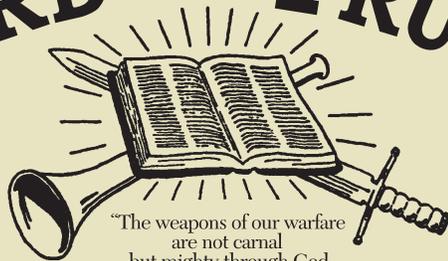


The SWORD and TRUMPET

"Blow ye
the Trumpet
and warn
the People."



"The weapons of our warfare
are not carnal
but mighty through God
to the pulling down of strongholds."

"Take the Sword
of the Spirit
which is
The Word of God."

Guidelines



THEATRE REMAINS, LYONS.

AUGUST 2004

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SWORD AND TRUMPET GUIDELINES monthly magazine is a faith ministry directed by a Board representing various constituencies of the Mennonite Church. It is committed to defending, proclaiming, and promoting the whole Gospel of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It emphasizes neglected truth and contends for “the faith which was once delivered to the saints.” This publication exposes and opposes doctrinal error which compromises that faith and leads to apostasy.

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Person of the Month:

Irenaeus

(130-200 A.D.)

At this time in the early history of Christianity heresy had already begun to creep into the Church. This was a tenuous and difficult time but God brought on the scene scholars who had been converted to Christ and were able to use their gifts to confront the heresy head-on. The most remarkable of these men was Irenaeus.

We do not know his place of birth or his parentage but he was a native of the city of Smyrna—the same city named in the book of Revelation by the apostle John.

As a teenager Irenaeus studied under Polycarp of the Smyrna church. Polycarp had heard the Apostle John preach in Ephesus and he remembered the words of John and others who had seen the Lord. Irenaeus was that close in time and relationship to those who had known the apostles and thus those who had known the Lord Himself!

Irenaeus would have been about 26 years of age at the time of Polycarp's martyrdom. From Smyrna Irenaeus went to Rome where it is thought he studied under Justin Martyr—probably one of the greatest apologists of the second century.

After Justin was martyred for his faith Irenaeus went to Gaul (France) where there was a strong Church established by a Greek colony. He settled in the city of Lyons and became an elder in that local church.

In 177 the severe persecution under Marcus Aurelius reached the southern part of Gaul as well. A total of 45 believers were eventually martyred, having endured torture and terrible prison conditions. Among these was a boy of 15 and a young slave girl who valiantly stood up for their Lord. During this time of persecution Irenaeus was sent to Rome with a letter entitled the "Letter of the Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne."

When he returned there was much rebuilding to do in the Church. The heresy of the Gnostics was invading the country. It was the most subtle heresy of the second century—a mixture of Christianity and pagan philosophy. It was in the forefront from 80-150 A.D. The Gnostics claimed a "special knowledge" of the "way of salvation." Irenaeus set about to write a five-volume treatise entitled, *Adversus omnes haereses (Against Heresies)* to deal with the problem. Two of the volumes dealt directly with the Gnostic heresy. The other three dealt with questions of Christian theology and the need to maintain the Christian faith that had been handed down from the Lord and His apostles. Irenaeus' strongest argument was to tell the believers which Christian doctrines were under attack.

In 180 he also wrote *Rule of Faith*—a simple summary of fundamental Christian beliefs so that people could test heretical beliefs to determine what was really truth. This document was the first of its kind but it was to become the basis for other creeds 200 years later.

Irenaeus proclaimed that there was not "secret knowledge" reserved for a few as the Gnostics preached. He knew that there was a whole "body of truth," or accepted beliefs, which had been given in the Gospels and which he also knew from his experience with Polycarp and Polycarp's association with the Apostle John mentioned earlier. This proved the veracity of the faith "once delivered to the saints" which had been passed on. Hence, there was no "secret knowledge" which augmented or diminished *the truth* of God!

Near the end of his life Irenaeus, whose name means "peace," was asked to go to Rome to mediate a disagreement between the churches in Asia and the rest of the Church as to the date for the celebration of Easter. The controversy was settled "peaceably."

Irenaeus was used of God at a crucial time in the history of the Church to **stand in the gap** for TRUTH. May there be more men like him. Irenaeus went to be with the Lord he loved in the year 200 A.D. at the age of 70.

—Gail L. Emerson

The Question of Evil and Suffering

by Marcus Yoder

The question of evil and suffering and how a loving God could permit them is one of the most asked questions today. In fact, it is one of the top five questions college students ask about Christianity. Ravi Zachariah, who defends Christianity in some very hostile places, says in his book *Cries of the Heart*, “I have never been in a conversation with a skeptic who failed to raise this as the principal reason for his or her skepticism. The question is without doubt one of the most honest and genuine questions that can be raised of a Christian faith that talks of a loving God who is in control of all things.”

This is also one of life’s oldest questions. The Scriptures are full of men and women asking God the same questions. In Jeremiah 12:1 the Prophet asks God, “. . . Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?” David asks God, in Psalm 74:10, “O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name forever?” Many of the prophets and great men of God have cried out to Him with this question.

With what happened on September 11 and other events since then, the questions of where God is in all the evil and suffering around us begs even more of an answer. In fact, it is estimated that in the last six decades over one hundred million people have been killed by their fellow human beings. The wanton killing and destruction that is happening all around us makes it imperative that we examine this question.

Many Christians today, when faced with this question, would rather not talk about it because it forces them to think deeply about the premises behind their faith. I believe that as Christians we need to be ready to

give an answer and to defend the faith. If we want to evangelize and bring people into our churches, then we need to have a ready answer to questions such as this.

Before we look at the Christian answer, we must first examine the sources of evil and suffering. These sources can basically be divided into three categories. First of all suffering comes from natural sources. Floods, tornadoes, fires, and other natural disasters certainly do affect the people who experience them. The second category is more personal—it is our bodies. Disease and aging are very prevalent. In fact, each of us, from our conception to our death, is wrestling with this area. The third category is other people. One only has to look at the Holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia, and the loss of millions of lives under Stalin to wonder how humans could perpetrate such horrible things on each other. This last category is by far the most difficult one with which to deal.

This question is most significant, because if we as believers have no good answers, why should people love and follow a God whom they view as capricious? Without a doubt, the deepest human thinking and struggling is done on this issue. Who of us has not heard or met someone that is wrestling in this area? If Christianity does have answers on this issue, then we of all people should live with a much greater purpose. In fact, Nietzsche says, “He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*.” If we claim to have the answers, then we must be willing to share ourselves with those who have no clue how to live.

There are three transformations the modern world has done to this area. First of all, we have learned how to minimize the

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pain. One television producer said, “Our rule of thumb in showing human suffering, is that the death of a thousand people in the third world is equivalent to a hundred people in the West, ten adults in your own country, and one child in your local community.” It is very easy for those of us who live comfortably to have “microscopic” vision focused entirely on ourselves and the small worlds we have created.

The second area we have transformed in this issue is we have maximized our capacity for evil. Because of the violence in the world today, many of us have compassion fatigue. It seems as though we are bombarded by images daily of death and suffering. A child with its belly swollen by hunger, people lying along the road dead, teenagers killed by fellow teens, and babies aborted with no chance at life bombard us daily. One only has to pick up the newspaper or newsmagazine and see these images. The third area we have changed is that we have marginalized faith and traditional comforts. We have moved from community togetherness to grief counseling. Many of us do not want to get our hands dirty. We do this either out of fear that we will not know how to help people or out of pure selfishness.

How we respond to the question of evil and suffering is largely due to our view of God and who He is. So we must begin the Christian view of this by examining the premise behind Christianity.

The first premise in Christianity is that behind everything is a personal, infinite God who is involved. He is personal not just because of us, but He is personal in Himself. He is personal because of His own nature, not because we need Him to be personal. He isn’t made in our image, we are made in His. This is the grounds for the sanctity and preciousness of each human being. He is also involved in the affairs of the world. He did not just create and then sit back and be uninvolved in His creation. The universe is open to His ordering. He is not the silent watchmaker who made and wound up His cre-

ation, then left it alone.

We must begin the Christian answer by first looking at the sources of suffering, pain, and evil. The first of these is natural calamities. People the world over have suffered tremendously.

The Biblical answer to suffering, pain, and evil is threefold. First is the fact that, **the world should have been otherwise and we are free to feel it.** By this I mean that pain and suffering are abnormal and alien intrusions rather than something natural. This lies in the twin doctrines of the creation and the fall. It must be understood from the perspective of the creation and the fall. Sometimes we see what might have been and other times we see what has become marred by the fall. If suffering is the result of the fall rather than creation, a consequence of what we have done rather than who we are, then suffering and pain are abnormal and alien, not normal and natural.

Jesus, when faced with death and suffering at the death of his friend, Lazarus, felt the weight of sin and death. In John 11:33, 38 it says that Jesus “groaned in himself.” The word for “groaned” comes from the Greek word meaning “to be upset, to be indignant, to snort with anger.” So Jesus, when confronted by death, was upset because of the results of the fall. Within the perspective of the creation and fall, such anger (or shock or grief) is natural precisely because the evil is unnatural. C. S. Lewis observed, “Of all men we hope most of death; yet nothing will reconcile us to—well, its unnaturalness.”

Second, in the Biblical answer, is the fact **that no other God has wounds.** God, in the person of His Son Jesus Christ, defeated evil by letting it do the very worst to Him, and then overcoming that evil. The story is told of a Dinka village in the country of Sudan that was overrun by Muslim soldiers of the regime. Men, women, and children had either been slaughtered or carried off to slavery. The few women who were left—themselves brutally misused—began to gather themselves together in the

light of their burning homes. Their first instinct was to take little sticks and fashion crosses and push them into the ground. What were they doing? Fashioning some instant memorials to the victims? No, these were not grave markers but acts of faith. As followers of Jesus of Nazareth, they served a God whom they believed knew pain as they knew pain. They still staked their lives on the conviction that they were not alone.

The wounds on the hands and feet of our Lord remind us that He suffered and died so we might have life. He knows the pain we are going through. We have a God who has been here and done this. He took the best that evil could throw at Him and defeated it!

The third answer to this question is the fact **that our Leader knows what He is doing, and knows what is coming.** Many of the Scriptures in the New Testa-

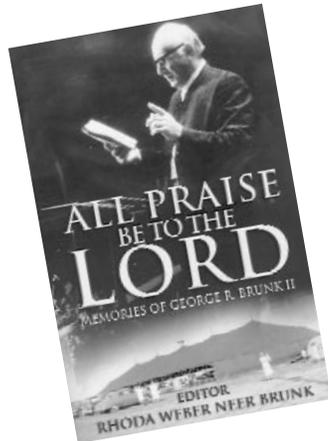
ment that talk about suffering also talk about the future and the fact that pain and evil are not permanent. Someday those who follow Jesus will again live in the perfection for which we were intended. The future outlook for the believer is what makes the present livable.

The true answers to the questions of suffering, pain, and evil are not propositional or philosophical but relational. Those who know Christ and have experienced the comfort of God are better able to find help in the dark night of the soul. As believers, let us be ready to answer these questions of a hurting, miserable world. Let us allow them to see it in action in our own lives. ■

Some of the ideas and illustrations came from the book *The Long Journey Home* by Os Guinness and *Cries of the Heart* by Ravi Zachariah.

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From the Editor's Desk

Paul M. Emerson

FROM THE ARCHIVES

A Desperation Theology

by Sanford G. Shetler

We are in the process now, if the church is not extremely cautious, of falling into the predicament of formulating a kind of “desperation theology” or what might be called a pseudo-theology of survival. Caught up with the many philosophies and ideologies abroad, high churchmen, and particularly seminary professors and seminarians, are, in desperation, carrying on a kind of battle that reminds one of a recent tactic in Vietnam where a city was purportedly destroyed in order to save it!

Evidently embarrassed to be associated with an institution (the Church) which is receiving rebuffs on every hand for its so-called failure (a process which has, in fact, gone on since the founding of the Christian Church), high churchmen and theologians are trying hard today to restate Christianity to “make it relevant for our age.” *But in the process, they are destroying the church while professing to save it.*

If one “unstructures” a building it is simply no longer a building. If it is *restructured*, then its purposes are completely changed. If, for example, an old church edifice is remodeled to serve as a

garage, it is also simply no longer a sanctuary, but a garage.

It seems that Communists, who have avowed since the days of Marx to eradicate Christianity, can go on a holiday these days, for the churches themselves have taken over their task. Likewise, higher critics, who for more than a century have questioned the authenticity and authority of the Word, can also go on a picnic, for many so-called evangelicals are now preaching the same higher criticism of the old German rationalists. A noted news commentator some years ago said that what frightened him was not how the East and West differed but how they were alike. This is exactly the point and explains the apprehensions many evangelicals have today concerning liberalism and evangelicalism. The line between liberals and evangelicals has, in fact, been almost obliterated, the result, no doubt, of the endless dialogizing among Christians of every shade of belief and unbelief.

Following the old theory of “if you can’t lick them, join them,” theologians who for some time have been critics of orthodoxy have now joined the ranks of

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those who have nothing but contempt for the tenets of historical Christianity. The winds of unbelief are blowing over my own denomination. It seems no group is granted immunity today.

Former critics of secularism, an ism which churchmen for years have recognized as the deadly foe of Christianity, are now declaring publicly with fervor that secularism is not a *foe* of the Gospel at all, but a *fruit*! Secularism, they say, is the church come of age, and represents making its message applicable at every point from the political arena to the marketplace.

Unduly impressed with the so-called scholarship of the scientific community, many churchmen have completely acquiesced to evolutionism, declaring that there is no real conflict between evolution and creationism! Yet Darwin's associate, Huxley, himself declared in his famous Nashville speech in the late 19th century that while there were those who were trying to bring about a wedding between Christianity and Darwinianism, such people were only softheaded. The two ideologies are irreconcilable. Either one accepts supernaturalism or he accepts evolution. There is no middle ground. Theistic or developmental evolution, now accepted by many evangelicals, does not pose an acceptable alternative. The great indictment against evolution is that it has made of itself a *Weltanschauung* (worldview) which is totally incompatible with any candid belief in God.

So today, in desperation, intrigued by the scholarship of the intellectuals and by scientism, and fully aware of the crass materialism, secularism, and worldliness sweeping over the churches, and viewing the fight for survival of Christianity next to a lost cause, ranking churchmen are now ready to seek a negotiated peace. They are seemingly ready at this juncture to tolerate or suggest almost anything in the process of trying to make themselves relevant—ready to form strange coalitions with people and

groups of widely divergent views, and, in fact, with those who are the agents of the destructive forces themselves—all under the name of Christianity and the false notion that God is somehow mysteriously at work in His world waiting to be joined by all men.

Fighting a losing battle with the entertainment world, for example, churchmen are now introducing the arts, including current music and art idioms, drama, and the dance into religious services. Seeing that separation from the world is no longer popularly accepted in Christian circles, churches are rapidly becoming conformed to the world. Hearing that there are those in our midst who find it hard to accept the supernatural, preachers no longer choose to plague their listeners with outdated Biblical myths such as the Creation story, the Virgin Birth, or the Resurrection of Christ. Noting that social action is the popular mood, churchmen decide that Jesus was, in fact, Himself a revolutionary, ready to practice civil disobedience and to lead "triumphal marches" into Jerusalem. Listening to the cries of the critics that preaching is no longer a relevant technique, the streets have become the pulpits as pastors conduct marches in behalf of garbage problems, open-housing, or what have you.

In desperation churchmen are trying hard to say something but are just not sure what that is. They have now made one full turn in the process of becoming relevant and are saying that perhaps we had better begin to *listen* instead, listen to what the pagan world has to tell us. Maybe we *have* been wrong all this time. *Perhaps the pagans are the church and we are the world!* If so, then dismantling our church edifices and chopping up our pulpits for firewood, might be the most appropriate thing to do these days, and instead of proclaiming, "Let the church be the church," maybe the time has come to revamp the slogan and say simply, "Let the church be the world." ■

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

AUGUST 1, 2004

Choosing Faithful Leaders

1 Timothy 3:1-13; 5:17-20

The five lessons for August come under the general theme, "Guidelines for the Ministry of the Church." They are taken from 1 and 2 Timothy (two each), and Titus. Be sure to read and reread these entire books as well as do some background study on their message and purpose. These are personal letters from Paul the Apostle to two of his faithful and trusted co-workers. In these letters he gives guidance for both personal and corporate Christian behavior. Though written to leaders, the lessons therein are highly applicable to individuals, as well as for church life today.

Today's lesson focuses on personal qualifications for the offices of bishop and deacon. Paul, the aged, is giving direction for continuation of church life and leadership selection to those who are taking responsibility for the work he began. Timothy is at Ephesus (1:3) where Paul had left him to combat false teaching (Chapter 1). After giving some instruction on prayer, modesty, and roles in Chapter 2, he gives specific instruction regarding qualifications for leaders in Chapter 3, the focus of today's lesson.

Paul begins with qualifications for a bishop, or overseer, which, he says, is a respected position. The sum total of his counsel is that such as are appointed to

this work must be blameless. Now that's a tall order, but Paul goes on to spell out certain details that must be evident in a man's life before he should be considered for that responsibility. An overseer is one who gives guidance to church life and, by extension, to individuals in manner of life and behavior. If he himself is not an exemplary person, his influence will not have the positive effect of building up the church (see v. 5).

While we do not have space here to discuss the many issues spoken to (see discussion question #2), note especially that the man must be mature (v. 6) and well thought of beyond the confines of the church. He must be an all-around capable and irreproachable person.

Qualifications for deacons (servants) are very similar to those of the bishop, with whom they worked in the administration of the local brotherhood. Their function, however, had more to do with practical matters than with direct spiritual ministry. They, too, were to be men of blameless character (v. 10), living above reproach, ruling well their own households. Note, too, that the character of their wives was to be such as to enhance their husband's work, a value in any ministry position.

In the closing verses of the lesson (5:17-20), the emphasis is on how these servants of the church are to be treated by the brotherhood. They are to be held in honor, respected, supported financially, and protected against unwarranted accusations. However, should

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they fall into sin, that should not be covered up but used as an example of warning to others.

Our focus today is on choosing leaders. But let's remember that leaders are people, just like the rest of us.

For thought and discussion

1. We expect our church leaders to be men of sterling character and qualifying aptitude. Since leaders are chosen from the brotherhood, what does this say about the character of every member?
2. Be sure to study the reasons behind the individual characteristics Paul outlines as qualifications for these two offices. Why are they so important?
3. Given the qualifications outlined here for mature men in responsible positions, what are the advantages of calling such from within the local brotherhood?
4. Why is it so important the wives of men called to positions of leadership in the church also be of high standards and outstanding character?
5. Think seriously about the concepts in the last portion of the lesson (5:17-20). Why are these so important, and are we living up to them in our local fellowship? Perhaps discussion would be in order.

AUGUST 8, 2004

A Godly Servant

1 Timothy 4:6-5:8

In these verses, Paul turns from instruction in the selection of leaders to more personal matters related directly to Timothy. There are, of course, broad implications here for other church leaders as well. Paul first points out to Timothy that his warnings to the brotherhood regarding

those teaching falsehood (4:1-3), will establish him as a faithful, qualified servant of Jesus Christ.

Paul then encourages Timothy to exercise himself in godliness. Godliness has lasting benefits, not just for time, but for eternity as well. Paul contrasts it with bodily exercise which has only limited, short-term value. Timothy is encouraged to concentrate on those things which will enhance spiritual qualities. He is also instructed to teach these principles to others.

We do not know Timothy's exact age, likely mid-30s. But Paul seems to be speaking of relative rather than actual age in verse 12. There were undoubtedly believers much older than Timothy at Ephesus for whom he carried spiritual responsibility in teaching, preaching, and administration. Paul tells him not to allow that to intimidate his work or witness.

Paul encourages him to be exemplary in all areas of life and thus dispel any concerns others might have regarding his relative youthfulness. He was to continue to direct public services, exercising his gifts for the edification of the church. Paul admonishes him to continue in the doctrine in order to further enhance his usefulness by personal spiritual growth and development.

This emphasizes the need for one in a leadership position to be a student of the Word in order to be able to instruct others as well as to safeguard his own spirituality. Leaders carry responsibility beyond themselves and diligence must be their watchword. The salvation of souls depends upon it.

In the verses from Chapter 5, Paul instructs Timothy regarding human relationships. He is to treat all with respect and courtesy. Elders he is to treat as he would his parents, younger ones as brothers and sisters. Paul recognizes the vulnerability of leaders within church relationships and cau-

tions Timothy to be careful and not damage his integrity by improper relationships. In warning Timothy, Paul lays down timeless principles for leaders in every age.

Paul then gives instruction concerning the care of widows. The first line of responsibility lies with family members, children, or nephews. Paul makes the responsibility very clear in verse eight. Charity begins at home. However, he is not saying that the church carries no responsibility for those who are destitute or have no other means of support, only that family responsibility comes first. (Read through verse 16 for additional instruction on the care of widows.)

A godly servant is one who studies the Word of God, lives out its principles, teaches others to observe them, and is careful in all relationships. May God help each of us to follow Paul's instructions to Timothy.

For thought and discussion

1. In 4:6, Timothy is instructed to "put the brethren in remembrance of these things." Find other Scriptural references, both Old and New Testament, that point out the necessity of repetitive teaching.
2. Just how does one exercise himself unto godliness? The key is found in this passage.
3. What is the best way to give the lie to negative criticisms concerning the Christian faith?
4. Think about the negative impact of inappropriate behavior or relationships between the sexes within the Christian brotherhood.
5. How can we best discern who is most worthy of assistance from the church? What are some practical ways these needs can be met? How about some discussion on this issue?

AUGUST 15, 2004

An Approved Workman

2 Timothy 2:1-15

Paul's first challenge to "son" Timothy in this passage from his second letter is to be "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." This seems to be in reaction to the forsaking by those in Asia, singling out Phygellus and Hermogenes for special mention (1:15). Paul uses their departure to warn Timothy and to encourage his steadfastness (see also 1:13, 14), and also to caution carefulness in the selection of other teachers.

It is extremely important for the gospel to be faithfully transmitted from generation to generation (see Deuteronomy 6). Paul encourages Timothy to commit the message he has heard from him to other trustworthy and faithful teachers. The purity of the gospel must be preserved in an unbroken chain of faithful teachers. Otherwise the church fails and slides into apostasy. Paul, recognizing he was near the end of life, expresses concern for the continuity of the pure Word of God and its faithful propagation.

Paul uses the illustrations of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer to show the diligence and dedication necessary to be a "good soldier of Jesus Christ." A person who enters into the army of the Lord must do so with complete dedication, laying aside, as far as primary interest, all other pursuits. This is necessary in order to please one's commander. He must also play by the rules, as a good athlete does, and he will know the joy of harvest for his labors as does the farmer.

Paul urges Timothy to consider what he has said and apply it in passing the responsibility of communicating the gospel to others. He also assures him that the Lord will give him fuller understanding of these things and, by

implication, guidance in their application.

He then calls Timothy to a remembrance of the heart of the gospel message—Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. Paul goes on to say that it is because of his commitment to this gospel that he is in bonds as a common criminal. But, he exults, “the word of God is not bound.” Regardless of the limitations, sufferings, bondage of those who proclaim the Gospel, the message will continue to go forward saving and blessing still others. Paul says, I suffer willingly that others may obtain salvation through Christ Jesus as I have.

In verses 11 through 13 Paul seems to break away from his instructions to Timothy to expound on the themes of suffering and endurance for the sake of Christ. It is in dying to self that one finds life in Christ. The one who suffers for His cause can be assured of a future reign with Him. But the one who turns away will experience rejection. God is faithful. He will be true to Himself and to His Word.

Then Paul again picks up the instruction to Timothy in regard to the selection of faithful teachers. Such must not allow themselves to waste time or effort in vain disputings and wrangling over issues of minor importance. These, says Paul, lead people away from the truth, not toward it.

Rather, he says, give all diligence to live and act in such a manner that one need not be ashamed before God. Such a workman will handle the Word of God faithfully and accurately—interpreting it correctly for the benefit of those who hear.

For thought and discussion

1. Reflect on the importance of the continuity of faithful teachers and the tragedy to the church, and to individuals, when faithfulness to the Word of God is lacking.

2. In this passage Paul calls for total commitment of life and interest to the work of the gospel. Discuss how best to prioritize our time and energies to be faithful to the Lord’s call and still not neglect our material responsibilities.
3. How willing are we to suffer, even to bonds and imprisonment, if necessary, that others may hear the gospel message? It’s worth thinking about.
4. What are some of the “vain wranglings” we have a tendency to allow to take up our time in the church, and how can we best identify and avoid such?
5. Identify the elements in this passage that portray a diligent workman, handling the Word of God with accuracy and carefulness.

AUGUST 22, 2004

Faithfulness in Ministry

2 Timothy 3:1-5, 12-4:5

As Paul winds down his instructions to Timothy, he gives one last warning regarding the difficult times yet to be faced by the church. He predicts perilous times in which those professing godliness revert to living after the desires of the flesh. The danger here of course is the deception such bring into the body of believers. They profess religion but their lives give no evidence of holiness. Paul instructs Timothy to stay away from such persons.

It is clearly not one’s verbal profession alone, but one’s total life which gives indisputable evidence of a relationship with God. Paul makes it clear that those who follow selfish desires, who are lovers of money, boastful, proud, disobedient, abusive, slanderous, conceited, etc., are not giving evidence of the power of God at work in their lives.

Paul does not mean to imply that one

person will exhibit all of these negative traits, but that various individuals will exhibit one or more and that they will be found within professing Christendom. The double tragedy is that such persons will lose out spiritually themselves and carry the potential of infecting others within the brotherhood. Ungodly actions under the cloak of religion is an extremely dangerous thing. Paul forthrightly warns against it. (Be sure to read the context.)

Paul then appeals to Timothy to continue in the things he has learned from the Scripture for that is the only means to salvation. He speaks of the power and authority of the Scripture, noting that it is God-breathed and therefore profitable, both for personal growth and development and for refuting deception and ungodly practices. It is really all one needs to become a well-rounded believer and an approved workman for God.

Then once again Paul charges Timothy to proclaim this word at every opportunity, when suitable and when not so suitable. He is to use that word to reprove and rebuke and exhort those who are living in opposition to the principles of that word or in danger of departing from them. Note that he is to exercise patience in his correction.

Paul warns that there will be those who reject the pure doctrine in favor of that which tickles their ears and allows them to retain a semblance of religiosity while living according to their sinful lusts. These will supplant the true gospel with fables—the saving message for a salving message.

In one last challenge to Timothy before giving affirmation of his pending death, Paul admonished Timothy to watchfulness, endurance, and diligence. He recognizes there will be difficult times ahead and he encourages Timothy not to falter in his efforts to guide the church. He is to preach, instruct, exercise discipline, and whatever else is

necessary to keep the church and its mission focused. In so doing he will faithfully discharge all the duties of his ministry.

Faithful ministry. Needed in Timothy's day. Needed in ours.

For thought and discussion

1. Be sure to read the Book of Jude as you study today's lesson. Note the parallels with our text and note also Jude's concern for the purity of the church.
2. Discuss the danger to the church today by those whose lives do not match their profession of godliness.
3. This lesson affirms the inspiration of Scripture. Why is our acceptance of this doctrine so crucial to faith and life?
4. Paul's address in this passage is to Timothy, and portrays the responsibility of leadership in maintaining a pure church. What happens when leaders fail? And what can be done about it?
5. Paul charges Timothy to "make full proof of thy ministry." Doesn't this same charge apply in some measure to every Christian? How can we do this? What are some practical guidelines? Discuss this with your class.

AUGUST 29, 2004

God's Faithful Servant

Titus 2:7, 8, 11-3:9

In our lesson today Paul addresses another of his faithful, trusted co-workers. Titus, a Greek, was one of Paul's converts (1:4), a companion in mission (Galatians 2:1), and a capable administrator (2 Corinthians 8:6, 16; Titus 1:5). Here again, as in his letters to Timothy, Paul, with a recognition of his fading life, expresses concern for the ongoing purity and effective administration of the church. (Read

the entire epistle.)

After giving Titus instruction for appointing local leaders in the churches in Crete, and outlining their qualifications (Chapter 1), Paul turns in Chapter 2 to personal admonition to Titus. He is to speak things becoming, or in accord with, sound doctrine (v. 1). He is also instructed to set an example for others (2:2-6) by living an exemplary life, being faithful in his teaching, being a model of good works, and a person of integrity and dignity.

Titus is also to be sound of speech, not double-tongued, giving no occasion to the opposition to find fault. Perhaps one of the most vulnerable areas for giving offense is in our speech. Other than personal appearance, speech is one of the first defining aspects of one's character. It must be guarded with all diligence.

In verses 11 through 14 Paul summarizes the gospel. It was God's grace that brought salvation to man. That gospel teaches discipline and restraint in living and encourages patient waiting for a future hope, the glorious appearing of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He provided for man's salvation by the sacrifice of Himself. That sacrifice secures redemption from sin and a restored relationship with God (Colossians 1:12-14). This redemption secures a cleansed people ready and eager to do good works, the fruit of salvation.

Titus is then urged (v. 15) to teach these things to others. He is also instructed to use these principles to exhort and rebuke those who fall short of their performance. He is to do this with the authority of his office and the support of a personal life of integrity.

In Chapter 3 Paul again picks up the thread of qualifiers for those in positions of leadership. They are to be in subjection to rulers and civil government. They are not to slander or quarrel, but to be meek, gentle, and courteous in all human relationships. Paul

tells Titus (verses 8 and 9), to continue to hold these godly characteristics before his people and encourage them to maintain good works and avoid useless, profitless controversies about points of the law.

In verses three through seven, Paul interjects a personal comment about his life before and after salvation. (He possibly includes Titus also in the "we" of verse three.) Foolish, deceived, disobedient, following fleshly lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy and hatred—these identified his former life. But after the regenerative work of God's Holy Spirit transformed him, his life took on a different direction and motivation and outlook. Paul never gets far away from praise and wonder at God's mercy and grace. And neither should we.

For thought and discussion

1. Isn't the advice Paul gives Titus good for all Christians, not just those in leadership positions? Can we not all improve in these areas? Reflect on areas where you need personal improvement and then determine by God's help to make such improvement that will enhance your life and witness.
2. Reflect how speech identifies the person. Is your speech sound, pure, above reproach?
3. Take a careful look at verse 15. What does this indicate about the personal life of a leader, a teacher?
4. Do we have a tendency, perhaps, to expend time and energies in discussing controversial issues of no real value to the Christian life and witness? How can we keep our focus clear?
5. Do you, do I, continue to marvel at the mercy and grace of God in providing salvation and hope of glory? Think about it. ■

Newslines . . .

by Rebecca Good

incidents events occurrences facts illustrations episodes committees vignettes proceedings problems
experiences crises adventures transactions meetings tragedies scoops reports conferences happenings
bulletins questions reports affairs dramas encounters personages actions tidings et cetera

Christian Thievery?

Recent research for the Gospel Music Association found that evangelical Christian young people are almost as likely to illegally copy music as their secular counterparts. This is a practice engaged in by many, much to the chagrin of the music industry—music is downloaded off the internet to be enjoyed for free, without buying the musician’s CD. Another practice is using a computer to copy CDs, called burning, and then distributing the copied CDs to others. Both practices are stealing from the artists who created the music. The research revealed that 80 percent of teenagers had stolen music in the past six months. The researchers also found that 77 percent of born-again Christian teens engage in the very same illegal practices. According to George Barna, only 10 percent of Christian teens consider music piracy to be morally wrong. Worse yet, 64 percent of that 10 percent engage in the very practice they consider to be immoral. Joel Belz of *World* magazine laments, “If the coming generation of those most likely to fill evangelical church pews in the years ahead have so shallow an approach to the Eighth Commandment, what about the other nine? And if they are that casual about something so simple as “Thou shalt not

steal,’ then what will they do with harder issues like war and peace, babies born with handicaps, or when to take a 90-year-old off feeding tubes?”

—from *Christian Century* and *World*

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Putting the Chill on Free Speech

On April 28, Bill C-250 was passed in the Canadian Senate by a vote of 59-11. This new law adds to previous Canadian law, making it now illegal to publish, distribute, mail, import, or speak any communication that could be perceived as promoting or inciting “hate” against “identifiable groups,” such as members of a certain race or gender or gays and lesbians. Now anyone who criticizes homosexuals publicly could be jailed for up to two years. The bill does have a religious exemption, stating that a person won’t be prosecuted for anti-gay speech “if, in good faith, he expresses . . . an opinion based on a belief in a religious text.”

One Saskatchewan court has already held that certain Bible passages expose homosexuals to hatred. Church-law analysts already are advising religious leaders on how to handle the new law. Attorney Bruce W. Long in a March issue of *Church Law Bulletin* wrote: “Churches and religious organizations

may want to consider . . . avoiding public criticisms of identifiable groups . . . limiting opinions to private conversation, and if targeted or investigated, relying on the constitutional right to remain silent.” —from *World*

How to Lead a Heavenly Life Upon Earth

Living in any known sin is a grand impediment to a heavenly conversation. What havoc this will make in thy soul! O, the joys that this hath destroyed! The ruin it hath made among men’s graces! The soul-strengthening duties it hath hindered! Christian reader, art thou one that hast used violence with thy conscience? Art thou a wilful neglecter of known duties, either public, private, or secret? Art thou a slave to thine appetite, or to any other commanding sense? Art thou a proud seeker of thine own esteem? Art thou a peevish and passionate person, ready to take fire at every word, or look, or supposed slight? Art thou a deceiver of others in thy dealings, or one that will be rich, right or wrong? If this be thy case, I dare say, heaven and thy soul are very great strangers.

—Reverend Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

Methodists Wage a Long War

It seems that every four years, the United Methodists have to battle the issue of homosexuality at their quadriennial conference. The conservatives have won every time, but every time by decreasing margins. This has been continuing for three decades. And the homosexuals will be sure to be back four years from now at the next conference.

Conservative delegates at this year’s conference did win some victories. They strengthened the language of the

church law book to read: “The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.” By a 674-262 vote the delegates retained the church’s ban on ordination and placement of practicing homosexuals as ministers.

At the conference, the delegates also rejected a measure to separate into two denominations, and voted 869-41 to reaffirm “our commitment to work together for our common mission.” They also voted 625-184 to endorse “laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.” They are the first mainline denomination to make such a statement. —from *World*

Mysterious Dark Spot Seen in Satellite Photos

An expedition plans to search the northeastern slopes of Mt. Ararat in Turkey this summer, July 15 to August 15. They are hoping to examine a large object in the middle of a glacier; they believe this could be Noah’s Ark. Record heat waves last summer caused the melting of an ice cap over the object, making it more visible. Close-ups of the mysterious object in the satellite photos reveal something which resembles three beams and a cross beam. It looks like it is around 50 feet by 70 feet. This could be a part of Noah’s Ark, which perhaps broke up during the Biblical flood. The expedition is funded by Daniel P. McGivern, a Roman Catholic entrepreneur from Honolulu, who believes that finding the Biblical ark could spark a worldwide religious revival. The search team will include 30 Americans and Turkish scientists, forensic specialists, and archaeologists.

—from *The Washington Times*

Natural Knowledge

Even pagans understand God's requirements

by J. Budziszewski

Certain moral truths really are common to all human beings. Because our shoes are wet with evasions the common ground may seem slippery to us, but we all know that we shouldn't murder, shouldn't steal, should honor our parents, should honor God, and so on. "Common moral ground" is a cumbersome term for the foundational principles of morality, and also a little thin; a simpler term is "natural law." Here are a few questions people have concerning this misunderstood concept.

Q: Aren't all sorts of wrongs natural? It is natural to fly into a rage. It's natural to murder.

You're mixing up two different senses of the word *natural*. People do fly into rages and do murder, but the question is how we are designed. We are designed with a capacity for anger, to arouse us to the protection of endangered goods. It doesn't follow that anger should be indulged so far that goods are endangered. Aren't we also provided with brakes?

Q: But we violate nature every time we have a cavity filled. Isn't it natural for human beings to transcend their natures?

Saying that we violate the nature of a tooth every time we fill a cavity is like saying that we violate the nature of an automobile every time we plug a leak in the radiator. When we plug the leak, we are fulfilling the design by putting the car back in proper order. In the same way, filling a cavity restores to the tooth its natural function of chewing. Healing does not transcend our nature; it respects it . . .

Q: Since you're a Christian, why not just rely on the Bible?

For several reasons, but the best one

is, the Bible itself testifies to the reality of the natural law.

Q: Does it actually mention natural law?

It doesn't use the term *natural law*, but . . . Paul mentions the witness of deep conscience when he writes, "When Gentiles who have not the law [of Moses] do by nature what the law requires, . . . [t]hey show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them." He captures the discipline of natural consequences in the formula, "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." The Bible is big on the witness of design—design in general, design in us. And it's remarkable that when the apostles are speaking to pagans, they don't begin with Scripture, but with what the pagans know already—for instance their longing for an "unknown god," which implies knowledge that none of their deities are adequate.

Q: Don't natural law thinkers put too much confidence in the capacity of fallen man to know moral truth?

In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul doesn't blame the pagans for not having the truth about God and His moral requirements, but for suppressing and neglecting it. In the Proverbs, the complaint made about "fools" is not primarily that they lack knowledge but that they despise it. In other words, atheism and moral obtuseness are not primarily an intellectual flaw; their most important ingredient is obstinacy. The natural law tradition does not deny these things. It recognizes error, it recognizes obstinacy, and it recognizes self-deception.

Q: Isn't natural law just a baptized pagan theory?

It's true that the first philosophers to use the term "natural law" were pagans, but the biblical testimony to its reality came earlier still. Besides, if God has made some things plain . . . wouldn't you expect the pagan philosophers to notice them? Of course their theories needed correction at many points, but that has been done.

Q: Isn't the portrayal of God in natural law different from the God of Scripture?

No, it's an incomplete picture of the

same one. Nature proclaims its Creator; Scripture tells you who He is. Nature shows you the results of His deeds in creation; Scripture tells you the results of His deeds in history. Nature manifests to you His moral requirements; Scripture tells you what to do about the fact that you don't measure up to them. Scripture is more important because it tells you the plan of salvation, but not even Scripture makes nature superfluous. ■

—Excerpted from J. Budziszewski's book *What We Can't Not Know* (Spence Publishing, 2003). Reprinted by permission from *WORLD Magazine*, Asheville, NC (www.worldmag.com).



Train Your Children to Obey

by John Wesley (1703-1791)

"Children, obey your parents in all things; for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." —Colossians 3:20.

It has been a subject of controversy for many years, whether there are any innate principles in the mind of man. But it is allowed on all hands, if there be any practical principles naturally implanted in the soul, that "we ought to honor our parents" will claim this character almost before any other.

It is enumerated among those universal principles by the most ancient authors and is, undoubtedly, found even among most savages, in the most barbarous nations. We may trace it through all the extent of Europe and Asia, through the wilds of Africa and the forests of America. And it is not less but more observable in the most civilized nations.

So it was first in the Eastern parts of the world, which were for so many ages the seat of empire, learning and politeness, as well as of religion. So it was afterward in all the Grecian states and

throughout the whole Roman Empire. In this respect it is plain, they that have "not the [written] law, are a law unto themselves," showing "the work [the substance] of the law [to be] written in their hearts."

Obedience to Parents Is a Bible Concept

Wherever God has revealed His will to man, this law has been a part of that revelation. It is the substance of this which Paul delivers to the Ephesians: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord" (6:1); and again in these words to the Colossians, "Children, obey your parents in all things" (3:20).

It is observable that the apostle enforces this duty by a threefold encouragement:

(1) To the Ephesians he adds, ". . . for this is right." It is an instance of justice as well as mercy. It is not more than their due. It is what we owe them for the being which we received from them.

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(2) To the Colossians he says, “. . . this is well pleasing unto the Lord.” It is peculiarly pleasing to the great Father of men and angels that we should pay honor and obedience to the fathers of our flesh.

(3) It is “the first commandment with promise” (Eph. 6:2); the first to the performance whereof a peculiar promise is annexed—“That it may be well with thee” (v. 3) and “that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Exod. 20:12).

We have seen innumerable proofs that it belongs to the Christian as well as to the Jewish dispensation. Many remarkable instances of its accomplishment occur even at this day.

Obedience Is a Divine Duty

Look around into the world, not the heathen, but the Christian world. Look among those who have the Scriptures in their own language. And who is there that appears even to have heard of this?

Here and there a child obeys the parent out of fear or perhaps out of natural affection. But how many children can you find who obey their fathers and mothers out of a sense of duty to God? And how many parents can you find that duly inculcate this duty upon their children? It seems a vast majority both of parents and children are totally ignorant of the whole affair.

You will easily observe that by parents, the apostle means both fathers and mothers, as he refers us to the Fifth Commandment, which names both the one and the other. However human laws may vary herein, the law of God makes no difference but lays us under the same obligation of obeying both the one and the other.

But before we consider how we are to obey our parents, it may be inquired, How long are we to obey them? Are children to obey only till they run alone? till they go to school? till they can read and write? or till they are as tall as their parents? or attain to years of discretion?

Nay, if they obey only because they fear to be beaten or because otherwise they

cannot procure food and raiment, what avails such obedience? Those only who obey their parents when they can live without them and when they neither hope nor fear anything from them shall have praise from God.

Children Borrow Wisdom by Obedience

It is with admirable wisdom that the Father of spirits has given this direction, that as the strength of the parents supplies the want of strength and the understanding of the parents, the want of understanding in their children till they have strength and understanding of their own, so the will of the parents may guide that of their children till they have wisdom and experience to guide themselves.

Obedience Is Lesson Number One for Every Child

This, therefore, is the very first thing which children have to learn: that they are to obey their parents, to submit to their will in all things, and this they may be inured to long before they understand the reason of it and, indeed, long before they are capable of understanding any of the principles of religion.

Accordingly, Paul directs all parents to bring up their children in the discipline and doctrine of the Lord. For their will may be broken by proper discipline, even in their early infancy; whereas, it must be a considerable time after before they are capable of instruction. This, therefore, is the first point of all: bow down their wills from the very first dawn of reason and, by habituating them to your will, prepare them for submitting to the will of their Father which is in Heaven.

But how few children do we find, even of six and eight years old, who understand anything of this! Indeed, how should they understand it, seeing they have none to teach them? Are not their parents, father as well as mother, fully as ignorant of the matter as themselves?

***Parents Doom Own Children by
Allowing Disobedience***

Whom do you find, even among religious people, who have the least conception of it? Have not you seen the proof of it with your own eyes? Have you not been present when a father or mother has said, "My child, do . . ." and heard the child without any ceremony answer peremptorily, "I won't"? And the parents quietly passed it by without any further notice.

And do they not see that by this cruel indulgence they are training up their child, by flat rebellion against his parents, to rebellion against God? Consequently, they are training him up for the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. If they duly considered this, they would neither eat, drink nor sleep till they had taught him a better lesson and made him thoroughly afraid ever of giving that diabolical answer again.

Let me reason this case a little further with you parents who fear God. If you do fear God, how dare you suffer a child above a year old to say, "I will . . ." or "I won't . . ." and go unpunished? Why don't you stop him at once, that he may never dare to say so again? Have you no compassion for your child? no regard for his salvation or destruction? Would you suffer him to curse or swear in your presence and take no notice of it? **Why, disobedience is as certain a way to damnation as cursing and swearing.**

Stop him, stop him, in the name of God. Do not spare the rod and spoil the child. If you have not the heart of a tiger, do not give up your child to his own will, that is, to the Devil. Though it be pain to yourself, yet pluck your offspring out of the lion's teeth. Make them submit, that they may not perish, that you may save their souls.

I cannot tell how to enforce this point sufficiently.

Parents' Will Must Conquer and Control God's Will

To fix it upon your minds more strongly,

permit me to add part of a letter on the subject, printed some years ago:

In order to form the minds of the children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will. To inform their understanding is a work of time and must proceed by slow degrees, but the subjecting the will is a thing which must be done at once, and the sooner the better. For, by our neglecting timely correction, they contract a stubbornness which is hardly ever to be conquered, and never without using that severity which would be as painful to us as to the children.

Therefore, I call those cruel parents who pass for kind and indulgent, who permit their children to contract habits which they know must be afterward broken.

I insist upon conquering the wills of children betimes, because this is the only foundation for a religious education. When this is thoroughly done, then a child is capable of being governed by the reason of his parent till his own understanding comes to maturity.

I cannot yet dismiss the subject. As self-will is the root of all sin and misery, so whatever cherishes this in children insures their after wretchedness and irreligion. And whatever checks and mortifies it promotes their future happiness and piety.

***Children Who Submit to Parents' Will
More Likely to Yield to God***

This is still more evident if we consider that religion is nothing else but the doing of the will of God and not our own, and that self-will being the grand impediment to our temporal and eternal happiness, no indulgence of it can be trivial, no denial of it unprofitable.

Heaven or Hell depends on this alone. So that the parent who studies to subdue it in his children works together with God in the saving of a soul. The parent who indulges it does the Devil's work, makes religion impracticable, salvation unattainable, and does all that in him lies to damn his child, soul and body, forever.

How dreadful are the consequences of that accursed kindness [of parents] which gives their children their own wills and does not bow down their necks from infancy. It is chiefly owing to this that so many religious parents bring up their children that [they] have no religion at all, children who, when they are grown up, have no regard for them.

Why is this but because their wills were not broken at first, because they were not inured from their early infancy to obey their parents in all things and to submit to their wills, as to the will of God?

Did you point out to them the will of God, that they should obey you in all things? Do you inculcate this over and over again till they perfectly comprehend it? Oh, never be weary of this labor of love.

Don't Reward Disobedience

At least do not teach them to disobey by rewarding them anything because they cry for it. And herein they are apt scholars; if you reward them for crying, they will certainly cry again. So that there is no end unless you make it a sacred rule to give them nothing for which they cry.

Why should you not begin today? Surely you see what is the most excellent way—best for your own soul. Why then do you disobey? Because you are a coward, because you want resolution. And doubtless training them in this requires no small patience, more than nature ever gave. But the grace of God is sufficient for you; you can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth you.

Parents, Be Strong

I am pained continually at seeing parents suffer their children to run into the same folly of dress, as if they had not religion at all. In God's name, why do you suffer them to vary a hairsbreadth from your example?

"Why, they will do it." They will! And whose fault is that? Why did you not break their will from infancy?

At least do it now—better late than

never. It should have been done before they were two years old. It may be done at eight or ten, though with far more difficulty. However, do it now and accept the difficulty as the just reward for your past neglect.

Be not mealy-mouthed; say not, like foolish Eli, "Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear [of you]," instead of restraining them with a strong hand; but speak, though as calmly as possible, yet firmly and peremptorily, "I will have it so"; and do as you say. Instill diligently unto them the love of plain dress and hatred of finery.

A Word to Children

Permit me now to apply myself to you, children, particularly you who are the children of religious parents. Indeed, if you have no fear of God before your eyes, I have no concern with you at present. But if you have, if you really fear God and have a desire to please Him, you desire to understand all His Commandments, the Fifth in particular.

Did you ever understand it yet? Do you now understand what is your duty to your father and mother? Do you know, at least do you consider, that by the divine appointment their will is a law to you?

Have you considered the extent of that obedience to your parents which God requires? "Children, obey your parents in all things"—no exception, but of things unlawful. Have you practiced your duty in this extent? Did you ever so much as intend it?

Look upon your father and mother with new eyes. See them as representing your Father which is in Heaven. Endeavor, study, rejoice to please, to help, to obey in all things. Behave not barely as their child, but as their servant for Christ's sake.

Oh, how will you then love one another! In a manner unknown before, God will bless you to them, and them to you. All around will feel that God is with you of a truth. ■

—Abridged from "Message of Victory."

The Concluding Verses of the Book of Revelation

by J. A. Seiss

We come now to the last section of this wonderful Book—the Epilogue—the closing remarks. The Grand Panorama of an ending and renewing world has reached the point where everything enters upon the eternal state, and we are now to take leave of the wonderful exhibit. We have seen the Church in its universality and varied historic continuity from the days of the Apostle down to the time when Christ shall come for His people, and how He will end its career by taking one here and another there, and leaving the rest, because of their unreadiness to taste the sorrows of the great Tribulation. With the judgment thus begun at the house of God, we have seen it roll along through the breaking of seals, the sounding of trumpets, and the pouring out of bowls of wrath, in ever-varying scenes of miracle and wonder, towards saints and sinners, the living and the dead. We have seen the Antichrist coming up from his abyss, captivating the world, running his course of unexampled blasphemy, and sinking forever in his deserved perdition. We have seen the final doings of Satan in heaven and earth, his arrest and imprisonment, his short loosing, and his final consignment, with all his, to the lake of fire. We have seen the thrones of the shepherdizers of the nations, the breaking down of all rebellion, and the coming forth into the living world of the eternal principles of righteousness. We have seen the shaking of the old heavens and earth, and the same passed through the throes of the long-expected Regeneration. We have seen the crowned princes of the first resurrection wedded to the All-Ruling Lamb, and led into the golden city of their hopes. We have seen the New Jerusalem come down out of heaven from God; Sin, Death, Hades, and the curse swept into Gehenna; the Tabernacle of God taking its place

among men; redemption complete; Paradise regained; and the nations of the earth in Edenic peace and glory setting out under their immortal kings for an eternity of uninterrupted blessedness. And it only remains now to give a few closing particulars with reference to these momentous Revelations that men may attend to them with that reverence and faith which of right belongs to them. May God help us to hear, learn, and inwardly digest them to our abiding consolation!

The first thing we are called on to note is their absolute truth and certainty. There is nothing in which the difference of the Scriptures from all others teachings is more manifest than in the positiveness and authority with which they deliver themselves on all subjects, even where reason can tell us nothing, and where the presentations are so marvellous as to stagger belief. When the Saviour was on earth, He spake with such clearness and simplicity, and with such knowing majesty and commanding mastery of all wisdom that men who heard him were amazed, forgot all other authorities, and hasted away in awe, saying, "*Never man spake like this man.*" And so it is in all the Word of inspiration. Even where angels would scarce dare to tread, it enters with perfect freedom, as upon its own home domain, and declares itself with all that assured certainty which belongs only to Omniscience. Even with regard to all the astounding and seemingly impossible wonders of this Book, the absolute truth of every jot and tittle is guaranteed with the abounding fulness of the completest knowledge of everything involved. In case of some of the most wonderful of these presentations the word to John was, "*Write, because these words are faithful and true.*" And so here, with regard to all the contents of the Book, it was said to the Seer, "*These words [are]*

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faithful and true.”

Thrice it is repeated, that these presentations are faithful and true (19:9; 21:5; 22:6); and twice is it affirmed that these showings are all from God. In the opening of the Book it is said, that he “sent his angel to his servant John” for the purpose of making these revelations, and here at the conclusion, we have it repeated, that “*the Lord the God of the spirits of the prophets sent his angel to show to his servants what things MUST come to pass.*” Nay more, Christ Himself adds special personal testimony to the fact: “I, JESUS, *sent my angel to testify to you these things.*” Thus the very God of all inspiration, and of all inspired men, reiterates and affirms the highest authority for all that is herein written.

Either, then, this Book is nothing but a base and blasphemous forgery, unworthy of the slightest respect of men, and specially unworthy of a place in the Sacred Canon; or it is one of the most directly inspired and authoritative writings ever given. But a forgery it cannot be. All the Churches named in its first chapters, from the earliest periods succeeding the time of its writing, with one accord, accepted and honored it as from their beloved Apostolic Father. Papias, Bishop of Hieropolis, a disciple of St. John, a colleague of the Seven Angels of these Churches, and who gave much attention to the collection of all the memorable sayings and works of the Apostles, accepted and honored this Book as the genuine production of this venerable Apostle. Nor is there another Book in the New Testament whose genuineness and inspiration was more clearly and strongly attested on its first appearance, and for the three half-centuries next following. Augustine and the Latin Council unquestionably had good and sufficient reason for classing it with the most sacred apostolic records, and the Church in general for regarding it as a Book of prophecy “from Christ’s own divine, omniscient, and eternal Spirit.” And if it really is the Lord

Jesus who speaks to us in this Book, there is nothing in all the Canon of Scripture which He more pointedly attests, more solemnly guards, or more urgently presses upon the study and devout regard of all who would be His disciples. People may account us crazy for giving so much attention to it, and laugh at our credulity for daring to believe that it means what it says; but better be accounted possessed, as Christ himself was considered, and be pronounced beside ourselves and mad, after the manner of Paul, than to take our lot with Pharisees, and Festuses, and Agrippas, and Galios. If we err in this, we err with the goodly fellowship of the saints, with the noble army of the martyrs, in the society of many great and good and wise in many ages and nations. And if it should finally turn out that we have been beguiling ourselves with dreams, they still give us the most consistent philosophy of Providence, and the most comforting solutions of life’s mysteries whilst our pretentious submission to what seems most surely to be our Creator’s word and will may serve us best when we come to answer at His judgment-seat. We believe that it is God who tells us, “*These words are faithful and true*”; therefore we so take them, and build our faith upon them, and testify them to all the world.

A second particular to be noted in this Epilogue is the repetition of the benediction upon those who treasure what is written in this Book. In the opening verses the inspired writer said: “Blessed is he who readeth, and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and observe the things which are written in it.” But here the Saviour Himself, even He whose nearing Apocalypse these records were given to describe, says, in a voice uttered from His glorious throne in heaven, “*Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this Book.*” All this is additional to the seven times repeated admonition: “*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.*” Is there another

Book in the holy Canon so intense, so emphatic, so constant, so full from end to end, in its expressions of the good to be gained and the ill to be avoided by the hearing and learning of its own particular presentations? It is precisely as if the Saviour knew and foresaw, as He certainly did, what neglect, prejudice, and mistreatment this Book would encounter in the later ages of the Church, and how it and the students of it, and especially the believers in its wonderful descriptions, would be ridiculed, avoided, and put aside, as not in the line of proper and wholesome edification. And how will some of these pious scorners, whom Christ has set and ordained to feed His sheep and give them meat in due season, feel and fare, when from the judgment-seat He shall say: "Sirs, I gave you the complete chart of my promised Apocalypse; I caused it to be made as plain as words and visions can make anything of the sort; I told you over and over of the momentous importance of studying, treasuring, and making known to the Churches what I thus sent my angel and my beloved disciple to show you; and yet you have held it to be a crazy Book, one which either finds or leaves crazy those who study it, and have not believed my Word, nor taught it to my people, nor allowed it to speak in the appointed Lectionaries, and have only sought to explain away its momentous import into a little dim foreshowing of a few ages of ordinary earthly history! Was this the way for good servants of their Lord to act? Was this being faithful stewards of the mysteries of God? Was this the way to treat what I have been at such pains to give, and pointed you to with so much solemnity, and promised to reward your study of it with such special benedictions?" Alas, alas, what answer will they make? Will they say that it was too difficult a Book for them to understand? This would only be adding insult to their unfaithfulness. Dare we suppose that the merciful Jesus would hang His benedictions so high as to be beyond the reach of those to whom they

are so graciously proposed? Would He mock us by suspending His offered blessings on terms beyond our power? Yet this is the charge men bring against their Redeemer when they think to plead the incomprehensibility of this Book for their neglect and practical rejection of it. The very propounding of these blessings and rewards is God's own seal to the possibility of understanding this Book equally with any other part of Scripture. Would He, the God of truth, lie to us? Would He, the God of mercy, mock us? Would He who gave His life for us, and ever lives and ministers in heaven and earth for our enlightenment and salvation, give us a Book to tell us of the outcome of all His gracious operations, command us to note its words, to believe and treasure its contents, and promise us a special blessedness in so doing, if what He has thus put into our hands is not at all within the limits of our comprehension and successful mastery? Does not everything that we know of the dear God above us rise up to condemn all such thoughts as slanderous of heaven, and blasphemy against our precious Saviour's goodness? Therefore these very benedictions pronounce against the common notion that this Book is too difficult for ordinary Christians, and rebuke all who despise and avoid it. If it is anything, these proffered blessings are more than a divine justification for all the time and pains which we have been bestowing upon it, and for accepting, believing, holding, and testifying as the very truth of God all that we have found herein written. Let men estimate us and our work as they please, we have here the unmistakable authority of heaven for it, that this Apocalypse is capable of being understood; that its presentations are among the most momentous in all the Word of God; and that the highest blessedness of believers is wrapped up with the learning and keeping of what is pictured to us in it. And if Christians would rise to the true comfort of their faith,—if they would possess themselves of a right philosophy of God's

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purposes and providence,—if they would be guarded against the greatest dangers and most subtle deceptions of the Old Serpent,—if they would really know what Redemption means, and what the height and glory of their calling is,—let them not despise or neglect this crowning Book of the New Testament, but study its pages, take its statements as they read, get its stupendous visions into their understandings, treasure its words in their hearts, and believe and know that it is comprehensible for all who are really willing to be instructed in these mighty things. If we wait till they are fulfilled, it will then be too late to get the blessing which the reading, hearing, and keeping of what is said

concerning them is to bestow. It is in our understanding of them before they come to pass that the blessedness lies; for when once Christ comes in the scenes of His Apocalypse, the time to begin to put ourselves in readiness for it will be past. We must understand beforehand, as this record was meant to advise us beforehand, or it will be useless to think of getting ourselves in position when once these momentous scenes become accomplished realities. By all that is sacred, therefore, let us beware how we treat this Book, and the showings which it contains, remembering this word of the Lord Jesus, spoken to us from heaven: *“Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this Book.”* ■



Confronting Conflict Outside the Comfort Zone

by Roger Overturf

A premier issue facing the contemporary Christian community is the need to operate “outside the box.” It’s about getting out of our comfort zone in order to have a more effective outreach to our communities, our nation, and our world. One of the surest ways for you to move out of your comfort zone is to evaluate the effectiveness of your own life or the effectiveness of any organization in which you play a role. Ready to give that a try?

Here is my fourfold thesis: 1) the 21st century church’s influence in and over contemporary society, particularly American society, has weakened in comparison to that wielded by godly men and women of the past, 2) the cause of that weakening is easily identifiable, 3) the Bible has much to say about the cause and its remedy, and 4) the process of implementing the solution will be uncomfortable.

Proposition #1

The 21st century church’s exertion of influence in society is not affecting the American or wider Western culture to the same degree it enjoyed in the first two centuries of American history. This element of the case seems self-evident enough to accept at face value. But, for the benefit of argument, consider three elements of our society: entertainment (especially television), education, and politics.

A cursory look at television offerings should be sufficient. Anyone close to the age of 50 can recall when television offerings were family-friendly. Recall the stature with which authority figures, including police and clergy, were held in society simply because of the vocation they chose to pursue. Attendance at the church of your choice was assumed. Respect for

public safety officials was expected, as was respect for clergy. Belief in God, or at the least an assent to the positive influence of religion in society, was nigh unto universal.

Compare that to what we find today. Television, along with nearly every form of popular entertainment, is riddled with depictions of immorality, disrespect for authority, and debauched parental images. Clergy are no longer depicted as respectable, but as either pitiful for their lack of material ambition or as ignoble bigots for their stands on issues of morality and protection of human life. Religious belief is most often disdained as either regrettable ignorance or purposeful escape from reality. Religion and religious people, rather than being viewed as a societal good, are dismissed as cultural roadblocks.

In public education, every effort is being made to remove any evidence of God, godliness, or a godly heritage. This is not only true in the sciences, but also in history and the social sciences, as well as literature. The recent federal appeals court decision to declare the Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional is just the latest example. How far removed from the American tradition is this attitude. Consider that our predecessors placed a strong priority on higher education with the Bible as the cornerstone.

For example, in 1642 Harvard adopted guidelines that read, in part, "Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3), and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning. And seeing the Lord only giveth wisdom, let every one seriously set himself by prayer in secret to seek it of Him (Proverbs 2:3)." The motto of Harvard was *Christi Gloriam* (Christ be glorified) and the college was later dedicated *Christo et Ecclesiae* (for Christ and for the Church). The founders of Harvard believed that "All knowledge without

Christ was vain." Today, can you imagine the president of any of the Ivy League schools saying such a thing in private to say nothing of committing these to a document? Of course, you can't. He or she would be excoriated as an insensitive bigot. Yet, it was this set of principles which served as the cornerstone for the creation of what is still viewed as the greatest system of higher education the world has ever known.

Do we even need to consider the political arena? Unfortunately, we do, for it is from this arena that much of the degrading of societal influence has occurred. How far our nation's government has strayed from the path established by the Founding Fathers! For example, Patrick Henry, member of the Continental Congress, said, "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ. For this very reason peoples of other faiths have been afforded asylum, prosperity, and freedom of worship here." In case you think these sentiments were limited to the 18th century founders, consider these words: "Our strength lies in spiritual concepts. It lies in public sensitivity to evil. Our greatest danger is not from invasion by foreign armies. Our dangers are that we may commit suicide from within by complacency with evil, or by public tolerance of scandalous behavior." These were the sentiments of Herbert Hoover, 31st president of the United States, who served from 1929-1933.

Proposition #2

How has this happened? How has the clear, indisputable Christian heritage of American society been undermined? How have we, as believers, allowed the dismantling of our cultural foundation?

There is one primary reason for this catastrophe. The reason the church has lost its position of influence in American and Western culture is *worldliness*. Little about the Christian community can be

viewed as substantively different than any other group. We live, work, serve, and behave in ways indistinguishable from our neighbors.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the statistics concerning divorce among couples claiming to be Christians. Researchers, such as George Barna, tell us that the incidence of divorce among conservative, evangelical Christians is high, perhaps even higher, than the general population.

The sad fact is that we have simply lost our distinctiveness as Christians. Consequently, Christianity is no longer viewed as a positive influence, either in the lives of individuals or in society as a whole. Christians are viewed as nothing more than a special-interest group in a sea of such groups.

Proposition #3

The biblical description of worldliness in the context of the church is the presence of “strife” or selfish ambition within the body. Scripture is very clear about this issue. Consider the following selections:

Also a dispute [KJV = strife] arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves” (Luke 22:24-26).

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you (1 Cor. 1:10, 11).

*Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. **For since there is jealousy and quar-***

reling among you, are you not worldly? (1 Cor. 3:1-3, emphasis mine).

Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.

For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder (2 Cor. 12:19, 20, emphasis mine).

The passage from Luke is most instructive. Jesus was annoyed by the strife engendered in the midst of His disciples. He encouraged His followers to act as servant-leaders, not lording it over their followers or one another, but seeking to use their position as a means of blessing others rather than reaping any positional perquisites. Of special note is the timing of this instruction; it occurs immediately following the institution of communion. It’s interesting to note that while churches have no problem following the sequence of the ceremony as it is described here, many have problems living out the principles behind it.

Paul’s comments to the Corinthian church are also enlightening. These epistles are written to the most offensive of Paul’s church plants. We are all familiar with the sensualities and other issues Paul deals with throughout the letters. But, how often do we consider the Apostle’s disdain for the Corinthians’ penchant for quarreling, strife, and internal conflict?

But, those passages only begin to scratch the surface of scriptural teaching on the subject. Consider one of the most quoted Pauline passages and make special note of the context in which Paul writes it:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the

renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing, and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. . . . Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone (Romans 12:1-3, 16-18).

We have all heard multiple teachings on Romans 12. We've learned about the principle of daily surrender in the context of our personal walk with God. We've been taught about the principle of daily sacrifice in the context of our vocational calling, our marriages, and our relationships with our children and parents. But, what do we know about this principle in the context in which it was written? Paul is writing about breaking out of the world's mold with respect to *the way we treat one another as fellow believers*. He is writing about refusing to allow conflict, strife, and selfish ambition to characterize our relationships with one another. This is necessary because those attributes are what characterize the world's relationships. Selfishness, strife, and conflict are the definition of worldliness.

Seriously consider this: Is the picture Paul paints of harmony, self-denial, and "others-orientation" the picture of your church? Is it the picture of the 21st century Western church? Sadly, it is not.

Conflict and strife are rampant in today's church. Entire movements have sprung up within the church because of it. Some wear combativeness as a badge of honor rather than the one of shame and selfishness it truly represents. The neglect of the ministry of reconciliation—reconciliation of one to another—and the embracing of self-centeredness and nihilism have resulted in our loss of influence. For, if we

are unable to love and treat one another with grace, we cannot expect to properly introduce others to the grace of God. Neither can we expect to incite in others the desire to replicate our experiences of grace.

Two passages in the Gospel as recorded by John illustrate the importance of the concept of Christian community to our Lord. In one, John quotes the Lord Jesus as He teaches His disciples about servant-leadership as He washes their feet. The other is a segment of Jesus' high priestly prayer. Consider their consistent message:

*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another** (John 13:34, 35, emphasis mine).*

*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one: I in them and You in Me. **May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me** (John 17:20-23, emphasis mine).*

Can there be any doubt that the standard for the church is one of commitment to serving the needs of others in the context of love, acceptance, and unity? Not if these passages are to be believed.

I believe it is this failure—it is this worldliness—that has diluted the influence of the church as an institution and of Christians as individuals in contemporary culture. It is for this reason we must actively pursue the transformation of our culture through the compassion of Christ.

Proposition #4

The antidote for strife and conflict is peacemaking. If we want to reclaim our culture for Christ, if we want the church

to regain its position as the moral compass for our society, then we must seek to create peace within our own community. The importance of this process is made clear in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus speaks to the crowds gathered there about the application of the principles as opposed to the letter of the law. When He speaks to the issue of murder, He says:

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment." But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca," is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift (Matt. 5:21-24).

What Jesus is saying here is that anger and bitterness towards another is the moral equivalent of murder. And, that murderous attitude not only places a barrier between you and the person with whom you are angry, it also places an impenetrable barrier between you and God. It may be that you have reached a plateau in your relationship with God. For some reason, you are unable to worship Him in the way you know you should. You find it difficult to hear from God. May I suggest that the reason may be that you are holding onto anger against and harboring bitterness toward another. Jesus said in the passage above that God does not want your worship until you have placed that bitterness aside and reconciled yourself to that other person.

Ken Sande, director of Peacemaker Ministries, writes:

The message given by Jesus and the apostles is resoundingly clear: whether our conflicts involve minor irritations or major legal issues, peace and unity are of

paramount importance to God. Therefore, peacemaking is not an optional activity for a believer. If you have committed your life to Christ, He commands you to make peace and unity a high priority in your life. Token efforts will not satisfy this command; God wants you to strive earnestly, diligently, and continually to maintain harmonious relationships with those around you. Your obedience to this call will advance the gospel and allow you to enjoy the personal peace that God gives to those who faithfully serve Him.

This can be a very troublesome undertaking. People can be very annoying, even demanding. Putting aside our own interests in order to accommodate others is painful. But, only when we take seriously this issue of peacemaking, reconciliation, and Christian community based on relationships of mutual respect and personal humility will we have the capacity to positively affect the culture around us. Imagine the expanded influence the church could have if it were to appropriately reflect the grace, peace, and reconciliation offered in Christ. Better than imagining such influence, read about the fledgling church in Acts. There you'll find a group of people, transformed by their encounters with Christ, who, by virtue of their relationships with one another (Acts 4:32, 33), went on to spread the gospel to the world.

We have the potential to have the same kind of influence in our world. We can be the city on a hill that Christ intended for us to be. But, we will not live up to that potential unless we are willing to renounce the worldliness that defines us. Matthew 5:9 states, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."

If we are serious about wanting to influence our neighbors, our community, and our world, we must take seriously the scriptural injunction to be transformed ourselves. Then, because we reflect the compassions of Christ, we can begin to transform the culture in which we live. ■

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Evangelism

by Mark D. Avery

Most, if not all, Christians understand that the Great Commission applies to the Church today. Evangelism has nearly always been an important stated purpose of the Church. Yet the Church has often struggled with the practice of reaching out and touching the unsaved with the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Some churches have found rather effective methods of pointing people to Christ, while others have tended to cloister themselves away from the needy world. One denominational leader even stated that some churches in his organization had not had a new convert in over twenty years. It seems reasonable to think that something is wrong when a church fails to produce new believers.

We do understand that churches go through transitions and downturns, yet continuing for several years without experiencing some conversion growth must indicate a serious deficiency somewhere in that local church.

Our understanding of theology reminds us that God is able. Indeed, God has not changed. His will still includes finding and winning new people. Effective churches believe this in practical ways. Their methods demonstrate a determination to influence people to believe unto salvation.

Many churches find themselves in difficult circumstances. The United States has rightly been called the melting pot of the world. The mixture of ethnic groups and cultures poses both opportunities and challenges. Along with their cultures, many immigrants to our society bring relics of their religions. Paganism, secularism, and materialism abound, offering great challenges to the spread of the gospel in our land.

Too often, however, churches have responded to these challenges by isolating

themselves from their communities. They find it easy to conclude that people are not interested in the gospel. If they were, they would come to church. Of course, we know that is not true. Few people attend church uninvited; most new attendees visit churches because they were invited by a friend.

Churches are in difficult areas by design. A war is being waged between the forces of good and the forces of evil. The Church is seen as a threat by Satan's forces. Still, the Church has a responsibility to get involved in the battle against sin. The Church has the responsibility of sharing the gospel. The Great Commission is still in effect.

So, what can churches do to reach their communities? No single strategy will work for every church. Individual congregations, however, can and should make every attempt to reach their communities. Knowledge of the community, exposure in the community, and the developing of creative methods that are adapted to the needs of the community are good places to start. And always remember, it is the method and not the message that we adapt to the needs of various cultures.

The motivation for evangelism is what makes it effective. The best programs and activities fall short of accomplishing the mission unless they come from a heart of love. We have heard it so often that we may regard it as a trite statement, but it is still true: People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. Our neighbors, those people living near us and our churches, need to know that we care, for in taking time to care we will find opportunities to witness for Christ. ■

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Just a Touch

by Nelson Jennings

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

"You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

—Mark 5:24b-34

When Mikhail Gorbachev was asked about his philosophy of life, he said, "People are born, they suffer, and they die." And it is not only Mr. Gorbachev who holds to his opinion. Gautama Buddha taught his followers, "Life is suffering."

Such assessments of life do reflect truth. Life can be a quicksand of confusion and self-absorption. Surely you see difficulties in your own life. You work and live around people who are facing their own difficulties. Often in the midst of these problems people are out for their own good, not caring about what is right or what happens to others around them. This is a desperate world of pain and confusion. And it is into this very world that Jesus stepped.

The account of Mark 5:24-34 reminds us that Jesus is deeply aware of this pain and confusion and is able to extend healing to the weary and broken in the midst of painful situations. Jesus is in the middle of a crowd and a woman touches Him. This woman has been through a tremendous amount of agony. The passage says she had spent all she had trying to find a cure for her illness. She may have faced many who attempted to help her out of goodwill, but undoubtedly she has been oppressed and abused. She is perhaps the least likely person in the crowd to receive the sort of attention that this text gives her—that Jesus gives her.

Yes, this woman is a very unlikely candidate. She is not exactly the key person upon whom to build a ministry or a movement. But we see, in the midst of the pain and confusion, that Jesus has a special concern for her. Indeed the entire Biblical picture of Jesus is that He has a bent towards helping those who are poor, oppressed, and sick. In both the Old and New Testaments we see that God has a special concern for those who are marginalized—the poor, the orphan, and the widow.

Jesus exhibits a particular concern for and availability to those who are in desperate, multi-faceted, real-life need for Him. And rightly so, the apostles carried on His concern. At the outset of his Christian ministry, the Apostle Paul records his meeting with the apostles in Jerusalem (Gal. 2). In the midst of the apostles' encouragement and admonition of Paul they say, "We encourage you to remember the poor." Paul says that was the very thing he was eager to do.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see that God is a God who comes close to the very small and insignificant people of Israel. Moses said, "The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than

other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deut. 7:7, 8).

Throughout the Old Testament, we see that God is a God who comes close to the very small and insignificant people of Israel.

Yahweh is the great Creator God, and it is for the greatness of His name and display of His compassion and mercy that He comes to those who need Him and *know* that they need Him. In doing so He also judges those who oppress.

God opposes the proud and those who take advantage of others, whether those people are in political responsibility, like the Pharaoh of Egypt, or ecclesiastical, economic, social, or any sort of responsibility with respect to others. If there is unfair treatment and gaining of personal advantage at someone’s expense, God holds them—He holds us—accountable.

Jesus displays His special concern for the poor and oppressed in the way He treats the woman we meet in Mark 5. The text tells us that she had used up all that she had paying those who might help her. Upon hearing of Jesus’ goodness and compassion toward others in a similar situation, she comes to Jesus. And God works to show that He is good. Likewise it is for the display of His mercy that God, in Jesus Christ, wants to use us as His people, to care for those who are needy. We are to work on behalf of those who do not have homes, friends, family, health care, adequate education, and financial means. It is for the glory of God that we do so—to reflect His concern.

We need to extend care and concern on

a macro, worldwide scale and a micro, neighborhood-wide scale. The Lord’s people should be concerned about international debt and the effect of this debt in the poorer countries of the world. We indeed need to be concerned about the problem of AIDS around the world. And we need to be concerned about the economically and physically needy in our own cities. Globally, locally, personally, we need to be concerned because God is concerned about special needs of those who are poor, oppressed, and sick.

Some people want to take God’s special care and concern for those who are poor and disadvantaged and oppressed and sick and to say that this is God’s *exclusive* concern. Such teaching either explicitly or implicitly implies that if you are not in the category of being poor and oppressed, you are outside the scope of God’s mercy. This is not true to Scripture.

The Lord says, “This is the one I esteem, he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word” (Isaiah 66:2). Jesus displays concern for all sorts of people. Nicodemus, Jairus, and others were in positions of high responsibility and Jesus came to them. Yet He obviously shows special concern for those who are weak and oppressed. It is not an exclusive concern, but it is a special concern that reflects His justice and mercy.

Yes, Jesus gives hope and compassion to *all* who would come to Him in humble faith. Doesn’t the woman of Mark 5:24-34 exemplify that for us beautifully? The more I have had the opportunity to ponder this woman’s situation, the more I have been made aware of my own incapacity and unwillingness to come to Jesus in humble faith the way that she did. I have reflected again on my own life, hurtling towards death and total self-centeredness had not the mercy of God broken into my heart. I have had to ask myself if I understand how desperate my need has always been for the mercy of God.

This woman knew how desperate she was. She was sick for 12 years. As she

sought help to cure her suffering, she saw her financial resources dry up. In our day we could say she saw her 401k retirement plan disappear. All of her stocks bottomed out. She had been under the care of many doctors and instead of getting better she got worse. She knew how desperate she was for the mercy of Jesus.

Do you know how *desperate* we all are? Utterly desperate! We are helpless apart from the Lord's mercy and grace. This is not to imply that we should, can, or will walk around constantly conscious of how desperate we are for God's mercy, but there need to be times and occasions when we are extremely aware of this truth. And we, as God's people, are to assume a posture of being absolutely desperate for His mercy.

Jesus was indeed this woman's last hope! She heard about this man walking around, doing "strange" things. And she thought, "If I can just touch his clothes, I will be healed" (Mark 5:28).

Somehow this unnamed woman of Mark 5 is able to maneuver her way through this throng of people and come up from behind. She touches the very edge of His outer garment. Feel it with her. The text tells us that at that moment she feels herself being healed. Can you *imagine*? Something had happened. Jesus had indeed come through. He proved Himself to be the source of hope, for her, for *her*, a nobody whom no one had been able to help. Jesus healed her, simply by her coming up in total dependence upon Him.

Many of us know instances of great and deep awareness of God's mercy and grace. Perhaps it has been physical healing, conversion, or others times when He has moved in your heart and life so very, very powerfully. In these moments we recognize deeply that He is all we have. And the Lord helps us grow in recognition of our dependence upon Him, upon His mercy for the forgiveness of our sin, for the making good of our lives, and ultimately for the redemption of the universe.

What follows the healing is a seemingly strange occurrence. Jesus looks around

and says, "Who touched Me?" And His disciples (like us, His modern-day disciples) are dense. The disciples do not get it. Essentially they say, "Everybody is touching You!" But Jesus continued to pursue this specific person. Having been healed and sought out by Jesus, in her desperation this woman comes and falls down in fear before Him. Then she just lays it all out in full honesty as we might say today, "before God and everybody." She tells Him the "whole truth." And Jesus responds with grace. He addresses her for *her* good, for *her* ongoing discipleship and healing.

I would venture to say that most of us know what it means to be utterly honest before God. At the same time, because of the deceitfulness, hesitancies, lies of our own hearts, it is difficult to come to terms with the "whole truth." Maybe it is difficult to come to terms with what is happening in your marriage, with friends, at work, or with other factors in your life. Scripture teaches us that our hearts are so very deceitful. I do not think any one of us has that quite licked. Reading this text in recent days, I have been reminded of the deceitfulness of my own heart. I desire to be transparent before God and others, but it is not natural.

***Do you know how desperate
we all are? Utterly desperate!
We are helpless apart from
the Lord's mercy and grace.***

As we see Jesus meet this woman with love and mercy, we can be encouraged in our own hearts to lay it all out before the Lord who has pursued and healed us. It is not necessary or particularly helpful to "spill your guts" before everybody around you. But certainly before God we must. He knows you better than you know yourself. It is only with His help, and strength, that you can be able to begin to be honest with yourself.

This passage does not end with Jesus

saying, "Woman, what are you doing?" Jesus continues to be her source of hope and compassion. He says, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be free from your suffering." Jesus is fully worthy of her and our trust and dependence.

In this world of pain and confusion she finds healing. And she finds freedom. As do we. Not all sickness is healed. Not all injustice has been rectified. Not all wars have ceased. But one day those will cease as well. For now He assures you and all who come to Him in humble desperation and dependence that He is the One. He is hope and compassion. Trust in Him today and be the means of His hope and compassion to others. ■

—Article reprinted from the Spring 2004 issue of *Covenant Magazine*, with permission from Covenant Seminary.

Observations

by David L. Miller

When I was in grade school, I was taught that there are three branches in national government: legislative, executive, and judicial. At the time I memorized the terms, I did so without understanding the philosophy of the founding fathers who put the system in place.

The foundation on which the threefold system rests is the Constitution. The executive branch is to carry out the practical operations of government. The legislative branch is expected to enact new laws as needed. The courts can be appealed to to examine new laws or other legal questions to assure compatibility with the Constitution.

The tripartite system was designed to provide checks and balances to allow for orderly operation and growth of government with stability and constitutional integrity.

It is thankworthy that the Constitution reflects an awareness of certain Judeo-Christian principles. However, it is a secular document. Ours is not a Christian nation. It is a kingdom of this world.

The system seems to have worked well.

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However, in recent decades there is a growing concern that the courts seem to have a tendency to abandon their role as referees of constitutional law. They sometimes hand down decisions that reflect "political correctness" that compromise the intent of the Constitution.

With reference to *Roe vs. Wade*, 1973, Douglas Johnson, National Right to Life committee legislative director, is quoted as follows: "The Blackmun papers show that a group of jurists decided that legal abortion would be a good social policy and set about to make it happen. There was no pretense of trying to enforce the letter and history of the Constitution . . ." (*World*, 3-20-04).

Harry Blackmun was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1970 where he served until 1994. He died in 1999. He had arranged that five years after his death his personal papers could be made public. These papers show that Mr. Blackmun saw himself not primarily as a guardian of the Constitution, but as one who was in a key position to further a liberal social agenda. He wrote the 5-4 majority opinion in *Roe vs. Wade*.

Regrettably, such philosophy is not limited to our courts. The church also has a Constitution called the Bible, or more specifically, the New Testament. It is the message of eternal life. The central person is Jesus Christ. People who follow Him and His Word are often out of step with the majority. But there is persistent and relentless pressure in some churches to disregard clear guidelines from the "Christian Constitution." Such people often favor an agenda that is more popular and compatible with our unregenerate nature.



Charles Colson, writing for *Christianity Today* (April, 2004) expresses some of the concerns above from a slightly different perspective. He quotes a conservative columnist, David Brooks, who has concluded that Evangelicals no longer put a high value on doctrinal orthodoxy (soundness). They prefer to be accepted by the

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cultural mainstream. To fill their pews, pastors emphasize the upbeat and play down the business of God's wrath. He says that Moral Majority and Christian Coalition are now husks of their former selves.

Here are several additional excerpts from this provocative article: "Many compartmentalize their faith. God is for Sunday. Secular culture shapes the view and lifestyle the rest of the week. . . . When it comes to the culture there is no such thing as peaceful coexistence for Christians. . . . Truth can be sacrificed on the altar of mainstream secularism. . . . Mainstream means getting along. To get there all we have to do is to abandon biblical responsibility. . . . God will judge us harshly if we stand around enjoying the warm glow of our culture's approval while the culture crumbles."



Back to Jerusalem, by Paul Hattaway, is the title of a book about a vigorous evangelistic movement in China. *Christianity Today* (April, '04) also reports on this notable development. Remarkable features of this movement include the following:

- The movement is carried on by a network of unregistered house churches.
- There is a minimum of structure and usually no formal training.
- The chief characteristic is a passion for souls.
- Persecution is severe. It is viewed as God's training ground and God's furnace of affliction to make them effective in their evangelistic witness.
- They look to the Lord for their financial support.
- They do not see miracles and signs as essential to their work. They report that God does provide such phenomena as a witness to the lost.
- Many evangelists in the rural areas greet each other with the question: "How many people have you led to Christ today?"
- They refer to their work as the "Back to Jerusalem" movement.
- Their burden is to take the message of salvation to the whole world, ultimately back to where it started. The awareness that

this seems to be a precondition for Christ's return provides a strong motivation.

When China fell to communism in 1949, foreign missionaries had to leave. They assumed that their efforts were wasted, crushed by an atheistic regime. Contrary to their expectations, the church went underground and flourished under the heavy hand of persecution.

Reliable statistics are not available, but it is estimated that there are from 80 to 100 million Christians in China today. And the numbers are growing.

Thanks to Bro. Ernest Hochstetler for calling attention to this soul-stirring example of Christ building His church.

An American Christian presently in China reports that many Chinese Christians, including church leaders, do not have ready access to Christian literature or Bibles. Let us pray that God would anchor our Chinese brethren in His Word, and bring clarity to their understanding of godly principles.



Despite declining crime rates in Kansas over the past decade, the prison inmate population has grown by 45% during the same period, apparently due to more stringent sentencing guidelines. Prison facilities in the state are full. Some inmates are being transferred to Texas prisons to comply with court-ordered mandates against overcrowding. Under present sentencing guidelines it is estimated that the prison population could double within 10 years. It costs the state about \$28,000 per inmate, per year.

There is a growing sentiment in the state that there are surely better solutions than simply building more prisons. Considerations include better rehabilitation and review of sentencing guidelines.

It is out of our field of responsibility to operate the criminal justice system. But to introduce inmates to the One who can make them free indeed is a continuing opportunity, making an important difference to the system and to the people in it. ■
—Used with permission from *Calvary Messenger*.

The Christian in an Election Year

by David L. Burkholder

We are once again in the midst of a presidential election year. The news media are full of ads, polls, surmisings, charges, and countercharges. It seems as though nearly everyone has an opinion or a prognostication regarding how they would like to see things turn out. And it's all too easy to get caught up in the hullabaloo and fervor of the campaign. But what should be our involvement as conservative, Bible-believing, nonresistant Christians? Our intent with this article is to answer these questions and show how the Christian life and its purpose is incompatible with the realm of politics. We will examine the issues from the biblical, historical, and practical perspectives.

The Biblical Perspective

When debating any issue the first recourse for the Christian must be the never-changing Word of God. The first principle we need to keep in mind is that as Christians our primary citizenship is in heaven, not on earth. Philippians 3:20 and 21 (NKJV) spell that out: *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."*

The ultimate desire of the Christian's life on earth should be to look forward to being eternally transformed into the image of Christ. That desire will affect all we do in the here and now. It will affect our loyalties, our interests, our ambitions, our activities, our speech, our attitudes toward others, our involvement

in affairs of this world—all areas of life. As Christians we are to live loosely to this world, being as strangers and pilgrims, those who are just passing through, whose focus is on a higher level than this world. As such we must be completely detached from this world system, its appeals as well as its governing politics.

We are, however, to be responsible citizens of whatever earthly government we find ourselves living under. Such responsibilities include submission and obedience to its authority in areas which do not conflict with our primary loyalty to God. Romans 13 spells it out: pay taxes, give honor and respect to those in authority, recognizing they are fulfilling a God-ordained function. We are also instructed to pray for those in authority. In 1 Timothy 2:1-4 we read: *"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."* This passage not only outlines our responsibility to pray for civil magistrates, but to also seek the salvation of their souls.

We are to be good citizens, upright, above reproach, well spoken of for our kindness and acts of charity toward those in need. We should be uncomplaining, honest, and upright in conduct, both in business and social relationships. We must also meet all obligations, both to the state and our fellowmen. Honesty and integrity must be the Christian's

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hallmarks. It should be clear to all who observe our lives that we live with a different motivation than that of general society. We are citizens of the heavenly kingdom, and that should show in our manner of life.

Colossians 3:12 also outlines some characteristics to be exhibited by the child of God. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering." These are qualities not usually found in the life of politicians. Our value system should outshine that of the world. First John 2:15, 16 tell us that we are to "love not the world [its organized system controlled by Satan] neither the things in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world." The Christian is to portray love for the heavenly Father and things of His realm. The politician, conversely, is intent on elevating himself and calling attention to himself and his abilities, portraying himself as the one to be looked up to and followed. It's a matter of basic loyalties.

The Church's Perspective

One of the major tenets of the Anabaptist movement was the principle of separation of church and state. The Anabaptist reformers held strongly to a two-kingdom theory that ruled out participation by the follower of Christ in civil affairs. They were to be separate. And that separation was complete—no voting, no jury duty, no office holding, no participation in war, or the keeping of civil order. Many of these principles became tests of membership by various groups. And rightly so, for these issues define the line between the principles that govern the kingdom of Christ and those of the world system.

The mixing of politics with religion has proven detrimental to the spiritual

tenor of the church in that it has tended to dilute spiritual fervor with social action. Neither has it proven to be of significant uplifting moral value to politics. The two stem from entirely different realms and their policies and procedures simply do not mix.

Daniel Kauffman in *Doctrines of the Bible* says:

The idea that it is the duty of the Church to take hold of Government and run things for God is neither taught in Scripture nor supported by the facts of history. The place for Christian people to take hold and work is in the Church, and the place of most effective power is at the Throne. . . . When Christianity was adopted as the religion of State in Rome, the result was that Rome corrupted the Church instead of the Church purifying Rome. . . . Today the average church member in politics is not one whit cleaner morally or better spiritually than is the average non-church member in politics. Christianity and world politics do not mix. Their spheres are essentially different. Both Government and Church are better off if each remains in its sphere. The idea that the Christian can render substantial aid in the cause of righteousness by "mixing in politics" has often been proved a delusion.

Some Practical Considerations

The political climate. In political campaigning there is much personal accusation hurled by candidates at one another. It seems nothing is off-limits to make oneself look better than the opposing candidate. All of this harshness, mudslinging, and defamation flies in the face of Christ's command to exercise kindness and love in all human relationships. The dog-eat-dog atmosphere of political campaigning is in stark contrast to the lowliness, meekness, humility, and love that Christians are commanded to exhibit toward others. The political climate simply is not conducive to exercising these qualities. That should tell the Christian something of his priorities in

an election year.

Biblical injunctions. Romans 13:10 says: "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Is that the way it works in politics? Is love exhibited? Certainly not. Romans 12:10 tells us to "be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another." How far would a politician get by following the principles of kindness, love, preferring others? It is simply opposite of what normally takes place in political campaigning. Philippians 2:3 says: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Would anyone get elected that way? Without strife? Esteeming the other candidate better than himself? Titus 3:2 tells us that we are "to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men." Modern day political campaigns delight in displaying the character flaws, real and supposed, of one's opponent. Meekness is not evident either.

As Christians we take our directives from God's holy Word. The principles found therein are at cross purposes to those of politicians and civil authorities. The committed child of God will easily discern the difference between Christian motivation and the political scene of the world and shun that which is unholy and at odds with the principles of heaven.

J. C. Wenger in *Separated Unto God* says: "If we cannot support the government in the maintenance of the police force or in waging war, then we ought not to attempt to control the policies of government by voting. . . . Christians should not seek to regenerate society by employing political methods; rather, the Christian should work at the regeneration of men by individual conversion to Christian faith and life. Since the government cannot operate on the principle of nonresistance, why should nonresistant Christians attempt to help govern?"

Furthermore, . . . prayer to God is more powerful than the employment of any political means. The nonresistant Christian also faces the difficulty of electing a man to do what he himself cannot do as a Christian. . . . The central fact remains that the central calling of the Christian is evangelism, and that the calling of the Christian is fundamentally to work on a spiritual rather than a political plane."

Guy F. Hershberger, in *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* states: "The mission of nonresistant Christians is not a political one. It is rather a curative mission. It is to bring healing to human society; to prevent its further decay, and that through a consistent witness to the truth. The same Sermon on the Mount which commends the way of nonresistance to the disciples of Christ also says, 'Ye are the salt of the earth,' and if the earth is to be salted, the salt dare not lose its own savor through activities which destroy its essential nature."

It should be amply clear that the Christian's responsibility lies in an entirely different sphere than that of politics. Jesus commanded His followers to teach and instruct men in the ways of God. The Christian's primary goal, therefore, should be first of all to live a life that brings honor and glory to God, and in so doing to point others to His saving grace. The verbal witness of the Christian will do more to change the world than any political agenda. The realm of politics must be left to those with lesser goals than that of the Christian.

Hypothetical Questions and Suggested Responses

In an election year we will be faced with questions from associates and those we rub shoulders with on a daily basis. How should we respond? With love and in humility, leaving a positive witness for our stand, based on the unchanging Word of God. We have no reason to be apologetic when we stand

on the principles of God's Word.

"Do you plan to vote?" (This question provides an opportunity to give testimony to our basic loyalty to God and His principles. Think it through carefully.)

"Who do you hope wins the election?" (The man God directs the American people to vote for. The one He has chosen as best for the current national and international situation.)

"Do you think so-and-so candidate would make a good president?" (While I may, or may not, necessarily agree with all his views, I do believe God could use him to accomplish His purposes in our nation and world.)

"Wouldn't our nation be a better place if more Christians like you would get involved in politics and help raise the moral level of our society?" (My observation has been that more often the Christian's witness is negatively impacted rather than the moral level of society being raised. Furthermore, I believe God controls everything. I also believe that Satan is hard at work in this world's system, and that only God's power can thwart him. I believe I can be more effective on my knees than at the ballot box.)

Some Practical Questions

Is it possible for the committed Christian to become involved in the political process without violating biblical principles?

Is it possible for the Christian to get involved in politics without compromising his spiritual integrity or relationship to God?

Does the involvement of Christians in politics actually raise the moral and spiritual level of society?

Does becoming involved in politics have a tendency in any way to shift a Christian's primary focus in life?

Will God be honored by the Christian associating with those whose actions, attitudes, and morals are lower than

what Christ demands of His followers?

Conclusion

So, what should a Christian do or not do in an election year? We believe it inconsistent for him to vote or politic in any way. Neither should he show overt favoritism for one candidate above another. It can be counterproductive. In 1960 some Mennonites voted for the first time, to keep a Catholic president out of the White House. It didn't work, and probably did more to taint their witness than it did to change the direction of our country. We should do nothing to compromise our personal or corporate witness or to bring reproach to the name of Christ.

We can, and should, be committed, praying, concerned, and helpful individuals, ministering in the name of Christ to the total needs of our sick and dying world. A consistent life, free from questionable entanglements, will go a long way to show where our supreme loyalties lie. Our lives must be lived on a higher plane than that of the bickering, name-calling, and degradation of character employed by those seeking office.

Let's look again at Philippians 3:20. "For our citizenship is in heaven, from whence we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." That verse establishes our loyalties and outlines our priorities. Our citizenship is in heaven, and that is where the focus of our loyalties and interests must be centered. The attitude of eagerly waiting for our Lord's return will help keep our focus on spiritual matters and off the matters of this world and its political system. If we keep that verse in focus it will help us keep our thinking and actions straight in this election year. Furthermore, it will see us through life as we live here for the honor and glory of God, and eagerly await our transport into the heavenly kingdom, our ultimate, eternal home. ■

My Resolve

I am living in the era of the world's crisis.
I am living in the era of the Church's crisis.
I must face these solemn facts, and plan to make my life produce the largest possible fruitage for my Heavenly Father, through lip and life.

Therefore

I will, with unreserved faith, give more time to the definite study of the Word of God.

I will give more time to prayer for God's blessing upon His work and workers.

I will give more time to personal work for the salvation of lost souls and the edification of fellow believers.

I will seek to live a more humble and self-sacrificing life.

I will seek to acquaint myself with the facts concerning the world's true needs and the needs of the true Church.

I will give more liberally to God's work, being certain that I am supporting only those ministries that are truly using my gifts for the furtherance of the Word and will of God.

I will stand, by God's grace, with unquestioned confidence in the whole Word of God, and with the unsheathed Sword of the Spirit, contend for the faith once for all delivered, against all deceivers in school and church.

—With permission from Fundamental Evangelistic Association
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