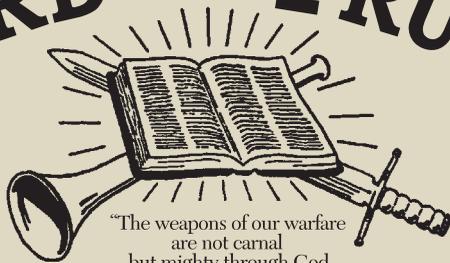


The SWORD and TRUMPET

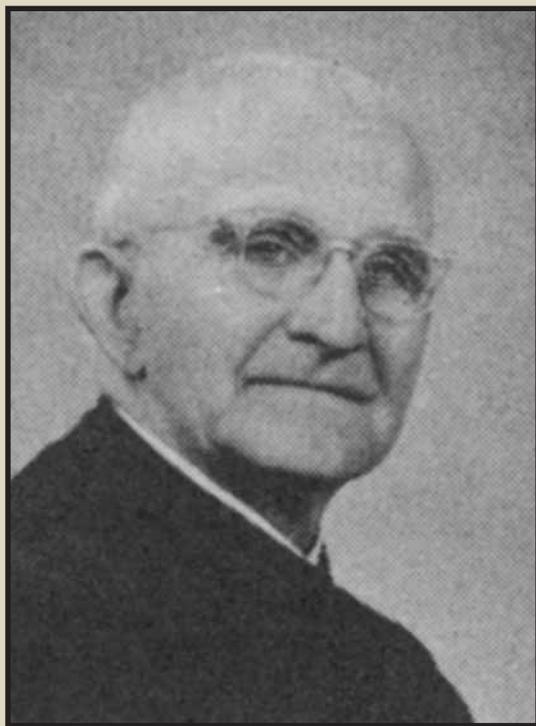
“Blow ye
the Trumpet
and warn
the People.”



“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



AARON MAST

MAY 2006

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Person of the Month:

Aaron Mast (1880-1964)

Born July 31, 1880, near Gap, Pennsylvania, to Amos and Sarah (Kauffman) Mast, Aaron was the youngest son in the family.

The Mast home was one where the principles and values of the Christian faith were taught and lived. As a boy he went to the Methodist Sunday school near his home due to the absence of a Mennonite Sunday school in the area. While Aaron was still young his mother began a Sunday school in his home. This teaching had a great impact on Brother Mast's life.

Although his formal schooling ended when he was 15, Mast seemed to have a love of learning in many areas, including God's Word. This continued with him all his life. As a man he evidenced knowledge joined with wisdom: a necessary ingredient.

In 1896, at the age of 16, Aaron was born again. He then joined the Millwood Mennonite Church. During his early years as a Christian he was busy in the work of the church. He was also interested in missions and the growing work of the Lord beyond the work of his local church.

In the course of time he met Lavina Stoltzfus. They were later married in 1908 when Aaron was 28 years old. God blessed them with the births of seven children. Brother Mast worked as a painter to support his family.

In November of 1919, at the age of 39, Brother Mast was ordained as a deacon and later as a minister in 1921. He was then called to pastor the Holly Grove Church near Westover, Maryland. In March of 1934 the Ohio Conference sent him to pastor Maple Grove Mennonite Church in Belleville, Pennsylvania, where he was ordained as bishop in November of the same year. In 1934 there were some difficult problems in the Big Valley churches. This was a time of transition. By carefully expounding the Scriptures on these matters and using tact, Mast won the confidence of the people. He served in the ministry at Belleville for 23 years.

Brother Mast was a good expositor of God's Word. He faithfully studied Paul's epistles, Ephesians and Romans being his favorites. He was systematic in his interpretation and forceful in his delivery. A capable speaker, his messages were deep and showed much spiritual discernment. Everyone could understand him, both young and old. He was concerned for the youth and was considered their friend. He had a fatherly way of counseling which was a help to many. In addition to pastoring, Mast was active as an evangelist.

Aaron Mast was a man of conviction as well as patience, which grew along with graciousness as he aged. When he came to an understanding of some truth in the Scriptures, he would put it into practice in his life. He did not compromise God's Word.

Aaron was active, as well, over the years in the broader Mennonite Church through his several conference associations. The Lord used him in starting what became Mennonite General Conference and he served on its various boards and committees.

(continued on page 6)

Conflict or Shalom?

by J. Dabler

A church recently requested our team's intervention services. On our first visit, one issue emerging at the center of the hostility involved the new facility. Genuine hurt over space allocation and the architectural design was evident. After two long days (in an obviously aging building) conducting more than 40 tearful interviews, we asked to tour the new facility. We were taken to a window overlooking a large, partially paved parking lot. To our horror, we realized that the "new facility" ripping families apart and destroying the Christian witness in the community had not even been built yet.

Addressing conflicts in the church is particularly important because the church is not an institution made by man but is the very body of Christ (Ephesians 1:23). Because the Church is one of the God-created institutions against which Satan constantly makes war (Revelation 12:17), we must be quick to address any conflicts that would damage the unity of the body and the experience of shalom (peaceful unity). Almost all of Paul's letters deal with misunderstanding and controversy in the Church. These quarrels and divisions can be overt or hidden (1 Corinthians 1:11), but they are always a result of "heart battles."

What Causes Fights and Quarrels Among Us?

The Book of James reminds us that conflicts are a result of the desires that battle within our hearts (James 4:1). Many desires are not sinful. However, when desires become demands and the inevitable disappointment results in punishment, we know that idolatry is present. At the heart of all conflict resides some form of idolatry. "Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say, 'We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven.' " (Lamentations 3:40-42). What are some of the clues that idols are present?

Defensiveness. In working with churches in conflict, we often see defensiveness—which can be viewed as one

way we "claim to be without sin" (1 John 1:8). A demanding insistence that we explain and others listen and understand is one of the most common—and hidden—forms of defensiveness. We set our hearts on defending our positions and ourselves. We insist on being "right." It is easy to try to deny our pride, selfish ambition, and vanity, but the truth is that we often value our own opinions—our "rightness"—over love and unity.

Preference wars. Most church conflict does not involve foundational theological issues but personal preferences and opinions. Spiritual immaturity is revealed when a question or criticism is experienced as a personal attack. Instead of responding graciously, hearts close and relationships end. Common preference conflicts involve worship styles, allocation of budget dollars, and Christian education curricula. One church experienced a heated disagreement over the color of the geraniums lining the church driveway. One person aptly captured the key issue by writing, "What will we say to God to explain why the color of the geraniums was more important than modeling love, joy, peace, and patience in front of our children and neighbors who are watching this conflict worsen?"

Looking to church to meet our felt needs. Church conflict escalates when we expect the church to be conveniently tailored to our wants and desires. This misguided mindset leads us to view people in the church as resources for our comfort rather than valuable members of

one body who need and are needed by us. As a result, we neither love nor serve them well. In fact, when our expectations are disappointed, we engage in destructive gossip, criticism, and bickering. Church conflict—a terrible witness to the watching world—is the frequent result.

Competition. Competition in the church diminishes our experience of shalom. We compete for resources, forgetting that our God is the one who owns the cattle on a thousand hills. In the context of pushing for excellence in serving the Lord and His people, the body of Christ is called to develop a unified vision for servant-hearted ministry within the church. Otherwise, in our pride, we will bicker and fight over the value of “our” ministries—instead of remembering that there is only one ministry: that of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Developing Churches of Shalom

How do we become peacemaking churches rather than ones that engage in “quarreling, jealousy, and outbursts of anger” (2 Corinthians 12:20)? How can we let “the peace of Christ” rule our hearts (Colossians 3:15), demonstrating the unity of the Triune God so that the world might know the Father’s love through Jesus Christ (John 17:23)?

Walk in the light of the Lord. Shalom in the church is deepened when we see our sin and repent. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we [God and believers] have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:7, 8, explanation added). Walking in the light does not require perfect living, but truthful living. It is a rich concept that includes, among other things, a penetrating honesty about our imperfection. In fact, seeing our sin can be comforting because we know that it is only the light of God that reveals it. It is through genuine confession that we experience the

sweetness of fellowship with God and others: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Set your hearts and minds on things above. In Colossians 3, Paul’s “paradigm of peace” instructs us to “. . . set your hearts, on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:1b, 2). We can easily lose our focus on the two great purposes in life—to love God and to love others. True repentance comes as we turn from unworthy loves to the important matters of the Lord—justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23).

Clothe yourselves. In order to experience sweet shalom in the church, we are called to clothe ourselves with the virtues that God graciously gives. Although we are growing in Christ, we are not yet perfect. Within the intimate boundaries of our church family, sparks will fly. But we have been called to bear with one another in love: “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:12-14). As we remember and experience God’s lavish love for us, we are empowered to love others even when it is difficult. We are encouraged by the promise that “God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them” (Hebrews 6:10).

Remember that all believers are progressing in sanctification. Another tendency that prevents us from experiencing “the peace of Christ . . . as members of one body” (Colossians 3:15) is that we sometimes have a hard time

“letting” others change. We may be unwilling to see them in a new light. While we know that God is changing us, we doubt that He is changing them. In suspicion, we relate to others as they once were, rather than as “new creations” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Learn to disagree peacefully and allow for different perspectives. Even in our differences we can have unity. For this to happen, we need to submit to the headship of Christ—the great unifying reality for believers. Unity, not uniformity, allows us to experience peaceful fellowship in the body of Christ. Division occurs when we reject the notion that we can disagree and still remain in loving relationships. The Apostle Paul models the attitude that promotes relationship in the face of differing perspectives: “All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you” (Philippians 3:15).

Remember that we are one body. The marvelous truth in 1 Corinthians 12 is that Jesus Christ is the head of the church and all believers are members of His body. Even if we don’t feel it, the truth is that all believers belong in the body of Christ (v. 15). It is God who chooses to create us with different gifts for different purposes (vv. 4-6). Furthermore, these true and obvious differences are intended for the common good (v. 7). “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

Submit to our imperfect leaders. To experience precious shalom, we are called to submit to the God-ordained authority of our leaders, both civil and ecclesiastical: “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men” (Titus 3:1, 2). Many church leaders are amazing examples of sacrificial love and service even though they sometimes fail us. Few things are

more beautiful than seeing church leaders humbly take responsibility for their failures. Yet these same servants have experienced their greatest wounds when others failed to follow a Biblical process of reconciliation (Matthew 18:15-17). When hurt or disappointed, we honor God by being willing to pursue reconciliation and offer forgiveness.

When we must disagree with our leaders, we can choose to rebel, succumb in defeat, quit and leave, or resist in a gracious way. How do we seek to bring about redemptive change in the church, all in the context of Biblical submission? We set our hearts and minds on obeying God’s Word. We speak the truth in love. We ask for, rather than demand, a hearing from our leaders. We gently, respectfully persuade with Biblically informed positions. We willingly invest our time and energy to help provide solutions. Submission may result in a degree of suffering. Yet, we always have the option of choosing to submit, even in the face of unjust suffering, because we are conscious of God (1 Peter 2:19).

Firm in One Spirit

Regardless of our circumstance or the people around us, Paul calls us to “. . . conduct [ourselves] in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27). Our enduring relationships and abiding friendships provide victorious testimonies of God’s saving and sanctifying grace. As redeemed children of God, let us commit to live at peace with one another. May shalom abound in our churches so that when Jesus returns He will find us firm in one spirit, eager to praise and glorify Him. ■

—Article reprinted from the Spring 2006 issue of *Covenant*, the quarterly magazine of Covenant Theological Seminary. Reprinted with permission.

From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

Deposing the Mature

The trends today in the church of Jesus Christ are very alarming. Many leaders in the evangelical circles are rapidly moving into apostasy. We in the conservative Anabaptist world would do well to aggressively avoid this apostate slide which is being led by the church-growth “experts.” Writing in his book, *Raising the Standard*, Wayne J. Edwards (a pastor in Georgia and founder of a revival ministry encouraging God’s people to raise the standard of righteousness in their lives and in the church) presents the following dismal picture of churches disenfranchising the spiritually mature.

“Two groups of people are ‘checking out’ on organized Christianity: those who are or have been involved in the church with their time, talents, and tithes for years, and those who are not sure they want to get involved with traditional institutions, and even if they do get involved, they are less likely to support it with their time or talents,

much less their tithe. And yet, at least to this pastor, it seems our whole concern today is for the second group rather than the first. In fact, those in the first group are being told in no uncertain terms to move over and make way for a new generation. And to offer any criticism at all to this activity is to question the will of God.

“I believe many pastors have become so concerned about reaching the unchurched that they are ‘unchurching’ the church! In their zeal to do whatever it takes to attract a new generation of unbelievers to their church, they are, at the same time, diverting the present and past generations of believers away from the church—those who helped buy the property, build the buildings, establish the organization, and who have faithfully supported the church for years. And sadly, statistics are showing they are leaving the church by the droves; giving up, giving out, giving in—but they aren’t giving

dollars any more.

“I have talked to some of these ‘dechurched’ folks. These people have not given up on God or ceased to believe in Jesus Christ. These seasoned saints are being told that the tools God used to bring them to faith in Jesus Christ; methods that enhanced their love for God and encouraged them to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord; ministries that inspired them and motivated them to give, to go, to serve and to send; concepts that God has used to build His church for 2000 years are not relevant any more. Those who are writing the contemporary church growth manuals are saying the old disciplines of inductive Bible study, dynamic expository preaching, and the great hymns of our faith, are actually barriers to unbelievers—hindrances that must be removed if we are to reach a new generation of lost people.

“Pastors are being told by the church growth experts that if they want to attract unbelievers to their church, they must soften their preaching on sin, relax their convictions about the blood of Jesus Christ and change their music so that it sounds like the music of the world. They are being advised to use only paraphrased versions of the Bible, and to keep their ‘messages’ short, because today’s generation will not endure a lengthy lecture.

“They are being encouraged to insert current movie clips, interpretive dance, personal illustrations and other unique things, just to grasp their attention, and to spend the majority of their sermon time on personal application as opposed to biblical proclamation. One of the most ludicrous examples of this was a pastor who said he actually made his own recipe of salsa as a part of his ‘sermon’ on how God wants every married couple to enjoy ‘hot sex!’

“So, the church in America is being lulled to sleep with affluence, entertainment, and a form of godliness, but

without the true power of God. We have many great churches, if you look at the size of their buildings, their budgets, and the baptisms they report. But the majority of churches today are nothing more than religious organizations, trying to attract the world with amateur theater, synthesized music, and engaging media.

“And the faithful remnant, those who sacrificed their time, talents, and tithes to see the church begin, grow, and develop, are now being relegated to the rear of the sanctuary, or they are being told to leave; systematically removed as those who no longer matter.” ■



AARON MAST . . . cont'd.

His concern for good Christian education led to his involvement in the establishing of Belleville Mennonite School. He also had a part in starting and speaking on a local radio program sponsored by his church. This broadcast was heard for twenty-plus years.

Brother Mast was a statesman who was appreciated in his community as well as in the broader church.

In 1948, at the age of 68, he did not retire from preaching or painting, but he did pass along his responsibility of pastoring to those younger. Eventually he resigned from his office as bishop, as well.

In 1964, after several months of heart problems, Aaron Mast went home to be with the Lord on March 25. He was 84.

His funeral was held at Maple Grove Mennonite Church in Atglen, Pennsylvania, and he was buried in its cemetery.
—Gail L. Emerson

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

MAY 7, 2006

A Treasure Worth Seeking

Proverbs 2:1-5; 3:1-6, 13-18

May's lessons are taken from the Book of Proverbs, part of the Old Testament Wisdom Literature. Henrietta Mears in her book, *What the Bible Is All About*, states regarding Proverbs: "This is a book for everyday instruction. It deals with the practical affairs of life. . . . It divides men into two classes—wise and foolish." *The New Bible Commentary* adds: "The proverbs in this book are not so much popular sayings as the distillation of the wisdom of teachers who knew the law of God and were applying its principles to the whole of life."

Today's lesson, from Chapters 2 and 3, focuses on the search for wisdom. By that we deduce that wisdom does not come automatically, but must be diligently sought out. We should also observe the difference between secular and spiritual wisdom and the value of the spiritual over the purely secular. In question #1 we're asking you to define wisdom and its benefits. Give special attention to its spiritual aspects. (Read at least the first four chapters as background.)

The author of the Book of Proverbs, Solomon, here addresses his instruction to "My son," which may be taken figuratively as teacher to pupil. The thrust in 2:1-5 focuses on the search for wisdom. The pupil is to apply himself diligently to the pursuit of wisdom; it must be the fervent desire of his whole being. Wisdom's value is compared to silver, which is also acquired through diligent search and much effort. The acquisition of wisdom, true wisdom,

opens up to one the knowledge of God. Note in verse six that "the Lord giveth wisdom." He is its true source.

In the passage from Chapter 3 we see the benefits of heeding the teacher's instruction to pursue wisdom. Long life and peaceful relationships result from following the path of wisdom. The elements of wisdom are to be integrated into the activities of life, which results then in securing favor with both God and man. God is pleased when His children follow the path of wisdom. One's fellowmen recognize mercy and truthfulness in the one who makes godly wisdom the cornerstone of his relationships and actions.

The one who seeks wisdom must first of all recognize that its benefits come solely from God. And secondly, that they are achieved through trust in God and seeking His will in the issues of life.

We notice in verses 13-18 the value of wisdom and the joy it brings to the one who achieves it. Wisdom for living is of surpassing value to silver or gold or precious gems. It results in a pleasant life, a peaceful life, and long life. There is nothing comparable to the satisfaction that comes from a relationship with God which results in wisdom for living and guidance in human relationships. Happy is the man who gets wisdom. Wisdom has its source in God, and its outworking tempers all of life. There is more satisfaction in acquiring wisdom than in the riches pursued by the natural man.

For thought and discussion

1. What is wisdom? What does it do for us?
2. How does one acquire wisdom? Where does it come from?

3. Is wisdom more than head knowledge? If so, how does it find expression in the daily activities of life?
4. What is the relationship between knowledge and wisdom? Can you have one without the other? Which is most important?
5. Reflect on personal experiences where more godly wisdom would have made for more peaceful relationships.

MAY 14, 2006

Wisdom's Invitation

Proverbs 8:1-5, 22-31

After defining wisdom, her value, and the importance of seeking her (last week's lesson), we now look at wisdom's invitation for acceptance by all men. Again we have (verses 1-3) the teacher, Solomon, addressing his pupil, the learner. His declaration is that wisdom, here personified as a righteous woman, sends forth her personal appeal for all men to heed her call for acceptance. "Wisdom clearly and with dignity and in the most public places pleads with men to receive her" (*The New Bible Commentary*).

Wisdom, in her attempt to woo all men, makes her appeal from the most conspicuous and public places—the high places of the city, at the gates, by the wayside, at the crossroads. Her call is to all men, to the simple, to the fools. Wisdom calls to all. In the verses between our text verses, wisdom declares the content of her instruction, the value of possessing her, and how she benefits those who embrace her.

While wisdom is distinct from knowledge, it is nevertheless inextricably tied to the proper use of knowledge. Without a proper framework for expression, knowledge fails to live up to its potential and simply becomes an end in itself. There may be educated fools, but there are no wise fools. Wisdom relates to the proper use of knowledge and enhances that knowledge by making it practical in life.

In verses 22-31 we note the eternal

attribute of wisdom. These verses also state the source of all wisdom. It comes from God. Wisdom, speaking here, declares that before the material world was formed, she existed. She, as an attribute of God, was present in the eternal counsels of God, planning and executing the physical world. We cannot think of true wisdom apart from the reality of God. They are inseparable.

Verses 27-31 speak to wisdom's presence at the creation. Notice the "when's" and the "then." Wisdom was participant in the creating of the world and its matter. Verse 30 states that she was with God as a master workman. Wisdom was not only a participant, but also a joyous observer of the mighty acts of God. She recognized the value of the habitable world for the sons of men. Wisdom saw more than the material; she also saw the non-material aspects of creation. And she rejoiced at the provisions made for man.

We should also look at verse 32. There, and in the following verses, wisdom makes her final appeal, setting forth the blessing of those who hear, accept, and keep her instruction. Notice what wisdom says at the end of verse 36: "All they that hate me love death." So wisdom's invitation goes beyond the mere enhancement of knowledge, it involves moral issues and, as we could assume from this statement, eternal consequences.

Wisdom is still calling. Will we hear and understand the full scope of her appeal? And then make the wise choice she offers?

For thought and discussion

1. What is the value of wisdom in one's life? Look for verses that explain its value.
2. We achieve knowledge through study. How do we achieve the wisdom to properly use that knowledge?
3. If wisdom is an attribute of God, how can mere man hope to achieve it?
4. Think about people whom you have known that exhibited wisdom in their living. What other characteristics did they also exhibit?

5. If wisdom is such a valuable thing, why do not more people seek her? What are the implications in accepting wisdom's invitation?

MAY 21, 2006

The Way of Integrity

Proverbs 11:1-15

Matthew Henry says, "A proverb is a short sentence which contains within itself its whole purpose." As we look into Chapter 11 of Proverbs we observe the truth of that statement. We find here short, pithy statements about many issues of life, not necessarily closely related except in the continuing contrast between the actions of the righteous and the wicked person. We need to keep in mind, too, as Matthew Henry says, that "these are divine proverbs, inspired by God, penned by Solomon."

The only central theme in this passage is the apposition of principles followed by the righteous person and the ones followed by the unjust, wicked person. The righteous person, the one who seeks to follow God and please Him in all of life, will exemplify integrity and uprightness in all of his dealings. By contrast, the ungodly, wicked person, will seek to please only himself and deal with others to his own advantage, regardless of the consequences.

Space will not permit a close examination of each of the principles spoken to here in this text. We will look instead at broad issues. You can more thoroughly examine the individual principles in your own private study. There is much to learn from these proverbs, usually more than meets the eye or is apparent on first reading. So think deeply and broadly to catch their full significance.

The first three verses focus on honesty, humility, and integrity and show how following these principles pleases God and gives direction to life. The contrasting negative principles are given to prove the rationale for following the good. Again Matthew Henry says: "Nothing is more

pleasing to God than fair and honest dealings, nor more necessary to make us and our devotions acceptable to Him."

The next set of verses (4-9), contrast the righteous and the wicked and show the resulting effects of their actions. There are consequences to our actions and unless our motives are God-driven, our actions will lead to failure. While the first three verses focused on our dealings with others, these verses focus more on one's relationship, or lack thereof, to God.

Verses 10 and 11 speak of community relationships as affected by either the righteous or the wicked. They show the positive effect of personal integrity on the community and the benefit of living where it is practiced by the citizenry.

Verses 12 and 13 speak to interpersonal relationships and how they can be enhanced by appropriate responses. A man of integrity will hold his tongue when to speak would injure another or enflame passions. Verse 14 shows the benefit of broad counsel in coming to decisions and verse 15 the folly of going surety for a stranger.

The bottom line is that a man of integrity will be a man of God, directed in all of his actions by a desire to please God and live at peace with his fellowmen.

For thought and discussion

1. What is the purpose, and value, of teaching by proverbs? Are there some that have had particular meaning in your life?
2. This lesson is about integrity. How would you define integrity? How is it played out? Discuss.
3. Have you been victim of a dishonest person? How did you react? How should the Christian react to dishonest persons or dealings? Discuss this with your class.
4. How is a life of integrity developed? How is it maintained? What are its results, now and hereafter?
5. Why is a life of integrity so important? Discuss with your class its implications for all of life.

MAY 28, 2006

The Virtuous Woman

Proverbs 31:10-31

This final chapter of Proverbs was written by King Lemuel. Commentators are divided regarding his identity, some feeling that it is Solomon, others, the prince of a neighboring country. However, or whoever, we should not overlook the fact that the instructions (verses 1-9), and the discourse on a noble woman (verses 10-31), recorded here were words given to King Lemuel by his mother (v. 1). It is she who describes “the character of a woman of genuine worth” (Clarke). (I am deviating a bit from the *International Lesson* text and including all verses from 10 through 31.)

The words in this passage are spoken to two classes of individuals, the man seeking an industrious, valuable wife, and the woman seeking to develop into a pleasing, useful companion to a worthy man. This passage speaks to ideals and goals, not requirements for a marriage partner. Instead of becoming discouraged by feelings of inadequacy, women should accept the challenges here to become all they can in order to enhance the life of their husband and family. Rare indeed would be the woman in whom all these qualities could be found. But that should not hinder or discourage the pursuit and development of qualities which will endear a wife to her husband and strengthen the marriage bond by her willing and dedicated attention to the home and family.

The great lesson to be learned here is that of wholehearted dedication. The virtuous woman gives herself for the benefit of others. She is unselfish. She bends all of her energies toward ministering to others—her husband, her family, her servants, and, one could easily surmise because of her character, to anyone in need.

Without going into detail on the many issues spoken to here, we can at least outline the broad categories they represent.

This ideal woman was industrious, thrifty, had a strong business sense, was prepared for all situations, confident, and, as a result of the application of these virtues, honored by her husband and her children. A woman with these qualities is priceless. In Proverbs 12:4 we read: “A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband.” Happy indeed is the man who finds her.

Now look at verses 11 and 12. Notice the level of trust placed in such a woman by her husband. Notice also the level of commitment on her part. What a beautiful picture of marital love, commitment, and fidelity. It is an ideal to be sought and nurtured by every Christian couple.

Notice also the honor accorded her by her children and her husband in the closing verses of the chapter. Her children have learned valuable lessons for life by observation. They will go out from the parental home prepared, equipped, and challenged by the example of their mother.

The secret of her success? She feared the Lord (v. 30).

For thought and discussion

1. As supplement to today’s lesson, search out other Biblical accounts of godly women. What characterized their lives? What established their usefulness?
2. Brothers, how can we encourage our wives when they feel they fall short in some of the areas spoken to in this passage?
3. God does not endow all individuals alike. What is our responsibility to the gifts He has given? See Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4.
4. What are the most important things a mother can communicate to her husband and children? Discuss.
5. While this passage focuses on the virtuous woman, husbands, too, play an essential role in a smooth-running household. Men, let’s discuss ways we can improve and also determine to show more honor to our wives for the outstanding role they perform. ■

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

Suppressing Truth But Not Porn

Internet search corporation, *Google*, is resisting a subpoena by the Justice Department that wants to track internet child pornography searches. However, *Google* has agreed to censor out of Chinese searches information that China's communist government doesn't want people to see. Is this consistent?

—from *Crosswalk.com*

Polar Bears, Evangelicals, and Global Warming

On February 8, the Bush Administration announced that it would study a proposal to add polar bears to the endangered species list due to warming climate change. This announcement dovetailed with an evangelical Christian group who met in Washington the same day to call the government to limit greenhouse gases. These evangelicals, concerned that global warming is creating ecological problems, have put together a Climate Initiative which reads: "Our commitment to Jesus Christ compels us to solve the global warming crisis." However, the National Association of Evangelicals would not formally support the initiative, some saying that "global warming is not a consensus issue."

—from *WORLD*

A Not-So-Brotherly Brother Bear

Timothy Treadwell, an environmentalist activist, spent 13 summers living either alone or with only one other human companion in close interaction

with grizzly bears in Alaska. Viewing himself as the bear's friend and believing they somehow needed him to survive, he carefully documented around one hundred hours of footage in order to educate the world about the plight of his friends. In 2003, Treadwell and his girlfriend were attacked and eaten by a bear.

—from *WORLD*

New Tribes Mission Forced to Leave Venezuela

New Tribes Mission (NTM) has provided humanitarian relief and Bible translation to remote areas in Venezuela for 60 years. Now they are being ordered to leave the country and are accused by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez of being "a true imperialist infiltration" and also spies for the CIA. One tribe among whom NTM was working (the Amazonas) protested the government edict but apparently to no avail. NTM is still hoping for a stay of the order.

—from *WORLD*

Intelligent Design Is Gaining Some Momentum on College Campuses

Until recently, discussions about whether or not Intelligent Design (ID) should be included alongside of theories of evolution occurred primarily within grade-school education. But now the debate is entering college campuses and presents a significant challenge to entrenched evolutionary theory. Nearly 30 of public and private American universities have clubs promoting Intelligent Design. At Cornell University

there are 80 members in an ID club.

Intelligent Design (ID) theorists say there is scientific basis for believing that the universe has been created (designed). Two main leaders in the movement are Michael Behe and William Dembski, fellows at The Discovery Institute in Seattle, WA.

One main charge that ID proponents constantly deal with is that ID is a religious belief and not scientifically based. But scientists such as Michael Behe scientifically point out that the study of life on the molecular level reveals the complexity of cellular structure in units which contain interdependent parts. These units make up systems of parts which depend on one another for their existence. The removal of any one of the parts of the system causes the system and all other parts of the system to cease functioning. Behe outlines this concept (called irreducible complexity) in his book *Darwin's Black Box*. This has called to question Darwin's evolutionary theory that depends on gradual and direct Natural Selection for the development of these units.

—adapted from *Baptist Today* and *Darwin's Black Box*

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Quotables:

“The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is its comprehensibility.” —Albert Einstein

“Theology without experience is irrelevant; experience without theology is blind.” —T. F. Torrance

“If you go on a blind date with anger, you'll wind up married to the devil.” —Tony Evans

* * * * *

Did You Know:

74% of Americans do not go to church?

* * * * *

More States Are Protecting Marriage

While national attention to legal marriage protection seems to be in limbo, on a state level, concern for marriage protection is on the rise. Edward Plowman in *World Magazine* tells us that “this year five more states—Alabama, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Virginia are scheduled to vote on constitutional amendments that define marriage as a union between a man and a woman. They are expected to pass handily.” Plowman also tells us that these states would join 19 others that have already, in some form, protected marriage against homosexuality.

Though national attention to the issue of marriage seems stymied for now, in 1996 Congress passed what is called the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). This act among other things backed the right of states to reject recognition of same-sex marriages registered in other states. The U. S. Constitution's “Full Faith and Credit” clause says that states must recognize the “acts, records, and judicial proceedings” of other states. So theoretically a state that banned homosexual marriage would have had to recognize a resident homosexual couple married in a state that allowed it. However, Plowman says that there is some unclear language in the clause that sets some limits on exactly what a state must recognize. Apparently this unclear language enabled Congress to pass the DOMA.

—from *WORLD*

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Church and World

The relationship of the church to its surrounding culture has always been a difficult and controversial subject. Mennonites have traditionally emphasized a more separated stance, underscoring the nonconformity passages of Scripture. Accepting the fact that the world

is evil and always will be, Mennonites typically withdraw and become the “quiet in the land.” Protestant Evangelicals on the other hand are generally more interested in transforming the culture through engagement of various sorts. Desiring to be “salt and light,” some enter careers with the secular media, arts, or politics; some engage in culture war; others worry. Several years ago, Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson critiqued conservative evangelicalism with “handwringing over all that is bad in the world” and seeking to change society so that it reflects Christian values. In their view, the desire to feel significant was part of the driving force behind evangelical engagement, particularly as practiced by the Religious Right (see, *Blinded by Might*).

A recent article in *Christianity Today* by Frederica Mathewes-Greene (an Eastern Orthodox) brings out an interesting analogy of the Christian’s relation to the world. In “Loving the Storm-Drenched,” Greene likens the culture to weather. She makes the point that we cannot change the culture any more than we can change the weather. We can seed the

clouds and manipulate weather a bit, but broadly we cannot change its patterns. In the culture we can “provide quality fiction, films, and music. . . . We can do some things to help improve ongoing conditions. But it is futile to think that we will one day take over the culture and steer it. It’s too ungainly. It is composed of hundreds of competing sources. No one controls it.”

Furthermore Mathewes-Greene says that “God has not called us to change the weather.” Rather, Christians are responsible to “care for individuals caught up in the pounding storm.” She also worries that we have come to believe that “the public square is real life.” This results in increased fervor concerning the external world, and less and less towards the relational, spiritual, and personal details of the interior life.

Culture, she believes “is not a monolithic power we must defeat. It is the battering weather conditions that people, harassed and helpless, endure. We are sent into the storm like a St. Bernard, with a keg around our neck, to comfort, reach, and rescue those who are thirsting, most of all, for Jesus Christ.”

We Were Strangers

by Jim Ruff

One of the most difficult adjustments for a new missionary upon arriving on the field is overcoming the overwhelming feeling of being a foreigner, an alien, and a stranger. Whether *gringo*, *gaijin*, or *l’e-tranger*, the missionary is usually easy to pick out, and—in some cultures more than others—the stares and whispered comments do not decrease over the years. Many years ago, my family struggled with a particular experience: a child saw one of us from a distance and

screamed, “A foreigner; I’m afraid!” Even though the missionary gradually begins to feel very much “at home” with the people, he or she is always strange, new, and different to someone, just as there is always someone in your home country different to you.

What type of feelings does seeing or meeting a foreigner summon up in you? More importantly, what type of mindset does God want us to have towards others who may look or seem different?

In His grace and loving-kindness, God gave Israel specific guidelines for dealing with strangers, even to the point of instructing them to have a certain attitude toward the aliens who came to be among them. The Israelites were told not to wrong or oppress a resident alien, for the Israelites were also strangers in the land of Egypt, and they knew the “feelings of a stranger” (Exodus 22:21; 23:9). The Lord made an even stronger demand in declaring that they were to treat the resident alien who was with them as “one born among” them, and demanding that they love him “as themselves,” sealing it with the stamp of finality: “I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 19:33, 34; Deut. 10:19). Jewish commentators have often pointed out that in Leviticus 19:34 God is not demanding love for proselytes, but love for resident aliens in general. The same word is used of Israel’s status in Egypt, and they did not become “proselytes” to Egyptian religion.

The very humanness and stubbornness of many Israelites prevented them from keeping the spirit of these commands, and their failures are frequently noted in the Bible. Yet, positive examples are also to be found. In 2 Samuel 15:19, David spoke of Ittai, the Gittite, as being a foreigner and an exile. The concern David demonstrated for this man, who was separated from his home in the Philistine city of Gath, was such an example.

If the Israelites struggled in keeping the spirit of God’s commands, how then can a contemporary Christian do better? God has provided the answer. How does the Christian learn kindness? God was kind to us (Romans 2:4). How do we know love? God loved us (1 John 4:19). How do we learn humility? Christ humbled Himself for us (Philippians 2:1-8). These passages provide keys to open up the minds and hearts of Christians in their relationships with aliens and strangers. Since God loved you, love!

Since God delivered you, preach deliverance! You were prisoners, blind, bound, hopeless, and dead in trespasses and sins. While this is not universally true in our churches, many of us have experienced as adults what it is to be alienated: alienated from God; alienated from Christianity. As those who have been loved by God, we need to remember where we were without Christ and have compassion for the lost.

To whom should that love be shown? Jesus usually answered such questions by responding, “your neighbor.” As an example of such neighborly activity, Jesus chose a Samaritan, whose people Jews despised. When many potential Jewish helpers had passed by their beaten countryman, it was a Samaritan who demonstrated love to him.

We should show our love and kindness to everyone without distinction. Strangers to the Lord live right next door to you and to your church. How about opening your doors to them? Hebrews 13:2 says, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels.” The word translated *entertain* has the basic idea of “having a special affection for strangers.”

Strangers to America from various ethnic backgrounds are on your street. Missionaries can understand how they feel. Can you? If so, treat them with love and compassion. Offer to be their guide to the culture and the neighborhood. Do they know English? Perhaps your church could start an English-as-a-Second-Language program to introduce these neighbors to the language, the church, new friends, and the Lord! Your interest in them, their culture, their families, and their fears will replace fears with friendship and longing with belonging. Remembering how we’ve been loved, let us learn to love our neighbors just as we do ourselves. ■

—From the Winter 2005 issue of *Message*

Joseph and Rejection

by John Coblentz

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). “Now all these happened unto them for examples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

From these verses and others, we learn the benefits of studying the examples of men and women in the Bible. They were human beings like us who faced trials, challenges, disappointments, and victories. They sinned. They hurt. They bled. They cried. They prayed. Some turned to God, and some turned away from God.

One of the ironies of Joseph’s sad experiences in growing up was that he was favored by his father and rejected by his brothers. And the more his father favored him, the worse seems to have been the attitude of Joseph’s brothers. Joseph didn’t always help the situation. He would report to his father the bad behavior of his brothers when they were out of the house. And telling them his dreams irritated them to no end.

None of this excuses the brothers for their ill will. They hated Joseph with a passion. And when the opportunity arrived, they sold him into slavery with malicious glee.

We can hardly imagine the scene—Joseph sobbing and pleading with them while they dickered with the merchants about the price. The memory burned its way even into their callous consciences, and years later, they said, “We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear” (Genesis 42:21).

Rejection. How it bites in the heart, and how it burns its brand on the memory! But what can we learn from this sad

family interaction?

1. Rejection in family relationships may be tied to, and is invariably worsened by, favoritism. While Jacob would likely have denied that he rejected the rest of his sons, the favoritism he showed to Joseph felt like rejection to the others. Their rejection of Joseph was fueled by such special treatment as the multi-colored coat given to Joseph.

2. The closer the relationship, the more painful the rejection. Joseph was not mistreated and maligned by strangers, but by his own family. To be thrown into a pit and sold as a slave by a band of outlaws would have been bad enough, but for his own brothers to do these things was almost incomprehensible.

3. The pain of rejection is severe, but those who reject others often feel totally justified in doing so. We look at Joseph’s brothers as unmercifully cruel, but in their minds, no doubt, they were only “evening the score.” It was time, in other words, for the boy who basked in his father’s favor to taste what it felt like to be the outcast. Dangerous reasoning, always, when we try to even the scales!

4. Rejection easily turns into a vicious cycle. Not only do we tend to reject those who reject us, but we pass our habits of rejection on to our children. Fortunately, Joseph responded in such a way that rejection was at least partially arrested in this troubled family. But apart from the grace of God, rejected children often grow up to reject their own children. We would expect that when we have personally known rejection, we would avoid the same mistake. But, in fact, our tendency is to hurt others in the very way we have been hurt most deeply.

5. The rejection cycle does not need to continue. Praise God for His grace! When those who experience rejection turn

their hearts to the Lord, they can find healing. They don't need to live in misery and bitterness all their days. They can find the sweetness of the Lord's presence even in the worst of situations. Joseph is a beautiful example of one who was severely rejected but, because of his trust in the Lord, was not destroyed.

6. Often, the ones who hurt us most deeply will eventually be at our mercy. We see this in many Biblical accounts. Joseph eventually had both the position and the power to do his brothers harm. Moses could have stood back and watched the Lord annihilate the complaining Israelites. David had opportunity to take Saul's life. God seems to give these opportunities both to offer the "rejecters"

a means of repentance as well as to test the character of those who have experienced rejection.

How did Joseph keep his head in such difficult situations? We don't have all the details of his responses, of course, and he may have struggled in ways we are not told. But one thing is unmistakable: Joseph kept his eyes trustingly on God. To know that God loves us and will never forsake us is an anchor the soul can cling to in the upheaval of rejection.

In a culture where hatred, betrayal, disconnection, and rejection seem to be a way of life, we really do need the example of Joseph. ■

—From the February 2005 issue of *Deeper Life Ministries Newsletter*. Used by permission.

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

by R. Albert Mohler Jr.

When should the church exercise church discipline? In one sense, a form of redemptive church discipline is exercised whenever the Bible is taught and the truth of God's Word is applied to the lives of believers. The convicting power of the Word of God is the first corrective in the hearts of Christ's people. Nevertheless, a more personal and confrontational mode of discipline is required when sin threatens the faithfulness, integrity, and witness of God's people.

The Bible reveals three main areas of danger requiring discipline. These are *fidelity of doctrine*, *purity of life*, and *unity of fellowship*. Each is of critical and vital importance to the health and integrity of the church.

The theological confusion and compromise which mark the modern church are directly traceable to the church's failure to separate itself from doctrinal error and

heretics. On this matter the Bible is clear: "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone come to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds" (2 John 1:9-11). The Apostle Paul instructed the Galatians that "if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is accursed" (Galatians 1:8, 9).

The letters of 2 Peter and Jude explicitly warn of the dangers presented to the church in the form of false prophets and heretics. Jude alerts the church that "cer-

tain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who long before were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). Similarly, Peter warns “there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves” (2 Peter 2:1).

The church must separate itself from these heresies—and from the heretics. The permissive posture of the church in this century has allowed the most heinous heresies to grow unchecked—and heretics to be celebrated. Francis Schaeffer was among the most eloquent modern prophets who decried this doctrinal cowardice. Schaeffer emphatically denied that a church could be a true Christian fellowship and allow false doctrine. As he stated, “one cannot explain the explosive dynamite, the *dunamis*, of the early church apart from the fact that they practiced two things simultaneously: orthodoxy of doctrine and orthodoxy of community in the midst of the visible church, a community which the world can see. By the grace of God, therefore, the church must be known simultaneously for its purity of doctrine and the reality of its community.”

The visible community of the true church is also to be evident in its moral purity. Christians are to live in obedience to the Word of God and to be exemplary in their conduct and untarnished in their testimony. A lack of attention to moral purity is a sure sign of congregational rebellion before the Lord.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul chastised severely: “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were

sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

When Christians sin, their sin is to be confronted by the church in accordance with the pattern revealed in Scripture. The goal is the restoration of a sister or a brother, not the creation of a public spectacle. The greatest moral danger to the church is the toleration of sin, public and private. One of the greatest blessings to the church is the gift of biblical church discipline—the ministry of the keys.

The integrity of the church is also dependent upon the true unity of its fellowship. Indeed, one of the most repeated warnings found in the New Testament is the admonition against toleration of schismatics. The unity of the church is one of its most visible distinctives—and precious gifts.

The warnings are severe: “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ, but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting” (Romans 16:17, 18). Writing to Titus, Paul instructed that the church should “reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and sinning, being self-condemned” (Titus 3:10, 11).

A breach in the unity of the church is a scandal in the body of Christ. The church is consistently exhorted to practice and preserve a true unity in true doctrine and biblical piety. This unity is not the false unity of a lowest-common-denominator Christianity, the “Gospel Lite” preached and taught in so many modern churches, but in the healthy and growing maturity of the congregation as it increases in grace and knowledge of the Word of God.

The ongoing function of church discipline is to be a part of individual self-examination and congregational reflection. The importance of maintaining

integrity in personal relationships was made clear by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, as He instructed the disciples that anger against a brother is a deadly sin. Reconciliation is a mandate—not a hypothetical goal. “Therefore, if you are presenting your offering at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering” (Matthew 5:23, 24).

Similarly, Paul warned against participating in the Lord’s Supper amidst divisions. The Supper itself is a memorial of the broken body and shed blood of the Saviour, and must not be desecrated by the presence of divisions or controversies within the congregation, or by unconfessed sin on the part of individual believers. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and

blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly” (1 Corinthians 11:26-29).

The “discipline of the table” is thus one of the most important disciplinary functions of the congregation. The Lord’s Supper is not to be served indiscriminately, but only to those baptized believers who are under the discipline of the church and in good standing with their congregation.

In the twenty-first century, the great task of the church is to prove itself to be in continuity with the genuine church as revealed in the New Testament—proving its authenticity by a demonstration of pure faith and authentic community. We must regain the New Testament concern for fidelity of doctrine, purity of life, and unity of fellowship. We must recover the missing mark of the church. ■

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from www.AlbertMohler.com

Limitations of the Democratic Process

by J. Ward Shank

The Christian Church came into being at a time when the Roman Empire held almost universal dominion, and yet Christianity, by the very strength of its life principle, proved itself vastly more powerful than empires. It has been rightly observed that Christianity is not dependent upon any one form of human government, and that in its essential being it can even flourish under the most tyrannical forms. The Anabaptist movement arose and spread under very adverse conditions. There are evidences of a strong evangelical church in Russia today. While we may not know what may be the actual state of the church in Red China or Cuba, it is possible that a vigorous church flourishes

underground in those countries.

This is not to say, however, that benevolent, or democratic, government is not an aid to the propagation of the Gospel. There were those stabilizing and freedom aspects of the Roman government which greatly aided in the inception and spread of Christianity, even while that system held thousands of slaves under bondage. It enabled the citizen Paul to travel widely, along with others of his missionary generation. “They went everywhere preaching the Word.” The Anabaptists sometimes enjoyed privileges of tolerance and protection which were used to advantage. The great revival and missionary movements of the past century in Eng-

land and America were largely made possible by the diffusion of democratic principles. The very existence of political freedom brought aspects of liberty and opportunity to the church.

We have become somewhat fond of saying that our forefathers (the Pilgrims, Rhode Island colony, Mennonites, the Quakers under Penn, and others) came to this country seeking religious freedom. We have drawn some easy conclusions that this country was established on religious foundations, and that democracy had its birth in consequence—a boon and a blessing to all the world. And there are large elements of truth in this.

We should remember, however, that American democracy had its first inspiration in atheistic and humanistic minds like those of Tom Paine and Thomas Jefferson. The Declaration of Independence, far from having a religious motivation, came out of reaction to tyranny in Europe, and more immediately as a protest to the policies of George III of England (taxation without representation). The Bill of Rights was a guarantee of political rather than of religious freedom, as such.

What has all this to do with our life in the Mennonite Church today? *It is that having lived under democratic institutions, and having enjoyed the blessings of freedom in a wonderful land, we are prone to confuse democratic institutions and democratic processes with the outworking of Christianity.* It has been ingrained into us that political democracy is based upon right, particularly as opposed to monarchical or autocratic methods, and even as opposed to some representative forms of government.

This is shown nowhere more vividly than in some Christian patriots and hyper-fundamentalists, who oppose communism to Christianity, who virtually identify Red Russia with Antichrist, who would be willing to fight the communists as in a holy war, and who clothe democracy with religious sanctity. This is not to

excuse communism or any form of autocracy; but we wish merely to point up the fact that methods of western democracy should not be equated with Christianity, nor do Christianity and democracy necessarily originate from the same sources.

We come now to where this bears particularly upon our life in the Church: The benefits of our land have led us to feel that the true form of order in the church is that of democracy, or that as a function of brotherhood there should be full democratic participation and expression. As a consequence, it is assumed that all questions for decision should be subject to the vote, and that there should be full and free option on all matters of policy, choice of personnel, matters of discipleship, and even of doctrine. We sometimes hear it flatly stated, “The church *is* a democracy,” or “*Since* the church is a democracy, such or such should obtain.”

Limitations

Our present point of inquiry has to do with some limitations upon the democratic process as applied in the Church. We present here seven propositions for consideration.

1. Democracy and Christian brotherhood are not synonymous.

The Church must begin with brotherhood. It is the paramount consideration. Whatever democratic methods come into use must be but incidental to the working of brotherhood. This latter reaches far beyond the mere concept of democracy, being based on love, mutual respect, and submission.

Brotherhood itself does not presume equality in every respect. There are different orders of responsibility and varying levels of decision making. This is illustrated nowhere quite so well as in the home, with its parental responsibility, even between husband and wife. It is shown in the divine order of headship as set forth in 1 Corinthians 11. It is shown in the responsible exercise of the offices of the Church, all without allowance of a

superiority-inferiority condition. The various parts of the body (brotherhood) are shown to be interdependent—but not confused as in the democratic process.

2. *The spirit of political democracy is alien to that of the Gospel.*

Political democracy was born in the atmosphere of the town meeting or the constitutional assembly, where the basic motivation was concerned with rights and privileges. The spirit is that of a demand or guarantee of “individual expression in politics,” of “liberty, equality, and fraternity,” and of government “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

These rights and privileges speak of the good, but the purpose is after all, political. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says,

Political liberty has been conquered by universal suffrage, but economic liberty has not been achieved . . . [note the aspirations of the New Deal, the Fair Deal and the Great Society.—Editor’s note]. Democracy cannot triumph wholly until the spirit of democracy dwells in all the people. Without this spirit nothing more has been accomplished than to substitute for the tyranny of an individual, or of a minority, or a class, the tyranny of a fluctuating majority.

In contrast, the spirit of the Gospel seeks the good of another, even to the point of laying down of life. Here we readily acknowledge that in this respect we have not attained fully, nor perhaps even approximately, to the spirit of the Gospel; but it is the place where we ought to work.

3. *Pure democracy is hardly possible of achievement.*

We have noted above the reference to “the tyranny of a fluctuating majority.” If tyranny in any degree may sometimes reside in a majority, then the equality that is thought to prevail in modern democracy is scarcely a reality. It is also as possible to have the tyranny of a minority, such as through men grasping and holding the lines of power, using psychology in order to sway mass opinion, demagogic appeals, etc.

The constant demand is for a kind of pure democracy which undermines the

true executive functions necessary everywhere in society and in the church as well. A recent writer in *Atlantic Monthly* states it like this:

A second theme of student radicalism today, and a polar twin to the concept of “organized America” is the idea of “participatory democracy.” This is a vague notion, but a dynamic one . . . for participatory democracy requires that all people be fit to govern; and this in turn requires that all people be *made* fit to govern. . . . No legislator can be as free as a private citizen, and to make all the people legislators is willy-nilly to abolish the category of private citizen altogether (*Atlantic Monthly*, November 1965).

This, of course, was spoken in a political context, but the principle holds true anywhere there is a demand for this kind of pure democracy.

4. *Popular rule is unstable.*

Today, as never before, the opinions of men are subjected to crosscurrents of ideas. Newspapers, magazines, books, radio, television, and billboards bombard the mind, and the voice of the moment who is best able to command these tools becomes the controlling power. Hence the masses of men can be swayed, and these in turn provide the base of power for those who control them. Appeal to the masses is almost always based upon *emotion*, rather than upon truth, or for that matter, sound reasoning.

That matters of decision in the church are often unwisely based upon emotional appeal is something we must realistically face. This does occur, however good the intention or noble the purpose.

5. *Democracy is based upon faith in man.*

Robert M. Hutchins, former president of the University of Chicago, says, “The democratic faith is faith in man, faith in every man, and faith that man, if he is well enough educated and well enough informed, can solve the problems raised by his own aggregation.”

In the Church, the reasoning is similar: That the power of the New Birth and the presence of the Holy Spirit is so diffused

through the body that government is thereby safe in the hands of all.

Certainly there is much to commend this concept—except that it too often fails to take into account the presence of carnality, the immaturity either of age or youth, and the shortsightedness of those in a position to influence either majorities or minorities. Religious democracy can rise no higher, and is no more safe, than the spiritual level of the group who would exercise the democratic forms. Indeed, it may even rise no higher than those on the lower level. Insofar as it is rooted in faith in man, it is nothing more than dependence upon a broken reed.

6. *Genuine equality in democracy is scarcely ever a reality.*

In fact, it is most often very far removed from reality. As someone has remarked, “God created all men free and equal, but some are more equal than others.” This, of course, from very human reasons.

There is always the shadow of the demagogue, the man who can and does sway the people, even while they think they are free. There is the development of the privileged and the ruling class in any situation, where even the democratic methods are used to perpetuate this class in power. The privilege of the ballot is often represented as the quintessence of equality, while ignoring the fact that anyone in the minority can be told at any time that he enjoys no equality, and that his ballot is only a gesture lost in a forest of votes.

7. *Not everything is a proper subject for debate and referendum.*

The popular cry today is for an opportunity for discussion and the ballot, extending to almost every subject and consideration. It often seems that the more delicate the matter, the more insistence there is upon the privilege of popular decision.

In the Church, we should seldom, if ever, allow known error to be defended in discussion or debate. Hence, some subjects are simply not debatable issues within the context of the Church. We would hardly think of allowing someone in our congregations to

speak for participation in war. The very same principle of limitation applies to other and more subtle issues.

Some matters of personnel are often best decided in ways other than by ballot. A method that may appear feasible today may provide a pitfall for tomorrow, simply because we have set the precedents of popular selection of personnel that cannot easily be repealed.

It is doubtful if the service of a pastor should be fully subjected to the popular voice. Where this method is pursued, the temptation to please the congregation may soon become a more potent factor for compromise than that of a salaried ministry. There is no hireling more an hireling than one who has his ear attuned to *vox populi*, the voice of the people.

Some Final Considerations

This is not to say that there is not much of value in democratic procedures. We have tried to be forthright in pointing out some limitations. The very term *limitations* should indicate that we may allow for some measure of what we know as democratic functions. But let us rather think of them as brotherhood functions—not as democracy.

Christian brotherhood is realized as a fruit of the Spirit, and as such it is not contrived or manipulated. It is based on *yieldedness*: “Let your moderation [or yieldedness] be known unto all men.” It is based on deference, not upon the exaltation of the individual opinion and the pressured power of the ballot, as in democracy. It exercises the grace of submission.

The Church should give recognition to the convictions of all within the brotherhood. There should be enough recognition of the brotherhood voice to secure the interests of all and to take advantage of all our judgments. This is, however, with prior recognition of the offices of the Church as set forth by the Word, and of the free functioning of the prophetic ministry. ■

—from *The View From Round Hill*, available from *Sword & Trumpet* \$4.00 (special sale price)

The MBBs’ “Dirty Little Secret”

by Ergun Caner

You have never read a story like this one.

It was a meeting like the hundreds of others we have experienced over the course of twenty years. My brother Emir was gently debating another Arabic Christian at a seminary on the best methods of reaching Muslims with the Gospel of Christ. The “talking points” were familiar. In fact, we have grown used to discussing the same issues in countless meetings and various manners. Everything fit the standard parameters until an innocent student rose to ask the fateful question:

“How do we faithfully proclaim the gospel to Israel? They are fighting such a horrible battle at such a tremendous cost. How do your backgrounds as former Muslims help you share Christ with the Jews?”

My brother smiled to himself. He knew what his answer was, but he did not know the position of his colleague. The other man speaking in the forum was a learned evangelical Christian who had, like us, converted from Islam. He had spoken countless times before thousands of American evangelicals and was viewed as a leader in Middle Eastern evangelism. This man shifted imperceptibly and shuffled his papers, hoping Emir would jump in. However, Emir stood quietly and allowed the painful silence to force the man to answer.

Slowly, without looking up, the man spoke: “Well, with regard to Jewish evangelism, we should always present Jesus as Messiah. This is certain. However, [pause] in the Palestinian-Israeli

conflict, [pause] I think we should remain [pause] neutral.”

Welcome to our world.

“Coming Out”

This story may shock and surprise you. Yet I have decided to tell it and, as they say, let the chips fall where they may. This article has taken me twenty years to write. And I am about to betray my kinsmen according to the flesh. I am about to betray our dirty little secret.

Most articles and books that I have written with my brother have been either academic or works on understanding and reaching Muslims. In 2002, when our book *Unveiling Islam* became a bestseller, we were thrust into the media spotlight. Our debates, sermons, and addresses have been in front of tens of thousands of people. We have addressed the thousands of messengers at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention twice. We have appeared on countless television shows, talk shows, and national radio shows.

In 2003 *Unveiling Islam* (Kregel) earned the Gold Medallion Book Award; and our books *More Than a Prophet* (Kregel) and *Voices Behind the Veil* (Kregel) also became bestsellers and were nominated for awards. We are presently working on our largest book, a million-word reference that will be the first Christian commentary on every chapter and verse of the Qur’an. And our publisher sold out of copies of our recent book, *Christian Jihad* (Kregel),

at a conference in the summer of 2004. Suffice it to say, we like to write.

Yet these books were easy compared to this article. It is intensely personal, and I debated and prayed about it for weeks.

Difficult as this may be, I feel compelled to finally tell the story. However, doing so means that my brother and I, both professors at Christian universities, are opening ourselves to scorn. In truth, we are used to scorn from Muslims. They hound us at every turn and threaten us weekly in e-mails and letters. They protest our appearances and shout at us in the churches where we speak.

But this scorn will be altogether different.

This scorn will come from fellow Christians.

This scorn will come because we betrayed the secret of our kinsmen—Muslim-background believers (MBBs).

I finally decided to “come out” in *Israel My Glory*. Knowing the editors as I do, I know they stand with me. At least Emir and I will not be alone.

A Vestigial Hatred

As Muslims, we were raised to hate the Jewish people.

As Christian converts from Islam, many of us still do.

Read those words carefully. Let their meaning and importance sink in. Surely you have met hundreds of us during these past years. Springing out of the background, former Muslims have taken the center stage in many denominational meetings and conferences. Though we are all confronted with questions concerning presenting the gospel to Muslims, rarely are we asked about Israel, the Jewish nation, or the covenants in Scripture between God and His people.

Many of our kinsmen, whose names you know and whose books you have read, are grateful you haven't asked

them. Why? Because many former Muslims who are now genuine believers still disdain, scorn, and hate the Jews. These include many who speak in forums, write books, and serve in churches. It truly is our dirty little secret.

Emir and I refer to it as the remnants of Islam, a type of vestigial hatred. As children, we were raised in our *madresses* (training centers) to believe that Jews drink the blood of Palestinian children. Imams would preach sermons that dripped with hatred for the Jewish people and the Jewish nation. We called them the “pig people” and “common dogs” who had taken our land and slaughtered our brethren.

Then, when we converted from Islam, convinced that *Isa* (Jesus) was not a prophet of Allah but actually the Messiah, we were all faced with a common threat. Many of us have been disowned, cast out, deported, imprisoned, or worse. Those of us who survived began new lives, separated from our heritage and families. Very little remains—except for a lingering bias. We still hate the Jewish people. I must confess, my brothers and I still did.

In the early 1980s, after our conversion, my brothers and I began new lives as believers in Jesus as the Christ. In many ways, our church became our family, since our father had disowned us. I hungered to know the Lord and His Book and I read the Word passionately, sometimes for three or four hours a day. I wore out highlighters as I made my way through the Old Testament.

When I got to the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12, I stumbled. “Old Testament,” I muttered. “Jesus got rid of that.” Soon I became disgusted with the constant reiteration of the refrain, “Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph.” I had been raised to believe in Muhammad's redaction of the teaching, “Abraham, Ishmael, Jesus, Muhammad.”

We read in the Qur'an that it was

Ishmael, not Isaac, who was almost sacrificed on Mount Moriah. This is the core teaching of one of our celebrations (*Eid*). Now I was confronted with the fact that, 2,200 years after Moses had written Genesis 22 and approximately 2,700 years after the event had actually taken place, Muhammad had *changed* the story.

Quickly I flipped to the New Testament. Surely I would find that Jesus, my Saviour, repudiated the Old Testament; that way my bias could remain unaffected.

Then I got to Romans 9–11. Game, set, match for the Jewish people as the priest-nation of God. I began to ask questions. I began to read books. I even attended Messianic Jewish services.

And slowly, ever so slowly, I began to love the Jewish people, as does our Father. They are God's chosen. And the land of Israel belongs to them.

It took my brothers and me some time, but we assumed that all former Muslims (we are called Muslim-background believers, or MBBs) went through the same journey. Apparently not.

The Replacement Myth

Shortly after I made my first appearance on the television program of pro-Israel Bible teacher Zola Levitt, I was flooded with e-mails from angry Muslims. I was expecting that. What I did not expect was the number of angry e-mails from Anglo Christians. They usually went something like this: "My brother in Christ, the church has replaced Israel!"

After one meeting, a former Muslim who had become the pastor of an Egyptian-Christian fellowship pulled me aside and said, "You are hurting your witness, my friend." His not-so-gentle rebuke continued: "The covenants with Israel to Abraham, David, and Ezekiel were conditional. He came to His own and they rejected Him. The church is

now the new Israel."

He offered me a number of evangelical books to prove his point. I began to read these theological studies, many of which I know you, dear reader, have on your shelves. Reformed writers, evangelical writers, and even popular radio and television preachers all said the same thing: Israel was replaced by the church.

Well, now twenty years later, may I state it emphatically, so there is no misunderstanding?

God's covenant with Israel was unconditional. Israel remains God's chosen nation.

Though they are, in the Hebrew Scriptures' own terms, a "stiff-necked" and "stubborn" people, God has *not* abandoned them. To teach otherwise is unbiblical, ungodly, racist, and anti-Semitic. I do not care how beloved these well-known authors may be; nor do I care how many engagements this position will cost me. I cannot abandon God's people or replace His plans. Romans 9–11 still remains in the Book.

The Myth of Palestine

Today we are confronted with the ongoing conflict over Jerusalem. Daily we see bombs explode and bullets fly, as the fight of the last fifty years resonates. I ask, "Where is the Christian voice?"

Sadly, many who should speak out are mute because a residue of hatred for Israel still lingers in their hearts.

Time and time again, Emir and I have asked fellow MBBs, "Show us 'Palestine' on any map. When did the Palestinians ever form a government, have a capital, or maintain an embassy?"

The answer, of course, is never. The concept of a country named Palestine did not arise until after Israel became a nation. It is an entirely hypothetical country based not on a common ethnic background but on a common hatred of Israel. Our fellow Arabs and Persians have found compatriots among Anglo and European theologians who have

adopted an entire theology and eschatology based on this common hatred. My brother and I are now in the ironic position, as MBBs and Persian Turks, of defending Israel against white European Christians. Strange world.

We agree with former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: "Jerusalem is God's eternal and indivisible city." Someday we hope to meet him and tell him so.

The Myth of Allah

Another strange component of this issue is the use of *Allah*. Recently we heard an evangelical missionary speak of the "Allah-leuia" movement, where missionaries are using the Arabic term *Allah* to proclaim the gospel. Some even go so far as to enter mosques and assume the positions of prayer (*rakats*) but pray to Jesus in their minds. *Allah*, they conclude, is merely the Arabic term for "God." *Adonai* and *Allah* speak of the same God, they say.

May I state for the record, ***Allah* is not the Arabic term for "God."**

Allah is an idol.

In all of our debates in universities and colleges, my brother and I have never found one Muslim *ulema* who believes that Allah of the Qur'an and the God of the Bible are the same God. Never. If monotheism is the sole measure of truth in this case, if Allah is the same god as the true and living God, then Elijah owes the prophets of Baal (also monotheistic) an apology.

So why use the term? I asked a Christian Arab why he continues to use the term *Allah* when he prays, and he whispered to me, "I cannot bring myself to use the Hebrew names, you know?"

Yes. I know. Sadly, I know.

I realize that in one short diatribe, I have taken on Replacement Theology, Puritan eschatology, modern theologians, and entire denominations. However, my silence of twenty years is over. Our dirty little secret is out.

Emir and I shall continue to stand with Israel in the conflict against our kinsmen according to the flesh. We shall continue to confront Replacement Theology whenever we see it.

And we shall continue to stand with Israel as God's chosen nation because He calls us to do so in the Old and New Testaments. The Jewish people need to accept Jesus as the Messiah, to be sure. But they also need the Christian community—the church—to stand alongside them in a world bent on their destruction. It begins now. ■

—Reprinted from the November/December 2004 issue of *Israel My Glory*

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A total of 40 million people around the world are living with HIV—more than the population of Poland. Nearly two-thirds of them live in Sub-Saharan Africa, where, in the hardest-hit countries, HIV prevalence is almost 40%. The global HIV/AIDS epidemic killed more than three million people in 2003 and there are emerging and growing epidemics in China, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Vietnam, several Central Asian Republics, the Baltic States, and North Africa. South Africa has the most cases in the world, with five million.

By 2010, it is estimated that the total number of people likely to be living with HIV could be over 65 million. ABWE missionaries serve in many of the places most affected by AIDS around the world. They have compassionate hearts to reach out to victims of HIV—not only those infected, but to the families of victims and to children.

Mixed Swimming Religious Hypocrisy

by Ronald Williams

Pharisees practiced certain monstrous sins, but salved their stricken conscience by practicing their wicked deeds with a religious facade, i.e., the non-support of their parents by declaring their property and wealth as “Corban” (It is a gift, by whatsoever those mightest be profited by me; and honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free—Matt. 15:5, 6).

With characteristic Pharisaic insincerity, this “religious man” could say all his means with which he could be expected to support his needy parents were devoted to God by an inviolable vow. Consequently, he was not expected to support his parents and could hide his blatant sin behind a religious vow (Mark 7:9-13). He could clearly break God’s Law, yet appear godly!

Religion which is the fruit of a depraved, carnal heart is fully capable of heinous sin, directly contradicting the clear spirit and letter of the Law of God. Our Lord publicly described these inconsistencies and hypocrisies, both to warn true believers, and to rebuke Pharisees and scribes, calling them to repentance: “All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” (Matt. 23:3). It is worthy of note to observe the descriptive terms our Lord used to characterize such religious hypocrisies: “Woe unto you,” “hypocrites” (Matt. 23:13), “ye blind guides” (Matt. 23:16), “ye fools and blind” (Matt. 23:19), “ye are like unto whited sepulchres” (Matt. 23:27), “even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matt. 23:28).

It is incumbent upon all of us who name the name of Christ to recognize it is not our religious habits and customs or the culture around us that are the standard of right and wrong, but the clear commands

of the Word of God.

Presumptuous Sin

There are those so bold in their rejection of Christ and love of their sin that they will not mince words like the Pharisees. This is the soul who exclaims, “I know it is wrong, but I will do it anyway and no one will stop me!” This is rightly called presumption: “the sin with the high hand,” for which there was no sacrifice, no propitiation, only judgment (Num. 15:30, 31).

David, recognizing the capacity of his lower nature, though he was a regenerated soul, cried out, “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression” (Psalm 19:13). Peter describes these brazen, audacious sinners who, though they are religious teachers, as actually being lost men: “But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities” (2 Peter 2:10).

We learn from David that even a regenerate soul is capable of presumptuous sin and consequently, we ought to have a healthy, well-informed fear of our innate depravity. Most presumptuous sin is committed by those described by Peter: unregenerate blasphemers; rebellious, self-willed and dissolute. Paul’s nickname for these souls is: “They are the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil. 3:18).

However, one does not have to be a drinker or philanderer to live so wickedly, as the lives of the Pharisees would attest. Their sin was cloaked under religious hypocrisy, whereas the presumptuous sinner sins with a “whore’s forehead” (Jer. 3:3)—one so jaded in sin they are incapable

of blushing.

Contradictory Concepts

An oxymoron is a figure of speech in which apparently contradictory terms are combined, i.e., “good Devil,” “beautiful sin.” Certain practices in modern Christianity come to mind as oxymorons, i.e., “Christian rock music,” “women’s pants,” and “mixed swimming.” These transparently contradictory concepts ought to be apparent to any sincere believer with the wisdom of a twelve-year-old. However, we are so capable, even as believers, of being desensitized to the repugnance and abomination of sin that we can be a party to it, or allow it with very little compunction of conscience.

It was this proclivity of even regenerate souls to adapt to monstrous sin that motivated God to command Israel to separate from Canaanites: “Ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars . . .” (Judges 2:2). “They shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you . . .” (Judges 2:3).

Process of Desensitization

The principal elements in compromising with sin and sinful culture until desensitization occurs are three: shock, accommodation, and emulation. At first, a Biblically enlightened conscience will be shocked when exposed to terrible sin or sinful practices. Failing to follow God’s admonition to “flee also youthful lusts” (2 Tim. 2:22), a healthy believer with a normal lower nature will find creative and imaginative means of accommodating what at first shocked and troubled his conscience. Finally, after accommodating sin long enough, he will find ample justification to emulate the wickedness, and ends up committing those acts himself.

This has happened to God’s people down through the millennia, and is happening to us in our age and culture as well, in the lives of those who have allowed it.

Mixed Swimming: An Example of Desensitization

Mixed swimming might more honestly

and more appropriate be termed “mixed nudity.” How else can we be consistent and morally honest with our Biblical heritage of holiness? Popularity of and acceptance of mixed swimming notwithstanding, it is wicked, morally indefensible, and behavior that ought not to be named among true believers.

Many nineteenth-century believers were aflame with missionary zeal and a God-given desire to live holy lives. May I say they would be scandalized in the extreme were they to see contemporary believers shamelessly cavorting around in modern swimwear, unblushingly exposing major portions of their body for all who wish to see. Are they prudish and Victorian, and are we more enlightened as we recreate in various degrees of nakedness? May I submit we have become desensitized to sin and have adopted the ways of the heathen! Moody, Spurgeon, and their contemporaries would be justified in crying out against our shameless nakedness.

Defining Acceptability: The Occasion or the Principle?

To put this in perspective, imagine dear brother, if your wife and/or your physically mature daughter are in the privacy of their bedrooms, clad only in the most intimate of foundation garments. Would you invite them in this condition of dress to meet your male friends? If you would invite them, would they allow themselves to be viewed by masculine eyes in such a scantily clad condition?

Hopefully, you are offended and horrified by even the thought of such a suggestion. And, hopefully, your wife and daughter would be similarly scandalized at such a compromise of their privacy and modesty.

Or, would you, sir, cavort around the living room in your underwear as your wife is hosting a ladies’ tea?

Hopefully, these outrageous illustrations would reveal you still have a Biblical sense of modesty, decency, and shamefacedness.

Sadly, many believers would only be

ashamed at the type of garment in a wrong setting, not at the exposure of their nakedness. The same woman who would rather die than expose herself to the eyes of men while in her foundation garments, will then thoughtlessly and shamelessly expose herself simply because she is wearing what is called swimwear. Dearly beloved, the sin and scandal is not in wearing inappropriate garments on wrong social occasions, but in the nakedness itself!

Nakedness Is Shameful

Scripture is universal in its condemnation of nakedness as being “shameful” (Exodus 32:25; Rev. 3:18; 16:15)! Even priests were cautioned about their clothing and carriage so no one could view their thighs. And, because God is clear that “the eyes of man are never satisfied” (Prov. 27:20), we recognize it is our vision that is the primary gateway of beginning sexual arousal. Job affirmed this principle: “I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?” (Job 31:1). The man who says that the nakedness of women does not bother him is either not physically developed, a pervert, a liar, or dead! Pornographers understand the unquenchable sexual desire in carnal men and flagrantly utilize this weakness of men’s lower nature against them to enrich themselves.

Lustful Gazing: A Pervasive Reality

The only difference in a man visiting a pornographic web site and pornographic store as opposed to viewing scantily clad women in swimwear is that in the latter case, he does not have to purchase his viewing. Hopefully, women in swimwear will at least cover some areas of their bodies. However, this is small consolation to them as they are still sufficiently naked as to be the object of lustful gazing from any man who wishes to titillate his depraved fantasies.

Defrauding

Dear sister, of what eternal value is it for you to exhibit your varying stages of nakedness to the prying and lustful eyes of men,

though you can legitimately say your swimwear is “socially acceptable”? Are you not in fact defrauding men, whether your nakedness is socially acceptable or not?

In the realm of human sexuality, a woman defrauds a man by unlawfully raising his sexual expectations or desires, without at the same time providing a righteous means of lawfully fulfilling those desires. God forbids all defrauding, “Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour” (Lev. 19:13), and specifically, He forbids defrauding in human sexuality, “that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such . . .” (1 Thess. 4:6). In other words, she may only act and dress that way in front of her husband, not some other man!

Degradation of Nakedness

I have learned in over three decades of working with young women that they are fully cognizant of what they are doing when they dress and act in provocative, alluring, coquettish ways. The woman of this world, in a pathetic, degraded yearning for male attention and acceptance, finds her security in focusing on fleshly externals: “Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel . . .” (1 Peter 3:3). However, the believing woman focuses on internal character qualities in a quest to please the Lord. Such qualities may be of little or no interest to a lost man, but a godly man will take approving interest of such character development: “But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Peter 3:4).

Dear feminine heart, you will undoubtedly have many men looking at you as you expose your shame and nakedness in swimwear, but what have you accomplished? You have demonstrated a worldly heart by focusing on externals rather than God-pleasing internal character development. You are defrauding men by making yourself an object of unmitigated male lust. There-

fore, you are degrading and demeaning yourself in principle, the same way a prostitute does. She does it for financial remuneration through a shameful physical act, whereas your *quid pro quo* (something for something) is the lurid and lascivious male attention you receive even though an actual physical act is not consummated.

You may comfort yourself, dear sister, in the social acceptability of “mixed swimming” just as the Pharisees did for their covert sins, but they found out a Holy God was not impressed, and He categorically denounced them. You will give an account to the Lord Jesus at the judgment, not to the Gallup Poll, fashion designers, or dissolute “beach bums” who have been gazing upon your body.

***Husbands/Fathers, Protect
Your Wife and Daughter!***

Dear brother, what kind of man would allow the lewd and wicked eyes of lustful men to fantasize about the bodies of their wife and/or daughter? Swimwear is usually the most flagrant exposure of a woman’s body, but she can also be immodest and defrauding in much of what is considered acceptable fashions of the day. Since nakedness is Biblically shameful, a wise and godly man will insist his wife/daughter be dressed according to three principles: long, loose, and layered.

Clothing should be sufficiently long to cover their bodies, not teasingly, provocatively short or revealing. Their clothing should not be form-fitting. Many women may say they are covered, but the type of cloth or style of fashion is so clinging that it accentuates and calls attention to her sexuality instead of covering it. Layering of clothing prevents any revelation of body parts that should only be viewed by her husband, not some other man. For a godly woman, modesty is always in style, regardless of what the fad and fashions of the world may dictate. Her heart is seeking the Lord, not the lurid stares of base and wicked men for some distorted sense of security and worth it brings to her ego.

Modesty Is Also Appropriate for Men

Brothers in Christ, we may mince words and practice the wicked insincerity of Pharisees and somehow justify our presence in swimwear if we choose; many are doing so to their satisfaction. However, multitudes of younger and older women have confided that sculpted, virile men in varying degrees of nakedness have been a temptation and stumbling block to them. Her temptation in looking at a partially clad man may not be as compelling and controlling as it is for a man’s surging lower nature in looking at a woman, but it is still defrauding! But beyond what you may do to women as they view your nakedness, what are you doing to yourself in that environment?

Do Not Just Avoid an Act of Sin

Avoid the steps to its commission. Pharisees were quick to affirm, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Matt. 5:27). However, as they demonstrated in so many areas of their lives, they may have observed the letter of the Law, but were very diligent in finding creative ways to circumvent the spirit of the Law.

The physical act of adultery is preceded by temptation, specifically the temptation of sight and subsequent evil fantasy, hence the warning of Proverbs 6:26, “Lust not after her beauty in thine heart . . .” Note the inward fantasy of depravity. That even righteous men are capable of such base behavior is clearly illustrated by David, “He saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and inquired after the woman . . . and David sent . . . and took her . . . and he lay with her” (2 Sam. 11:2-4).

Note, please, the progression. Nakedness was seen. This initiated evil fantasy, which was followed by the act. A Pharisee would say sin only occurred in the act of adultery. However, our Lord speaks with asseveration in Matthew 5:28, “But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” A Pharisee may try to be cleverly insincere to cloak his goals, but a

Holy God casts this all aside and calls it sin!

I challenge you, dear brother, before a thrice holy God, as you are in the company of developed women in the varying stages of nakedness their swimwear displays, and as you gaze upon their bodies, try telling the Lord your innermost thoughts and imaginations are pure and without lust. The fact is, you have committed adultery in your heart, and given the right circumstances, you may be only a few steps away from the actual act of physical adultery, because the lustful desire in a heart can lead to the sinful act. Pharisaic argumentation resulted in a religious facade, but with wicked hearts and lives. Using such wretched insincerity today, we could identify outwardly with the cause of Christ, and at the same time participate in such transparently carnal activity as mixed swimming with no stricken conscience.

Sober Reflection Needed

For those desiring to participate in mixed swimming, were you in a government run directly by God, you would be in deep trouble. No one will be doing so in the Millennium! However, we are in a free country, and you may, as a thoughtless lemming, follow multitudes in donning their “colored underwear,” otherwise known as “swimwear,” and indulge your insatiable lust to your heart’s content. But would you at least be honest about your lust and sin and stop trying to justify your behavior under the guise of social acceptability. Cleverly disguising your motives does you a disservice. Honest, open sinners are closer to repentance than those who are creatively justifying their carnal lusts. ■

—from Hephzibah House, 508 School St., Winona Lake, IN 46590. Reprints may be obtained from Hephzibah House.

A Symbol of Authority

by Linford Berry

This article is basically an edited transcript of a sermon delivered at Calvary Mennonite Fellowship on January 29, 2006.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

You might wonder why we need another sermon on this subject. You might think that since we are Mennonites, we should have this one nailed down. As a matter of fact you might actually pride yourself on having this small passage of Scripture figured out better than most of mainstream Christianity.

Or maybe you don’t see any reason to be concerned with this subject. You see this as some archaic tradition dictated by the church and you go along just to keep the peace. After all, it is the heart that matters most—right? What difference does it make whether or not I observe the specific applications of this passage?

Let me try to explain why I think this is such an important issue. I think we as cul-

tural Mennonites are especially vulnerable here. It is true that we should have this subject nailed down, but we have tended to rely on tradition and church regulations rather than on the inspired Word of God to instruct us in this area. It is far too easy for us to become proud in our application of this passage and not really understand the important principles which are foundational to properly understanding and applying this passage. It is often easier to regulate and make rules about acceptable behaviors and dress, than it is to carefully explain the principles from God’s Word which should govern our lives. We have not done very well with this.

And because of this, our young people and those coming from outside our tradition often don’t have a deep-seated convic-

tion about why we apply this Scripture in the way that we do. They are not convinced of the truth here in 1 Corinthians 11. By the way, *conviction* means “to be convinced.” If you are convicted in a court of law, that means that the judge or the jury has seen enough evidence to be convinced that you are guilty—you are convicted. In the same way we need to be convinced about the subject of headship and head coverings. I am afraid that we haven’t done a very good job of convincing or convicting our people about this. Another reason our convincing has been weak is because of our inconsistency in applying this Scripture to our lives. We Mennonites might think that we have it figured out, when in reality we often violate the very principles that this passage teaches.

Another reason that I believe this passage in particular deserves attention is because of the many misinterpretations of this Scripture by modern Christian teachers, preachers, and commentators who claim to hold to the inerrancy and authority of Scripture and with whom we can agree on a lot of other issues. It is easy for us to become convinced that since they obviously have a high regard for Scripture and are true to what it teaches in other areas, then they must be right about this too. We can listen to them carefully explain this passage exactly as it is written and then they will come to the end and say something like, “But this passage doesn’t apply to us today.”

At its core, the actual physical applications of the principles in this passage are somewhat trivial. I do not mean unimportant. Being a Christian should be totally life consuming and lived out in every aspect of our lives. Why then is a visible symbol of this faith so difficult? When compared to the commitment Christianity requires . . . it makes the wearing of a head covering seem insignificant by comparison. I think one of the reasons why the issue of the head covering has become such a big issue in our churches is because of the very visible decay in the headship

order of our culture and in the church at large—in the last 50 years especially. We have been affected more than we realize by the radical feminist movement. We are bombarded by its message daily. Christian men and women need to constantly rethink what they are told about themselves by the mainstream culture in order to gain a godly perspective of the proper roles of men and women.

It comes down to what you love. Does it matter what everyone else in the world is doing? If it does, why? By the way, this doesn’t just apply to sisters either. This passage has some hard things to say to us men as well. If our focus is on Jesus Christ, then applying the principles found here in 1 Corinthians will become a joy. What Christian wouldn’t want to advertise his commitment to the headship of Christ? If we can’t be obedient in these simple applications how can we take a stand when it comes to more important issues?

What I would like to do is to review this passage and explain it as we go along. Then I will attempt to answer some of the most popular misinterpretations of this passage.

v. 2. *Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the teachings (or traditions) even as I delivered them to you.*

In verse 2 he introduces the next subject in this letter to the Corinthian church. This book of 1 Corinthians is primarily a corrective epistle. Paul is dealing with problems and issues in the church. Paul is about to explain one of the practices of the church at large in more detail so that the Corinthians will understand it and observe it more willingly. We may infer that some irregularities had occurred or that an objection or question had been raised concerning these things. He begins talking about this subject in a more conciliatory tone than he had used earlier. He praises them for remembering what he teaches them and being willing to hold on to the teachings or doctrines and customs that are passed on to them.

v. 3. *But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.*

In verse 3 he lays the foundation for the rest of the discussion. He indicates that there is a divinely ordained headship order, in which women are under the leadership or headship of men, and men are under the direct headship of Christ and Christ is under the head of God the Father. This point about Christ being under the headship of God is not developed here in this passage, but it does help to instruct us about the nature of this headship arrangement. In Philippians 2 we have this instruction, **“Have this mind among your selves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”** Christ Himself was subordinate to God the Father and did not seek equality with the Father. **Even though he is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and upholds the universe by the power of His word** (Hebrews 1:3). We get a picture in these two passages about how this headship works. We will come back to this thought later when we look at the image and glory of God in verses 7 and 8.

v. 4. *Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.*

Verse 4 would have been a culture shock for the Jews of Paul’s time. If Paul had been writing to a Jewish church it would have been more difficult for the men to follow these teachings than the women, because traditionally both men and women wore head coverings. Paul himself would have had the custom of wearing a head covering when at the synagogue in much the same way the orthodox Jews do today. We must understand that this passage was meant to speak to the men just as much as to the women. He even mentions the men first. It is strange how today we often overlook this part of the text. It

seems just as important that men not cover their heads as it is for women to wear a covering. Paul is saying that it is shameful for men to wear a hat or head covering when praying or prophesying, because it does not properly honor his headship relationship with Christ.

v. 5. *But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as if her head were shaven.*

Verse 5 is the continuation and converse of verse 4. If a woman prays or prophesies without a covering on her head, then it is just as disgraceful as if she were bald. She would not be properly honoring her headship relationship with men and with Christ.

v. 6. *For if a woman will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a woman to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.*

Although in the ancient world the customs of dress varied, the women of all cultures allowed their hair to grow long. Short hair was a sign of grief or disgrace. Sometimes women’s hair was cut off as punishment for a crime. It was not until this past century that women began to cut their hair short and not be ashamed about it. Paul uses two different words here for the removal of the hair, both shorn (to cut off with scissors) or shaven (with a razor). Paul was saying that it is universally accepted that it is disgraceful or shameful for a woman to have her hair cut in this way. Since it is shameful to have her hair removed, let her be covered.

v. 7. *For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man.*

Up until now Paul was simply giving instructions. He was saying do this and don’t do that. Here in verse 7 he begins to explain the reasons behind the instructions. Paul is explaining the head covering for women and the absence of a head covering for men as a symbol. He explains that men and women are themselves symbols, point-

ing to the purposes for which they were created. When he says that man is the image of God he is referring us to Genesis 1 where it says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” When Paul adds “and glory” he is using the sense of honor and majesty in contrast with the dishonor he associated with a man’s covered head. The majesty of God belongs to men according to the mandate, “Let them have dominion,” and for a man this is part of what it means to be in the image of God. Man was created to symbolize God’s dominion here on earth. But the woman is not designed to represent God in the same way as the man does. Instead she is the glory of the man. In the same way that man is the glory (or honor and majesty) of God, the woman is the glory of man. She reflects the glory of the man by her submission. In another epistle Paul says that in this submission she also symbolizes her submission to the authority of God. This inherent symbolism is what God intended from the beginning of creation. It was not some new concept just for the New Testament church or the Christians at Corinth.

v. 8. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. v. 9. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

Again the apostle is reemphasizing the created order and purpose of men and women. Man was created for God and is His glory, and woman was created for man and is the glory of man. The covered head of the women and the uncovered head of men is a symbol then of their submission to the order that God has designed and created. As the image of God’s authority, a man should not dress like a woman, because this would involve a symbolical violation of his headship.

v. 10. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

For this reason refers to the preceding verses. Because of the angels is an additional reason. The NIV says, “**For this reason and because of the angels, a**

woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.” The word *power* in the KJV means a symbol of authority. The head covering is a personal acknowledgement of the fact that she is under authority, that she recognizes the God-given created order. The use of the word *authority* is very interesting here. It seems that some of the women in the Corinthian church maintained that in Christ, women should have the authority or right or permission to behave like men without the usual restrictions of dress and behavior. Sounds like what we hear today. The word *authority* was a catchword that they used, and so Paul picks up on that and turns it around as if to say, “Yes, women do have authority—the authority that God has set over them. Let them wear a head covering as a symbol of that authority rather than claim an authority of their own. When a woman wears a head covering or a symbol of authority, then she has true power, because she is operating in the sphere that God has ordained for her.”

The angels mentioned here are an interesting study. Not everyone agrees why they are mentioned or what they have to do with headship. We do not understand the ministry of angels nearly as well as the early church. Angelology is not studied very often by the church today, but I find the study of angels very interesting. I am sure that the Corinthian church knew exactly what Paul was talking about when he mentioned angels. For a little bit of context let’s look at other places Paul mentions angels.

1 Corinthians 4:9, “For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.”

And in **1 Timothy 3:16** Paul writes about Jesus and says, “**He was manifest in the flesh, vindicated by the spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up to glory.**”

In the Book of Revelation angels are

seen as assisting the saints with their prayers. **In Revelation 8:2-4 John says, “Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.”**

In all these references it seems that angels have a role as observers of the saints or messengers for the saints to God. In Jewish tradition and also in the early church tradition, angels were said to be present when the saints were worshiping. Look at **Hebrews 12:22. “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festive gathering. And to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.”** Here angels are portrayed as watching and joining in with the worship of the saints. When we worship here on earth we are actually engaged in spiritual worship with those saints who have already gone to heaven and with the angels. The early church’s understanding was that any offense against good order or propriety offended the angels, perhaps causing them to depart and affecting their ministry to us as mediators between us and God. Perhaps the covered head of the woman has some special significance for the angels and would be necessary for their blessing and participation in prayer and prophesying.

I think this is the most plausible explanation of this verse although I would be quick to allow for other interpretations.

v. 11. Nevertheless (or in any case), in the Lord woman is not independent of the man nor man of woman; v. 12. For as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

Paul is now supplementing or reinforcing his argument by stating the general principle underlying it. That is that in the grand scheme of things there is really no such thing as an independent woman, or an independent man. Both are necessary in order to fulfill God’s design and purpose. There is nothing to be gained by either sex pretending that the one can be independent of the other or pretending to be equal to each other. Woman owes her existence to man because she was created from his rib, and man owes his existence to woman through birth, but God created them both. Both men and women are intricately dependent on each other.

v. 13. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

So what do you think? Is it a good idea for women to pray to God without the symbol of her submission to His order of authority? Notice that prophesy is not mentioned here. This might indicate that praying, not prophesying, is the thing Paul was most concerned about with respect to the women.

v. 14. Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, v. 15. but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering.

By “nature” Paul probably means our natural inclinations when judging what is proper for each sex. He uses an analogy here to further emphasize the truth he is trying to teach. What he is saying is that the headship order and the symbolism of that order are natural and transcend whatever cultural practices or customs are in place. Even in our culture today with all its “liberated” women, hair is still a woman’s glory. Just look at how many millions of dollars are spent each year by women in this country taking care of their hair. Men, on the other hand, have always had shorter hair. Long hair is regarded as effeminate. It requires much grooming; it interferes with vigorous physical work;

and some would say that in the event of a fight it is much easier to get a hold of. It is therefore unmanly by nature. When a man wears long hair it is a universal symbol of rebellion. The same way with women who shave their heads or cut their hair very short. This is not just a recent phenomenon. What Paul is saying here is that even in the natural world woman is given a kind of covering which is different from that of the man.

v. 16. *If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.*

With this he brings this subject to conclusion. He points back to the way he introduced the subject. He appeals to them on the basis that this is a churchwide practice or teaching. A similar appeal is made in Chapter 14:33 when he says, **“As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent.”** By this verse he assures the Corinthians that this teaching is not just for them but for all the churches of God. He is not just picking on them.

Now let's look at some ways people object to and misinterpret this passage.

Some people simply disregard this portion of Scripture entirely. These people are the same ones that do not believe that the Bible is anything more than a good storybook. They pick and choose which parts of it they want to believe.

But for those who hold to the inerrancy and authority of all Scripture there is another objection. These people study this passage and conclude that the headship order is ordained by God (which it most certainly is) but that the specific application of head coverings was a cultural thing that does not apply to us today.

Let's examine that one for a minute. First of all Paul makes no reference to any kind of cultural significance. He actually does the opposite. He points to the creation order and the natural symbol of head covering as represented by long and short hair. These things transcend cultures. In fact what he was teaching actually was at odds with many cultures of that time. We

have already mentioned the Jewish custom of head coverings for men which Paul is teaching against here. It is also understood that it was a custom for the Greek Corinthian women to be veiled when out in public, but to take off their veils when worshiping their gods. This is probably why Paul's instructions were specifically about praying and prophesying. The way the Greek verb tenses are written indicate that what he was actually saying was **continue** to have your head covered when you are praying or prophesying. Furthermore this was a practice that was observed by all the churches in the early church no matter what their cultural background. For example, the Roman Christians painted pictures of veiled women in the catacombs. Ever since then, the church as a whole interpreted this passage as having no cultural significance at least up until the last 50 or 100 years. We should not be viewed as being different or unusual for holding to this teaching. We are simply holding to the traditional interpretation. For the last 2000 years the church has practiced this. We should be asking others why they feel the need to reject this longstanding interpretation. They are the ones that are different. It is also interesting to note that the emergence of the feminist movement of the 50s and 60s coincided with the attempt to explain away the application of the headship principle. I believe this is probably significant and should tell us something.

Another way people attempt to explain this passage is by misunderstanding the word *tradition* or *teaching* in verse 2. They say that this was simply a first-century man-made tradition. What they don't understand is that the language Paul used here was much stronger than simply a man-made tradition. This word refers to doctrines of the faith or church. Elsewhere, when Paul uses this term, he is describing doctrines that are not optional, like the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Most Bible scholars who are serious about proper interpretation will come to

the conclusion that the teachings of this passage and the practice of it do indeed transcend culture. There is no other way to do justice to this passage. For these people another argument arises. They argue by using verse 15 that the woman's long hair *suffices* for her covering. They say, "Yes, we agree that this passage teaches a God-ordained headship order and, yes, the application of a head covering does transcend culture, but the hair is the woman's head covering." It is interesting to note that most of the same people who use this argument as justification for dropping the wearing of a covering are within a few years sporting short hair as well. I am not talking about women who have never been taught and who don't understand this passage. I am talking about women who have been taught and look for an excuse to take it off. If long hair is indeed the covering, then wear long hair! But it is obvious from their behavior that the issue is not really the veiling itself, but rather a rebellion against this God-ordained order.

You see, it all depends on whether you believe the Bible is authoritative or not. If you do not believe that the Bible speaks accurately and authoritatively about this subject then you have no reason to believe that it speaks accurately or authoritatively about anything, including creation or salvation or anything else. That is one reason why this passage is so important, because what we do with this passage will indicate how we interpret all the rest of Scripture.

If you do believe the Bible to be the inspired and authoritative Word of God, then all that is left to do is to properly interpret and understand it. This exercise is not the same as simply listening to or reading what a couple commentators or preachers have to say about a passage and then saying you understand and interpret it properly. No, this takes careful word study using the original languages as much as possible, and taking every verse in its context and comparing it with other verses.

In the passage we are discussing, for

instance, we have the statement about her hair being a covering. If this were the only verse that we had in reference to this subject we would necessarily conclude that her hair is the only covering necessary. This is exactly what many modern commentators and preachers do. They look at this one verse by itself and refuse to give the surrounding context much consideration. This same method of biblical interpretation, if used elsewhere in Scripture, makes room for all sorts of devious conclusions.

But if we examine this verse in light of its immediate context and in light of the whole book of 1 Corinthians and in light of the cultural and historical significance, we must come to a different conclusion—that is, if language or words mean anything.

If we look at verse 6, we find that it would be impossible for the hair to be the only covering.

"If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head" (NIV).

If we use the logic of those people mentioned above, then we must conclude that what this verse is saying is that "if a woman doesn't have her head covered with hair, then she should cut her hair off." How can you cut off something that you do not have? And by the way, this verse is very clear in the original language so don't come back with, "Well, it must have been translated wrong."

Then the issue becomes, How do we reconcile these two verses? They must agree for God cannot contradict Himself. In order to settle this issue, then we must look a little deeper into the context and language. Notice verse 6 is an explicit instruction: "If she won't do this then she should do this." Verse 15 by contrast is a part of an analogy. Paul is using the analogy of the natural world in verses 14 and 15 to illustrate a spiritual truth. "Does not nature itself teach you?" Teach us what? That there is a natural difference between

men and women. Long hair for men is considered distasteful, but for a woman it is considered beautiful or glorious (even in today's world).

The rules of sound Biblical interpretation (or any interpretation for that matter) require that we give more weight to the instructive parts of a text than to the analogical parts of the text. So we need to find a way to understand verse 15 that doesn't negate or contradict what was said in verses 5 and 6. Because verses 14 and 15 are an analogy, I believe the best way to understand them is to realize that Paul was comparing the natural covering of long hair for women and short hair for men to the symbolic covering of the headship order. **“That is why a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head—because of the angels” —verse 10.**

We can also understand that in the historical and cultural context, women with shaved heads were a disgrace and men with long hair were a disgrace. So there was certainly no need for Paul to be convincing the women not to cut off their hair or for the men to let their hair grow long. That is not the issue here at all. It is simply taken for granted in verses 5-6 and verses 14-15 that such cropped or shaved hair would be disgraceful, and so everyone agreed that a woman's head should be covered. And if there is something especially suitable about a woman's head being covered naturally, then she should be glad to wear a symbolic head covering in addition to the naturally long hair. But if she does not like a symbolic head covering, well then, let her shear off her natural covering (hair) also.

I do not think these verses can make sense any other way. Almost every biblical scholar who is faithful to the text comes out at the same place on this interpretation. And this is the way the entire church has interpreted it since it was written. It is only in the last 100 years that any serious attempt has been made to isolate and misinterpret verse 15 at the expense of verse 6.

Then there are those who say, “Okay, I believe that the head covering applies to all

cultures and that the hair alone is not enough, but I should only have to wear it at church.” So where do they get that? Well, our text specifically mentions praying and prophesying as times when the headship order is to be observed. If we study closely we will discover that it cannot be limited only to times of corporate worship. First, we have the instructions that this headship order is a creation order. That means that it is in effect all the time from the beginning of creation. Secondly, we notice that immediately after this discussion of headship Paul writes in verses 17 and 18, “but when you come together.” It is clear that in the chapters and verses before verse 17 he has been primarily writing about issues that pertained to life outside the gathered assembly, and after verse 17 and in the following chapters, he specifically addresses issues that pertained to church life as the believers met together.

Furthermore, in Chapter 14 Paul explicitly commands women not to prophesy in church. So why would he command the women to wear a head covering when prophesying in church and then three chapters later forbid them to prophesy in church? Now this doesn't mean that a woman cannot prophesy anywhere. So obviously the praying and prophesying have to do with more than just church. As I mentioned earlier, the Greek verb tenses indicate that what he was saying to the Corinthian women was, “Continue to have your head covered when you pray or prophesy. Or do not take off your head covering when you do these things.” You see the practice of the non-Christian Greek women was to take off their veiling when they worshiped or prayed to their gods, but to wear them at other times when they were in public. This is why he specifically needed to address these two activities. So we can conclude that the practical applications of this passage must necessarily apply to other times and places outside of an official church function.

How about those who say, “Well, why can't we come up with some other more

culturally acceptable symbol to represent headship or how about if we wear a small ‘token’ head covering as a symbol of a head covering?” Notice that according to our text the head covering is already a symbol, so if we did this then we would have a symbol of a symbol. Also, the text clearly indicates that the head is to be covered. What does covered mean? *Covered* in the Greek meant something that wraps or is thrown around and hangs down, something which conceals. How can some other symbol do that? How can a two-inch “token” covering do that? In addition, the head covering was a universal symbol which was understood by the entire early church. When they saw a woman’s veiled head they knew what that meant. If we start using all sorts of different types of symbols how will anybody know which symbol is which? I am not suggesting that all head coverings need to be identical. But if we use something other than an actual head covering as a substitute, then the symbolism is lost.

Now let’s look at some practical applications.

First, let me be quick to point out that, unfortunately, this passage and others have been used incorrectly to justify the perpetration of all sorts of abuse and oppression of women. This has happened even in Anabaptist churches. But this abuse should not deter us from a proper understanding and application of this and other passages that talk about headship. Just because there are terrible abuses of the automobile doesn’t prevent us from getting in one and driving even though we know that many accidents occur. While we decry the abuses that have taken place in the name of headship we must not give in to those that want to throw the whole idea out.

That brings up a point which I have alluded to earlier. That is, that men have not done very well at applying this passage to themselves. This passage is talking in pretty strong terms to men and women. What about the uncovered head for a man? How do we wear hats? When do we wear them and when do we take them off?

If we are going to be consistent and expect our sisters to wear their head covering most of the time, then we need to avoid wearing hats at those same times. For far too many men the hat has become a fashion symbol. That is one reason why advertising on hats is so effective.

So when can we wear hats as men? If we are going to be consistent, then the only time men should wear a hat is if under the same circumstances a woman would also wear some additional protection on her head. For example, sometimes we men need protection from the elements; i.e., cold wind or hot sun. Other times we need protection from falling objects; i.e., a hard hat. At times we may even need protection from dirt or dust. In all these cases a woman would need an additional head covering as well, so it is still consistent. What is not consistent is the unnecessary wearing of a hat or other head covering when it obviously is not for protection but rather as a fashion statement (example, a baseball cap worn to social functions) or nonconformity to the fashion statement (example, the black hats that many Old Order groups require).

First Corinthians 11 actually speaks just as forcefully to the men as it does to the women. In fact, in Paul’s time this passage would have been offensive to many men, particularly Jewish and Roman men who had the custom of wearing head coverings when they worshiped their respective deities. I find it very interesting that we often overlook or underemphasize the role and responsibility of men in this matter. It is just as important that men keep their heads uncovered as it is for a woman to keep her head covered.

We as men have not done very well at this. Another area we have not done very well with is accepting and acting within our God-given responsibilities as heads. The feminists would have us to believe that men are weak and ineffective and women can do it better. Too often this is sadly true, because we men have failed to act Biblically. If we are going to expect our

women to properly fill their role in submission then we must lead.

Now for the sisters, what type of head covering should we expect? As mentioned earlier, the Greek word for covering would seem to suggest some type of hanging or flowing veil rather than a cap. This was also the way the early church practiced it. I would not want to be dogmatic on this, because I believe that what is ultimately important is the symbolism of the covered head and the exact type or style of covering is not so much in view in this passage. There are no instructions for us about what kind of material it is to be made of or what color it should be. The only instruction is that the head is to be covered. This means that some very small “symbolic” head covering would not suffice.

There is something that I take issue with on our practice of this in Mennonite churches. I will go out on a limb and say that I believe the head covering is not just for Christian women. Now my Beachy friends will appreciate me for saying that, but our traditional Mennonite practice has been that a woman doesn't wear a head covering until she has accepted Christ or is baptized. I can find no support for this in Scripture. The reasons Paul gives for wearing a head covering point back to the creation order. They do not seem to be directly related to any kind of salvation experience. I believe our traditional practice as Mennonites is at least extra-Biblical and quite possibly anti-Biblical. I would be quick to point out that a non-Christian woman is not going to be very likely to submit herself to God-ordained authority in this way so she probably will not be wearing a head covering. What does concern me, however, are our young women who have been raised in Christian homes and have been taught proper headship but are not yet Christians. Shouldn't they be wearing this symbol of authority? The other thing that happens is that we begin to equate the wearing of a veiling with being a Christian. It becomes a works thing, and by inference we teach our children that all those who don't wear it

must not be Christians.

In closing, let me admonish us to not confuse form with function. To merely place a covering upon one's head does not make one submissive. I have met some veiled women who were violating the principles of this passage and I have met some uncovered men who were also violating the headship order. The scribes and Pharisees were obsessed with keeping certain forms, but in function they completely missed the point. Our Saviour had some very strong words for them. I am afraid we as Mennonites have failed in this area. When we can look at a woman's head covering and know what specific church group she is a part of, I think that tells us that we have been too obsessed with the form. We want to make sure that it is just so. We do not seem to be as concerned about whether or not she is actually following the principles behind the form.

In addition, if someone does not wear a head covering, we shouldn't automatically assume that they are not submissive or spiritual. If this person has been faithfully taught this passage and understands it correctly and still refuses to wear a head covering or to keep his head uncovered, then they are being disobedient to Scripture, and that cannot possibly be fulfilling the principle of submission in this passage. But we dare not use the presence or absence of proper application of this passage as a litmus test for a person's spirituality or submission. It may be that they have never properly understood it.

I am thankful that even as we Anabaptists seem to be looking for ways to minimize this teaching, the Christian world in general is waking up to this issue. There is an incredible amount of interest in this subject outside of our Anabaptist circles. And we can learn a lot from some of these people who do not come to this subject with the same traditional hang-ups that we often have.

God bless us as we strive to fill our God-given roles in His headship order! ■

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Separated Unto God

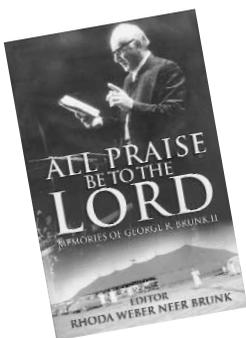
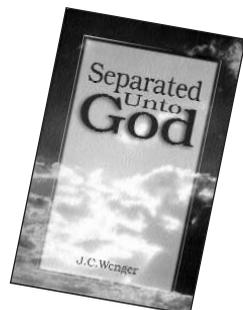
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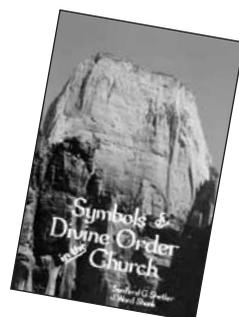
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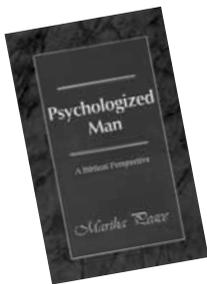
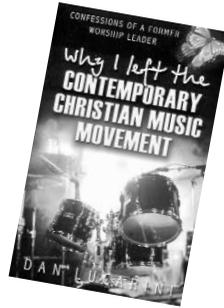
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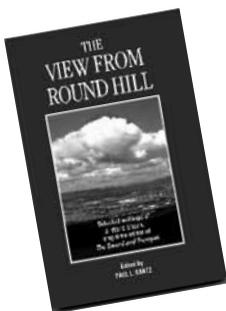
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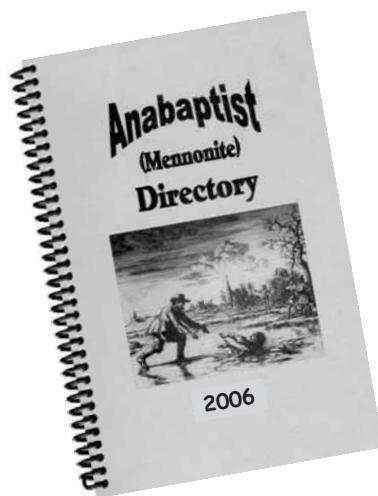
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