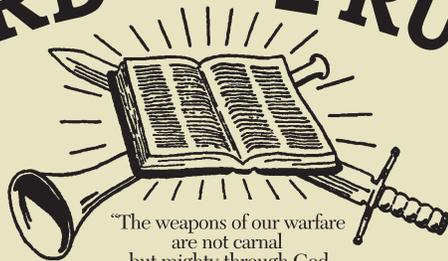


# The SWORD and TRUMPET



"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*



CARL BECKER

FEBRUARY 2005

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## The Sword and Trumpet

Founded in 1929 by Geo. R. Brunk I

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

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# Person of the Month:

## Carl Becker (1894-?)

Carl Becker was born in 1894. After finishing high school he worked to help support his sister and widowed mother. By the time he was twenty-two the heavy need for support of his family was declining so he took his meager savings of roughly \$100 and decided to embark upon six years of medical training at Hahnemann Medical College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to become a doctor—a career which would give him the financial security he desired.

In 1922, at the age of 28, he opened a practice in Boyertown, Pennsylvania. In that same year he married a woman named Marie whom he had met at a church function some years earlier. Carl had promised the Lord that he would give his life to God if the Lord would provide him with an education. He did not know where in the world God would send him but he believed he belonged to God first. He made known to Marie his promise and she was willing to accept that.

As his practice in Boyertown flourished it seemed as if his promise to the Lord had been forgotten until one day he received a letter from an official of the Africa Inland Mission requesting that Carl come to Africa to replace a doctor who had died suddenly. Carl did not accept immediately due to his mother's financial situation. Later, in 1927, Carl consented to go. By the summer of 1928, at the age of 34, he and Marie set sail for Africa. Financially, this was quite a change for them—leaving an income of \$10,000 plus a year to go to a primitive corner of Africa to serve—he knew not where—for \$60 per month. What a test of faith!

The couple set up housekeeping in the Congo in a place called Katwa. Apparently unruffled by her surroundings, Marie turned their mud hut into a mansion of sorts. Eventually, in 1934, the family moved with their two children to a small station in Oicha located in the thick Ituri forest—the home of the Pygmies. These people suffered much discrimination from their own people and kept to themselves but when their medical needs increased they came out of their isolation and sought Dr. Becker's help.

Out of virtually nothing Brother Becker built a very adequate medical compound, with his own monthly salary, which met the medical needs of the jungle very well. The Lord blessed and within two years Carl was treating and witnessing to 200 patients daily. He could not possibly reach all the people but over time the witch doctors even began turning to Christ as a result of the evangelistic efforts of Dr. Becker and others on the field.

Carl's weekends were not a time for rest and relaxation. He used them as an opportunity to visit villages and share the Gospel with the people. Evangelism was his real focus. He was not formally trained in God's Word but he simply shared Christ and people were saved. The standard Sunday school pictures made no sense to the natives so Carl sketched his own "African" pictures so the people could better understand.

At one point Dr. Becker became discouraged because so many of his hours were taken up with medical work as opposed to evangelism but he came to see his work *as evangelism* since he was able to preach and teach every day to several hundred people who came for treatment. This was a tremendous opportunity to establish a strong African Church.

Although Carl treated all kinds of illness, his primary concern was the large incidence of leprosy in Oicha and he worked diligently to find a cure that would eliminate the suffering of lepers. By the early 1950s Dr. Becker had established an 1100-acre leprosy village where he treated 4,000 resident patients. While working on his cure for leprosy he was also delivering

*(continued on page 3)*

# The After Service

by Paul Zehr

One of the things that stands out to a newcomer that attends our services is the prolonged period of fellowship following dismissal, which we refer to at times as "the after service." This practice is foreign to many liberal church settings and even to some more traditional settings.

What is it about our delayed home going after service? Is it just a peculiar, cultural habit we have picked up? Let us consider some of the reasons for the after service.

*We are social beings with social needs.* Many people seek to meet their social needs at the arena, on the golf course, or in their backyard parties. What better place is there for the people of God to socialize than with fellow-believers? This may not be the most important reason for the after service but it is one purpose.

*We enjoy being in the presence of like-minded believers.* This is a step beyond the social ties. There are spiritual ties that draw the people of God together. For a people who practice the Holy Kiss, it is only natural that these bonds will be expressed in a time of Christian fellowship. To exercise this ordinance and then have little to do with our fellow brethren

or sisters would hardly seem consistent.

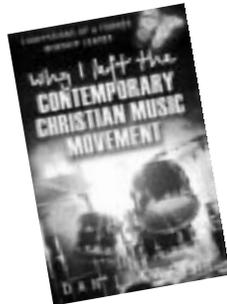
*To exhort one another.* During the service we are exhorted and taught in a collective way. After the service, we can share individually with each other, giving an opportunity to make this exhortation personal as we discuss the truths which were presented.

*To encourage one another.* These are the times when we can share struggles with each other and be encouraged in the fact that others are also facing the same struggles we are and are finding victory. Social workers in society are concerned that people with emotional needs find support groups of similarly challenged people. We have a support group within our own brotherhood. There are others who understand our struggles.

We do recognize that this time of after-service fellowship could degenerate into a mere social interchange and effort is required on our part to keep it profitable. Let us now consider some practical helps for us to preserve the value of the after service.

*Keep it spiritual.* It is easy enough for people with similar business interests to

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by Dan Lucarini

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gravitate to holding business discussions. There is a place to show an interest in each other's well-being, which may include asking how natural things are going but it needs to be with a spiritual perspective. In other words, discuss it in the light of how it affects spiritual and family issues. It is also profitable to discuss practical applications of the truths taught in the service in the light of our daily work.

*Prevent a generation gap.* It is a blessing to see young and old share together. It is natural for youth to want to share with youth, young fathers with young fathers, etc., but there is also a blessing in youth fellowship with the older ones too.

*Avoid cliques.* It is easy enough to find and talk to the same friends time after time. But spiritual fellowship will seek the fellowship of each one. Spiritual fellowship will not want to exclude others from the circle but will reach out to those who find it more difficult to share.

*Control our children.* Parents can easily become absorbed in their discussions and momentarily forget that they are parents. We should know where our children are and what they are doing. If our children cannot be self-restrained, they should stay with us.

*Maintain a reverent atmosphere.* In addition to keeping our children under control, we should be conscious of the fact that we are in a house of worship. We will not make it a place of commerce. We will also keep the noise levels down, being careful not to talk or laugh loudly.

*Exercise moderation.* There is a blessing in the after service, but there is also a time to go home. Prolonging the time will make it more difficult to control our children. Extended visiting should be done in our homes as we extend Christian hospitality one to another.

The after service is part of our goodly heritage and continues to be a blessing. With spiritual goals in view it will continue to serve us well. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Ontario Informer*.

## CARL BECKER . . . cont'd.

500 babies and performing 4,000 operations a year. Sometimes, when finishing an operation, Brother Becker would thank the Lord for saving the patient's life and then he would request that the Lord would give opportunity for him to lead the patient to Christ. Quite a feat for just one doctor!

He also tried to help those experiencing mental illness. Although he achieved some success in this endeavor Dr. Becker believed that the simple Gospel of God's love was what alone could bring hope to those plagued by fear and superstition.

In the 1960s when nationalism came to the Congo the Simba guerrillas sought out Brother Becker to kill him. In 1964, at the age of 70, he was eventually persuaded to flee to East Africa with his wife and several hospital staff workers. After a year in East Africa they returned to the Congo to continue the work and rebuild what had been destroyed by the war.

Carl continued in Africa until 1976. He had completed his final planning for the establishment of an interdenominational medical center and a training school for the African people. Others then, on the field, saw to the completion of the project. Brother Becker retired to the U.S. in poor health at the age of 83.

Dr. Carl Becker was a man of great dedication, zeal, modesty, efficiency, and humility. In his nearly 50 years of missionary service he left a huge impact upon the African people. One African man expressed the real value of Carl Becker's life when he said that although he had received the message about Christ from the teaching and preaching of many missionaries he had *seen Christ* in Brother Becker, the great "*munganga*" of the Congo.

—Gail L. Emerson

## **From the Editor's Desk**



Paul M. Emerson

### **Identifying Error— Together?**

The current Conservative Anabaptist scene consists of many small groups of congregations as well as many single (unaffiliated) congregations. Most value their distinctives too much to be interested and involved in any larger network structure. Danger is properly seen in unadvised mergers. However, the diversity and autonomy of these groups leaves the door open for error and its teachers to go from group to group. Having been identified in one fellowship and subsequently censored, the problem issue and/or person simply moves to another fellowship and sets up shop. This happens again and again until the heresy or apostasy has run its course or dangerously infected sincere believers.

When an error or false teacher is identified by a congregation or group of congregations, could a council be called from across the Conservative Anabaptist movement to share information, examine Scripture on the issue, and give counsel? No structure or yoke would be necessary for this to happen. One group could initiate this process by sending letters to many groups and

requesting a meeting of brethren to hear and give counsel on the matter at hand. The counsel would be non-binding so the council would exercise no authority over participants. The council could organize itself for that meeting only and then disband when the task was finished. Conclusions would be published in various Mennonite media. The result would alert those throughout the Conservative Anabaptist movement of the danger and save much pain. There may be other ways to accomplish the above but they probably lack the efficiency of the council approach. The beauty of this idea is that issues could be unthreateningly examined and the faithful supported.

Issues that could be handled this way include: major doctrinal deviations (e.g. Open Theism), slanderous activity (i.e. that damages a group of congregations), exposure of common dangerous teachings (that undermine congregational integrity). Can we help and affirm each other in spite of not crossing our t's and dotting our i's exactly the same or are we doomed to isolationism? ■

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**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

# THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



*A Devotional Commentary*



by David L. Burkholder

**FEBRUARY 6, 2005**

## *Overcoming Grief*

Ruth 1:3-8, 14-18

The lessons for February deal with the issues of grief, pride, uncertainty, and prejudice, giving us help in handling these issues in our individual experiences. Each of these issues is characterized by the life of a specific Bible character. Today's lesson focuses on overcoming grief, taken from the Book of Ruth, highlighting the experience of Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. For the setting of the lesson read the entire first chapter of Ruth.

Grief is a very personal thing, but its effects can be mitigated by sharing the pain. We see that principle at work in today's lesson. Naomi, her husband and two sons, had gone to Moab to seek relief from famine in their hometown of Bethlehem. After a period of time Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died and she was left with her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion.

Mahlon and Chilion both married Moabite wives, but after about 10 years the men also died. Then Naomi was left alone with her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. This was a very difficult situation for a widow in a strange land. She now had no security or means of support.

From our perspective, of course, we know that God was at work behind the

scenes. When everything looked bleak and hopeless, Naomi heard word that "the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread." The famine was over and crops were again being produced in Bethlehem. So she decided to return to her homeland, and set out, her daughters-in-law accompanying her.

Along the way, however, Naomi had second thoughts about Orpah and Ruth going with her to the land of Judah. They would have no family there, no likely chance to marry, and no means of support. So she urged each to return to her "mother's house." At least in Moab there would be opportunity for them perhaps to remarry. At least they would have the support of family and friends which they could not be assured of in Judah.

After many tears Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye and set out to return to her people. Ruth, however, had decided to cast her lot with Naomi—come what may. And of course we know the rewarding result of that decision.

In verses 16 and 17 we have that golden commitment of Ruth's to cleave to Naomi, through thick and thin—till death. They had shared the grief of loss together, now they would share an uncertain future together, supporting and encouraging one another.

Yes, the pain of grief is personal. But shared grief eases the burden. The awareness that others understand and care helps to ease the hurt and make it

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more bearable. Ruth's support of Naomi is both an excellent example of loyalty and one of sharing the burden of grief. Subsequent happenings also show us the shared joy they experienced as events unfolded. They were drawn together in grief. That bond was strengthened by joy.

***For thought and discussion***

1. Be sure to do some background reading on the historical setting of the Book of Ruth.
2. Who were the Moabites? Was it appropriate for Israelites to marry them?
3. Study the customs and culture of the times to see what kind of situation Naomi found herself in after the death of her husband and sons.
4. Compare Ruth's commitment to Naomi with the vows couples make at the marriage altar. And maybe this would be a good time to review and renew yours.
5. How can we best share the grief and pain of another? Perhaps you would want to discuss this issue in your class.

**FEBRUARY 13, 2005**

***Overcoming Pride***

2 Kings 5:1-5, 9-15a

Today's lesson focuses on the experience of Naaman, the Syrian general, and his struggles with leprosy and pride. Naaman was a great man and a skillful warrior. But he carried in his body the stigma of death. He was a leper. Tragedy had struck and the king of Syria (likely Benhadad) was willing to go to any length for the recovery of his accomplished and valued general.

It was the prompting of a captive Israelite girl that set things in motion for Naaman's recovery. She had been snatched from her parental home and

homeland in a raid by the Syrians. However, it is obvious that she had a good attitude toward her mistress and master and likely enjoyed their favor as well. She was an outstanding little girl, seeking the well-being of the one who held her captive. She was also a person of strong faith.

Through the suggestion of the maid, word reached the king, who lost no time in sending Naaman on his way to "the prophet in Samaria," being Elisha. In order to strengthen his case, the king sent a letter of recommendation and significant treasures along with Naaman to the king of Israel, Joram. The way of the secularist is to buy favor with gifts. They soon discovered, however, that they were dealing with spiritual power, not worldly power.

There is an interesting sidelight to the lesson in verses 6-8 omitted from our text. Be sure to read them as well for the interest they add to the account.

So Naaman drew up at Elisha's house in full array, expecting the prophet to come out and deal with him in a manner befitting his position. But Elisha didn't bother to stir. He simply sent his servant, Gehazi, to instruct Naaman to go wash in the Jordan River seven times for healing.

Naaman was incensed. He felt he was being treated beneath his dignity and besides, "were not the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel?" He turned away in a rage. He failed to understand that it wasn't the waters of Jordan that would bring cleansing, it was the act of obedience that was essential to his healing.

Again the situation was saved by an insignificant person, one of Naaman's servants. He pled with his master to consider the instruction of the prophet. Why not observe this simple command to "wash, and be clean"? he asked.

So Naaman overcame his pride and went down to the Jordan and dipped into its waters. Nothing happened on

the first six dips, but on the seventh “his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” Complete obedience was the key to restoration. Then Naaman returned to thank the prophet and give glory to the God of Israel. Truly there was no god in all the earth like the God of Israel. His acknowledgment showed his humility.

### ***For thought and discussion***

1. Does pride tend to afflict primarily those in high positions? If so, why?
2. What kind of person does it take to wish well those who have caused us harm? Perhaps some discussion on this would be beneficial.
3. Notice the vital role of seemingly insignificant persons in this story: the servant girl and Naaman’s servant. Is one ever too insignificant to be used of God? Think of other Biblical examples.
4. What healed Naaman? How do we experience the fulness of God’s blessing in our lives?
5. Why must pride first be dealt with in order for us to receive God’s blessing? See also Daniel 4:37 and context.

## **FEBRUARY 20, 2005**

### ***Overcoming Uncertainty***

John 3:1-16

One need only examine his own life to understand Nicodemus’ dilemma. We are faced with countless uncertainties. We wonder if a product will live up to its claims, or if a person will be true to the trust we place in him, or if the efforts of our own lives are accomplishing anything of worth for our Lord. But Nicodemus’ uncertainty was on a deeper level—was this man of whom he had heard so much really the Christ, the anointed of God? He set out to find out.

Perhaps Nicodemus came to see

Jesus at night so he could have a private, undisturbed conversation, free from distracting crowds. Perhaps he came secretly because of his position as a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin. But at least he came, and his inquiry was an honest one. He had observed Jesus’ miracles and sought to know more of this “teacher come from God.”

Jesus seized the opportunity to turn Nicodemus away from a strict observance of the Law to an understanding of the true kingdom of God. He told Nicodemus that one must be born again, or be born from above, to be eligible for the kingdom of God. This threw Nicodemus into a quandary. How can a person be reborn when he is old? It posed an impossible situation to Nicodemus’ searching mind.

But Jesus steered Nicodemus from physical thinking to spiritual. This new birth of which He spoke was a spiritual rebirth, with water baptism evidencing the Spirit’s inner work in the life. Jesus went on to describe how one observes such a rebirth. Just as we cannot see the wind, yet the evidence of its effect is plain to see, so, too, the new birth is verified by evidence of a changed, empowered life.

Does Jesus chide Nicodemus a bit when He says that as a teacher of Israel he should understand these things? He goes on to explain that the things whereof He speaks must be understood from a spiritual perspective. He also declares His divinity and oneness with the heavenly Father.

Furthermore, Jesus explained the procedure by which the new birth would become possible. He, the Son of man, would be lifted up on a cross to provide salvation for all who looked to Him in faith. To make Himself clear to Nicodemus, He used as an illustration the experience of the children of Israel and their run-in with the fiery serpents in the wilderness. It was the look of

faith that healed the bitten Israelites. It would be the look of faith toward Jesus that would heal a sin-bitten world.

Then we have that beautiful salvation verse, proclaiming God's love for the world and the salvation He would provide for all mankind through the gift of His Son. Verse 17 emphasizes the reason for Christ's coming—to provide salvation for lost mankind.

Did Nicodemus comprehend and accept Jesus' teaching? In John 7:50 and 51 Nicodemus comes to Jesus' defense before the Pharisees, and in John 19 we find Nicodemus helping Joseph with the burial of Jesus. These would indicate at the least a sympathy with Jesus and an acceptance of His teaching. We would like to believe that, thoughtful man that he was, Nicodemus overcame his uncertainty and fully embraced Jesus as the Christ and experienced the new birth He came to provide.

#### ***For thought and discussion***

1. What is the best thing to do when faced with uncertainty? Think of some things to do to help overcome uncertainty.
2. How do we overcome the natural mindset to speak to a person of spiritual things?
3. Do you understand what it means to be born from above? Can you give testimony to the change this brings to the life?
4. Reflect on the power of illustrations to make a point.
5. Reflect on God's love, His gift, and the quality of life we can experience as a result.

## **FEBRUARY 27, 2005**

### ***Overcoming Prejudice***

John 4:7-10, 19-26

Prejudice is a learned response. It is not something we are born with, but

rather learned through observation, training, and experience. The root of prejudice is really pride—the feeling, or assumption, that due to race, religion, social or financial status, others are of lesser standing or worth than oneself. Prejudice is a divider, as we see so clearly in today's lesson. Let's not overlook that fact as we study this intriguing encounter of Jesus and the woman of Samaria. (Read 4:1-42 for context.)

Jesus, enroute from Judea to Galilee, chose the shorter route of going through Samaria instead of bypassing by crossing the Jordan. Given the animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans, most Jews would rather spend the extra time than go through the homeland of the hated Samaritans. Feelings ran deep. But Jesus was on a mission and He knew there were receptive souls in Samaria.

As Jesus rested from His journey, sitting on Jacob's well, waiting for the disciples to bring back food from the village, a Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus engaged her in conversation by asking a simple request, a drink of water. The woman was astounded that He, a Jew, would even speak to her, a woman and a Samaritan, much less ask her to give Him a drink.

Jesus immediately began to steer the conversation toward spiritual matters. But the woman was at first uncomprehending. She couldn't get her mind off natural water. Patiently, Jesus led her on, gently implying that He had a greater gift than mere water and that He was indeed a person above the ordinary. (Read verses 11-18.)

When Jesus informed the woman He knew of her marital situation, she woke to the fact that He must be a prophet. How else could He have known? Then, either to take the focus off her situation, or perhaps simply revealing her deep soul need, she asked where was the appropriate place to worship.

Jews and Samaritans both looked for

Messiah (v. 25), but they were deeply divided in their worship, the Jews feeling the Samaritans had a corrupted religion because of their mixed race and the establishment of an alternate place of worship. (See 2 Kings 17:24ff.) Here was a man, the woman thought, who could bring light to a perplexing situation.

Again, Jesus took the conversation to a deeper level. It wasn't the place of worship that was all-important, but rather the heart condition. He was also at the same time introducing the new form of worship which would characterize the new covenant relationship between God and those who would come to Him through Messiah's work. It was to be a heart relationship and not an outward expression of ritual and ceremony.

Jesus then revealed Himself fully to the woman as the long-expected Messiah. Her subsequent joy and testimony brought many more Samaritans to faith in Jesus, the Christ. Barriers were coming down, prejudices overcome. Messiah, the Uniter, was at hand.

### ***For thought and discussion***

1. Explore the roots of prejudice. What should be the Christian's response? How can it be overcome? Maybe you'll want to spend some class time discussing this.
2. What can we learn about witnessing from Jesus' approach to the woman in our lesson? Perhaps some discussion would be profitable.
3. Compare the woman's request (v. 15) with James 4:3. Why do we often not receive the things we ask for?
4. Do some study on the Samaritans, how they came to be, their worship, and the source of the deep animosity between them and the Jews.
5. Study the matter of "worship from the heart." What is involved in worship? How is it performed?
6. In this encounter Jesus was not only breaking down barriers, He was proclaiming the universality of the gospel. Be sure to read Acts 1:8 in a new light. Did you see it? ■

## **Ready Bible Answers**

by Geo. R. Brunk I



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# Newslines . . .

by Rebecca Good

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

## The New Gnostics

Luke Timothy Johnson writes in *Commonweal* that trends he sees in today's church resemble the Gnosticism of the second and third centuries. Johnson says these new Gnostics can be found in every Christian congregation (Protestant and Catholic) in the United States. Indeed, they are often the most educated and committed members.

Today's Gnostics buy into a set of perceptions very popular in academia. This thinking is often referred to as historical consciousness. One of the perceptions of historical consciousness is that no people or history can lay claim to any special revelation or story—every culture and people has their own equally special story. The truly enlightened person will reject the notion of exclusive Christianity and embrace a universal view of salvation.

Another of the facets of historical consciousness thinking consists of the thought that every sphere, including religion, is tainted by human self-interest. All transcendent claims are political—a power grab. Thus, to the new Gnostic, the canon of Scripture was elevated to an exclusive position by patriarchal bishops, while the more Spiritual writings of the early church were suppressed in favor of writings that emphasized outward behavior (e.g. *The Da Vinci Code*).

Gnosticism has always been a private, internal experience. Johnson writes, "In a very real sense, Gnosticism was an argument for spirituality over religion." Today,

many Christians across the board view the "spiritual" aspect of their faith as the most important. Even many conservative Christians see their Christianity as being about personal salvation and individual satisfaction more than commitment to the community of believers and participation in the visible kingdom of God. —from *Commonweal*

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## Facts About Our World

6 billion	global population
6,809	known languages
1 billion	illiterate people
400,000,000	people with no Scripture
414	languages possessing complete Bible
1068	languages possessing New Testament
2700	languages with no Scripture who will not be reached in any other language

—from *Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics Newsletter*

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## Christian Woman Dies at Hands of Chinese Government

A Christian lady, Jiang Zongxiu, 34, died in police custody on June 18, 2004, in Guizhou Province in China. On June 17, Jiang and her mother-in-law, Mrs. Tan Dewi, went to the marketplace where they passed out Bibles and gospel tracts. The local Public Security Bureau (PSB) arrested and handcuffed them, then took them to the county detention center. The

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official arrest document issued by the PSB accused Jiang and her mother-in-law of “suspected spreading of rumor and disturbing the social order.” The police document said that they had “seriously disturbed the social order by distributing Christian literature to the masses in the market.” Through that night and the next morning, they were interrogated.

The official newspaper of the Chinese Department of Justice, the *Legal Daily*, later quoted Mrs. Tan Dewei as saying that when she met with Jiang during a recess time on the morning of June 18, Jiang said that she had been “kicked a lot, her shoes were torn off, and her hair was pulled out.” Also on that day, Mrs. Tan Dewei and Jiang were sentenced by the PSB to 15 days of detention. The evening of June 18, Jiang’s village chief told her relative that Jiang was declared dead at 2:00 p.m. that day. The officials said her death resulted from a “sudden disease”; those who knew her said she was a strong, healthy lady. People who saw Jiang’s body at the funeral home said that it was bloody and scarred, and even a policeman said “it is very obvious that she was beaten to death.”

—from *The Voice of the Martyrs*

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Remember the Sabbath Day?**

Before Family Christian Bookstore began opening on Sunday afternoon about a year ago, the business polled its customer base to see how they felt about it. “Eighty percent said they shopped on Sundays, and 89 percent said they would shop in FCB if it were open on Sundays.” A spokeswoman for FCB said they have received “dozens and dozens” of letters and e-mails praising the new hours, and very few complaints. —from *World*

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Gay Rights Movement Attempts to Hijack Civil Rights Movement**

Many African-American Christians are

firm in their stance against gay marriage. They also do not like the way gay-rights activists compare their movement to the civil rights movement of the 60s. Many black pastors see this as a manipulative ploy, masking the debate as an issue of discrimination, rather than what it really is, the licensing of sexual deviancy. “They use that to put Americans on a guilt trip,” said William Owens, a black pastor from Memphis. African-Americans across the spectrum resent the comparison to their past. Jesse Jackson said that “the comparison with slavery is a stretch,” noting that “gays were never called three-fifths human in the Constitution.”

“The civil-rights movement was founded on the Word of God,” says Alveda King, niece of Martin Luther King Jr. “But the gay-rights movement is not founded on the Word of God, nor is it founded in the church.” Many blacks feel that taking up the cause of homosexual marriage would be to betray God’s blessing on them in their past battle against segregation.

At least 64 percent of African-Americans oppose gay marriage. According to an AP report, “Nearly three-quarters of African-American Protestants say that homosexual behavior is sinful.” One of the nation’s largest black denominations, the Church of God in Christ, declared in April that same-sex unions are in “direct violation of the law of God.” The African Methodist Episcopal Church issued a formal statement in July stating that same-sex unions are “contrary to the will of God.”

William Owens has founded the Coalition of African-American pastors, with the goal of defeating gay marriage.

Wellington Boone, a well-known black bishop from Georgia, said he believes the black church is called for “such a time as this.” The black family has already experienced the havoc wrought by slavery and welfare. “The greatest move of God that we are going to see is where the darkness has the most intensity. And which group of people, and families, have experienced the most darkness and been plundered more

than any other? The highest rate of abortion, the highest rate of children conceived out of wedlock . . . that's the African-American people." They know gay marriage will only damage them more.

—from *Citizen Magazine* online

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**Plain People at the Polls**

Bob Alexander, a GOP committeeman in Leacock Township of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, commented that the polls saw "a 100 percent increase in Plain voter turnout." Many of this year's new voters were Amish or Mennonite, according to the estimation of local election officials. The four-horse hitching rail at the polling station was a busy spot throughout election day. Dale High, judge of elections for Leacock Township, said, "The morality issue brought the Amish out." He commented, "They aren't happy about the war, but that is more tolerable than the morality issue. They were more in opposition to Kerry and the issues he stood for."

A 60-year-old Amishman from Lancaster told the AP that the Amish despise abortion: "We're totally against it. And as far as gay issues, that's completely contrary to the Bible." Another Amishman commented to the AP, "I don't agree with war at all. But he [Bush] had to do what he had to do."

President Bush met privately with several dozen Lancaster County Old Order Amish in July, learning about them and explaining his own faith. On election day, 66 percent of the vote in Lancaster County was for him.

—from *World*

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**The Pill of Death**

The abortion pill known as RU-486 has been taken by about 360,000 American women since its approval by the FDA in 2000. The FDA's Dr. Steven Galson said, "We've received 600 reports overall" of adverse effects in

women who have taken the drug. In spite of public concern that RU-486 is dangerous, especially since three women died after taking it, the drug will remain on the market, albeit with a strengthened "black-box" warning on the package, the FDA's strongest safety alert. The label warns of "risks including death from bacterial infections, septic shock, and heavy bleeding." It also warns against taking RU-486 to terminate tubal pregnancies.

—from *The Washington Times*, National Weekly Edition

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**What Is Happening in North Korea?**

On November 17, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported that North Korean leader Kim Jong-il ordered the removal of his portrait from display in public places and homes throughout his nation about one month ago. Yonhap said that Mr. Kim was concerned that he "has been lifted too high." Mr. Kim's portraits have long been a popular wall decoration throughout "the hermit nation"; often, they are displayed beside a picture of his father, Kim Il-sung, who ruled North Korea until his death in 1994.

The Kyodo News Service reported that on November 17, North Korea's official press no longer employed the term "dear leader" when referring to Mr. Kim.

Mr. Yoo Ho-yul, a professor at Korea University said, "Taking down Kim's portraits means there is a shift in the personality cult built around him, or some movement related to the succession of his leadership."

A North Korean woman who defected to South Korea in 2000 said, "Removal of Kim's portraits from homes is something that I cannot even imagine." She went on to tell of a neighbor couple in North Korea, who were punished when, during a family row, they accidentally dropped and broke a framed picture of Mr. Kim.

—from *The Washington Times*, National Weekly Review

# Pro-Life for All of Life

by Andrew Vander Maas

*“Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor. He says, ‘I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms.’ So he makes large windows in it, panels it with cedar and decorates it in red. Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food and drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him. He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?” declares the LORD (Jeremiah 22:13-16).*

There is a devaluing of life occurring in our society. It is evidenced in the news stories that report violence in our neighborhoods, school systems, and churches. The devaluing of life is seen in the policies of the countries around the world that have legalized euthanasia. Even in the United States, Oregon has legalized physician-assisted suicide. Furthermore, that devaluing is seen in the statistic that reports more than forty million abortions have taken place in our country since 1973.

But there are other evidences of violence in our society, some not as noticeable as the ones mentioned above. This evidence comes in the form of the abuse and neglect of children in our country. Right now, more than 500,000 children in the U.S. have been taken out of their homes because the state has deemed it necessary to intervene for their protection. These children need to be considered when thinking of what it means to

stand for the value and sanctity of life. In fact, in some ways, they are at the heart of the battle for life.

Now why would I say neglected children are at the heart of the battle for life? A friend of mine who has served as chief of staff for U.S. Congressman Pete Hoekstra helped me see why this is true. Many policymakers in Washington approach the right-to-life issue as a debate about quality of life rather than a debate about whether life inside a womb is a human. On the whole, science agrees that the life is human. However, many people accept abortion as viable because they question the quality of life the unborn baby will have. They note the abuse and neglect in our society and conclude that at-risk, unborn children would be better off dead than alive.

Now as we consider these sad perspectives, it draws to mind a number of questions to which we as the Church need to respond. If we look to principles given in Jeremiah 22:15, 16 and throughout God’s Word we can begin to find some answers.

## ***Who Are God’s People to Be Concerned About?***

In Jeremiah 22 King Josiah is lifted up as an example because he defended the poor and the needy. Who are the poor and needy? The poor and the needy are referred to again and again in Scripture as the alien, the fatherless, and the widow. God is very concerned to build into the fabric of Israelite society laws to provide a voice and a defense for those who cannot speak for themselves.

God is concerned to defend those who are most susceptible to the abuse of power. Part of the role of the king was to be that defender.

This theme of caring for the alien, the fatherless (or orphan), and the widow is carried on through the prophets and into the New Testament. In Matthew 25 the Lord says to those who come before Him, “Whatever you have done for the least of these, my brothers, you have done for me.”

Who might these people be, these poor and needy in our society? Along with unborn children, the child who has been born into abuse falls into this category in our society. These children are the ones for whom the state often has to step in and intervene and take out of their parents’ homes. These are the ones who the pro-abortion politicians point to and say, “You see that? Do you see those kids? It would have been better if they had never been born. It would have been better if they had been aborted, rather than to come into this type of circumstance.” These are the ones who have ended up, so to speak, on the garbage heaps of our society.

### ***For What Are God’s People Pleading?***

The basic idea behind the Hebrew word translated into English as “to defend” is to plead on behalf of somebody else. For what should we plead? We should plead for justice. Justice is not such an easy thing to define, but briefly put, it is God’s holiness applied to relationships. Let me give you an illustration.

Annie is a child, a fictional character, but she represents the reality of thousands of boys and girls in the United States. Annie’s father is a drunk. When he comes home, he is frequently angry and he lashes out at his whole family and particularly Annie because she’s the oldest. He beats his daughter. At night, when Annie is cleaning and

dressing her wounds, she understands that her father is angry. She feels some guilt because she senses she must have done something to deserve this from her father.

Later on, as her father begins to sober up and remorse begins to set in, he goes in and he seeks to comfort his daughter in a way that no father should ever comfort his daughter—in a way that is detestable to the Lord. This is the story of Annie, a story that properly elicits anger on the part of God’s people. This anger is born out of a desire for justice, a sense of violated holiness, a sense that this is not the way things ought to be.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by this story and countless others. There are at least 500,000 children (Annies) in the protective care of states all over the country waiting for people to take them in. So, how can one person make a difference even in the life of a single child?

One way that people can help these children is by taking them in—either as foster children or as adopted children. This step is not for everyone, but for some individuals and families it is their role in responding. (My wife and I have served as foster parents and adopted two of these foster children.) I know firsthand this is very messy. But God did not call us to have neat, clean odor-free lives. He calls us to get messy. Taking these children into your home, even as foster parents, may give them an opportunity to see something they have never seen. They could see, for the first time, Christ’s love expressed through you. They could see positive parental models. They could receive the physical care they need. And it could be the only time in their lives that they ever darken the door of a church.

There are other ways in which we can get involved in the lives of poor and needy children. Many evangelical ministries throughout our country provide tutoring programs for Christian inter-

vention into family situations before children are taken out of a home.

As you know, the advances in the pro-life position have helped many women see that abortion is not the only option and a poor one at that. (Ed.: As Bibli-cists we believe abortion is murder.) As a result, many women decide to keep their babies, but once they decide not to have an abortion they often do not know where to go. God's people can be of great help to these people by taking in a pregnant mother and helping her until that child is born. We need to work together as churches in order to minister to these women in both word and deed.

Brothers and sisters, it is a part of the call of the Christian to make caring for the poor and the needy part of life. We cannot stand on the sidelines and let others care for those about whom God says He is concerned.

#### ***Why Should God's People Care?***

Why should we do this? Here is the all-important question. If it is simply a matter of earning God's favor, then according to Scripture we are wrongly motivated. Scripture is also gracious in going beyond the simple "because God told us to." The first reason we should care is because we were created to care. God has called us to live this way because helping the poor and the needy is part of being God's image bearers in His creation. It is not about some pie-in-the-sky idealism—this is about God's norms, the things that He has woven into the very fabric of His creation. This is who we were created to be: defenders of the cause of the poor and the needy.

God's heart beats with the cause of the poor and the needy. In fact, in Jeremiah 22:13-16 God says defending the cause of the poor and needy is tantamount to knowing Him. If we miss this theme from the Bible, we have missed a major part of God's revealed Word. As we see God in Scripture we also see that

He created us in His image. As we obey God's call to care for the poor and needy, we reflect the image of God and are faithful to be who God called us to be.

This points us to our second motivation. For in the whole of history, there has only been one person who has been perfectly what God called Him to be. That, of course, was the Lord Jesus Christ. And brothers and sisters, what was His life all about? His life was about defending the cause of the poor and needy. His life was about getting messy for our sakes, for the sakes of orphans who were in need of a family.

Who were those orphans? They were you and I. We were the orphans who were born addicted to sin, not drugs, but to sin. We were those orphans who were abused and violated by the evil that existed all around us. Yet God, in His love, sent His Son. And the Son, in His love, divested Himself of His glory, came down to earth and made a home for us according to His Father's will—and not just a foster home, either. Our Heavenly Father adopted us! As we care for the abused and neglected, we are faithful to the God who demonstrated this same love for us.

We want everybody to know the truth of the Gospel. How do we proclaim the truth? One way we do this is by providing the world with a picture—a picture of what it is like to be adopted into God's family. Brothers and sisters, the fight for life is waging all around us. Let us make sure that we are doing a good job at being pro-life, for life, all the way through life, at every stage of life. Let us show those politicians who would say that the lives of the poor and needy are worthless that they are wrong. In so doing we will be faithful to our humanity. In so doing we will be faithful to a God who loved us and adopted us when we were poor and needy. ■

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# A Fear to Be Desired

by C. H. Spurgeon

***“And shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.” —Hosea 3:5***

## ***A Distinction to Be Observed***

Human language is necessarily imperfect. Since man's fall, and especially since the confusion of tongues at Babel, there has not only been a difference in speech between one nation and another, but also between one individual and another. Probably, we do not all mean exactly the same thing by any one word that we use; there is just a shade of difference between your meaning and mine. The confusion of tongues went much further than we sometimes realize; and so completely did it confuse our language that we do not, on all occasions, mean quite the same thing to ourselves even when we use the same word. Hence, *fear* is a word which has a very wide range of meaning. There is a kind of fear which is to be shunned and avoided, that fear which perfect love casts out, because it hath torment. But there is another sort of fear which has in it the very essence of love, and without which there would be no joy even in the presence of God. Instead of perfect love casting out this fear, perfect love nourishes and cherishes it, and, by communion with it, itself derives strength from it. Between the fear of a slave and the fear of a child, we can all perceive a great distinction. Between the fear of God's great power and justice which the devils have, and that fear which a child of God has when he walks in the light with his God, there is as much difference, surely, as between hell and heaven.

In the verse from which our text is taken, that difference is clearly indicated: “Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord”; so that this fear is connected with seeking the Lord. It is a fear, which draws them

towards God, and makes them search for Him. You know how the fear of the ungodly influences them; it makes them afraid of God, so they say, “Whither shall we flee from his presence?” They would take the wings of the morning if they could, and fly to the uttermost part of the earth, if they had any hope that God could not reach them there; at the last, when this fear will take full possession of them, they will call upon the rocks and the hills to hide them from the face of Him who will then sit upon the throne, whose wrath they will have such cause to dread. The fear of God, as it exists in unrenewed men, is a force which ever drives them further and yet further away from God. They never get any rest of mind until they have ceased to think of Him; if a thought of God should, perchance, steal into their mind, fear at once lays hold upon them again, and that fear urges them to flee from God.

But the fear mentioned in our text draws to God. The man who has this fear in his heart cannot live without seeking God's face, confessing his guilt before Him, and receiving pardon from Him. He seeks God because of this fear. Just as Noah, “moved with fear,” built the ark wherein he and his household were saved, so do these men, “moved with fear,” draw nigh unto God, and seek to find salvation through His love and grace. Always notice this distinction, and observe that the fear which drives anyone away from God is a vice and a sin, but the fear that draws us towards God, as with silken bonds, is a virtue to be cultivated.

This appears even more clearly in the Hebrew, for they who best understand that language tell us that this passage should be read thus, “They shall fear

toward the Lord, and toward his goodness." This fear leans toward the Lord. When thou really knowest God, thou shalt be thrice happy if thou dost run toward Him, falling down before Him, worshiping Him with bowed head yet glad heart, all the while fearing toward Him, and not away from Him. Blessed is the man whose heart is filled with that holy fear which inclines his steps in the way of God's commandments, inclines his heart to seek after God, and inclines his whole soul to enter into fellowship with God, that he may be acquainted with Him, and be at peace. It is also worthy of notice that this fear is connected with the Messiah: "They shall seek the Lord their God, and David their King," who stands here as the type of Jesus the Messiah, the King of Israel; and further on it is said, "They shall fear the Lord and his goodness"; and I should not do wrong if I were to say that Christ is Jehovah's goodness, that, in His blessed person, you have all the goodness, and mercy, and grace of God condensed and concentrated. "In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." So, that fear which is a sign of grace in the heart, that fear which we ought all to seek after, always links itself on to Christ Jesus. If thou fearest God, and knowest not that there is Mediator between God and men, thou wilt never think of approaching Him. God is a consuming fire, then how canst thou draw near to Him apart from Christ? If thou fearest God, and knowest not of Christ's atonement, how canst thou approach Him? Without faith, it is impossible to please God, and without the blood of Jesus there is no way of access to the divine mercy-seat. If thou knowest not Christ, thou wilt never come unto God. Thy fear must link itself with the goodness of God as displayed in the person of His dear Son, or else it cannot be that seeking fear, that fear toward the Lord, of which our text speaks. It will be a fleeing fear, a fear that will drive thee further and yet further away from God, into greater and deeper darkness, into dire destruction,

in fact, into that pit whose bottomless abyss swallows up all hope, all rest, and all joy for ever.

***The Grace Which Is to Be Cultivated:  
"They shall fear the Lord  
and His goodness."***

We will divide the one thought into two; and, first, I will speak about that fear of God, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, a token of grace, a sign of salvation, and a precious treasure to be ever kept in the heart. What is this fear of God? I answer, first, it is a sense of awe of His greatness. Have you never felt this sacred awe stealing insensibly over your spirit, hushing, and calming you, and bowing you down before the Lord? It will come, sometimes, in the consideration of the great works of nature. Gazing upon the vast expanse of waters, looking up to the innumerable stars, examining the wing of an insect, and seeing there the matchless skill of God displayed in the minute; or standing in a thunderstorm, watching, as best you can, the flashes of lightning, and listening to the thunder of Jehovah's voice, have you not often shrunk into yourself, and said, "Great God, how terrible art Thou!" not afraid, but full of delight, like a child who rejoices to see his father's wealth, his father's wisdom, his father's power, happy, and at home, but feeling oh, so little! We are less than nothing, we are all but annihilated in the presence of the great eternal, infinite, invisible All-in-all. Gracious men often come into this state of mind and heart by watching the works of God; so they do when they observe what He does in providence.

Dr. Watts truly sings,

*"Here he exalts neglected worms  
To sceptres and a crown;  
Anon the following page he turns,  
And treads the monarch down."*

The mightiest kings and princes are but as grasshoppers in His sight. "The nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance," that has not weight enough to turn the scale. We

talk about the greatness of mankind; but “all nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.” Again Dr. Watts wisely sings,

*Great God! how infinite art thou!  
What worthless worms are we!*

When we realize this, we are filled with a holy awe as we think of God’s greatness, and the result of that is that we are moved to fall before Him in reverent adoration. We turn to the Word of God, and there we see further proofs of His greatness in all His merciful arrangements for the salvation of sinners, and especially in the matchless redemption wrought out by His well-beloved Son, every part of which is full of the divine glory; and as we gaze upon that glory with exceeding joy, we shrink to nothing before the Eternal, and the result again is lowly adoration. We bow down, and adore and worship the living God, with a joyful, tender fear, which both lays us low, and lifts us very high, for never do we seem to be nearer to heaven’s golden throne than when our spirit gives itself up to worship Him whom it does not see, but in whose realized presence it trembles with sacred delight.

It is the same fear, but looked at from another point of view, which has regard to the holiness of God. What a holy being is the great Jehovah of hosts! There is in Him no fault, no deficiency, no redundancy; He is whole, and therefore holy; there is nothing there but Himself, the wholly perfect God. “Holy! holy! holy! is a fit note for the mysterious living-creatures to sound out before His throne above; for, all along, He has acted according to the principle of unsullied holiness. Though blasphemers have tried, many times, to

*Snatch from His hand the balance and the rod,  
Rejudge His judgments, be the god of God,*

they have always failed, and still He sits in the lonely majesty of His absolute perfection, while they, like brute beasts, crouch far beneath Him, and despise what they

cannot comprehend. But to a believing heart, God is all purity. His light is “as the color of the terrible crystal,” of which Ezekiel writes; His brightness is so great that no man can approach unto it. We are so sinful that, when we get even a glimpse of the divine holiness, we are filled with fear, and we cry, with Job, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” This is a kind of fear which we have need to cultivate, for it leads to repentance, and confession of sin, to aspirations after holiness, and to the utter rejection of all self-complacency and self-conceit. God grant that we may be completely delivered from all those forms of pride and evil!

The fear of God also takes another form, that is, the fear of His Fatherhood, which leads us to reverence Him. When divine grace has given us the new birth, we recognize that we have entered into a fresh relationship towards God; namely, that we have become His sons and daughters. Then we realize that we have received “the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” Now, we cannot truly cry unto God, “Abba, Father,” without at the same time feeling, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” When we recognize that we are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ,” children of the Highest, adopted into the family of the Eternal Himself, we feel at once, as the spirit of childhood works within us, that we both love and fear our great Father in heaven, who has loved us with an everlasting love, and has “begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.”

In this childlike fear, there is not an atom of that fear which signifies being afraid. We, who believe in Jesus, are not afraid of our Father; God forbid that we ever should be. The nearer we can get to

Him, the happier we are. Our highest wish is to be forever with Him, and to be lost in Him; but, still, we pray that we may not grieve Him; we beseech Him to keep us from turning aside from Him; we ask for His tender pity towards our infirmities and plead with Him to forgive us and to deal graciously with us for His dear Son's sake. As loving children, we feel a holy awe and reverence as we realize our relationship to Him who is our Father in heaven, a clear, loving, tender, pitiful Father, yet our Heavenly Father, who "is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him."

This holy fear takes a further form when our fear of God's sovereignty leads us to obey Him as our King; for He, to whom we pray, and in whom we trust, is King of kings, and Lord of lords, and we gladly own His sovereignty. We see Him sitting upon a throne, which is dependent upon no human or angelic power to sustain it. The kings of the earth must ask their fellowmen to march in their ranks in order to sustain their rulers, but our King "sits on no precarious throne, nor borrows leave to be" a king. As the Creator of all things, and all beings, He has a right to the obedience of the entire creature He has made. Again I say that we, who believe in Jesus, are not afraid of God even as our King, for He has made us also to be kings, and priests, and we are to reign with Him, through Jesus Christ, for ever and ever. Yet we tremble before Him lest we should be rebellious against Him in the slightest degree. With a childlike fear, we are afraid lest one revolting thought or one treacherous wish should ever come into our mind or heart to stain our absolute loyalty to Him. Horror takes hold upon us when we hear others deny that "the Lord reigneth"; but even the thought that we should ever do this grieves us exceedingly, and we are filled with that holy fear, which moves us to obey every command of our gracious King so far as we know it to be His command. Having this fear of God before our

eyes, we cry to those who would tempt us to sin, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" It is not because we are afraid of Him, but because we delight in Him, that we fear before Him with an obedient, reverential fear; and, beloved, I do firmly believe that, when this kind of fear of God works itself out to the full, it crystallizes into love. So excellent, so glorious, so altogether everything that could be desired, so far above our highest thought or wish, art thou, O Jehovah, that we lie before Thee, and shrink into nothing; yet, even as we do so, we feel another sensation springing up within us. We feel that we love Thee; and, as we decrease in our own estimation of ourselves, we feel that we love Thee more and more. As we realize our own nothingness, we are more than ever conscious of the greatness of our God. "Thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged," says the Prophet Isaiah, and so it comes to pass with us. The more we fear the Lord, the more we love Him, until this becomes to us the true fear of God, to love Him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. May He bring us to this blessed climax by the effectual working of His Holy Spirit!

Now I want to dwell, with somewhat of emphasis, upon the second part of this fear: "They shall fear the Lord and his goodness." It may at first seem, to some people, a strange thing that we should fear God's goodness; but there are some of us who know exactly what this expression means, for we have often experienced just what it describes. How can we fear God's goodness? I speak what I have often felt, and I believe many of you can do the same as you look back upon the goodness of God to you, saving you from sin, and making you to be His child; and as you think of all His goodness to you in the dispensations of His providence. You may, perhaps, be like Jacob, who left his Father's house with his wallet and his staff; and when he came back with a family that formed two bands, and with abundance of all that he

could desire, he must have been astonished at what God had done for him. And when David sat upon his throne in Jerusalem, surrounded by wealth and splendor, as he recollected how he had fed his flock in the wilderness, and afterwards had been hunted, by Saul, like a partridge upon the mountains, he might well say, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?"

In this way, God's goodness often fills us with amazement, and amazement has in it an element of fear. We are astonished at the Lord's gracious dealings with us, and we say to Him, "Why hast Thou been so good to me, for so many years, and in such multitude of forms? Why hast Thou manifested so much mercy and tenderness toward me? Thou hast treated me as if I had never grieved or offended Thee. Thou hast been as good to me as if I had deserved great blessings at Thy hands. Hast thou paid me wages, like a hired servant, Thou wouldst never have given me such sweetness and such love as Thou hast now lavished upon me, though I was once a prodigal, and wandered far from Thee. O God, Thy love is like the sun; I cannot gaze upon it, its brightness would blind my eyes! I fear, because of Thy goodness." Do you know, dear friends, what this expression means? If a sense of God's goodness comes upon you in all its force, you will feel that God is wonderfully great to have been so good to you. Most of us have had friends who have become tired of us after a while. Possibly, we have had some very kind friends, who are not yet tired of us; but, still, they have failed us every now and then at some points; either their power could not meet our necessity, or they were not willing to do what we needed. But our God has poured out His mercy for us like a river; it has flowed on without a break. These many years He has continued to bless us, and has heaped up His mercies, mountain upon mountain, until it has seemed as though He would reach the very stars with the lofty pinnacles of His love. What shall we say to all this? Shall we not fear Him, and adore

Him, and bless Him for all the goodness that He has made to pass before us; and, all the while, feel that, even to kiss the hem of His garment, or to be beneath His footstool, is too great an honor for us?

Then there will come upon us, when we are truly grateful to God for His goodness toward us, a sense of our own responsibility; and we shall say, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" We shall feel that we cannot render to Him anything compared with what we ought to render; and there will come upon us this fear, that we shall never be able to live at all consistently with the high position which His grace has given to us. As God said concerning His ancient people, we shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that He has procured for us. It will seem as though He had set us on the top of a high mountain, and had bidden us walk along that lofty ridge; it is a ridge of favor and privilege, but it is so elevated that we fear lest our brain should reel, and our feet should slip, because of the height of God's mercy to us. Have you never felt like that, beloved? If God has greatly exalted you with His favor and love, I am sure you must have felt like that many a time.

Then, next, this holy fear is near akin to gratitude. The fear of a man, who really knows the love and goodness of God, will be somewhat of this kind. He will fear lest he should really be, or should seem to be, ungrateful. "What," he asks, "can I do? I am drowned in mercy. It is not as though my ship were sailing in a sea of mercy; I have been so loaded with the favor of the Lord that my vessel has gone right down, and the ocean of God's love and mercy has rolled right over the masthead. What can I do, O Lord? If thou hast given me only a little mercy, I might have done something, in return, to express my gratitude. But, oh! Thy great mercy in redeeming me, in converting me, and in preserving me, and in all the goodness of Thy providence, toward me, what can I do in return for all these favors? I feel struck dumb; and I am

afraid lest I should have a dumb heart as well as a dumb tongue; I fear lest I should grieve Thee by anything that looks like ingratitude.”

Then the child of God begins, next, to fear lest he should become proud; “for,” says he, “I have noticed that, when God thus favors some men, they begin to exalt themselves, and to think that they are persons of great importance; so, if the Lord makes the stream of my life flow very joyously, I may imagine that it is because there is some good thing in me, and be foolish enough to begin to ascribe the glory of it to myself.” A true saint often trembles concerning this matter; he sometimes gets even afraid of His mercies. He knows that his trials and troubles never did him any hurt; but he perceives that, sometimes, God’s goodness has intoxicated him as with sweet wine, so he begins to be almost afraid of the goodness of his God to him. He thinks to himself, “Shall I be unworthy of all this favor, and walk in a way that is inconsistent with it?” He looks a little ahead, and he knows that the flesh is frail, and that good men have often been found in very slippery places, and he says, “What if, after all this, I should be a backslider? Thou, O Lord, hast brought me into the banqueting house, and Thy banner over me is love; Thou hast stayed me with flagons, and comforted me with apples; Thou hast laid bare Thy very heart to me, and made me know that I am a man greatly beloved! Shall I, after all this, ever turn aside from Thee? Will the ungodly ever point at me, and say, Aha! Aha! Is this the man after God’s own heart? Is this the disciple who said he would die rather than deny his Master?” Such a fear as that very properly comes over us at times, and then we tremble because of all the goodness which God has made to pass before us.

I think you can see, dear friends, without my needing to enlarge further upon this point, that, while a time of sorrow and suffering is often, to the Christian, a time of confidence in his God; on the other hand, a time of prosperity is, to the wise

man, a time of holy fear. Not that he is ungrateful, but he is afraid that he may be. Not that he is proud; he is truly humble because he is afraid lest he should become proud. Not that he loves the things of the world, but he is afraid lest his heart should get away from God, so he fears because of all the Lord’s goodness to him. May the Lord always keep us in that state of fear for it is a healthy condition for us to be in. Those who walk so very proudly, and with too great confidence, are generally the ones who first tumble down. My observation and experience have taught me this: when I have met with anyone who knew that he was a very good man, and who boasted to other people that he was a very good man, he has generally proved to be like some of those pears that we sometimes see in the shop, very handsome to look at, but sleepy and rotten all through. Then, on the other hand, I have noticed a great many other people, who have always been afraid that they would go wrong, and who have trembled and feared at almost every step they took. They have feared lest they should grieve the Lord, and they have cried unto Him, day and night, “Lord, uphold us”; and He has done so, and they have been enabled to keep their garments unspotted to their life’s end. So, my prayer is, that I may never cease to feel this holy fear before God, and that I may never get to fancy, for a moment, that there is, or ever can be, anything in me to cause me to boast or to glory in myself. May God save all of us from that evil; and the more we receive of His goodness, the more may we fear, with childlike fear, in His presence! ■

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Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) Influential Baptist minister in England. History’s most widely read preacher (apart from those found in Scripture). Today, there is available more material written by Spurgeon than by any other Christian author, living or dead. Born at Kelvedon, Essex.

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# Open Idolatry

by Joost F. Nixon

“Little children, guard yourselves from idols” —1 John 5:21.

For several years now the Open theism paradigm was a matter discussed by “professional theologians and philosophers” in the byways and back alleys of technical theological journals.<sup>1</sup> Confined largely as it was to academic circles, where denials of historic doctrines are marks of cutting-edge scholarship, Open theism did little damage to the church at large. But in their magnanimity, the Openness fellows have decided to share their little secret with common folk. Now admittedly, this is a boon if these men are making a true correction to Christian theology gone astray for two millennia.<sup>2</sup> But if, as we suspect, this is stale heresy warmed over and garnished with postmodernism, then thank you very much, but pass the meat and potatoes.

The contributors to this volume assert that Openness theology is not only ugly and erroneous, but it is also evil. And here inevitably someone will cry *foul*. “Here we were having a peaceable *dialogue*, *wrestling* with difficult issues, *exploring* a new paradigm regarding the nature of God, and these churls start getting nasty.” Appeals are made for us to “love one another in the midst of our disagreements,” because this is just a “debate about the nature of the future.”<sup>3</sup> And “compared to our common faith in the person of Jesus Christ and the importance of loving unity in Him, this issue and other theological issues are peripheral.”<sup>4</sup> But while agreeing that we ought to love one another, we certainly disagree about the importance of the debate. The debate is not merely about the nature of the future, but about *the very nature of God and the gospel*.<sup>5</sup> And when the stakes are so high, what precisely does love require? Love requires that unfashionable words

like “anathema,” “heresy,” and “sin” be employed where appropriate. Admittedly, in our day where lack of toleration is the only thing really intolerable, we are at a decided rhetorical disadvantage when we resort to such plain speaking. But we trust the reader will understand that love, and not a nasty disposition, compels language that will surely be read as unloving by our insipid generation.

Other sections of this work have been devoted to demonstrating that Open Theism doctrine is ugly and unbiblical. But there are also *moral* implications in advancing false doctrine, especially doctrine as pernicious as Open Theism, that beg to be expounded. Thomas Ascol and Steve Schlissel have addressed the pastoral and cultural ramifications of Open Theism doctrine in their contributions to this work. And I hope to add to their witness by focusing on a single but, I think, very significant point: Open theism breaches the third commandment by imputing to the living God characteristics the Bible uses to identify idols.

## *Idols of the Heart*

Though Open Theism has soteriological ramifications that are truly scary,<sup>6</sup> its main assault is against the very person of God. Recognizing that attributes of transcendence like God’s immutability and omniscience are two centuries out of *vogue*, advocates of Open theism have whipped out their theological scissors to fix the apparent problem. Tragically, in their attempts to make God relevant, they have robbed Him of His majesty. And in robbing God of His majesty they have left man bankrupt and without hope. This is the net effect whenever anyone depreciates God. Idols, whether

crafted in foundries of iron or the ivory towers of academia, always have a devastating effect on those who worship them. In the words of the psalmist, “Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them”<sup>7</sup> (Ps. 115:8). And what are idols, that idolaters will become like them? As we shall examine more fully later, they are vain, worthless, and insignificant. It is no wonder, then, that God prohibits idolatry in the second commandment:

You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commandments (Exodus 20:4-6).

Idolatry has massive cultural ramifications. We learn to sin like our fathers, and it usually takes multiple generations to *unlearn* it—once we discover our error. While we’re doing so, covenantal sanctions and judgments are operating against us. The advocates of Open theism are not unknown fellows, and their influence in evangelicalism should not be underestimated. If their theology wins the day, generations of Christians will fall into idolatry.

The second commandment primarily addresses idols of wood, stone, and metal. But children of Western culture are far too sophisticated to bow down to glorified kewpie dolls. And as a subset of Western culture, professional theologians are no exception—after all, what would they say to their tenure committee? No—for moderns a much safer, more respectable form of idolatry is the mental variety.<sup>8</sup> But just because modern idolaters do not erect Asherah poles in their backyards does not mean that they are exempt from God’s censure. God informs Ezekiel:

Son of man, these men<sup>9</sup> *have set up idols in their hearts*, and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all? (Ezekiel 14:3).<sup>10</sup>

Idols of the heart can take a number of different forms. But for our purposes, we want to zero in on the type of heart idolatry that worships a *false* god under the name of the *true* God, Yahweh. This kind of idolatry flies in the face of the third commandment by attributing to the true God the vanity of idols. It is an attack on the reputation of the living God.<sup>11</sup> And this is the idolatry that Openness theologians commit.

### ***What’s in a Name?***

Of all the ten *words* given in fire and smoke on Mount Sinai, perhaps the least understood is the third. Few verses have been so rich, and yet understood so superficially by Christians:

You shall not take the name of [Yahweh] your God in vain, for [Yahweh] will not leave him unpunished who takes his name in vain (Exodus 20:7).<sup>12</sup>

The context is particularly important here. The ten commandments were given on Sinai and the people “did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to [them] at Horeb out of the midst of the fire” (Deut. 4:15). The second commandment addresses this, forbidding men to represent God by any form or image. Instead, God—who is spirit—is represented by something nonmaterial, *viz.*, His *name*.<sup>13</sup> And thus we have the *third* commandment, which ensures that the *lawful* representation of God (His name/reputation) is not to be degraded.

What’s in a name? Plenty—especially to the biblical writers. God’s name is a metonym for His person.<sup>14</sup> It is a word-symbol that denotes the person of God. In Messiah’s High Priestly prayer, He prays, “I have manifested thy *name* unto the men which thou gavest me . . .” (John 17:6). Jesus did not mean that He had a fancy for pronouncing God’s name all the

time. Rather He meant that He was demonstrating in the flesh the person and character of God while walking the earth.<sup>15</sup> Another example is Psalm 20:1, which reads, “[Yahweh] hear thee in the day of trouble; the *name* of the God of Jacob defend thee.” Here again, God Himself is the One being invoked for protection, *as represented by His name*. But metonyms and symbols are not unfamiliar to us, which is why we get angry when someone burns the flag or spits on a picture of our mother.

But God’s name is more than just a metonym of His person. God’s name reveals aspects of His character, and therefore an assault on God’s character is an assault on His name. The LORD intended to reveal previously unknown aspects of His character through His name, Yahweh:

God spoke further to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty [El Shaddai], but by my name, LORD [Yahweh], I did not make myself known to them” (Exodus 6:2-3).

A superficial look at this text might first suggest that the name “Yahweh” was not known until Moses’ day. Yet the name appears in Scripture *prior* to Moses’ encounter with God at the burning bush (as early as Genesis 2:4), and men began to call upon it in the days of Enosh (Gen. 4:26). So though the name was employed prior to Exodus 6, God had not yet revealed the meaning He intended to convey by it. J. A. Motyer offers the following interpretive translation of Exodus 6:2-3:

And God spoke to Moses, and said to him, “I am Yahweh. And I showed myself to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob in the character of El Shaddai, but in the character expressed by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them. . . .”<sup>16</sup>

The name *Yahweh*, then, was to convey—in a way that a physical image could not—the character of God. As it stood at the beginning of Exodus, the name was

like an empty canvas. But from the events of the Exodus on, God would be filling the canvas with a picture of His character, demonstrating to the people what it meant to be *Yahweh*. In fact, when Moses cried out to God to reveal His glory (Exodus 33:18, 19), God answered by *proclaiming His name*, along with a divine exposition of it:

And [Yahweh] passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “[Yahweh], [Yahweh Elohim], compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet he will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations” (Exodus 34:6, 7).

God’s name is replete with significance. He is the God of glory, Who shows mercy and lovingkindness to His covenant people, and exercises justice (Exodus 34:6, 7). He is a warrior Who destroys His enemies (Exodus 15:3-7). He is a redeemer Who decisively rescues His people from captivity (Exodus 20:2). And this is just dipping our toes into Exodus. God progressively reveals more about His nature throughout the Old Testament and into the New, so that the perfections of God are manifest. These perfections, as understood by the historically orthodox for thousands of years, stand in stark contrast to the worthlessness and impotence of idols. This vision of God that the Bible gives us balances the immanence and transcendence of God in a way that idolatrous views of God cannot. In contrast to the notions of Deists, God is involved in His creation. He is omnipresent and through providence cares for all His hands have made. He is a Person, and thus He is relational, and not, as Pinnock caricatures, “an unblinking cosmic stare.”<sup>17</sup> But in contrast to pantheism and process theology, God is also transcendent above and distinct from

His creation (Rom. 1:23). It is this element—this transcendent element to God’s perfections—that grosses modern egalitarians out.

### ***Making God Over***

All the inhabitants of earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, “What hast Thou done?” (Dan. 4:35).

Moderns read this verse, and verses like it, with curled lip and darkened brow. After their initial alarm at the divine hubris, they would be quick to sign God up for some sensitivity training. After all, who does God think He is, anyway? Surely God doesn’t want to imply He is somehow *better* than we are? Does He? Huh? And what’s with God’s authoritarian leadership paradigm? That’s very *eighties*, you know. Doesn’t God know that group decisions are vastly superior to this fascist top-down model?

Admittedly, Openness theists have a point. Taking Him at face value, God is neither heeding the recent management literature, nor being particularly sensitive to twenty-first century cultural norms.<sup>18</sup> The transcendent God of the Bible is terminally unhip. No *wonder* our tent revivals are so poorly attended. But never fear! Though the Openness fellows are somewhat embarrassed by God’s retro leadership-style, being the loving, condescending fellows that they are, they’re willing to help Him out of the jam with a little Clintonesque image consulting. A little clipping of the omnipotence here, a spin on those pesky foreordination passages there, and He’s well on His way to becoming a more relevant, likeable deity. But no makeover is complete without updating the duds. The robes of divine majesty must be exchanged for the bell bottoms of mutability. There—that’s better. Now God looks a lot more (*contented sigh*) . . . like us.

The problem with the Openness makeover is exactly this—their god looks too much like us, and too much like the picture the Bible paints of idols. God’s name—His holy character—have been reworked in such a way as to divest Him of His deity. But because God is not represented by molten images but by His name; because He is a spirit and His attributes cannot be seen with the naked eye, it is vitally important that He is represented with words accurately so His glory is upheld among the people and they do not sink into idolatry of the mind. And this brings us back to the third commandment:

You shall not take the name of [Yahweh] your God in vain, for [Yahweh] will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain (Exodus 20:7).

In the third commandment, Yahweh specifically prohibits *vanity* being attributed to His person. The Hebrew word, *shāw’*, means “emptiness, nothingness, vanity” whether referring to speech or conduct.<sup>19</sup> The same word is employed for a Hebrew vowel (*shewa*) that is so short and insignificant as sometimes to be unpronounceable. Thus, the word “designates anything that is unsubstantial, unreal, worthless, either materially or morally. Hence, it is a word for idols.”<sup>20</sup> As we examine its usage in Scripture, we see that sometimes the word denotes *men and idols who are unworthy of trust*. An example is found in Jeremiah 18:15:

For My people have forgotten Me,  
They burn incense to worthless [vain] gods  
And they have stumbled from their ways,  
From the ancient paths,  
To walk in bypaths,  
Not on a highway (Jer. 18:15).

Rather than walk in the ancient paths, the children of Israel have forgotten God and pursued impotent idols<sup>21</sup>—inanimate blocks of wood that cannot help those who pray to them (cf. Ps. 115:1-8). What a contrast they are to the living God, whose arm is not so short that it cannot save!

Another occurrence is found in Psalm 60:10, 11:

Hast not Thou Thyself, O God, rejected us?  
And wilt Thou not go forth with our  
armies, O God?  
O give us help against the adversary,  
For deliverance by man is in vain.  
Through God we shall do valiantly,  
And it is He who will tread down our  
adversaries.

*Vanity* is a word used to describe men and idols who are worthless and impotent. They cannot save. But the concept is wholly inappropriate to use regarding the living God. And while Open theists never employ the actual word *vain* to describe God, they do employ the *concept* by limiting God's ability to accomplish His purposes.

Open theists would affirm that sometimes God's will is thwarted.<sup>22</sup> Or rather, God can accomplish His will, but in some instances only *if other free agents cooperate*.<sup>23</sup> This applies to prayer. Sanders writes, "Our failure to practice impetratory prayer means that *certain things that God wishes to do for us may not be possible*<sup>24</sup> *because we do not ask*. In the words of Peter Baelz, 'Our asking in faith may make it possible for God to do something which *He could not have done without our asking*.'"<sup>25</sup> God's beneficent intentions are constricted by man's prayer? Men *empowering* God? Mercy! Perhaps Sanders would rewrite Psalm 127:1 to read:

Unless the laborers cooperate,  
The LORD builds the house in vain.

Sanders also applies his theology to the incarnation, "God places His trust in [Mary and Joseph] giving His consent to the risks involved. The incarnation does not come about through sheer overwhelming power but through the vulnerability of *being genuinely dependent on some Jewish peasants*."<sup>26</sup> It is astonishing to me that instead of men placing their trust in God to fulfill His promises, we have God placing His trust in men! More-

over, it is ironic that the *psalmist* is wise enough to know that deliverance from man is vain (Ps. 60:11), but according to the Open theists, *God is not*. And if God's assistance is dependent upon the assistance of millions of free agents with bad attitudes—assistance the Scriptures tell us is vain or unreliable—then what does that tell us about God? It tells us His omnipotent arm has been amputated below the elbow. Or perhaps a more tenable explanation is that Open theists are engaging in idolatry and attributing to God behavior that He Himself rebukes as accursed:

Thus says [Yahweh]:  
Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind  
And makes flesh his strength  
And whose heart turns away from [Yahweh] (Jer. 17:5).

Here *Yahweh* is the proper locus of faith and dependence, and man even at his best is a bad bet. The Open Theism assertion that God is unable to accomplish elements of His plan demeans God's majesty and puts the Most High on the same level as a bronze Buddha.

But Open theists do not only question God's ability to work "*all things* after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11),<sup>27</sup> they also call into question God's omniscience as it regards the future. As others<sup>28</sup> have so amply pointed out, God's very *Godness* is connected with His foreknowledge. In fact, God identifies an inability to tell the future to be a mark of idols:

"Present your case," [Yahweh] says.  
"Bring forward your strong arguments,"  
The King of Jacob says.  
Let them bring forth and declare to us  
what is going to take place;  
As for the former events, declare what they  
were,  
That we may consider them and know  
their outcome;  
Or announce to us what is coming.  
Declare the things that are going to come  
afterward,  
That we may know that you are gods.  
—Isaiah 41:21-23a

God considered the failure of idols to predict future events to be damning evidence that they were frauds. An ability to predict the future (indeed, to decree it), is part of the *Godness* of God. In another context where He is comparing His incomparable glory with the vanity of idols, Yahweh says:

I am [Yahweh], that is My Name;  
I will not give My glory to another,  
Nor My praise to graven images.  
Behold, the former things have come to  
pass,  
Now I declare new things;  
Before they spring forth I proclaim them  
to you. —Isaiah 42:8, 9

God wants no confusion between real deity and impotent idols. His glory, as represented by His name, will not be given to idols. In contrast to them, Yahweh does something they cannot—He “declares new things before they spring forth.” But notice, now, how Open theists “give His glory to another.” They have taken His holy name and assigned it to a deity who does not know, and thus cannot declare, the future. For example, events as significant as the fall were “totally unexpected”;<sup>29</sup> and even the cross was unplanned.<sup>30</sup> Sanders knows he is making a radical statement: “The notion that the cross was not planned will seem scandalous to some readers.”<sup>31</sup> In this much, Sanders scores full marks; such an assertion *is* scandalous. And it is scandalous because it is a direct assault on the deity of Christ.

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus told His disciples that “from now on I am telling You before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am” (John 13:19). John Piper explains the import of this statement, “With the words *I am*’ Jesus lays claim on deity in words that God uses of Himself in texts like Isaiah 43:10 (‘You are my witnesses, declares the LORD, “And My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am” ’). And the warrant for believ-

ing that He is divine, he says, is that He is telling the disciples what is going to befall Him before it comes to pass.”<sup>32</sup>

The gospels are so explicit in demonstrating that Christ foreknew what was to befall Him that Sanders has to go to extraordinary lengths to explain that really He *didn’t* know. One example is his excruciating treatment of Judas’ betrayal. Judas is not really betraying Jesus, but rather arranging a private meeting between Jesus and the High Priest so they could “resolve their differences and bring about needed reforms.”<sup>33</sup> It’s curious that such a friendly chat would occur at the pointy end of a sword (John 18:3)—but let’s not be hindered by *trifles*. Sanders concludes that “it is clear that Judas is not betraying Jesus and that Jesus is not issuing any prediction of such activity.”<sup>34</sup> Clear? Clear as mud.

Let’s return to our point. Foreknowledge of future events is a mark of deity, and the absence of that ability an attribute of vain idols. Omnipotence is a perfection of God, and impotency a characteristic of idols. Open theists deny Yahweh the former qualities,<sup>35</sup> and attribute to Him the latter, thus worshiping a false god under the name of the true. This, I have been asserting, is exactly what is prohibited by the third commandment.

### *Jealous for His Name*

All sins are not created equal. There *are* such things as degrees of culpability and judgment. Jesus tells us, for instance, that Chorazin and Bethsaida will have it worse on the day of judgment than Sodom, for the Sodomites would have repented had they seen the miracles Christ performed (Matt. 11:21).

Some transgressions, because of their personal nature, affect fewer people than do other, more public sins, and we can reason they will receive a proportionally lesser judgment. And while *all* sins are ultimately committed against God, some sins are more personally directed against Him than others. These too, because of

the exalted status of their Object, will incur a greater judgment. And of course some sins fall into both categories. They are public assaults on the person of God that have enormous societal consequences. Idolatry, which has always been a snare, is one of these sins. And idolatry that misrepresents the very nature of Yahweh to His people is perhaps the most subtle and devastating form of public sin. Such sin is that of Jeroboam, who redefined Yahweh and whose “sin caused Israel to sin.”<sup>36</sup>

God takes such sin very seriously and promises to reward the transgressor accordingly. Considering all that it conveys, Yahweh is jealous for His name and will not allow it to be profaned, or treated as common (cf. Ezek. 20:9, 14, 22, 44). God will Himself assert His distinctness and transcendence—without depreciating His immanence—against those who blur the lines. This is seen in the last clause of Exodus 20:7, “for [Yahweh] will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.” If God’s word is true, I think we can expect to see God judge this heresy with a firm hand. We hope, for mercy’s sake, that He does so soon. ■

#### ENDNOTES

1. Clark Pinnock et al, *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 9.
2. *Ibid.*, 59-60. See Peter Leithart’s chapter in the present work for a refutation of this.
3. Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 19-20.
4. *Ibid.*, 20.
5. Besides its errant doctrine of God, Openness theology has ramifications on biblical soteriology and anthropology—for starters. See Clark Pinnock’s interview with *Modern Reformation*, Nov./Dec. 1998.
6. See John MacArthur’s contribution to this volume.
7. All Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the New American Standard Bible (La Habra: The Lockman Foundation, 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977).
8. Unfortunately, Open Theism proponents are not the only ones prone to this sin. Most Christians are in constant need to correct and refine their view of God. See “Why We Must Think Rightly About God” in A. W. Tozer’s *The Knowledge of the Holy* (Lincoln: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1961). But orthodox Christians commit this sin intermittently, whereas Openness theologians do so consciously.

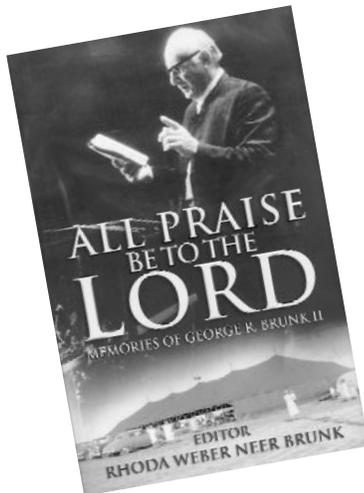
9. The elders of Israel who had come to consult Yahweh through Ezekiel, after setting up idols of the heart.
10. Emphasis mine.
11. “The evidence points to the fact that taking the Lord’s name (i.e., His reputation) ‘in vain’ will surely cover profanity, as it is understood today, or swearing falsely in the Lord’s name. But it will also include using the Lord’s name lightly, unthinkingly, or by rote.” “*Shāw,*” by Victor P. Hamilton, in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2., R. Laird Harris et al, eds. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 908.
12. Since the Achaemenid period, the covenant name of God, “Yahweh,” has been rendered (and pronounced) “Lord” (Adonai) out of reverence for His name. I think this in itself is a misapplication of the third commandment. The commandment does not prohibit *use* of the tetragrammaton, so much as the abuse of it. As a result, I usually render the divine name in brackets throughout this chapter. See J. A. Motyer, “Name,” in *The New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd Ed., J. D. Douglas et al, ed. (Wheaton: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 813.
13. “God’s name takes the role of the cultic symbols such as the ark or a cult statue having ‘a constant and almost material presence . . . at the shrine.’” B. F. Huffmon, “Name,” in *The Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd edition, Karel van der Toorn, et al, ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 612.
14. Metonymy is “the use of the name of one thing for that of another associated with or suggested by it (e.g., ‘the White House has decided’ for ‘the President has decided’).” *Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 1134.
15. “Jesus recalls that He has revealed God to the disciples. The ‘name’ stands for the whole person (see John 1:12). To manifest the name of God then is to reveal the essential nature of God to men.” Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, in *NICNT*, F.F. Bruce, ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 723.
16. J. A. Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name* (Leicester: Theological Students Fellowship, 1959), 12-13. See also Charles R. Gianotti, “The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH,” in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 142, Jan. 1985, 38-39.
17. Inside cover blurb to Sanders, *The God Who Risks* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998).
18. Clark Pinnock tells us that “I also do theology contextually, recognizing that *theology will reflect the culture in which it emerges*” (my emphasis). Clark Pinnock, “A Pilgrim on the Way,” in *Christianity Today*, February 9, 1998. Open Theism reflects nothing if not postmodern cultural prejudices.
19. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 996.
20. Hamilton, *Wordbook*, 908.
21. Perhaps the irony of the situation will not escape the reader. The Openness theologians reject, at the minimum, the ancient paths of the last 2000 years of Christian theology and exegesis, to follow after a god they openly admit cannot accomplish at least some of His purposes. And they call this god “Yahweh.” Some things never change.

22. "[God's plans] are not ironclad decrees that fix the course of events and preclude all possible variations. For God to will something, therefore, does not make its occurrence inevitable. Factors can arise that hinder or prevent its realization." Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 26.
23. "[Jesus accepting the suffering God assigned to Him] supports the conclusion that the fulfillment of God's plans for humanity generally requires the cooperation of human agents." *Ibid.*, 44.
24. The incredulity is mine.
25. Sanders, *Risks*, 273. I've added the italics.
26. Sanders, *Risks*, 93. My emphasis.
27. Again, the emphasis is mine. Search in vain for a cogent Open Theism interpretation of this verse. You won't find one in Boyd (2000), Pinnock et al (1994), or Sanders (1998).
28. See Jonathan Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will*, ed. by Paul Ramsey, in: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale, 1957), 239-269; John Piper, "Why the God of Glory is at Stake in the 'Foreknowledge' Debate," in *Modern Reformation*, Sept./Oct. 1999, 39-43; and Stephen N. Williams, "What God Doesn't Know," in CT's sister publication *Books and Culture*, Nov./Dec., 1999.
29. Sanders, *Risks*, 46.
30. *Ibid.*, 101.
31. *Ibid.* He then makes an unconvincing effort to explain away Psalm 22:16; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20; and Revelation 13:8 and 17:8.
32. Piper, "God of Glory," 41. See his fuller discussion of the foreknowledge of Christ concerning His passion.
33. Sanders, *Risks*, 99.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Proponents of Open Theism might quibble that they really *do* believe God is omnipotent (Really guys! *Honest!*). But their explanation that God willingly allows His holy will to be thwarted by creatures is, practically speaking, a denial of omnipotence.
36. The references to Jeroboam, and this phrase employed to describe him, occur too many times to list. Let the reader look at Kings and Chronicles to see the infamy of the man and the cultural effects of his sin.

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# The Sunday School Lesson

*How to get the most out of your study*

by David L. Burkholder

Whether student or teacher you have no doubt approached the study of the Sunday school lesson with questions: Where do I begin? What do I want out of this lesson? What is the best approach to present it to the class? What is the main teaching of the passage for today? What is its application to life? How can I best engage my class? And so forth. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to lesson preparation, there are certain principles which do apply to all.

The first step is to read the text carefully to determine the message of the passage under study. You may need to do several readings, maybe in several different versions, to get a clear understanding of the passage. The next step will be to determine the specific teaching of the passage under consideration. What did it say to the original readers? What is it saying to today's reader? That step will be enhanced by finding a key verse, or phrase, that sums up the message of the passage. Jot down the theme and keep it in mind as you continue your study.

Having determined the theme of the passage you will want to see how it relates to any overall theme for the month or quarter, or perhaps year. Each lesson in a series should be a cohesive part of the whole. Make sure your study of individual lessons fits the overall theme. That way each lesson can build on past lessons and lay groundwork for future lessons in the series. Rarely do lessons stand alone; more often they are interrelated either by theme or scriptural text. Study them that way for best comprehension and best overall learning experience.

Early in your study you should begin jotting down ideas or questions to raise in class, either as participant or teacher. Well-thought-out questions stimulate good

class discussion and help to get everyone involved. There is an art to asking substantive questions which make the class think. Develop that art and your class discussions and conclusions will be more meaningful and practical. Make sure your questions enhance the understanding of the text under consideration. It's too easy to go off on tangents and entirely lose the thought of the lesson.

Although commentaries should not be one's first recourse, they can provide helpful insight to understanding the passage under study. A good workman will want to "rightly divide" the Scripture. The comments and understandings of trustworthy scholars can enhance your study. Be sure to compare. Not all scholars are in agreement when it comes to interpretation and application. Choose those who are in basic agreement with your understanding of the passage. Shun any novel ideas or interpretations. There is safety and spiritual security in accepting long-standing interpretations of Scripture.

As you study, look for current applications of the Scripture. Your goal should be more than just achieving a good understanding of the particular passage. You should also look for a very practical, present-day application to life. Really, that should be the goal of all Bible study, to determine what God is saying to me today through His written Word.

If you are studying to teach, you should develop an outline or lesson plan for presenting the lesson to your class. That way you will be certain to give attention to all aspects of the lesson and be sure not to miss important elements. Basically, your outline should include a brief introduction to the lesson, with perhaps a bit of review of the previous lesson or lessons. The body

of the lesson comes next, and then a brief summary at the close of the class period. Application can be worked in along with the discussion on the text, or at the end as you summarize the lesson and its meaning for today.

Keep in mind that the primary purpose of the Sunday school is to enhance knowledge of the Scripture through discussion and interchange between teacher and class. Therefore, whether teacher or class member, each has responsibility to study and prepare in advance in order to move the process toward fulfillment. Careful preparation will also ensure that the class period does not end up as a lecture or mini-sermon by the teacher. The best learning takes place when there is open discussion and sharing of ideas and insights.

There are at least two levels of study a person can pursue—superficial and deep. In superficial study one may read the text several times and perhaps a commentary or two and stop, thinking he has a grip on the lesson. A person doing deep study will, of course, go deeper. He will look at word meanings, maybe isolate several sub-themes, and read adequate context to ascertain how the lesson fits into the larger scope of surrounding Scripture.

While superficial study is certainly better than no study, it should be clear that it will not yield the depth of understanding achieved by a more thorough exploration of the text. The serious Christian will certainly see the value in applying himself to a deep and thorough study of the life-giving Word of God. One writer on Bible study methods said: “The Bible does not yield its treasures to indolence.” Hard study is a necessary aspect of unlocking the treasures of Scripture and will reward the diligent seeker with deeper, fuller understanding.

We have been focusing on the human element in the Sunday school learning process. We do not want to minimize the role of prayer and Holy Spirit direction. Lesson preparation should begin with prayer, seeking divine guidance for under-

standing and application of the lesson to life. And where better to turn for enlightenment than to the Holy Spirit who inspired the original writers of Scripture? His help is essential to the process and His help should be engaged early.

Another key to effective lesson preparation is to begin early. I have often been challenged as I reflect back on a Sunday school teacher I had in my teen years. I remember him saying that he began lesson preparation Monday morning. He had the class of teenage boys at heart and he felt he needed adequate preparation to hold our attention and get through to us with the principles of the Word of God. By starting early in the week, the ideas, principles, and message of the lesson has time to percolate through our thinking and more firmly fix its purpose and meaning in our minds as we meditate and study throughout the week.

There are times when, for various reasons, less than adequate time is available for preparation. It has been my experience that at such times the Holy Spirit has blessed with special understanding and enlightenment. But it is a dangerous thing to neglect study when time could be available but is misused. The Holy Spirit does not reward negligence. The measure of our effectiveness as teachers will be a direct result of the seriousness and diligence with which we approach our task.

The Sunday school class period should not be looked upon as a time filler, but rather as an excellent learning opportunity and a vital part of the overall program of the Church. One goal of the Christian life is to know God’s Word so we can better discern His will, and make application of the principles of the Scripture to life. The Sunday school period gives valuable opportunity to achieve this goal. But only if and when everyone commits himself/herself to diligent study, preparation, and involvement.

Let’s set a goal for the revitalization of our Sunday schools. And let the process begin right here and now, before next Sunday. Are you ready? And willing? ■

# What Is Postmillennialism?

by Thomas Ice

Postmillennialism is the belief that Christ will return after the Millennium. Thus, the name *post* (after) millennial (1000). All postmillennialists believe that the current age is the kingdom, while some believe that the millennial phase of the kingdom is present and others hold that it is yet future when the world has been Christianized. Postmillennialists also believe the Church is the agent through which this return to Eden will be mediated by Christ the King from heaven.

Most postmillennialists have stressed the preaching of the Gospel, resulting in a conversion of most of mankind as the means for Christianization. However, the more recent Reconstructionist version adds to evangelism obedience and faithfulness to biblical law as a condition for victory. Some postmillennialists believe that the conversion of the world will be a very slow and gradual process, taking perhaps thousands of years more. Others believe that conversion could happen within a short time (about 10 years) as the result of a great revival. Systematic postmillennialism was the last of the three major eschatologies to develop. It was first taught within the Church in the 17th century.

## *Postmillennial Self-Definition*

Contemporary reconstructionist, post-millennialist Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., offers the following seven characteristics of evangelical postmillennialism:

1. Postmillennialism “understands the Messianic kingdom to have been founded upon the earth during the earthly ministry and through the redemptive labors of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . the Church becomes the transformed Israel.”
2. “The fundamental nature of that kingdom is essentially redemptive and spiritual . . . Christ rules His kingdom spiritually in and through His people in the world (representation), as well as by His universal providence.”
3. Christ’s “kingdom will exercise a transformational sociocultural influence in history. This will occur as more and more people are converted to Christ.”
4. “Postmillennialism, thus, expects the gradual, developmental expansion of the kingdom of Christ in time and on earth. . . . Christ’s personal presence on earth is not needed for the expansion of His kingdom.”
5. “Postmillennialism” confidently anticipates a time in earth history (continuous with the present) in which the very Gospel already operative in the world will have won the victory throughout the earth in fulfillment of the Great Commission. . . . During that time the overwhelming majority of men and nations will be Christianized, righteousness will abound, wars will cease, and prosperity and safety will flourish.”
6. There are “two types of postmillennialism today: pietistic and theonomic postmillennialism . . . Pietistic postmillennialism . . . denies that the postmillennial advance of the kingdom involves the total transformation of culture through the application of biblical law. Theonomic postmillennialism affirms this.”
7. “Possibly ‘we can look forward to a great “golden age” of spiritual prosperity continuing for centuries, or even for millenniums, . . .’ After this . . . earth history will be drawn to a close by the

personal, visible, bodily return of Jesus Christ (accompanied by a literal resurrection and a general judgment) to introduce His . . . consummative and eternal form of the kingdom.”<sup>1</sup>

### ***Liberals and Conservatives***

While many of the basic elements of postmillennialism remain the same, distinction should be made between liberals who promote a postmillennialism through humanism (i.e., the social gospel of the past) and evangelical postmillennialism that promotes progress through the Church’s preaching of the Gospel and application of Mosaic Law. Both adhere to a gospel combined with social change as the agency of change and progress. Thus, in a sense, evangelical postmillennialists believe that many 19th century *postmills* went astray by adopting humanistic liberalism; instead they should have relied upon a more traditional, conservative approach.

### ***History***

The historical rise and development of postmillennialism has been the object of some dispute, partly because of some similarities between it and amillennialism. Amillennialism and postmillennialism, for example, would have Gentry’s points one, two, and four in common. Thus, because of points of similarity, some have confused amillennialism and postmillennialism. These similarities make it difficult at times to clearly distinguish postmillennialism and amillennialism in history. It is the differences that are significant, in spite of similarities. Both are clearly anti-premillennial.

It is generally thought that Daniel Whitby (1638-1725) developed systematic postmillennialism as a clearly distinct form of millenarianism. This does not mean that elements of systematic postmillennialism did not exist prior to Whitby, for they clearly did. However, it seems best to understand the maturity of postmillennialism into a distinct system

as post-Reformational and in a sense an optimistic form of amillennialism. Thus, postmillennialism’s development is dependent upon amillennialism.

Only a handful of partisan polemicists would attempt to argue that postmillennialism has a post-apostolic presence. “All seem to agree that postmillennialism is quite foreign to the apostolic church. There is no trace of anything in the church which could be classified as postmillennialism in the first two or three centuries.”<sup>2</sup>

The rise of figurative interpretation and Augustine’s millennial inter-advent theory began to lay a foundation for the later development of postmillennialism. Augustine “held that the age between the first and second advents is the Millennium of which the Scriptures speak and that the Second Advent would occur at the end of the Millennium. This is definitely a postmillennial viewpoint as it places the Second Advent *after* the Millennium.”<sup>3</sup> However, it is also at the same time an amillennial viewpoint. Augustine and his eschatology is best classified as amillennial because he lacked the optimism required for a true postmillennial viewpoint, regardless of whatever similarities they may have in common.

Another contribution to the development of systematic postmillennialism was the rise of Christendom and the merger of church and state with Constantine’s declaration that Christianity was the new religion of the Roman Empire (A.D. 313). Before Constantine, it is estimated that only 8 to 10 percent of the Empire was Christian. However, as the fourth century neared its end, virtually all people identified themselves as Christian. This development led to a form of victory and optimism about the spread of Christianity and its ability to overcome even a hostile state, like the previously evil Roman Empire. However, such optimism was tempered with the loss to Christendom of North Africa in the fifth century and the rise of militant Islam a few centuries

later.

Joachim of Floris' rise to prominence in the 12th century certainly was a watershed event in the development of eschatology. He not only laid the foundation for the historicist interpretation of prophetic literature, but his optimism is seen by some as contributing to the development of postmillennialism. Whether or not he can be classified as a clear postmillennialist,<sup>4</sup> he certainly contributed to an optimistic view of history. E. Randolph Daniel notes,

... the twelfth century was optimistic about history and the future. The Gregorian reformers certainly believed that they could dramatically reform and purify the Church on earth. Joachim, who was clearly Gregorian in his sympathies, believed that history was evolving toward the status of the Holy Spirit . . . when the Church would enjoy a historical era of peace and spiritual attainment that would far surpass anything achieved in the past.<sup>5</sup>

While Joachim helped prepare the way for the later development of postmillennialism, it is best not to classify him as a millennialist.

Joachim's third status has often been described as chiliastic or millennial, which implies that it constitutes a new beginning, the emergence of a spiritual church that would replace the corrupt clerical church. Certainly the millennium as depicted in Apocalypse 20 is a new beginning, but Joachim's status of the Holy Spirit is not millennial in this sense. . . . Joachim's thinking is evolutionary, not revolutionary. He was a reformer, not a millennialist.<sup>6</sup>

Joachim helped prepare the way for postmillennialism by contributing an idea of optimism that was to be continuous with the course of the present age. His belief that it was to be an age of the Holy Spirit was often adopted by later postmillennialists.

The Reformation sprang out of an attitude of pessimism and despair. Marjorie

Reeves notes, "E. L. Tuveson has argued that the classical attitude of Protestant reformers towards history was one of pessimism: all things must decline; decay is the essential fact of history."<sup>7</sup> Robin Barnes says, "In the eyes of many Lutherans in the late sixteenth century, the entire social order appeared to be falling apart."<sup>8</sup>

John Calvin, while not reaching the depths of Luther's despair, cannot be claimed for postmillennialism as some have done<sup>9</sup> just because he utters statements of optimism. Such statements need to be optimistic within the context of a postmillennial creed. Calvin also made pessimistic statements: "There is no reason, therefore, why any person should expect the conversion of the world, for at length—when it will be too late, and will yield them no advantage."<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, "despite Calvin's Augustinian avoidance of historically oriented eschatology, the hint of progressivism in his thought left the way open for the frank meliorism and chiliasm of many later Calvinist thinkers."<sup>11</sup>

It would be left to the post-Reformation era for developments to spring forth into what can rightly be called postmillennialism. Joachim's idea of progress was recast into a "new interpretation of the Apocalypse and of the eschatological pattern which looked forward to some great transforming event rather than to inevitable decay."<sup>12</sup> Postmillennialism came into flower in the 1600s as the "idea of novelty rather than return is seen in the excited references to all the new manifestations of the age—the new lands, the new learning, the new books, the new missionaries."<sup>13</sup> This was aided by the gains of Protestantism over Catholicism in Europe as the new continued to gain over the old.

The postmillennialism of the 17th century consisted mainly of those who believed in the success of the preaching of the Gospel and correspondingly the conversion of the Jews. The later belief was

one held in common with premillennialism. Yet, even though there were a few prominent postmillennialists in the 17th century, the position exploded into popularity as a result of Whitby's "new interpretation" of Revelation 20 at the dawn of the 18th century.

Contemporary reconstructionist postmillennialists usually bristle at the reminder of Whitby's key role in postmillennial history. Their defensiveness likely stems from the fact that Whitby was a less than orthodox Unitarian. Nevertheless, it was as a result of the efforts of Whitby who provided exegetical and theological definition for postmillennialism that the position began to gain ground and become the dominant eschatology in Europe and eventually North America before its decline. Walvoord noted the following concerning Whitby:

He was a liberal and a freethinker, untrammelled by traditions or previous conceptions of the church. His views on the millennium would probably have never been perpetuated if they had not been so well keyed to the thinking of the times. The rising tide of intellectual freedom, science, and philosophy, coupled with humanism, had enlarged the concept of human progress and painted a bright picture of the future. Whitby's view of a coming golden age for the church was just what people wanted to hear. It fitted the thinking of the times. It is not strange that theologians scrambling for readjustment in a changing world should find in Whitby just the key they needed. It was attractive to all kinds of theology. It provided for the conservative a seemingly more workable principle of interpreting the Scripture. . . . Man's increasing knowledge of the world and scientific improvements which were coming could fit into this picture. On the other hand, the concept was pleasing to the liberal and skeptic. If they did not believe the prophets, at least they believed that man was now able to improve himself and his environment. They, too, believed a golden age was ahead.<sup>14</sup>

After gaining dominance in Europe and America among both conservatives and liberals, postmillennialism began a decline into near extinction. Fallout from the French Revolution in Europe dealt a severe blow to postmillennial optimism. Later, in the States, postmillennial decline awaited the turn of the century and was dealt a near-fatal blow by WWI and WWII and identification with the Social Gospel and Liberalism. Only in the 1970s did postmillennialism begin to reassert itself, primarily through the reconstructionist movement. While postmillennialism has made some gains in recent years, it is still a minor position in the overall field of eschatology.

### ***Objections to Postmillennialism***

The greatest problem with postmillennialism is the fact that the Bible just does not teach it. Where is a specific passage that teaches the postmillennial concept? I am asking for a passage that teaches the idea of postmillennialism. It is nowhere in the Bible. Lack of specific biblical support is fatal to postmillennialism for any Bible-believing Christian. This explains why their normal presentation approach is to first attack premillennialism and then present broad theological concepts that one must adopt as a framework within which one needs to approach biblical texts.

Basic to postmillennialism's failure to match up with Scripture is its lack of a consistent hermeneutic. At key points, postmillennialism must abandon the literal hermeneutic of the historical, grammatical, and contextual approach for some degree of spiritualization.

Nowhere does the New Testament teach that the kingdom of God was brought into existence at Christ's first coming. The New Testament does say that the kingdom was "near" during Christ's ministry, but it stops short of saying that it arrived during Christ's first coming. Furthermore, while personal redemption is certainly an essential key

to the kingdom, that fact should not be used to negate equally clear teachings concerning the physical nature of this kingdom.

The postmillennial idea of progress is not found in any particular text of the Bible. Rather, it appears to be an idea brought to the pages of Scripture. Postmillennialism is inconsistent with the biblical fact that the cataclysmic return of Christ brings in the kingdom (Revelation 19–20), not the preaching of the Gospel and gradual human progress. Gospel preaching in the current age is for the purpose of gathering out the elect for the future kingdom. An increase in the number of Christian converts has not resulted in a transformational sociocultural influence. Too often there has been cultural regression. Such thinking, by postmillennialists, falls far short of the Old Testament description of the actual conditions of the kingdom.

Postmillennialism confuses Israel and the Church. The postmillennial view requires the Church to take over the fulfillment of promises made to national Israel so that they may posit a present kingdom. Modern postmillennialism needs to posit Replacement theology or supersessionism as a key plank in its theology. Thus, it denies that the modern state of Israel could have any place in God's future prophetic plan. Postmillennialism is anti-Zionist. The New Testament does not teach that Israel has been replaced by the Church. Paul says to these things, "God has not rejected His people [Israel], has He? May it never be!" (Romans 11:1). The Church is certainly a partaker in the Abrahamic promises, but not a taker-over of Israel's promises.

While it is true that the Bible predicts an increasing spread of the proclamation of the Gospel in the current age, this does not support the notion of postmillennial progress. All millennial positions—premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism—believe in a global preaching and spread of the Gospel dur-

ing the current age. In addition, the Bible speaks frequently in catastrophic and interventionist language of Christ's return to earth as the cause of millennial conditions. Specific statements of gradualism are lacking in the Bible. Postmillennialism also denies the New Testament teaching that Christ could return at any moment, known as "imminency." The Great Commission is being fulfilled, not by exercising a certain level of response to the Gospel, but when the Church is preaching the Gospel and making disciples throughout all the nations. This is occurring in our own day.

Shifting from pietistic to theonomic will not make postmillennialism suddenly more effective in history. In fact, at least pietistic postmillennialism was much more evangelistic than is the current brand of theonomic postmillennialism. If the Church were looking to theonomic postmillennialism to show the way in the area of evangelism, then it would become extinct within a generation.

If a viewpoint truly represents Scripture, then it is not too much to ask that it correspond to history. Postmillennialism teaches that this current age will be a time of steady and upward growth. However, this is impossible to defend from history. While the Gospel frequently expands to new territories, at the same time so many areas where the Gospel has dominated society and culture there has been regression and relapse, not progress. It appears that wherever Christianity has come to dominate the culture, and has lost that dominance, it has never been revived as a significant force. This is not progress, it is regression. At this point in time, history supports the premillennial notion of the global spread of the Gospel, while at the same time the Church becomes increasingly apostate.

Postmillennialism fails to account for the fact that if there is going to be a fulfillment of millennial conditions predicted in the Bible, it is going to be only as a result of a revolutionary intervention of

Jesus Christ at His Second Coming in order to introduce new factors, which are discontinuous with the present age. It will require the personal presence of Jesus Christ Himself to roll back the curse and to rule with a rod of iron. Only the premillennial model provides the changes necessary to implement a millennial golden age.

Postmillennialism is taught nowhere in the Bible. The postmillennial model of historical expectations is also failing. It is, therefore, more than reasonable to conclude that postmillennialism is a deviant and unbiblical aberration. ■

#### ENDNOTES

1. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), pp. 70-73.
2. John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), p. 19.
3. Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, p. 19.
4. D. H. Kromminga, *The Millennium in the Church: Studies in the History of Christian Chiliasm* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), p. 20f.
5. E. Randolph Daniel, "Joachim of Fiore: Patterns of History in the Apocalypse" in Richard K. Emmer-son and Bernard McGinn, editors, *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 73.
6. Daniel, "Joachim," pp. 86, 87.
7. Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study of Joachimism* (Lon- don: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 501.
8. Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apoca- lypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 5.
9. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, pp. 88, 89.
10. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n.d.) Vol. XVII, p. 147.
11. Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis*, p. 33.
12. Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, p. 502
13. Reeves, *Influence*, pp. 502-03.
14. Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, pp. 22, 23.

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## Separated Unto God

by J. C. Wenger



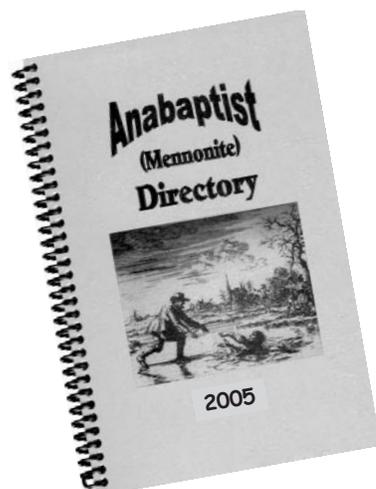
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