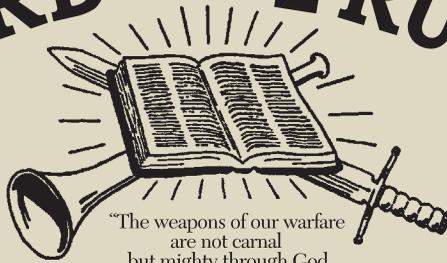


The SWORD and TRUMPET

“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



BLAISE PASCAL

MARCH 2006

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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:

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

Blaise Pascal was born in Clermont-Ferrand, France, June 19, 1623, to Etienne Pascal, a minor noble and government official who had a mind for science.

When Pascal was three years old, his mother, a godly woman, passed away, leaving Etienne with Blaise and his two sisters.

Pascal's father was very much concerned about a good education for his children, so in 1631 when Blaise was eight years old Etienne, moved the family to Paris. He wanted the children to be stimulated in their thinking.

As a child Pascal was a good student and seemed to love learning—mastering Greek and Latin by the time he was twelve years of age. He also accomplished the gigantic feat of working through the 32 geometric theorems of *First Book* by Euclid. As a result he was invited to attend the Academy of Science meetings with his father. This young genius had figured out the mystery of conic sections before he was sixteen and then wrote a treatise anticipating projective geometry. While still a teenager he discovered the famous lemma, or helping theorem, in math (later known as the Pascal theorem) and invented and put together the first calculating machine. This was only a fraction of his scientific inventions and accomplishments to come.

The Pascal home was nominally Catholic in its religious practice until 1646. In that year, at the age of twenty-three, Blaise came in contact with a group within the Roman Catholic Church known as the Jansenists. They were similar to the Puritans in that they were trying to purify the Roman Catholic Church. They stressed God's grace as opposed to the works salvation taught in Catholicism. Subsequently, the whole family embraced the teachings of this revival movement. For Blaise, it meant a time of searching out the Scriptures and seeking to live a godly life. He continued his scientific work but determined to live for God alone. From his study of the Word he came to the conclusion that our faith can only be based on the Bible. He recognized the benefit of church councils and tradition but knew that the Scriptures must be the final word of authority.

Five years later, in 1651, Blaise was left without the comfort of family due to his father's death and the entrance of his younger sister into a Jansenist convent. His older sister had left home previously to be married. Feeling alone, he sought out the companionship of some of his aristocratic friends and their pleasures. He soon realized the vanity of such a life. One evening, in 1654, while reading from John 17 he had an encounter that truly transformed his life. He referred to it as his "second conversion." God was very real to him and he totally surrendered to the Lord. From that point on he devoted his time solely to theological and spiritual pursuits.

The views concerning holiness of life of the Jansenists were not appreciated by the Jesuits or at the Sorbonne. Eventually the Pope condemned the group. However, in

(continued on page 4)

The Great White Throne Judgment

by George R. Brunk II

Of all the judgments mentioned in the New Testament, this one is the most frightening and the most terrible of all. The graphic description of this judgment is found in Revelation 20:11-15.

The Greek word translated *throne* occurs 59 times in the New Testament—44 of these are found in the Book of Revelation.

The Book of Revelation may be thought of as the “throne book” of the Bible, while the fourth chapter of Revelation may be thought of as the “throne chapter” of that book because that Greek word occurs 14 times in Chapter 4.

The first occurrence of the word *throne* in the Book of Revelation is in Chapter 4 and verse 2. John tells us about his vision of the tribulation judgment and the first thing that he saw when he was taken up into heaven was “a throne . . . and one sat on the throne.”

There are notable differences between the throne in Chapter 4 and the final judgment throne described in Revelation 20. There was a rainbow “round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.” That rainbow was a sign of the covenant which God made with His people. But here, there is no rainbow in the Great White Throne judgment.

Again, we observe in Revelation 4 that “out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne.” Those thunderings and lightnings must have been warnings from God. In contrast, there are no lightnings nor thunderings that proceed out of this Great White Throne. Also in Chapter 4 we read that “the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and

they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (verses 8-11). But in the Great White Throne Judgment of Chapter 20 there are no such praises unto God. There appears to be nothing but silence of the doomed in the presence of God’s wrath and judgment.

When Will the Great White Throne Judgment Occur?

According to the sequence of events in the closing chapters of the Book of Revelation, this judgment will occur very soon after the one thousand year reign of Christ on earth and immediately following the Great Deception of the Devil at the conclusion of the Millennium.

“And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false

prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (verses 7-10). Indeed, one of the most astonishing events of all history!

Who Will Preside at This Great White Throne Judgment?

John says, “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.” The Lord Jesus Christ Himself will be both judge and the jury at this pitiful event.

Before Him, John, “saw the dead, small and great, stand before God . . . the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and Hades delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.”

Indeed, a resurrection occurs but there is no trumpet sounded and no shout of the archangel. “There is simply the going forth of eternal power, into the sea, into the graves, into Hades, into all the depositories of the souls and bodies of the unholy dead and all the vast multitudes suddenly stand in the presence of the Throne. Not one of them had ever lived and died from the beginning of the world till then . . . the great and the small, the big sinners and the little sinners, rulers and subjects, noble and plebians, the learned and the ignorant, the refined and the vulgar, the civilized and the barbarous, emperors and beggars, all alike are there. We read of no white thrones, no spotless linen, no palms, nothing but naked sinners, before the naked majesty of enthroned Almightyness, awaiting their eternal doom” (J. A. Seiss).

Twice in this passage we are told that these will be judged according to their works.

But then they inquire, why this other book which is the Book of Life? J. A. Seiss says, “This must needs be opened to two, for many there be whose lives are fair and honest, who spend their days in conscientious purity, who live and die in the persua-

sion that they have filled all the requirements of virtue, but who have never experienced the regenerating power of the new creation, who have never felt the need of atonement by the propitiation. The records of their own deeds is therefore not enough for the determination of their proper space and standing . . . therefore the Book of Life must be opened to add His testimony and its testimony brought into the decision. If the name of anyone is not on that roll, no matter how virtuously and honestly he may have lived, there is no hope for him.”

The Massive Assembly of the Doomed

John saw the dead, small and great, stand before God. Such a scene staggers the imagination—think of it—here we see that vast body of the law standing before the One who could have and would have redeemed them. Here they stand in resurrected bodies waiting for the judgment to eternal damnation. Here is the resurrection to shame and contempt—a resurrection unto eternal damnation and the fire of perdition. One almost trembles at the gravity of this situation within moments of eternal damnation in the lake of fire forever. One is made to wonder whether this will be the largest gathering of human creatures in the history of the human race or the second largest number. Those of the first resurrection will already have met the Lord in the air. Will that be the largest or the second largest gathering of human beings in the history of the universe?

This Is the Second Death— The Madhouse of the Universe

“And death and hell [Hades] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the Second Death. And whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the Lake of Fire.”

So we have here the end of one chapter in the history of the human family when there will be no more death and no more Hades as the place of the dead. If Hades as the region of the dead is no longer to

exist, one is made to wonder about the Abyss and Tartarus. Temporal death and the place of departed spirits are now things of the past. This then is that awful hell from which there is never more deliverance, where all the enemies of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ find themselves at last, for all eternity.

***A Powerful Message
to the Unsaved Now Living***

“In the presence of these awful verities what shall one say to those who know it all, yet go deliberately on their way which can have no outcome but the Second Death? I look at them and think; the terrible-ness of their hallucination paralyzes my outruns. I would fain arouse them to their better senses: but when I speak, my intensest words seem as ashes in my mouth in comparison with the alarm for which their situation calls.

“Oh, ye unbelieving men—ye dishonest men—ye profane men—ye lewd men and women—ye slaves of lust and appetite—ye scoffers at the truth of God— ‘How can ye escape the damnation of hell?’ (Matt. 23:33). Ye men of business—ye whose souls are absorbed with the pursuit of gain—ye people of wealth without riches toward God—ye passengers on the voyage of life without prayer, without concern for your immortal good, your God, or the eternity before you—hear before you—hear . . . ye almost Christians, lingering these many years on the margin of the Kingdom, looking in through the gates, but never quite ready to enter them, intending, but never performing, often wishing, but still postponing, hoping, but without right to hope—the appeal is to you . . . and ye who call yourselves Christians but have forgotten your covenant promises—ye Terahs and Lot’s wives, who have started out at a place of sin and death, but hesitate halfway, and stay to look back—ye baptized Elymases, and Judases, and Balaams, who through covetousness and fain words make merchandise of the grace of God—see ye not that

‘your judgment now of a long time lingereth not and your damnation slumbereth not’ ” (2 Peter 2:3). And if there be anyone oblivious or indifferent toward these great matters—asleep amidst the dashing waves of coming retribution—the message is to you. ■

BLAISE PASCAL . . . cont’d.

1656, at the age of 33, Pascal made a brilliant defense of the Jansenist views in a paper known as *The Provincial Letters*. He became known as the most accomplished debater for the faith of his time. Pascal took the Jesuits to task for their flawed moral character and their intellectual dishonesty, as well as their wrong understanding of grace. As would be expected, his views provoked much controversy in some circles. In 1657 he began work on another document, an *Apology for the Christian Religion*. He was attempting to present arguments for the faith, which would convince unbelievers to turn to Christ but was unable to finish it before his untimely death.

In addition to his aforementioned accomplishments, Pascal also contributed much to the world of mathematics and science by making discoveries of the following: hydrodynamics and hydrostatics resulting in the invention of the barometer, vacuum pump, air compressor, syringe, and the hydraulic press; proving the existence of a vacuum and the weight of air, laying the foundations for differential and integral calculus, and designing an omnibus carriage resulting in the world’s first bus service, to name just a few.

His greatest contributions though, were in the realm of theological matters. He was a deep thinker—finding Christ, The Truth, and proclaiming Him to others so that they might also be set free!

Blaise Pascal died August 19, 1662, at the age of thirty-nine, in the home of his brother-in-law. —Gail L. Emerson

From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

Following the Sheep or the Shepherd

by Mark D. Avery

The Associated Press reported that on July 7, 2005, Turkish shepherds watched helplessly as one sheep jumped off a cliff and nearly 1500 others followed. When it was over, 450 sheep lay dead. Some of the sheep were spared from death as the pile of sheep at the bottom grew higher. The sheep, following their natural instinct, simply followed what the others had done.

This is not the first incident where sheep blindly followed their leader. Those who have worked with sheep say that often the herd will duplicate the actions of its leader. If one sheep jumps as it passes through a gate, the rest will likely do the same.

While people are much smarter than animals, we often see the herd instinct at work among humanity. How often have we seen intelligent people swayed by a

smooth-talking, charismatic individual? Instead of looking for facts, many people tend to blindly follow their leader.

The Bereans of Acts 17 were commended for their response to Christian teaching. The Apostle Paul and his companion in ministry, Silas, taught in the synagogue and found a ready response from the believers. Rather than simply believing or rejecting what was said because of who said it, those hearers listened carefully to the message presented, received it with a ready mind, and then compared what was taught to the Scriptures they had, namely the Old Testament. Nor was this a one-time event for them, for they “searched the scriptures daily” to discover whether Paul and Silas were teaching the truth.

Of course, we would understand that Christian preachers and teachers have an

awesome responsibility to preach the Word. None should ever go to the pulpit or lectern to spout his or her own brand of theology or politics. Rather, diligent preparation—spiritual and academic—should be made before one’s mouth is engaged. If we approach our duties with a full heart and a full head, we are much more likely to have our mouth filled with “worthwhile stuff.”

At the same time, however, every Christian would do well to follow the Bereans’ example: listen, receive with a ready mind, and search the Scriptures to confirm the veracity of what is taught and preached. The Bereans refused to follow blindly some teaching or practice; instead, they required a firm, scriptural basis for doing so. Yet upon finding the teachings of Paul and Silas to be in agreement with the

Word of God, they believed.

The lesson applies to everyone, both believers and unbelievers. So easily people tend to listen to one side of an issue, then react. While the authenticity of the messenger is extremely important, as in preaching and teaching, the integrity of the message is also essential. How important it is that we examine what we hear in the light of biblical truth!

Christians can and must avoid following the example of the sheep which jumped off the cliff. We can be misled, and misleaders are spreading their false teachings all around us. Yet safety comes as we carefully and prayerfully study and apply God’s Word in our lives. Safety comes in following the Good Shepherd. ■

—From *The Church Herald and Holiness Banner*, August 2005. Used with permission.

Separated Unto God

by J. C. Wenger



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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

MARCH 5, 2006

Man: God's Special Creation

Psalm 8:1-9

The lessons for the spring quarter, March, April, May, are taken from the Poetical Books of the Old Testament: Psalms, Job, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs. The general theme is: Living in God's World. The four Psalms for study this month are all Psalms of David, the man close to God's heart, the Sweet Singer of Israel. We often turn to the Psalms because there we find identity with the full range of human emotions. Psalm 8, our study today, is a psalm of praise and worship. It also contains some Christological overtones.

David begins this psalm by extolling the majesty of the Creator God, whose glory is above the heavens. Notice, too, that he addresses Him as "our Lord," recognizing Him as the God of Israel with whom it was possible to have a personal relationship. Even the praise of children will confound those who oppose Him (v. 2).

Then, as David observes the wonder and majesty of the heavens (see Psalm 19:1), he asks, Why does this great, majestic, creative God even consider mankind who is so far beneath Him? (See Job 7:17, 18.) But not only does God look favorably upon man, He has also invested him with responsibility over the lesser creation (Genesis 1:26).

Though man is beneath the angels in some respects—angels stand in the presence of God, are not bound by time and space constraints, and are God's special envoys—man also enjoys privileges that angels do not. Man enjoys a redemptive relationship with God, which angels do not understand (1 Peter 1:10-12). Man also enjoys a voluntary friendship relationship

with God as an agent of free choice. And a time is coming when man in his glorified state will enjoy a position above the angels.

The trust that God has invested in man as caretaker of the rest of creation places grave responsibility on man to be a faithful steward. It is all too easy to ignore the responsibility or misuse the abundance at our disposal. But we must remember that God has given it to us in trust and that we are responsible to Him for wise use of His resources.

What did God see in man that caused Him to look so favorably upon him and to trust him with such far-reaching responsibility? Man is God's special creation, created in the very image and after the likeness of God. Man was endowed with intelligence and capacity for learning and doing. God put His stamp upon man, His highest creation.

But God invested even more in mankind. He invested the life of His Son to redeem man from his willful sin, and in that act, enabled man to renew a right relationship with the holy God. So, while we ponder God's acceptance of us, unworthy as we are, we are forced to exult with David, "O Lord, *our* Lord, how excellent—glorious, goodly, noble, worthy—is your name in all the earth!"

For thought and discussion

1. Our finite minds cannot conceive the glory and majesty that is God's. But let your mind run a bit in an attempt to place Him far above anything known to man.
2. God has given man tremendous power and responsibility over the rest of His creation. Are we being faithful stewards? Think about man's responsibility and answerability.
3. Study the qualities and capabilities with which God endowed mankind. See Genesis 1:26-28.

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4. How should an awareness of what this lesson teaches inspire us to respond to God? And in what ways?
5. Do we tend to take God's gifts and blessings too much for granted? Discuss ways in which we can be more aware and more responsive.

MARCH 12, 2006

God's Wonderful Creation

Psalm 104:1-13, 24, 33

Last Sunday's lesson focused on man as God's special creation. Today's focuses on the world as His wonderful creation. Psalm 8 began with a recognition of the majesty and power of the Creator God. In Psalm 104, David begins by blessing this great God who is clothed with honor and majesty.

The New Bible Commentary calls this psalm "a poetical commentary on the first chapter of Genesis." We notice in this psalm the integrity of God's creative acts. What He created, He also provided for the sustenance thereof (verses 10-13). We also recognize the highly figurative language employed in this psalm. (Read the entire psalm for a more complete picture of how David viewed God's wonderful creation.)

In recognition of God's greatness, David calls upon himself to "bless the Lord . . . my God." This great God is clothed with a robe of splendor and majesty. Verse 2 reminds us of John's words in 1 John 1:5, that "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." God is equated with light (2 Timothy 6:14-16).

Then, after describing the majesty of God, David goes on to describe His greatness in terms of His creative power. Here David uses figurative language, for we know that God simply spoke the world and its constituent elements into existence. He did not physically lay the foundation beams nor stretch out the heavens as a tent. Nor does He need the chariot of the winds for transportation. But He does use His angels as messengers to minister to man (verse 4).

While the first several verses of the chapter speak of the upper world or heavenly

realm, the rest of today's text speaks of the lower or earthly world. Verses 6 through 9 may well have a double meaning, speaking both of the unimproved world of creation and the subsequent flood which destroyed the world. In any case, the waters were controlled by the Word of God. (See Gen. 1:2, 6-10; 7:19, 23, 24.) And God has promised that the waters will never again cover the earth in destruction (Gen. 9:15).

Verses 10-13 speak to the sustaining aspect of God's creative design. There is balance in nature. God provided springs of fresh water to give drink to man and beast; the trees provide nesting places for the birds of the air. And as we read on in the chapter we see further evidence of God providing for His creation, both man and animal life.

In verses 24 and 33 we see David's response to his understanding of God's creative work. He recognizes the wisdom of God in His creative acts, filling the earth with the richness of His blessing. In response David declares that he will sing praise to the Lord as long as he lives. He understood the greatness of God and stood in awe of His majesty and marveled at His creative wisdom.

And shouldn't we marvel, and stand in awe, and praise Him as well?

For thought and discussion

1. As background for today's lesson, you should read Genesis, Chapters 1 and 2. Note the parallels in Psalm 104.
2. We usually think in terms of God blessing us. How do we bless Him? Discuss.
3. Certainly the workings of the world and its universe argue unquestionably for an intelligent Creator. Are you prepared to explain your faith in a Creator to those who claim it all came about by happenstance?
4. Think about the intricacies and interdependence of the various aspects of our world. Then praise God for His greatness and power.
5. Allow this lesson to strengthen your faith in the all-powerful Creator God. Not only did He create an intricate world; He also stooped down to redeem us to Himself. How can we bless Him most appropriately?

MARCH 19, 2006

The Omniscience of God

Psalm 139:1-14, 23, 24

While our first two lessons focused primarily on the creative power of God, this lesson's focus is on His omniscience and omnipresence. And who would argue that the great, creative God who made such a marvelous world and endowed man with skills and responsibilities would not also be all-knowing and everywhere present? It will be helpful to read Psalm 138, a psalm of praise, in conjunction with Psalm 139 in its entirety.

David had a keen awareness of God's power and abilities. He also had a close relationship with Him, calling Him Lord. David recognized that God had a personal interest in him and knew him inside and out. That knowledge, he says (verse 6), is too high and lofty for him to comprehend.

David acknowledges that God knew the minute details of his life—when he sits down, when he gets up, when he lies down, his thoughts, the places he goes. Everything about him is open before God. Even his inmost thoughts and the words he means to speak are known to God. (See Heb. 4:12, 13.) Certainly this awareness should prompt one to careful examination of speech, motives, and actions.

In verses 7 through 10 David gives credence to the adage that “you can run, but you cannot hide.” He asks, “Where can I go to get away from God?” And the answer is, of course, nowhere. God is everywhere. He is in the heavens above and in the depths beneath. East from west do not separate from Him. Wherever David may go, or we, by extension, God is there. He will lead His children; He will hold them in the hollow of His hand. You just simply cannot get away from God's presence.

Darkness cannot hide from God. Darkness and light are both alike to Him. God is everywhere. None of the physical, material elements which bind man are any restraining obstacle to God. Time, space,

distance, daylight, night, nothing hinders God's all-seeing eye or ever-present Spirit.

David then turns to an expression of praise (v. 14), growing out of his awareness of the greatness of God's creative act in man and His wisdom in creating such a wonderful and thoroughly integrated world. David had no problem recognizing God as the Creator and sustainer of the universe.

In verses 23 and 24 David opens himself fully to the omniscience of God, pleading for His thorough investigation of His life and motives. I once heard a preacher say that that is a dangerous prayer because if you pray it, God will answer, and show you areas where your life needs changing. David was so committed to God and to pleasing Him that he was unafraid to open himself to God's searchlight.

And shouldn't all of us be so eager to please God, who knows all about us anyhow, that we voluntarily open ourselves to His thorough examination, and then be willing to be led “in the way everlasting”?

For thought and discussion

1. As I write this (December 6, 2005), the world's population is just shy of six and one-half billion people. It is awesome to realize that God knows all about each individual and has a personal interest in his/her welfare. Let this awareness prompt you to careful living before Him. He knows all about you.
2. Why do people try to hide from God's presence?
3. Should not an awareness of God's omniscience both prompt careful living and give us a sense of comfort, knowing that He cares about us?
4. What was the secret to David's unqualified acceptance of God as Creator and sustainer of the world, and how does that stand in contrast to those today who deny these facts?
5. Are you willing, as was David, to open your life to God's scrutiny? If you pray for His searching, God will answer. Be prepared.

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MARCH 26, 2006

A Hymn of Praise

Psalm 145:1-13

After noticing how David marveled at God's purpose in creating man (March 5), at the majesty and completeness of the natural world (March 12), then recognizing God's omniscience (March 19), we now see him offering this hymn of praise in Psalm 145. *The New Bible Commentary* says of Psalm 145: "This Psalm is a preface to the final group of Psalms which together constitute the grand conclusion to the whole Psalter. The exuberant praise of this poem is paralleled by the comprehensive benediction of Psalm 150. Most of the phrases have been taken from other psalms, but nowhere else is there such a piling up of phrases descriptive of the greatness of the Lord."

Read Psalms 145 through 150 to sense the intensity of David's expressions of praise. It seems as though David's thoughts just tumble over one another as he seeks to express his praise, which builds to a crescendo culminating in Psalm 150 with his final words: "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."

The two main themes running through our text focus on the praise of God, and God's majesty and goodness. The psalm begins with David's exaltation and blessing of God whose greatness is unsearchable, or beyond man's comprehension. In response to God's daily blessing of him, David reciprocates with daily blessing and praise to God, because, he says, the Lord is great. And even though David recognized the unsearchable greatness of God with his limited power of mind, that in no way hindered his praise. It was continual.

Verse 4 reiterates Moses' words to Israel in Deuteronomy regarding the passing on from generation to generation reminders of the acts of God on their behalf. It is good for us today, as well, to pass on to our children and grandchildren the many acts of God's mercy and blessing on our lives. That builds faith, trust, and confidence in

following generations. David recognizes that God's awesome greatness and merciful goodness (verses 6 and 7), will draw praise from others too. God's greatness and goodness touches all men.

In verse 8 David turns to a recital of God's characteristics of benevolence, compassion, patience, mercy, and goodness. In verse 9 David states God's favor and mercy over all His works. Verse 10 tells us that all God's works—animate and inanimate—will praise Him. But specifically, His saints will bless and praise Him. Those who best recognize God's mercy on their individual lives will give Him the most abundant and perfect praise.

The praise of God not only accrues to God's benefit; it develops deeper awareness within the one doing the blessing, and it witnesses to others of the greatness and mercy of God. In the total scheme of things only God's kingdom, and all that that includes, will endure (v. 13). And while the world stands, God's dominion will extend over all.

David's exuberant praise to God arose from his lips day by day. He seemingly spared no effort in reminding God how grateful he was for His continued blessings. And neither should we. Let's re-examine our attitude and expression of praise to God.

For thought and discussion

1. Do you have a favorite psalm? If not, pick out one and memorize it as your personal expression to God.
2. It seems at times that perhaps our praise of God is dimmed by the trials and struggles we are going through. But is that a valid reason to forego praise? Think about it.
3. What are reasons for man to praise God, as deduced from this psalm? What reasons do you have to praise Him?
4. How do the inanimate works of God bring praise to Him?
5. Discuss ways that God's people can best praise Him for His mercy and goodness to them. ■

Newslines . . .

by Christian 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

Why Are Complementarian Views Losing Gender Debate?

On November 17, in a presentation at the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), Russell D. Moore claimed that egalitarians are winning the gender debate because evangelical complementarian men have largely abdicated their biblically ordained roles as head of the home. Complementarianism is the view that men and women are created equally in God's image, yet their roles are complementary. Egalitarianism, on the other hand, views men and women as gifted equally with the result that no role is limited to one sex.

The church paper, "Florida Baptist Witness," says that "Moore called for a complementarian response built upon a thoroughly biblical vision of male headship in which men lead their families and churches by mirroring God the Father, whom Scripture portrays as the loving, sacrificial, protective Patriarch of His people." According to Moore, complementarians have not dealt adequately with the feminist driving forces pervasive in the culture. Two forces that are far too influential in evangelical and even complementarian churches are consumerism and therapy. Therapeutic and consumerist currents have led evangelicals away from Scripture as the external, objective standard of truth. This has pushed them to look inside themselves. Because self then, and not Scripture, becomes the final authority, many hold complementarian views but actually practice egalitarianism.

As to consumerism, Moore says that "complementarian churches are just as captive to the consumerist drive of Ameri-

can culture as egalitarians, if not more so."

Moore is dean of the school of theology and senior vice president for academic administration at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

—adapted from *Florida Baptist Witness*

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Discovery of Pool of Siloam Substantiated

While repairing sewage pipe in the old city of Jerusalem in 2004, workers found the edge of what appeared to be an ancient pool. Authorities thought this discovery to be the Pool of Siloam mentioned in the New Testament. Since then more excavation has been done and an even more elaborate pool uncovered. This substantiates the discovery as the real biblical Pool of Siloam.

Princeton New Testament scholar James Charlesworth says that many scholars (who didn't believe in the historicity of the Book of John and who held more to the spiritual teaching associated with the Pool of Siloam rather than its literal existence) were initially skeptical of the discovery. But now Charlesworth says: "We have found the Pool of Siloam . . . exactly where John said it was."

—adapted from *Christian History*

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Roman Catholics and Capital Punishment

In a recent meeting in the nation's capital, Roman Catholic bishops called for an end to capital punishment. Holding that state executions are unfair and unhealthy for America's soul, Catholics stated "we seek to build a culture of life in which our

nation will no longer try to teach that killing is wrong by killing those who kill.” Still there was affirmation of the church’s teaching that allows capital punishment in limited circumstances, but the leaders qualified this by urging life imprisonment as a better alternative.

—adapted from *Christian Century*
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Liberal American Anglicanism Chided

Almost half of the primates from the worldwide Anglican Communion have rebuked the archbishop of Canterbury for not condemning the liberalism of American Anglican churches. The center of concern is the election in 2003 of an openly homosexual Episcopal bishop, V. Gene Robinson. Archbishop Peter Akinola of Nigeria and Archbishop Drexel Gomez of the West Indies see the unity of the church challenged by “unrepented sexual immorality.” In a letter to Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, the bishops expressed appreciation for Williams’ admittance that only heterosexual marriage can be described “holy and blessed,” but chided him for his detachment from confrontation of the immorality in the church in America. They urged the bishop to “rethink your personal views and embrace the church’s consensus and to act on it based as it is on the clear witness of Scripture.” —from *Christian Century*

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Debunking Da Vinci Drivel

Dan Brown’s popular novel, *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) will soon become a film and likely will grab the attention of the public with its myriad heresies. The novel, in which Jesus marries Mary Magdalene, producing a bloodline in France, has become Amazon’s number one best-seller and has been on the *New York Times* best-seller list for 47 weeks. Though the supposed marriage of Jesus to Mary Magdalene is obviously over the top, other ridiculous ideas abound in the book: that Constantine delegated a conspiratorial staff to manipulate

the texts of the New Testament and divinize the only human Christ; that the Council of Nicea (where Jesus’ true divinity was affirmed) was an ecclesiastical ploy to preserve masculine power and to assert infallibility to the texts of the church, and that the gnostic gospels (texts that early church fathers rejected as specious) are more reliable than the church’s canonical ones.

Evangelical scholars have responded in kind. Darrel Bock (Dallas Theological Seminary) has written an excellent response in his *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*. Bock has also gained publicity in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, where John J. Miller concluded that, “Mr. Bock shows that Mr. Brown’s central contentions are based on evidence so thin that calling them conjecture would be a compliment.” Another New Testament Scholar, Ben Witherington, has written *The Gospel Code* in which the contradictions of the novel’s arguments are exposed. Moody Bible Church Pastor Erwin Lutzer, in his *Da Vinci Deception* focuses on the fallacy of choosing the gnostic gospels over the church’s canonical ones. He concludes: “The answer can only be found in the spirit of the times: the desire for doctrinal diversity, the pressure of feminism, and the dogged insistence that we can have our own direct experience of God without the mediation of Christ. Only this desire to be ‘trendier than thou’ can explain the mindless rush. . . .”

—adapted from articles on *christianity today.com*

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Head of Crystal Cathedral Stepping Down

Robert H. Schuller reported to his congregation Sunday, January 1, that his son, Robert A. Schuller, will succeed him as head of the all-glass Crystal Cathedral in California. The elder Schuller, founding pastor of the church, is 79; he is considered one of the more influential religious leaders in the country (though very controversial to conservatives, with his emphasis on wealth and positive think-

ing). He plans to remain chairman of the board of international ministries. The younger Robert A. Schuller, 51, will be installed as senior pastor. He and his father plan to continue together the television show, "Hour of Power," which has gained a worldwide audience of 20 million.

—adapted from *Chicago Tribune*

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Religious Persecution Continues

According to *Open Doors USA* there was a noticeable increase in persecution of Christians throughout the world in 2005. *Open Doors* found that religious persecution rose in such countries as North Korea, Indonesia, and Eritrea. In Eritrea "26 pastors and 1,700 evangelical church members are currently imprisoned, and some have been tortured by government military forces." The head of *Open Doors* says that "Eritrea doesn't make the news very often because it's not either an ally or an enemy of the United States; but it is a country where millions of people are subjected to a Marxist-influenced government that is drumming up fear in a war with Ethiopia. In North Korea, an estimated 400,000 Christians face daily persecution, including torture in prison camps."

Nevertheless there were positive developments in the past year: "The evangelical church is growing rapidly in many of the countries where persecution of the church is common—even in some parts of Asia and the Middle East that are dominated by Hindu, Buddhist, or Islamic majority." Some of this growth is thought to be attributed to "Christian disaster relief efforts—particularly the church's response to the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004, which killed more than 283,100 people, and the 7.6-magnitude South Asia earthquake of October 2005, which had an estimated death toll of more than 87,350 people." —from *Agape Press*

1. **beam-ends**—the end of a ship's beams, which stretch from side to side, supporting the deck; "on its beam-ends" means to have them touching the water, so that the vessel lies on its side in imminent danger of capsizing.

O Blessed Hurricane!

by Charles Spurgeon

"On mine arm shall they trust"—*Isa. 51:5.*

In seasons of severe trial, the Christian has nothing on earth that he can trust to and is therefore compelled to cast himself on his God alone. When his vessel is on its beam-ends¹ and no human deliverance can avail, he must simply and entirely trust himself to the providence and care of God. Happy storm that wrecks a man on such a rock as this! O blessed hurricane that drives the soul to God and God alone!

There is no getting at our God sometimes because of the multitude of our friends; but when a man is so poor, so friendless, so helpless, that he has nowhere else to turn, he flies into his Father's arms and is blessedly clasped therein! When he is burdened with troubles so pressing and so peculiar, that he cannot tell them to any but his God, he may be thankful for them; for he will learn more of his Lord than than at any other time.

Oh, tempest-tossed believer, it is a happy trouble that drives thee to thy Father! Now that thou hast only thy God to trust to, see that thou puttest thy full confidence in Him. Dishonor not thy Lord and Master by unworthy doubts and fears; but be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Show the world that thy God is worth ten thousand worlds to thee. Show rich men how rich thou art in thy poverty when the Lord God is thy Helper. Show the strong man how strong thou art in thy weakness when underneath thee are the everlasting arms. Now is the time for feats of faith and valiant exploits. Be strong and very courageous; and the Lord thy God shall certainly, as surely as He built the heavens and the earth, glorify Himself in thy weakness and magnify His might in the midst of thy distress. The grandeur of the arch of heaven would be spoiled if the sky were supported by a single visible column, and your faith would lose its glory if it rested on anything discernible by the carnal eye. May the Holy Spirit give you to rest in Jesus . . .

—Reprinted with permission from *Free Grace Broadcaster*, Winter 2005

Following the Crowd

by Howard Bean

On a sunny morning, September 3, 1999, a thick morning fog formed along a section of Ontario's busiest highway, Route 401. Car followed car into the fog, hoping that the highway ahead was clear. It was not. A total of 87 cars, trucks, and vans collided. In this veritable wrecking yard stretching over one-half mile, eight persons died and 85 were injured. Following the crowd, although ignorant of danger, was perilous.

Paul the Apostle followed the crowd of Jewish leaders and scribes who were persecuting the Christians. After his life was transformed by Jesus Christ, Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 3:13 about personally having been "a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."

Beware of following those who lead into sin or spiritual danger. Doing what "everybody else" does is not safe. A documentary showed a lot about the behavior of sheep. One scene was of a packinghouse where sheep were slaughtered. The sheep had to walk from their large pen up a narrow ramp and then turn right. In order to get the sheep to move up the ramp, a "Judas goat" was trained to lead the sheep up the ramp to their death. The goat was placed among the sheep and then walked confidently to the ramp as the nervous sheep watched. After the goat got about five feet up the ramp, he stopped and confidently looked around at the nervous sheep, who then began to follow. Near the top of the ramp the goat turned left, as a gate was opened only for him and then closed. The sheep, however, continued up the ramp and turned right, to their death.

Like sheep, unbelievers have "the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them" (Ephesians 4:18). Herd-like, the mob at Jesus' trial copied the

scribes and Pharisees in clamoring for Jesus' crucifixion. At a mob scene in Ephesus in which Paul's life was at risk, "the more part knew not wherefore they were come together" (Acts 19:32). Not only do some follow the crowd ignorantly, some are manipulated and deceived into conforming. For example, one man in Utah bought several used cars and lined them up in front of his store. His business increased significantly. Because we are conditioned to conform, we tend to find the presence of others to be an assurance that what is available is good and right.

In present-day culture there is both a blind, unthinking following of one's peers as well as manipulative measures to affect people's actions and nudge them along a certain route of lifestyle.

Consider, for instance, the matter of morality. Those with a hedonistic or secular agenda promote the idea that all young people are engaging in premarital promiscuity and older folk are almost without fail having extramarital affairs and it is normal, fine, and consequence-free. This idea is promoted by many entertainers and educators.

Unfortunately, many people justify their natural carnal inclinations on the basis of what is seen in the movies, heard in music, and observed to some extent in our communities. Immoral media models who, overtly or subliminally influence others to copy their lifestyles, are like the strange woman of Proverbs 7:21-23. "With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life."

Another example of following the crowd

has to do with material possessions. Your neighbor has a snowmobile—you need one too. Your co-worker has a new pickup—you ought to buy (or lease) one too. The advertising world capitalizes on people's tendency to copy what other people have. As one wag said, "My neighbors are keeping me broke. They are always buying things I can't afford."

Courting couples can easily follow sub-Christian dating practices of present or previous couples. Practices like holding hands, sitting close, and engaging in physical intimacies are easily copied by peer couples. Also, the practice of dating at an early age (before late teens) is readily followed by subsequent teens at age 16.

Young men, don't rob the cradle. And be sure you are well away from the cradle yourself.

People tend to copy slang and questionable expressions without much consideration as to whether the words are appropriate or not. Jesus said, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

It is easier to adopt the weaknesses of a peer than it is his good qualities. Therefore, don't follow the crowd—follow the Lord. ■

—Used by permission of author



The Ministry of Reconciliation

by Wendell Miller

"And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none" (Ezekiel 22:30).

Oh, the desperation of seeking but not finding—especially in a life-and-death circumstance. Job's cry of old echoes the need of fallen man: "Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:33). But the New Testament provides the answer, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The coming of the Lamb of God brought a weighty responsibility. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Is it not a marvel that God has chosen to use His people, who are humanly limited, to carry the message of reconciliation to others?

What is the mission of the minister of reconciliation? *Reconciliation* is translated from a Greek word meaning "to change mutually." Sinful man is doomed to die before the justice of the holy God. Before sinful man can experience the peace and blessing of God, a mutual change needs to take place in the relationship between man and God. Jesus is the Daysman that can put His hand on both sinful man and the holy God, reconciling man to God. Our mission as a minister or servant of God is to aid men in finding the answer to their deepest need.

We bring men to God by pointing them to Jesus—the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We cannot make the choice for others, but we are responsible to testify to them of the great things the Prince of Peace has done for us. After Jesus cast many unclean spirits out of a man, the man desired to be with Him. But Jesus commanded him, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things

the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee" (Mark 5:19).

Who should be active in the ministry of reconciliation? Who is better qualified to testify to others than a sinner who has been saved by grace? A salesman who avidly recommends a product but does not use it himself is leaving a poor testimony about the quality of his product. Likewise, only those who have experienced the wonder and blessing of being a new creature in Christ are qualified to declare to others the great things Christ has done for them.

What are some characteristics of the minister of reconciliation? As ministers of reconciliation, we are servants to the great Master of reconciliation and under the authority of Jesus Christ. To be effective in this ministry, we must follow Him, loving as Christ loved, teaching as Christ taught, and serving as Christ served. It is imperative that we learn from the example of our perfect Master.

The woman at the well expressed surprise that Jesus, a Jew, would approach her with a request for water, since she was a Samaritan (John 4:9). Christians who are interested in the salvation of souls will be congenial to all men, even those who may be surprised at our interest in them. A congenial attitude will be attractive to others. We should greet others with a smile, go about our duties with a song, and testify of God's goodness even in difficulty. Can others see Jesus shining through our personality? When questioned about the hope that lies within us, do we answer in a manner that encourages more conversation, or do others sense we are hesitant to share our faith with them?

A compassionate heart is a vital trait of the minister of reconciliation. During a very busy time in Jesus' ministry, He said to His disciples, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). Yet when they arrived at their place of intended rest, the people were there waiting for Him.

Instead of complaining, Jesus "was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd." What would have been our response if we had left the crowd for repose, but the crowd followed our footsteps?

To be successful in reconciliation, sinners must sense that we care about them. Jesus took time to share with Zacchaeus even though some murmured. Our contacts with the world need to be guarded, but, like Jesus, we need to spend time with others, especially those who are showing an active interest in Bible truth. How fervent are our lives for the lost souls of men? Do we have the testimony of Apostle Paul that the love of Christ compels us to testify?

The ministry of Jesus was not primarily one of condemnation but rather of compassion. "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17). While it is proper to testify to the world that the Bible condemns immorality, we need to emphasize the remedy for sin and deliverance from sin. Jesus, in relating to the adulterous woman brought to Him by the Pharisees, said, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). We, too, may never soften our view of Gospel requirements for both confessing and forsaking sin.

Intercessory prayer is an invaluable aid in leading men to Christ. Jesus spent whole nights in prayer during His ministry. How faithful and fervent is our prayer life?

A ready testimony is important, but we need to show with our lives as well as testify with our lips. Unless we are practicing what we testify, our testimony will be an idle tale. A consistent life is irrefutable.

May we always prove ourselves faithful in the ministry of reconciliation. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Eastern Mennonite Testimony*

We profess to be nonresistant people. We do not believe in war and the thought of killing a fellow human being should never enter our minds. When do these convictions begin to develop? Are the games our children play “just games”?

What Firearms Are For

by a *Family Life* reader

Church services were over and the men stood outside, visiting in the late winter sunshine.

“We sure heard a refreshing sermon again,” remarked Daniel, a grandfather.

“Yes, we did,” agreed his brother David. “It was good to be reminded how blessed we are to live in a free country where we can gather unhindered to worship God.”

The men’s conversation was interrupted by the sound of boyish voices. “Bang! Bang! Bang!”

Daniel’s eyes turned to see what was going on. Eight young schoolboys were playing in the snow. Five of them had sticks in their hands and were playfully using them as guns. Three of the young lads lay motionless in the snow, pretending they had been shot.

A group of men, some of them fathers of the boys, stood nearby, but none of them seemed to notice.

Katie tied her horse to the hitching rail as she admired the lovely roses that climbed up the trellis beside the house. “Mabel certainly has a talent to make things look nice and neat,” Katie mused. Tears blinded her eyes as she thought of her dear friend and neighbor who was so very ill. The doctors had given her little hope of ever being well again.

Hearing tiny footsteps behind her, Katie reached for the loaf of bread that she had brought to share with Mabel and her family. She started for the house, with Mabel’s five-year-old Henry chattering at her side.

“What have you been doing this afternoon?” Katie asked.

“Oh,” Henry answered eagerly, “I was playing a game where you shoot men. I had to play by myself, because Peter was sleeping. My grandmother gave me the game. I shoot lots of men, but, oh well, it’s just a game.”

Katie could not help feeling a bit disturbed. Henry’s game didn’t sound like the kind she’d want her children to play. Why had Henry so casually added, “Oh well, it’s just a game.” Had he heard that phrase from his parents or grandparents?

Young Marcus was a cheerful lad in the fifth grade who willingly went to school each morning. However, he was an ADD child and had some special problems.

One lovely spring day the children were playing ball for the first time that season. Everyone was happy and the birds were singing accordingly.

“Marcus, it’s your turn to bat,” shouted Nathan, an eighth grader. “Be sure to make a good hit, because the bases are loaded. You can do it,” Nathan encouraged.

Marcus tried his best, but his ball went straight into the pitcher’s glove. Marcus had made an out! Sadly, he walked back to await his turn to bat again. As he passed a group of older boys, Amos reached out, gave Marcus a kick, and asked, “Can’t you do better than that?”

“Let’s kill him,” Joshua sneered to the other boys.

Feeling wounded to the core, Marcus wished for a place to cry, but the bell was ringing and he had lessons to do. In the days that followed, he often sat staring into space. He couldn't do his lessons and then he had homework to do. His parents and teachers were often very frustrated. Why did this child just sit there and do nothing?

Little did they realize how often he was cruelly mocked at school. Finally, one evening Marcus was weary and teary-eyed. While milking, his father questioned him and heard his terrible tale.

* * * * *

Rhoda got up from the quilt to tend four-month-old baby Ida. Being an only child, Ida was not used to the noise of the neighborhood quilting and had missed her forenoon nap.

Rhoda found a rocking chair in the bedroom where all was quiet and peaceful. Maybe now the baby could sleep.

As Rhoda rocked, she noticed the marriage certificate of Titus and Emma in a lovely wooden frame above the bed. "This must be their bedroom," she decided.

Along the next wall stood a tall gun cabinet with two large glass doors. Inside it, four shiny polished guns hung on green velvet-covered wooden pegs. At the corners were small shelves holding bullets and shells. On the bottom lay a bright orange vest, neatly folded with an orange bill cap, also on soft, green velvet. It was a colorful arrangement.

Rhoda had known that Titus was a hunter, but she hadn't been prepared to see his guns on display like this. Rhoda couldn't help but wonder if Titus were hunting to supply his family with meat or if he went hunting for the love of his guns and the sport of killing.

Baby Ida was sleeping, so Rhoda laid her into a crib and went back to the noisy, active quilting room. Noticing that Titus' schoolchildren had arrived

home during her absence, Rhoda's mind suddenly turned back several years to when she had been their teacher. Joshua was now out of school, but Rhoda could still remember clearly how she had felt when she had heard of his cruel taunt to Marcus, "Let's kill him."

Had not Titus planted a seed in his son's heart? The seed of the love of guns and of killing?

* * * * *

"Knock! Knock! Knock!" The pounding on the door rang true and clear as Titus and Emma looked at each other. Emma's eyes filled with tears as Titus got up heavily from the breakfast table. They well knew what these knocks meant and they were not looking forward to it.

Two short weeks ago, Titus, along with thirty-nine other church brethren, had received letters informing them that the national army was drafting men to help them fight in another country across the ocean.

The forty men had visited the courthouse and attended numerous other meetings in an attempt to stop this, but all to no avail. They tried to explain that they couldn't kill or fight, but the officers had remained firm and stern.

Now the fateful morning had arrived and two officers stepped inside as Titus opened the door. "Good morning!" boomed the tallest officer. "Are you ready, young man?"

Titus still held the doorknob as he weakly answered, "No, sir, I-I can't go. I-er-don't believe in fighting. I don't believe in killing."

"Come on," growled the officer. "Get your things. We've got to go. We need men like you who are big and strong and know how to use a gun. You like guns, I see." He pointed toward the open bedroom door and the morning sun shone brightly on the firearms in Titus' cabinet.

Maybe Titus was a big healthy man, but now sobs shook his body as he real-

ized there was no way out. Bidding his weeping family farewell, he followed the two officers to the waiting vehicle.

The first four stories are actual happenings, though names and some details have been changed. The fifth story is imaginary, but is it beyond the realm of possibility?

Our churches are growing in number. We have many thriving congregations, and have been richly blessed. Each year, young people are baptized and added to the church, and there are many weddings.

Prosperity is a key word in our day. Who can deny it that the devil loves prosperity, and is always ready to take advantage of it? He has set his snares and slowly but surely lures victims to come his way.

It seems this hunting and shooting fever has somehow entered our circles and more and more of our people are afflicted by it. The children learn how to shoot, but sad to say many of them have not been taught the seriousness of shooting a person or the sacredness of

life. They often pretend to shoot each other, or perhaps a teacher or someone they don't like very well.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment . . . but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil. . . . Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:21, 39, 44).

Our forefathers in pioneer days were dependent on guns to obtain meat for the table and for protection against dangerous animals or pests. That was a valid reason then and it remains valid today. Unfortunately, our use of guns has broadened to include hunting for sport or for trophies, and it is to be feared that our familiarity with firearms for such purposes has gradually eroded our image as a quiet, peace-loving, and nonresistant people. ■

—From *Family Life*, October 2005. Reprinted with permission of the author.



Abusing Babies: Inside and Outside the Womb

by Haven Bradford Gow

Since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized baby killing in January 1973, more than 40 million innocent unborn babies have been butchered and scalded to death in their mothers' wombs. As pointed out by the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment (733 Fifteenth Street, NW, #926 Washington, D.C.), "Since *Roe v. Wade* became the law of the land, . . . [t]he

practice of medicine has been degraded by those in the profession who participate in [abortion]. And society as a whole has been coarsened by the toleration and even acceptance of the widespread taking of innocent human life."

According to Helen Malchan-Evans, a social critic in Little Rock, Arkansas, "Since the legalization of abortion in 1973, 14 million black children have

been aborted. . . . Abortion . . . has become a form of genocide. . . . The African-American culture has a great legacy, weathering many storms, including slavery, racism and degradation. . . . Have we spent our blood and tears fighting for equality only to have our children dying faster than we are able to replenish them?"

She adds: "Abortion is our no. 1 killer, yet the majority of African-Americans are unaware of this fact. If we are to survive as a race, we must know the facts and choose life for our children."

An article in the July-September 2005 *Vertical Thought* (Milford, OH) noted, "[O]ur unborn children have life. They take in oxygen and nutrients through the miraculous means designed by God. Their hearts are beating. They hear and respond to the outside world and remember certain sounds after they are born. From the moment of conception, a life has begun. . . ."

Yet in its January 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court said it simply could not decide on the question of when human life begins. However, according to Loyola University Medical School pediatrics professor Dr. Eugene Diamond, it is a definite scientific fact that a human being exists at conception: "The existence of biologically independent life in the unborn from the time of conception is supported by the following observations: (a) Human life can be made to begin under in vitro conditions by the fertilization of the ovum by sperm; (b) The zygote and embryo thus produced are independently viable and not 'part of' the petri dish or the uterus into which it will be eventually implanted; (c) Criteria necessary for the definition of 'life' rather than 'death' (e.g., heartbeat, electroencephalographic activities) are present early in the first trimester."

Ironically, supporters of legalized abortion said abortion on demand would reduce child abuse by eliminating unwanted babies before they are born; yet, as pointed out by a November 1999 report from the National School Boards Association and the National League Cities, among others, even with legalized abortion, child abuse and neglect have skyrocketed. An estimated 3,195,000 in 1997 were reported to authorities as abused and neglected. Between 1988 and 1997, reports of child abuse and neglect skyrocketed 41 percent.

For Canadian psychiatrist Dr. Philip Ney, a nexus exists between the pro-abortion mentality and the increase of child abuse (mental, physical, verbal, sexual). Dr. Ney observes that "when I investigated the relationship between child abuse and abortion . . . [i]t appeared that the rate of child abuse did not decrease with freely available abortions. In fact, the opposite was true. In parts of Canada where there were low rates of abortion, there were low rates of child abuse. As the rates of abortion increased, so did child abuse." Dr. Ney adds: "Indeed, it is a vicious cycle. That is, parents who have been involved in abortion are more likely to abuse and neglect their children. Mothers and fathers who were abused as children are more likely to abort their child."

When this nation's High Court legalized baby killing in January 1973, it helped create a moral and social climate conducive to abortion. People began to think that "if it is morally and legally acceptable to kill babies inside the womb, then what is wrong with abusing babies outside the womb?" We need to restore a culture of life that affirms the sacredness of sex, marriage, family, and human life. ■

—Mr. Gow is a radio commentator and writer.

The Disappearance of Church Discipline— How Can We Recover? Part Two

by R. Albert Mohler Jr.

The disappearance of church discipline has weakened the church and compromised Christian witness. The church's abdication of its moral responsibility has also led to public humiliation before the watching world. Any road to recovery will take the church through a rediscovery of the biblical and theological foundations for congregational discipline. The integrity of the people of God should always be a paramount concern. This story does not begin with the church, but with Israel.

Throughout the Bible, the people of God are characterized by a distinctive purity. This moral purity is not their own achievement, but the work of God within their midst. As the Lord spoke to the children of Israel, "For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44a). Given that they have been chosen by a holy God as a people of His own name, God's chosen people are to reflect His holiness by their way of living, worship, and beliefs.

The holiness code is central to the understanding of the Old Testament. As God's chosen nation, Israel must live by God's Word and law, which will set the children of Israel visibly apart from their pagan neighbors. As the Lord spoke through Moses: "You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies and his statutes which he has commanded you. You shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may be well with you and that you may go in and possess the good land which the Lord swore to give your fathers" (Deuteronomy 6:17, 18).

The nation is reminded that it is now known by God's name, and is to reflect His holiness. "For you are a holy people to the

Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 7:6). God promised His covenant faithfulness to His people, but expected them to obey His Word and follow His law. Israel's judicial system was largely designed to protect the purity of the nation.

In the New Testament, the church is likewise described as the People of God, who are visible to the world by their purity of life and integrity of testimony. As Peter instructed the church: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; for once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9, 10).

Peter continued, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:11, 12).

As the new People of God, the church is to see itself as an alien community in the midst of spiritual darkness—strangers to the world who must abstain from the lusts and enticements of the world. The church is to be conspicuous in its purity and holiness, and steadfast in its confession of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Rather than capitulating to the moral (or immoral) environment, Christians are to be conspicuous by their good behavior. As

Peter summarized, “like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior” (1 Peter 1:15).

The Apostle Paul clearly linked the holiness expected of believers to the completed work of Christ in redemption: “And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet he has now reconciled you in his fleshly body through death, in order to present you before him holy and blameless and beyond reproach . . .” (Colossians 1:21, 22). Clearly, this holiness made complete in the believer is the work of God, and holiness is the evidence of that redemptive work. To the Corinthian congregation Paul urged, “Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

The identity of the church as the People of God is to be evident in its pure confession of Christ, its bold testimony to the Gospel, and its moral holiness before the watching world. Nothing less will mark the church as the true vessel of the Gospel.

The first dimension of discipline in the church is that discipline exercised directly by God as He deals with believers. As the Book of Hebrews warns, “You have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov[ed] by him; for those whom the Lord loves he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives.’ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?” (Hebrews 12:5-7). As the passage continues, the author warns that those who are without discipline “are illegitimate children and not sons” (Hebrews 12:8). The purpose of discipline, however, is righteousness. “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:11).

God’s loving discipline of His people is His sovereign right and is completely in keeping with His moral character—His own holiness. His fatherly discipline also establishes the authority and pattern for discipline in the church. Correction is for the greater purpose of restoration and the even higher purpose of reflecting the holiness of God.

The second dimension of discipline in the church is that disciplinary responsibility addressed to the church itself. Like God’s fatherly discipline of those He loves, the church is to exercise discipline as an integral part of its moral and theological responsibility. That the church can fall into moral disrepute is evident in the New Testament itself.

The Apostle Paul confronted a case of gross moral failure in the Corinthian congregation which included “immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 5:1). In this case, apparent incest was known to the congregation, and yet it had taken no action.

“You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst,” Paul accused the Corinthian congregation (1 Corinthians 5:2). He instructed them to act quickly and boldly to remove this stain from their fellowship. He also warned them, “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the whole leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened” (1 Corinthians 5:6, 7a).

Paul is outraged that the Corinthian Christians would tolerate this horrible sin. Incest, though not literally unknown in the pagan world, was universally condemned and not tolerated. In this respect, the Corinthian church had fallen beneath the moral standards of the pagan world to whom they were to witness. Paul was also exasperated with a congregation he had already warned. Mentioning an earlier letter unavailable to us, Paul scolds the

Corinthians: "I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually I wrote you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves" (1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

The moral outrage of a wounded apostle is evident in these pointed verses, which call the Corinthian church to action and the exercise of discipline. They have now

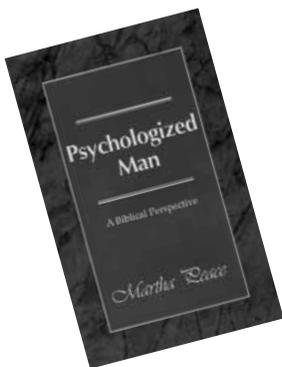
fallen into corporate sin by tolerating the presence of such a bold and arrogant sinner in their midst. Their moral testimony is clouded, and their fellowship is impure. Their arrogance has blinded them to the offense they have committed before the Lord. The open sin in their midst is like a cancer which, left unchecked, will spread throughout the entire body.

The Apostle's concern about the Corinthian church is a startling catalyst for concern about today's congregations, many of which are following a Corinthian pattern of moral compromise. Paul's letter is a poignant reminder of what is at stake in the recovery of biblical church discipline—nothing less than the church's witness before the world. ■

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Has Evolution Become a State Religion?

by John D. Morris, Ph.D.

The Church of England had been established as the official state church of that country for a long time, but in the nineteenth century an effort was launched to “disestablish” it, and remove its favored status. Yet some wanted to retain the designation, and launched the antidisestablishment movement. Their movement became known as antidisestablishmentarianism, a beloved word of all school children who brag they can spell the longest word in the English language. There are longer words, but we can learn a lesson from this historical episode.

America’s founding fathers rejected all ideas of a national church, even though numerous voices clamored for one and several of the individual states had already selected one or the other. The very first amendment to the constitution codified this commitment, that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. . . .” Nowhere did they insist on “the separation of church and state” in the sense that religious concepts had no place in government; indeed, quotes abound affirming their personal and national dependence on God. They insisted on freedom of religion, not the favoring of one denomination over the other. The modern-day removal of all vestiges of Christianity from the public arena would greatly displease the founders. Many were devout Christians, of varying denominations, but of deep personal convictions. They wanted to keep the state out of religion, not eliminate a Christian influence on affairs of the state.

How then can we understand the government-mandated rush to embrace the concept of evolutionary naturalism?

The idea that life originated, indeed the entire universe originated, through strictly natural processes (as opposed to supernatural processes) is a religious concept, incapable of observation or proof, yet held by faith. In evolutionary naturalism, life not only finds its origin, but also its meaning and destiny in nature. As many have noted, it is essentially equivalent with atheism.

Our government schools teach evolution with fervor at taxpayer expense, ignoring alternatives. Textbook writers often repeat information known to be false, in the name of good evolution teaching. Teacher unions aggressively combat other views while defending teachers who abuse students of different faiths than evolution. Our courts declare other origins’ views off-limits, branding them religion. Scientists have even redefined the goal of science. No longer is it “the search for truth”; it has become the search for naturalistic explanations. Self-serving civil libertarians promise a bitter lawsuit against any who would return to the views of the founders. How could we have come so far? Where is the road back?

The state-supported church of atheistic evolutionism has been almost fully established in this once Christian country. I, for one, support the “disestablishment” of this false, unscientific, and harmful church. I do not favor establishing any Christian creed as the State Church, but it should be allowed to function without government “prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” I pray that it would flourish and that America’s leaders would once again welcome its wholesome influence in society. ■

—From *Back to Genesis* (No. 203). Used with permission.

The Goodness of God

by John Coblentz

“How can a good God allow evil?” This is one of the most troubling questions in human experience. We can understand when wicked people suffer for their sins, but we run into confusion when good people suffer for no reason, or when innocent children must pay huge prices for the sins of adults who know better.

We don’t have to defend God, of course. He has demonstrated His goodness in astounding ways, and He is good whether people believe it or not. And at the same time, when we see and experience the goodness of God, we feel compelled to declare it! With a heart of gratitude, then, I wish to make three points about the goodness of God.

1. *God is good.* The Scriptures offer abundant declarations of God’s incredible goodness, and not only from the lips of those who were kept from trouble, but also from those who came through it. “I had fainted,” David says, “unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (Psalm 27:13).

When we say that God is good, we mean that He is goodhearted. He watches over His creation (and especially humans) with a kind and benevolent heart. He delights in seeing us happy and cared for, and He sorrows over our miseries, our troubles, and our heartaches (even counting them as His own).

2. *Circumstances in an evil world can obscure the truth of God’s goodness.* Here we are, again, at the difficulty of reconciling the truth of a good God with the reality of an evil world. This is not a trivial question. It has troubled theologians, and it is one of the favorite arguments of skeptics and cynics. But it is not with skeptics and cynics that we have our major concern here. We are

concerned with Christians who are struggling.

And we must not quickly condemn a Christian who is confused about the goodness of God, even one who is angry. Very holy people have struggled here. This was Job’s greatest conflict. He did not know how to fit his horrific experiences into his conception of God. In his anguished struggle, his honest thoughts and feelings were not always wise, as he later lamented.

But the truth is that doubts about God’s goodness are based on false assumptions. When we are struggling with things God has allowed in our lives, we may assume any or all of the following:

- a. That a good God ought not to allow evil things to happen to His children.
- b. That when He does so, He has betrayed them.
- c. That when He allows evil to happen to innocent people, He is responsible for it (because He could have prevented it).
- d. That the evil I am experiencing is the whole story. That is, we fix our eyes on the catastrophe we are going through and assume that since God hasn’t done what we think He should do, He will do nothing more. Needless to say, we must be very careful about drawing conclusions about God in the middle of the story.

These assumptions seem so logical. They are how it really does seem to be in the minds of suffering people, especially when they are suffering for no sin of their own.

3. *The goodness of God in a world of evil is most clearly revealed in redemption.* This is a truth with huge

implications. What we must come to accept is that God's greatest answer to evil is not prevention but redemption. Thankfully, God can and does prevent evil. He intervenes. He protects. He delivers from. And it is all right for us to pray, in Jesus' words, "Deliver us from evil." But this is not all God does, and if we look honestly at His record, it is not the greatest thing He does, nor is it the greatest revelation of His goodness.

When we find ourselves embracing the false assumptions mentioned above, we must replace them with truth.

- a. Any evil we experience does not (and never can) alter the goodness of God.
- b. God is fully able to turn every sorrow into joy.
- c. Any trouble we face as God's children is an opportunity to learn how incredibly goodhearted God really is.
- d. When we are tempted to be angry at God or to doubt His goodness, it is a matter of wrong perspective. Always.

God is never removed from our sorrows except by our own unbelief. This is a God who weeps with us. This is a God who sent His own Son into suffering to assure us that He cares and understands human sorrow.

Where is God when I suffer? He is right there with me. And He is assuring me He can use the experiences I'm going through to equip me to be more holy, more compassionate, wiser, more like His own Son. He can redeem my sorrows—purchase them for eternal use. He can turn damage into usefulness, scars into radiant beauty, victimized innocence into wisdom. God specializes in making a mockery of evil, as it were, in totally reversing its effect on my life.

But there is a condition. We must trust Him. We must believe—sometimes against all apparent evidence otherwise—that God is good, that He

knows exactly what we are going through, that it grieves His heart, and that He is able to turn evil circumstances into our eternal good.

When we trust God in the midst of not understanding Him, we release Him to do tremendous things in our lives (as Joseph, David, Daniel, Job, and many others have testified). We also set ourselves on the way to seeing new horizons in the goodness of God. At the end of the story, after the final chapter is written, if we have trusted Him, we will shout with all our being that God truly is good! And He was all along.

"O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him" (Psalm 34:8). ■

—From *Deeper Life Ministries* Newsletter June 2005. Used with permission.

"The Ploughboy's Bible"

by J. Mark Horst

William Tyndale was a highly educated Englishman. While in the employ of Sir John Walsh, he lived at Little Sodbury Manor. Gazing out over the fields, he observed the ploughboys working the manor fields. This was the inspiration for his English translation of the Bible.

The highly educated had the Latin Bible. Erasmus' Greek New Testament was also available. But these were of little value to the poor, uneducated folk. Tyndale decided to compile the Scriptures in the language of the ploughboy! Because of opposition Tyndale hid in Europe, living under a fictitious name.

In 1526, Tyndale's English New Testament was smuggled into England in bales of cotton and containers of wheat. The King and Bishop were violently

opposed to Tyndale's work and as a result, a wave of persecution swept across the country. Prisons overflowed, Bibles were burned, and believers were burned at the stake with Tyndale's Bible around their necks.

Hearing these reports, Tyndale stated, "In burning the New Testament they did none other thing than I looked for; no more shall they do if they burn me also, if it be God's will it shall be so. Nevertheless, in translating the New Testament I did my duty." Tyndale managed to keep one step ahead of his pursuers in Europe until 1535.

In the spring of 1535, a man named Henry Phillips came to Antwerp where Tyndale was hiding. In a short time, Phillips met Tyndale and gained his confidence. In the words of Phillips, Tyndale was "simple and unexpert in the wily subtleties of this world." Phillips used Tyndale's naivete to betray him to the authorities.

After Tyndale's arrest, he was held in the castle at Vilvorde for about a year and a half. **Finally, on October 6, 1536, he was tied to the stake, strangled, and then burned.** His

final words, spoken with fervent zeal and in a loud voice, were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

Tyndale's contribution to the spread of Christianity is unparalleled. Not as well-known or appreciated is his contribution to the English language. A joint exhibit between the British Library and The Library of Congress stated, *Contrary to what history teaches about Chaucer being the father of the English Language, this mantle belongs to William Tyndale, whose work was read by ten thousand times as many people as Chaucer's.*"

What a debt of gratitude we owe this faithful martyr for the Word of God in our language! Let's mark the sixth day of October as a special day of remembrance and gratitude for Tyndale's contribution to the spread of the Gospel. I fear we too often forget the tremendous price that was paid for the Word we have today.

I am eternally grateful that this "ploughboy" has the Bible in a language he can understand! ■

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How Much Shall I Give God?

by Larry Halteman

Many Christians ask the question, "How much money shall I give in the offering?" A sincere seeker will find the answer to this question. He will gather information from the Bible and his fellow brethren. The knowledge he obtains will be used to establish purpose of heart.

If excuses were eliminated from this subject our church funds would surpass our expectations. Excuses, excuses, excuses, we hear them again and again!

Supposedly, excuses relieve us of our accountability. This is a wrong belief. Instead, I believe, we can give more.

The goal of this article is to increase our eternal assets. Isn't it amazing how God changes our temporal gifts into eternal assets? Choose to invest into eternal assets.

Investing into God's program pays dividends. God's interest rates far exceed the bank's rates. Investing wisely is of utmost importance.

Perishable and imperishable assets are defined in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. *“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built there upon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”*

Imperishable assets are gold, silver, precious stones. Investing into God’s program is a risk-free venture; thieves, moths, and rust will not corrupt these assets. Fire will not hurt them! God’s program is solid, unable to be touched by any temporal casualty.

The banks’ ending interest rates, and all other earthly investments, pay the interest of ashes. Wood, hay, and stubble will be consumed by fire. Temporal assets are perishable assets.

Christian businessmen, which is the better investment? It is our choice today but our choices will reflect how big our ash pile will be. In reality, will there be any ashes left after this Great Fire?

We have considered heaven’s value system; now let’s look at our stewardship. We are God’s stewards (Matthew 25:14-30). The talents in this scriptural account refer primarily to material goods. Material goods are often reduced to the term *money*. Talents could also be defined as personal abilities, native gifts from God. Scriptural precedent shows us that personal talent is of more value to God than money, and our worship toward God of greater value than personal ability. However, this article focuses on the least important of the three.

Our motivation to give money should

stem from the fact we want to please God. Our worship of God needs expression. Worship expresses itself in giving.

The greatest enemy of giving is our own carnality. To help our carnality problem, we voluntarily choose to please God. So, we give. The second greatest enemy of giving is probably professing, ungiving, Christians. This selfishness discourages willing volunteers.

We have clear Bible directives teaching us to give but how do we know how much we should give? Biblical principle shows us how to perform Biblically.

Borrow to give. When needs arise in the church, volunteer to borrow, to help meet the need. We borrow for temporal assets, why not borrow for eternal assets? We borrow readily for tomorrow’s ash pile, why not borrow for tomorrow’s great dividends?

This scriptural precedent is found in 2 Corinthians 8:1-3. *“Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For **to their power**, I bear record, yea, and **beyond their power** they were willing of themselves.”* The churches of Macedonia were in a pitiful financial state. They were experiencing affliction and deep poverty.

Most present-day Christians, in such a state, would say they can’t give. What did the churches of Macedonia do? They gave beyond their power. To be able to afford something, is within our financial ability. If we cannot afford something, it means it is beyond our financial capability. This is exactly what the Macedonian churches experienced. They gave **to their power**, which equals maxing out their affordable finances. Most Christians would say, stop now, use common sense! Macedonian churches went **beyond their**

power, that is to say, they borrowed to help meet the need.

The Macedonian Christians possessed two great keys—a key of a willing mind and the key of great joy. Who will volunteer to borrow so they can give more?

Give all. Who will volunteer to give all their living? The will to please God compels some to give all their living to God. The widow gave all of her living (Mark 12:41-44). She gave what she really needed to keep. Her faith stood the test of giving all her income. Could our faith, in God, stand the test of giving all our income for a month, six months, one year? Be assured, the widow did survive.

The Macedonian churches and the widow contrast the worldly philosophy we have in our minds. Both of these examples are for the season of special needs.

Give bountifully. Give eleven to ninety percent of net income. Please do not use your tax returns for your base for giving. It is easy to show little or no net profit by a financial strategy. This is not fair to God! God expects us to provide for our household and if we own a business, it is necessary to keep it in good operation. After we pay these necessary costs and save a little for old age, consider the rest as net income. Money brings a false sense of security. Faith in God should be our secure base, not lots of money. Considering these facts, let's think more about giving bountifully. If we own land, a house, and have no debt, would giving ninety percent of net income be too much? Perhaps youth could give seventy-five percent of net income and save ten percent for future goals. If young families with children are frugal, perhaps they could give thirty percent of net income. If we expect our eternal building material to be gold, silver, and precious stones, we cannot be building an earthly ash pile.

Give ten percent as a starting base. Old Testament precedent is often believed to be ten percent. This is not correct. We do not know how many freewill offerings they gave besides their required giving standard. Giving ten percent as a starting base is good but we should move into fulfilling New Testament precedent.

Give less than ten percent. *“For if there be first a willing mind it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not”* (2 Corinthians 8:12). Some people may have very little left after the basic household costs are met. They are to give what they are able and God will bless them for sharing.

Is giving according to New Testament precedent too idealistic? Were the Macedonian churches too idealistic? Was the widow too idealistic? No, they were not too idealistic. They performed a realistic idealism that pleased God. Could it be that we need this realistic idealism to combat the American Dream? The American Dream of money, power, prestige, and pleasure is deceiving people. Remember Jesus' words, it is hard for a rich man to enter heaven. Serving God or mammon is a life or death issue. Why not deal radically with mammon? But when the young man heard that saying he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions (Matthew 19:22).

In summary, how much shall I give God?

- It is based on our net income.
- It is based on our increase of equity.
- It is based on our willingness to voluntarily choose to please God.
- It is based on the proportion of our faith.
- It is based on God's access to our heart and its pocketbook. ■

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The Husband's Role

written by six husbands

1. THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE

An article on submission from a husband's viewpoint is probably going to sound a bit one-sided. After all, what man in his right mind would write an article that even vaguely suggests that anything less than full submission on the wife's part is acceptable? The average man is smart enough to know that his position as head of the house is secure only as long as his wife and children are in submission. However, an article on submission from a husband's view may reveal some things that most women have never thought of.

When a man vows before God to take this woman as his wife, he is accepting a responsibility for her physical and spiritual well-being until death parts them. He promises to provide and care for her and be the leader in their home. He promises to love his wife no matter

If my wife commits a sin under my direction or with my permission, the guilt of that sin lies not only with her but with me as well.

what. The woman promises, among other vows, to submit to her husband's leading. She promises to obey her husband as long as it is not against God's Word. It is the combination of these vows that make the husband the head of the house. He has been given a man-

date by God to do as he thinks is best and, if his decisions do not violate Scripture, his wife has no choice but to obey.

Why then, does a husband need to help around the house? Why does the head of the house need to cut the meat on other people's plates before he can eat his own meal? Why does the head of the house need to tuck in several chil-

dren before he can go to his own bed? Why does the head of the house need to explain away other people's nightmares before he is free to have his own? And, most importantly, why should the head of the house check with his wife before he makes decisions? *It is because he is the head of the house!*

When a man becomes the head of a house, we can compare his responsibility to that of the centurion in Luke 7. Notice the way the centurion declares his position. In verse 8 he says, "For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." Take note that the centurion does not say, "I am a man with authority." Instead he describes himself as being "set under authority." This is the position that every married man is in.

Just as the centurion is set under authority, so is the husband. The centurion says to a soldier under his command, "Go." That soldier, because he has orders to do whatever the centurion tells him to, will go. The centurion, having sent the soldier is now responsible for the results of this soldier's actions as long as the soldier does not deviate from his orders.

While the centurion is an officer, and can give orders as he thinks best, his responsibility to those in command above him, and ultimately to the Roman emperor, causes him to indeed be a man "set under authority." The authority has, in a sense, become a burden to him. So it is with a husband. A husband also has the authority to "order his wife around," but he is responsible for her actions under his orders; first to Christ, but ultimately to God (1 Cor. 11:3).

When I consider the authority that I was set under when taking my marriage vows, I am thankful that God saw fit to give me a wife who is truly a submissive, Christian woman. Being married to her makes it a joy to carry the burden of authority that I was set under. That does not mean that I never feel the weight of the burden. I am sometimes still in awe of the responsibility that this authority gives me. For I am not only responsible for my own physical, material, and spiritual health, I am now responsible for my wife's, as well as that of the children that God has blessed our home with.

My wife, as a Christian, is responsible to God for her actions. However, if she commits a sin under my direction or with my permission, the guilt of that sin lies not only with her, but with me as well. As a Christian, my wife cannot follow my directions to sin and remain guiltless. While she is under my authority, she is ultimately responsible to God. However, if I were to order her or allow her to do something that I know is sinful, Christ says it were better for me if I had a millstone hanged about my neck and I were drowned in the depths of the sea. If that treatment is better than the consequences of leading her astray, I need to think carefully about the orders and directions that I give.

Nearly every marriage, and certainly every Christian marriage, happens because of love. We all know the routine. Boy meets girl; they fall in love; they get married and live happily ever after. Well, after we experienced the routine, it may have not worked out quite like that, but the basics are still there. I married my wife because I loved her. I love her even more now. She has proven to me why marriage is described as a foretaste of heaven. And because I love her, I want to make her as happy as I can. After all, she has made me happier than I ever thought I could be.

—A husband in PA

2. THE HUSBAND HOLDS THE KEY

Every man who is blessed with a wife and children in a home of his own needs to recognize the awesome responsibility that comes with this blessing.

So easily the husband can be guilty of a selfish desire to make good and to establish *himself* as a concerned brother in the church—a hard worker with good management who has his family in good standing. Or there may be other similar selfish desires that drive a man to do what he does. In the process, his wife may feel taken advantage of and used by her husband to further his own goals.

Instead, we need to team up with our wives, join hands, and plan and dream together in seeking God's will for our lives. The husband needs to train his mind to see things from a woman's point of view. This doesn't necessarily mean giving her all she wants, but it does mean giving her every consideration. She can tell if I am living for her and the children, or just for self.

In a problem marriage, it may appear on the surface as if the trouble lies with the wife, but the husband's faults may be so well hidden that he himself does not see them. I know of a couple who had a poor relationship all their married life. Many people felt the wife was the main problem. Her jealousy toward her husband's family was quite obvious, as was her sulking and self-pity. She had difficulty accepting her husband's way of doing things and she gave vent to anger at times.

While we cannot justify any of these things, it turned out that the husband was to a large degree the cause of them. At the very least, it was his responsibility as the leader of the home to seek help for the situation.

But before he could do that, he needed to be humble enough to take a good honest look at himself. If he had, he might have discovered his own share

of the blame. He was critical of his wife's family's way of doing things and thus triggered her jealousy and made it hard for her to accept his view. By being pre-occupied with his own ideas and not including her, nor taking an interest in her personal life and goals, he caused her to give way to self-pity. All this, along with a defensive attitude gave her the message, "I'm no different from other men, so why do you have a problem?" This caused the anger and frustration.

Whenever there are problems in the home, whether in the marriage itself or with child training, we men hold the key to improvement. We ought to take the lead in finding a solution. But we need to keep in mind that the root of the problem may not always be obvious, nor the solution where the problem appears to be.

To illustrate my point, let me tell you about the two driving horses we bought at a sale recently. They were three and seven years old, both fresh off the track, and I knew they would have to be handled carefully if I wished to avoid serious problems.

The three-year-old was very green and skittish at first, but improved every time we hitched her up. Before long she became quite dependable. The seven-year-old was not so green and did real well, but after awhile she became more and more contrary every time we hitched her. At last she was a real balker. By all appearance she needed a thorough going over, or else be sold.

But then I got to thinking. Maybe something was bothering her. She did have a small sore on her shoulder, and while I couldn't see any sore on her back she ouches when I touched it. We gave these sores time to heal, then got new pads for her collar and back. But she seemed to only get worse the more we used her.

Then someone asked me, "What kind

of bit do you have on her?"

"Well, er, it is kind of a twisted bit, quite sharp," I stammered. Also, the bridle was a little too tight for her. So we got a straight, rubber-coated bit and also adjusted the bridle, as our friend advised. Although her problems didn't go away overnight, she kept improving until now you would hardly know she ever was a balker.

So where was the problem? Was it with the horse, or was it the way I treated her? If I wanted to be defensive, I could say, "Well, I used the same harness and bridle on both horses, so why didn't it bother the young horse? I couldn't even see any sore in her mouth, and the one on her shoulder was just a tiny one! Those little things shouldn't have bothered her."

All very true, but the bottom line is that some horses and some women are more sensitive than others. Regardless if my horse was a big part of the problem, the solution had to begin with me!

So getting back to the husband's role in the home, do we get the point? We men hold the key to solving problems. As the leader in all other matters, why don't we also take the lead in recognizing our faults and changing our defensive attitude? Then the rest of the family will have a good example to follow.

In Ephesians 5:25-30 we are given a good picture of how a man should nourish and cherish his wife, even as Christ does the church. In other words, even as Christ is a helpful, healing balm for problems in the church, so we men should be the same for our wives. Instead, we often irritate the very area we are called to help her with.

But that can be all right. Thereby we can recognize our own problems, and hers too. Yes, we all have shortcomings—men, women, and children. Will we men take the lead and bring our faults to Christ, then help our dear wife and children to bring theirs also?

—A husband in Michigan, struggling to do his part

Some horses and some women are more sensitive than others.

3. TAKING TIME TO TALK

There you have it, wives. We husbands are not perfect. We do fail at times. And when we do, men, we have something on our hands. We have a responsibility, and that is to admit our mistakes and not wait for our wives to bring them to our attention. As much as we may think that admitting wrong will ruin their trust in us, it will not. Rather, it builds trust, and reassures a wife that her husband can actually determine right from wrong.

It is in the woman's place to be submissive, but we husbands have no right to demand it, and especially not if we are not trustworthy. It is very true that most women lean quite heavily on their husbands to supply spiritual leadership, but just think what a weight of responsibility that puts on us. If we are not spiritually-minded, what will it do to our marriage? Let us examine ourselves. How do we stand with God?

Is there a hidden sin that is hindering our relationship with God? Is there anything we are unable to openly discuss with our wives? I believe they will sense it, but they won't know what it is. This is very disturbing and confusing to them.

Also, a snoring husband is no comfort when a wife has a burden on her mind and wants to talk about it. (This is the part I'm ashamed to let my wife read!) Of course, there are some evenings when I enjoy a good long talk for an hour, or even two or three hours. But other times I don't last five minutes.

I remember one evening when I was especially tired. How glad I was once the children were all tucked into bed and we were ready to retire at last. But it so happened that one of the children had been very disobedient that day, and Mom was distressed and wanted to talk about it. *Oh, no, why does it have to be tonight?* I thought.

Now really, she had tried to cope with the children all day while I was away at

work. Was it fair to let her try to deal with those feelings all alone while I slept? At such times we ought to send a little prayer heavenward, asking God to help us listen and truly feel for her and understand her.

Tonight I would have no problem doing just that. In fact, I feel very unworthy of all that took place today. I was off work so we did some tasks in and around the house all forenoon. Then after lunch I offered to take the two little girls with me to the barn to clean it out, and to pick up some boards lying around outside. Also, I wanted to clean out the chicken house.

My wife helped bundle up the girls as it was cold out there.

Then she got her own wraps and came out and helped me. I cleaned out the chicken house and she gathered up the trash. After that we helped

each other carry the hotbed into the garden—a chore she had asked me to do a week ago, and had been patiently waiting since then.

Just think, she had left her work in the kitchen to come out and help me. But then I had the nerve to go through her trashpile to be sure none of my treasures were in it. She caught me at it too! She just laughed about it. I don't think she was surprised, knowing me as she does.

She had to go in when the baby awoke. The two little girls followed her inside, since they were cold. I still had an hour or two of cleaning in the chicken house. Around 7:00 I was finished at last and quickly headed for the house. Here they were, happily waiting with a warm supper on the table and the house in perfect order. Lord, help me to appreciate more my loving, caring wife. Let me see . . . maybe I could offer to do the laundry for her on Saturday, beins the baby is so fussy yet.

Was it fair to let her try to deal with those feelings all alone while I slept?

Perhaps I shouldn't even be writing this anymore, as your deadline is already past. How do you expect men to be that prompt? Or maybe that was just a date you used to scare us. My wife asked me to read the Staff Notes when *Family Life* first came. But then in her kind way she didn't bug me anymore. Tonight I finally picked it up myself to read it. So that is why I am writing this at 10:45 p.m., two days late.

—Someone's husband in Ohio

4. THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

As a father, husband, and minister, I felt moved to respond in appreciation for the two articles in the January issue: "The Joy of Submission" and "The Making of a Good Leader." Although admittedly two sides of the coin, they are definitely one and the same coin, and we cannot separate the two sides from each other and still retain the value of the coin.

As a husband, my appreciation for "The Joy of Submission" is not because it stressed that wives should be submissive. Rather, all of us, husbands and leaders included, were taught by words and examples the beautiful art of submitting to those in authority over us.

It is the love of the truth that gives strength to a Christian wife to submit her will to her husband, even when he is wrong.

This may well be "the pearl of great price" in the parable Jesus taught in Matthew 13:45, 46, "Again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant man seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

Once this merchant realized the value of this pearl, he became willing to give up all his own treasures he had accumulated in exchange for this one

truth that exceeded all others. The joy of submission is a treasure we cannot attain without giving up our own will and perceptions. Likewise, the love of the truth cannot be experienced until the truth has made us free.

It is the truth of God's Word that has revealed sin and man's fallen estate, and found us guilty and sinners before an all-righteous God. It is this same truth (the Word of God) that we acknowledge, confess, accept, and submit to, and this gives us the joy of salvation and sets us free from guilt and condemnation. Yet this joy cannot be attained unless we learn to love the truth (and not resent it) that reveals our sinful nature, and become willing to give up all self-justification, excuses, reasoning, and blame-shifting. Only then can our conscience be appeased.

We have the example of our Leader to follow, Jesus, who as man was tempted in all points as we are, yet was Lord of all. He chose to submit Himself to His Father's will, "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God . . . who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Hebrews 12:2, 3).

It was the love of the truth that gave joy to the one thief on the cross who acknowledged his transgressions and submitted himself to the judgment and punishment of the law. Turning to Jesus in faith, he received the promise, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." But it was the resentment of the truth that caused the other thief to bitterly reject Jesus and the truth that condemned him.

Likewise, it is this love of the truth that gives strength to a Christian wife to submit her will to her husband, even when he is wrong. It is not her natural disposition, character, ability, or training, but simply her choice, as Mary who "hath chosen that good part" (Luke 10:42),

which brings her the joy of submission.

This may well be the most valuable lesson we will ever learn, whether we are youth leaders, fathers, husbands, wives, ordained leaders in the church, or community leaders. When our love for the truth leads us to make choices that differ from others and causes conflict, may we be given strength of character through the Holy Spirit to willingly submit to criticism without retaliating, but commit this to God in true submission, not trying to force either truth or the thinking of others down to our level.

Should this become our lot, we need to beware lest we mistake the self-satisfied, exalted feeling of having had the last word, of having stood our ground and not compromised, or an attitude of “I told them!”—and deceive ourselves into thinking this is the joy of submission. Lest we experience what the Jews did, who crucified Jesus because He had told them the truth, and then He was resurrected and ascended into heaven.

I have written this in gratitude to the Holy Spirit for thus renewing and revealing this truth (this pearl of great price).
—Paul M. Martin

5. MELTING THE HUSBAND’S HEART

As a husband and father, I am very conscious of my responsibilities, which I know are many. But I am sure my wife can say the same thing. Yet we know that in any business, it works best if someone has more of a say-so than 50-50. The husband needs to go ahead and make decisions, even if he knows he may not always make the best one.

I think a loving wife overlooks her husband’s faults that are not sin, and by adoring, respecting, and admiring his good points, she will melt his heart. This is the same as our hearts melt because of the love of Jesus toward us—we want to do His will and give Him the

honor and glory.

I would advise the wife not to give up after just a couple days of trying. Communication means telling each other in a quiet time alone what more one wishes in his or her marriage. Then the other one has an idea where he or she could improve. The wife finding the right time to say this is important. If a wife thinks a husband is making a bad decision, she could offer a different suggestion but then add that it is up to him.
—A husband in Iowa

6. BOTH WERE AT FAULT

My wife came from a family where the mother was dominant. I do not say this with disrespect for my mother-in-law. She was not a domineering woman by nature, but circumstances dictated that she should play a major role in the decision-making in their marriage. My father-in-law was less sure of himself and leaned rather heavily on his wife for support. With this arrangement, they had a surprisingly good working relationship.

This situation, however, was not without effects on the children. The daughters of the family were used to Mother being in charge. Soon after our marriage, I realized that my bride was used to proceeding without conferring with me, her husband, the *head of the house!* I thought to myself, “This girl needs to be taught submission to her husband!”

Admittedly, my attitude did not do much for the situation. We did have a good relationship for the most part. We had moved onto a small farm and had hopes and plans for the future. We enjoyed working together. But if we happened to disagree, she found it hard to submit. And I was determined that she does! Out of a sense of duty, I would remind her of her role as a Christian wife, but she became defensive and argued with everything I tried to reason with her. In

short, she became unreasonable.

I will not go into detail about our disagreements. With time, the question came to my mind, "If I want my wife to respect and reverence me as the Biblical model specifies, am I worthy of that respect and honor? Do I give her any

My wife has learned to be a more submissive wife and I have learned to be a more understanding husband.

consideration?" It dawned on me that perhaps our differences, though not frequent, were as much my own fault as my wife's.

I learned that if there was a disagreement that could turn into an argument, it was better for me to

let the matter lie until she had time to think it through instead of forcing her to see it my way. My wife's nature and that of my own are opposite in this respect. When I see that I am in the wrong, I need to get it off my chest and apologize. When my wife is in the

wrong, even though she knows it, she remains on the defensive and cannot bring herself to admit it then and there. Instead of pressuring her for an apology, I have learned that if I give her enough time, she will come on her own with a heartfelt and genuine apology.

I now realize that to demand respect from my wife was a selfish action on my part, even though from a Biblical standpoint she owed it to me. I would end up feeling self-pity after a round of trying to defend my position.

How often we hear in wedding sermons how Satan tries to drive a wedge between husband and wife, and I shudder to think how our marriage could have turned out. But may God be praised, we have both learned important lessons. My wife has learned to be a more submissive wife, and I have learned to be a more understanding husband, worthy of respect. However, we both need to work on it constantly.

—Living and still learning, WI

—From *Family Life*, April 2004

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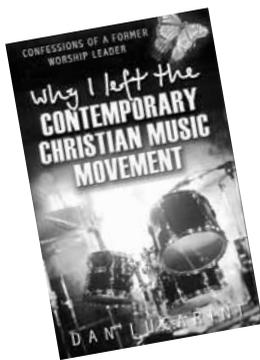
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Is Education a Curse or a Blessing?

by Dale Eby

Depending on who you ask about their view of being educated, there will be a negative facial reaction as well as a few sharp words of opinion. Others see education in a very positive light and spend time applauding much education. How is it that the topic of education receives such mixed reviews? As we send our children off to school or gear up for homeschooling let us remind ourselves of the reason for obtaining more education.

The Bible speaks about the Christian being wise and with understanding. Training is a major part of the parents' responsibility for their children. Proverbs 9:10 tells us, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." The foundation for education needs to be a holy reverence for God. To be wise is not the same as being educated, but the receiving of knowledge contributes to one's usefulness in life. It is then honorable to become educated, so as to develop knowledge, skill of mind, and character. Education does not make one spiritually wise, but rather the putting of ourselves under the hand of Jesus, our Master, makes us wise. When we are under the Master, He wants to use what we have become "educated" in. In our work for Him it must be our desire to do it with our might and to the best of our ability. These things contribute to our pointing others to Christ Himself.

To better define what education is, we can say it is the knowledge or skill obtained or developed by a learning process. Too many times we grow weary of the process and view the state-mandated school law as a curse when in

reality it is a blessing. But without that mandate our Christian schools would not be what they are, and our Christian textbook companies would not be as systematic as they are in developing curriculum. Though much study is "wearisome," we need to remember that exercise builds muscle, while discipline to study builds one's mind. Some view education as a curse because of the cost in dollars. If that were a curse, then houses, cars, hunting gear, recreational equipment, and computers must come in the same category.

I remember seeing a bumper sticker a number of years ago which read, "If you think education is expensive try ignorance." As children of God we need to value being enlightened. Education in the ways of God brings us purpose, and new light on life. When truth has been revealed to us we are to take the responsibility of applying that truth to our walk of life. Where would we be if we had not heard the sounds of the letters of the alphabet, and put them together for words that carry great meaning for our life? Existing without the written page would significantly narrow our own world, and lessen our Christian influence. To be educated then, is to have allowed the development of our mind and character, and the establishment of convictions for God's glory.

There are more ways to become "educated" than to go to school but in reality school gives us good ground to grow from. Academic matters, as well as personal and social matters are addressed here. In the Christian teacher's mind there must be the ultimate focus of pointing children to their

Saviour, and the work of the kingdom of God. Learning to read and speak well as a representative of God's truths become strong factors in a Christian's impact on a lost and dying world. Ignorance or carelessness when presenting the Gospel to a seeker is nothing to be proud of. Being able to articulate what we believe and how it has impacted our own lives is powerful in drawing sinners to Christ. I recently met a group of older teenagers working on a summer job site. Upon first observation it was clear that these young people were hard workers, happy, courteous, and could relate well with others. Their boss informed me these were all Christian youth from a good church and school, and some neighbors bordering the job site were positively impressed with the quality of people they were observing here. I did not ask any of these young people to explain their faith to me, but from the fifteen minutes I was around them I am quite sure they had convictions and a faith they could share. The boss said another crew of workers on this job site had a man who was feeling the convicting power of the Spirit in part because of the examples and words of these youth. Brothers and sisters, we have a job to do which requires the use of all our faculties. Are we willing to develop them and offer them for the Master's use?

There is a fallacy afloat in our society that says the more degrees behind one's name the better person he is. We react to that mentality, but let us not walk in ignorance because of it. Rather let us put knowledge and learning in a different perspective. Education must be a tool for good and not a stumbling block to faith in God. God taken out of education gives us no solid foundation from which to operate as we were created to operate. A godless life, whether educated or not, will bring no eternal results for the heavenly kingdom. Why do we exist anyway? A bachelor of sci-

ence degree in the social sciences, a master's degree in communication, or a doctor's degree in education all fall flat for changing lives when God is outside the formula. Merely stacking up degrees has tended to make good men oblivious to the simplest realities of life; and to the God who created them. The blessings of systematic studies does however, become apparent when God's kingdom is being built by these. A linguist who translates the Bible into a native tongue is blessed by his education. A communicator who can quiet the evolutionist with his clear presentation of creation is blessed by time spent in studying science, math, reading, and even geography. An educator who has the ability to create a lesson that gives the poor reader a grasp on the English language is blessed by his education. The degree behind each of these person's names may have brought them a position among people, but their value becomes evident as they care for others to the point of prodding them on so they can function at new levels.

The purpose for education then is to be the best one can be for their part in building God's kingdom. It is not for a better paying job nor is it for power or position. The Bible is clear that he who is greatest among you is to serve. How we serve is a test of our love for the One who created us. Selfish ambitions for becoming "Educated" are like the man who built bigger barns to store his excess crops in. These crops were not the problem but his attitude about them. Education is not the problem but our attitude is. Colossians 2:3 says, "In whom [Christ] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Yes, education will spoil you if it is man's philosophy and reasoning, but when education comes with our eyes on Christ, education will help preserve the truth, instead of alterations we all are aware of.

What are the objectives of our educational programs then? As school time

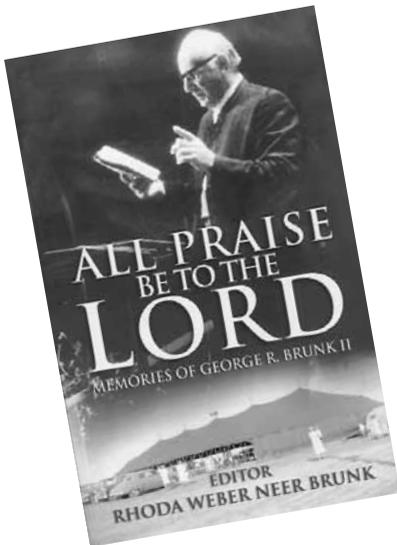
comes around again we prepare to give all information from God's perspective. That means our Bible becomes the filter for viewing all the subjects to be taught. Man's character development needs to be moving Christ-ward. Man's thought patterns need to be trained to see sin for what it is, and to see one's responsibilities before God. Man's skills development needs to be seen as a gift to use for God's glory. As parents and teachers, do we show by example what we desire to teach? Ask God to "educate" us in new ways this year, as well as our children.

Parents, whether education is viewed as a blessing or a curse falls largely on your shoulders. Whether children become educated to the point of strong convictions and to the development of the right purpose in life is in their response to our character and wisdom. May the knowledge, skills, and mind God has given us be strong influences for the furtherance of a kingdom that will not crack or crumble. Make full preparation for the continuing education of those who are coming behind. ■

—From *The Mid-Atlantic Informer*, September 2004. Used with permission.

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The Power of His Glory

by R. C. Sproul Jr.

You want to know what your problem is? You don't love Jesus enough. I know this not because I know you, but because I know me. I've got the same problem. My wife has the same problem, as do my kids. The sheep in my flock suffer from the same problem. The folks I meet at conferences have the same problem too. Wherever there is a sin-problem, underneath it all, is this problem. Husbands don't love their wives as Jesus loves the church, because husbands don't love Jesus enough. Children disobey their parents because they don't love Jesus enough. Pastors soft-pedal the Bible because they don't love Jesus enough. And people hop from one church to another because they don't love Jesus enough. Politicians grow power-hungry because they don't love Jesus enough. Rich people suffer from greed because they don't love Jesus enough. Middle-class people suffer from greed because they don't love Jesus enough. Poor people suffer from greed because they don't love Jesus enough. Find a sin and you will find there a heart that doesn't love Jesus enough. Find Jesus, and you will find the solution to your problem, which is just what Jesus has promised will happen.

It is a good thing that evangelical Christians have wakened from their pietistic slumbers. It is good and proper that we should be about the business of making manifest the reign of Christ over all things. That He is Lord has effects that stray rather far from our hearts. We fight the culture wars because they are

simply a manifestation of the war between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. But the serpent is more crafty than any of the beasts of the field. He took the biblical wisdom that argued that we ought to tend to our souls, and turned it into world-denying piety. And now he takes the biblical wisdom that argues that we must push for the crown rights of King Jesus, and turned it into worldliness, and a denial of the call to piety. Jesus, on the other hand, calls us to seek first two things: the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Our sanctification is long and laborious simply because we do not seek His face. We do not long for His presence. We do not seek to behold His glory, because we are insufficiently impressed.

How can we seek two different things first? We do so when we realize that the weapons of our warfare, that the very engine of changing the world, is changing ourselves. The reign of Christ will be manifest in the political, social, artistic, cultural realms only insofar and only through the manifestation of the reign of Christ within His people. We will only make known the great Gospel truth that this is our Father's world, as we live

as pilgrims, recognizing that this world isn't our home, that we are just passing through.

It is because we are worldly that we embrace the culture's engines of change. We think that we will change ourselves and the world only as we read more books, make more movies, elect more politicians, produce more widgets, and add more programs to our churches. We think sanctification is a doctrine to be studied, rather than a calling to be pursued. In truth, it is neither. We do not

pursue a calling, but a person. Sanctification isn't merely the means by which we become more holy, but is the means by which we become more like Jesus. Just as He, the Son of God, is the express image of the glory of the Father, so we, the bride of Christ, are the image of our eternal Husband. We glorify Him by becoming more like Him.

This is the promise of God, the end of our sanctification, our glorification: "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). Do you see the connection? We don't know what we shall be, but we do know we will be like Him. How will we be like Him? What means brings this to pass? We shall see Him as He is. This is the glory of our King, not that He labors faithfully to change us, not that He changes us by the Word of His power, but that He changes us by the power of His glory. Seeing Him makes us like Him.

Which brings us back to our troubles. Our sanctification is long and laborious

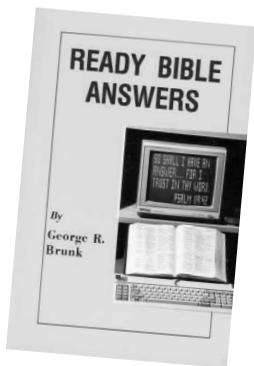
simply because we do not seek His face. We do not long for His presence. We do not seek to behold His glory, because we are insufficiently impressed. It is the pomp and the power, the dazzle and the sizzle, the bright lights and the baubles of the world around us that have captured our hearts. We don't find His glory glorious enough, and so we are not yet like Him. We do indeed see through a glass darkly, a glass darkened by our love affair with the world. If we loved Him, we would seek Him. If we sought Him, we would find Him. If we found Him, we would see Him. And if we saw Him, we would be like Him. And believing this, John tells us, will purify us, "and everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as he is pure" (v. 3). So may it be said of us.

Dr. R. C. Sproul Jr. is director of the Highlands Study Center and associate pastor of Saint Peter Presbyterian Church in Bristol, Tennessee.

—Reprinted from the January 2006 issue of *Tabletalk*.

Ready Bible Answers

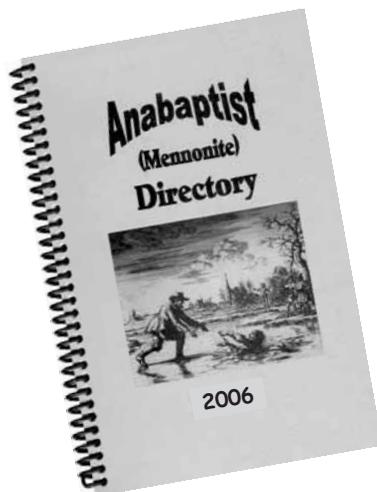
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