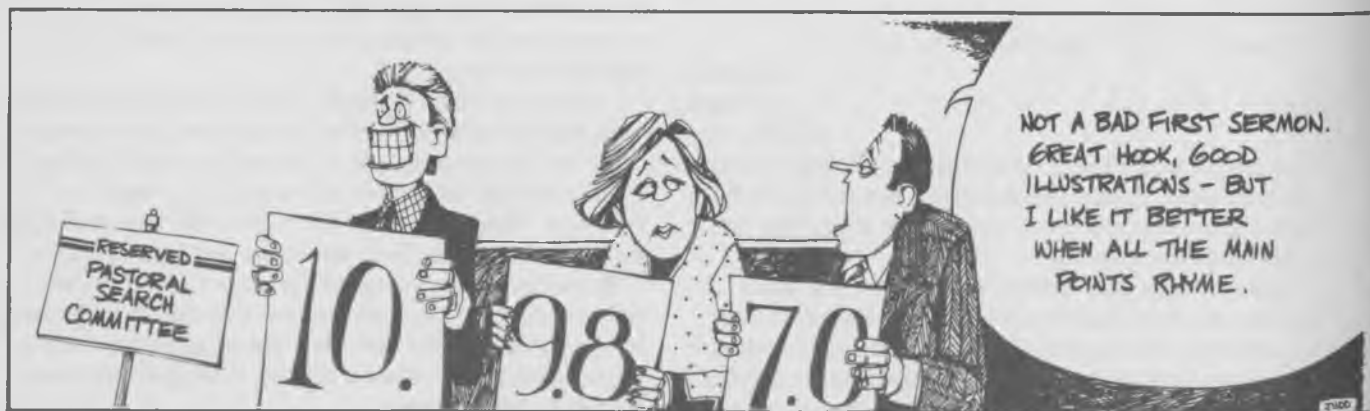
**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

- Announcements
- Invocation
- Vocal Solo ..... "Sing to the Lord"
- Congregational Singing ..... "I Will Praise Him"
- ..... "O Come, Let Us Adore Him"
- Teen Musical Selection ..... "We Bow Down"
- Offering
- Congregational Singing ..... "We Will Stand"
- ..... "The Family of God"
- ..... "The Bond of Love"
- Scripture Reading ..... Gal. 3:26-29
- Message ..... "PUZZLING PIECES—PERFECT FIT"
- Congregational Response ..... "Not My Will, but Thine"
- Pastoral Prayer
- Benediction

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

The pastoral prayer is at the end of the worship service to focus the people toward a response to the message. Pray that God's will, and not theirs or yours, be done.

**BEYOND BELIEF**



# A Chip off the Ol' Block

by Alan Lyke

Gal. 4:1-7

## INTRO

When people see you, of which of your family members do you remind them? Do you have your father's nose, or your mother's eyes? Do you have your mom's sense of humor, or your dad's love for sports? Maybe everyone in your family is brown-haired, yet your hair is bright red, courtesy of a recessive gene from your great-grandfather on your mother's side. Perhaps you are the only one who can carry a tune in a family of people who embody what it means to "make a joyful noise unto the LORD" (Ps. 100:1, KJV). When people see you, of which of your family members do you remind them?

More important, when people get to know you, of whom do you remind them? Do the influences of a certain author impact how you approach life? Is there a cultural hero that influences your behavior? Are there elements of a favorite philosopher's teaching that are part and parcel of your everyday living? Can your lifestyle be attributed to a specific religious figure? When people get to know you, of whom do you remind them?

Like it or not, we have all been molded by members of our extended family. Like it or not, we are all influenced by someone or something. Our text this morning deals with whose spiritual children we are, how we can tell, and what we can do about our spiritual parentage. [Read Gal. 4:1-7.]

## I. WE ARE HEIRS OF THE PROMISE

As is typical with Paul, more than one conversation is taking place at the same time in this passage of Scripture. Verses 1 and 2 actually relate to the content at the end of chapter 3. There Paul concluded his discussion about who the Galatians are in Christ, the kind of spiritual lineage they can claim, the kind of inheritance they can expect as God's children. Though their lineage and inheritance are secure in Christ, it is not in their "hands" yet. They have not experienced all that it means to be a child of God.

Paul tells the Galatians they are "heirs in waiting," that is, owners of all that has been promised to them as children of God. Yet that "all" will be completely theirs only according to the timetable set by the Father. When He deems it right for His children to fully receive what is already theirs, then they can have it—but not until then.

**ILLUS.** The most notable example of this in our time are Princes William and Harry of Britain's royal family. They live among all of the trappings that the House of Windsor has to offer. They enjoy a life of luxury and op-

portunity available only to a very favored few. However, none of the wealth is theirs—yet. The young princes are "heirs in waiting." Even their father, Prince Charles, while he has greater access to the family treasures, is limited in his authority over them. Only when they make Charles king will he be the person who ultimately governs the riches of the House of Windsor.

So we who belong to Christ are owners of the blessings of God, "joint heirs with Jesus" of the kingdom of God. However, the date set by the Father for our full realization of all that it means to be His child has not yet come. We are not there yet. But that day is coming!

## II. WE ARE CHILDREN OF BONDAGE

Paul moves the discussion about children into another area, beginning in verse 3. He is saying, "And while we're on the subject of children, let me remind you of the kind of children we all were once upon a time." The picture is not a pretty one at all.

While the "heirs in waiting" have riches to look forward to, these children in verse 3 are slaves; they are in bondage. Not only do they have someone who is keeping them from a better life, but also these "slave owners" intend to keep it that way. What the NIV translates as "the basic principles of the world," others translate as "the elemental things of the world" (NASB), or "the elemental spirits of the universe" (RSV).

Some think these "basic principles of the world" relate to the law of God because it undergirds every part of our existence. This point of view stems from the fact that the prior conversation was about the "Judaizers" who were attempting to impose the law on all the Galatian believers.

I think it's better to understand the phrase "basic principles of the world" as that which is outside the kingdom of God. Words like "slavery" (NIV) and "bondage" (NASB) speak to me of what it's like for someone to live outside the family of God. Even the legalistic tendencies of the Judaizers had not made them all slaves to the "basic principles of the world."

These basic principles, Paul seems to suggest, are whatever we place our faith in instead of our "faithing" in God. It could be a religious structure, a moral code of ethics, or our own self-determined set of rules by which we live. Whatever the case, the result is still slavery, bondage, because we belong to someone or something other than the living God.

## III. WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD

The good news is that the bondage is not permanent; the slavery is not eternal. In "the fullness of time" (NRSV), God made a way for us to be children of the Kingdom instead of slaves in bondage. Verses 4 and 5 summarize the gospel message into a few short lines. God acts; God redeems; so we receive "the full rights" of sons. Paul implied that the law Judaizers were holding on to is not enough to make you God's child. The "elemental things of the world" are insufficient means by which to enter God's family. Only God can make us His children. Only God can adopt us into His family. Only God can set slaves free to become "King's kids." Only God!

Paul mentioned briefly the earthly steps God took to complete His goal of including us in His family. His Son was "born of a woman, born under the Law" (NASB)—not because it had to be that way but because God chose to make it so. From our vantage point, Jesus' birth and life on earth diminish any excuse we have for not believing Him to be God's Son. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Our adoption was God's intention. He took great care in offering His Son to make our becoming His children a reality.

**IV. WE ARE CHILDREN OF THE SPIRIT**

Paul concludes his discussion about children by contrasting the difference between the children of the promise, the children of bondage, and those who belong to the family of God. The first group of "children" are heirs in waiting. They have not yet fully received what belongs to them. The second group of "children" are in bondage. They will never be free because they do not belong to God. The third group of "children" are members of God's family. They are free to inherit all that God has for them.

Beyond the privilege of being God's children, His children also are recipients of His Spirit. The presence of the Spirit of Christ in our hearts is both confirmation and affirmation. The Spirit confirms that we are indeed God's children. The Spirit affirms that our faith has been well placed.

The "basic principles of the world" cannot offer us a "presence" like the Spirit of Christ. Holding fast to the law cannot provide us with a "witness" like the Spirit of Christ. Only our Heavenly Father can give what belongs only to Him—His Spirit. His Spirit's presence assures us that we belong to God, so that we call Him, "Abba! Father!" We are verified "chips off the ol' block" by the Spirit of Christ in our hearts—that is, if we receive Him.

**CONCLUSION**

Unlike our earthly lineage, God gives us the ability to

choose who our spiritual family will be. We cannot choose our earthly mother or father, but we can decide to become one of the children of God.

The whole point of Paul's discussion here in Gal. 4:1-7 is to encourage the Galatian Christians to believe what was already true—they were the sons and daughters of God. If they were God's children, then they were His heirs as well.

It is a promise extended to us as well. Whose child will you be?

**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

- Announcements
- Invocation
- Congregational Singing ..... "Hallowed Be Thy Name"  
"Jesus, Name Above All Names"  
"His Name Is Wonderful"
- Welcome
- Congregational Song ..... "Since Jesus Came into My Heart"
- Vocal Ensemble ..... "Isn't He Good?"
- Offering
- Prayer Chorus ..... "He Is Able"
- Pastoral Prayer
- Scripture Reading ..... Gal. 4:1-7
- Vocal Solo ..... "I Am His, and He Is Mine"
- Message ..... "A CHIP OFF THE OL' BLOCK"
- Congregational Response ..... "My Desire"
- Benediction

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

During the pastoral prayer, have the congregation stay seated except for those who, by their standing, give witness to a prayer request they believe God is willing and able to answer.

**CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS**

Instead of "receiving" the offering, have the congregation walk to the front of the sanctuary to give their offerings by placing them in the offering plates.

**BEYOND BELIEF™**



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# Free to Be a Slave

by Alan Lyke

Gal. 5:1-18

## INTRO

The apostle Paul says, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free" (Gal. 5:1, NASB). Yet, in his first letter to the Corinthians, the same man says, "Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (9:26-27, NASB).

That doesn't sound much like freedom to me. Why would Paul say that he's free in one place, and then say he's made himself a slave in another? [Read Gal. 5:13-18.]

Whether we care to admit it or not, we are not the masters of our destinies, the captains of our souls. We have not charted our own course independent of everyone else. Our decisions are not free from the influence of others. Regardless of how independent we think we are, we are slaves to these people, indentured to those forces that have formed our decision-making processes. It's not a very pleasant thought, but true nonetheless.

So Paul reminds the Galatian Christians and us that though we are free in Christ now, there's always the possibility we might become slaves again in the future.

## I. GALATIAN SLAVE MAKERS EXERTED INFLUENCE

In that particular church, two positions held the potential for slavery. On the one side, those "dear friends" of Paul were willing to make Jews out of Gentile Christians. On the other side were those who made sure their Jewish "brother" knew the heresy of legalism. In fact, the situation deteriorated to the point that Paul uses animal language (v. 15) to describe how well they were not getting along.

Paul said to them: "Even though you're free from the law, you're becoming slaves again, this time to party politics. Instead, use your freedom to become slaves to each other." Their theologies became their idols, their masters for whom they fought against each other. Then he reminded them of what they already knew: "YOU ARE TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF" (v. 14, WEYMOUTH). They were free to become slaves to their brothers and sisters in Christ. Dissension is not acceptable; Christ is their Model, and they are to follow His example.

## II. CONTEMPORARY SLAVERY EXERTS INFLUENCE

Slavery and freedom carry a variety of meanings, depending on our backgrounds. Slavery for one can be a form of outmoded economics, while for someone else it's a part of the family history. Freedom for one might be the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, while for someone else it's a chance to buy a chunk of it.

We can also think of slavery as addiction. Whether it's drugs or booze or power or food, addiction is a condition

that a person steps into, not always realizing the consequences, but finding them all too quickly to be painful and finding themselves in bondage.

If we can see addiction as slavery, we realize it is the consequence of our own choices. Such slavery is not something forced on us from the outside.

If we are locked in addiction, we are slaves to something. In a society whose values are "Me, my car, and my VCR," we're susceptible to bondage like never before.

Rom. 6:16 has a discussion similar to the one in Galatians but put on a more systematic level. We see another definition of slavery: "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?" (NASB).

Who or what calls the shots in our lives? We do obey someone or something. Who or what is it?

Ourselves?  
Our careers?  
Our company?  
Our future?  
Our friends?  
Our school?  
Our status?  
Our relatives?  
Our religion?

**ILLUS.** John Sung came to America in 1920 to work on his doctorate in Chemistry. He excelled in his studies. Attractive offers of jobs came to him. Also, Christ's call came to him. After a period of great spiritual struggle, he dedicated himself utterly to God.

Soon afterwards, he had a most unusual dream in which he saw himself in a casket. God seemed to say to him, "John Sung is dead—dead to self, but alive to Christ!" Then it seemed that the corpse began to stir. Angels began to weep! "Don't weep, angels," said John. "I will remain dead to the world and live only for Christ!"

He became a mighty preacher of the gospel. For 15 years, he was a "burning and shining light" in China and southeast Asia. He was acclaimed China's greatest evangelist.<sup>1</sup>

This story begs the question: Whom do we serve?

Let's go back to Rom. 6:17-18. [Read passage.] Slavery to someone or something other than God is not permanent, but it's still slavery. It is the very thing from which Jesus Christ wants to set us free: slavery to sin.

We have to decide what we want. Incredible as it seems, people may still choose to be slaves to masters other than Jesus.

Phillips translates Rom. 6:23 this way: "Sin pays its servants: the wage is death. But God gives to those who serve him: his free gift is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (emphasis translator's). We are free to be slaves to sin if we choose, but we don't have to stay that way.

## III. YOU CAN FIND RELEASE FROM SLAVERY

A resource is available to all Christians. Everyone has power available who chooses to be a slave of Christ. That

power comes from the Spirit of God, the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, the same Spirit whom Jesus said would guide us into all truth. Paul teaches that if we "walk by the Spirit," to be empowered by Him, directed by Him, we won't give in to "the desires of the flesh" (v. 16, RSV).

What is the "flesh"? The "flesh" is Paul's term for everything aside from God in which one places his final trust.<sup>2</sup> It sounds as if we're back to slavery again, that is, trusting, obeying, following anything but God.

If the potential for slavery always exists, how do we avoid its traps? Walk by the Spirit. If the flesh continues to badger us to give in to its desires, how will we overcome it? By walking in the Spirit. It is the freedom intended for us in Christ: freedom from bondage, freedom from slavery, freedom from sin.

In fact, in Christ we are now free to be slaves. Free to be slaves? Yes, slaves! However, our new Master is a benevolent one. Instead of squelching our personalities, He develops them to their highest potential. Instead of thwarting our creativity, He frees it to greater and deeper expressions. Instead of reminding us of our weaknesses, He makes us strong. Instead of holding our sins against us, He forgives them and releases us from them.

One commentator wrote about our freedom in Christ.

"Christ has set us free" means that God's decisive salvation has been accomplished and a complete change of allegiances has been effected. No longer bound to task-masters like sin, the law, and death, Christians are set in the service of God. Like Israel, they become his possession, a special people whose identity comes in union with the liberator Jesus Christ. This is to say that more than their external situation is altered by the experience of being liberated.

**ILLUS.** One could conclude from the manumission of slaves or the release of prisoners that nothing occurs but the removal of outside restraint. Yesterday persons were in chains and today they walk free. More than likely, however, they are the same persons, essentially unchanged. At the exodus and more crucially in Christ a deliverance happens which by its very nature is a transference from one dominion to another, with the remarkable result that the new bondage is perfect freedom.<sup>3</sup>

But only if Jesus Christ is our Master! Only as we submit to Him do we find the abundant life He offers us. His new bondage is perfect freedom. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). Sounds like a slavery to me, but if we follow Jesus Christ, we will never be more free!

1. Tan, "Corpse Began to Stir," in *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*, 1366.  
 2. R. Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms* (Leiden, 1971), 103, in Bruce, *Galatians*, 243.  
 3. Charles B. Cousar, "Galatians," in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 107.

**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

- Announcements
- Invocation
- Congregational Singing ..... "O Magnify the Lord"  
 "Praise Him"  
 "I'm So Glad"
- Welcome
- Congregational Singing ..... "Glorious Freedom"
- Vocal Duet ..... "Free Indeed"
- Offering
- Prayer Chorus ..... "Holy, Holy"
- Pastoral Prayer
- Scripture Reading ..... Gal. 5:1-18
- Vocal Solo ..... "It Took a Miracle"
- Message ..... "FREE TO BE A SLAVE"
- Congregational Response .... "Lord, I Want to Be a Christian in  
 My Heart"

Benediction

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Use directed prayer as a means of focusing prayers of the congregation in a single direction. Allow enough time between your directions for the people to truly pray. Don't be afraid of the quiet.

**CREATIVE WORSHIP**

Have the congregation sing as they leave the sanctuary, reinforcing their commitment to "be like Jesus" in their hearts.

# Lists, Lusts, and Love

by Alan Lyke

Gal. 5:16-26

## INTRO

**ILLUS.** I once went looking for a book by the title *The Book of Lists*. It was written and/or compiled by David Wallechinsky and Irving Wallace. According to my memory, it had only been in print for a few years. According to reality, it was printed in 1977. So much for my perception of time!

In that book you'll find lists of things that have never been listed before, like

1. 20 famous people who died young
2. 35 countries and their nuclear bomb capabilities
3. 15 most dangerous airlines
4. Shoe sizes of 20 famous men

And so on. It is 500 pages of mind-numbing trivia. For example, did you know Illinois Avenue is the most landed-upon space in Monopoly?

## I. LOOK AT THE LISTS

The reason I went looking for the book is the two lists contained in our text for this morning's message. These lists have been called "the catalog of vices and virtues, of don'ts and dos, of shouldn'ts and shoulds."

However, more is contained there than simply principles for daily living. Whether you are inside or outside the framework of Christianity, if you had to choose between the end results of the two lists, you'd choose the fruit of the Spirit.

**ILLUS.** Imagine yourself as an employer, looking for someone to keep your business. You have two applicants for the job: one whose résumé is the works of the flesh, the other whose résumé is the fruit of the Spirit. Which one would you hire?

**ILLUS.** Maybe you're in love with two people at the same time. You have to choose with whom you want to spend the rest of your life. So you write down the characteristics of each person: one set is the works of the flesh; the other, the fruit of the Spirit. Which person would you marry?

In both situations, the choices are easy. Given the opportunity to choose between peace or pain, love or lust, I'd go with the fruit of the Spirit any day. So would you.

However, more is at stake than ethical and personal benefits of these two lists. The real issue you face is the respective sources—the flesh and the Spirit.

## II. LOOK AT THE LISTS' SOURCES

The Spirit is easy to identify. We know that whenever

our English translations capitalize the word, it refers to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, and not the human spirit. Looking back over the list of "Spirit fruit," those words are all words we'd use to describe God. Very few people fit that description, but the words fit God just fine.

The word "flesh" is not so easy to identify. Some Bible translations have given their own definitions: "sinful nature" (NIV); "lower nature" (PHILLIPS); "self-indulgence" (JB). These translations reflect aspects of the flesh, but they don't go far enough in conveying the meaning of the Greek word, *sarx*, which literally translated is "flesh" (KJV).

## III. LOOK AT THE LISTS AND THE "FLESH"

If we use the ideas of "sinful nature" or "lower nature," then the description of the conflict can be misunderstood in a couple of ways. The first misunderstanding is that Christians are doomed to a hopeless struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. No freedom, no victory, just daily battles, hoping to survive from one day to the next! Jesus said, "I came that [you] might have life, and might have it abundantly" (John 10:10, NASB). I think Jesus had something more than an unending "hopeless struggle" for our Christian lives.

Another misunderstanding this "lower nature" concept brings with it is that the "higher nature" in us takes over complete control of us. We become spiritual automatons: we "hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil," not because we don't want to do so, but because we are unable to do so. The idea conveyed is that once we become Christians, there are no more battles to fight, no more maturing to take place. As the theme song from the Broadway musical *The Wiz* says, we think we can just "ease on down, ease on down the road," and let the "higher nature" do our living for us.

The latter idea has more appeal than the first, but it doesn't fit with the life of Jesus, who endured 40 days of fasting and temptations in the wilderness. He also chose to accept the cup offered to Him by His Father for our sins. That doesn't sound like an easy road to me.

The first concept suggests that being a Christian is a daily "pain in the neck," while the second notion sees Christianity as a "no pain, no strain" discipleship. The danger in believing either of those teachings lies in the fact that they aren't true!

This word "flesh" suggests more than the idea of a "sinful nature," but giving in to it leads to sin. It is more than a "lower nature," though if we follow it, we will sink lower than we ever thought we could go. Instead, as one writer puts it, "The flesh is the power that opposes God and enslaves human beings."<sup>1</sup> As we discussed last time, "The flesh is Paul's term for everything aside from God in which one places his final trust."<sup>2</sup>

## IV. LOOK AT THE LISTS AND THE CHRISTIAN

Paul is writing to Christians, to people whose sins have been forgiven, who have the Spirit of God in their hearts. The "flesh" they are battling is all that opposes God, tempting their God-given human desires into doing something contrary to His will. Are they responsible for their

actions? Most certainly! Are they perfect in their responses? Not always! Is it inevitable that they will sin again? No! Possible, yes! Inevitable, no!

All of this discussion begins with this truth: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5:1). One writer summarizes by saying: "The liberty given in Christ in the Spirit may and must regard sin as a conquered power, but not as an enemy who can suffer no further defeat in the sense of moral perfectionism. It is a liberty that calls men to battle just because this is no longer a hopeless affair . . . an uncertain struggle, but one which . . . may be fought and won in the Spirit and the power going forth from him."<sup>3</sup>

To paraphrase retired Nazarene preacher and educator Richard Howard, "It is not that [we're] incapable of following [our] own desires, but rather that [we have] the power not to follow them when they are contrary to the will of God."<sup>4</sup>

That brings us back to our lists. The works of the flesh are not inevitable; they can be overcome by the Spirit of God in us. The fruit of the Spirit is not impossible. It will become ever more a reality in us as we follow the leading of the Spirit.

**V. LOOK AT THE LISTS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

The content and consequence of both lists are their

**FALLOWFIELD**



own reward. Beyond that, there is something greater involved: the kingdom of God. The fruit of God's Spirit in us reveals we are citizens of God's kingdom; the works of the flesh on an ongoing basis in us reveal that we are not.

God purposes that we *all* belong to His kingdom. Do we? Do you? It can be true of you by your confessing to Jesus Christ that you've been guilty of committing the works of the flesh and need His forgiveness.

Perhaps you already belong to God but are trying to fight the battles, the temptations, and the flesh on your own power. The Spirit of God, already present in you, would like to empower you, would like to lead you, if you let Him!

"Walk by the Spirit," and you will not give in to "the desires of the flesh" (v. 16, RSV).

1. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London, 1977), 553, in Bruce, *Galatians*, 243.
2. Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, 103, in Bruce, *Galatians*, 243.
3. Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), n.p.
4. Howard, "Galatians," 95.

**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

- Announcements
- Invocation
- Congregational Singing ..... "I Will Enter His Gates"
- Welcome
- Congregational Singing ..... "Great and Wonderful"
- "Bless the Lord"
- "Blessed Be the Name of the Lord"
- Offering
- Congregational Singing ..... "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"
- Pastoral Prayer
- Scripture Reading ..... Gal. 5:16-26
- Vocal Solo ..... "Only One Life to Offer"
- Message ..... "LISTS, LUSTS, AND LOVE"
- Congregational Response ..... "Cleanse Me"
- Benediction

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Remind the congregation of the faithfulness of God in the past to encourage their faith in Him for the present and the future.

**CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS**

Distribute copies of the text for the morning message, with the verses organized for responsive reading. The corporate reading of this passage will help underscore the differences between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit.

# It's Obvious

by Alan Lyke

Gal. 5:16-25

## INTRO

There are a number of ways to say, "It's obvious!" One old line says, "It's plain as the nose on your face." In my high school days, when something said was very obvious, we used to respond sarcastically, "Oh, really?" Today, my children use the phrase "No duh!" conveying something obvious.

### I. THERE ARE REASONS WHY WE MIGHT MISS THE OBVIOUS

There are some reasons that we miss the obvious. It's not unusual to carry our own lists of the obvious and the nonobvious. For example, we may have more concern about cultural sins than we do about biblical sins. Others focus on their social justice agenda while ignoring other societal issues that need the gospel of Christ. Some people hold favorite theological themes that keep them from appreciating other interpretations of Scripture. The obvious gets overlooked. The list goes on and on.

The apostle Paul knew the Galatian Christians were in danger of missing the obvious. Their issues dealt with the "works of the flesh" (v. 19, *κτλ*) and the "fruit of the Spirit" (v. 22). Paul voices his concern to the Galatians by giving detailed lists of both characteristics (all *niv*). Perhaps those things he lists as the "works of the flesh" can be better understood by breaking the list down into categories.

### II. THE "WORKS OF THE FLESH" ARE OBVIOUS

Richard Howard describes the works of the flesh as "legitimate desires . . . illegitimately satisfied."<sup>1</sup> The first category deals with *sensual* works of the flesh, some of which need no further explanation. (1) Sexual immorality. (2) Impurity, which implies one's whole personality is debased. (3) Debauchery, when one doesn't care who sees or knows what's going on. This portion of the list progresses from bad to worse.

The second category includes *spiritual* works of the flesh. (1) Idolatry, the practice of worshipping "God substitutes." (2) Witchcraft, the practice of magic and superstition, which recognizes an alternate authority to God.

*Relational* works of the flesh follow. (1) Hatred. (2) Discord. (3) Jealousy. (4) Fits of rage. (5) Selfish ambition. (6) Dissensions. (7) Factions, which includes party politics and cliquish security. (8) Envy. All of these hinder unity. All cause division. All fly in the face of the new commandment Jesus gave to His disciples, "Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12). This third category has the most things listed and is the most difficult to avoid.

Paul's next listing are *social* works of the flesh. (1) Drunkenness. (2) Orgies. These have to do with immediate gratification.

The apostle ends his list with a catchall phrase, "and

the like." He implies the list is only the beginning. There is more that could be added. It also implies that it is not enough to look over the list and say: "Well, I'm all right. I don't do those things." The absence of an evil on that list does not guarantee the presence of Christ. It is possible to be so self-disciplined that we avoid being guilty of anything Paul listed as one of the works of the flesh. However, self-discipline cannot deal with conditions of the heart. Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler, the apostle Paul's testimony, and our own experiences witness to that.

Aside from personal and societal consequences from engaging in the works of the flesh, there is a larger concern. The most important reason the works of the flesh should be avoided is that people who practice them on a regular basis "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (v. 21). There are at least two reasons for that: (1) Their actions reveal they do not belong to God, so they will not receive the inheritance of His kingdom. (2) Their actions keep them from belonging to God, so they cannot be members of His kingdom.

The eternal truth is that sin separates us from God. However, He has provided a way into His kingdom through confession and repentance (1 John 1).

### III. THE "FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT" IS OBVIOUS

Characteristics of the Holy Spirit's work in the believer's life sound familiar by now: (1) Love. (2) Joy. (3) Peace. (4) Patience. (5) Kindness. (6) Goodness. (7) Faithfulness. (8) Gentleness. (9) Self-control.

These virtues of Christ, the fruit of the Spirit, were enfolded in the life and teachings of Jesus.

**ILLUS.** In his *Notes from My Bible*, D. L. Moody suggests that the fruit of the Spirit can all be defined in terms of *love*. So, according to Moody: *Joy* is love exulting. *Peace* is love reposing. *Patience* is love untiring. *Kindness* is love enduring. *Goodness* is love in action. *Faithfulness* is love on the battlefield. *Gentleness* is love under discipline. *Self-control* is love in training.<sup>2</sup>

What should be obvious is that this list of the fruit of the Spirit does not describe the life of a passive person. The fruit of the Spirit requires active participation on our part, not just passive acceptance. These qualities always result from the Christian intentionally being "in Christ."

No specific actions are described in this list. We often reduce these conceptual descriptions to defined behaviors. Then we attempt to do them in our own strength. The apostle intends the disciples of Jesus to allow the Holy Spirit to have His way of molding, guiding, shaping, and cleansing our spirits so that we reflect His Spirit at work in us.

### IV. LIFE IN THE SPIRIT IS OBVIOUS

Paul uses some difficult language to describe the fruit of the Spirit as realities. "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires" (v. 24). The "crucifixion" Paul refers to results in living for Jesus and not for ourselves. Crucifying the sinful nature results in, as Jesus put it, denying ourselves, picking up our crosses, and following Christ.

Paul follows with an "if/then" statement (v. 25). It is the natural extension of our new life in Christ, the result of the crucifixion of the sinful nature mentioned in the previous verse. "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." The life we live aligns with the life of the Spirit at work in us. We follow His steps, His direction, His guidance. The result will be the fruit of the Spirit increasingly evident in our everyday lives.

**V. HOW DO WE RESPOND TO THE OBVIOUS?**

Avoiding the works of the flesh and embracing the fruit of the Spirit are more than self-discipline, more than moderation in all things, more than passing judgment on people who don't measure up to our standards, more than seeing it's impossible. Perfection, Christlikeness, is our mandate; the fruit of the Spirit, our expectation. The Holy Spirit is the Agent of transforming our hearts. He is our Guide.

How do we respond to the obvious? Not by carrying both lists around in order to check on how we're doing, but by following the guidance of the Spirit of Christ, by obeying His commands. The fruit will come. "In Christ" the fruit will be obvious.

**CONCLUSION**

C. S. Lewis wrote:

I think all Christians would agree with me if I said that though Christianity seems at first to be all about morality, all about duties and rules and guilt and virtue, yet it leads you on, out of all that, into something beyond. One has a glimpse of a country where they do not talk of those things, except as a joke. Everyone there is filled with what we should call goodness as a mirror is filled with light. But they do not call it goodness. They do not call it anything. They are not thinking of it. They are too busy looking at the source from which it comes.<sup>3</sup>

"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

1. Howard, "Galatians," 102; see 93-103.
2. D. L. Moody, *Notes from My Bible* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1895), 166.
3. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1958), 116.

**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

- Announcements
- Invocation
- Congregational Singing ..... "Revive Us Again"
- Welcome
- Congregational Singing ..... "Allelu, Allelu"
- ..... "Thy Loving-kindness"
- ..... "Something Beautiful"
- ..... "Lord, We Praise You"
- Congregational Praises
- Offering
- Congregational Requests
- Prayer Chorus ..... "In His Time"
- Pastoral Prayer
- Vocal Solo ..... "My Jesus, I Love Thee"
- Message ..... "IT'S OBVIOUS"
- Congregational Response ..... "Lord, Be Glorified"
- Benediction

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Remind the congregation that in the same way Jesus was born in "the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4, NRSV), so their prayers will be answered "in His time."

**CREATIVE WORSHIP**

Ask members of the congregation to complete this sentence, "Lord, I praise You for . . .," repeating the chorus after one or two persons testify.



# Going Together

by Alan Lyke

Gal. 5:25—6:10

## INTRO

At times it's good to be alone. We all need space to recover our strength, quiet to mend our minds and hearts, and solitude to heal our spirits. Our times alone can be times of true re-creation when we put them into the hands of our Heavenly Father.

However, too many Christians believe that is the only way to live the Christian life. They believe that in order to be truly spiritual, they have to go all alone—become Christian lone rangers without even a “Tonto” for companionship.

God did not intend it to be that way. True Christians belong to and participate in the community of believers. True Christians don't go their own ways; they go together with their brothers and sisters in Christ.

### I. CHRISTIANS NEED TO GO TOGETHER

[Read Gal. 5:25—6:10.] Note verse 25. We've read this verse three of the last four Sundays. It's a transitional verse. It concludes the previous section of the Epistle that deals with our lives in the Spirit. It also introduces this next section of Scripture.

Verse 25 says, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” There is really nothing too difficult when it comes to understanding that verse. We live one day to the next as the natural expression of our lives as Christians. Spiritual considerations remain part of the territory. We do our best to “keep in step.”

Sometimes we keep the things of the Spirit on a spiritual level. Spiritual things relate when we're being religious, but not when we're being practical. Somehow we have difficulty in transposing the cadence of the Spirit's leading into a rhythm for everyday living.

However, as Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel points out: “The world needs more than the secret holiness of individual inwardness. It needs more than sacred sentiments and good intentions. God asks for the heart because He needs the lives. It is by lives that the world will be redeemed, by lives that beat in concordance with God, by deeds that out beat the finite charity of the human heart.”<sup>1</sup>

That is the essence of walking in the Spirit. The apostle Paul knew that. So rather than leave the Galatians with teachings that made them so “heavenly-minded they were no earthly good,” he got specific and, in turn, gets specific with us.

### II. CHRISTIANS NEED TO STAY TOGETHER

[Read 5:26—6:10.] Of all the situations mentioned in these verses, the one described in 6:1 may be the most difficult. What do we do with someone who knows Jesus Christ, who follows the Scriptures, but for some reason

winds up involved in sin? Unfortunately, most of the time we do nothing. Inwardly we hope they'll discover the error of their ways. Outwardly we may even put some distance between us and them. And sometimes we bury them alive. Rather than “caring enough to confront,” we allow them to stay in the hole they've dug for themselves and begin to fill it in with silence and pseudosanctity until it's filled to the top so that we can smooth it over as though nothing happened. I heard someone say, “Burying our wounded so the rest of us will be healthy doesn't seem like much of a way to build an army.” And I agree, don't you?

So how do we respond when Christian brothers or sisters find themselves in sin? Do notice that the verse does not say that we are to go looking for sin in their lives. It says that our fallen brother or sister is “overtaken” by it (NKJV), so they know as well as the others around them what kind of shape they are in.

What do we do? We respond gently. We help shoulder the burden. We keep our judgments to ourselves. We keep in step with the Spirit.

**ILLUS.** I think the best example of this kind of comradeship can be found outside the Christian community. Alcoholics Anonymous was founded by an alcoholic unable to stop his drinking on his own. In the movie based on the events of his life, *My Name Is Bill*, there's a line I pray we could all make our own. When asked why he organized AA the way he did, Bill replied, “Because we drunks know how to care for one another.”

To follow Christ does not make us impervious to temptations. To be forgiven of our sins means we're “dry sinners” if you will. We need to, and we must, care for others in sin in the same way Christ cared for us when we were in that predicament.

Alcoholic drinking is never condoned in an AA meeting, but neither is the drinking person turned away. What a wonderful model for the Body of Christ to follow! Sin must be rejected, but the sinner must always be loved the way Jesus loves him or her.

### III. CHRISTIANS MUST GROW TOGETHER

Another area of Christian living is the matter of spiritual pride. Of all situations Jesus confronted in His early ministry, spiritual pride most often felt the sting of His anger. His life in us has made us Christians; we have nothing to boast of on our own.

Seeing others fall, watching them stumble under their loads, may lead us to think we've got things all together. To be sure, we can know our sins are forgiven. But we must remember that we've not yet arrived. Richard Howard says, “It is dangerously easy for one to build up a strong case for himself when he sees fault in another.”<sup>2</sup>

How should we respond to the temptation to practice this kind of “spiritual pole-vaulting”? (1) We begin by testing ourselves by the life of Jesus. In places where we are found wanting, we must ask for forgiveness. Pray for grace, and pray for our brother or sister who is struggling. (2) We aid those who are wrestling with sin issues by making their burdens our own. That is not to say that we take on their guilt, but we don't allow them to face

their issues alone. (3) We continue to pursue doing that to which God calls us, mindful that our journey is not over, nor have we reached all that God has in store for us. (4) Finally, "keep in step with the Spirit." Yet we must recognize that the Spirit will never lead us to "vault" over someone as we follow His lead.

**IV. CHRISTIANS MUST LIVE TOGETHER**

One area of our lives concerns priorities. Most of what is important to us gets reflected in two books—our datebooks and our checkbooks. When Paul says, "Share all good things" (v. 6), "A man reaps what he sows" (v. 7), and "Let us not become weary in doing good" (v. 9), he addresses two commodities that are most important in our society: time and money.

Verse 6 primarily focuses on financial support for those in the ministry. Yet it also implies investing time in those who teach us, whether through lectures or through various situations of life.

When Paul says, "A man reaps what he sows," he includes the time it takes to care for loved ones, neighbors, and fellow workers. That kind of "time sharing" is as important as how we spend our financial resources with which God has blessed us.

The words "Let us not be weary in well doing" (v. 9, KJV) apply as much to our financial support of ministries as it does to carrying the burdens of people around us.

In establishing our priorities, we must ask these questions: Whose time is it? To whom does my money really belong? If we are Christian in any sense of the word, we'll confess, "They're not mine, they belong to God; I will do with them what He wants."

So what are we supposed to do? Care for each other. Gently confront sin in another. Avoid spiritual pride. Prioritize our lives for Jesus Christ. It may sound like a tall order. Do you feel like taking this list and putting it on top of your other lists of things to do?

On our own, it's impossible. To paraphrase E. Stanley Jones: "To struggle to live the walk of the Spirit, without the life of the Spirit, is to make these verses a whip of duty instead of a natural manifestation of the Spirit of Christ."

"Keep[ing] in step with the Spirit" will guide us into involvement. Where the Spirit leads, He empowers, He sustains, He comforts, and He instructs.

Given this context, we are to take our walk in the Spirit together. Make sure we care for each other because we need each other in order to carry on.

**CONCLUSION**

Reuben Welch says:

Christian fellowship is no place for "get in or get out"—it's "get in, get in." And if you need to slow down—you slow down. That's why it's good for us to read Scripture and sing hymns together—the slow folks

have to speed up and the fast folks have to slow down and we have to do it together. It doesn't help much for those who have made it to say to us weaklings—"Try harder. See, I've done it, so you can make it."

That makes me think of some dear old grandmother whose children are all gone, who spends all day praying and listening to holy records, saying to a young mother going out of her mind with little kids and noise, "Oh honey, just get alone with God." *Yeah, thanks a lot. You can't even get alone in the bathroom any more.*

We're all learning, and we've all got a long journey ahead of us. We've got to go together and if it takes us until Jesus comes we better stay together; we better help each other. Because that's how it is in the Body of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

And that's how it is when we walk in the Spirit! We go together!

1. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, n.p., in Job and Shawchuck, *Guide to Prayer*, 133.  
 2. Howard, "Galatians," 115.  
 3. Reuben Welch, *We Really Do Need Each Other* (Nashville: Impact Books, n.d.), 109-10.

**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

- Announcements
- Invocation
- Congregational Singing .... "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"
- Welcome
- Congregational Singing ..... "We Have Come into His House"
- "His Name Is Wonderful"
- "I Love You, Lord"
- Offering
- Vocal Duet ..... "Day by Day"
- Prayer Chorus ..... "Be Still and Know"
- Pastoral Prayer
- Scripture Reading ..... Gal. 5:25—6:10
- Vocal Solo ..... "Make Me New"
- Message ..... "GOING TOGETHER"
- Congregational Response ..... "I Love You with the Love of the Lord"
- Benediction

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Anticipating the theme of the message, have members of the congregation join hands while you lead them in prayer, concluding with a recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

**CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS**

If the members of your congregation are strong singers, divide verses 2 and 3 of "All Hail the Power" into phrases, and have one-half of the congregation sing the first phrase, the other half the second phrase, and so on through the verses.



# Bragging Right

by Alan Lyke

Gal. 6:11-18

## INTRO

**ILLUS.** I pulled up behind a car one day and read this prominently positioned bumper sticker: "It's hard to be humble when you own a Pomeranian." A Pomeranian? Do you know what that is? A Pomeranian is a miniature-notarized four-legged yip-yip with fur! And this lady was having a hard time being humble because she owned one! Incredible!

Before we get too hard on her, we better put away our football banners and fold up our favorite college T-shirts because those dynasties will last for only so long. We should cover up our trophies from Boy Scout or Girl Scout days when our troop won the camp award for "most likely to get tied in knots."

It may not be a Pomeranian, but most likely there's some award, some accomplishment, some possession that's ours that makes it hard for us to be humble. We just can't help ourselves!

Pride! C. S. Lewis says, "The more pride we have, the more we dislike it in others." He goes on to say: "In fact, if you want to find out how proud you are, the easiest way is to ask yourself, 'How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take notice of me, or shove their oar in, or patronize me, or show off?' . . . It is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I am so annoyed at someone else being the big noise."<sup>1</sup>

Tough words? Sure! Anyone own a Pomeranian?

You have my permission to boast. In fact, if I read the passage of Scripture right, you have God's permission to boast. Obviously the content of our boasting, the basis for our bragging, is at issue here in Galatians.

## I. WHAT DO WE BOAST ABOUT?

On the one hand, there were those who wanted to make a good impression, so they went along with the status quo. They knew that following Jesus' teachings could cause them persecution. So they hedged on their convictions and hoped to get by. The Jews weren't going to bother them because they adopted the Hebrew law as their own. The Romans weren't going to bother them because they looked enough like Jews to deserve their protection.

Then there were those who were wanting the Galatian Christians to subscribe to their brand of Christianity. Paul says that they were doing it for one reason—so they could brag about how many followers they had. Someone calls it "scalp hunting," gaining a position of pride because of the number of scalps they had on their line.

**ILLUS.** An acquaintance of mine used to keep track of how many people he had led to Christ until God pointed out how much pride he was taking in his "record of victories."

Some people in the Galatian churches were free and

easy: "Hey, none of that law stuff for me. I can do as I want." And they did.

But the Scripture says: "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation" (v. 15).

Ultimately, it doesn't matter what we claim to believe or don't believe; it doesn't matter what we do or don't do. If we have not been made new creatures in Christ, we might as well hang out our Pomeranians or hang on to whatever makes us feel proud. We've missed the life that Jesus has for us by holding on to whatever "it" is and, by default, choosing not to be made new. One commentator put it, "Every man who is not in Christ has his world—that for which he lives and slaves, and perhaps is willing to die."<sup>2</sup>

Boasting about our worldly accomplishments is not the kind of bragging Paul had in mind. Nor does he suggest that we are to be proud of how correct we are doctrinally. A position of theological arrogance automatically puts us in competition with our brothers and sisters in Christ instead of our cooperating with them in a world that desperately needs to know Jesus. Our mission as Christians is *not* to tell people what we don't believe, but in whom we believe, in whom we have life, in whom we are new creations.

Christians sometimes combine Gal. 6:14 ("May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ") with Matt. 10:38 ("Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me"). The result is often a form of "poor-me Christianity" that focuses on how big a load *we* have to carry, on how heavy *our* cross is, drawing attention away from Jesus to us.

Calvin Miller offers an insightful corrective when he writes: "Use me big or use me small, I said, all the while believing it would be some ostensible, important place—an elevated niche. But then instead, He beckoned me away from dignity to serve where many might see His face and never mine."<sup>3</sup>

Our boasting as Christians is not in what we've done, or in what we believe, or in what kind of cross we've carried. We brag rightly as followers of Jesus Christ when we glory in His cross, when we boast of what He's done for us and in us and through us.

## II. ABOUT WHAT MUST WE BOAST?

To say Jesus died for us is confessing that we couldn't do what needed to be done by us. To boast in the Cross means others will more likely follow our example and look there for their forgiveness, instead of relying and bragging on themselves.

F. F. Bruce offers valuable insight at this point: "For one who makes the cross his supreme, indeed his solitary, ground of boasting, all the accepted standards of social life are necessarily turned upside down: a total transvaluation of values has taken place. Not only does he no longer know anyone by worldly standards; he has made a radical reassessment of everything in the light of the cross."<sup>4</sup>

What a difference it would make in our sphere of influence if tomorrow we boasted in the cross of Christ! How

different our colleagues would seem! How much closer our families would be! How more like Jesus we would be!

To boast in the cross of Christ is not to tear ourselves down, but to lift Jesus up. Too many Christians suffer from self-imposed low self-esteem because they thought it was the only way for Jesus to be prominent in their lives. The very fact that Christ died for us shows how esteemed we are by Him. That should encourage us to love ourselves as He has loved us.

So we have God's permission to boast. In fact, we're urged to do so. But not about our Pomeranians, or Boy Scouts' trophies, or personal theologies, or even our crosses.

**ILLUS.** "Dr. Bonar once said that he could tell when a Christian was growing. In proportion to his growth in grace, he would elevate his Master, talk less of what he himself was doing, and become smaller and smaller in his own esteem, until, like the morning star, he faded away before the rising sun."<sup>5</sup>

If we're going to do our bragging right, we'll live and breathe so others can see the cross of Christ as life—in me, in you, and in all of us. Hopefully they will join us and say: "May I never boast in anything, except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

1. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 94-95.  
 2. Howard, "Galatians," 122.  
 3. Calvin Miller, "A Very Little Cross," in Merle Meeter, comp., *The Cross of the Risen King* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 147.  
 4. Bruce, *Galatians*, 144.  
 5. D. L. Moody, "How to See Growth in Christ," in Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*, 571.

**SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

- Announcements
- Invocation
- Congregational Singing ..... "We Bow Down"
- Welcome
- Vocal Solo ..... "In the Name of the Lord"
- Congregational Singing ..... "Majesty"
- "Honor the Lord"
- "O Come, Let Us Adore Him"
- Offering
- Scripture Reading ..... Gal. 6:11-18
- Vocal Ensemble ..... "The King of Who I Am"
- Message ..... "BRAGGING RIGHT"
- Congregational Response ..... "When I Survey"
- Communion
- Benediction

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Pray the pastoral prayer through the prayers in the process of serving Communion. It is an audible reminder of the physical price paid for our redemption, peace, and hope of eternity.

**CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS**

Instead of passing the elements of the Lord's Supper down through the pews, have the members of the congregation walk to the front to take the elements from their respective trays, which are being held by those normally involved in serving Communion. This physical activity will heighten the congregation's sense of participation in receiving of the elements.



That was what I'd call a real fire and brimstone sermon!

# Highpoint

## Sunday Night Preaching Resources

This series is not a course on comparative religion. Nor is it a *Consumer's Report* for people who are scratching their heads as they stand in the supermarket of gods, faced with more options than are found on the potato chip aisle."

With those words, Joe Knight introduced his series of sermons to me in a letter describing his work. He continued, "This is a witness to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ that is geared for those who rub shoulders with people of many different religious faiths. This is a primer."

*Highpoint* for this quarter will probe your mind and beliefs. It will help you connect the message of grace with post-modern minds that may be lurking in your congregation. I am pleased to offer this selection for your consideration. May the preaching light burn brightly during these Sunday nights!

David J. Felter, editor  
*Highpoint*

# Welcome to *Highpoint*

**O**n a recent telephone call with Pastor Joe Knight of Georgetown, Texas, I discussed with him the possibility of writing a series of sermons for *Highpoint*. Joe began to share with me some of the ways in which God has been leading him recently. He discussed with me the vision that God had placed before him of becoming a polemical evangelist. Now before you grab your dictionaries to see whether or not that word is actually present, let me assure you that Joe knows what he is talking about. Polemics, while not a popular term in our day and time, stands for a rich tradition in which the fundamental truths of a proposition are not only examined but proclaimed as well. Indeed there are criteria that must be met in order for truths to be established as supporting evidence for any tradition. Joe is convinced that in our world Christianity is going to confront, and indeed is in the very process of confronting, incredible challenges as we approach the dawn of a new millennium. It is his belief that men and women need to understand the fundamental truths of Christianity and be able to express them in such a way as to engage the minds and hearts of those coming from other traditions. Keenly aware of the fact that Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other Eastern religions are making tremendous inroads in not only North America but all the parts of the world, Joe is con-

cerned that there be a cadre of trained evangelists who understand the diversity and challenge of both the new arrivals in North America as well as those who are opening their minds to the claims of counterfeit gospels.

With this in mind, Joe shared 12 sermons that he has developed and used in the congregation there in Georgetown, Texas. As an update, Joe revealed to me that he is planning to pursue this God-given call and direction upon his life by furthering his education so that he can develop a specialty in terms of ministry skill and ability. As you study these sermons, you will note that they are extremely foundational. In fact, there is little more that you can do on Sunday night to help your congregation prepare for the challenge of the new millennium than preach these sermons. I trust that as you open your heart and mind to these sermons, you will allow the Spirit of God to take the insight both from the Scripture and from the fertile mind of Joe Knight and apply them to your situation. Take these sermons and put them into your own style and format. You will find truth, illustration, and insight in abundance in this series.

To close the series, we have offered Joe's adaptation of a service of Christian baptism. In addition there are two other sermons that will parallel these concerns. One is on prayer, and the other is on willingness to be obedient followers of Jesus Christ.

What more could we do than to prepare our congregations for the challenge of the coming millennium? May God bless you.

## Meet Joe Knight

Joseph Knight was born in Winfield, Kansas, to Marselle and Betty Knight. Raised in a parsonage family, Joe heard God's call to ministry as a teenager. He received the B.A. from MidAmerica Nazarene College (now MidAmerica Nazarene University), the master of divinity from Nazarene Theological Seminary, and pursued graduate studies at the University of Washington.

Joe has been married to his wife, Pam, for 16 years. They are the parents of Jordan, Kimberly, and Kyle. His ministry includes a stint at College Church of the Nazarene in Olathe, Kansas; staff member at Beaverton, Oregon, First Church of the Nazarene; and senior pastor of congregations in Kansas, Washington, and most recently at Georgetown, Texas.

He has resigned from the pastorate in Georgetown in order to pursue additional study in the field of polemical evangelism.

JUNE  
JULY  
AUGUST  
1998

DAVID J. FELTER  
*Editor,*  
*Highpoint Series*  
KANSAS CITY



# Is It Real or Counterfeit?

This series is not a course on comparative religions. Nor is it a *Consumer's Report* for people who are scratching their heads as they stand in the supermarket of the gods, faced with more options than are found on the potato chip aisle.

It is a witness to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ that is prepared for those who rub shoulders with people of many different religious faiths.

## Suggested Order

1. Housecleaning Starts with Idols—Christians and Idolatry
2. Christ and Idolatry—the Heart of the Matter
3. Christ and the World Religions
4. A Polemic for the Unconvinced
5. Escaping the Maze of Universal Religion
6. How to Cult-Proof Your Life
7. Christ and Pseudo-Christ
8. Pearl of Great Price
9. Resurrection—History or Hysteria
10. Atheists in Power
11. Service of Christian Baptism: What Is a Christian?
12. Prayer, a Major Key to Revival
13. I'll Say, "Yes, Lord, Yes"

**This is a series dedicated to advancing the cause of Christ to one of the most challenging audiences in the world: the U.S.A.** It is challenging because the Christian faith is a reasonable faith, and many Americans operate on an emotion-based faith.

Standing on the edge of the platform with racing heartbeat and sweaty palms, we think long and hard: Why am I doing this? Are you ready to take a leap of faith and hang by an elastic cord that snaps you up and down a few times, as if you're a human yo-yo?

You tell yourself, "This is the stupidest thing I've ever done." You bargain with God: "Lord, if You get me out of this, I'll teach that junior high boys class, half of them diagnosed with ADD."

I know. Been there, done that.

### Handling Objections:

1. Take them seriously.
2. See what underlies them.
3. Listen respectfully to them.

Don't cut in.

4. Understand them at their profoundest level. Do not ridicule or denigrate.

5. Sympathize with the deeply human impulses that they embody.

6. Nevertheless, note that they need have little or no real claim on a human being or on a Christian.

7. Don't be cocky.

### Prayers for This Series

That those currently living in ignorance will be brought to the truth.

That they will meet the One who "has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true" (1 John 5:20).

That those currently living in Christ will "keep [them]selves from idols" (v. 21).

JOE KNIGHT

Pastor

GEORGETOWN, TEXAS



# HOUSECLEANING STARTS WITH US—CHRISTIANS AND IDOLATRY BROTHERS, KEEP YOURSELVES FROM IDOLS

## INTRODUCTION

A. To embrace a culture, we must beware that we don't accept the gods it adores. Before the church can offer Jesus Christ as the great Alternative to the world, it must make sure that Jesus Christ is the exclusive choice of the church.

B. Protests may come: "Thanks to God's grace, idolatry could never affect me." Or, "Idols? Hey, this is the dawn of the 21st century. We've come of age. Let's not go back to the Dark Ages!"

To those protests, both Paul and John have this answer:

"If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Cor. 10:12).

"Dear children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

## I. THIS MESSAGE ATTEMPTS TO ANSWER FOUR QUESTIONS

A. What practices today constitute idolatry?

B. Why might a believer in the living and true God ever fall for a god that is false? Is the temptation here real or just hypothetical? Can we imbibe in that which we do not believe?

C. Why must Christians avoid it?

D. What is the strategy of immunizing ourselves from idolatry?

## II. GIVE ME SOME EXAMPLES

A. What specific practices are idolatrous? (Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5-7; Col. 3:5-9; Rev. 9:20-21; 21:8; 22:15)

B. What sins stand linked with idolatry?

1. Sorcery and Magic
2. Covetousness and Greed. "Material prosperity becomes our overriding individual aim" (T. S. Eliot).
3. Mammon, a false god (Matt. 6:24, κJV).
4. Autonomy and Self-rule—God exists to serve me and my needs, make me happy. This is subtle, but it often barter with God: "If You make me happy, I will serve You." This seeks the rewards of men rather than the approval of God.

## III. IT COULDN'T HAPPEN TO ME

A. Is idolatry a threat to the true Christian?

1. *It CAN happen to me . . . if my DESIRES dictate my religion.*

2. *It CAN happen to me . . . if I buy into the impression that the gods of this world somehow have the upper hand over the God of the Cross.*

3. *It CAN happen to me . . . if I rationalize them as supplemental rather than substitutions.*

## IV. SO WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? Three Reasons Christians Must Avoid Idolatry<sup>1</sup>

A. There is reality behind idolatrous practice.

Idols are abominations, behind which stand demonic powers.

Two Things to Remember . . .

1. Idols are a JOKE! They are impotent and vain (1 Chron. 16:26; 2 Chron. 25:15; Ezek. 8:10).

2. But the joke's on YOU! Demonic powers lurk behind them. Any person subjects himself if he participates in their activities (Deut. 32:17; Rom. 1:18-22; 1 Cor. 10).

B. Involvement with idols defiles us personally, even though they are surreal.

To participate in the activity is to partake of the spiritual entity that that symbol or activity represents.

Ezek. 37:23

1 Cor. 10:14-22

C. Believers divide their love and loyalty to Christ by coming into voluntary contact. In doing so, they test the Lord.

## V. OPERATION IMMUNIZATION

What strategy will protect us from idolatry?

A. Run! (1 Cor. 10:14)

B. Make a clean break.

C. Turn away—a call to repent (Hos. 4:1-8; 14:8-9; Isa. 1:15; Amos 5:14; 1 John 5:21).

D. Avoid giving mixed signals to young believers through disputable issues.

CONCLUSION. "In a new age darkened by the collapse of character and the dissolution of faith, the church cannot model the kingdom of God if it is conformed to the kingdoms of man. If the church today is to be the church, it must diligently protect its spiritual integrity. This begins with what the Greeks called *metanoia*, which means 'a change of mind.'"<sup>2</sup>

1. These reasons have been adapted from Colin Brown, "idol," in *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*.

2. Chuck Colson, *Christianity Today*, October 20, 1989, 33.

# CHRIST AND IDOLATRY—THE HEART OF THE MATTER

## INTRODUCTION

A primer for conversation with world citizens—first principles of idolatry. Jesus and idolatry—If we think like Christ, we'll be thinking straight!

- I. IDOLATRY IS A DISEASE ON THE INSIDE OF A PERSON, NOT A PLAGUE INSIDE OF A NATION OR RELIGION. IT IS LOCATED IN THE HUMAN HEART, NOT IN THE RELIGIOUS SYSTEM OR THE FORM.<sup>1</sup>
  - A. The Bible locates idolatry *internally* within the heart rather than *externally* in the outward religion. Behind the "image" is a disease of soul.
  - B. The apostle Paul concurred (Gal. 5:19-20).
- II. WORSHIP IS A MATTER OF THE HEART, NOT ITS OUTWARD FORM Matt. 15:8-9
  - A. To whom did Jesus make this indictment? Not foreigners of world religions, but of the sons of Abraham, God's elect people!
  - B. Jesus was not agitated over form but over heart. He was primarily concerned with the spiritual condition of individual men and women.
- III. JESUS APPLAUDED THE FAITH OF MEN AND WOMEN *WHEREVER* HE FOUND IT AND CONDEMNED ITS ABSENCE
  - A. The Gospels go out of their way to point out that many actions that Christ *commended* were by those *outside* the accepted religious system.
  - B. Foreigners! Jesus rewarded faith wherever and in whomever He found it. Do we do that? Would we compliment a noble act of a Buddhist? Or would we stand ready to condemn the *man* because of his system?
 

"Christ worked only in His own sphere, the sphere of men's hearts . . . by operating on the heart, he meant to operate upon everything else; for all human relations grow out of it."<sup>2</sup>
  - C. Where is idolatry?
    1. We don't have to go overseas to find it.

2. We don't have to read books on ancient history to discover it.
3. It's here.
4. It's now.

- IV. WHAT IS THE REMEDY FOR OUR HEART DISEASE? (John 3:3-8; Acts 15:9-11)
  - A. Implications for us: Let's think straight about idolatry.
  - B. The Book of Acts reveals to us that the first missionaries did not set out to preach against "rival religions" . . . Rather, they exposed the universal condition of the human heart, proclaiming its remedy in the Cross.
  - C. The Cross is good news for all "nations," regardless which national deities they may happen to embrace.
  - D. We would do well to adopt the thinking of Jesus and Paul on idolatry. If we view it as something that happens overseas, we commit a double sin: against our neighbor and against God's Word by missing the point.
- V. HUMANKIND IS DEFILED BY SIN
 

Deeply tainted by evil (Mark 7:20, NRSV).
- VI. JESUS HAS COMPASSION ON THE SUFFERINGS OF HUMANKIND. HE CAME TO HEAL THE SOUL OF ALL OF ITS DISEASES (Luke 4:18, NASB; Matt. 9:36, AMP).
  - A. Jesus knew that with general sinfulness is general suffering. Satan and evil spirits were interested in promoting both (Mark 1:32; 6:13; Matt. 9:32; Luke 13:16).
  - B. Healing is tied to the demand for repentance and righteousness. And exorcism of evil often preceded healing. And healing without repentance is like recontaminating the body after a good purging.
- VII. THE REMEDY FOR HUMAN ILLS IS FOUND IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD
 

The kingdom of God is as wide as humanity itself. It is not confined to the people of Israel (Luke 1:32-33, 54, 68-79; 2:11, 25, 38).
- VIII. WHILE THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WORLDWIDE IN SCOPE, IT ENTERS ONE SOUL AT A TIME
 

Jesus' initial target audience was not the heathen,

but it was the elect, Israel. In its purest form, missions is an invasion of God upon the human heart wherever there is idolatry.

Jesus may be in a Buddhist temple. Or He may warm the pew of a Protestant church. We must stress this when talking to someone from another religion.

- IX. ADVANCEMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS TIED TO HIS MESSIAHSHIP
- X. JESUS CONFERRED UPON HIS FOLLOWERS THE AUTHORITY REQUIRED FOR ITS CONTINUATION AND EXTENSION (Mark 3:14-15; 6:7-13; Matt. 10:1, 8, 11, 14; Luke 9:1-6; 10:19)
- XI. JESUS ORGANIZED THE CHURCH UNDER APOSTOLIC LEADERSHIP

CONCLUSION. Take an evil man with an above-average intelligence, give him a good program and state-of-the-art tools and education, give him an assignment, and he will eventually mess it up.

Take another person with strong character and a good heart, give him inferior tools to work with, and often he will succeed.

Likewise, rituals and religious symbols have not the power to change an evil person into a good one.

1. See John Cadoux, *Early Church and the World: A History of the Christian Attitude to Pagan Society and the State Down to the Time of Constantine* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1955).

2. Neander, *The Life of Jesus Christ* (English trans.), 344. Quoted by Cadoux.

# CHRIST AND THE WORLD RELIGIONS

## WHY DID JESUS ENTER A WORLD ALREADY BRIMMING WITH RELIGION?

### INTRODUCTION

- A. *The Encyclopedia of American Religions* lists more than 1,500 religious groups in America—900 have Christian roots, 600 non-Christian—North America today resembles the world of the apostle Paul. The signs suggest that, barring a major action of the true God, the trend will continue.\*
  - B. How Christians are to properly respond to these other religions is on the mind of any alert follower of Jesus Christ. Does religious pluralism, which we prize in our country, preclude our attempts to convert devotees from other faiths?
  - C. The New Testament is more than a theology book. It is also a training manual on how to live out our faith and witness in a religious society.
  - D. Four Thoughts:
    - FRET NOT—God has no clones.
    - FOCUS IN—Jesus has no peers.
    - TAKE HEART—God has no pets.
    - LET GO—God is not mocked.
1. **The presence of many faiths does not mean the existence of many gods**  
(1 Cor. 8:4-6)
  2. **In the main, world religions began with a question mark rather than an exclamation point**  
In other words, they started by recognizing widespread human needs coupled by a search for a solution.
  3. **Each of the world religions contains truth about life. It forms a culture (a cult-ure)**

that is built upon what it perceived to be the highest values.

#### 4. Each religion built its culture upon the available knowledge it possessed

Each one's shortcoming was not in what was wrong in the particulars, but limited on the one big, most vital, issue: What is God like, and how can anyone have a personal relationship with Him? God was clouded from view.

What could be known about God came to every person through:

The Light of Creation—Rom. 1:20

The Voice of Conscience—Rom. 2:14-15

But because of the power of sin over all men and women, these alone were insufficient to bring anyone to God. People worshiped the creature rather than the Creator, and the voice of conscience is not necessarily the voice of God. The human conscience can suffer either callousness or a maddening hypersensitivity.

1 Cor. 8:7-8

#### 5. God, at the world's ripest hour, did something to change the face of human and religious history forever. In one dramatic and novel act, He rendered every religious attempt to reach up to Him unnecessary. He did this by physically and literally reaching down to humanity!

Jesus eliminated our optical problem at Bethlehem.

John 1:18; Col. 2:9

Jesus provided for our spiritual problem at Calvary.

He did not enter the world to win a championship, but to show us the way home to our Heavenly Father and to save us from sin, death, and hell.

God is like a parent talking to a small child who is enticed by a cheap trinket: "All that glitters is not gold."

#### 6. What is God's attitude toward man's religions? God's treatment of other religions falls into two distinct time periods: B.C. and A.D.

B.C.—Prior to Jesus Christ's coming:

- a. **Patience—God "held His horses"** (Rom. 3:25)
- b. **Mercy—God shut His eyes** (Acts 17:29-30)
- c. **Generosity—God opened His hands**

A.D. After the coming of Christ:

#### a. **Idolatry is unnecessary**

In Jesus, God became seen as well as heard.

In Jesus' cross, God became accessible.

Because of Jesus' resurrection, God became credible.

#### b. **Idolatry is inexcusable**

We no longer can honestly say: "God, I didn't know any better."

#### 7. When God calls, we must decide who it is we will follow

CONCLUSION. When it comes to the subject of God, humankind is doubly blind.

First, God is invisible to his or her natural eye. Second, God is visible to the spiritual eye, but only to those whose eyes are working.

God has solved both problems. The first He solved in Bethlehem's manger. The last He solved at Golgotha's hill and in Jerusalem's attic.

\*Terry Muck, *Alien Gods on American Turf*, 1992.



# A POLEMIC FOR THE UNCONVINCED

## INTRODUCTION

Who is God? That was the question for Paul as he stood before the Philosophical Review Board of his day.

Illustration: On a rest room wall in the famous Powell's Bookstore in downtown Portland, Oregon, was graffiti bearing these words giving modern voice to the Athenian ailment:

"God is a placebo. He/She is what you want Him/Her to be."

Those words conveyed the heartache of our times.

"Agnosticism is the silent agony of our age. It's not the questions about God's existence that trouble most people, but the questions about what He is like and how they can know Him. The unanswered questions about God, about His nature, will and ways have surfaced as an honest but very unsatisfying, 'I just don't know!' And this uncertainty troubles people both inside and outside the church."\*

Athens was the "Gods R Us" of the ancient world. When it comes to toys, multiplicity is fun and games. But when it comes to God, multiplicity is nightmare and bafflement. Less is more! And least is best—one knowable deity is *gospel!* And that's precisely the announcement of the ages that Paul heralds forth.

Paul was just a man like us. But he had a message from God. He doesn't bring us one more speculation to heap on our pile. Through this man, God reveals to us five essentials about himself. And each of these clear up mistaken human notions.

### I. GOD IS . . . CREATOR OF ALL THINGS

The world may have invented religions, but it didn't invent God.

### II. SELF-SUFFICIENT

"God without man is still God. Man without God is nothing."

"And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:25).

History is governed. We don't have to look out after God. It is He who looks out after us.

### III. LONGING FATHER

We come to know God through personal encounter, not by philosophical deduction.

"From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26-27).

"We are God's offspring" (v. 29).

Illustration: "An atheist does not find God for the same reason that a thief doesn't find a policeman."

### IV. PERSONAL REDEEMER

God is a jealous Lover who pursued YOU. Since your stubborn heart kept you from getting to Him, He sent His only Son to die for your sin so you could know Him personally.

"The good news about Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18).

Our problem—We were hardly sincere in our search for God! Ours was more of a flat-tire religion—just wanting a quick fix on the road of life. We didn't really want someone to bow to, to allow to be God in our lives.

History is rescued and eagerly awaits its hope.

### V. RIGHTEOUS JUDGE

Our opinion of God is less important than His opinion of us. We'd best pay attention to His standards of judgment, not man's.

"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).

### CONCLUSION. Action Steps

Let God love you.

Stop trying, start trusting.

Shut your ears to the mixed messages that stymie you from the truth. Pray and ask God to show you more of himself. He's very interested in answering such an honest

prayer!

You may believe that you cannot serve God or be close to Him where you're at. Such is not the case. God established boundaries and times. Don't ever think you have to wait until another time and place to serve Him.

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\*Source unknown.

# ESCAPING THE MAZE OF UNIVERSAL RELIGION

## INTRODUCTION

The gospel means great news. How do you share something good with people? Are you apologetic and embarrassed, or are you enthusiastic?

What's so great about the gospel?

Simply this: It provides God's complete and total solution to the complete and total pollution of man. It replaces our religious guesswork with a clear-cut what-you-must-know information.

This gospel is summed up in five Js.

I. **JUDGMENT**—The Gospel of Unvarnished Truth (Rom. 1:18—3:20)

What's gone wrong with the human race? We are in this mess for one reason: man has forgotten God. And in the process, man has hung himself out to dry.

A. This devolution of man is really no more than a devaluation of God.

B. **Dismissed**—We deliberately buried truth for right living.

“Who suppress the truth by their wickedness” (Rom. 1:18).

C. **Replaced**—We deputized little gods of our making.

“Images made to look like . . .” (v. 23).

Our little invention was no longer a separate holy god, but an expression of our wishes. Now god is my equal, or worse, my servant to do my bidding.

D. **Trivialized**—We dumped God down.

“Exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (v. 23).

E. **Utterly Discounted**—For all practical purposes we gave God up.

“They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator” (v. 25).

God always has options. He can do anything He pleases.

## F. **The Domino Effect of Suffering**

1. *Discount*—We give God up (Rom. 1:18-23).

—Our willful abandonment

2. *Disconnect*—God gives us up (vv. 24-28b).

—Our just condemnation

3. *Dysfunctions*—We get hang-ups (vv. 28c-32).

—Fatal attractions, human bondage

A society in search of sobriety—chemical, sexual, credit, fulfillment

4. *Disorder*—Life comes with breakups (vv. 29-32).

—Fractured families and societies

II. **JESUS**—The Gospel of Free Grace (Rom. 3:21—5:21)

III. **JUSTIFICATION**—The Gospel of Unhindered Acceptance (Rom. 3:21—5:21)

“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Rom. 4:25).

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

IV. **JOYFUL JOURNEY**—The Gospel of Undivided Mastery (Rom. 6—8)

V. **JOINING**—The Gospel of Unity (Rom. 9—16)

CONCLUSION. Summary of the Gospel:

A. God Gave Christ Up! (Rom. 4:25a; 8:32; Gal. 2:20)

—For Our Sins

B. God Raised Him Up! (Rom. 4:25b)

—For Our Justification

C. God Shapes Us Up! (Rom. 8:1-30)

—For Our Perfection

D. God Patches the World Up

Jew and Gentile (Rom. 9—11)

Jewish and Gentile Believers (Rom. 12—15:13)

Believers with Their Enemies (Rom. 12:14-21)

Believers and Their Government (Rom. 13:1-7)

Believers and the Law (Rom. 13:8-14)

Believers and All Saints (Rom. 15:14—16:27)

# HOW TO CULT-PROOF YOUR LIFE NOURISHING OURSELVES UPON THE TRUTH

## INTRODUCTION

Immediately following the Heaven's Gate fiasco in San Diego, *U.S. News and World Report* ran this cover story: "How Can Reasonable People Hold Unreasonable Beliefs?"

Religious cults are nothing new. Christians in Paul's day lived and worked alongside those who advanced bizarre religious ideas. A fitting subtitle for Colossians might be "The Colossal Christ of the Colossian Church—a Cult-Proofing Guide for All Times."

Let's read Col. 2:6-8 for the instructions we must follow and verses 9-10 for the reasons why. God's immunizing formula for us is this simple:

If you're nourished on prime rib,  
You'll never ask for baloney.

### I. ACCEPT NO SUBSTITUTE

"The mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:2-3).

"I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments" (v. 4).

*Question:* How do people "get carried away"? What is it that inclines one to gullibility, causing him or her to fall for the wrong thing?

*Answer:* Shortcuts to satisfaction. That is, people get carried away when they want something so badly that they will sacrifice truth to get it. The reason that people tap into the occult is for some benefit that it promises to give. But what they don't realize at the time is that they will wind up getting more than they bargained for. They find themselves trapped.

### II. ADD NO SUPPLEMENT

"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in

bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ" (Col. 2:9-10).

Have you become a *Jesus-plus* Christian? Do you pride yourself on being "open-minded," seeking to gain heavenly benefits from unheavenly sources? Are you fascinated with astrological charts, horoscopes, and psychic hot lines, and occasionally resort to them to somehow guide your life?

If so, you may ask: Why limit our spiritual intake to only Jesus Christ? Surely there is a wider diet of truth and spiritual power available from which we can draw direction for our lives today.

### III. BECAUSE OF GOD'S PERPETUAL FULLNESS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

God fully and eternally resides in Jesus, through all ages and all times. "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8, NKJV).

### IV. BECAUSE OF THE SON'S ONGOING FULLNESS IN THE BODY OF BELIEVERS

"And you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority" (Col. 2:10).

Literally, "You are *in Him* made full." The sense is this: "In Him" is the fullness of God. So being in Him, you become filled with God. "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another" (John 1:16).

Note: This "you" is plural, not singular. Together, the Body of Christ is full. This is a mystery of Christ's fullness in His Body, the Church. See Eph. 1:23; 3:19; John 17:21.

### V. TAKE ACTION

How do we live this truth? Realizing that "perfecting the saints in Christ" (see Col. 1:28-29) is our main responsibility, let us labor by the Spirit's strength to:

- A. Rejoice in your freedom from all seductive powers.
- B. Receive Christ by faith as your sufficient Savior.
- C. Remove the unheavenly *pluses* out of your walk with Christ.
- D. Review key promises and exhortations. (Col. 2:6-7; 2:9-10; 3:1-2; 3:15-17)
- E. Feed on Christ through a daily quiet time.

CONCLUSION. To the exhortation "Accept No Substitutes," there is a counterpart: "Fear No Shadow" (2:16-17). The former addresses substitutes of the present, where the latter looks for necessary supplements from the past. A shadow is nothing more than the dark side of something real. It can neither hurt nor help. In this case, the real object casting its shadow is Christ himself and His saving work. The point: Never allow religious people possessing more zeal than knowledge to judge you by the old traditions (shadows) that Jesus (Object) has now fulfilled. Don't cower to their rules (2:20-23).

# CHRIST AND PSEUDO-CHRISTS

## WILL THE REAL MESSIAH

### PLEASE STAND UP?

#### INTRODUCTION

“The Messiah has come,” and He’s got a web page. “His name is Ahmad of Qadian, India (1835—1908), the promised Messiah. He has come to call all people around one faith, Islam, which is the only solution for the world.”

How could he be? That spot had already been taken by David Koresh in 1993. Or before him, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, who claimed to be the “second coming of Christ.” It’s time to demand: Will the *real* Messiah please rise!

In light of our times, let us consider today:

Messiah Wanna-bes

Messiah, the Must-be

#### I. MESSIAH WANNA-BES

##### A. Jesus warns us:

“False Messiahs and false prophets will appear . . . Listen! I have told you this ahead of time” (Matt. 24:24-25, TEV).

##### B. Jesus exhorts us:

“Jesus said to them, ‘Watch out, and don’t let anyone fool you. Many men, claiming to speak for me, will come and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will fool many people” (Mark 13:5-6, TEV).

##### C. His predictions fulfilled:

A.D. 44-46: Theudas  
The MAGICIAN Messiah

“Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody [great], and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing” (Acts 5:36; see Josephus *Antiquities* 20.97).

A.D. 46-48 Judas  
The MARTYR Messiah

“After [Theudas], Judas the Galilean appeared

in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered” (Acts 5:37; see Josephus *Antiquities* 20.102).

A.D. 47-60

“The Egyptian”

The TERRORIST Messiah

“[A Roman soldier to Paul:] ‘Aren’t you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?’ Paul answered, ‘I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia’” (Acts 21:38-39; see Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.6).

1989

Rev. Sun Myung Moon

Unification Church

The YUPPIE Messiah

“I am the new Messiah, the second coming of Christ. I vow to establish a global theocracy and will rule it” (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Feb. 12, 1989).

1993

David Koresh

*The Branch Davidians*

The APOCALYPTIC Messiah

“I am Jesus Christ, the Lamb of Revelation, who will open the seventh seal and unleash the end of the world battle” (taped message partially quoted in *The American Statesman*).

1835—1908

Ahmad, India

The ISLAMIC Messiah

“God has provided me with heavenly signs for the satisfaction of seekers after truth. He has disclosed to me the secret of the unseen and of the future” (web page, “The Messiah Has Come,” 12/3/97).

#### II. MUST-BE MESSIAH

How can we avoid confusion about which one is real? Think *qualifications*: Paul, in a Jewish synagogue at Thessalonica, narrowed these down to just *two*. Then he announced the Good News (Acts 17:1-3):

The Messiah will suffer according to Scripture.

The Messiah will rise according to Scripture.

The Messiah is Jesus.

That is, Jesus *alone* fulfilled the qualifications. Do you believe that Jesus is God’s Anointed One? Here are the reasons why I do:

Conclusions and Personal Application\*

#### 1. How certainly is Jesus the true Messiah!

Such a variety of circumstances could not have concurred but from the express determination of God. Let us then receive Jesus as the promised Messiah; let us welcome Him with hosannas; let us depend upon His death as a sure ground of HOPE.

#### 2. How cheerfully may we leave ourselves to God’s disposal!

How were the malice of Satan, the envy of the priests, the treachery of Judas, the cowardice of Pilate, etc., overruled to bring about God’s purposes!

Thus may God overrule the most adverse circumstances for our good. Let us then in all times rely on that gracious declaration—Rom. 8:28.

\*See Charles Simeon, *Luke, in Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible* (Zondervan, 1956).

## PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

## INTRODUCTION

This series of messages is devoted to one thing: presenting Jesus Christ, not as just one more bead on the string, but as *the* Pearl of Great Price. And that in discovering *Him*, we will gladly give all of ourselves to Him, considering nothing too precious from your treasures to give that you may follow Him.

Why Jesus? "All religions offer up the same thing" is just not true.

If you're hungry for a Big Mac, where do you go? McDonald's. If you loathe Big Macs but want a Whopper, where can you find one? Burger King. Nobody with half a brain goes looking for a Big Mac at a Burger King, nor a Whopper under the Golden Arches.

If it's nirvana you seek, you'll only find it offered through Buddhism. If it's low blood pressure, get in lotus position, hum, and try Hinduism. But if you want to know the God of the universe, be reconciled to Him, there's only one name under heaven through which that may be gained: Jesus.

## I. JESUS' PERSONAL CLAIMS ABOUT HIMSELF

He considered himself to be morally and spiritually perfect. He entertained no sense of personal shortcomings before God.

- A. We never see Jesus confessing sins of His own or praying for personal forgiveness. Yet He taught His disciples that they should pray: "Forgive us our trespasses" (from *Book of Common Prayer*; see Matt. 6:12; Luke 11:4).
- B. God's law never convicted Him. In contrast, notice how it affected the apostle Paul (Rom. 7:14).
- C. He accepted the term "Lamb of God," a reference to an unblemished male sacrifice for others.
- D. He could rebuke others without any sense of inadequacy (Mark 10:21). This is significant in that sin is universal. Everyone has felt moral shortcomings, and the recognition of them is normally a mark of goodness.

Buddha began his spiritual journey because of a sense of moral need. To the saints in church histo-

ry, contrition was a virtue. The prophets experienced a heightened sense of personal sin.

## II. HE PLACED HIMSELF AT THE CENTER OF THE RELIGIOUS UNIVERSE

- A. The demanded commitment to "me" in His calls to discipleship (Matt. 10:37-38).

At the Lord's Supper He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25, NASB).

- B. The "I am" sayings of John's Gospel. Jesus presents himself as the answer to mankind's deepest needs. The miracles of this Gospel only serve as signs pointing to His identity.
- C. He dared to reinterpret Jewish law with authority (Matt. 5-7) and took upon himself the authority to forgive sins! The prophets, by contrast, said, "God will forgive you."
- D. His discipleship sayings (Matt. 10:37; 11:29).
- E. In doing so, Jesus fully believed that "I am" the answer to people's religious needs. Not His teachings apart from himself.

## III. HE SPOKE OF THE ETERNAL WORLD AS THOUGH HE HAD BEEN THERE PERSONALLY

- A. This is unique. All leaders of world religions deal with the eternal world. Yet their descriptions of it come from visions or "enlightenment" (Luke 10:18; John 8:58; Luke 15:7; and John 3:31-32)
- B. By contrast
  1. Buddha gained "enlightenment"—oneness with ultimate reality (by experience). Any of his followers can do it by following the Eight-fold Path.
  2. Muhammad described the eternal world through information given him through visions.
  3. Confucius said, "We haven't solved the problems in this life; don't ask me about life to come."

## IV. HE VIEWED HIS DEATH AS SOMEHOW PROVIDING DELIVERANCE NECESSARY FOR MANKIND

In Christ's mind, His death was more than the inevitable (Matt. 20:28). It was a unique death, which offered redemption for all people.

## V. HE CLAIMED THAT HE WOULD RISE AGAIN IN THREE DAYS AFTER HIS DEATH

- A. Christ was not just another martyr who died for a cause.
- B. Without examining the arguments in favor of the resurrection of Christ, let us note that apart from the fact of the Resurrection, the previously mentioned claims of Christ and Christianity itself have no validity. The entire Christian faith hangs on historical facts (John 5:22; John 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rom. 10:12-13; Eph. 1:20-23; and Phil. 2:2-11).

CONCLUSION. "If Christ is not supremely worshipful, then Christianity becomes as vast a system of idolatry as the earth has ever had" (A. M. Hills).

# THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

## HISTORY OR HYSTERIA?

### INTRODUCTION

Christianity rises and falls with the bodily resurrection of a crucified man of the first century, Jesus of Nazareth. The Bible admits that if Jesus did *not* rise from the dead, then we ought to sing with old Dandy Don, "Turn out the lights. The party's over!" We might as well whittle our crosses into kindling, thus erasing the cursed sign of the biggest hoax ever played upon humankind. If Jesus is not risen . . .

The Church is founded upon a lie.

Our preaching is hype.

The apostles were either dupes or liars.

Our hope rests upon fantasy.

Our faith is worthless.

Our sins and guilt have no remedy. Humankind is lost (1 Cor. 15).

On the other hand, if Jesus *was* raised and is living today, then . . .

Our faith has a reason.

The apostles, though martyred for their witness, were not wasted.

Our hope for a future paradise is certain.

The answer for the wreckage of sin upon humanity finds its remedy in the Cross.

Preaching is our moral obligation.

It also means that Jesus leaves His competition in the dust—literally! All other religious leaders have long since vanished from history. The Resurrection is the bottom line. Although history cannot possibly "prove" any past event, it can provide us with probable certainty. Is the Resurrection message history or hysteria? "Come now, let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18).

### I. REASONS TO BELIEVE

A. Jesus lived. Gospel accounts, Jewish documents, Roman sources indicate this.

Jesus was crucified at the hands of Roman authorities at the instigation of Jewish leaders in Je-

rusalem (Matt. 26:3-5, 14-16, 47-68; John 11:47-53; Rabbinic Tannaim; Thallus—Roman historian A.D. 50).

- B. Jesus was considered dead (Matt. 27:50; Mark 15:37-39; Luke 23:46-49; John 19:30).
- C. Jesus was buried in a known and accessible tomb at Jerusalem (Matt. 27:57-66; John 19:38-42).
- D. Jesus Christ was preached raised from the dead and ascended into heaven and that the tomb was empty (Matt. 28:6-7; Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:9-11; preaching: Acts 2:22-24, 33; 5:29-32; 10:39-42; 13:28-37; 17:31).
- E. The Jewish leaders at Jerusalem were concerned and motivated to disprove the preaching of Christ's resurrection, probably more than any reader would be today (Matt. 28:11-15; Acts 5:28).
- F. The earliest disciples received terrible persecution because of preaching *this* message of Christ (Acts 4:2, 17-18; 5:29-33, 40; 23:6; 25:18-19).
- G. The tomb in which Christ was buried was found empty (Matt. 28:6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:2-3; John 20:1-9).

### II. TWO SIGNS OF THEIR VERACITY:

The early believers suffered horrible persecutions. You just don't suffer what they suffered for a lie. Only one missed a martyr's death: John, who was banished to the Alcatraz of his day.

### III. WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?

- A. Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God (Rom. 1:4, 16).
- B. Jesus Christ deserves to be worshiped (John 20:27-28).
- C. Jesus Christ has absolute power over evil (1 Cor. 1:18-25).
- D. The return of Jesus Christ for His Church is made certain (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

CONCLUSION. What shall I do with Christ?

1 Pet. 2:6-8; Acts 2:37-38; Rom. 10:9-13

God accepts the Son's provision for human sin! Forgiveness and cleansing is real and full! (Rom. 4:25).

## ATHEISTS IN POWER

# WHEN THE GODLESS RULE OVER YOU

### INTRODUCTION

“Truth is always strong, no matter how weak it looks; a falsehood is always weak, no matter how strong it looks.”\*

Atheism wears many faces. Some who have dropped God out of life’s equation are recluses, fearing to leave their living rooms. Others are activists, thinking that man is there to plug the holes of the universe.

There is another face of atheism, one that is raw, barbaric, and terrifying. This is in-your-face atheism that holds power. These not only have dropped God out of the equation of their life but also are banking on never having to answer to a soul for their murderous actions.

#### I. LIES EVERY ATHEIST BANKS ON (Ps. 10:2-13)

A. “The idea of God is irrelevant to my life.”

“In his pride [he] . . . does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God” (v. 4).

B. “I am invincible.”

“He says to himself, ‘Nothing will shake me; I’ll always be happy and never have trouble’” (v. 6).

C. “Even if there should be a God, He won’t care about me.”

“He says to himself, ‘God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees’” (v. 11).

D. “No God, no judgment.”

“He won’t call me to account” (v. 13).

#### II. FOUR TRUTHS EVERY TORTURED SAINT CAN FEED ON (Ps. 10:14-16)

A. God has His unseen hand on the situation.

“But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand” (v. 14).

B. God has a heart of compassion.

“The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless” (v. 14).

C. God wears the crown of sovereignty.

“The LORD is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land” (v. 16).

D. God holds the scepter of final judgment for the good of all (v. 15).

#### CONCLUSION. HEART-TO-HEART TALKS WITH GOD

**Help, Lord!** A Cry for Divine Aid

“Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless” (Ps. 10:12).

**Justice, Lord!** Stop Evil’s Progress

“Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness” (Ps. 10:15).

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\*Phillips Brooks.

## WEEK 11

NOTE: This outline was composed by John T. Seamands, *Tell It Well* (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City). I distribute it to the congregation at the baptism service. I have printed the supporting scriptures to be read by the congregation aloud throughout the message. Following the baptism of the last candidate, each reads his written testimony. I offer an invitation, adding that at our next baptism they could also be included. These services are some of the most evangelistically conducive I have seen.—Joe Knight

# SERVICE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

## WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

WELCOME TO THIS SERVICE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM!

The ordinance of baptism is a privilege that is reserved for believers. But believers in *what*? What is a Christian, and what basic tenets does he or she embrace?

A Christian is a person who . . .

### **Believes in One God, not many gods.**

“There is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, . . . yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live” (1 Cor. 8:4-6).

### **Believes in One Savior, Jesus Christ.**

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men” (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

### **Believes in One Church worldwide.**

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

### **Believes in One Chance, here and now in this life.**

“Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Heb. 9:27-28).

### **Has One Goal in life, to glorify Jesus Christ.**

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).



# PRAYER, A MAJOR KEY TO REVIVAL

Isa. 62:1-7

## INTRODUCTION

Prayer as the key to revival. Let us look at what consumed the lives of these intercessors.

### I. THESE INTERCESSORS WERE CONSUMED WITH A BURDEN REGARDING THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF THEIR CONTEMPORARIES

A. Within the heart of this great prophet was first of all a great concern for the state of the nation and church. All the great intercessors of the Bible were concerned about the spiritual condition of their people. Isaiah cries out, "I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem" (v. 6, NKJV).

1. Moses was so concerned about the people that he asked God to blot him out of the book of life if it would bring His presence and glory back to Israel (Exod. 32:30-32).
2. Abraham was so concerned about the people that he asked God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if He could find 10 righteous people (Gen. 18:22-33).
3. Nehemiah was so concerned with Israel in the Captivity that he wept and fasted four months before taking any action (Neh. 1:4 ff.).
4. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, cries out for backsliding Israel: "Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people" (Jer. 9:1).
5. Paul prayed that he might be accursed from Israel in order for her to be saved (Rom. 9:1-4).
6. Jesus prayed over Jerusalem for her pitiful condition and desolation (Matt. 23:37-39).

B. We must become intercessors. We must become like Isaiah and not keep silent for the sake of our beloved church. We need to have a vision like Isa-

iah that we will not rest until our churches are filled with the righteousness of God and our main focus is the salvation of God (vv. 1-5).

Transition: But how can we become watchmen?

Intercessors with God for the people?

CONCLUSION. INTERCESSORS ARE CONSUMED WITH THE WILL OF GOD (vv. 6-7)

God delights in our persistence in prayer. This is seen in the parable of the unjust judge recorded in Luke 18. The unjust judge wanted to get rid of the widow lady crying for justice because of her persistence. Unlike the unjust judge God delights in our persistence and intercessory prayer.

# I'LL SAY, "YES, LORD, YES"

## INTRODUCTION.

We are living in a day when the word "yes" means very little. In sports, "yes" means I will sign the contract, but I will not live by the contract if I think I should get more money. In marriage, we say, "Will you take this person and love, comfort, and honor him or her, and forsaking all others, keep yourself only unto this one, so long as you both shall live? If so, say I do." But as soon as the pressure of life starts, it's bailout time. Forget what I promised.

"Yes" is a commitment word. The meaning of yes is "an affirmative or consenting reply." It is a pledge to follow a certain course of action. Yes to a contract means I will fulfill the contract. Yes to marriage means I will commit myself to seeing it through.

In the church, we say yes to God and then forget that the first yes was only a commitment to say yes for the rest of our lives. Somewhere along the way, we stop saying yes. Oh, we don't say no; we just don't say anything. But anything less than "Yes, Lord, yes" is not a complete yes. Yes to God means I say yes:

1. I will start.
2. I will continue.
3. I will finish.

### I. SAYING YES TO GOD IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE:

#### A. It is our only security.

"LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure" (Ps. 16:5).

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and *secure*" (Heb. 6:19, emphasis mine).

"He who fears the LORD [the one who says yes] has a *secure* fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge" (Prov. 14:26, emphasis mine).

#### B. It is the only way to have satisfaction.

"He *satisfies* the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things" (Ps. 107:9, emphasis mine).

We sing it:

*All my lifelong I had panted  
For a drink from some cool spring  
That I hoped would quench the burning  
Of the thirst I felt within.*

Refrain:

*Hallelujah! I have found Him—  
Whom my soul so long has craved!*

*Jesus satisfies my longings;*

*Thro' His blood I now am saved.*

—Clara T. Williams, emphasizes mine

### C. Only God knows what is best for you.

"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jer. 29:11).

## II. CONTINUING TO SAY YES IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE:

### A. It takes care of the "Who's in control?" problem.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living [daily yes] sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (Rom. 12:1).

"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life" (Rom. 6:22).

### B. "Yes, Lord" keeps us from being distracted.

"But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful" (Mark 4:19).

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33).

### C. "Yes, Lord" keeps us from being resentful:

Toward others.

"This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly" (Gen. 50:17).

"And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25).

Toward God.

"A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD" (Prov. 19:3).

"Do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not *resent* his rebuke" (Prov. 3:11, emphasis mine).

"And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful" (2 Tim. 2:24).

## III. HOW TO MAKE SURE YOU ALWAYS SAY "YES, LORD"

### A. Count the cost.

In Luke 14:28, Jesus is saying, before you make any decision, you should count the cost.

"Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things" (Ps. 103:2-5).

### B. Trust God.

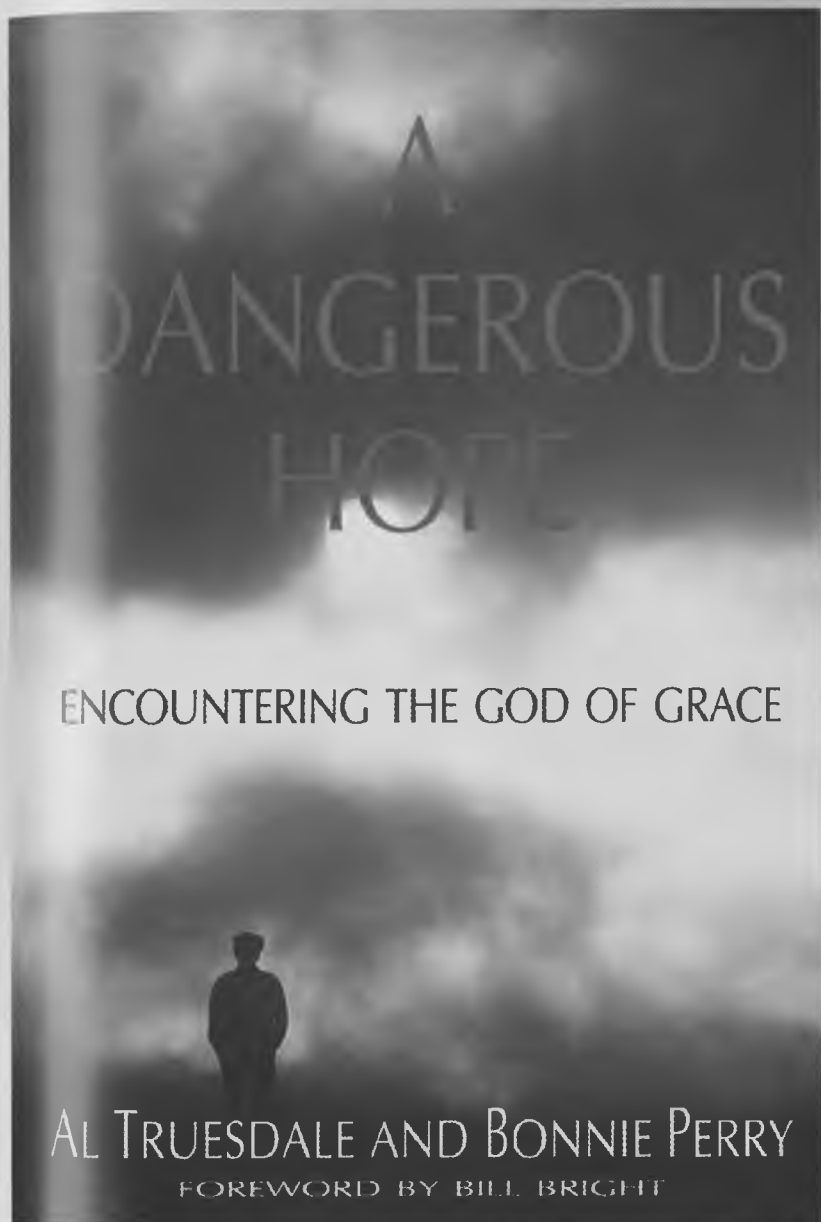
"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Prov. 3:5-6).

"I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10).

CONCLUSION: In closing sing "I Give All to You," No. 482, *Sing to the Lord* (hymnal).

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