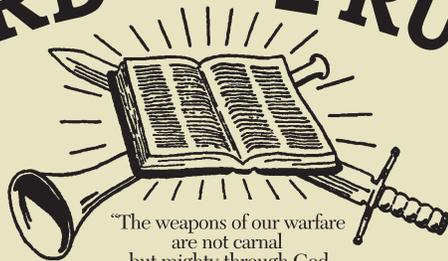


The SWORD and TRUMPET



"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



ELMER B. MOYER

NOVEMBER 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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IN THIS ISSUE

1. Elmer B. Moyer	Cover
2. Person of the Month	1
3. Lost Wonder	2
4. Thankfulness That Promotes Spiritual and Emotional Health	3
5. From the Editor's Desk:	
Objectives for the Congregation	5
5. The Sunday School Lessons	6
6. Newlines	11
7. Living in the Power of the Holy Spirit	14
8. Affluenza: You Need to Simplify	18
9. Israel's Place in Relation to the Church	27
10. Willingly Ignorant	31
11. The Christian and Wealth	33
12. The Matter of Manners.....	36

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Person of the Month:

Elmer B. Moyer (1888-1957)

The son of Christian G. and Hannah Moyer, Elmer was born on April 27, 1888, in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

Although his formal education was less than the rest, Brother Moyer was a great reader and traveler.

As a young person, Elmer was quite interested in baseball but after he accepted the Lord as his Saviour his interest turned to the things of the Lord. He began to diligently apply himself to the study of God's Word. His life was an example of 2 Corinthians 5:17 in action.

Elmer Moyer and Lena Stout were married September 27, 1910. There were at least five children from their union.

On May 16, 1912, Brother and Sister Moyer were baptized and became members of Souderton Mennonite Church.

Elmer was very interested in mission work, so in 1919 when the Franconia Conference Mission Board approached him about assuming the supervision of the Norristown Mission the decision to go and the subsequent moving were not a problem. His time as mission superintendent was short-lived, however, since he was placed in the lot at Souderton where the family lived in a church-owned house across the street from the meetinghouse—a first for Franconia Conference.

As a preacher, he used good diction and always laid a good foundation for each message giving a forceful presentation with a challenge at the end. He had a keen understanding of the Scriptures and was particularly interested in types and figures.

He cheerfully served the Lord in his home congregation as well as in Bible and prophecy conferences elsewhere. From 1942 to 1950 he was a teacher at Johnstown Bible School. He was involved in the local conference and also had a great interest in the Mennonite Church as a whole.

Brother Moyer loved preaching and kept going as long as he could until heart problems put an end to his responsibility as a minister. He preached his last sermon August 26, 1956.

Seven months later to the day, on March 26, 1957, Brother Elmer went home to be with the Lord. He was buried in the cemetery of Souderton Mennonite Church.

—Gail L. Emerson

Lost Wonder

by Mark D. Avery

Several years ago, at the urging of well-known news commentator Paul Harvey, we purchased a coffee brewer. Advertising stated that this machine would brew a pot of coffee in two minutes. I stood and watched as the first pot of coffee brewed. The advertising was accurate: my coffee was ready within the two-minute time frame.

Interestingly, my morning schedule changed. Previously, I had started the coffee, walked outside to get the newspaper, and settled down in the living room for my morning devotional time. My new schedule, however, found me pausing to watch the coffeemaker brew my two-minute pot of coffee. Rather than waiting ten or fifteen minutes for coffee, it was ready in just two minutes. I sensed a certain fascination with that quickly brewed, but just as tasty, coffee. Like many other new and interesting items, the coffeemaker soon lost its novelty, and I quit watching the coffee brew.

Many nice things that we use on a daily basis bring a sense of excitement or satisfaction when we begin using them, yet in a short period of time, the new wears off and we take them as simply another part of life. Sadly, the same thing sometimes happens in Christian living. Most of us have experienced repeated blessings from God. Having enjoyed His blessing over a period of time, we face the potential of losing our sense of wonder about God. God becomes commonplace, rather than the exalted One who inhabits eternity. Instead of worshiping God “high and lifted up,” like Isaiah saw Him, some allow God to become another part of

life’s routine.

When a person begins to lose his sense of wonder toward God, he also loses his sense of responsibility to His Word. It becomes easier to justify attitudes and actions that once had been forbidden by the Word and the Spirit. Usually, the change is gradual. Nevertheless, over time inward and outward changes demonstrate the loss of awareness of God in daily living. Perhaps the easiest way to lose our sense of wonder is to allow our daily devotional life to become routine or nonexistent.

Some measures can be taken to insure that we do not lose our sense of wonder. The most important action we can take is to develop and maintain a habit of a daily time of personal worship and devotion. Yet our private worship must not become a routine. We must keep it vital, living.

An attitude of praise and thanksgiving will contribute to our sense of wonder. Those who practice giving praise and thanksgiving to God realize that those expressions remind them of God’s benefits in the past and offer encouragement to trust God for the present and future.

During the Thanksgiving season, many will look back over the year and remember God’s blessings. While we ought to practice the spirit of the season, Christians ought also to develop the habit of offering praise to God throughout the year. May we regain and maintain a healthy sense of wonder when we consider God. ■

—Used with permission of *The Church Herald and Holiness Banner*

PAGE 2

SWORD AND TRUMPET

Thankfulness That Promotes Spiritual and Emotional Health

by Anthony H. Good

We live in a world where many thankless and ungrateful attitudes are expressed each day. According to 2 Timothy 3:1, 2, the last days will be characterized by unthankfulness. The virtue of gratitude is not native to our humanity, but rather results from a life that has experienced Calvary.

Thankfulness finds its basis in at least three aspects. First, we must have a strong faith in God, believing that He is sovereign, and confident that we can place our trust in Him. We must believe that He is the Creator of "every good and perfect gift." Second, we must possess an unselfish attitude toward ourselves and our possessions. Third, we must appreciate the gifts and blessings we receive from God and man.

When our lives are characterized by thankfulness, life takes on a new perspective.

Because our God is the basis of our outlook on life, we view ourselves as blessed recipients of our heavenly Father's manifold mercies, rather than victims of unpleasant circumstances.

When speaking of God's creation, the term *deliberate design* is used, meaning that when God created the universe there was obvious design and order. As men gradually learn more about the design of the human body, they discover there is consistency in body cell formation. It is a marvel of our great Creator. If our physical bodies are so marvelous and by "deliberate design," shouldn't it be obvious that God has a definite plan and purpose for our lives?

The myriad of circumstances, whether small or great, which make up our lives do not befall us by happenstance or luck, but rather are results of

our heavenly Father's definite design and purpose. Proverbs 3:5, 6, "*Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*" While we all say we agree wholeheartedly with this, the proof of our belief lies in our response when we stand face to face with extreme disappointment. It may be a terminal illness or disease, extreme financial difficulty, God withholding the blessing of children, spiritual fatalities, or even death itself, etc. We may face these personally or with a close friend. Even amidst these, those who are walking close to God will recognize God's goodness and His blessings to them. The aching heart who gives expression of God's goodness in his life sends forth a testimony that rings loud and far and is a tremendous inspiration to fellow saints.

We must also reckon with the fact that life's pleasant and disappointing experiences do not fall equally on mankind, but God in His sovereignty is able to bless us with the experiences which will best prepare us for our future Home. God does not intend that we become embittered by these, but rather that we would feel more keenly our need of Him and draw on His unlimited strength. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Christ told Paul that "*My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*" God wants to use our overwhelming experiences and our feelings of helplessness to help us lean more heavily upon Him, and through it He will grant us added strength and grace to bear our burdens. James 4:6 teaches us that God gives

plenty of grace to meet our needs. The key is that we see God's greatness and our smallness and then reach out to Him for strength.

As we view God, ourselves, and life in a proper perspective, then we are prepared to approach life with a thankful heart. Thankfulness and self-centeredness cannot exist within the same body. When we see ourselves and our needs as the primary focus, we fail to see God's blessings in our lives, or the positive contribution others have on us. Rather than viewing life with circumstances in focus and thinking how terrible we have it, we must view life with God in focus, and then we will notice life's blessings.

Does our thankfulness have an effect on our spiritual and emotional health?

Notice these verses. Psalm 27:13, 14, "*I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say on the Lord.*" Psalm 61:1, 2, "*Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer, From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*" This overwhelming feeling that David was experiencing was depression wrapping itself around him like a blanket. We are all emotional beings and the distresses of life do affect our emotions whether we like to admit it or not. When we fail to see God and lay hold on His promises, and allow ourselves to dwell excessively on our distresses, then we begin to feel overwhelmed.

Philippians 4:7, 8, "*And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely . . . think on these things.*" We must make a conscious effort to think on the lovely things.

PAGE 4

Romans 1:21, "*Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*" An unthankful heart is an apostatizing heart.

By nature we are prone to complain and notice the negative aspects of life and also the faults of others. We've probably all heard the "Grumblers" song. It depicts people who find something to complain about every day of the week and every season of the year. A complaining and discontented person focuses mostly on himself and finds some reason why his surroundings should be different. Complainers are constantly comparing themselves with others whom they feel have life so much better.

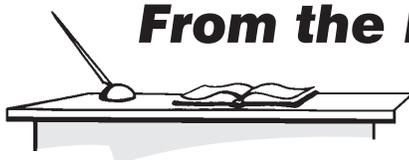
Unthankfulness is so discouraging to others. The next time we are tempted to complain, consider the influence we have on someone else. Will we reflect the love of God to others, or will we discourage them by our negative attitude? Remember that most unthankful folk would not place themselves in the grumblers' camp. We see ourselves, and our situation seems so terrible. Let's not become so nearsighted in life that we fail to look about us and notice God's goodness. The songwriter reminds us to "Count your many blessings . . . and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done."

God has also blessed us with many about us that have needs we can contribute to meeting. When we look for opportunities to help others and share our blessings with them, it helps place our own difficulties in proper perspective.

May our testimony never be marred by unthankful expressions. Colossians 3:15, "*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.*" ■

—Used with permission of *The Pilgrim Witness*

SWORD AND TRUMPET



From the Editor's Desk

Paul M. Emerson

Objectives for the Congregation

While reading a newly published book which details the history and ministry of a large metropolitan congregation, we noted the following stated objectives:

1. To uphold a tradition of strong expository preaching by gifted men of God.
2. To worship God in a worthy manner through thoughtful words, fervent prayers, and excellent music.
3. To integrate every member of the congregation into Bible studies and other groups where individual needs can be met and each can minister to others.
4. To supply loving pastoral care for each member of the church family.
5. To provide an effective Christian education program to inform, train, and disciple all members of the congregation.
6. To advance the missionary work of the church in the local community and throughout the world.
7. To serve the church and its community through ministries of mercy.

Can we not learn a great deal by reflecting on these objectives? Do our congregations really hear God speaking through His Word as it is faithfully explained from the pulpit? Is worship directed to God or is it designed primar-

ily to meet the worshiper's felt needs? Are the members ministering to each other in and through the programs of the congregation? Our people should be counseling and nurturing one another rather than looking outside to professionals. Are we as ministers available to our people on a one-to-one basis for shepherding? Have we put the study and effort into our Christian education programs to bring our people from Biblical and spiritual illiteracy to Scriptural proficiency? Sometimes we may be guilty of seeking merely "warm bodies" to fill teaching vacancies without due consideration to gifting and maturity. Are we really committed to follow our Lord's Great Commission or are we doing a few things and giving a few dollars to salve our collective conscience? Most of us have done quite well with ministries of mercy and we should continue to do so. However, we have often not done nearly as well with the other six. The order of the objectives is important. It seems that too often we have put number seven first and as a result, have sometimes left the most important undone or at least on a low priority level. Let us carefully evaluate our priorities as individuals and congregations. ■

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

NOVEMBER 7, 2004

Introducing the New Covenant

Matthew 5:17, 18, 21, 22, 27, 28, 31-35,
38, 39, 43, 44

In the Redemptive Plan of God, the time of the long promised New Covenant is at hand. Jesus, the Messiah, has come to earth and is beginning His ministry of teaching and explaining the fulfillment of the Old Testament Law in the New Covenant relationship. Today's lesson is taken from The Sermon on the Mount. It will be helpful to read all of Matthew 5, 6, and 7. You should at least read all of Chapter 5, context for today's text.

In today's lesson text Jesus speaks to interpersonal relationships, sins of the mind, marriage relationships, one's speech, nonretaliation, love, and good works. He portrays a variety of Old Testament standards and shows them in contrast to the superseding principles of the New Covenant. This New Covenant relationship, as foretold by the prophets, was to be one of the heart, not centered in a series of legalistic dos and don'ts. (See lesson for October 17.)

The New Covenant relationship demands more than simply the observance of certain outward restrictions. There must be a change of heart, a change of attitude, a complete transformation of thought patterns in regard to God as well as toward one's fellowmen. But, as Jesus makes clear (vv. 17, 18), the New Covenant does not abrogate the

old, rather it fulfills its demands with new attitudes, new relationships, and new patterns of thought.

Notice how Jesus introduces each of the principles spoken to in today's text: "Ye have heard," or, "It hath been said." That introduction set the stage for His pronouncement, "But I say unto you," indicating a dramatic change, a reversal of ideas, a new approach. Jesus' approach was a radical departure from the Law which controlled men's outward actions but could do little to control the heart. Now the emphasis was to be on the inner motivation guiding men's thoughts and actions.

The old law condemned killing. The new law goes even further and condemns the anger and hatred that precede murder. The old law forbade adultery. The new law condemns the lustful look. The old law permitted divorce—often on very inconsequential grounds. The new law is stricter, focusing on purity and the permanence of the marriage bond. The old law was strict on the keeping of oaths. The new forbids the making of oaths. The old law permitted retaliation for harm or wrong done to oneself. The new law is one of acceptance of wrong without retaliation, a positive response instead of a negative one.

And then the culminating principle of the new law: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Love triumphs over hatred, defines rela-

PAGE 6

SWORD AND TRUMPET

tionships, motivates all of one's thoughts and actions; love, the key to the New Covenant.

Be sure to read to the end of the chapter.

For thought and discussion

1. Be sure to understand the qualifying principles of both covenants, and be sure you understand why the new is better than the old.
2. Space does not permit a discussion of each of the issues Jesus speaks to in today's lesson text. However, it will enhance your study to explore these various issues in more depth.
3. Which is easier to observe, a set of outward restrictions, or those emanating from inner control? This should be good for some class discussion.
4. Why does heart change come so slowly and with such difficulty?
5. Explore the ramifications of love in human relationships. What are the results of its action? How are we able to achieve this high standard?

NOVEMBER 14, 2004

The Redemption of the Body

1 Corinthians 15:42-58

The culminating act in God's Plan of Redemption will be the redemption of the body. God's children are now "sealed" by the Holy Spirit as we await that event (Romans 8:22, 23) when Christ returns to earth to claim His children—whether living or dead—and gives them a new body, fashioned like unto His glorious resurrection body (Phil. 3:20, 21). Today's text gives us assurance of this experience. Paul begins Chapter 15 by verifying Christ's resurrection, then goes on to show how that gives assurance to the Christian of his ultimate bodily resurrection, or living change, when Christ returns at the trumpet call of God. (For the best understanding of

today's text, read all of Chapter 15.)

Verses 35-37 will help us understand the "so also" of verse 42. Just like grain, the physical body we now possess must die in order to come to new life. The body that is "sown" in the earth is perishable. The body that will be raised at Christ's coming will be imperishable. The natural body must die to produce a spiritual body, just as grain dies to produce new life.

Verses 45-49 contrast man and Christ. The natural man comes first, then the spiritual. Man is from the dust, and returns to dust, but the life-giving "Adam" is from heaven and knows no corruption. And we who are of the earth have the privilege of bearing the image of the incorruptible heavenly Adam.

But to receive that image there must be a complete and dramatic change. The bodies we now inhabit of flesh and blood are not suited to the heavenly, eternal realms. These bodies, whether suffering the corruption of death or still alive at Christ's coming, will undergo instantaneous transformation. Mortal bodies will become immortal. That which perishes will become imperishable. That which is earthly will become heavenly.

At that point death, man's last enemy, will be overcome. The Christian's victory will be complete. Death will lose its sting, the grave its stranglehold. And we will be raised to new life, immortal life, imperishable life, casting off forever the bonds and limitations of earth. Thanks be to God! That victory is ours through the Lord Jesus Christ who Himself paved the way by His own resurrection and triumph over death.

Therefore, Paul writes, be steadfast and unmovable and diligent in the Lord's work, my beloved brethren (1st century, 21st century), having this knowledge "that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (See verses 12-14.) Christ has been raised to an endless life and His experience gives us promise of resurrection and a glorified body. That knowledge

should keep us striving, working diligently while we anticipate future glorification.

There is a brighter, better day ahead—a time when these bodies of clay will be resurrected (or experience a living change) to a glorified, incorruptible body fit to inhabit the eternal realms with the One who has made such a dramatic event possible. Praise God for His plan of redemption!

For thought and discussion

1. Our mortal, finite minds find it difficult to grasp all the implications of the final resurrection. But don't allow that to discourage you. Study this passage with the goal of stretching your understanding of what God has in store for His faithful followers.
2. As a help in your study, read the accounts of Christ's appearance to His disciples after His resurrection. (Read especially from Luke 24 and John 20 and 21.)
3. Contrast the two Adams. Don't miss how the first can become like the last.
4. How does the teaching of this passage challenge us to faithful living and diligent service for God?
5. We look at death as an enemy. But should the Christian fear death? Think this issue through from your personal perspective.

NOVEMBER 21, 2004

Ambassadors for Christ

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

In God's scheme of things He does not intend for His blessings to be hoarded by the few. His intention is that those who have come to living faith in Him tell others. The life of the redeemed is to be a visual and verbal witness of the power of God to transform sinful, lost mankind into saved, energetic workers in God's king-

dom. That is the thrust of today's text.

In this passage we see Paul defending himself and his actions as being the direct result of Christ's compelling love experienced in his life. In his defense he establishes the principle of Christian ambassadorship—that those who have been redeemed are now responsible to represent Christ to others.

The first part of verse 11 must be seen in context with verse 10. The Lord is not to be feared except by those who come to His judgment seat unprepared to meet a righteous Judge. In light of that possibility Paul says "we persuade men," warning against God's wrath, encouraging them to correct their relationship to Him.

Apparently Paul had been accused of being unbalanced in his zeal for the Lord (v. 13). But, he says, God knows me and you know me. He didn't see the necessity of reestablishing his credentials with the Corinthian believers. Paul says his manner of life and witness should give them something to boast about to those who put emphasis on outward performance instead of looking for heart motives.

Regardless, Paul says, whatever he does is for God's glory and the benefit of the church. And all is due to the constraining love of Christ, love He has shown to him and is now Paul's all-consuming passion to proclaim to others. Paul says if that makes me appear mad, so be it.

Christ died for all, and in His death (and subsequent resurrection) all men may find true life. Those who do become a new creation replace the old life with its passions and evil ways with a new life modeled after Christ's in righteousness and holiness. In this new life man becomes reconciled to God, made right with God through the redeeming work of Christ.

And then man becomes God's representative. To mortal man He has given the ministry of reconciliation, proclaiming His love for man through the work of

Jesus Christ. It is a great, and grave, responsibility. Barclay puts it this way: "Here is the Christian's proud privilege and almost terrifying responsibility. The honor of Christ and of the church are in his hands. By his every word and action he can make men think more—or less—of his church and of his Master."

Christ is the One who reconciles. He became a sin offering on man's behalf, that man might experience the righteousness of God. As Eerdman says: "In some sense which we cannot fully understand or explain God identified His Son with sin that man might be identified with the righteousness of God." Christ knew no sin in Himself. Man has no righteousness in and of himself. The great proclamation is that through Christ man can become what God wants him to be. This is the message of God's ambassadors.

For thought and discussion

1. Think through the implications of being an ambassador for Christ. Maybe class discussion on this would be profitable.
2. Paul was accused of madness in his zeal for the Lord. Are we in any danger of being called unbalanced due to our zeal in witnessing for our Lord? It's something to think about.
3. Think about the depth of God's love for lost mankind and how He expressed that love through His Son Jesus Christ. Shouldn't we be loving Him more? And serving Him more faithfully?
4. Christ knew no sin. We have no inherent righteousness. Study carefully the implications of verse 21.
5. In a sense this lesson rounds out the redemptive plan of God. We have God's provision, man's privilege, and man's responsibility in light of coming judgment. Think through these issues in your study.

NOVEMBER 28, 2004

One Body in Christ

Ephesians 2:11-22

Jews and Gentiles in the ancient world were separated by wide cultural, religious, and political differences. Bringing them together in a harmonious working relationship was difficult at best. However, as the Apostle Paul shows in today's text, this was possible, but only through the saving, harmonizing grace of Christ. In today's lesson Paul shows how diverse groups can become one in essence and in purpose. It is only through the transforming, reconciling work of Christ that this becomes possible, thus emphasizing today's theme, One Body in Christ. A thorough reading of the entire Book of Ephesians will be most helpful in broadening your perspective on today's text.

In today's text, Paul depicts the melding of Jew and Gentile into one body, the body of Christ. One needs to understand the animosity these people held for each other in order to understand the full measure, capability, and power of God's grace. Humanly speaking there were irreconcilable differences between them. Religiously, (before Christ), there was no harmony. Gentiles were forbidden to enter the temple precincts beyond the outer court, and a wall was erected (see v. 14), and posted with warnings that carried the threat of death for trespassing.

Jew and Gentile lived worlds apart. But in Christ Jesus they became one. Paul reminds his Gentile readers of their hopeless, helpless position before they came to know Christ and His transforming power. (See verses 12 and 13.) Jesus makes peace between factions. He reconciles. His blood brings together Jew and Gentile, making of the two disparate groups a new entity—a brotherhood.

Make no mistake, both Jew and Gentile had to make some rather serious adjustments in their thinking and attitudes. There had to be acceptance both

ways. Age-old shibboleths had to be discarded—prejudices laid aside. In Christ each finds a new identity. (See also Galatians 3:26-28; Colossians 3:10, 11.) And through Christ each has equal access to the Father.

Now born-again Jew and Gentile are fellow citizens, members of God's household. Both receive instruction and guidance from the prophetic writings of old and from the apostles sent by Jesus to teach and instruct. Jesus is here depicted as the chief cornerstone of this household of God. The purpose of the cornerstone was to hold the structure together. (See also 1:22, 23.)

In the last several verses of our text we see how this new relationship revolves around Christ. He holds this new brotherhood structure together. Around Him each member finds his place, joined to the cornerstone and joined to each other. From this amalgam rises a unified structure in which God is pleased to dwell by His Spirit.

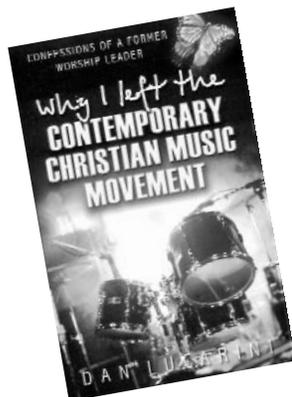
This is indeed a beautiful picture of the transforming power of God, bringing unity out of diversity, bringing peace out

of hatred, bringing cooperation out of disharmony. It proves that the body of Christ is formed by divine power—to the benefit of each member and to the glory of God. Praise Him!

For thought and discussion

1. Some understanding of both Jewish and Greek cultures will enable you to better understand the theme of today's lesson. A Bible dictionary and commentaries will be helpful.
2. Are there people in your community who would not find a welcome in your fellowship? If so, why? This should provoke some serious thought.
3. What are some steps we can take to tear down walls of prejudice that exist in church and community? Discuss this issue.
4. How have you experienced the transforming power of Christ in your life (or church) accomplishing what would have been humanly unthinkable? Share with your class.
5. Are you filling your role in the household of God? Remember, each member has a vital function. ■

Why I Left the Contemporary Christian Music Movement



by Dan Lucarini

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Our Brothers

Promise Keepers' founder Bill McCartney plans to strengthen ties with Messianic Jews. Messianic Jews believe Jesus is the Messiah but continue to practice Jewish rituals, and to identify themselves as Jewish. Jewish religious leaders generally despise them and are offended when Christians hold up Messianic Jews as good examples for other Jews. The Anti-Defamation League and other Jewish leaders have warned that any alliance between evangelical Christians and Messianic Jews would make it impossible for them to work with evangelicals. Many Christian groups cave in to this anti-Christian pressure and avoid fellowship with their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters. Russ Tesnick, executive director of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, said that Mr. McCartney's support would be "a significant thing." Messianic Jewish leaders participated in a Promise Keepers rally in Washington in 1997.

—from *Daily News-Record*, Harrisonburg, VA

Reading of Literature on the Decline

According to a survey called "Reading at Risk," released by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), only 57 percent of U.S. adults read one book in 2002. Less than half of Americans over 18 now read novels, short stories, plays, or poetry. In fact, the reading of literature declined by 7 percent since 1992. Young adults aged 18 to 24 experienced the greatest decline in reading. NEA chair Dana Gioia blamed the Internet, television, and movies.

The survey also noted that readers of lit-

erature are more socially engaged. They do more volunteer work, visit art museums, performing art events, and ball games. Reading a variety of literature broadens one's worldview and leads to greater awareness and more involvement in society.

Some may say that Web surfers at least have to read some, but the NEA responds that interactive electronic media "foster shorter attention spans and accelerated gratification."

—from *The Mennonite*

Protestants Lose Ground in America

Some pollsters predict that the U.S. will lose its historic status as a majority-Protestant nation in only a year or two. Tom Smith, director of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago says that this year or next, the number of Protestants will fall below 50 percent of the U.S. population for the first time. Mainline Protestant churches have been losing members for years, but growth in evangelical or fundamentalist denominations have offset the losses. It is noteworthy that about 2 percent of Americans now identify themselves as Christian rather than Protestant.

Jews make up 2 percent of the U.S. population, and, as they have for decades, Roman Catholics constitute around 25 percent of the U.S. population. The Roman Catholic church remains the largest denomination in the U.S., with 65.2 million members. The largest Protestant denomination is the Southern Baptist Convention with 16 million members.

—from *The Washington Times*

Amish Meet the President

A group of Lancaster County Old Order Amish were privileged to attend a private meeting with President Bush on July 9. The president had addressed an audience at Lapp Electric Service in Smoketown in the morning. An Amish woman who lived nearby gave a quilt and a card to Bush, thanking him for his leadership of the country. Bush wanted to speak to the woman and her family, so the meeting was arranged. The group eventually numbered about 60 persons, as other friends wanted to be included.

When the President and Secret Service men entered the room, one housewife said, "Are you George Bush?" He said that he was, and shook hands around the circle, asking the names of each person. He especially thanked the lady who gave him the quilt. Bush seemed relaxed and tried on an Amish hat.

Someone explained that since most Amish do not vote, they would pray for him instead. According to an observer, Bush's eyes were filled with tears as he replied that he needs the prayers of the Amish and that having a strong belief in God is the only way he can do his job.

—from *Mennonite Weekly Review*

Do Unborn Animals Now Have More Rights Than Unborn Humans?

A new British welfare law gives slugs and snails the same protection as cats and dogs. Persons under age 16 will not be allowed to own pets. If scientific evidence proves that garden pests such as insects and caterpillars have suffered pain and distress at the hands of gardeners, the gardeners could be fined. Fines for the mistreatment of animals go up to \$37,000 and 12 months in jail. Unborn animals receive the same protection.

—from *The Washington Times*

Who Will Live the Longest?

"On average, white U.S. males live to be 75 vs. 68 for blacks; for women, the racial gap is 80 vs. 75. Married folks outlive singles (but men benefit more than women

do); older siblings live longer than younger ones; mothers slightly outlive childless women. Americans with higher education live six years longer than high school dropouts; Oscar winners outlive unsuccessful nominees by four years; CEOs outlive corporate VPs. The elderly who attend worship services weekly live longer than those who don't. Smoking typically costs you 10 years; obesity costs an average of 7.1 years for females, 5.8 years for males; those who sleep seven hours a night live longest; tall folk (6 ft. to 6 ft. 3 in. for men, 5 ft. 7 in. to 5 ft. 9 in. for women) average three more years than short people. Japanese live longest: 81 years; Zambians shortest: 33 years; immigrants to the U.S. outlive natives by three years." —from *TIME*

Bush Leads Out in War Against Human Trafficking

Groups involved in fighting human trafficking commend President Bush for his administration's work on this front. Human trafficking is a horror of the modern world. Some 600,000 to 800,000 people a year are sold across international borders and forced into prostitution or labor. Women suffer the most with about 80 percent of human trafficking involving women, and 70 percent of these get pushed into the sex trade.

President Bush is working under the authority of a new law, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, signed by President Clinton in October 2000. The legislation created tougher penalties for traffickers, and requires the State Department's Trafficking in Persons office to submit an annual report that ranks countries in three tiers according to how actively they fight trafficking. Economic sanctions threaten those in the lowest tier. In September, 2003, President Bush sanctioned North Korea, Cuba, and Burma. In 2003, 20 countries adopted "new, comprehensive" anti-trafficking laws. Since 2001, 149 traffickers have been charged by the Bush administration with 94 convictions, a sharp increase over the previous three years. The U.S. has also allotted \$295 million for

anti-trafficking efforts in 120 countries.

Many give credit for the recent successes against human trafficking to the new law, not to President Bush himself. But even opponents admit he has done well. In a speech before the United Nations General Assembly, he gave several minutes of his speech to the subject, a first for a U.S. president on an international platform. New legislation does not amount to much if leaders do not give it a push to gain momentum. Derek Ellerman, executive director of Polaris Project, an anti-trafficking group with mostly leftist employees says, "Trafficking is an issue that everyone recognizes is a priority with the Bush administration." —from *World*

Dangers Accosting the Christian Family

W. Bradford Wilcox, a sociologist at the University of Virginia and a Roman Catholic layman, is the author of the book, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands*. In a recent interview in *Christianity Today*, Wilcox mentions three sobering realities of

the Christian family in the United States.

The divorce rate among Christians is far too high. Churches need to work harder to make sure that their members honor their marriage covenants. Engaged and newly married couples must be mentored, divorced persons require discipline, and remarriage should not be allowed in most cases.

Wilcox also notes that birth rates have dropped in the Christian community since the 1960s. Though many Christians think only of the emotional union between the spouses, "[m]arriage is supposed to be a fruitful, spiritual, emotional, and physical union between spouses that enlarges the kingdom of God in large part through the bearing and rearing of children." The Bible states clearly that children are a gift from God, and Christians must act accordingly.

Also, Wilcox warns that though the family needs our attention and work, it is not the ultimate object of our devotion. Evangelical families and institutions especially must guard against insularity. Instead of focusing on themselves, Christians are called to serve the world around them. —from *Christianity Today*

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Living in the Power of the Holy Spirit

by Stanley Toussaint

We don't know what lies ahead of us, but we do know that there will be a lot of pressures. Pressures with regard to time. Pressures with regard to family. Pressures with regard to job and career. Pressures with regard to serving others. Pressures with regard to exercise and health. Pressures with regard to spiritual life.

All these things press upon us, besides emergencies that will come along that we have not anticipated!

Indeed, we are living in a pressure-packed time. How are we to live in times like these? Obviously, there are no one-word or one-sentence answers, but I would say that one critical element for every Christian is what the Bible calls "walking in the Spirit" or "the filling of the Spirit."

To be filled with the Spirit means to be controlled or influenced by God the Holy Spirit.

So I'd like to talk a little about three questions: What exactly *is* the filling of the Spirit? How do I become filled and stay filled? And if I am filled, what does it look like in practical terms—how will it change my life?

What Is the Filling of the Spirit?

To be filled with the Spirit means to be controlled or influenced by God the Holy Spirit. Where did I derive that definition?

First, from the contrast you often find between drunkenness (or drinking) and the filling of the Spirit in the New Testament.

• In Luke 1:13, the angel Gabriel

appears to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, and says, "You're going to have a son, and you're going to call him John." And he continues, "He will not drink wine or strong drink, but he will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb."

• Acts 2 begins with the filling of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. And what do the people say? Why, they're drunk with new wine. And Peter says, no, they're not drunk; it's just the third hour of the day.

• But the verse that really contrasts the two is Ephesians 5:18, "Don't be drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit."

So you find this constant contrast with drinking or drunkenness and the filling of the Spirit. When a person is intoxicated, you say he is "under the influence" of alcohol. Driving while intoxicated is the same as driving while under the influence. Therefore, we would conclude that the filling of the Spirit means to be *controlled* by the Spirit.

The second thing that leads me to that conclusion is the vocabulary. Many words in the New Testament are translated "fill" or "fulfill." But there are only three words that are used concerning the Spirit.

The first word, a verb, is *pimplēmi*. It is used in Luke 4:28 of the people's response when Jesus was preaching in His hometown of Nazareth. They became so angry that they were "filled" with wrath. Does that mean that they were filled with wrath like you fill a bottle? No, it means that they were so overwhelmed and *controlled* by wrath that they wanted to take Jesus out and kill Him.

Luke 1:67 says that Zacharias was

“filled” with the Holy Spirit and that he prophesied. God the Holy Spirit moved in sovereignly upon Zacharias and *took control* of him, and he prophesied.

The second word, also a verb, is *plēroō*. It is used in John 16:6, where the Lord Jesus told His disciples that He was going to go away. He says in John 16:6, “Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has *filled* your heart.”

Sorrow gripped their innermost being: their hearts. Just as sorrow grips a person, so the Holy Spirit can control or influence him.

The third word is an adjective: *plērēs*. It is used in Acts 13:10, where Paul confronts Elymas, the sorcerer who tried to stop Paul from preaching to Sergius Paulus, the proconsul. And he says, “You are *full* of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil.”

The same adjective is used for one of my favorite characters of the New Testament. In Acts 11:24 it is used for Barnabas, who is described as a good man, “full” of the Holy Spirit and of faith. He was gripped by the Holy Spirit and by faith.

How Can You Be Filled With the Spirit?

Now the question is, how do you get it? Amazingly, in the Bible you don’t find “Step 1, Step 2, or Step 3” on the filling of the Spirit.

I think the reason is that God is so gracious toward us that anybody who really loves the Lord Jesus and wants to please Him is *going to be filled* with the Holy Spirit. But I do find a couple of very broad hints as to how to be filled with the Spirit. I’m assuming confession of sin, by the way, but I’d like to point out two very broad passages.

The first is John 7:37-39:

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes

in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Obviously, this passage is talking about the Holy Spirit—it says so. And it must be talking about somebody who is filled with the Spirit because it says out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living water, meaning he’s going to be a blessing to other people.

Now the question is, how do you get that? The answer is in verse 37, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.”

That’s it! *Coming and drinking of Christ is the same as trusting in Christ, believing in Christ.*

To illustrate, let’s suppose that I am in a car parked at the curb, and I turn it on and the engine is roaring. But I’m going nowhere. Why? Because I haven’t put the car into gear—that’s the problem.

Now, you have all the power of God the Holy Spirit within you. So how do you put it into gear? Trust in Christ. Begin the day by saying, “Lord, I can’t live this day by myself. I’m trusting You.”

When I come to my classes, even after all these years of teaching, I still say,

MISCONCEPTION ALERT!

“Some people think that the filling of the Spirit means that you receive more of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit is a person, not a divine liquid poured into a bottle. When you receive the Holy Spirit, you have all of the Holy Spirit you are ever going to receive. The issue is not getting more of the Holy Spirit. The issue is the Holy Spirit controlling more and more of us.”
—Dr. Toussaint

“Lord, I’m overwhelmed; this is beyond me. I’m trusting You.” When I speak in chapel, I pray, “Lord, I need You.” When you trust in Christ, God the Holy Spirit loves to go to work.

If you don’t know the spiritual condition of a church, just listen to the people sing. Singing is a dead giveaway.

The second clue is found in Colossians 3:16, 17:

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

How do you know it’s talking about the filling of the Holy Spirit? Look at Ephesians 5:18-21:

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Notice the similarity? The results of being filled with the Spirit are parallel to letting the word of Christ richly dwell within you. The fact is that Ephesians and Colossians are sister epistles. They were written by Paul at the same time and carried by the same messenger to churches only 100 miles apart. So there are parallels between them.

The filling of the Spirit is paralleled with letting the word of Christ richly

dwell within you. What does that mean? It means you have a heart of simple submission and obedience to God’s Word. It is just that simple.

So if you put the two together, you can see that when you (1) trust Jesus Christ and (2) obey the Scriptures, that is when God the Holy Spirit goes to work.

What Happens When You Are Filled With the Spirit?

One manifestation of being filled with the Spirit is **music** (Eph. 5:19). If you don’t know the spiritual condition of a church, just listen to the people sing. Singing is a dead giveaway. Dead churches don’t sing; they just kind of stand there and mumble.

I grew up in Hinckley, Minnesota, attending a gospel-preaching, Bible-believing church. On a Sunday morning in that little town, we’d have 110 people in Sunday school. Yet that little church, in one 30-year period, put 25 people into full-time ministry. That was the kind of church it was. Sunday evening services were a delightful time of singing.

Another manifestation is **giving thanks** (Eph. 5:20). “Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and God, even the Father.” First Thessalonians 5:18 says, “In everything give thanks.”

You can give thanks in any circumstance.

If you have an automobile accident, be thankful the car wasn’t totalled. If it was totalled, be thankful no one was hurt. If somebody was hurt, be thankful no one was killed. You can always give thanks.

Easy for me to say? No.

When I was 11 years old, I was infected with a bad case of polio. I was totally paralyzed from my hips down—I could not move a muscle in my legs and couldn’t even move a toe. To this day, when I see Jell-O, it makes me think of my legs when I had polio because I’d lift

up my legs and the muscles would have total atrophy.

By God's grace, I was able to walk again. I praise God that I've been able to live a very active life. No sports, obviously, but a very active life. But as I'm getting older, I am experiencing what is known as "post-polio syndrome." Post-polio syndrome simply means that the polio comes back, though not in the same way exactly. My legs are getting weaker and weaker every year. I don't know how long I'll be able to walk.

Do I give thanks for my polio? Yes, I do give thanks for polio.

I have learned things through polio that I never would have learned any other way. Polio has taught me many lessons. I must say, though, I don't *always* give thanks: I haven't licked that one yet!

But I can tell you that when a person is filled with the Spirit, he begins to see things from God's perspective. He sees God's sovereignty, and he gives thanks because God is at work.

Another manifestation is in **repenting of self-centeredness**. The Bible says, "Submitting yourselves, always giving thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus and then be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." This means when you submit your well-being to other people, you're concerned with other people, you're walking with other people, and thinking of other people, not just of yourself.

The working of the Holy Spirit in us

MISCONCEPTION ALERT!

"Notice what the Bible does *not* say. It does not say you are filled by praying to the Holy Spirit. It does not even say you are filled by trusting in the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ. So when you trust in Christ, God the Holy Spirit goes to work."
—Dr. Toussaint

means that we become involved in other people's lives, with many other results.

The filling of the Spirit also involves the **ongoing fruit of the Spirit**. Galatians 5:22, 23 says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

You will notice that it is in the present tense. *Keep on being filled*. You can't go on last week's experience, last year's experience, or yesterday's experience. It is something that you must experience in the eternal *now*. Be filled with the Spirit constantly. It is a command.

Not for "Super Saints" Only

When I was younger, I would read about the filling of the Spirit. I would read Lewis Sperry Chafer's book *He That Is Spiritual* and other books like Hudson Taylor's *Spiritual Secret*, and I would think to myself, "I'll never be spiritual. I'll never be filled with the Spirit." I realized I was wrong.

We *can* be filled with the Holy Spirit. All of us are to be filled with the Holy Spirit; it is a command. The filling of the Holy Spirit is the chassis—the drive train—of our Christian experience. Let's pray:

Our Father, we thank You for the wonderful provisions that You've made for us—beyond our comprehension, the third Person of the Trinity indwelling us. We pray, Father God, that we all may have a heart that is open on the godly side, that we are consistently trusting in Christ for every task, every moment, and that we may have a heart of obedience to the Scriptures. Quiet, humble submission. Speak, Lord, Your servant hears. We pray these things for this day, the coming weeks, and the coming year, even for the rest of our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen. ■

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Scriptures taken from the NASB.

AFFLUENZA: You Need to Simplify

by Steve and Mary Farrar

A few years ago, my grandmother died at the age of 101. She had twelve brothers and sisters. When they'd all reached adulthood, the children held a family reunion every year. As time went by, that reunion began to include children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren. More than three hundred people often showed up.

But Nana's two oldest brothers never came. And it was always a great sadness when their names were brought up. Everyone missed Troy and Harry. They both died as young men in 1918.

Now a lot of young men died that year in World War I, but that's not what took the lives of Troy and Dallas. Those two young men, in the prime of their lives, died from the flu. That's a hard thing to imagine in this day and age, but they were not alone. In 1918, more than 500,000 Americans died of the same disease.

The 1918 influenza epidemic was the most destructive in history. In fact, it ranks with the plague of Justinian and the black death as one of the most severe holocausts of disease ever visited upon the earth. It was estimated "that more than 20 million persons perished of influenza in a few months and more than 50 times as many were sick. In the United States, 548,000 died. In India, 12,500,000 persons, or 4% of the total population, [were] said to have been killed by influenza in the autumn of 1918."

Can you imagine 20 million people dying from the flu? However, as incredible as that seems, another epidemic was even more devastating. Between 1347 and 1370, nearly 40 million died from the black death, or the plague. Estimates vary, but this deadly epidemic wiped out somewhere between one-third and one-half of the entire population of Europe.

Precisely what was the black death? Plague is primarily a disease common to rodents, especially rats. The rat flea carries it from one rat to another, but human beings can catch it if they become infested with fleas. In the crowded conditions of medieval cities, whole populations commonly did just that. In times of extreme stress, during sieges or famines, city dwellers were especially at risk. If plague became epidemic, as often happened, the death toll soared because there was no known cure and no knowledge of what caused it in the first place. Only modern sanitation can prevent it, and only modern antibiotics can control it.

A Modern Epidemic

I don't know any families who have lost a child to influenza. And I don't currently know of any families in our neighborhood who are desperately trying to fight off the plague. Medical research and technology now routinely protect us against horrific diseases that once wiped out entire families, neighborhoods, and even cities.

But another epidemic is now taking a tremendous toll on our children. It is not influenza and it is not the plague. I call it *affluenza*.

It doesn't come from rats. It comes from the rat race.

*Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray my Cuisinart to keep;
I pray my stocks are on the rise
And that my analyst is wise;
That all the wine I sip is white
And that my hot tub's watertight;
That racquetball won't get too tough
That all my sushi's fresh enough;
I pray my cell-phone battery works
That my career won't lose its perks;
My microwave won't radiate*

PAGE 18

SWORD AND TRUMPET

*My condo won't depreciate;
I pray my health club doesn't close
And that my money market grows;
If I go broke before I wake
I pray my Volvo they won't take.*

Affluenza is not restricted to wealthy families. It's becoming increasingly more epidemic in the "lives of those who are merely well-off, who are comfortably middle-class, or who simply aspire to greater incomes, acquisitions, and status." In other words, the majority of families in America are now at risk.

Affluenza attacks relationships. Family relationships. And our children suffer the most. Affluenza causes parents to lose their minds and sacrifice their children on the altar of success.

But affluenza almost never reveals itself in the clear light of day. It's a subtle killer, a spiritual virus that creeps up on people before they realize they've been afflicted. Affluenza manifests itself in:

1. a reaching for more and more, in spite of what we already have,
2. an insatiable drive to be successful,
3. a chronic lack of contentment,
4. a consistent choosing of career over family relationships,
5. an overscheduled, overloaded life that leaves no room for significant time with spouse and children.

Pressure Cooker Families

A family afflicted with affluenza is characterized by pressure and busyness. Their schedules become so full they have no downtime, no family time, no time to eat a meal together, no time to enjoy a meaningful conversation. They leave themselves no time to discover what's going on inside their children's heads, no time to work through conflict, no time to think and plan together about the kind of life they really want to live.

And there is fear. Fear that if we slow or stop this pace, we will somehow "miss out" and our children will be left behind in the dust. This fear generates a tremen-

dous pressure to succeed, pressure to keep up. And that's followed, of course, by pressure to stay on top, pressure to be number one, pressure to excel in career, athletics, and school.

Affluenza causes parents

- to give their children too much freedom and too little attention,
- to give their children too many things and too little time,
- to pressure their children to perform rather than encouraging them to develop natural skills at a natural pace,
- to give their children too much information, which erodes their moral innocence,
- to focus on acquiring an image rather than achieving character.

You Need Simplicity

So what's the cure? Well, affluenza is both complex and deceptive. The more you have, the more energy you spend to maintain what you don't need. But the cure is just the opposite; it's called *simplicity*.

Randy Alcorn tells the story of a man who ran into a friend at the airport. The man looked very troubled.

"What's the matter?" Hugh asked.

The man sighed. "I thought I was finally going to have a weekend to myself. But now I have to go supervise repairs on my house in Florida." Dejected, he sat waiting to take off in his private jet.

Here's a man with everything he needs, with what most people dream of; yet he couldn't even enjoy his weekend. He was enslaved by his possessions. We think we own our possessions, but too often they own us.

This man would be better off if he simplified his life.

So how do we simplify? The cure has five parts. To defeat affluenza,

1. you need *contentment*,
2. you need a *compass*,
3. you need to *cut it out*,
4. you need to *conserve*,
5. you need to *cultivate*.

It doesn't get much simpler than that.

You Need Contentment

I was fine until I picked up the magazine. In fact, I was doing great. I was tired, because I had just spent six hours mowing our yard on a sweltering, smothering summer day. The temperature hovered close to one hundred degrees, and the humidity registered more than 90 percent. As I sat down to guzzle my iced tea, I had a real feeling of accomplishment. The yard looked like a million bucks and so did our ten-year-old house with its new coat of paint.

As I said, I was fine until I picked up that magazine. After several minutes of cooling down and sipping tea, I started flipping through the pages. I stopped to notice the pictures in an article that profiled a couple in Des Moines. They had just remodeled their eleven-year-old kitchen, and the finished product looked incredible.

I flipped a few more pages and noticed a do-it-yourself feature on putting a deck in your backyard. I already had one, but to tell you the truth, it didn't look anything like the deck in the magazine. Until then I'd been perfectly happy; in fact, I had spent a great deal of time that very afternoon sitting on that deck as I took breaks from the blasting heat. I'd had a real sense of contentment and enjoyment on that deck, as I sat drinking my iced tea under our thirty-foot maple tree. Come to think of it, I was fine until I picked up that magazine.

Do you see the remarkable transformation that took place? Just five or six minutes earlier, I had sat down with a real sense of contentment. I was proud of my home and how it looked.

And yet, within minutes I could hardly stomach the idea of living in such a roach trap. Look at the kitchen! Those countertops are Formica! We need to get some countertops with ceramic tile—this place looks like something Roy Rogers might use to serve his buckaroos on a cattle drive. Military personnel in Afghanistan are eating in canvass mess halls that look better than this dump!

And look at these cabinets. I've seen firewood in better shape. The magazine showed a pantry that opened up to reveal multiple shelves that rotated in a circle, at the touch of a button. Look at this dump we call a pantry. It's about as well organized as the backpack of a five-year-old on his way to kindergarten. We have cans of soup in there somewhere that are three or four years old. At least I think we do. We put things in our pantry and never see them again. If we could get to all that stuff, we could feed a small country for a month! What we need are some rotating, motorized cabinets around here!

How did I go so quickly from satisfaction to disgust? The answer is "comparison." I was perfectly happy until I began leafing through the glossy pages of that magazine . . . and began making comparisons.

By the way, the magazine I was reading circulates to 7.6 million readers. It's known as *Homes and Gardens*. No, that's not quite right. It's *BETTER Homes and Gardens*. Better than whose? Better than mine!

No wonder America is so driven. Think of it. Every month, eight million people are reminded that someone out there has something that's better than what they have. It might be a deck, a house, or a garden . . . but it's *better than theirs!*

I have a question for you.

What would it take to make you happy?

- A remodeled kitchen?
- A bigger house?
- A new SUV?

For others it may be a romantic husband, a serving wife, or a child who is compliant in nature and successful in school.

In Philippians 4:11, 12, the Apostle Paul writes:

For I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

When Paul wrote these words, he was in

prison. Prison does not represent the best of circumstances. But Paul had learned to be content and joyful, no matter where the Lord led him.

Contentment must be learned. It doesn't come naturally to us; we tend to concentrate on how things could be better. That's where comparison slips in the back door and robs us of contentment.

Comparison is the enemy of contentment. We must learn to be content in the will and the goodness of God, even when things could be better . . . because they *always* could be as long as we're still on Earth!

Paul could be content in a five-star hotel . . . or in prison.

Paul could be content driving a new BMW . . . or a '64 Volkswagen.

Paul had learned that he didn't need *more* to be content, nor did he need a different set of circumstances. That was his secret. He could be content right where he was. And he did this through the life-changing power of Christ.

As he spoke about contentment, his very next words were: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

Contentment is a wonderful thing. Contentment brings happiness and satisfaction. It also carries with it a thankful spirit and a perspective of gratitude. By contrast, we tend to *compare* ourselves with people who have more than we do. Why not compare yourself to people who have less?

If you're bothered that you don't have a nicer bathroom, why don't you compare yourself to someone who doesn't have indoor plumbing at all?

If you're unhappy because you really need a bigger house for your growing family, then why not compare yourself to the impoverished family who sleeps ten to a room? That kind of comparison will make you thankful and content in a hurry.

The first step toward contentment is thankfulness. And thankfulness is an attitude, an approach to life. Thankfulness leads to contentment and overcoming overload.

Do you recall what we said earlier, that

children pick up affluenza from their parents? Children also pick up on the reverse, real fast, if their parents are content and happy. Tonight at dinner, why don't you do something different when you pray? As your family bows and you lead them in prayer, thank God that you have water—*clean* water. Thank the Lord that you have food to eat that is *not* infested with worms or flies. Thank God for your electricity. Thank Him for your indoor bathrooms. And thank Him that your children will have hot water for their baths before bed.

I think you get the idea.

That kind of prayer will bring contentment to your family in a big hurry. And it will put a stop to the petty whining so characteristic of affluenza.

You Need a Compass

In this world of materialism and pressure to succeed, it's easy to get lost. That's why you need a compass. A compass provides perspective and tells you which way you are going. It's calibrated to what is known as "true north."

Another kind of compass will keep you off the path to affluenza. Matthew 6:33 says: "But seek *first* His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Seeking the kingdom of God *first* will calibrate your life and keep you pointed away from the false path of affluenza. The psalmist wrote: "Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. . . . Because I consider all your precepts right, I hate every wrong path" (Psalm 119:35, 128, NIV).

Don't seek success first—seek Christ.

Don't seek prominence and promotion first—seek integrity and righteousness and the approval of Christ in your work.

So what's first in your life? What are you pursuing like a heat-seeking missile? Is it knowing Christ and being a godly man or woman? Or is it something else? Any pursuit other than seeking Him first is ultimately cheap and worthless. Don't seek the world's agenda first.

Seek God's agenda.

Seek God's plan.

Seek God's blueprint.

Seek these things with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

If you are seeking Christ first, following His blueprint for marriage will be a priority for you—and divorce will not be an option.

If you are putting Christ first, you will communicate with your spouse and work out your conflicts and differences to the glory of God.

If you are seeking Christ first, you will follow His guidelines for raising your children instead of the world's system.

I have covered this extensively in my book *Gettin' There*, so I will just touch on it here. Every family at its core needs two things: provision and care. Provision is food, shelter, and clothing. Care is love, affection, nourishment, and emotional security. Do you know any family that does *not* need those two things?

In Scripture, God has appointed the man as the primary provider. He has appointed the wife as the primary caregiver. Yet our culture says that both husbands and wives should be working full-time to make provision. So . . . who is caring for the children? You must answer that question before the Lord.

So many good families have convinced themselves that they must have two incomes to get by. But that simply is not true. And believing that lie may cost you more than you realize. Andy Dappen gives some free advice on the subject:

My wife and I used to think that we needed two incomes. . . . We were wrong.

After our two children were born, my wife began working part-time as a teacher, earning less than \$30,000.00 a year. That \$30,000.00 boiled down to \$10,000 in disposable income after all work-related expenses, child care, and taxes came out.

But we found out that we could save that same \$10,000 a year by reducing expenses, if she made the home and family a full-time job. And we'd be taking care of our family in the process.

What kind of balance is in your home

when it comes to provision and care? Are you top-heavy on provision and low on care? Why not ask God to help you find the balance that your children need? Wouldn't it make a huge difference if both of you didn't work full-time? It would lower the stress and the pace of your life. And yes, it might lower your income! But maybe it wouldn't lower it as much as you think.

You Need to Cut It Out

Is your life cluttered with nonstop commitments and clutter?

You need to cut it out!

You need to have a garage sale and get rid of that stuff.

What I have in mind here is not the garage attached to your house. I'm talking about unloading your schedule and your commitments.

Just last weekend I spoke with a man who told me he'd been dealing with overload for the last year. He owns his own company and averages sixty to seventy hours a week at work. I asked him what he did in his spare time. He told me that he served on the boards of twenty-two separate ministries. No wonder he's overloaded. He needs to clean out the garage.

Cleaning out the garage of your life is a matter of priorities. It's a matter of saying no to very *good* things so you can say yes to *better* things. What goes and what stays? You might get your spouse or a good friend to help you decide. It's always easier to clean out the garage when you have help. Sit down and show them your schedule. Explain your priorities. And let them help you sort out the junk in your life. When you have a friend to help you, cleaning out the garage is not an overwhelming task.

I have traveled in a conference ministry since 1990. Most weekends I'm far from home, speaking somewhere across the United States. I love it and am privileged to do it. But last year I noticed something for the first time. The traveling was starting to get to me.

Mary and I sat down and looked at my schedule. Two things became very obvious.

I needed to step back from one of the Bible studies I was teaching in Dallas during the week. I could handle one, but not two.

Then I had a conversation with my friend, Gary Rosberg. Gary does what I do, so he intimately understood my situation. Following that conversation I made two more changes. First, I decided not to stay over after a conference and speak on Sunday. Our conferences would run Friday evening and all day Saturday. Usually I would speak six to seven times. More often than not, the host church would then ask me to speak in their services on Sunday. That could equal two and sometimes three services in addition to the seven I had already committed to.

So Gary, Mary, and I came up with a policy. When I'm invited to stay over and speak on Sunday, the answer is no. It's a polite no, but it's definite. That move right there gave me twenty-five more days a year to be in church with my own family on Sunday.

Second, we began concluding our conferences at noon on Saturday instead of going to 4 p.m. And that gave me four extra hours of travel time so I could get back home by Sunday morning.

Those were the best two moves I've made in a long time! Believe me, there's nothing like a clean garage.

You Need to Conserve

Recently I walked into a store in California that had a big sign posted on several different walls.

WE ARE CONSERVING ENERGY. WE HAVE
TURNED OUT ONE-THIRD OF OUR LIGHTS
TO SAVE ENERGY AND CUT COSTS!

Quite frankly, there was plenty of light in that store. If I hadn't seen the sign I never would have known that they were cutting back. But they were. And it was a very wise move.

G. K. Chesterton once said, "There are two ways to get enough. One is to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less."

We can all find areas where we can cut our expenses. Many people have had to significantly cut their expenses over the last year or so because of the drop in the stock market. Money is not flowing as freely as it did in the '90s. So businesses are cutting expenses and so are families.

In the last two years we have gone through a process of downsizing our ministry in order to be more effective. We changed the way we were structuring our conferences. We weren't sure how these changes would actually work out, but God worked everything out! As a result, we have reduced our staffing and costs by approximately 70 percent. Yet we are ministering to just as many people as before.

You've heard the adage, "Less is more."

That is a true statement. It's true for a ministry or business, and it's true for a family. Spending less is a simple way to simplify your life.

You Need to Cultivate

I have a friend who's a farmer in Nebraska. Ron cultivates more than three thousand acres. His family depends on good crops of corn, wheat, and soybeans each year.

But if Ron doesn't plant, Ron doesn't reap. That's pretty basic, isn't it? In fact, nothing could be more obvious. If you don't plant, you won't get a harvest. The same is true in the Christian life.

Cultivation, in the Christian life, is called *giving*. And giving is another antidote to the virus of affluenza. Let me introduce you to a small but wonderful book by my friend Randy Alcorn. It's called *The Treasure Principle*. This little book is only ninety-two pages long, but as far as I'm concerned, it's a must-read. It contains an explosive message that will "free you up" in many ways.

In this short chapter I can give you only a small taste of the biblical concepts that Randy lays out so well. But perhaps a taste will provoke a desire to begin the process in your own life.

Let's start with a simple admission.

Many of you who are reading this aren't giving at all. That is a major mistake. George Barna has done some research on the giving habits of born-again Christians:

Among born-again adults, there was a 44 percent rise in those who gave nothing last year. Compared to 1999, the mean per capita donation to churches dropped by 19 percent in 2000. One-third of born-again adults said they tithed in 2000, but a comparison of their actual giving and household incomes reveals that only one-eighth did so.

In the Old Testament, God's people once began failing to give as they should. God spoke to them through the prophet Malachi:

Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, "How do we rob you?" In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house (Malachi 3:8-10, NIV).

The *tithe* was a tenth part of their income. Ten percent was to be returned to the Lord. And Proverbs 3:9 states, "Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first of all your produce."

Here's how the Lord meant for this to work. When the harvest first came in, they were to give to God first. That was a scary thing! If you gave to the Lord from the first of the wheat, what if a fire came and burned the rest of the crop? You would be financially ruined, but you would also have nothing to feed your children.

God wanted His people to give to Him first, *trusting* that He would meet whatever needs developed later. Giving first to God is an act of trust and an expression of faith in His character. But the tithe was the standard that God had set:

A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD (Leviticus 27:30, NIV).

So does the concept of a tithe still apply to us today? I like the balance and wisdom that Randy Alcorn brings to that question:

Jesus validated the mandatory tithe, even on small things (Matt. 23:23). But there's no mention of tithing after the Gospels. It's neither commanded nor rescinded, and there's heated debate among Christians about whether tithing is still a starting place for giving.

I have mixed feelings on this issue. I detest legalism. I certainly don't want to try to pour new wine into old wineskins, imposing superseded First Covenant restrictions on Christians. Every New Testament example of giving goes far beyond the tithe. However, none falls short of it.

There's a timeless truth behind the concept of giving God our firstfruits. Whether or not the tithe is still the minimal measure of those firstfruits, I ask myself, *Does God expect His New Covenant children to give less or more?* Jesus raised the spiritual bar; He never lowered it (Matt. 5:27, 28).

But we can't *afford* to give!

That's always our first response. Especially when we find ourselves in a tight financial situation. I will never forget something that happened years ago.

My mom and dad had experienced a major setback financially. They had made a major investment that had gone under. My parents had always tithed, but things were so tight they decided they just couldn't do it. So they didn't. And things didn't improve. This went on for months. And then it went on for more months.

Finally, my dad became convicted. He became convinced that his lack of faith was a major cause of their financial difficulty. And my mother agreed, so they began tithing again. This was a tremendous step of faith for them because the money just wasn't there. But they purposed in their heart to give a tenth back to God, of whatever came in.

That year their income doubled from the previous year.

Not too long after that, they decided that they should increase their giving. So, instead of giving 10 percent, they upped it to 20 percent. That next year their income increased ten times. They actually gave

more that year in tithes than they had made the previous year. Did you catch that? Their income had increased so much that their tithe was larger than their total income for the previous year!

My dad and mom decided to tithe when they couldn't afford it. They gave to the Lord *first* and trusted Him to provide their mortgage payment. And He did. In fact, God didn't just provide. He opened the windows of heaven.

But that is what He promised to do through the prophet Malachi. Earlier we quoted the Scripture from Malachi—but we only cited half of it. Here's the rest of the story:

Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, "How do we rob you?" In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. "Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it" (Malachi 3:8-10, NIV).

A number of years ago, Pepsi created an ad campaign featuring something called "the Pepsi challenge." The soft drink giant asked consumers to compare their brand of fizz with that of their rival. This is the tithing challenge. And God is the One who challenges you to test Him. You think you can't afford to test Him? You can't afford *not* to test Him!

When my dad's accountant found out he was tithing, the guy went nuts! And he was a Christian. He told my dad that he was in no position to tithe.

The fact is, we are *always* in a position to tithe. We are always in a position to trust the living God to meet our needs.

The accountant told my dad that he needed to invest that money instead of tithing it. Well, my dad did invest it. What investment do you know of that gives a tenfold yield? There were a few dot-coms whose stock did pretty well for a while.

But what is that stock worth now? And what will it be worth in eternity?

I was in college when my parents went through that difficult time. Quite frankly, I didn't learn a whole lot in college. But I got a real education watching my parents trust God with their tithe. Why don't you do that for your children? Do what you think you can't afford to do. And then let your children see the goodness of God as He opens the windows of heaven and meets your needs.

Trusting God with your tithe will inoculate your children against affluenza. And for the rest of their lives, they will have a living example before them, proving that the promises of God can be trusted.

Summing It Up

Simplicity is a mindset that leads to some very hard choices. It is the cutting away, or trimming off, of the good in order to have the best. It is an elimination of the cholesterol that slowly but surely clogs the arteries of the soul. Simplicity is painful because it is the greatest step of trust yet. And few are those who venture to go this deep or this far. The tragedy is that if you walk away from biblical simplicity, you have really missed the very thing that overcomes overload. You've lost the very thing that changes the course of your life from that of being *momentarily* at rest to that of being *continually* at rest.

Many of the other disciplines we've discussed in the pages of this book are actions which we can implement. And we are good implementers. Simplicity, on the other hand, is a *walking away*. It is a conscious choice *not* to act, not to do. Sanctuary says yes to God. Sustenance recognizes the need for soul nourishment. Supplication understands the power of beseeching the throne of heaven. But simplicity says *no*.

No to overspending and overcommitting.

No to opportunities that tear apart families and marriages.

No to the pace.

No to the world's expectations.

And we do not like to say no. We enjoy our addictions to the pace. We love the rush of the pursuit of success. We perish at the thought of a missed opportunity or a lesser sense of accomplishment in the eyes of the world. But when we choose simplicity, we are making the hard choices that change the very core of the way we live life. Simplicity reforms our lives. Simplicity resists 24/7 at every turn and puts us on a different path, a path of clear focus and biblical living.

Ironically, most everyone I know *does* long for a simpler life. They would love to go back to the days when life was less complex. But even though we can't go back a century, every one of us can and must simplify our lives. We must work at learning how to be content. We must go back to God's blueprint and determine how He wants us to live in our marriages and with our children. The principles of marriage and parenting are His principles—and we are to conform our lives to them. We are so

quick to listen to some PhD or radio talk show host, and so slow to listen to almighty God.

We must streamline our schedules and get rid of what really doesn't matter. We must cut and cut until we have made time for solitude and for those who are most important to us. Finally, we must spend less and give more, remembering at all times that it is impossible to out-give God.

A simple life is like anything of great value—it requires thought and sacrifice to achieve. But what a difference it will make in the long run! Your life could be vastly improved in just ninety days if you began today to implement these principles.

I don't know about you, but just the thought of that decreases my overload.

But let's do more than hear these truths. Let's *do* these truths. And let's do them to the glory of God. ■

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Israel's Place in Relation to the Church

by Delmas Gehman

Jesus' life and ministry was directed to the people of the nation of Israel. After Jesus died and rose again, the early church was comprised largely of Jewish believers. Then things changed as most of the Jewish people became more and more hardened against the Gospel message. The apostles, first Peter and then Paul, were called to also preach to the Gentiles. As time went on, many more Gentile believers came into the church. The prophets had foretold that Jesus would be a light to lighten the Gentiles.

Along with the Gentiles coming into the church this question arose. "Is God through with Israel?" "Has God totally rejected Israel?" They knew that God had worked directly with Israel down through the ages ever since Abraham, and now they wondered if God had completely rejected Israel in favor of the church.

In Romans 9, 10, and 11 Paul deals with the subject of the place of the Jewish nation. In Romans 9 we read of God's mercy toward the Jewish people. Paul had a continual sorrow in his heart for his kinsmen according to the flesh. Paul was a Jew. His brethren the Jews were in unbelief and he wished there were something he could do to bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. In Romans 9 it is shown that God has mercy on whom He will and whom He will He hardens. It seems evident that when we harden our hearts to God's extended offer of mercy, then He hardens us even further. This is what happened in Pharaoh's experience. God never interferes with man's freedom of choice. Who are we to question God? He, as the potter, has power over the clay.

Near the end of Romans 9 Paul shows

how the Gentiles obtained salvation. God showed mercy to the Gentiles who followed not after righteousness and *the Gentiles attained to righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ*. With the Jewish people, the opposite was true. Israel who followed after righteousness had not attained it because *they sought it not by faith*. They did not believe on Jesus Christ. They were seeking for righteousness but were not willing to believe in Christ, thus they failed to obtain that which they sought for.

Romans 10 tells in detail how Israel had a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. They were attempting to establish their own righteousness and were unwilling to accept God's way of righteousness. Then, Paul outlines how the Lord is rich to all who call upon Him, whether Jew or Gentile! He ends the chapter by calling Israel a disobedient and gainsaying people. This is the type of people the Jewish nation was. Does this sound familiar? Could that also be a description of you and me without Jesus Christ? Certainly, it is a description of all human beings without the Lord.

In Romans 11:1 Paul says, "I say then" referring back to the last verses of Chapter 10. Because they were disobedient, rebellious, obstinate, and contrary, he asks, "Has God cast away His people?"

What would your answer be? If someone were disobedient, obstinate, and contrary toward you, what would you do? You'd reject them, wouldn't you? That's human nature, isn't it? When someone is ugly toward us, we tend to draw back and write them off as being a hopeless case!

But this is God and what does He say? "GOD FORBID!!" Certainly not! God

has not cast away His people which He foreknew! He has not cast away this people with whom He worked so miraculously down through the centuries.

Perhaps some are tempted to question whether God really has a future in mind for Israel. We hear such things like, "Why would God work with them: they are in unbelief?" When I hear such things, I remember that I was in unbelief. I was one who spurned the call of God. I was disobedient, contrary and obstinate, yet God showed His great mercy to me. If we truly realize the magnitude of the mercy shown to us, it will not be hard to believe that God would in the future show mercy again to the Jewish people collectively as a nation. Look how longsuffering He was with you and me in bringing us to repentance! We got far more than we deserved! So, I believe, if we have a proper view of how sinful we were in light of God's holiness and how far He needed to reach down to save us, it will no longer seem so impossible for Him to bring those hardhearted Jewish people back to Himself.

God has not rejected His people which He foreknew—those whom He chose way back when He called Abraham.

In Romans 11:5 Paul says there is a remnant according to the election of grace. There are some Jews, a very small remaining part of the whole, who have come to faith in Jesus Christ. These have obtained the righteousness they were seeking for (11:7). The rest, the large part of the Jewish nation, were blinded or hardened which means to render stupid or calloused. And that is just how you and I would become if we resist the truth. Just as Pharaoh was hardened when he did not believe, so it happened to Israel. According to 11:8 God has given them the spirit of stupor, or a deep sleep. It is such a stupor that they seemingly cannot see the truth of the Gospel.

Yet the question is asked again, "*Have they stumbled that they should fall?*" The word *fall* here carries with it the thought

of falling beyond recovery. Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? The answer again is "God forbid!" In the words of these verses is embodied much hope for the Jewish nation. The result of this temporary casting away is that salvation is brought to the Gentiles. That is how we come in on the blessing! This salvation working in the lives of Gentile believers is to cause Israel to be envious and to desire the salvation that the Gentiles have! Are we walking that kind of life that causes those around us, especially the Jewish people, to envy us and want what we have?

The deterioration of the Jewish nation is the riches of the Gentiles (11:12). Through their fall salvation came to us heathen Gentiles. How much more riches will the world experience when their fullness, their completion, takes place when they finally accept their Messiah! If their rejection meant the reconciling of the world (11:15), their acceptance will be nothing less than life from the dead! We see a picture of that in Ezekiel 37! The whole valley of dry, dead bones is given life.

If the root where the nourishment comes from is holy (11:16), so are the branches that receive the nourishment. *Remember, we are not the root; we are grafted into the root.* It is so important that we do not get pride mixed into our experience and think we really have something because we belong to the Lord. Remember, we Gentiles, wild branches that we are, are grafted into the tree and are getting our nourishment from the root and rich sap of the tree. So we dare not boast against the branches. We could say, "Well, they were broken off." Yet, Romans 11:20 brings us back sharply to reality again. They were broken off because of unbelief. How did we get grafted in? We are grafted in by faith and it is only by faith that we stand. If we become arrogant, we will lose our position also, just as they did. You see, *arrogance is self-centeredness instead of*

faith in God. Arrogance is forgetting God's mercy and trusting in ourselves, thinking we are something good in ourselves.

Perhaps we should consider some evidences of arrogance. One evidence of arrogance is saying that the church is now Israel and that the blessings promised to Israel are transferred to the church but the curses stay with Israel. We have nothing in the Scriptures to back up this claim. Rather, many of the promises given to Israel cannot be fulfilled in any other manner than to Israel if God will be true to His Word. Certainly, God's integrity is not in question!

Another evidence of arrogance is saying that we are spiritual Jews. In the New Testament, both Jew and Gentile are brought together in one body, the church, but all the references in the New Testament referring to Jews are clearly speaking of sons of Abraham by physical lineage.

A third possible evidence of arrogance is calling our church headquarters Jerusalem or perhaps inferring that our home church or locality is Jerusalem. This is what the Roman Catholics did in their Replacement Theology—called the city of Rome Jerusalem and claimed that God was through with Israel and had now transferred all her blessings to the church.

A fourth expression of arrogance is claiming that the olive tree is now the church and that Jews have to be grafted into it. All of these are contrary to the text of Romans 11 and many other Scriptures which foretell the time when God will again visit the Jewish people and will restore them to their former glory when they acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

So the question is before us, "Has Israel been cast away never to rise again?" Romans 11 answers it in the negative. We also have many other scriptures which agree. *"Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day,*

and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD" (Jer. 31:35-37).

We must continually keep before us the danger that if we become arrogant we also shall be cut off. *When we see Israel in its proper light, the plan of God becomes plain in continuity rather than being some disconnected snapshots here and there.* We need to understand that God had a plan for Israel from the foundation of the world and He knew that they would fall away and reject Him. God also planned for the Church from the beginning; it was not an after thought. It was a mystery not understood by the Old Testament prophets but which is revealed in the New Testament (Ephesians 3).

God did not work with Israel for a while, only to trash His plan and start over with the Church! Think about it! It was God's Plan that the salvation and relationship with God which the Gentile church was experiencing would provoke the Jews to jealousy so that they would see their need and be saved.

It is no surprise then, that the devil was interested in corrupting the church and causing it to apostatize and turn into a purveyor of anti-Semitism and to inflict horrible persecution on the Jews. What better way to turn them away from the Gospel when, in the name of religion, such horrible crimes were done. Down through the Dark Ages the Roman Catholic Church perpetrated unspeakable horrors against Jews, the true Christians, and others through the Inquisition. The very instrument that

God planned to bring the Jews to envy fell away and caused them to turn away further from the truth. But the true Christians always have had and will have a sincere love for the Jewish people. We long for the day when the sons of Abraham will turn to their Messiah.

Our responsibility as Christians is to repudiate anti-Semitic talk and to show love to our Jewish friends and neighbors so that they can see the love of Christ in our lives. Are we living such a godly life that they would become jealous of us?

Another blow to our pride is this—if wild branches can be grafted in, how much easier it is for the natural branches to be grafted in again! (11:23).

Paul does not want the Christian church to be uninformed (11:25). Contrary to popular thinking, ignorance is not bliss! God calls us to responsibility to know the Scriptures and to understand. That is why this is given, that we may know. This ignorance can come from simply being uninformed, or even worse, from a disinclination to know! The product of this willful ignorance is being wise in our own opinion! This should never be the case with the child of God! Unfortunately, however, too many Christians seem unwilling to heed Paul's warning against ignorance here. So Paul settles the issue once and for all that the blindness and hardening of Israel is only temporary. Until—what a word full of potential! Until the fullness or the complete number of the Gentiles be come in.

“And so all Israel shall be saved.” All Israel who repents and turns to their Messiah in their hour of deep distress shall be saved. What words of hope! Yet, when we think of all that Israel must go through in the future, to bring them to their Messiah, it causes great heaviness of heart. According to the prophets, they will experience the most severe time of trouble ever seen on this earth. Jeremiah 30:7 calls it the “time of Jacob's trouble.” This is what it will take to bring them to their knees and to realize

their need of Jesus their Messiah. Yet, we must remember that God works with willing hearts; God does not force anyone to come to Him. He will allow the wrath of man to be unleashed on them until they cry out to Him for mercy.

“There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer.” There is no one else who fits this description but Jesus Christ Himself! He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. Zechariah 12 gives us the details of this cleansing which Israel shall experience. According to Ezekiel, there will be some who will rebel and will not take Jesus as their Lord and will then be purged out from among the people. At that time, all Israel shall be saved.

At the time when Paul was writing this, the Jewish people were enemies of the church (11:28). But he says they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. They are beloved because of the promises God made many years before to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God never goes back on His Word! (11:29).

When we view the great plan of God in dealing with Israel and His dealings with us, we concur with Paul when he says in Romans 11:33, *“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”*

“For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things.” All is of Him for He created it. It is through Him we live and move and have our being. Through Him all creation is held together and functions in an orderly way. Through Him we exist and through Him we have salvation. To Him—all things are pointed to Him. The entire plan from start to finish is to bring glory to Him. And God will vindicate Himself. He will bring glory to His holy Name through His working with us and through His working with the Jewish people.

Our response should be “Thank You, Lord!” and “Praise the Lord!” ■

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Willingly Ignorant

by Henry M. Morris

As creationists repeatedly encounter the refusal of our secular evolutionists even to consider the evidence for special creation and against evolution, we are tempted to apply to them such pejoratives as “intolerance,” “narrow-mindedness,” “bigotry,” and the like. But the pungent phrase of the Apostle Peter is probably the most appropriate of all— “*they willingly are ignorant.*”

It is worth knowing, however, that evolutionists can be almost as stubborn against their fellow evolutionists as they are against creationists when these other evolutionists come up with novel theories of their own. We remember the bitter war of words between neo-Darwinist Richard Dawkins and the late punctuationist Stephen Jay Gould for example.

There is hardly a more doctrinaire evolutionist anywhere than Lynn Margulis, yet listen to her complaint.

More and more, like the monasteries of the Middle Ages, today’s universities and and professional societies guard their knowledge. Collusively, the university biology curriculum, the textbook publishers, the National Science Foundation review committees, the Graduate Record Examiners, and the various microbiological, evolutionary, and zoological societies map out domains of the known and knowable; they distinguish required from forbidden knowledge, subtly punishing the trespassers with rejection and oblivion; they . . . determine who is permitted to know and just what it is that he or she may know.¹

Margulis was fuming about the difficulty she was having in getting her concepts of evolutionary mechanisms considered. She goes on to complain that

. . . if an individual with ambition to study nature rejects neo-Darwinist biology in today’s ambience, he becomes a threat to his own means of livelihood . . .²

Such prejudice is found not only in biology. Those physicists who question relativistic physics or quantum mechanics or the Big Bang are all but ostracized by their physics colleagues. Dr. Frank J. Tipler, a recognized world-class authority in these subjects, and a professor of physics at the University of New Orleans, has noted also that:

The most radical scientific theory with religious implications is Intelligent Design. It is impossible to get any member of the National Academy of Sciences to consider it seriously.³

Tipler has written a book entitled, *The Physics of Immortality*, which admits the possibility of god (not the Biblical God, of course, but a sort of relativistic god), and this has been unacceptable to the physics establishment. He notes, significantly, that over 90% of the distinguished physicists in the National Academy are admitted atheists.

Clearly, the scientific community is not open to any evidence or any theory that might even hint that God really exists and might actually act in the physical universe.⁴

Dr. Tipler has been particularly exercised by the standard “peer review” process used by publications in deciding whether to publish a paper or by granting agencies in deciding whether to finance a research proposal. In his critique of this process, he makes the following bitter comments.

Today, the refereeing process works primarily to enforce orthodoxy. I shall offer evidence that “peer” review is *not* peer review: the referee is quite often not as intellectually able as the author whose work he judges. We have pygmies standing in judgment as giants.⁵

And he does, indeed, offer much evidence to support this claim. For example,

he cites several winners of Nobel prizes whose prize-winning papers had initially been rejected by this peer-review process.

Another evolutionary physicist who has had many problems getting his theories recognized is João Margueijo, who has just recently been able to publish some of his evidence that the velocity of light was greater in the past. He has written the following:

As an individual you are judged by how many papers you publish, where you publish them, their quality, and how often they are subsequently cited. But more importantly, publication is part and parcel of the fact that scientists, who tend to live on grant money, are obligated to make their findings and ideas available to others. They will not get their share of funding unless they can show a solid publication record.⁶

His bitterness is reflected in the following:

Referee reports are often empty of scientific content and reflect nothing but the author's social standing, or their good or bad relations with the referee. . . . To cap it all, editors can be totally illiterate.⁷

With respect to our particular concerns as Bible-believing creationists, Tipler recognizes (though he himself is not a Biblical creationist in our context) that:

The most radical ideas are those that are perceived to support religion, specifically Judaism and Christianity.⁸

What prospect, then, do we creationists have of getting true scientific creationism a hearing in any of the standard scientific journals?

Not much, obviously. We have never been able so far even to get an article accepted by such popular journals as *National Geographic* or *Reader's Digest*, whose editors have made it clear to us that they are committed to evolutionism.

Creationists have been confined so far to publication in our own journals, even though our articles are peer-reviewed and genuinely scientific. The now-famous statement by Harvard's Richard Lewontin that "we cannot allow a divine foot in the

door" reinforces our oft-repeated complaint that creation cannot get a fair hearing in the marketplace of ideas.

We could cite innumerable examples. My own experiences have confirmed this closed door many times. For example, the book *The Genesis Flood* received considerable attention in the scientific world and has resulted in making creationists out of many evolutionists. Before publication, we had it "peer-reviewed" by at least eighteen scientists plus many theologians and Bible scholars.

Yet, when I was at Virginia Tech (Head of the Civil Engineering Department there), the administration would not allow me even to list that book or any of my articles promoting scientific creationism on my official staff resume (fortunately, I had a goodly number of engineering publications also, and they were quite willing for these to be listed).

Another remarkable insight to this situation was obtained when Dr. Tom Barnes and I tried to find a publisher many years ago for the newly completed high school biology textbook produced by the Creation Research Society. The book had been written by a committee of highly competent Ph.D. creationist biologists and experienced high school biology teachers. (Dr. Barnes had been Chairman of the Committee and I was Society President.) But the fifteen leading publishers of high school textbooks whom we approached would not even look at the manuscript!

The following admission by the editor of *Research News* is very illuminating, as an answer to those who are continually rebuking creationists for their failure to publish scientific articles on creationism in the standard scientific literature.

In my editorial judgment, the collection of ideas known as "scientific creationism" (which is not the same as intelligent design) lacks the credibility to justify publishing any submissions that we get from its adherents.⁹

Many more examples and illustrations could be added, if space permitted. I have

had technical articles requested by technical journals, only to have them rejected when actually submitted. For example, my small book, *The Scientific Case for Creation*, was rejected by a scientific society which had originally requested it for publication. The book was later published also in Russia, while communism still reigned there, and played a significant part in opening the Russian science establishment to considering creationism.

The so-called National Center for Science Education was established for the very purpose of keeping creationism out of the schools, and it is still quite active and successful. Many of their scientists have become aware of the lack of any legitimate evidence for macro-evolution, but they are still as committed to it as ever.

In addition to Peter's attribution of willful ignorance to their attitude, the Apostle Paul has also affirmed that those who reject or ignore the great evidence of cre-

ation in the physical universe are "without excuse" (Romans 1:20). The evidences for God and the truth of His Word are very, very strong.

FOOTNOTES

1. Lynn Margulis, "Big Trouble in Biology," Chapter 20 in *Slanted Truths* (Ed. by Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1997), p. 265.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
3. Frank J. Tipler, "Refereed Journals: Do They Insure Quality or Enforce Orthodoxy?" (ISCID Archiv. June 30, 2003), p. 8.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
6. João Magueijo, *Faster Than the Spread of Light* (Cambridge, Mass. Perseus Publishing Co., 2003), p. 183.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 217, 218.
8. Tipler, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
9. Karl Giberson in *Research News* (July/August 2002), as quoted by Kevin Anderson in article "Intentional Editorial Censorship," *Creation Matters* (Creation Research Society, May/June 2002), p. 8. ■

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The Christian and Wealth

by David L. Burkholder

There is a certain sentiment afloat in our day promoting the idea that a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus should not have personal wealth, that His children should be poor as He was, holding neither property nor possessions. There are also those who argue, from a misguided conception, for a redistribution of wealth, that the "haves" should share with the "have nots" to equalize wealth. On the other hand there are those who preach a health and wealth gospel that says if you commit your life fully to the Lord He will bless you with both health and possessions. So wherein lies the truth, and what does the Bible say on these issues?

Let's look first at some Old Testament examples of men of means. While it is true we do not live under the Old Testament

economy, we certainly can learn lessons from those who did, especially in regard to their relationship with God. There was that great patriarch and friend of God, Abraham. He had vast herds and flocks; his servants numbered over 300. He was a man of significant wealth. Look also at Job, that "greatest of the men of the east." He had herds numbering in the tens of thousands and vast holdings to sustain them. We read of Jacob who had large flocks and herds, giving him a position of wealth among his contemporaries.

Moving on through Old Testament history we come to Kings David and Solomon. Their wealth, especially that of Solomon, was unsurpassed in their time. In Solomon's case, the Lord specifically mentioned that He added riches to Solomon's

life (1 Kings 3:11-13). Many years later in Israel's history we read of King Hezekiah and his great wealth (2 Chronicles 32:27-29). The interesting thing to note here is in verse 29 where we read, "For God had given him very much substance." His possessions and wealth were gifts from God. Hezekiah was a God-fearing king and God honored his trust with material blessings in return. Now all of these were men of God and for none of them did God condemn their wealth. The lesson we learn from these Old Testament saints is that God accepted and even blessed their prosperity.

We conclude from all of this that God did not condemn wealth among Old Testament saints. But what does He say about wealth among New Testament believers? This is the era that concerns us. What is God's position on wealth for New Testament saints? What about the Rich Young Ruler, or the wealthy farmer in Luke 12? or Zacchaeus? What lessons do we learn from these individuals about God's view of wealth in the New Testament economy?

Jesus' condemnation of the Rich Young Ruler (Matthew 19:16-22) was because he had made an idol of his possessions. The only way for him to get release was to get rid of the possessions which enslaved him. In the case of the prosperous farmer in Luke 12, again Jesus' condemnation was because of misplaced values, not simply because he was prosperous. We have no record that Jesus even mentioned riches in His talk with Zacchaeus, the rich tax collector. Zacchaeus' response to dispose of his wealth was simply the response of a heart touched by Jesus' love and forgiveness.

In 1 Timothy 6 we find the crux of the New Testament teaching on wealth. In verses 9 and 10 we read (emphasis mine): "But they that *will be rich* fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For *the love of money* is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

This passage makes it abundantly clear that it is the pursuit of wealth for selfish, personal reasons that destroys the soul. The temptations involved in the unwholesome pursuit of wealth drown out spiritual values and lead to the destruction of faith values. Such pursuit also leads to an unrewarding end. The one who pursues riches for the sake of riches is never satisfied, and that burning desire crowds out all other issues of life and leads to spiritual poverty. This is the relationship of believers to riches that is spoken to in the New Testament. They are not to be acquired or accumulated for personal benefit alone. They are not to be the primary pursuit of one's life, for that is detrimental to the soul.

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:19-21 emphasizes the principle of correct values. The Christian's focus is to be on things of heavenly value, not material, earthly gain. Material goods accumulated on earth do not provide lasting security for they are always vulnerable to theft or deterioration. Conversely, treasures sent beforehand to heaven, through the expenditure of one's means for the benefit of others and the spread of the gospel, are secure and lasting. Such also carry the added spiritual benefit of drawing one's heart heavenward, away from the fleeting, temporal treasures of this perishing world.

Therefore, in the parable of the soils in Matthew 13, Jesus warns against "the deceitfulness of riches." Riches do not always buy the expected result. Sometimes they shortchange by giving little in return. Emphasis placed on riches is detrimental to the soul and, in the end, turns out to be a great deceiver by substituting the fleeting, temporal gain of the world for things of eternal value. It's a poor exchange. The Psalmist warns: "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them."

The Bible is clear that to labor with one's hands in order to provide for one's household needs is an expected standard. Every able-bodied person is expected to work, and some, because of certain economic or personal advantages, or particular

financial aptitude, will accumulate more resources than necessary for their own needs. And while charity, a willing assistance of those who fall on hard times or for some reason cannot provide adequately within the scope of their responsibilities is certainly in order, nowhere does the Word of God suggest there should be a leveling of wealth simply to put everyone in the brotherhood on an equal financial footing.

Also we do not find in the scripture that God promises health or wealth in return for serving Him. Such motives are selfish and in opposition to the teaching of scripture regarding commitment and sacrifice for the cause of Christ. However, God does promise His providential care for those who put their trust in Him (Psalm 34:10; 68:10; Luke 12:22-24, etc.). Often that care comes through those upon whom He has poured out His blessings in abundance, those who understand the principle that it is more blessed to share than to hoard.

It would seem clear, both from biblical examples and observation, that God has endowed some individuals with more money-making and financial management skills than He has others. (See Deuteronomy 8:18.) And it is also true that such carry more responsibility with what they have been entrusted than do those with less—but only in proportion. Such individuals are given specific responsibilities with their abundance.

In Ephesians 4:28 we have the principle of alms-giving stated, that those who have are responsible to give to those in need. Also, in 1 Timothy 6 there are explicit directions given to those who hold wealth: They are not to become proud because of their wealth; they are not to put their trust in uncertain riches; they are to willingly distribute of their goods to those in need. There is also reiterated (verses 6-8) the principle we find in Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:19-21 that the pursuit of godliness is of far surpassing value and yields far more lasting results than the pursuit of riches.

Wealth produced within the Christian brotherhood is sanctified by its proper use.

First, it is to be used to provide for one's immediate needs within the family framework. Secondly, it is to be used to help supply the needs of those unable to meet personal responsibilities, either temporarily or, in some cases, long-term. This responsibility is first to be exercised within the Christian brotherhood and then beyond, as opportunity and resources permit (Galatians 6:10). A third use of wealth is for the advancement of the kingdom of heaven by the spread of the gospel message.

For those engaged in full-time evangelism and for agencies doing what individuals cannot in sharing the gospel or meeting human need, financial support is vital and necessary. In contributing to such, givers become fellowhelpers in the gospel (3 John 8). The follower of Jesus dare not close his eye to human need, nor shirk his responsibility in the dissemination of the gospel. Both require finances and here is where the "haves" carry responsibility for the "have nots," both materially and spiritually.

Instead of calling for a redistribution of wealth, perhaps what we need in our day is a challenge to re-direction of wealth. Such re-direction would take the emphasis off wealth for personal benefit and place it rather on the good that can be accomplished by sharing. It should be clear that God does not frown upon wealth nor upon persons who have wealth, per se. What God is concerned about is the proper use of the wealth He has entrusted to individuals. He sees beyond the scope of human understanding to the principle expressed in Ecclesiastes 5:13 where the writer says: "There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt." In other words, riches can turn against one and do harm instead of good. This is true if either the motive or the use is wrong.

The message of the scriptures is that the wealth God has entrusted to individuals be used to honor His will in meeting human need and in the spread of the Gospel. To hoard it for selfish purposes transgresses the design of God and causes

harm to those who hold it. God calls each of His followers to faithfulness in this area of life. He also calls each to a continual evaluation of his standing before God, and correction where examination reveals areas where change is needed. Perhaps it is time for His followers to open them-

selves before Him on this issue and to take a hard look at their relationship to wealth.

So, let the examination begin. It will be beneficial to one's soul and, undoubtedly, to others as a result. Above all, it will bring glory to God, the giver of all things. ■



The Matter of Manners

by Mrs. William (Lydia) Overholt
Marshallville, GA

[We might ask, Are "Please" and "Thank you" uppity? Do "Excuse me" or "I beg your pardon," seem out of place? Perhaps we'd rather say things like, "Oops!" or "Huh?" And maybe we'd rather just say what first comes to our minds when giving our opinions. Consider with the writer the implications of social graces. —PLM]

Should plain people be concerned about proper manners? Might an overly concerned attitude toward this subject lead to a measure of pride? Are we basically satisfied with the way we are or do we want to change our ways in order to have more proper manners?

Manners are "good or polite ways of behaving or ways of addressing and treating others." One's demeanor or behavior when relating to another can make or break a budding relationship. That makes proper manners a significant aspect of Christian character and witness that we must not ignore.

Think of the account of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. Historically, the Jews looked down on the Samaritans and normally had no dealings with them. Our Lord broke those chains as He reached out to her and addressed her need. He used tact and respect in approaching delicate issues of her past life. He showed us an example of proper con-

duct toward someone caught in the web of sinful living.

The Samaritan woman responded with respect to Jesus, yet not realizing who He was, she addressed Him simply as "Sir." He must have had her rapt attention as He shared life-giving words. Do you suppose she looked away from Him as He spoke words of conviction? Initially, she would have been pleased to draw water for Him if He had had a container.

How important are proper manners? Does our behavior actually make a difference, especially when "outsiders" come into our midst? Surely we want to show them due respect, lest we "turn them off" by unmannerly conduct. Not only that, it's vitally important to have good manners toward our fellow church members—ministers and lay members alike.

The following are some aspects of importance as we consider proper manners toward one another:

1. Make eye contact when listening or speaking, at least enough so that the person senses positive regard. If we look all around when we're spoken to, the speaker feels devalued and will likely soon seek out another listener. Even when we're just one in a crowd, our listening can affect the speaker either positively or negatively.
2. Answer when spoken to. A greeting

needs to be answered with a greeting. This gives a feeling of warmth and acceptance, even when there's not enough time for conversation. If you need to go, say so, but with politeness and possibly even expressing your desire to speak at another time.

3. Let others go before you, especially giving honor to the handicapped and elderly. Children should be taught the importance of holding the door for others. It appears very unmannerly when a child nearly knocks another churchgoer down to get somewhere fast. That may sound extreme, but it has happened!
4. Patiently let others finish what they're saying before you speak. How does it

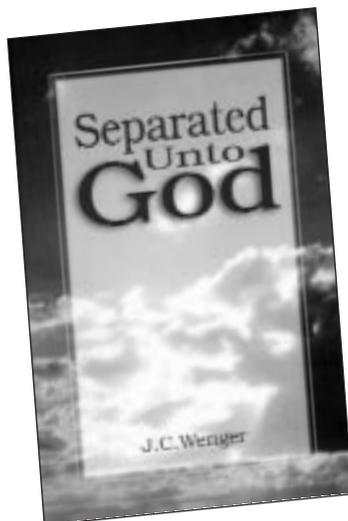
make you feel when you're relating a happening and another person interrupts you to give their version or their story? We've all probably done this at one time or another, but let us avoid this common mistake.

The foregoing comments are not necessarily listed in order of importance. No doubt, others could be helpfully mentioned. I trust we'll think about proper manners as we relate to our brothers and sisters in the church, as well as with strangers who come into our midst. May the Lord bless you as you consider good manners. ■

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Separated Unto God

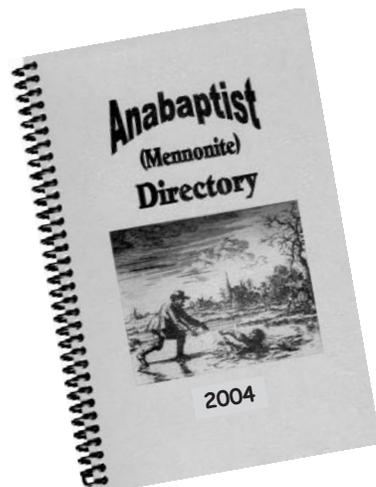
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