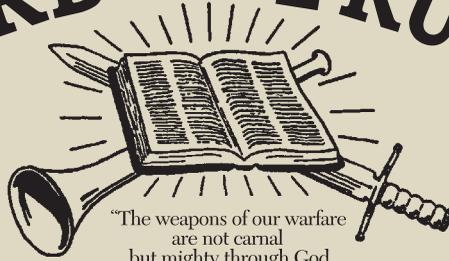


# The SWORD and TRUMPET

“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*



FRANCIS ASBURY

JANUARY 2006

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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:

## Francis Asbury (1745-1816)

Francis Asbury was born to a poor family in Hamstead Bridge, Staffordshire, England, on August 21, 1745.

At the age of 12 he left school so that he could become an apprentice to a blacksmith.

Two years later, at the age of 14, he was converted to Christ and subsequently became a licensed lay preacher of the Gospel. By the age of 21 he became a part of the Wesleyan Conference.

For four years he did itinerant preaching under John Wesley in his homeland of England. Then in 1771 an opportunity arose through Wesley for Asbury to travel to the New World and continue his itinerant work. Francis volunteered to go to North America and the following October he found himself in Philadelphia. At the time of his arrival there were only three Methodist congregations in our nation. Francis went right to preaching and starting churches at every opportunity in Philadelphia as well as New Jersey and southern New York. A year later, in 1772, Wesley made Francis his general assistant in this country. It was Asbury's job to see that the Methodist disciplines were observed. As a part of this responsibility Francis saw to it that every preacher under his care traveled a circuit.

A circuit-riding preacher himself, Francis worked endlessly to spread the Gospel and oversee the many new churches that were being formed throughout the eastern states of our nation. Because he was constantly on the move there was no place that he called "home."

Asbury believed in the idea of dependence for America so he remained in the colonies in spite of the Revolutionary War, while the other preachers appointed by Wesley fled back to England. Francis put down roots in the colonies and in 1778 he became a citizen of Delaware.

In December of 1784, while at an organizational conference for the Methodist Episcopal Church held in Baltimore, his peers elected him as general superintendent. He later took the *title* of bishop (of which Wesley did not approve), becoming the first Methodist bishop in America in 1785.

For 45 years Asbury toiled unceasingly for the sake of God's kingdom. During those years he kept a journal and wrote hundreds of letters. We now know that he made 60 trips on horseback across the Alleghenies, averaging 5,000 miles a year—a total of some 300,000 miles. He also ordained 4,000 preachers and preached 16,000

*(continued on page 4)*

# The Bible's Grand Design

## Luke 24:25-27, 44-49

by Dennis E. Johnson, Ph.D.

The brash fisherman cringed in the fire's shifting shadows, trembling at a slave girl's remark, fearing exposure. "I am no friend of that Nazarene!" he protested and later invoked God's curse to clinch his denials. Yet seven weeks later, his egocentric swagger replaced with God-given boldness, Peter publicly proclaimed in the same city, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

What explains so radical a transformation? What brought Simon Peter out of his dark night of denial into the daylight of fearless faith? Jesus' outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the fulfillment of the Father's long-awaited promise, was certainly one decisive factor (Acts 1:4, 5, 8; 2:1-4). Nor should we ignore the "many convincing proofs" by which Jesus validated His resurrection after His shameful crucifixion (1:3). By eating with Peter and the other disciples and inviting them to touch the wounds left by His sacrifice, Jesus overwhelmed their unbelief and banished their despair.

Yet Luke's Gospel directs us to another decisive, indispensable factor in Simon's transformation from wind-blown chaff to solid rock: Jesus taught His apostles to read the Bible with new eyes—to see the previously hidden grand design that had always been inscribed on the pages of Scripture. People who are deaf to Moses and the prophets will doubt even their own senses if Someone returns from the dead to demand their repentance (Luke 16:31). The Lord had to open their minds to understand the Scriptures, or else Peter and the others would have remained uncomprehending and un-

believing even when confronted by His resurrection glory.

### *The Scriptures According to Jesus*

Luke 24 lets us eavesdrop on the risen Lord Jesus as He teaches His closest followers to interpret Scripture. Unrecognized, He joins two downcast disciples leaving Jerusalem for the town of Emmaus, engages them in conversation, rebukes their dull and doubting hearts, and then sets those hearts ablaze with hope. How? By explaining from Moses' Law and all the Prophets "what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (24:27).

Later, He surprises a larger group and again directs them back to the ancient Scriptures, opening their minds to see how "everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, the Psalms" (vv. 44, 45). The Hebrew Old Testament has three subsections: the Law (Moses' five books), the Prophets (including "former prophets" which we call historical and "latter prophets"), and the Writings. The Book of Psalms stands at the head of the Writings and represents this whole third subdivision in Luke 24. "Law, Prophets, and Psalms" is thus a shorthand description of the entire Old Testament. Jesus led His friends through their Bibles from cover to cover, opening their minds to see the single interwoven theme that ties all the Scriptures together: Himself.

This single theme embraces a rich complex of related truths: This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations,

beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what My Father promised; but stay in Jerusalem until you have been clothed with power from on high (vv. 46-49).

In other words, the Old Testament announces: (1) the Christ, (2) His suffering, (3) His resurrection, (4) forgiveness in His name to the repentant, (5) proclamation to all nations with (6) Jerusalem as the starting point. By alluding to Isaiah 43:10 and 32:15, Jesus implied that the Scriptures' announcement of the Messiah's mission also includes (7) the apostles' role as "witnesses" (8) in the power of the Spirit "from on high."

From our distance, we may envy the apostles, wishing that we could have "audited" Jesus' crash course in biblical interpretation and resenting Luke's narrative restraint. After all, who can explain a book better than its author, especially when the Author is God-in-flesh Himself, and the masterpiece is the disclosure of His plan for all of history? If only we could have been there to ask Jesus which Old Testament passages announce His suffering, His resurrection, His invitation to the nations, His apostles' role as witnesses, or His Spirit's arrival in power! If only we could have asked Him how that puzzling story in Judges, this aphorism in Proverbs, or that bizarre vision of Zechariah reveals His suffering or the glory to follow! Why did Luke not tell us more about exactly how Jesus handled the Scriptures to bring into view their testimony about Himself?

Actually, Luke has given us precisely what we are asking for—in his Gospel that leads up to these post-resurrection appearances and in the apostolic sermons that flow from them in the Book of Acts.

### *Christ in Luke and Acts*

Luke's Gospel opened with the

announcement of his purpose (1:1-4)—to confirm faith through a careful record of events attested by the very apostles whom Jesus taught in Luke 24. From the beloved stories of Jesus' birth, through His ministry of words and deeds, to the cross, the grave, and resurrection glory, Luke shows us by quotation and allusion how the ancient Scriptures' profile of a coming divine-and-human, suffering-and-triumphant Redeemer-King finds its fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. Gabriel's annunciation, Mary's Magnificat, Zacharias' Benedictus, and Simeon's Nunc Dimittis contain Old Testament echoes of Davidic kingship, tabernacle, Exodus, Abraham's covenant, Malachi's sunrise, and Isaiah's promise of light to darkness-dwelling nations (Luke 1-2). John the Baptist is the desert herald foretold in Isaiah 40, preparing the road for the lord (Luke 3). Jesus is the freedom-preacher of Isaiah 61, sent like Elijah and Elisha to bless even the Gentiles (Luke 4; see 7:1-17). Jesus is the Servant foreseen by Isaiah, who fixes his face like flint to face suffering in Jerusalem (9:51; 21:37). In his suffering he inaugurates the new covenant promised through Jeremiah (22:20). Jesus is the sign of Jonah, risen from death's depths to summon rebels to repentance (11:29-32). He is the new Israel, restored on the third day to live in God's presence (Hosea 6:2). These are only a few of the many strands that tie ancient promises to their realization in Christ the Lord, reflecting to us the flashes of scriptural insight that Jesus conveyed to His apostles on that first resurrection day.

Then if we look "ahead" from Luke 24 into the author's second volume, the Book of Acts, even more of the Saviour's glory radiates from the Old Testament through the Spirit-powered apostolic preachers. Even before Pentecost, Peter sees Scripture in a new light. Previously repulsed by Jesus' suffering,

Peter now recognizes that the Christ had to be betrayed by a friend. God had planned, predicted, and orchestrated such sorrow for His Servant, and “the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas” (Acts 1:16). Psalms 69 and 109 express David’s pain over the treachery of intimates, foreshadowing the suffering of the final King. The sermons in Acts bristle with biblical texts (Joel 2; Psalms 2, 16, 110, 118; Deuteronomy 18; Genesis 22; Isaiah 49, 53, 55, and more). Stephen shows how his hearers’ mistreatment of Jesus fulfills Israel’s recurring pattern of rejecting rescuers sent by God: Joseph, Moses, and finally the Righteous One foretold by the prophets (Acts 7). The church’s prayer places its crisis in the context of Psalm 2, in which the Holy Spirit foretold the international conspiracy against the Lord’s Anointed (Acts 4:23-30). The debate over what to do with Gentiles who were pouring into the church is resolved as James turns the light of Amos’ prophecy upon the question. God has raised up Jesus, the Heir to David’s throne, to rebuild David’s fallen dynasty. Therefore, Gentiles who seek the Lord and bear His name must not be hindered or rejected (Acts 15:13-18). By the time Paul demonstrates the necessity of the Messiah’s suffering and resurrection in the Thessalonian synagogue (Acts 17:2, 3), Luke has shown us the wealth of biblical evidence available to the apostle.

### *Following Jesus’ Lead*

In our day, when subjectivity is king and literary theories give readers as much say as the author in what a work may mean, we must recognize precisely what Jesus was doing that first resurrection Sunday. He “opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). He was showing them the truth that was objectively

there in the text, in its words, sentences, and paragraphs. Interpreting every Scripture as fulfilled in Christ and His mission is not ripping passages from their contexts or wrenching their meaning to fit our tastes or preconceptions. We are simply following Jesus’ lead. It is humbly listening to each text’s testimony to God’s single, sovereign plan “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph. 1:10).

Have you found this key that unlocks the Bible’s richest Treasure? Do you read its every passage with the prayer, “Holy Spirit, you love to show us Jesus (John 15:26; Acts 5:32). Open my heart’s eyes to see Him here”? Jesus once said, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39, 40). As a result, may we search God’s Word not just for “tips for living” but for Life Himself. May the theme whenever we share the Word with our spouses, children, Christian brothers and sisters, neighbors and coworkers always be Christ and Him crucified. ■

—First published in *Evangelium*, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (Dec. 2003). © 2005 Westminster Seminary California. All rights reserved. Website: [www.wscal.edu](http://www.wscal.edu). E-mail: [mail@wscal.edu](mailto:mail@wscal.edu). Phone: 760-480-8474.

### **FRANCIS ASBURY . . . cont’d.**

sermons! During his ministry the Methodist church in America grew from three meetinghouses at the time of his arrival to 412 Methodist societies by the time he died. These societies had a total of 214,235 members.

Francis Asbury, a dynamo God used to spread the Gospel and advance His Kingdom, died March 31, 1816, in Spotylvania, Virginia, at the age of 70. Asbury College is named in his honor.

—Gail L. Emerson

## From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

# Minimizing the Bible?

by John Piper

### *Seeker-Driven Pastors and Radical Contextualization in Missions*

I have been pondering a possible relationship between the minimizing of the Bible in so-called seeker-driven churches and in some of the radical forms of contextualization that have emerged in missions. Perhaps there isn't any connection. But I wonder. The common denominator that I am pondering is the loss of confidence that declaring what the Bible says in the power of the Holy Spirit can create and sustain the church of Christ.

This morning I just read John 2:11, "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and *manifested his glory*. And his disciples *believed* in him." I bowed and prayed, "O Lord, this is how faith happens. People are given eyes to see your glory in your per-

son and in your deeds. Please don't let me turn away from the ministry that puts all the emphasis on the 'gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God' " (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Then I was reminded of another text in John which connected the revelation of Christ's glory to the written word of God. John 20:30, 31, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." The signs that reveal the faith-awakening glory of Christ are not mainly new signs being done today, but the signs that are written in the gospels. These are written "so that you may believe." He "*manifested his glory*. And his disciples *believed* in him." That is the way

faith comes. Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit comes, “He will glorify me!” (John 16:14). Therefore we declare the fulness of the glorious Person and Work of Christ in history. That is how the church is created and sustained.

It seems to me that a growing number of pastors and missionaries have lost confidence in this truth. They have concluded that the gap between the glory of Christ and the felt needs of their neighbors, or between the glory of Christ and the religion of the nationals, is simply too great for the fulness of God’s Word to overcome. The upshot seems to be the minimization of the Word of God in its robust and glorious fullness.

This is on my front burner just now because in recent weeks I have received a steady stream of testimonies from aching saints who say in so many words, “Our pastor doesn’t proclaim to us what the Bible says and means. The messages are not revelations of the glory of Christ. They are advice-talks with a religious twist.” And then I have been reading about certain kinds of gospel contextualization in missions that seem to minimize the fullness of the biblical revelation which converts should share with others. So I have been pondering whether there are connections.

I have no desire to naively equate the cultural conglomerate of western Christianity with the true, spiritual body of Christ. I can appreciate avoiding the word *Christian* in a missions context where it signifies: degenerate, materialistic, immodest western religion. And I realize that most of the ways we “do church” are culture specific rather than biblically mandated. But there are other questions that trouble me:

1) Are the essentials of biblical faith embraced by new converts to Christ, and do they make them

known in love to others? For example, do they embrace and make known that the Bible is the only inspired and infallible written revelation of God, and that Christ is God and was crucified for sin and raised from the dead above all authority?

2) Are the former religious behaviors of converts to Christ, which they may retain, communicating regularly a falsehood about what the convert means and believes?

3) Are words being used by converts that mislead people rather than make the truth plain? Are missionaries and converts following Paul’s commitment to candor: “But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s Word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2)?

I may be wrong about a Bible-minimizing connection between seeker-driven pastors and radically contextualizing missionaries, but it is hard not to see a loss of faith in the power of God’s Word when I hear that the Bible is not preached at home, and when I read from the frontiers: “We have little hope in our lifetime to believe for a major enough cultural, political, and religious change to occur in our context such that Muslims would become open to entering Christianity on a wide scale.”

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit to come in power in our day for the sake of powerful displays of the glory of Christ in the declaration of the Word of God where those glories are revealed with infallible and converting authority. ■

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# THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



*A Devotional Commentary*



by David L. Burkholder

**JANUARY 1, 2006**

## ***Faithful Leaders***

1 Timothy 1:12-20

The Pastoral Epistles, which we will be studying in January and February, are unique in that they were written to individuals, not churches, as were most of Paul's letters. Barclay says of them: "*These letters deal with the care and organization of the flock of God; they tell men how to behave within the household of God; they give instructions as to how God's house should be administered, as to what kind of people the leaders and pastors should be, and as how the threats which endanger the purity of Christian faith and life should be dealt with.*" They are instructive for us today in the life of the church.

In this first letter to Timothy, Paul charges him to faithful correction of those who were perverting the faith of the believers at Ephesus. (See verses 1-4.) He then launches into a rehearsal of God's mercy and grace in providing a Saviour for sinful mankind, of whom, he says, he is the chief example.

Paul was continually mindful of God's great mercy in turning him from a persecutor of the faith into a preacher. He also recognized that it was solely by God's enabling that he was capable of ministering on His behalf. (See also 1 Corinthians 15:10 and 2 Corinthians 3:5, 6.) Paul's single-minded dedication to the cause of Christ was his response

to the undeserved mercy of God. Paul recognized that just as he was an example of the worst of sinners, so too, now, he served as an example of God's saving grace (v. 16).

Paul concludes his testimony with a doxology, emphasizing God's characteristics of immortality, omnipresence, and omniscience. He alone is worthy of honor and glory.

Paul then turns back to his main purpose in writing to Timothy, to charge him to counteract the spiritually debilitating influence of false doctrine in the church. (See verses 3 and 4.) He also encourages Timothy to maintain personal faith in his warfare against false teaching (v. 19). It is all too easy to be deceived into accepting falsehood or half-truths. Leaders must be doubly on guard, both for their own spiritual welfare and the welfare of the church under their administration.

Paul gives the example of Hymenaeus and Alexander as ones who have made shipwreck of their faith by giving heed to false teaching. (See 2 Timothy 2:16-18.) Whatever all may be meant by the latter part of verse 20, commentators agree that at the least it included excommunication from the church. *The New Bible Commentary* explains it this way: "*By putting such an one outside the sphere of Christ's kingdom or protection, he was exposed to the dominion of Satan.*" A very dangerous situation in which to be.

Note also in this passage, and context,

the intimate relationship alluded to between Paul, now nearing the end of his life, and Timothy, to whom he was committing the care of the church. A beautiful example of one generation of leadership passing the torch to those younger.

***For thought and discussion***

1. Do some background reading on the Pastoral Epistles. Also, a repeated reading of 1 Timothy will enhance your study of the lessons for January.
2. What was the key to Paul's dedication to the ministry of the gospel?
3. We are all saved to the same degree. Reflect on why some, such as Paul, seem to be more appreciative than others of this privilege.
4. What are some helps to guarding against the influences of false teaching? (There are some hints in this passage and its context.)
5. Think about the implications of false teaching, leading to excommunication from the fellowship and opening one to the control of Satan.
6. Review the relationship between Paul and his "son in the faith," Timothy. Note, too, the transferral of responsibilities from older to younger.

**JANUARY 8, 2006**

***The Ministry of Prayer***

1 Timothy 2:1-8

As Paul shifts from expounding on the mercy of God and his charge to Timothy to correct false doctrine threatening the church, he begins a series of exhortations, the first of which concerns prayer. Prayer is an important and necessary part of every Christian's life. The song says, "*Prayer is the Christian's vital breath.*" It is our way of communicating with God.

There are various aspects of prayer, as we discover in today's text. There are

also preconditions to prayer, two of which are emphasized in this lesson. The universality of the gospel is also portrayed here within the framework of prayer. We note, too, the sovereignty and mercy of God. Our text contains only eight verses but it covers many subjects of vital significance in the Christian's life. However, our focus today is on the ministry of prayer.

Paul seems to infer in verse 1 that prayer for others is the primary obligation of the Christian. While his scope includes all men, he especially focuses here on those in civil authority—kings and others. For those today who take a dim view of praying for certain government officials, it should be noted that Nero was emperor during Paul's writing, and ultimately responsible for his execution. The responsibility of prayer is not limited to those we favor or who look upon us with favor. Paul enjoins prayer for all men.

Was Paul selfish in requesting prayer so "we may lead a quiet and peaceable life"? Certainly not. He was likely thinking in terms of an environment most conducive to carrying out the will of God to evangelize. Note in verse 4 how he emphasizes that it is God's will for all men to be saved. Carrying out Christ's commission is certainly easier where there is peace and quiet in the land. However, as Paul had often experienced, it must also be done at times when unrest and strife beset the effort.

Paul emphasizes that Christ alone is the sole mediator between God and man. Jesus, as the God-man, understands both God and man and is thus alone capable of mediating between the two. It was He who gave His life to satisfy the demands of a Holy God and provide the ransom for sinful man to be brought back into a relationship with God the Father.

Then Paul states again Christ's calling and commissioning of him as an apostle, especially to the Gentiles. Verse

7 harks back to Paul's testimony in last Sunday's lesson from Chapter 1 regarding God's gracious call and enabling.

In the last verse of our lesson Paul lays out preconditions for effective praying—holy living, proper motivation and attitudes, and faith. He is not so much emphasizing a specific posture of the body, but rather an attitude of the heart. The one who comes to God with his petitions and thanksgivings must come with a pure heart, in faith believing that God will hear and answer in His own good way.

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

1. Study the various aspects of prayer, as mentioned in this lesson and elsewhere in the Scripture.
2. We at least give lip service to praying for our government and world leaders. But just how faithful are we in carrying it out? Perhaps do some reflecting, with a view to changing attitudes and habits where necessary.
3. Why does it seem that historically the church has experienced some of its greatest growth during times of intense persecution, for instance, the Reformation?
4. Some religions use human intermediaries to reach for God. Note how verse 5 refutes all such claims.
5. Selfish, unworthy prayers get us nowhere. How can we better control our attitudes and direct our prayers with meaningful fervor?

## **JANUARY 15, 2006**

### ***Qualifications for Leaders***

1 Timothy 3:1-15

There are at least three major themes which characterize the life of the Apostle Paul. The first of these is his continual amazement, and thanksgiving, over God's mercy in saving him. The second is his consuming passion for reaching

the unsaved with the message of God's grace. The third is his concern for the ongoing spiritual integrity of the church of Jesus Christ. This concern finds expression in today's lesson in its focus on the qualifications of men to be called to positions of leadership in the church. Paul's concerns for qualified leadership are no less valid today than they were 19 centuries ago.

Paul concludes this passage, verse 15, by telling Timothy that his purpose in writing and outlining qualifications for leaders was to give guidance on the proper functioning of the church. This church, whose foundation is truth and which in its function supports truth, is none other than the organization established and formed by the living God. This truth which comes from God must be guarded by the diligent selection of men of high moral character and outstanding administrative abilities. (See Acts 6:3.)

Paul here addresses qualifications and responsibilities of bishops and deacons—spiritual leaders and those responsible for the material aspects of the body of believers. In Acts 6 and 14:23 and Titus 1:5 we note the establishment of the principle of choosing leaders from the local fellowship. Here is where men's gifts, abilities, and manner of life are best known, and where they must unflinchingly prove themselves as they interact with and serve the brotherhood (v. 10).

Men called to these offices must be mature, not new to the faith lest the position itself become a source of pride and thus damage one's credibility among the believers. He must be a one-woman man, and one who has his household well under control. Note, too, that the wives of these men must also meet certain criteria, both for the benefit of their personal ministry and as aides to their husbands in their work (v. 11).

As we review and contemplate the

qualifications set forth here for leaders in the church, we are forced to ask, just who is capable and qualified to fill these roles. The standard is high, for these are positions of responsibility, demanding unqualified integrity and unstinting commitment. One must say with Paul (2 Cor. 3:5, 6a) that our sufficiency and enablement comes from God. Man is simply not capable in and of himself for this great responsibility.

In the work of the church there is something for every member to do. There must be order and organization. And there must be those who give direction and guidance, both administratively and spiritually. Jesus said, "I will build my church." And He has gifted men to carry out His purposes. Let's be sure we are cooperating with His plan and carefully choosing capable and qualified men to lead this endeavor. We will be blessed and God honored.

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

1. As a supplement to this lesson, search out other passages which reflect Paul's concern for the spiritual integrity of the church.
2. Think about how the church of Jesus Christ is a unique organization. (Founder, structure, scope, etc.)
3. Study carefully the several offices of the church and their particular functions as outlined here and in other New Testament passages.
4. With leaders to be chosen from the local brotherhood, it stands to reason that the qualifications outlined in this passage should be found in all believers. How can we best promote that awareness and commitment within the church?
5. Think through and discuss the biblical procedure for calling men to leadership positions in the church. How was it done in the New Testament church?

See also the lesson for August 1, 2004, for help with today's lesson.

**JANUARY 22, 2006**

### ***Faithful Teaching to Counter Heresy***

1 Timothy 4:1-16

At the outset of this chapter Paul warns Timothy of heresies which will threaten the stability of the church. As he moves on through the chapter he instructs Timothy in how to thwart the damaging influence of these false teachings. By faithful teaching of the pure doctrine of the word of God and by living a life of integrity, false teachings can be successfully countered. However, Paul is also keenly aware that there will be those entrapped by these heresies and end up making shipwreck of their faith. (See 1:19, 20.)

Paul counters the philosophy of the Gnostics, which seemed to be the problem at Ephesus, by affirming that whatever God has created and established is good. Food and marriage are not evil in themselves, as the Gnostics asserted, but blessings provided by God for man's benefit. Man's response is to receive such with thanksgiving, thus sanctifying them for His use.

Paul then challenges Timothy to faithful teaching against these heresies, reminding him that "the words of faith and good doctrine" are to be the foundation of his teaching. Man has a tendency to turn to fables. Paul says avoid them. One's energies, as he instructs Timothy, should be expended in the pursuit of godliness, for godliness has its reward in this life as well as in the next. Paul says it is safer to be on God's side and suffer for one's stand than to become involved in the philosophies of man—and face the potential of apostasy.

In verse 10 Paul again states the universality of the gospel. Christ died for all men, and for those who accept Him, He becomes their Saviour.

Paul then encourages Timothy not to allow his relative youthfulness to intimate him from carrying out his pastoral duties. He was likely at least in his mid

30's, but undoubtedly there were older, mature, and experienced men in the church at Ephesus. Paul challenges him to such an exemplary life that his youthfulness would not stand in the way of his effectiveness. He was to make full proof of his ministry (2 Timothy 4:5), a ministry to which he had been called by the church and for which he had been gifted by God.

Timothy was also given instruction for the conduct of public worship services. There was to be a reading of God's Word, and an explanation of the same. There was also to be carried over an application to daily life. The Word profits best when it alters the life and the lifestyle.

Paul concludes this section of exhortation by challenging Timothy to be careful about his manner of life and to continually apply the principles of God's Word to daily living. This, Paul says, is the key to personal salvation as well as his effectiveness as a spiritual leader. The task of a leader carries grave responsibility. The eternal destiny of souls is at stake. A good leader will be careful in his living and faithful in his teaching.

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

1. What are some present-day heresies threatening the church? How can they best be countered? Maybe some class discussion on this.
2. Why does it seem so easy for people to "depart from the faith"? How can we be more diligent in keeping ourselves, our brother, our church securely in the faith? Discuss.
3. What is the Christian's obligation to his physical body? Is attention to physical fitness wrong? Why or why not? (See 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 6:19, 20; etc.)
4. What are the advantages/disadvantages of younger/older men in positions of leadership in the church? Discuss.
5. In our materialistic age how can we best encourage young men into a life of service for the church?

See also lesson for August 8, 2004.

## **JANUARY 29, 2006**

### ***Respectful Relationships***

1 Timothy 5:1-8, 17-25

In this lesson Paul gives Timothy pastoral advice on appropriate interpersonal relationships. As a young pastor Timothy would have many occasions to interact with persons of varied age, status, and gender. To maintain his personal integrity and the integrity of his office, these relationships must all be handled in purity and without bias. Paul's advice to Timothy is certainly relevant for church leaders in our day. Proper relationships are the key to a harmoniously functioning brotherhood. In an atmosphere of mutual respect and courtesy, people feel free to function without fear or anxiety.

Members of the Christian brotherhood should be treated as family, for, as Paul states elsewhere, "ye are all the body of Christ," and "members one of another." Unfortunately there will be times when members deviate from the scriptural norm, and corrective measures will need to be taken. In such cases, Paul instructs Timothy to use entreaty, not harsh rebuke, remembering that we are all family.

Paul next turns to the care of widows. The church must be alert to the needs of widows among them and be prepared to assist them. However, the first line of help should be family—children or grandchildren. Charity must begin at home. For the church, care must be exercised to help those truly in need and not those who look for charity in order to pursue an extravagant or pleasurable lifestyle. Verse 8 lays moral obligation on those responsible to provide for a household. There is definitely a spiritual aspect to material care.

In verses 17-19 Paul addresses issues of respect in regard to church elders. Here he speaks to official position, not age as he does in verse 1. Elders who serve in administrative, preaching, and teaching capacities are to be provided with adequate remuneration for their

work. Accusations against an elder are to be thoroughly substantiated to avoid personal vendettas. On these two issues Paul reaches back to Old Testament principles to establish his argument. Those who sin, whether leader or laity, Paul says, should be admonished before the brotherhood to safeguard the integrity of the church and to serve as a warning to others. All such disciplinary matters, however, must be carried out without showing favoritism or partiality.

Paul next gives a variety of admonitions. Verse 22 seems to reiterate what Paul had said previously in 3:6 about not ordaining one new to the faith. A leader should be one who has proved himself by a life of maturity and stability and one who keeps himself aloof from potentially damaging companionships. Timothy is also encouraged by Paul to use wine in moderation for medicinal purposes.

The chapter closes with Paul stating that those who confess their sins are pre-judged and their sins are then removed from God's record. However, for those who attempt to hide their sins, they will

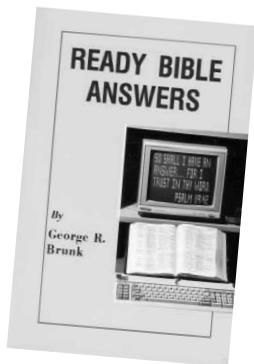
eventually be exposed and witness against them in the judgment. God will also see that good works are rewarded.

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

1. Courtesy is a Christian virtue. Are you doing your part to promote Christian courtesy in your home, your church, your community?
2. Have you been responsible for, or on the receiving end of spiritual correction? Which method works best in bringing results? Discuss.
3. The church has financial obligation to the poor among them. To what extent should this go, and how is it best carried out, and funded?
4. In what ways and for how long should a brother prove himself before being called to a position of leadership in the church? Should age be a limiting factor? Why, or why not? How about some discussion?
5. It does no good to hide sin. What are some of the downsides, in addition to the detriment to the individual, of allowing sin to go unconfessed? ■

## **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

## Our Indonesian Sisters

Three Indonesian women have been imprisoned for teaching Muslim children in a Christian Sunday school class. Though the children’s mothers were with them, and even though the Indonesian constitution guarantees freedom of religion, the women have been found guilty of attempting to convert Muslim children to Christianity. When they were each handed a three-year sentence, Muslims in the courtroom shouted, “*Allahu akbar*” (Allah is great!). The women plan to appeal their sentences, but in the interim, are sharing Christ with other prisoners.

—from *The Voice of the Martyrs*

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## Love at First Byte

Forty million Americans have tried to meet someone to date via the internet. In fact, internet dating may be the primary way that singles meet each other today. Certainly many people have met their marriage partner through online dating services such as *eHarmony.com*. Though some view the practice as sleazy, others feel that people who go online looking for a special someone are more intentional about finding a future life partner.

There are dangers. Twelve percent of online daters are already married. Also, anyone planning to meet an online dating interest should do so in a public place and inform family and friends of the meeting.

—from *WORLD*

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## Barren Reality

British novelist Lionel Shriver writes in the *Guardian* newspaper, “We will assess

the success of our lives in accordance not with whether they were righteous, but with whether they were interesting and fun.” She says of children that they are messy and bothersome; raising them is “hard, trying, and dull, inevitably ensnaring us in those sucker-values of self-sacrifice and duty.” Chillingly, she adds that today’s Europeans “don’t especially care what happens once we’re dead.”

Apparently, many Europeans and Japanese feel as this 48-year-old mother of none does, as populations continue to shrink, to the detriment of their economies.

The U.S. also faces the problem of an aging population and finding the money to pay for Social Security and Medicare, but at least the U.S. birthrate is at the replacement level—2.1%. Americans also tend to be more open toward immigrants, making our problem small compared to that facing Europe and Japan.

—from *WORLD*

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## Vanishing Sea of Faith

“The number of Muslims at Friday prayers in Britain reportedly exceeds the number of Anglicans at Sunday worship.”

—from *Touchstone*

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## Chasing Sleep

The number of young adults who took prescription sleep medication doubled between 2000 and 2004. Twenty-five million prescriptions for sleep medications were filled between January and July 2005. Sleep drugs are another of our modern medications that target well-being rather than disease. In spite of the large numbers using prescription sleep drugs,

most physicians are hesitant to prescribe sleep drugs because long-term side effects are unknown. (Clinical trials run for only a few months before a medication is approved.) Before trying to get your doctor to give you a sleeping potion, take a look at your life. Perhaps pain, sleep apnea, depression, or other unresolved problems are troubling you. Insomniacs should make sure they go to bed at the same time every night, get up at the same time every morning, curtail extra activities in the bedroom, and avoid caffeine. Also, wind down before going to bed with a mug of warm milk or hot herbal or decaf tea.

—from *U.S. News & World Report*

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### **Will Fido Go to Heaven?**

More and more clergy are officiating at pet funerals as their owners look for a way to memorialize their pet's life. In response to this trend, a group of scholars with the American Academy of Religion is working on the issue of animals and religion. Many Christian theologians of the past, including Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley, thought animals would be in heaven. Roman Catholics have a long tradition of blessing animals in honor of the feast day of Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals. St. Francis considered animals our brothers and sisters, and saw the goodness of God in them. Seeing them reminds us of God's beauty and creativity.

However, even though the priests and monks sprinkle holy water on the pets, the official Catholic position says that animals do not have a rational soul, and thus cannot go to heaven.

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

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### **Nothing in My Hands I Bring**

"People won't come to Christ unless they have nothing—and most people don't have that," said Tim Kellar, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan.

—from *WORLD*

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### **Iranians Hungry for the Word**

Tom White reports that groups in Iran who distribute God's Word keep running out of Bibles. One group passes out more than 1,000 Bibles per month. Christians in Iran are also becoming bolder in evangelism, sharing their faith while riding in public transportation, in shops, and in clubs, even though the security police are exerting more pressure against them. This personal evangelism is having an impact: another Iranian contact told of 88 people receiving Christ in the last half-year. There are now over 70 house churches with 600-plus people attending.

—from *The Voice of the Martyrs*

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### **Praise for America**

"The U.S. is still the most benevolent nation in the world and the most generous toward Christian non-profit ministries. We thank God for America."

—from *The Voice of the Martyrs*

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### **A New Awakening?**

*WORLD* magazine recently interviewed Berry College Professor Peter Lawler. In that encounter, he provocatively suggested we may be in "another Great Awakening, a powerful spiritual reaction against the soul-deadening excesses of liberalism." He pointed to "the growing evangelical counterculture complete with homeschooling and so forth. There is also a resurgence of Orthodox faith among Catholics and Jews. If it were not for our large and growing number of observant believers, our birthrate would be the same as that of France and Italy that are fading away. The heart of our Great Awakening is the recovery of family life as the center of faith." Lawler also cites the increasing literacy of evangelicals, their openness to the great tradition of Christian theology, and their love of C. S. Lewis and G. K. Chesterton as signs of new spiritual life. —from *World*

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## Read Those Nutrition Labels!

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends that we should cut as many trans fats out of our diets as possible. To aid in this, an FDA rule goes into effect on January 1, 2006, which requires that all packaged foods containing half a gram or more of trans fat per serving must state this on the nutrition label. Foods that contain up to half a gram of trans fat per serving, are not required to list it on the nutrition label, so if you eat quantities of that type of food, you could still be consuming too much trans fat. Trans fats are the byproducts of hydrogenated oils, which have been chemically altered by the addition of hydrogen atoms. Restaurateurs love trans fats because they can be reheated again and again without breaking down. Prepared food packagers love them because trans fats are resistant to rancidity, and they make foods flavorful, flaky, and moist. But trans fats both raise bad cholesterol (LDL) and lower good cholesterol (HDL) levels in the blood.

Now that trans fats must be labeled, food processors are scrambling to develop recipes that taste like the familiar product, but are trans fat free. Kraft Foods say that they have tried over 200 recipes in the quest to make trans-fat-free Oreos that taste just like the original. McDonald's promised in 2002 to rid its fryers of trans fats. It still has not happened, though its spokesman claims they are testing new oils.

Though several other oils should work well for fried fast food, the stumbling block is that these oils are more scarce and more expensive than hydrogenated soy oil which has long been the industry standard. Coming to the rescue, biotech giant Monsanto is developing a variety of soybeans which should render a stable oil without hydrogenation. The first non-genetically engineered batch of those is yielding a small harvest this year, but by 2008 should be able to meet a third of the demand for frying oils. —from *TIME*

## Elisha's Bears

by Henry M. Morris

*“And he went up from thence unto Beth-el: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them” (2 Kings 2:23, 24).*

This account has occasioned much criticism by skeptics, charging Elisha with petulant cruelty in sending bears to kill the little children who were taunting him. Actually, it was God who sent the bears, not Elisha.

The fact is, however, that he did not curse little children at all. The Hebrew word for “children” used with the phrase “little children” can be applied to any child from infancy to adolescence. The word for the 42 “children” torn by the bears, however, is a different word, commonly translated “young men.” Actually, both words are used more often for young men than for little children.

The situation evidently involved a gang of young hoodlums of various ages, led by the older ones, with all of them no doubt instigated by the pagan priests and idolatrous citizens of Beth-el. The bears which suddenly emerged from the woods “tare” (not necessarily fatally in all cases) 42 of the older hooligans.

The jeering exhortation to “*go up, thou bald head,*” was both a sarcastic reference to Elijah's supposed ascension, as well as an insult to God's prophet. This was actually a challenge to God and could not be excused. So God made good—in miniature—on a warning issued long before: “*And if ye walk contrary unto me . . . I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children*” (Lev. 26:21, 22). It can be a dangerous thing, for young or old, to gratuitously insult the true God and His Word. ■

—Taken from *Institute for Creation Research (ICR) www.icr.org*. Used by permission.



## ROAMING WILD: Investigating the Message of *Wild at Heart*

by Daniel Gillespie

**If sales mean anything, the latest must-read book for men is John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*—a work in which the author showcases his definition of true masculinity. As a best-seller, the book's success underscores the importance of this topic in today's church, where Christian men are desperately searching for a biblical model to follow. Does *Wild at Heart* provide that model for them? To be sure, Eldredge cites Bible verses, references biblical characters, and highlights several of God's divine attributes. But are his ideas about biblical masculinity actually biblical? Or are they more firmly founded in his own extrabiblical experience? We'll consider those questions as we examine *Wild at Heart* by the light of Scripture.**

The Marines are looking for a few good men. But you won't find them in the church, says John Eldredge, at least not without some serious change.

In his best-selling book, *Wild at Heart*, Eldredge examines the absence of biblical masculinity in contemporary Christianity, arguing that men must return to the rugged leaders they were designed to be. Even a cursory glance at modern society confirms Eldredge's bleak assessment and provokes the question, where did all the good men go? From the boardroom to the bedroom, from the ball field to the backyard, the absence of godly men has had a devastating impact on our culture.

The solution, according to Eldredge, is for Christian men to discover true masculinity—something they can do only in the wilderness. After all, men are not really at home in an office or a taxicab. Nor are they alive on a downtown sidewalk. Instead, men belong to the frontiers, where they will find a battle to fight, a beauty to rescue, and an adventure to live. Real men need adventure, danger, and physical challenge to be ful-

filled. That's why so many men are bored in American churches and dissatisfied with spiritual pursuits. Clearly, they cannot discover their God-given purpose in our modern urban society. Instead, they must find their hearts "out there on the burning desert sands" (p. 6).

Armed with an engaging writing style and a timely appeal, Eldredge's message has certainly struck a chord with Christian men around the globe. In fact, since its publication, the book has sold more than a million copies—giving its author one of the most influential voices on the topic to date. Many churches, Bible studies, and small groups have embraced the book as a groundbreaking perspective on true masculinity. And the book has also been endorsed by high-profile evangelical leaders. For example, Pastor Chuck Swindoll, in the foreword to *Wild at Heart*, calls the book "excellent," full of "splendid ideas," and "the best, most insightful book I have read in the last five years."

But are such accolades really justified? Does John Eldredge truly present men

with the means to manhood? Certainly the author has identified a clear problem. But has he diagnosed the cure correctly? Or is he actually leading Christian men farther away from where God wants them to be?

We believe a thorough assessment of *Wild at Heart* reveals that Eldredge's solution, although innovative, falls far short of true masculinity. In fact, many of Eldredge's arguments are directly opposed to the biblical teaching on the subject. This chapter will highlight four critical categories where *Wild at Heart* roams off the biblical path.

### ***An Insufficient View of Scripture***

Foundational to each of the flaws in *Wild at Heart* is an insufficient view of Scripture. Whether it is an absence of biblical support or a severely misapplied text, Eldredge wields the sword of truth clumsily in a faltering attempt to make his book Christian.

From the first chapter to the last, Eldredge never is clear about where his ultimate authority lies. On the one hand, he quotes Scripture and uses biblical examples to support his position. But on the other, he references movies, poems, books, and other authors as if they were equal to, if not weightier than, God's Word. On page 200, he says:

God is intimately personal with us and he speaks in ways that are peculiar to our own hearts—not just through the Bible, but through the whole of creation. To Stasi he speaks through movies. To Craig he speaks through rock and roll (he called me the other day after listening to "Running Through the Jungle" to say that he was fired up to go study the Bible). God's word to me comes in many ways—through sunsets and friends and films and music and wilderness and books.

*An overemphasis on Hollywood.* If asked, Eldredge would probably agree that Scripture must be the final authority in a believer's life. Unfortunately, his

book suggests otherwise. With more than sixty references to films and movie characters, Eldredge inundates his readers with Hollywood's portrait of masculinity. In the words of one reviewer,

We read about *Legends of the Fall*, *Braveheart*, *Gladiator*, *A River Runs Through It*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Bridge on the River Kwai*, *The Magnificent Seven*, *Shane*, *Top Gun*, *Die Hard*, *Flying Tigers*, and *The Natural*. One quickly finds that it is Eldredge's film background, not his biblical expertise, that forms the primary source for his conclusions.

To be fair, Eldredge's examples often picture a man of integrity, fortitude, and passion, all of which are important traits for biblical manhood. But his sources and the authority for his claims are still inherently questionable. Is Hollywood where Christians should go to find out what God expects for men? Should movies form the foundation, or furnish the role models, for true masculinity? Since when does the church develop its spiritual ideals from the on-screen imaginations of unsaved directors? At the very least, Eldredge (who graduated from college with a theater degree) sends a confusing message to his audience—especially when the film characters he spotlights often exemplify less than biblical behavior and values.

Listen to what Eldredge says on page 13: "Compare your experience watching the latest James Bond or Indiana Jones thriller with, say, going to Bible study." In other words, when compared to adrenaline-packed blockbusters, Eldredge seems to suggest that God's Word loses out. But should spiritual endeavors even be compared to special effects? Should the Bible be rated in terms of its entertainment value? Of course not. Certainly, Eldredge's desire to see thrill, excitement, and energy infused into the Christian experience is a good one. Unfortunately, in searching for renewed spiritual passion, Eldredge

begins with the film industry rather than primarily looking to the Scriptures.

*An overemphasis on other extrabiblical sources.* The author's extrabiblical support does not end with Hollywood. Quotes from secular songwriters, poets, and philosophers also line the pages of *Wild at Heart*. From the Dixie Chicks to the Eagles to Bruce Springsteen, Eldredge seems enamored by the thoughts of worldly men. He quotes Robert Bly, a self-proclaimed student of Sigmund Freud, more than twenty times in this book. It is as if Eldredge is making a deliberate attempt to use secular sources in order to seem relevant. Again, this preoccupation with "relevance" results in the elevation of contemporary human wisdom, while orthodox biblical teaching takes a conspicuous backseat.

Eldredge's reliance on extrabiblical sources is most striking when he recounts the supposed revelations he's received from God. On page 103 Eldredge writes, "I heard Jesus whisper a question to me: 'Will you let me initiate you?' Before my mind ever had a chance to process, dissect, and doubt the whole exchange, my heart leaped up and said yes." Without thinking or examining Scripture, he responds to what he thinks to be the voice of God. But how does he know this is from God? Eldredge later admits that sometimes such voices may not have God as their source. On page 134 he says, "You must ask God what He thinks of you, and you must stay with the question until you have an answer. . . . This is the last thing the Evil One wants you to know. He will play the ventriloquist; he'll whisper to you as if he were the voice of God."

Yet Eldredge himself seems to showcase the revelations he's received without any caution whatsoever. For example, on page 135 Eldredge recounts an alleged conversation (in the form of a journal entry) that he had with God.

What of me, dear Lord? Are You pleased? What did You see? I am sorry

that I have to ask, wishing I knew without asking. Fear, I suppose, makes me doubt. Still, I yearn to hear from You—a word, or image, a name or even just a glance from You.

This is what I heard:

*You are Henry V after Agincourt . . . the man in the arena, whose face is covered with blood and sweat and dust, who strove valiantly . . . a great warrior . . . yes, even Maximus. And then You are my friend.*

But how can he be confident that this is the Lord? Maybe it's actually a sly deception from Satan or the workings of an overactive imagination. Whatever the case, it's hard to envision the Lord of the universe resorting to movies to reveal spiritual truth.

Eldredge continues, on page 135, to describe how he felt after the interaction:

I cannot tell you how much those words mean to me. In fact, I'm embarrassed to tell them to you; they seem arrogant. . . . They are words of life, words that heal my wound and shatter the Enemy's accusations. I am grateful for them, deeply grateful.

It's remarkable how different these words are from those of men like David (see Ps. 19) and Paul (see 2 Tim. 3:16, 17) who reserved such praise for the written Word of God alone. Whether intended or not, Eldredge continually elevates his own thoughts (which he attributes to God) above the written Word (once for all delivered to the saints; cf. Jude 3). Such flippancy is dangerous, especially since the Scriptures reserve severe warnings for this kind of presumption (see Rev. 22:18, 19).

*A de-emphasis on key biblical texts.* Eldredge's abundant use of nonbiblical support provides a stark contrast to his noticeable absence of key biblical texts on manhood. Sure, Eldredge calls attention to some specific verses that describe God as a warrior or demonstrate Christ's zeal. But in a book specifically targeted at Christian men, how could he overlook texts such as Ephesians 5:25-33 and

Titus 2:1-8? These are passages where men are given explicit commands and the essence of biblical masculinity is directly addressed. In an effort to be relevant and fresh, Eldredge has left the believer's most effective tool on the shelf. In so doing, he ends up contradicting much of what Scripture actually teaches about manhood.

It is likely that these texts were overlooked because, generally speaking, they contradict the entire thesis of Eldredge's book. For example, in Titus 2:2 older men are called "to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness." Four verses later the young men are commanded "to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned." This is a far cry from the wild, unfettered, adventure-seeking movie star who is uncritically made the hero in *Wild at Heart*.

*An inaccurate method of biblical interpretation.* When Scripture is incorporated into *Wild at Heart*, it is often out of context or poorly balanced with the full canon of God's Word. In examining Old Testament saints Eldredge makes a common but harmful error in biblical study. He assumes that there is no distinction between prescriptive and descriptive texts in the Bible. By doing this, he confuses events, descriptions, and characteristics highlighted in narrative passages with direct commands given to the New Testament believer. Consider his comments on page 5:

Look at the heroes of the biblical text: Moses does not encounter the living God at the mall. He finds Him (or is found by Him) somewhere out in the deserts of Sinai, a long way from the comforts of Egypt. The same is true of Jacob, who has his wrestling match with God not on the living room sofa but in a wadi somewhere east of the Jabbok, in Mesopotamia. Where did the great prophet Elijah go to recover his

strength? To the wild. As did John the Baptist, and his cousin, Jesus, who is *led by the Spirit* into the wilderness.

But do these few examples really show us that God *always* uses wilderness experiences to change men's lives? Of course not. Scripture speaks highly of many men who "encountered God" without losing themselves in nature. Take Joseph (in an Egyptian prison), for example, or Daniel (in a Babylonian palace), or Nehemiah (in a Medo-Persian royal court), or the Apostle Paul (on the road to Damascus). These are just a few examples of men whom God greatly impacted, even while they resided in urban areas. In direct contrast to Eldredge's premise, the overall message of the Bible makes it clear: God is not nearly as concerned with the location of your life as He is with the condition of your heart.

With so much of the Bible being narrative, almost any principle imaginable could be supported by confusing prescriptive and descriptive texts. For example, after reading the life of Elisha, someone might argue that being mauled by wild bears is a proper punishment for disrespectful children (see 2 Kings 2:23-25). Of course, such an interpretation would be outrageous. But the principle behind it is essentially no different than that found on page 5 of *Wild at Heart*.

Another example of careless Bible study is Eldredge's explanation of the Book of Ruth. Throughout history, the vast majority of Bible scholars have understood the theme of the book to center on God's providence in extending the Messianic line. In contrast, Eldredge claims, "The book of Ruth is devoted to one question: How does a good woman help her man to play the man? The answer: She seduces him" (p. 191). This is certainly a novel interpretation—bordering on both the bizarre and the blasphemous.

Scripture makes it clear that the written Word of God alone contains everything we need for "life and godliness"

(2 Peter 1:3; see also Psalm 119:105 and 2 Tim. 3:15-17). To set aside the Bible's truth in favor of worldly wisdom and film references is to treat it carelessly and scornfully. We must approach God's Word on His terms, not with our own agendas—simply looking for proof-texts for our own ideas. Yet, that is exactly how the Bible is used in *Wild at Heart*. And that is why, at the most foundational levels, Eldredge's arguments fall seriously short.

### ***An Inadequate Picture of God***

A second fundamental flaw in *Wild at Heart*, flowing from an insufficient view of Scripture, is an inadequate portrayal of who God is. While Eldredge attempts to support his thesis by appealing to God's character, he handicaps his readers by giving them less than the full story. Granted, in a short book with a specific theme it is impossible to include all that Scripture has to say about the Creator and Sustainer of the world. Nonetheless, the author's lack of balance is indefensible. Eldredge emphasizes only the divine attributes that give credence to his idea of masculinity. Other attributes are conveniently omitted.

For example, Eldredge argues that godly men should not necessarily be "nice guys." On page 25, he supports this premise by looking to the actions of God: "I wonder if the Egyptians who kept Israel under the whip would describe Yahweh as a Really Nice Guy? Plagues, pestilence, the death of every firstborn—that doesn't seem very gentlemanly, now does it?"

Does this mean that godly men should also wreak havoc on their enemies? By emphasizing God's justice, wrath, and power, Eldredge certainly promotes God's authority. Yet, while he continually refers to God as a warrior, he fails to ever mention one of God's most awesome attributes—His mercy. And this is no minor oversight. Divine grace runs like a river through every page of Scripture

from the Old Testament to the New. God is merciful, gracious, and kind. The entire plan of redemption is an act of unparalleled and unimaginable mercy; yet nowhere in *Wild at Heart* is this attribute discussed.

Eldredge continues this trend on page 29, where he conveniently highlights the virile and untamed aspects of God's creation: "If you have any doubts as to whether or not God loves wildness, spend a night in the woods . . . alone. Take a walk out in a thunderstorm. Go for a swim with a pod of killer whales. Get a bull moose mad at you." Again, God's power in the wilderness is unmistakable. But God's character and His glory are equally evident in the beauty of a sunset, the complexity of the human eye, and the gentleness of a newborn baby. Because Eldredge's premise demands that God also be "wild at heart," he fails to present the full array of divine character traits.

*Wild at Heart* not only shortchanges several of God's praiseworthy attributes, it also misconstrues others. One of the most significant examples of this involves God's sovereignty. . . .

In an attempt to make God into an adventure-chasing thrill-seeker, Eldredge warps the biblical picture of God's sovereignty. Consider the following verses:

*I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted (Job 42:2).*

*Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me? (Jer. 32:27).*

*The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD (Prov. 16:33).*

*I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them (Isa. 42:8, 9).*

The God of the Bible is not a God who takes "risks." There are no unknowns

with God. He has foreknown everything in history from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1). In fact, the Book of Revelation makes it clear: God already knows how human history will end. It's certainly true that God is never the efficient cause or author of the evil that men do, but Scripture nonetheless teaches that He exercises His sovereignty even in the very worst acts of evil (Acts 2:23, 24; 4:27, 28). Nothing comes as a surprise to Him. His plan is comprehensive and eternal (Isa. 45:21).

Unlike Hollywood's heroes, who take startling risks to save the day, the God of Scripture sits enthroned in heaven, confidently and calmly in control of all creation.

*... for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose," calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it (Isa. 46:9-11).*

The Bible could not be more clear: There are no risks with God. But Eldredge seems to have overlooked the biblical evidence. As a result, he continually replaces Scripture's portrait of our sovereign God with his own self-styled definition. For example, on page 12 he describes God as "wild, dangerous, unfettered and free."

Granted, Eldredge does make a brief attempt to disassociate himself from Open Theism. (Open Theism is a relatively new theological position that proposes that God is unsure about the future, but He is trying His best to make it all work out in the end.) But the author's defense is unconvincing. On page 32 he concedes that "we must humbly acknowledge that there's a great deal of mystery involved, but for those aware of the discussion, I am not advo-

cating open theism. Nevertheless, there is definitely something wild in the heart of God."

This type of theological double-talk does not hold water. According to *Wild at Heart*, God is a God of risk, and risk only exists if the outcome is unsure. But this is certainly not the position of orthodox Christianity, nor is it in keeping with the overall tenor of Scripture. Denying the sovereignty of God is not only a blatant affront to His Person but also an outright denial of His Word.

### ***An Incomplete Portrait of Christ***

*Wild at Heart's* haphazard handling of deity is not confined to the heavenly Father alone. It is also seen in the book's depiction of Jesus Christ. Correctly asserting that Jesus is a model for masculinity, Eldredge fails by only giving half of the story.

Without question, there is no better model for masculinity than Jesus Christ. As the Son of Man, the Bible depicts Him as the perfect man—100 percent human and yet without sin. At the same time, as the Son of God He is the supreme object of our faith and the faultless example we are to follow. As the Apostle Paul told his readers in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

Eldredge should certainly be applauded for seeking to present Christ as a model for manhood. Nonetheless, he falls short when he limits the characteristics of Christ to those that fit his thesis. The image of Christ found in *Wild at Heart* is that of a man who cleansed the temple, confronted the Pharisees, and never covered in the face of opposition. He describes Jesus on page 29, saying:

Jesus is no "capon priest," no pale-faced altar boy with his hair parted in the middle, speaking softly, avoiding confrontation, who at last gets himself killed because he has no way out. He works with wood, commands the loyalty of dockworkers. He is the Lord of hosts, the captain of angel armies. And when

Christ returns, he is at the head of a dreadful company, mounted on a white horse, with a double-edged sword, his robe dipped in blood (Rev. 19). Now that sounds a lot more like William Wallace than it does Mother Teresa. No question about it—there is something fierce in the heart of God.

But in Eldredge's portrayal of Christ, these macho characteristics are never balanced by the true biblical descriptions of Christ's meekness, gentleness, and mercy. While it is true that Christians often misrepresent Jesus as passive and effeminate, Eldredge has reacted by swinging to the other extreme. Eldredge's Christ—a zealous radical who always seems ready to fight—is an equally inaccurate portrayal of the biblical Jesus.

One example of Eldredge's one-sided presentation is found on page 151, where he says, "You must let your strength show up. Remember Christ in the Garden, the sheer force of His presence? Many of us have actually been afraid to let our strength show up because the world doesn't have a place for it." Yet even in that passage, Eldredge misses the fact that Christ did *not* stand up for Himself or attempt to fight back. In fact, He even reprimanded Peter for acting like the hero of *Gladiator* and attempting to retaliate. "Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword'" (Matt. 26:52). By conveniently overlooking this portion of the text, Eldredge distorts the entire passage.

On pages 78 and 79, while giving advice to one of his sons who had recently encountered a neighborhood bully, Eldredge says:

"Blaine, look at me." He raised his tearful eyes slowly, reluctantly. There was shame written all over his face. "I want you to listen very closely to what I am about to say. The next time that bully pushes you down, here is what I want you to do—are you listening, Blaine?" He nodded, his big wet eyes

fixed on mine. "I want you to get up . . . and I want you to hit him . . . as hard as you possibly can" [emphasis added]. A look of embarrassed delight came over Blaine's face, then he smiled. . . .

Yes, I know that Jesus told us to turn the other cheek. But we have really misused that verse. You cannot teach a boy to use his strength by stripping him of it. Jesus was able to retaliate, believe me. But He chose not to. And yet we suggest that a boy who is mocked, shamed before his fellows, stripped of all power and dignity should stay in that beaten place because Jesus wants him there? You will emasculate him for life.

Is this really what Jesus meant when He commanded us to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39)? What about Christ's commands to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44)? Again, Eldredge completely misrepresents God's Word, replacing Christ's clear instruction with his own worldly wisdom and advice.

Note that in attempting to teach his son strength and to defend his masculinity, Eldredge completely ignores Jesus' supreme example, as he himself says in passing: "Jesus was able to retaliate . . . but He chose not to." That *is* true strength despite Eldredge's self-styled conclusions. The ability to demonstrate grace under fire comes only from the work of the Spirit in the lives of believers. If biblical masculinity is measured in terms of fighting back, then what about the example of Jesus, which we are expressly commanded to follow? "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten" (1 Peter 2:23). Jesus' example leaves us with only one possible conclusion—Eldredge is wrong to equate turning the other cheek with "weakness" (p. 79).

Christ, of course, was the antithesis of weakness. But His power is seen more in His constant restraint than in His rare display of action. Yet Eldredge presents Christ as "fierce, wild and romantic to the core" (p. 203). That type of misrepre-

sentation has led some critics, such as Rut Ethridge III, to protest by saying:

Is Christ wild? Since Christ is in absolute control of all things (Mark 4:39-41), the term “wild” just does not apply to Him. Further, when we examine the distinctive personhood of Christ and His Messianic role, we see not wildness, but pure and complete submission. Jesus said and did only what the Father wanted Him to (John 8:28, 29; Philippians 2:7, 8), and He lived in complete submission to the Law (Matt. 5:17, 18). Our very salvation depended on Christ’s lack of wildness! (Romans 5:18, 19). Sure, Christ railed against Pharisaical hypocrisy and drove money changers from the temple, but are those things really indicative of wildness . . . or self-controlled, passionate obedience to the Father? How can the very personification of meekness, humility, and absolute power be considered wild?

To view Christ more like William Wallace than Mother Theresa, as Eldredge does on page 29, is not the issue. After all, Christ cannot ultimately be compared to anyone. Instead, the issue is our likeness to Christ. *He* is the standard, not William Wallace, John Wayne, or James Bond. Christ and Christ alone is the true standard for manhood and masculinity. This is seen in His person and life, and it is commanded in His Word. Yes, Christ demonstrated passion, leadership, and power. But He also showed great mercy, meekness, and self-control. Eldredge is right in turning to Christ, but he fails to present Jesus accurately—as both the sovereign King and the suffering Servant.

### ***An Inaccurate Portrait of Man***

A final flaw exhibited in *Wild at Heart* is an incorrect and unbiblical view of man—a flaw that is especially alarming in a book about finding true masculinity. Eldredge’s misguided anthropology is seen in at least two ways.

*Man’s personal responsibility for sin is overlooked.* Instead of establishing individual responsibility for sin, the author

encourages men to shift the blame—seeing sin more as a sickness than a moral choice. An entire chapter (4) deals with the “wounds” that every man has—wounds that help explain who a man is and why he acts as he does. In other words, every man is a victim of some ill treatment: Either your father was too passive, or your father was too controlling; you were given too much responsibility or too much freedom. Either way everyone has a “wound.” On page 127 he states, “There are readers who even now have no idea what their wound is, or even what false self arose from it. Ah, how convenient that blindness is. Blissful ignorance. But a wound unfelt is a wound unhealed.”

By convincing his readers to blame their behavior on these hidden wounds, Eldredge replaces the guilt of a sinner with the self-righteous pity of a victim. That falls far short of the biblical picture of man’s responsibility. The Apostle Paul doesn’t cry out for mercy based on his upbringing or his legalistic Jewish parents. Instead he proclaims, “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1 Tim. 1:15). In Romans 3:23 he calls for everyone to recognize their sinful state: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Despite his many hardships, Paul never complained of being victimized. He did not reject or deny his sin, nor did he excuse the sinfulness of others as a wound inflicted on them. Instead, Paul recognized the reality and subsequent responsibility of human depravity (cf. Ps. 51:4, 5).

*Wild at Heart*, on the other hand, downplays sin at every turn. By shifting the focus away from sin, Eldredge diminishes man’s guilt before God and de-emphasizes his need for repentance. “Things began to change for Carl when he saw the whole sexual struggle not so much as sin *but as a battle for his*

*strength*” (p. 147). Without embracing sin as man’s true problem, the author badly misdiagnoses man’s greatest need. Scripture makes it abundantly clear that God will hold each individual accountable for sin (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). That is our real problem, and all of Scripture affirms this. And therefore our deepest need is for a Saviour, not a healing hand or a further affirmation of our strength. The “wounds” Eldredge encourages men to hide behind may be popular, but they are not biblical.

*Man’s purpose in life is misconstrued.* In addition to neglecting a proper view of sin, Eldredge also misunderstands God’s purpose for men. This is not surprising since, instead of looking to God’s Word for the answer, he looks instead to his own wants and desires. Thus, on page 48 he contends:

Why does God create Adam? What is a man for? If you know what something is designed to do, then you know its purpose in life. A retriever loves the water; a lion loves the hunt; a hawk loves to soar. It’s what they’re made for. Desire reveals design, and design reveals destiny. In the case of human beings, our design is also revealed by our desires.

What is Eldredge saying? Put simply, man’s purpose should be determined by his passions and pleasures. Because men have a desire for adventure, battles, and beauties, then that must be what they were designed to pursue. In assuming this, the author overlooks the fact that, as fallen human beings, our desires are inherently sinful and selfish. Moreover, he makes man’s purpose in life self-centered instead of God-centered. Christ said that He came to do the will of the Father and not His own (see Luke 22:42). In contrast, Eldredge claims the key to biblical manhood starts with embracing our own wills above anything else.

In a bookstore years ago, Eldredge “ran across a sentence that changed [his] life.” The sentence, from author Gil

Bailie, was this: “Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive” (p. 200). If this is Eldredge’s life motto, it’s no wonder he sees selfish ambition as the key to godly living. But this is certainly not in keeping with the instruction of Scripture (see Phil. 2:1-4). Contrary to Eldredge’s claims, what the world needs is selfless men who obey Christ and proclaim His gospel—seeking to serve Him rather than themselves. Christ calls us to deny ourselves and follow Him (Mark 8:34). It seems Eldredge is calling us to do just the opposite.

### Conclusion

There is no question that *Wild at Heart* addresses a critical topic in Christianity. There is a serious need for men with resolve, strength, and character. However, by failing to establish a high view of Scripture, a high view of God, and a proper view of man, Eldredge lays a faulty foundation for constructing true masculinity. His call to be a wild man is not only unnecessary—it is unbiblical. Men are to be dignified and above reproach, not dangerous and beyond restraint. The man behind the desk can be just as much a man of God as the mighty warrior of the Old Testament—if he holds fast to what God’s Word commands him to be (see Ephesians 5; Titus 2).

So let the man who searches for true masculinity look no further than the pages of Scriptures, for there he will find the truth about himself from the mouth of his Creator. Let his ears not be tickled by the whims of men, but let his mind be trained by the Word of God. And before any man looks for his battle to fight, his beauty to rescue, and his adventure to live, let him first look to his God to glorify. ■

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# The Father of Modern Missions

by Donald Prout

It was October 2, 1792, when 14 men gathered in the home of Widow Wallis—just “nobodies from nowhere,” as one writer describes them. But they had caught the vision of a lost world. One man in particular had inspired them to “look upon the fields white unto harvest.” His name was William Carey.

William Carey was born in Northampton on August 17, 1761. We are told by his biographers of such childhood escapades as falling out of a tree, cluttering his bedroom with all sorts of flora and fauna, and of devouring travel books, especially “Captain Cook’s Voyages.” This latter pastime earned him the nickname, “Columbus”!

By the age of 12 he had left school and was working as a gardener, a position he was soon forced to relinquish because of the rash that developed from working outdoors. It is ironic to realize that in adulthood this same William Carey would “endure 40 years of Bengali heat.”

His new employment was that of cobbling, the making of shoes in a shop owned by a Mr. Clark Nichols. Two things happened during those teenage years that changed the direction of his life.

The first took place at Christmastime 1778. It had been an act of dishonesty on his part followed by a lie to cover his sin. It left him conscience-stricken. But it also revealed to him his need of a Saviour. The second was when fellow-apprentice John Warr invited him to a Nonconformist place of worship, and this led to Carey’s conversion. As S. Pierce Carey puts it so well in his biography: “Now he was indeed ‘Columbus’ and had reached his new world!”

## *Marriage and Ministry*

Two years later, at the age of 19, he married the illiterate 24-year-old Dorothy Plackett. Two years of happiness were followed by the death of their first child and a fever that caused William to lose his hair at the age of 22.

He took to preaching—the “fire was in his bones”—and some Sundays he would tramp 12 miles “in all weathers over abominable roads” to preach to a handful of people.

On October 5, 1783, he was baptized in the river Nene by Dr. John Ryland (Jr.), a leading Baptist minister in that area, and he joined the Baptist Church at Moulton. More and more he found himself preaching. A “trial sermon,” however, to be put on the list of Baptist lay preachers, turned out to be a dismal failure. He was rejected. But the church at Moulton loved him, maybe saw the encouragement he needed, and called him as their pastor anyway. The calling of Carey to this ministry can still be read in the church secretary’s minute book. It seems he was not much more literate than Carey’s wife. “We met in peas and parted in younty,” he wrote.

To help support his growing family, Carey took to schoolteaching and still did some cobbling. In his spare time (!) he was mastering Latin and Greek, Hebrew, Italian, French, and Dutch! Bear in mind that he left school at the age of 12!

## *Rebuked*

It was at a meeting of the Ministers’ Fraternal at Northampton in 1786 where Carey’s vision was nearly quenched forever.

The Rev. John Ryland (Sr.) chaired the meeting and called upon a subject for discussion. The young pastor from Moulton dared to suggest: "Was not the command to teach all nations obligatory on all succeeding ministers to the end of the world?" The aged chairman was harsh in his reply. Calling William a "miserable enthusiast for asking such a question," he assured those present that if the Lord were pleased to convert the heathen, He could do it without human aid! Such is generally referred to as Hyper-Calvinism.

Carey sat down. But he knew the day was coming when he would rise again. He studied the facts and figures. A large map dominated the wall of his cobbler's workshop. In his mind's eye he could see the sheep scattered abroad without a shepherd. The biographies of Brainerd and Eliot, early missionaries to the Red Indians, sparked an inextinguishable blaze within. He would raise the subject again!

By 1792 he was a properly ordained Baptist pastor at Leicester. The first two years were filled with heartache: problems in the church, and the death of daughter Lucy. His expositions of the Apocalypse took "more than a year" and the burden of the lost world still lay heavily upon his heart.

Then at the Easter gathering of the Baptist Association, Carey had his opportunity to share his burden once again. There were 17 ministers present. On the second day of the conference, May 31, 1792, Carey preached "his Deathless Sermon." Taking his text from Isaiah 54:2, 3, "Enlarge the place of thy tent! Spare not! Lengthen thy cords and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles," he preached for an hour. "Carey," wrote one who was present, "was in an agony of distress." It was an earnest plea for missionaries to be sent overseas to those who had never heard the gospel.

*"Expect great things from God!"* he

cried passionately, *"And attempt great things for God!"*

But, as is so often the case, the benediction was said and those present began to leave the room. Things were about to return to normal. Carey grabbed the arm of Andrew Fuller and cried: "Is there nothing again going to be done, sir?" Fuller, seven years Carey's senior and more influential than this "enthusiast," called the meeting back to order. A proposal was made that at the next meeting, October 2, 1792, a plan would be discussed "for forming a Baptist Society for propagating the Gospel among the Heathen." Those 17 ministers left the meeting little realizing the impact which that decision would have upon world evangelization. In their hands they carried a copy of a booklet Carey had prepared—"the charter of modern mission," as Sir George Adam Smith called it.

Even today, more than 200 years later, only the pages of statistics are out of date in this "Enquiry into the obligation of Christians to use means for the Conversion of the Heathen." It is "a classic presentation of the argument for the world mission of the church."

On October 2, 1792, they gathered in a small back parlor "only 12 feet by 10 feet." There were twelve ministers, one student, and Deacon Timms. The house was owned by Widow Wallis—and if ever there was an illustration of blessings that accrued from the gift of hospitality, this was it! As they sipped their tea and ate their buns the decision was made. It was something new in British history. A missionary society was born, and the first offering was taken—*faith promises!*—and collected in Fuller's snuff box: thirteen pounds, two shillings, and six pence!

### ***The Doctor!***

At the next meeting, Carey, unable to be present, sent a letter that he had received from a certain Dr. John

Thomas. Thomas was an Englishman who had been living in India for some time, healing the sick and preaching the gospel. No missionary society had supported him. Indeed, he claimed that no support was necessary! One could earn one's own living on the field and have plenty of opportunities to evangelize. It should be pointed out that Dr. Thomas was continually in trouble over money. Or lack of it.

His creditors were after him. On one occasion he had been imprisoned (for two days) for not paying debts. And in India he had aroused ill feeling by pushing his Baptist views upon fellow European Christians who did not see things as he did. Yet he had also translated two of the Gospels into Bengali and there had been a few Indians profess faith in Christ. One of them, Ram Ram Basu, had even penned the first Bengali Christian hymn. And now Dr. Thomas was in England—planning shortly to return to India—and he wondered if the newly-founded missionary society could supply him with a fellow worker.

Carey volunteered. He would accompany Dr. Thomas to India. "You hold the ropes," he is reported to have said to the newly-formed mission board, "and I'll go down the mine!"

At first, Dorothy, who had never even seen the sea, refused to go. As well she might! Already she had three sons (all under eight), and a baby on the way. But Carey had set his hand to the plow, and there could be no turning back. Dorothy agreed to let Felix, the eldest son, go with him. But the boat was delayed six weeks and during that time Dr. Thomas' creditors caught up with him. He fled to London to sort things out while the captain unloaded the missionaries' baggage and sailed without them.

Two months later they were again ready to sail—on June 13, 1793. By this time Dorothy had consented to go also, "if her sister Kitty would accompany

her." So, with her three older sons and a babe in arms—Jabez—she joined her husband and Dr. John Thomas in one of the most incredible missionary sagas ever recorded.

### *India*

The voyage had taken five months (June 13-November 11, 1793). The Danish ship had weathered a dreadful storm around the Cape of Good Hope (it had taken 11 days to repair the damage) and the currents in the Bay of Bengal had pulled them a month back from their destination. But now they stepped onto this vast mission field.

For 200 years the East India Company had been the center of British activity. And some company chaplains were there to care for the spiritual needs of the European workers. Danish missionaries had ventured forth previously—and were settled in a province some hours to the north of Calcutta. But Thomas and Carey were the first Britishers to go forth in response to the Great Commission.

Those first months were not easy. Thomas' assessment of financial support—and the ability to earn one's own keep—was way off target. Within three months the missionaries were "broke." Carey was reduced to selling "pens and knives and scissors" to feed his family.

Ram Ram Basu had backslid; the area where they lived was marshy and malaria-infested; the godlessness of the white community and the customs of the Hindus were a continual shock. Burning widows alive, drowning unwanted babies in the Ganges River, and swinging on hooks embedded in the flesh were pagan practices that made Carey all the more determined to spread the light of the Christian gospel. And there was sickness. Both Dorothy and Felix came down with fever.

By February, 1794, the situation brightened. A Mr. Charles Short of the East India Company, although not a

Christian himself, took pity on the plight of his fellow countrymen. He invited them temporarily into his house. Perhaps his motives were not altogether humanitarian. After all, it wasn't long before he proposed to Dorothy's sister, Kitty, and married her.

The death of the plantation manager—in a town 300 miles to the north—led to Thomas recommending Carey for the job. The pay was reasonable and Carey accepted. A letter from the mission board in England criticized him for becoming involved in secular work. He wrote back assuring them that his concern for the heathen had in no way abated. But at least now his family had an income.

### ***Problems!***

In the midst of all this—1795—five-year-old Peter died and Dorothy again fell ill. This time there was no recovery. For the next 12 years “her brain became the haunted chamber of morbid fancies and tormenting fears.” Another biographer described her as “maniacal.” Carey refused to have her placed in an asylum; rather she was confined to the room next to his study where he continually cared for her.

Sickness also laid hold of Carey. “I wear my great-coat all day and yet shiver,” he wrote home to the mission board. Silence from England was another cross to bear. Two years would pass without a letter, although some might have failed to reach their destination. And then there was Ram Ram Basu, Thomas' convert of five or six years, who committed adultery and “dragged the mission into the dust.”

But encouragement came in the form of John Fountain, a young man from England who had joined the mission and been sent to the field. Except for a political hobbyhorse he oftentimes expounded, he and Carey would work well together.

By 1796 Carey was able to preach in

the native tongue so as to be “tolerably understood.” He reported to the home base that sometimes 500 gathered to hear him. The translating of the Scriptures was a major priority. Carey was able to buy his own printing press, and by 1797 the translation of the Bengali New Testament was ready. William Ward, a printer from England, arrived to join the team, followed by the Marshman family, and the Grants and Brunsdens!

### ***Attack!***

It was obviously the time for the devil to launch another attack—things were going so well.

The British authorities in India (possibly under pressure from the East India Company) ordered the new missionaries to return to Britain. The preaching of the gospel has never been popular among the self-righteous. Besides, who wanted educated Indians? Certainly not the East India Company! And were not their own chaplains from the Church of England doing all that needed to be done? Who would want these gospel-preaching Baptists telling everybody that they were sinners in need of salvation?

To thwart this latest problem, Carey moved the mission station out of British territory into Danish. At Serampore, where they had the governor's blessing, they built their new headquarters.

Dr. John Thomas by this time had abandoned missionary work and gone into the sugar refining business—and “the distillation of rum!” Carey wrote home to Andrew Fuller, secretary of the mission: “Mr. Thomas is gone far away and my domestic troubles are sometimes almost too heavy for me. I am distressed, yet supported, and I trust not totally dead in the things of God.”

### ***Printing***

The Serampore Mission took off in

January, 1800. Carey by now was the recognized leader, and by his side were Marshman and Ward—the three of them going down in Christian history as the “Serampore Trio.” The location was about two hours, by river, north of Calcutta. After some initial friction on the mission compound when “two of the men had even come to blows”—we are not told who they were—the printing press started to produce the Bengali New Testament. The “thousands of handwritten sheets” had to be laboriously typeset in a very difficult language—but in May, 1800, the first proofs were rolling from the press.

“To give a New Testament to men who never saw one before, who have been reading fictions as God’s Word—this is our privilege,” wrote Carey.

The Marshmans opened boarding schools for boys and girls respectively. Felix Carey, 15 (William’s eldest son), preached his first sermon and hopes were raised again. Even John Thomas came back and joined the work.

### *Encouragements!*

The greatest encouragement came in December. A Hindu carpenter named Krishna Pal came to the missionaries for medical attention, and there he heard and responded to the Gospel. He was the first Indian convert since Carey’s arrival seven years earlier. Krishna Pal was baptized—despite opposition from fellow Hindus—on December 28, 1800, in the Hoogly River. He became a devoted pioneer evangelist, dying of cholera 20 years later at the age of 58. On his deathbed he was asked if he still loved Christ. “Yes,” came the reply, “but not as much as He loves me.”

A hymn was written by Krishna Pal (in Bengali) and translated by Marshman—

O Thou my soul, forget no more  
The Friend who all thy misery bore;  
Let every idol be forgot,

But, O my soul, forget Him not.  
Jesus for thee a body takes,  
Thy guilt assumes, thy fetters  
breaks,  
Discharging all thy dreadful debt;  
And canst thou e’er such love forget?

Renounce thy works and ways with  
grief,  
And fly to this most sure relief;  
Nor Him forget Who left His throne,  
And for thy life gave up His own.

Infinite truth and mercy shine  
In Him, and He Himself is thine;  
And canst thou, then, with sin beset,  
Such charms, such matchless  
charms, forget?

### *Professor*

In April, 1801, Carey was invited to become professor of Bengali at a British government-run college in Calcutta. The salary was more than sufficient to support the whole mission and there was added advantage of lecturing to 100 students, “sons of British aristocracy,” and still having ample time for missionary endeavors. It had been estimated that Carey—from now until his death—would contribute £40,000 into the Baptist work at Serampore, and the 13 outstations. “This sum must represent at least £500,000 in modern terms, probably considerably more!”

There were more clashes with the East India Company—their main spokesman being a certain Thomas Twining—and more domestic grief. Dorothy Carey died in December 1807. William took unto himself a new wife in May, 1808. Some of the missionaries were appalled! In spite of the fact that this lovely Danish lady, Charlotte Rumohr, was an invalid “unable to walk up or down stairs,” it was a happy union until her death 13 years later.

### *Tragedy?*

Fire! On March 12, 1812, the print shop went up in flames. Carey walked

in tears amid the ruins—"In one night," he said, "the labors of years are consumed. How unsearchable are the Divine ways . . . the Lord has laid me low, that I might look more simply to Him."

Gone were precious manuscripts—translations into about 14 different languages—and his magnum opus, "The Sanskrit Dictionary," as well as so much more. Thousands of reams of paper, tools, books, and printing materials were lost. The presses alone survived.

But the Lord gave "beauty for ashes"—the disastrous fire gave the Serampore Mission undreamed of publicity back in Britain. Churches of all denominations rallied with financial support. Within a year they were printing the Scriptures again in more languages than before the fire.

The death of Charlotte in 1821 was yet another loss to the aging missionary. But two years later God filled the void with his marriage to Grace Hughes. He was 61 years of age at the time and she was 45.

By this time there were over 600 baptized church members in the Baptist work in India and thousands of adherents. And the home committee now numbering 35—most of whom had never met Carey—decided to appoint a board of trustees that would have the oversight of the Serampore properties: lands, buildings, printing works, and paper mill. Carey replied that "my heart is exceeding wounded at the society's proposal. We are your brothers, but not your servants."

The Serampore Trio had always regarded the work as the Lord's. It was a part of the Baptist Mission. But now laws from home were introduced to make it legal, the rift began. Harsh words sped across the ocean. For 16 years Carey and his workers had refused the home committee's demands. Eventually Carey gave in,

stipulating that he and his workers would be able to remain on the properties rent free until death!

More grief came when son Felix lost his missionary vision and became Burma's ambassador to the British Government in Calcutta. William Carey was not impressed by seeing his son strutting around with his gold sword, a scarlet-silk umbrella with gold and ivory handle, and 50 Burmese attendants. "Felix," he wrote home, "is shriveled from a missionary to an ambassador." But son Jabez was converted—after a rebellious 19 years—and went forth as a missionary in northern India.

### **"Well Done!"**

It was on June 9, 1834, when William Carey heard the Saviour's "Well done!" He was 72. For 40 years he had toiled for the Saviour in India without a furlough. He had translated the entire Bible into Bengali, Oriya, Marathi, Hindi, Assamese, and Sanskrit; and parts of it into 29 other languages.

Shortly before his death, Alexander Duff, the famous Presbyterian missionary, had visited him. "Mr. Duff," Carey had said feebly, "when I am gone, speak nothing about Dr. Carey—speak about Dr. Carey's Saviour."

It is true that we have talked of Dr. Carey—and his life and labors are a challenge to all of us—but we have also thought afresh of the One whom he served and who commanded him and motivated him to "take the Gospel to every creature." ■

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# The Will of God: General Parameters or Personal Direction?

by Robert Yarbrough

Few would dispute that “the will of God” is a big issue for any Christian. After all, it is referred to explicitly some four dozen times in the New Testament. God’s will should regulate our prayers (Matt. 6:10). Doing His will is requisite for fellowship with Christ (Mark 3:35). It is required for entrance into His kingdom (Matt. 7:21). Living out His will is perhaps the very highest of Christian priorities (Rom. 12:2).

But is knowing God’s will a matter of getting the big picture from Scripture’s general teaching? Or should we expect personal and specific divine counsel for most, if not all, personal decisions?

In favor of the personal view, John 14:26 is often cited: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (NIV). There is plenty of evidence that God can steer His people in quite personal and specific ways:

- Jesus wrestled with the Father’s personal will for Him in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:42).
- Paul was called to be an apostle by God’s will (1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1).
- The Corinthians responded favorably to Paul “in keeping with the Lord’s will” (2 Cor. 8:5).
- A matter as personal and private as sexual purity is “God’s will” (1 Thess. 4:3).
- Christians should have knowledge of God’s will and stand firm in it (Col. 1:9; 4:12).

In that light, why not view John 14:26 as sanction for a maximal understanding of God’s will as knowable for

every decision in every aspect of life?

Several factors counsel caution here:

- John 14:26 records Jesus’ words to the eleven apostles, the foundation of God’s household (cf. Eph. 2:20), on the night He was betrayed, not to believers at large at all times afterward.
- John 14:26 promises assistance in recalling things Jesus said. Only those who followed Him during His earthly days fit that description.
- John 14:26 with its promise to “teach you all things” is more likely to underscore apostolic didactic authority than to imply a *carte blanche* for the decisions that we make because we deem them to be God’s will.

Not even Jesus regarded His self-consciousness as immediately and fully congruent with the Father’s at all times. Otherwise, why would He have agonized in prayer like He did when He chose the Twelve (Luke 6:12)? Even after praying all night, one of those He chose was “a devil” (John 6:70). It was no easy thing, even for Jesus, to determine God’s will, or to accept it when it emerged. Think of Gethsemane.

How much more should we be prepared to “live by faith, not sight” (2 Cor. 5:7)? Must we not concede that at times God’s will is to withhold fuller knowledge of His will?

Since Scripture speaks frequently of individuals (and not just of Jesus or apostles) knowing and doing God’s personal will, we should be hesitant to rule out God’s prerogative to break into the loop of our decision-making process when He sees fit. We should not despair of particular personal guidance at junctures where God acts unmistakably to

provide it.

Yet humility requires that we recognize the inherent gap between human and divine wills. We must be willing to claw laboriously in search of the latter in prayer. And how about when God wills to insert a Judas into our lives? Too much glib use of John 14:26 overlooks Peter's insight into how much "the will of God" may be to thrust His people forth into dire straits (1 Peter 3:17; 4:19). I have heard many christen their decisions as God's will with "I feel a peace about that." Few correlate God's will with loss, pain, grief, or death. But God's will in Christ is frequently a cross.

John 14:26 hardly supports a doctrine of cognitive soothsaying by Christians who want automatic assurance that a decision newly emerged in their thinking was actually first hatched by the mind of God. At best, taken in con-

junction with broader New Testament teaching, it confirms God's desire and ability to deal with His people in highly personal and bountiful ways. It reminds us of why we go to Scripture again and again for divine guidance, not to some inner self: Christ and the Scriptures He sanctioned have the words of eternal life, not our sin-sullied psyches.

And it braces us to reaffirm that discovering *God's* will may play havoc with the *self*-realization that our culture conditions us to crave. It is rather self-abnegation that seekers of God have the best warrant to expect as God's will, if what Jesus predicted His disciples would pass on in John 14:26 is any clue. ■

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## Saying the Hard Stuff

by Gordon MacDonald

One of the first pastors of the church in Ephesus, Timothy, apparently didn't like the hard-stuff side of ministry. And that worried his mentor, Paul, considerably and explains much of the content of the two letters written to Timothy in the New Testament.

Ephesus was a tough city, and the Ephesian Christians were tough people—many of them freshly converted out of unspeakably dark spiritual conditions. My suspicion is that Timothy found Ephesus and its Christians a bit more than he could handle and wanted out. Perhaps that explains why Paul begins the correspondence by saying, "Stay there!"

Timothy was, apparently, a nice and gentle young man. "I have no one like

him," Paul wrote the Philippians, "who will so naturally care for you." Quite a compliment.

But he seemed to struggle with *hard stuff*. I'm talking about the kind of preaching and discipling that exposes errant belief, sinful attitudes, and ungodly behavior. *Hard stuff*: calling people to sacrificial living. *Hard stuff* makes people squirm, sometimes angry. But it may cause them to be repentant and eager to find better ways.

Timothy seems similarly reluctant in personal pastoral conversations. Good at eliciting how people feel, where they hurt, where they are struggling (many pastors do this well), he may have backed off from the confrontations necessary to expose people's sin and destructive

behavior. One of the earlier *hard-stuff* messages in the Bible was God's to Cain: "Sin is lurking at your door, and you must master it." Paul is wishing he heard more of that from Timothy.

Preach *hard stuff* (in Timothy's day as well as ours) and you run the risk that people will leave the church, or that they will make the preacher leave the church. I am reminded of the cartoon in which the preacher says to his wife, "I told them the truth, and they set me free." Admittedly, preaching *hard stuff* risks losing friends, lowering financial giving—and attendance.

Timothy, it appears, softened rather than toughened his words when he needed to. There are hints that he was guided by his fears, that he had a weak stomach, that he quickly gave ground when he was challenged. Paul—no stranger to these issues—puts it bluntly: *Timothy, stop it! Grow up! Be the "prophet" God called you to be! Don't let anyone back you into a corner.*

### ***People Pleasers***

Here is the subtle snare for us "nice guys." We don't like to be hurt, and we don't like to hurt others. We love unity, harmony, happiness in the body. And we drift into the trap of thinking that the best way to achieve that is to avoid *hard stuff*.

I suppose Timothy spent sleepless nights brooding on anyone who criticized his leadership, who opposed his efforts. I imagine he tried to woo people back into his favor. And—I'm guessing here—that he was tempted to pull punches when preparing sermons whenever he realized that a certain comment might offend key people in the congregation.

Early in my own ministry a board chairman whom I loved and respected became exasperated with me. "Pastor," he said one day, "you have a problem! You're too sensitive. You don't want to hear tough words, and you don't want to speak them when they need to be heard.

You better resolve this, or you're not going to last in the ministry." Paul lives!

Read Paul's two letters to Timothy, and you may get the feeling that Timothy's over-the-top "people sensitivities" were driving Paul nuts. Kind of like my board chairman. That's why the older man challenges the young man so powerfully: "convince, rebuke, exhort, correct, don't let older people intimidate you or blow you off, don't be timid, guard your gospel carefully (and don't let anyone whittle it down) . . ."

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### ***Sometimes we have to deliver an unwelcome message.***

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Paul was right, of course. *Hard stuff* was needed from the pastor at Ephesus because the people lived in a culture saturated with arrogance, violence, greed, stinginess, immorality, and (if that wasn't enough) blatant paganism. And these influences are not easily erased from the redeemed soul.

Preaching *hard stuff* was needed because the Ephesian congregation was not distinguished with qualities of spiritual beauty. Gossip and slander abounded, wannabe-teachers and leaders competed for recognition and control, and indications are that there was a dimension of church life that moderns identify as spiritual warfare. It wasn't imagined; it was real.

Paul was not asking Timothy to do anything he himself hadn't done many times. His letters to the Corinthians, for example, are full of *hard stuff*. He challenges dumb-downed theology and expresses consternation about the evils of disunity and insensitivity. He takes on the issues of in-church immorality, of destructive hero-worship. He is blunt about misused spiritual gifts, and he calls out the Corinthians for their dismal record in financial generosity.

Nowhere in the Corinthian letter are these issues candy-coated; nowhere are they compromised for fear of alienating people. Paul is Paul. You hear him saying, “Here’s the truth, and let it sting and cleanse where it has to.”

### ***Mishandled Hard Stuff***

This is not to say that Paul enjoyed delivering *hard stuff*. Unlike some, then and now, he was not a homiletical sadist. I think I’ve heard a few who are. *Hard stuff* is their only brand. They don’t feel a sermon is a sermon if it doesn’t make people angry, raise guilt, or feel as they are the only “pure” ones in the world (everyone else being so wicked). Preaching nothing but *hard stuff* is a subtle way to control people.

Crazy as it seems, such preachers can appeal to a kind of people who love *hard stuff*, who don’t feel they’ve heard the Word of God if it isn’t razor-edged with anger and accusation.

These kinds of preachers and audiences seem to find each other (the sadist and the masochist). Preachers who preach *nothing* but *hard stuff* are usually angry people themselves. They love throwing their opinions around like hand grenades.

In spite of what my board chairman said of my supersensitivity, I did dabble in *hard stuff* from time to time. And there was feedback.

One day, when I was very new to preaching, the father of one of our families stormed into my little office after a sermon in which I had told the parents of our teenagers that their parenting skills were inadequate. At the time, of course, I had no children of my own, a fact that he pointed out. He brought information that refuted some “facts” with which I’d whacked people. And, finally, he wished to inform me about some realities in child-rearing I couldn’t have known apart from firsthand experience.

His opening comment upon arrival: “You ought to get out from behind the

pulpit, go into the army, and let someone make a man out of you.” That certainly got my attention. It made me evaluate how I preached *hard stuff* and what its effect might be. I couldn’t be insensitive or (in this case) poorly informed. Doing your homework (both spiritual and intellectual) is necessary before you deal with *hard stuff*.

I wince when I remember the day I made papal-like pronouncements on divorce and later learned that, seated near the front, was the daughter of a family who hadn’t been in worship for years but who had come fresh from the divorce court, seeking consolation for her shattered life.

Oh, and there was the day I chose to speak on sacrificial stewardship when several men had just lost their jobs that week.

What I missed was the fact that *hard stuff* is more than just telling people how off course they are. What I had to learn is what parents have to learn: you don’t earn the confidence of your children if all you do is hammer them with critical comments. When it has to happen—and it does—preach *hard stuff* like a shepherd who would give his life for the sheep.

### ***Blending Anger and Affection***

When Paul wrote *hard stuff* to Corinth, he made it clear that this was not easy for him. “I write to you *tearfully*,” he said. These are not the words of a man just venting anger and frustration at people who have let him (or the Lord) down. They are the words of a tender father who writes out of brokenheartedness because he loves his people so much.

When Paul raised *hard stuff*, it was with dignity and exemplary candor.

“I can’t treat you as spiritually-oriented people. . . . I have to treat you like children, offering you milk instead of meat.” How’s that for bluntness? But later he will remind his hearers that the

words were for their benefit. “Some of you are becoming arrogant . . . some of you are actually proud that there is a bit of immorality among you . . . some of you who are pursuing lawsuits with each other are defeated already.” This is *hard stuff*, and it’s not held back. But it’s surgery with a clean and sharp knife.

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***Solid ground means examining our heart to see if what we’re saying comes from a deep affection.***

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And then: “I don’t regret for a moment that I wrote [*hard stuff*] to you even if it caused you sorrow.”

Or this: “I am afraid that when I come next to visit you I will be greatly distressed by what I find.”

What I like about these lines is that Paul talks frankly but without dismissing them. “I’m angry with you,” I hear him saying, “but my anger is fueled by my affection for you.”

It was not only the Corinthians who heard *hard stuff* from Paul.

To the Galatians: “You foolish [people]: who has deceived you?” “I wish those who are obsessed with circumcision would concentrate on emasculating themselves.”

To the Colossians: “Don’t let people capture you through hollow and deceptive philosophies that are not built on Christ.” A search for all of Paul’s *hard stuff* will take hours.

Elizabeth O’Connor once overheard her nieces playing school. The oldest of the three, Lisa, played the teacher and said, “Now children, there is no such thing as an Easter bunny. Do you hear me?” One of the “students” protested: “Lisa, Lisa, stop teaching us things we do not want to hear.”

This is the crux of the issue when it comes to *hard stuff*. It usually means

subject matter that people do not want to hear. So the pastor had better be on solid ground when *hard-stuff* time comes.

### ***Solid Ground***

You’re on it when you begin with a careful handling of Scripture. Not proof texts where one starts with an opinion and then seeks some sort of biblical endorsement. But a search of the Bible with the question: *What does the Bible say to this issue?* Which biblical people dealt with this matter and why? What are the implications if we do not change—or if we do?

As preachers, we’re on solid ground when we’ve sought the insights of deep thinkers of the Christian movement not just from our generation but from earlier ones. This means time in the library, of course. How have they spoken to these matters? How did their conclusions affect people in their time?

(Become doubly aware when you learn that some burned at the stake when they said *hard stuff*.)

Does it need to be said that solid ground also means getting our facts straight? Too often preachers get away with unsubstantiated generalities (“62% of men are . . . 84% of churches are doing . . . 40% of Americans say . . .”) that they heard somewhere on a radio broadcast or in some conversation. Surgical preaching that cuts out spiritual disease demands unimpeachable information.

The solid ground also comes out of a deep and searching prayer life. Prayer, first, that one is operating out of a heart of love. That one is not seeking to control or punish. And that one seeks only God’s best for the people. I think our people do not hear enough today that we have been on our knees interceding for them. That alone will concentrate the minds of more than a few in our congregation.

Solid ground means examining our heart to see if what we’re saying comes

from a deep affection and priestly concern for the person in the pew. Am I in touch with the realities of the real-world life and the pressures the people are under?

In comparing two preachers who preached on hell, a listener said, “The one preached about hell as if he were glad some of us were going there. But the other preached as if the thought that *anyone* might go there was breaking his heart.”

Finally, solid ground requires an integrity check. If we’re about to say tough things to our people, it is wise to make sure that I am not under the same judgment I’m about to offer. And if I am, then I must let them know that this is an issue “with which we are all—beginning with myself—struggling.”

*Hard stuff* may include thoughts that are counter to the majority political opinions of a congregation. *Hard stuff* may mean warning people of an arrogant and condemning spirit toward those who have differing positions on various moral and social issues. And *hard stuff* may mean calling to people’s attention the vast number of things the Christian movement tends to ignore because the cultural status quo protects our interests.

Within the church itself, *hard stuff* may mean holding up the biblical mirror and challenging people to measure themselves in the light of Christ’s purity and call to a holier life. It may mean challenging people on the genuineness of their conversion or their blindness to behaviors that are offending and dividing others.

### ***What Needs Saying***

One time I felt constrained to preach to my congregation about the growth of a polarizing spirit over a particular issue. People were talking too much, aligning themselves around positions that were causing strain on the fellowship. Unnecessary, hurtful words were being spoken,

and good people, feeling angry, were on the verge of going separate ways.

I began the sermon with two personal stories. I told the people first of a moment in my life when I wrongfully held a spirit of resentment against another person. I described the battle I’d gone through to forgive. Then I told a second story of a time when someone had resented me. Here I described what it felt like to be on the other end of the stick.

When I had the attention of the congregation, I said quietly, “And it is out of my experience on those two occasions that I have a deep and prayerful concern for each of you today.” From there I developed a biblical model for the matter we faced.

On the other end of that teaching, I faced the current issue squarely: “I am terribly disappointed in what I’m seeing and hearing today, and (with my voice lowered) it . . . needs . . . to . . . stop . . . right now! I’m not asking you to do anything I haven’t had to do in my journey: *Stop hurting each other. Start forgiving each other.* The next time I get evidence that this kind of thing is happening, I will come straight to you and raise the matter on a personal basis.”

Because I am too much like Timothy, this was very hard to do. But much of the problem was resolved over the next few days.

How often my father said to me when I was a misbehaving child and he was compelled to punish me, “This hurts me more than it hurts you.” As a child I found this claim preposterous.

Today I understand it. And it says well what the preacher’s heart should be saying: “When it comes to *hard stuff*, the greater pain is in the soul of the one in the pulpit who must speak tenderly but candidly.”

That was Timothy’s struggle. It’s been mine. Perhaps it is yours too. ■

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# The Urgency of Preaching

by Albert Mohler

Has preaching fallen on hard times? An open debate is now being waged over the character and centrality of preaching in the church. At stake is nothing less than the integrity of Christian worship and proclamation.

How did this happen? Given the central place of preaching in the New Testament church, it would seem that the priority of biblical preaching should be uncontested. After all, as John A. Broadus—one of the great preachers of Christian history—famously remarked, “Preaching is characteristic of Christianity. No other religion has made the regular and frequent assembling of groups of people, to hear religious instruction and exhortation, an integral part of Christian worship.”

Yet, numerous influential voices within evangelicalism suggest that the age of the expository sermon is now past. In its place, some contemporary preachers now substitute messages intentionally designed to reach secular or superficial congregations—messages which avoid preaching a biblical text, and thus avoid a potentially embarrassing confrontation with biblical truth.

A subtle shift visible at the onset of the twentieth century has become a great divide as the century ends. The shift from expository preaching to more topical and human-centered approaches has grown into a debate over the place of Scripture in preaching, and the nature of preaching itself.

Two famous statements about preaching illustrate this growing divide. Reflecting poetically on the urgency and centrality of preaching, the Puritan pastor Richard Baxter once remarked, “I preach as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men.” With vivid expression and a sense of gospel

gravity, Baxter understood that preaching is literally a life or death affair. Eternity hangs in the balance as the preacher proclaims the Word.

Contrast that statement to the words of Harry Emerson Fosdick, perhaps the most famous (or infamous) preacher of this century’s early decades. Fosdick, pastor of the Riverside Church in New York City, provides an instructive contrast to the venerable Baxter. “Preaching,” he explained, “is personal counseling on a group basis.”

These two statements about preaching reveal the contours of the contemporary debate. For Baxter, the promise of heaven and the horrors of hell frame the preacher’s consuming burden. For Fosdick, the preacher is a kindly counselor offering helpful advice and encouragement.

The current debate over preaching is most commonly explained as an argument about the focus and shape of the sermon. Should the preacher seek to preach a biblical text through an expository sermon? Or, should the preacher direct the sermon to the “felt needs” and perceived concerns of the hearers?

Clearly, many evangelicals now favor the second approach. Urged on by devotees of “needs-based preaching,” many evangelicals have abandoned the text without recognizing that they have done so. These preachers may eventually get to the text in the course of the sermon, but the text does not set the agenda or establish the shape of the message.

Focusing on so-called “perceived needs” and allowing these needs to set the preaching agenda inevitably leads to a loss of biblical authority and biblical content in the sermon. Yet, this pattern is increasingly the norm in many evangelical pulpits. Fosdick must be smiling from the grave.

Earlier evangelicals recognized Fostick's approach as a rejection of biblical preaching. An out-of-the-closet theological liberal, Fostick paraded his rejection of biblical inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility—and rejected other doctrines central to the Christian faith. Enamored with trends in psychological theory, Fostick became liberal Protestantism's happy pulpit therapist. The goal of his preaching was well captured by the title of one of his many books, *On Being a Real Person*.

Shockingly, this is now the approach evident in many evangelical pulpits. The sacred desk has become an advice center and the pew has become the therapist's couch. Psychological and practical concerns have displaced theological exegesis and the preacher directs his sermon to the congregation's perceived needs.

The problem is, of course, that the sinner does not know what his most urgent need is. He is blind to his need for redemption and reconciliation with God, and focuses on potentially real but temporal needs such as personal fulfillment, financial security, family peace, and career advancement. Too many sermons settle for answering these expressed needs and concerns, and fail to proclaim the Word of Truth.

Without doubt, few preachers following this popular trend intend to depart from the Bible. But under the guise of an intention to reach modern secular men and women "where they are," the sermon has been transformed into a success seminar. Some verses of Scripture may be added to the mix, but for a sermon to be genuinely biblical, the text must set the agenda as the foundation of the message—not as an authority cited for spiritual footnoting.

Charles Spurgeon confronted the very same pattern of wavering pulpits in his own day. Some of the most fashionable and well-attended London churches featured pulpiteers who were the precursors to modern needs-based preachers.

Spurgeon—who managed to draw a few thousand hearers each service despite his insistence on biblical preaching—confessed, "The true ambassador for Christ feels that he himself stands before God and has to deal with souls in God's stead as God's servant, and stands in a solemn place—a place in which unfaithfulness is inhumanity to man as well as treason to God."

Spurgeon and Baxter understood the dangerous mandate of the preacher and were therefore driven to the Bible as their only authority and message. They left their pulpits trembling with urgent concern for the souls of their hearers and fully aware of their accountability to God for preaching His Word, and His Word alone. Their sermons were measured by power; Fostick's by popularity.

Authentic expository preaching takes the presentation of the Word of God as its central aim. The purpose of the preacher is to read the text, interpret the text, explain the text, and apply the text. Thus, the text drives the sermon from beginning to end. In fact, in too many of today's sermons, the text plays a subordinate role to other concerns.

Real exposition takes time, preparation, dedication, and discipline. The foundation of expository preaching is the confidence that the Holy Spirit will apply the Word to the hearts of the hearers—explained by the Reformers as the ministry of Word and Spirit. That ministry—so vital to the people of God—is missing or minimized in many evangelical congregations.

The current debate over preaching may well shake congregations, denominations, and the evangelical movement. But know this: The recovery and renewal of the church in this generation will come only when from pulpit to pulpit the herald preaches as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men. ■

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# The Ten Amendments

by John Coblentz

Thirty-five hundred years ago, Moses received the Ten Commandments “written with the finger of God” on slabs of stone. These moral standards have proven through the years to be the bedrock of culture. Where they are honored, cultures thrive; where they are violated, the culture disintegrates.

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honor thy father and thy mother.
6. Thou shalt not kill.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness.
10. Thou shalt not covet.

Generally, in the Western World, these moral standards have been honored by laws respecting God, respecting the family, respecting human life, respecting personal property, and upholding truth.

But America is sliding. What once stood firm is no longer anchored. The only absolute, many declare, is that there are no absolutes.

Unfortunately, many in the church seem to have lost their way as well. Accommodation and compromise and tolerance have carried us into a moral mess where shady, shoddy living is the norm.

Recently, I wondered just what the Ten Commandments would be like if we were to rewrite them according to how people—including many church people—actually live. In that light, I offer the following amendments:

1. Thou shalt respect everyone’s per-

sonal view of God and every religion’s view of God. Believing that the God of the Bible is the only true God is exclusive and arrogant.

2. Thou shalt not be judgmental of those who give their first allegiance to such pursuits as making money, following sports, or honoring celebrities, as long as they say they are Christians and attend church when they can.
3. Thou shalt not be judgmental of those whose faith in God is lip service only. At least they have taken the name of Christ, and though they may lose their rewards in the judgment, their soul will surely be saved.
4. The Lord’s Day is a good day to sleep in, go golfing, eat out, and whatever else is an escape from the routine of living. Going to church is okay, but a Christian can worship God as well in the park or on the lake as in church.
5. Honor yourself. You are unique and special, and you can do anything if you believe in yourself. Your parents are responsible for your present problems, and unfortunately, most parents damage their children by inhibiting them too much. You are young only once, and it is understandable if you live wild and loose as a young person as long as eventually you settle down. And by the way, when parents grow elderly, they are best off in a nursing home with other older folks.
6. Thou shalt not murder, but it is understandable to be angry when others do you wrong and to tell them how you feel, and even to be mad at God when He allows hardship. Bad attitudes are probably not wise, but they are understandable.

7. Thou shalt be faithful to thy spouse as long as love lasts, but some couples simply are not compatible. And if a divorce does happen, God surely doesn't expect you to suffer the rest of your life being single. Furthermore, reading about adultery and illicit affairs in novels or watching such things acted out in movies is entertaining.
8. Thou shalt not outright steal, but keeping quiet about business errors in your favor, or not reporting cash income, or fiddling away time on the job are things everyone does nowadays.
9. Thou shalt not say outright lies about anyone, but repeating bad stories that are true is all right. Exaggeration of what others have done against you is okay as long as it is what you are truly feeling. And of course, you can say anything you want when you feel the need to share it with someone.

10. Thou shalt not keep thyself from having anything thy heart desires. Actually, the Lord delights in giving you what you want. If your neighbor has something you like, get a better one. If he goes on a vacation, plan a more extended vacation yourself. You owe it to yourself and your family to have the best, the biggest, and the most fun.

What do you think?

Which do we follow more closely—the commandments *or the amendments?*

When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, He was not introducing something new. Nor was He hemming us into a confined way of living. God was only verbalizing what was true and best for human beings, what has been and always will be best for our well-being.

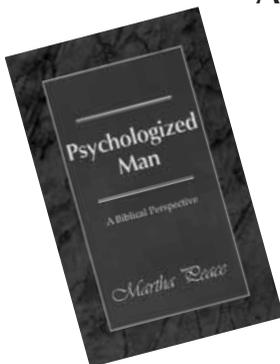
So instead of amending the commandments, we would do better to amend our ways. ■

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# Gospel-Driven Sanctification

by Jerry Bridges

Early in my Christian life I heard someone say, “The Bible was not given to increase your knowledge but to guide your conduct.” Later I came to realize that this statement was simplistic at best and erroneous at worst. The Bible is far more than a rulebook to follow. It is primarily the message of God’s saving grace through Jesus Christ, with everything in Scripture before the cross pointing to God’s redemptive work and everything after the cross—including our sanctification—flowing from that work.

There is an element of truth in this statement, however, and the Holy Spirit used it to help me to see that the Bible is not to be read just to gain knowledge. It is, indeed, to be obeyed and practically applied in our daily lives. As James says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22).

With my new insight, I prayed that God would use the Bible to guide my conduct. Then I began diligently to seek to obey it. I had never heard the phrase “the pursuit of holiness,” but that became my primary goal in life. Unfortunately, I made two mistakes. First, I assumed the Bible was something of a rulebook and that all I needed to do was to learn what it says and go do it. I knew nothing of the necessity of depending on the Holy Spirit for His guidance and enablement.

Still worse, I assumed that God’s acceptance of me and His blessing in my life depended on how well I did. I knew I was saved by grace through faith in Christ apart from any works. I had assurance of my salvation and expected to go to heaven when I died. But in my daily life, I thought God’s blessing depended on the practice of certain spiri-

tual disciplines, such as having a daily quiet time and not knowingly committing any sin. I did not think this out but just unconsciously assumed it, given the Christian culture in which I lived. Yet it determined my attitude toward the Christian life.

## *Performance-Based Discipleship*

My story is not unusual. Evangelicals commonly think today that the gospel is only for unbelievers. Once we’re inside the kingdom’s door, we need the gospel only in order to share it with those who are still outside. Now, as believers, we need to hear the message of discipleship. We need to learn how to live the Christian life and be challenged to go do it. That’s what I believed and practiced in my life and ministry for some time. It is what most Christians seem to believe.

As I see it, the Christian community is largely a performance-based culture today. And the more deeply committed we are to following Jesus, the more deeply ingrained the performance mindset is. We think we earn God’s blessing or forfeit it by how well we live the Christian life.

Most Christians have a baseline of acceptable performance by which they gauge their acceptance by God. For many, this baseline is no more than regular church attendance and the avoidance of major sins. Such Christians are often characterized by some degree of self-righteousness. After all, they don’t indulge in the major sins we see happening around us. Such Christians would not think they need the gospel anymore. They would say the gospel is only for sinners.

For committed Christians, the baseline is much higher. It includes regular practice of spiritual disciplines, obedience to

God's Word, and involvement in some form of ministry. Here again, if we focus on outward behavior, many score fairly well. But these Christians are even more vulnerable to self-righteousness, for they can look down their spiritual noses not only at the sinful society around them but even at other believers who are not as committed as they are. These Christians don't need the gospel either. For them, Christian growth means more discipline and more commitment.

Then there is a third group. The baseline of this group includes more than the outward performance of disciplines, obedience, and ministry. These Christians also recognize the need to deal with sins of the heart like a critical spirit, pride, selfishness, envy, resentment, and anxiety. They see their inconsistency in having their quiet times, their failure to witness at every opportunity, and their frequent failures in dealing with sins of the heart. This group of Christians is far more likely to be plagued by a sense of guilt because group members have not met their own expectations. And because they think God's acceptance of them is based on their performance, they have little joy in their Christian lives. For them, life is like a treadmill on which they keep slipping farther and farther behind. This group needs the gospel, but they don't realize it is for them. I know, because I was in this group.

### ***The Gospel Is for Believers***

Gradually over time, and from a deep sense of need, I came to realize that the gospel is for believers too. When I finally realized this, every morning I would pray over a Scripture such as Isaiah 53:6: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," and then say, "Lord, I have gone astray. I have turned to my own way, but You have laid all my sin on Christ and because of that I approach You and feel accepted by You."

I came to see that Paul's statement in Galatians 2:20, "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me," was made in the context of justification (see vv. 15-21). Yet Paul was speaking in the present tense: "The life I *now* live. . . ." Because of the context, I realized Paul was not speaking about his sanctification but about his justification. For Paul, then, justification (being declared righteous by God on the basis of the righteousness of Christ) was not only a past-tense experience but also a present-day reality.

Paul lived every day by faith in the shed blood and righteousness of Christ. Every day he looked to Christ alone for his acceptance with the Father. He believed, like Peter (see 1 Peter 2:4, 5), that even our best deeds—our spiritual sacrifices—are acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ. Perhaps no one apart from Jesus Himself has ever been as committed a disciple both in life and ministry as the Apostle Paul. Yet he did not look to his own performance but to Christ's "performance" as the sole basis of his acceptance with God.

So I learned that Christians need to hear the gospel all their lives because it is the gospel that continues to remind us that our day-to-day acceptance with the Father is not based on what we do for God but upon what Christ did for us in His sinless life and sin-bearing death. I began to see that we stand before God today as righteous as we ever will be, even in heaven, because He has clothed us with the righteousness of His Son. Therefore, I don't have to perform to be accepted by God. Now I am free to obey Him and serve Him because I am already accepted in Christ (see Rom. 8:1). My driving motivation now is not guilt but gratitude.

Yet even when we understand that our acceptance with God is based on Christ's work, we still naturally tend to drift back into a performance mindset. Consequently, we must continually return to the gospel. To use an expression of the

late Jack Miller, we must “preach the gospel to ourselves every day.” For me that means I keep going back to Scriptures such as Isaiah 53:6, Galatians 2:20, and Romans 8:1. It means I frequently repeat the words from an old hymn, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

### **No “Easy Believism”**

But doesn’t this idea that our acceptance with God is based solely on Christ’s work apart from our performance lead to a type of “easy believism”? In its most basic form, this is the notion that “since I asked Christ to be my Saviour, I am on my way to heaven regardless of how I live. It doesn’t matter if I continue in my sinful lifestyle. God loves and will accept me anyway.”

By a similar way of thinking, the claim that God’s acceptance and blessing are based solely on Christ’s work could be taken to mean that it really doesn’t matter how I live right now. If Jesus has already “performed” in my place, then why go through all the effort and pain of dealing with sin in my life? Why bother with the spiritual disciplines and why expend any physical and emotional energy to serve God during this earthly life if everything depends on Christ?

The Apostle Paul anticipated such “easy believism” in Romans 6:1 when he wrote, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” His response in Romans 6:2, “By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” answers the question, “Why bother?” Paul was not responding with “How could you be so ungrateful as to think such a thing?” No, instead he is saying, in effect, “You don’t understand the gospel. Don’t you realize that you died to sin and if you died to sin, it’s impossible for you to continue to live in it” (see Rom. 6:3-14).

### **We Died to Sin**

Now, however, we come to a big ques-

tion. What does Paul mean when he says we died to sin? It’s fairly obvious he doesn’t mean we died to the daily committal of sin. If that were true, no honest person could claim to be justified because we all sin daily. None of us truly loves God with our whole being and none of us actually loves our neighbor as ourselves (see Matt. 22:35-40). Nor does it mean we have died in the sense of being no longer responsive to sin’s temptations, as some have taught. If that were true, Peter’s admonition to abstain from the passions of the flesh would be pointless (see 1 Peter 2:11). So what does Paul mean?

Some Bible commentators believe that Paul means only that we have died to the penalty of sin. That is, because of our union with Christ, when Christ died to sin’s penalty we also died to sin’s penalty. Well, it certainly means that, but it also means much more. It also means we died to sin’s dominion.

What is the dominion of sin? In Romans 5:21, Paul speaks of sin’s *reign*. And in Colossians 1:13, he speaks of the *domain of darkness*. When Adam sinned in the Garden, we all sinned through our legal union with him (see Rom. 5:12-21). That is, because of our identity with Adam we all suffered the consequence of his sin. And a part of that consequence is to be born into this world under the reign or dominion of sin. Paul describes what it means to be under this dominion in Ephesians 2:1-3. He says we were spiritually dead, we followed the ways of the world and the devil, we lived in the passions of our sinful natures and were, by nature, objects of God’s wrath.

This slavery to the dominion of sin then is part of the penalty due to our guilt of sin. Through our union with Christ in His death, however, our guilt both from Adam’s and from our own personal sins was forever dealt with. Having died with Christ to the guilt of sin, we also as a consequence died to the dominion of sin. We cannot continue in sin as a dominant way of life because the reign of

sin over us has forever been broken.

This death to the dominion of sin over us is known theologically as *definitive sanctification*. It refers to the decisive break with, or separation from, sin as a ruling power in a believer's life. It is a point-in-time event, occurring simultaneously with justification. It is the fundamental change wrought in us by the monergistic action of the Holy Spirit when He delivers us from the kingdom of darkness and transfers us into the kingdom of Christ. This definitive break with the dominion of sin occurs in the life of everyone who trusts in Christ as Saviour. There is no such thing as justification without definitive sanctification. They both come to us as a result of Christ's work for us.

### ***Consider Yourselves Dead to Sin***

So we are free from both the guilt and the dominion of sin. But what use is this information to us? How can it help us live out a gospel-based pursuit of sanctification? Here Paul's instructions in Romans 6:11 are helpful. "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

It is important we understand what Paul is saying here because he is not telling us to *do* something but to *believe* something. We are to believe that we are dead through Christ to both sin's penalty and its dominion. But this is not something we *make* come true by believing it. We simply *are* dead to sin, whether we believe it or not. But the practical effects of our death to sin can be realized only as we believe it to be true.

The fact is that we are guilty in ourselves, but God no longer charges that guilt against us because it has already been borne by Christ as our substitute. The sentence has been served. The penalty has been paid. We have died to sin, both to its guilt and to its dominion. That is why Paul can write, "Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin" (Rom. 4:8).

But the question arises: "If I've died to

sin's dominion, why do I still struggle with sin patterns in my life?" The answer to that question lies in the word *struggle*. Unbelievers do not struggle with sin. They may seek to overcome some bad habit, but they do not see that habit as sin. They do not have a sense of sin against a holy God. Believers, on the other hand, struggle with sin *as* sin. We see our sinful words, thoughts, and deeds as sin against God, and we feel guilty because of it. This is where we must continue to go back to the gospel. To consider ourselves dead to sin is to believe the gospel.

This doesn't mean that we just believe the gospel and live complacently in our sin. Absolutely not! Go back again to Paul's words in Romans 6:1, 2. We died both to sin's guilt and its dominion. Though sin can wage war against us (hence our struggle), it cannot reign over us. That is also part of the gospel. But the success of our struggle with sin begins with our believing deep down in our hearts that regardless of our failures and our struggle, we have died to sin's guilt. We must believe that however often we fail, there is no condemnation for us (Rom. 8:1).

William Romaine, who was one of the leaders of the eighteenth-century revival in England, wrote, "No sin can be crucified either in heart or life unless it first be pardoned in conscience. . . . If it be not mortified in its guilt, it cannot be subdued in its power." What Romaine was saying is that if you do not believe you have died to sin's guilt, you cannot trust Christ for the strength to subdue its power in your life. So the place to begin in dealing with sin is to believe the gospel when it says you have died to sin's guilt.

### ***Progressive Sanctification***

Warring against our sinful habits and seeking to put on Christlike character is usually called sanctification. But because the term *definitive sanctification* is used to describe the point-in-time deliverance from the dominion of sin, it is helpful to

speak of Christian growth in holiness as progressive sanctification. Additionally, the word *progressive* indicates continual growth in holiness over time. The New Testament writers both assume growth (see 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Eph. 2:19-21; Col. 2:19; 2 Thess. 1:3); and continually urge us to pursue it (see 2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 12:14; 2 Peter 3:18). There is no place in authentic Christianity for stagnant, self-satisfied, and self-righteous Christians. Rather we should be seeking to grow in Christlikeness until we die.

This progressive sanctification always involves our practice of spiritual disciplines, such as reading Scripture, praying, and regularly fellowshiping with other believers. It also involves putting to death the sinful deeds of the body (see Rom. 8:13) and putting on Christlike character (see Col. 3:12-14). And very importantly it involves a desperate dependence on Christ for the power to do these things, for we cannot grow by our own strength.

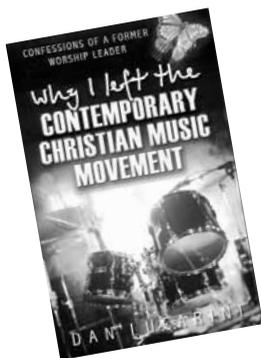
So sanctification involves hard work and dependence on Christ—what I call dependent effort. And it will always mean we are dissatisfied with our per-

formance. For a growing Christian, desire will always outstrip performance or, at least, perceived performance. What is it then that will keep us going in the face of this tension between desire and performance? The answer is the gospel. It is the assurance in the gospel that we have indeed died to the guilt of sin and that there is no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus that will motivate us and keep us going even in the face of this tension.

We must always keep focused on the gospel because it is in the nature of sanctification that as we grow, we see more and more of our sinfulness. Instead of driving us to discouragement, though, this should drive us to the gospel. It is the gospel believed every day that is the only enduring motivation to pursue progressive sanctification even in those times when we don't seem to see progress. That is why I use the expression "gospel-driven sanctification" and that is why we need to "preach the gospel to ourselves every day." ■

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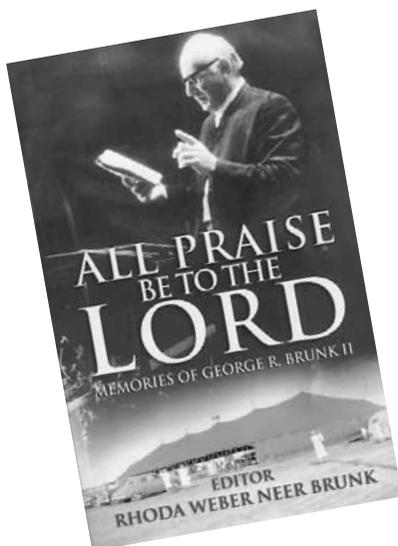
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