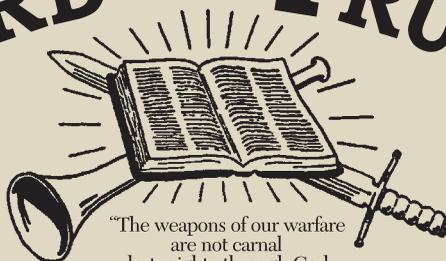


The SWORD and TRUMPET

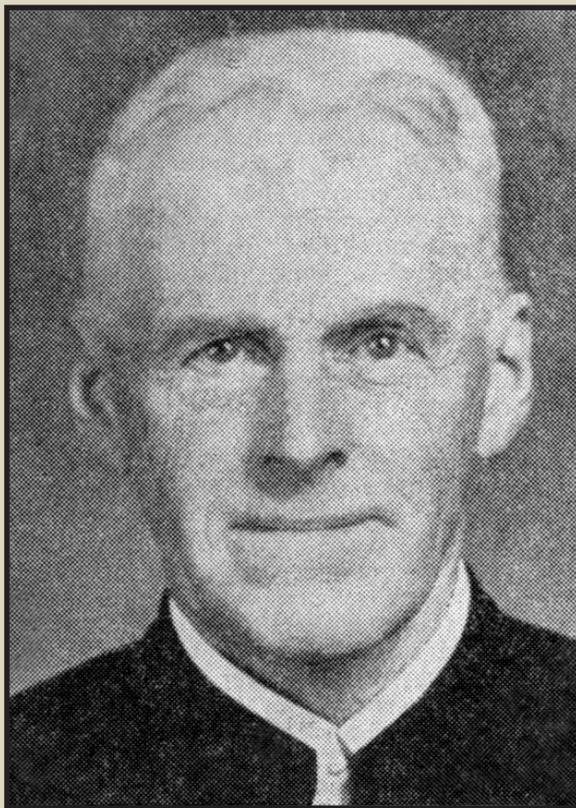
“Blow ye
the Trumpet
and warn
the People.”



“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



SAMUEL H. RHODES

JULY 2006

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Person of the Month:

Samuel H. Rhodes (1880-1957)

Samuel H. Rhodes represented one of the oldest families in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. We can well believe that he was a descendant of Preacher John Rhodes, who with most of his family, was massacred by Indians in 1766. Preacher John Rhodes lived near Luray, Va., in what is now Page County, where the largest settlement of Mennonites was made in the 18th century. As the original settlement of Mennonites declined, members of the Rhodes family moved to Rockingham County.

The old Rhodes homestead for the S. H. Rhodes family was the Lineweaver place one mile southeast of Weavers Church. Perhaps Peter Rhodes, the grandfather of Samuel H. Rhodes, was the first member of the family to live here. Of the Peter Rhodes family, Solomon married Susannah Heatwole. They began housekeeping at the homeplace where Samuel was born to them on March 24, 1880. Later they moved to a farm near New Erection which in time became the estate of the subject of this sketch.

Little is known about Samuel's early years. At the close of the summer session of the Sunday school in September, 1895, his teacher, J. D. Hartman, gave him a little book entitled, *Royal Invitation or Daily Thoughts*, as a reward "for good behavior, regular attendance, and good lesson during the session." That same year he accepted the "Royal Invitation," and was received into the church.

Samuel H. Rhodes was ordained to the ministry on January 3, 1902, at the age of 22. Soon after his ordination he, with Jacob A. Heatwole, who had been ordained at the same time, took a trip to Pennsylvania. Rhodes remembered that he became quite tired on this trip; he developed a cough which was later identified as whooping cough.

As a preacher, Rhodes felt he needed more education. Consequently in 1904 and 1905 he spent a year and a half in Bible study at Goshen College. While there he preached at the college five or six times. That was a pretty good record for a young Virginia preacher. The summer months were spent at Sterling, Ill.

His work in the Middle District of the Virginia Conference was not confined to one church. He took his turn preaching in all the churches of the district—the home base and the mountain churches. In the summer of 1910 he and his family lived at the mission home near Job, W. Va., where he served the churches in that area.

As a church leader he took an active interest in the total program of the church. He attended the first Bible term held by eastern Mennonites at Alexandria, Va., in 1914. He did some special Bible term teaching after the school was moved to Harrisonburg. He was a member of the religious welfare committee of Eastern Mennonite College for many years.

He took an active interest in the work of the Home Mission Board, the Virginia Board of Missions and Charities, and also in that of the General Board. He frequently attended the sessions of the General Mission Board and of General Conference. He lent his support in the organization and operation of the Virginia Aid Plans. He served as a member of the Sunday School Committee for the Middle District Sunday schools.

As the work of the Middle District expanded, especially after 1900, there was need for two bishops to serve the churches. Bishop L. J. Heatwole called for help in the office in

(continued on page 4)

DID JESUS TEACH RECENT CREATION?

by Henry M. Morris

Most everyone has been taught all through their school years that the earth, life, animals, and man have all been developing from primordial beginnings over billions of years of natural evolution. Many have tried to “baptize” this process, so to speak, by calling it “theistic” evolution or “progressive” creation saying that God may have used evolution as His process of creation.

Because of this ubiquitous indoctrination, even many evangelical Christians have felt they must conform to this evolutionary worldview, especially in relation to the so-called “deep time” that is so essential to evolutionism. One respected leader of the “Intelligent Design” movement, for example, recently wrote to me that he would prefer to believe in a “young earth,” but that science had proved that the earth was very old, so he had to go with science. Two other leaders of this I.D. movement told me personally on two separate occasions that they could not even afford to *listen* to my arguments for a young earth because they were afraid they would be convinced and that this would halt their opportunities to speak to college groups and others about Intelligent Design.

So I have written this brief article to show once again that the Lord Jesus Himself believes in recent creation and the youth earth. Assuming that a *Christian* is a person who believes in the deity and inerrant authority of Christ, it would seem that this fact should be sufficient to convince him.

What I will do here, therefore, is to list three key reasons for concluding that our Lord Jesus Christ believed and taught literal recent creation of all things essentially instantaneously by the omnipotent command of God, who “*spake, and it was*

done” (Psalm 33:9).

1. The Bible nowhere allows for long ages.

One can search the Scriptures (see my book *Biblical Creationism* for proof) from beginning to end without finding even a hint of evolution or long ages. To Jesus, every “jot or one tittle” of Scripture was divinely inspired (Matthew 5:18) and He warned us severely against adding any other words to it (Revelation 22:18). The Bible, therefore, would certainly not leave the vital doctrine of creation open to human speculation.

2. The Bible explicitly states how and when creation took place.

Although many evangelicals have long equivocated as to the meaning of the “days” of creation, this type of ad hoc handling of Scripture is never justified in the context, and Christ Himself would never have interpreted them as indefinite ages of some kind. Not only is “day” (Hebrew, *yom*) defined in this context the first time it is used (Genesis 1:5), but the writer conclusively restricted its interpretation to the literal meaning by numbering the days (“first day,” “second day,” etc.) and by indicating their boundaries (“evening and morning”), both of which restrictions elsewhere in the Old Testament limit the meaning to literal days. The question seems to be even more firmly settled when God wrote with His own finger that “*in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the [seventh] day, and hallowed it*” (Exodus 20:11), thereby basing our calendar’s seven-day week on this primeval creation week. Jesus referred

to this divine example when He said that *“the sabbath was made for man”* (Mark 2:27) to meet our weekly need of rest from work.

3. The Lord Jesus recognized that men and women existed right from the beginning.

The current opinion is that the cosmos evolved about 16 billion years ago, the earth about 4.6 billion, primitive life perhaps two billion, and human life about one million years ago. The Lord Jesus, on the other hand (who was *there*, having Himself created all things—note John 1:1-3), taught that men and women were made essentially at the same time as the cosmos itself, when He said that *“from the beginning God . . . made them male and female”* (Mark 10:6). *“The beginning”* obviously was a reference to Genesis 1:1, and Christ was specifically citing Genesis 1:26.

On another occasion, speaking especially of Adam’s son Abel, He referred to *“the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world”* (Luke 11:50, 51), thereby acknowledging that Abel was the first prophet, martyred in the very first generation—not 4.6 billion years after the formation of the earth. Jesus also said that Satan, using Cain to slay Abel, *“was a murderer from the beginning”* (John 8:44).

Note also that the father of John the Baptist, prophesying when filled with the Holy Spirit, said that God’s holy prophets had been predicting a coming Saviour *“since the world began”* (Luke 1:70). Then the Apostle Peter later preached that the second coming of Christ and the ultimate removal of the great Curse on the earth had even been events that *“God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began”* (Acts 3:21). The Apostle Paul wrote that evidence of God as Creator should have been *“clearly seen”* (by men, of course) ever since *“the creation of the world.”*

There can be no reasonable doubt that Jesus was what evolutionists today (both

theistic and atheistic) would call a “young-earth creationist.” It would seem that this should settle the question for all true Christians, who should certainly—on the authority of Christ Himself—completely reject the notion of geologic ages.

But they don’t! For one thing, not all who consider themselves Christians really believe the Bible, especially its unpopular teachings. Unfortunately, many who think they are Bible-believing Christians have become adept at “wresting” the Scriptures (note 2 Peter 3:17), even the recorded words of Jesus and the apostles, to make them conform to the scientism of evolutionary speculation. As noted above, there is not the slightest suggestion of millions and billions of years anywhere in the Bible when it is taken simply to mean what it says. That is why we “young-earth creationists” have to keep on reemphasizing the pervasive Bible teaching of just *thousands* of years of earth and cosmic history.

But what are we supposed to do when the Bible disagrees with the majority of scientists on such matters?

We are to believe the Bible—that’s what! When the teachings of men conflict with the Word of God, it would be wise to go with God.

Furthermore, there are now thousands of scientists (fully credentialed with post-graduate degrees from accredited universities) who have become convinced believers in recent creation. No doubt we are still a minority, but it is a growing minority. There are several hundred such scientists in the Creation Research Society, not to mention those on our ICR faculty as well as those associated with numerous other creationist organizations around the world.

There is also a rapidly growing body of scientific data that not only shows the impossibility of macroevolution but also much that repudiates the so-called evidences of “billions of years.” Creationist geologists have been developing an abundance of evidence of global catastrophism

instead of uniformitarianism in earth history—thus confirming the Biblical record of the great Flood as the major explanation for the fossil-bearing rocks in the earth's crust, instead of having to invent imaginary long ages of evolution to account for them.

It is possible now even to amass a list of dozens of worldwide natural processes (e.g., accumulation of salt in the sea) which, even on uniformist assumptions, will yield ages much too brief for evolution. Thus, even without referring to the Bible at all, it is possible to make an impressive case for recent creation. One cannot determine the *exact* age of the earth by science, of course, and these various processes may yield various values, but all prove too small for evolutionism to be possible.

With the supposed exception of radiometric dating, that is. The decay of uranium into lead, rubidium into strontium, and a few other such processes can be made to show extremely long ages, so radioactive decay processes have been considered by evolutionists to be firm proof of the billions of years.

But Christians need to remember that such calculations, like all the others, are based on the arbitrary assumption of uniformitarianism, which not only is unprovable but contrary to the Bible. The Apostle Peter calls it “willing ignorance” (note 2 Peter 3:3-6) when this assumption ignores the world-changing impact of special creation of all things in the beginning and the worldwide geologic impact of the global Deluge in the days of Noah.

Furthermore, the forthcoming publications of the ICR/CRS RATE Initiative will show strong scientific evidence that even these radioactive decay processes really provide convincing arguments that the earth is thousands of years old—not billions!

Therefore, we plead once again with our Christian theistic evolutionists, progressive creationists, gap creationists, and intelligent design minimalists to

come back to the Bible for their view of the world and its history. We should most certainly believe the words of our Lord Jesus Christ on this vital subject. “*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord,*” He might well say, “*and [believe] not the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46). ■

—Reprinted with permission from the June 2005 issue of *Back to Genesis*.

SAMUEL H. RHODES . . . cont'd.

1914 and as a result Christian Good was ordained. He was able to serve only two years. Then in 1919 Heatwole called again and S. H. Rhodes was ordained to the office of bishop on March 19, 1919. From that time to the death of Bishop Heatwole in 1932, Rhodes was the junior bishop of the district. But as time went on, Bishop Heatwole turned more and more of the work over to Rhodes, so that the transfer was completed by 1932.

From 1932-1947, Bishop Rhodes bore the burden of the leadership of the Middle District churches—the care of all the churches was upon him. This apprenticeship under Bishop L. J. Heatwole had helped prepare him for the work.

Quite early in life he witnessed the effects of divisive factors in the church. As a young Christian he had lived through the “Middle District” Trouble (1896-1900). At the close of the struggle, when members of the church were asked to come into the council room to identify themselves with the church, Rhodes entered the room as Bishop Anthony P. Heatwole was pleading with Preacher Gabriel D. Heatwole to remain with the church.

This scene made a deep impression on Rhodes' mind. He never wanted to witness anything like it again. Under his bishop leadership divisive forces mounted at times but he was able to weather the storm and keep the church together. It was his policy not to take sides in matters of controversy. (continued on page 6)

From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

Honoring Parents

by C. J. Mahaney

Who do your children most admire? Who would they say is truly great? Who do they speak about most passionately, most often? Who are they most enthusiastic about? An actor or musician? An athlete? A political figure?

Wouldn't a better choice be someone in your church? The local church is filled with truly great people. Every Sunday morning in the local church, true greatness is on full display in those who are faithfully serving others for God's glory. Teach your children to discern and admire true greatness there. Don't just passively attend the Sunday meeting; prepare your children for it and teach them to admire the men and women all around them who are truly great.

After the church service, talk together about the examples of greatness you've seen. That's a good topic for Sunday mealtime conversation—much better than subtle put-downs of the style and substance of the sermon

or the worship songs, or critiques of the appearance or behavior of the people who were there.

And there's an even closer location to look for greatness. If I could speak privately to your children, here's what I'd want to tell them. I'd say, "Have you noticed that true greatness is living under the same roof with you? True greatness is right there in the form of your dad and your mom who serve *you*."

I would tell them, "Your parents have served you unselfishly and continuously, and are therefore great in God's eyes. Are they great in *your* eyes? You may admire some star athlete or performer, but that person does *not* rank higher than your parents on God's celebrity list."

I would tell children everywhere that their enthusiasm for their parents should far exceed their enthusiasm for anybody else. There's no one they should admire or respect more. Because

I'm sure that for most of them, their parents in different ways are truly great in the eyes of God because they serve others for His glory, not only in their home but in their church as well. That's where true greatness can be found again and again.

The biblical command to honor father and mother is, in essence, a command to recognize true greatness. It's a command with a promise, and it's a wise command, because to honor parents is to recognize true greatness. So children are wise to obey it.

I would also remind your children of this: "In all probability, you'll one day stand before a casket that bears the lifeless body of your father or mother. That day is coming; it's inevitable, inescapable. And you'll know grief that day, as you should—grief is godly, and grief is a gift. But something I do *not* want you to experience that day is regret—regret over having failed to honor them, knowing that now it's too late.

"So listen up and wise up and don't be a fool. Honor true greatness. Honor your father and your mother. Make it your godly ambition that between this moment and that moment when you stand before their lifeless form, you will express your love and appreciation for them in countless creative ways."

And then this question: "Do your parents already know your deep love and respect? Have they actually heard you express it? If not, ask God to forgive you for your arrogance. Examine your heart and receive His forgiveness and change, by grace, right now. Honor your parents—and feel the pleasure of God."

That's what I would say to them. But since I'm not there to do it—if your children need to hear these things, will you tell them? ■

—Excerpted from *Humility: True Greatness*
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SAMUEL H. RHODES . . . cont'd.

Rhodes was a leader among the Virginia preachers. He usually put a great deal of enthusiasm into his preaching. As he worked into his sermons, or as he warmed up, he spoke more loudly and would make a powerful appeal to the church. His emphatic words were riveted to the hearts of his hearers by appropriate gestures.

Bishop Rhodes called for help in his office in the 1940s. On April 6, 1947, Daniel W. Lehman was called, and the gradual transfer of responsibility from a senior to a junior bishop was begun all over again.

Bishop Rhodes suffered a severe heart attack in November, 1954. For a time he lay between life and death. He rallied sufficiently, however, so that he could call for the "elders of the church" to anoint him. How glad he was to see the brethren with whom he had served, coming to perform the special service for him. The Lord did raise him up, his life was spared for three more years, during which time he was an inspiration to the church even though he did not perform many of the duties of his office. At this time in his life he felt that he had not read the Scriptures in the churches as effectually as he should have. This he regarded as one of his failures as a minister. He tried to make improvement along this line. When opportunity afforded, he read the Word with great emphasis and enthusiasm.

In 1901 Samuel H. Rhodes married Priscilla M. Holsinger, the daughter of Noah Holsinger, and granddaughter of Bishop John Geil, of the New Dale Church community of the Northern District. Their children were Amos H. Rhodes, Delphia Rhodes, Ina Mae (Mrs. Samuel Coffman), and Mary Esther Rhodes, who died as a child.

Bishop Rhodes passed to his reward on October 2, 1957. His favorite Scripture quotation was 1 Peter 1:3-5. He often quoted this Scripture as he brought comfort to those who were suffering. Read it.

—Harry A. Brunk, from 1958 *Mennonite Yearbook*

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

JULY 2, 2006

Scriptural Marriage Relationships

1 Corinthians 7:1-15

For the month of July we continue our study in 1 Corinthians. In the passages between our last lesson and today's, Paul speaks to the discipline of the unchaste (Chapter 5) and instructs regarding litigation (Chapter 6). In today's lesson from Chapter 7 Paul speaks to proper marital relationships. All of Paul's teaching is geared to encouraging proper conduct in the life of the believer, instructing in inter-personal and brotherhood relationships, and inspiring Christ-likeness. The principles are timeless.

We are not sure of the Corinthians' exact question to Paul (v. 1). However, from the discussion that follows it obviously concerned issues related to marriage. Did they question the validity of marriage in relation to the expected imminent return of Christ (verses 29-31)? Were they questioning, as it would seem from Paul's response, the validity of continuing a marriage between a believer and a non-believer? Were they perhaps questioning the actual purity of legitimate sexual relationships? We don't know. But Paul covers all these areas in his response and lays down timeless principles of marital conduct and relationships.

God instituted marriage. Man has corrupted it. And it is only natural that persons coming to faith out of an immoral society would have questions, as did the Corinthian believers. And many of these questions face new believers today. What does God say about commitment, perma-

nence, responsibilities, etc., in marriage. Is singleness commendable? Paul, under divine inspiration, answers these questions.

The first principle laid down is that it is better to marry than to burn with unfulfilled and uncontrolled sexual desire. Also, within the marriage relationship both husband and wife must respect the desires of the other. Sexual rights must not be denied except by mutual consent and only for the higher cause of spiritual development. To do otherwise is to give Satan an opening for temptation.

Paul also affirms that marriage isn't for everyone and that those capable of living victoriously celibate lives can often accomplish more for Christ's kingdom than can a married person. This passage raises some interesting questions regarding Paul's marital status. But that's beside the point.

Another issue spoken to here is that of the mixed, Christian/non-Christian union. They are to continue to live together, the Christian mate sanctifying the non-Christian and, by living a consistent, love-motivated life, draw the unbeliever to repentance and faith (v. 16 and also 1 Peter 3:1-4).

However, if the unbelieving mate should choose to leave the union, the Christian mate should allow them to go peacefully. But that does not give grounds for remarriage. Marriage is to be a permanent bond, separable only by death. Also, the believer should not give up the faith to keep the marriage bond intact. J. Otis Yoder, in his exposition of 1 Corinthians, *Glory in the Lord*, states: "A continuing relationship with Jesus Christ is more precious than the maintaining of an unequally yoked marriage."

(Be sure to read to the end of the chapter.)

For thought and discussion

1. This lesson could generate some lively class discussion. Be sure to include other New Testament teachings on marriage in your study and discussion.
2. What are some functions within the scope of the larger Christian family that are better carried out by singles than the married?
3. Today's society holds a very low view of marital commitment and fidelity. Think about your responsibility as a Christian couple/family in regard to the need of our day. What can we be doing that we are not to strengthen the view of marriage?
4. How can the church best address the issues of moral laxity in contemporary society? You might want to discuss some attendant issues and their ramifications.
5. How can the church best minister to members married to an unbelieving spouse? Discuss.
6. Be certain with this lesson to affirm the Biblical views regarding marriage, divorce, remarriage.

JULY 9, 2006

Respecting Our Weak Brother

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

At issue in this chapter is the validity of eating meat that has been offered in sacrifice to an idol. Was this acceptable for the believer in Corinth, or was it not? While we do not face that exact issue today, there are some timeless principles laid down here which do apply to inter-relational issues within the brotherhood.

This issue was no doubt another one about which the Corinthian church had written to Paul for advice. And for those Christians having only recently come out of heathendom, it was indeed a major issue. Paul prefaces his response with a

little lesson on the difference between knowledge and love. Knowledge tends to arrogance. Love builds up. And, lest anyone put too much stock in his knowledge, Paul states that he "knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know."

The emphasis here on love and its power to build relationships, sets the stage for Paul's following comments on the issue of meat offered to idols. Regardless of how the individual resolved this issue for himself, respect for his brother's scruples had to be the over-riding consideration. (Note particularly verses 7, 9, and 11.) Also to lay further groundwork for his argument, Paul emphasized what his readers should already have known: that an idol is really nothing, nothing but matter, no content, no power, just a block of wood or stone. The God of heaven is God alone. He is the One to be worshiped and served.

But, Paul goes on to say (v. 7), not everyone yet realized that an idol is nothing and holds no power to taint meat offered in its worship. Then he emphasizes that the issue really isn't meat, but conscience. The eating or not eating of meat in itself garners no special favor with God.

The real issue here is the protection of the conscience of the unenlightened. Suppose, Paul says, your weak brother sees you who with clear conscience "sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish?" It is serious business to run roughshod over the scruples of another, regardless of how unfounded their conviction.

To wound the weak conscience and cause your brother to stumble in his walk of faith, is really to cause offense to Christ, for He died for that person too. How much better to exercise discipline and love, and thus strengthen your own faith and that of your brother.

Paul speaks to this in the closing verse.

In order to avoid offense he will discipline his personal desires and even deny himself legitimate pleasures for the sake of his weak brother. That is the true Christian attitude, an attitude that builds and strengthens brotherhood. That is the attitude we should seek to emulate. (Read also Romans 14:13-23; 1 Corinthians 10:19-33; and Galatians 5:13, 14.)

For thought and discussion

1. Do some serious thinking on the issue mentioned in verse 1 on knowledge vs. charity. Which is the strongest? the most important?
2. What are the dangers of too easily tossing aside long-held traditions or scruples? Perhaps some class discussion on this issue would be good.
3. How should the Christian brotherhood handle the issues of either an overly scrupulous conscience or an attitude of libertarianism?
4. How do we within the Christian brotherhood determine what is acceptable and what is not? Should it be left to individual conscience? Or what? Discuss.
5. Some basic Christian principles are taught in this passage: love, self-discipline, self-denial, tolerance, respect, etc. Think through these carefully and see how your life and attitudes stack up.

JULY 16, 2006

Winning the Christian Race

1 Corinthians 9:24–10:13

In Chapter 9 Paul defends his apostleship and clears himself of any ulterior motives in his ministry to the Corinthian church. Then in our text for today he moves away from instruction on specific issues to challenge discipline and perseverance in running the Christian race. He cites the example of Israel's unfaithfulness to challenge the Corinthian believers to a life of faithfulness and perseverance.

Paul uses the example of an athlete and

his disciplined training to show the importance of continual effort at maintaining one's Christian commitment. The Corinthians were well acquainted with athletes and their training, Corinth being host to the Isthmian Games. The contrast, however, is that success in the Christian race results in an imperishable crown. (See 1 Peter 5:4.) So, Paul says, I discipline my physical appetites so I may run the Christian race unhindered and with an eye on the goal. (Be sure to relate this to the theme of last Sunday's lesson.)

Paul next uses the example of the Israelites to show how equal opportunity does not necessarily mean equal reward. There must be a corresponding commitment to a given opportunity. All the Israelites came out of Egypt, all passed through the Red Sea, all accepted the Mosaic Covenant as their rule of life, all were participants in the same spiritual blessings. "But with many of them God was not well pleased." And why? Because they did not live up to the terms of their covenant with God. They sinned, and God destroyed them in the desert.

So, Paul says to the Corinthians, don't be like them. Learn from their example. Profit from their mistakes. That's why these experiences of Israel were recorded, that subsequent generations would have a ready example to warn them and guide them.

Paul uses various experiences from Israel's wilderness wanderings to show how easily man turns away from God, and the tragic results of doing so. These were well-documented historical experiences which any good Jew would have been familiar with. Paul cites them in a negative sense as instructive for man's learning.

So, do you think you are strong? Then beware. That's when temptation is most likely to overtake you. Are you confident of winning the race? Be alert, tragedy may be lurking just a few footsteps behind.

Perhaps reflecting on Israel's experiences, and definitely relating to the present day, Paul affirms that as we run the

Christian race, and as temptations rear their head, God will be there to give us strength to overcome. Be assured that no temptation devised by man or devil can thwart the overcoming power of God. He is faithful. He will provide an escape route and will show the way to victory.

Run for the prize!

For thought and discussion

1. Draw parallels between physical training and spiritual training. Why are both important? Which is most essential? Why?
2. Translate spiritual disciplines into practical terms. Then discuss.
3. Someone has said that the only thing we learn from history is that we don't learn from history. Why is that so? How can we break that cycle?
4. How can we guard against overconfidence in our Christian experience? What are its dangers?
5. Verse 13 should be memorized and referred to often. It provides comfort and stability as we run the Christian race. God is faithful.

JULY 23, 2006

Cooperation for the Common Good

1 Corinthians 12:1-13

Here again in Chapter 12 Paul was writing to correct deviation in the Corinthian church. It was apparent that spiritual gifts were being misused, misapplied. Paul writes to correct the concept that there was status or stratification in the gifts, conclusions resulting from their former life with its devotion to idols and their supposed powers.

Paul makes it clear that true spiritual gifts are given by the Spirit of God and that while the gifts differed as to function, they were all given with one over-riding purpose—the harmonious functioning of the body of Christ, His church. Barclay

comments: “The church is the body of Christ and the characteristic of a healthy body is that every part in it performs its own function for the good of the whole; but unity does not mean uniformity, and therefore within the church there are differing gifts and differing functions. But every one of them is a gift of the same Spirit and designed, not for the glory of the individual member of the church, but for the good of the whole.” That is a lesson needed in every age. (Be sure to read Chapter 14 also.)

Notice that the gifts are given to complement each other, not to compete. The members of the body are to be unified in purpose, each exercising his individual gift to enhance the whole. One has the word of wisdom, another knowledge, one has the gift of deep faith, one has the healing gift, one has miracle-working power, one has the ability to exhort, another the gift of discernment. Still others have the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. (See also 1 Peter 4:10, 11.)

Was perhaps the gift of tongues listed last on purpose? While it was certainly one of the most glamorous and noticeable, and perhaps the most sought after of the gifts, it also perhaps carried the least value. Notice what Paul says further about this gift in Chapter 14. But just as there are seemingly insignificant and unimportant members of the physical body, yet they nevertheless play a role in the body's smooth functioning. There was no doubt a definite role for tongues in this fledgling church as well.

Notice that Paul says in verse 11 that the distribution of the gifts is the prerogative of God's Spirit. He knows the heart and abilities of man as well as the needs of the local brotherhood. So He gifts and enables accordingly. One should never disparage his gift, nor should he elevate it above another's in importance.

The goal toward which every member should strive is functional harmony of the body, not individual recognition. The

parallel to the human body which Paul draws in the remaining verses of the chapter is instructive. Our physical body parts function in harmony, controlled by the head, working together without individual recognition, for a common purpose. In the church we are one in Christ. Let's each as individual members do our part to achieve a smoothly functioning whole under the direction of our head, Christ. That will bring personal satisfaction, wholesome bodily functionality and, above all, glory to God.

For thought and discussion

1. Do some background study on the reasons and causes for the misuse of gifts among the Corinthian believers.
2. Instead of complaining about our gift, or envying the gift of another, we should be more concerned about exercising it for the benefit of the body of Christ. Are you faithfully exercising your gift?
3. What happens to unity when a competitive spirit develops in the church between those with differing gifts? How can this issue be addressed? avoided?
4. Is the church of today in default if not all of the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 are in evidence? Are all necessary today? Why, or why not?
5. What seems to be most necessary to achieve unity of purpose and function within the Christian brotherhood? Discuss.

JULY 30, 2006

The Way of Love

1 Corinthians 13

After encouraging cooperation in the exercise of useful gifts (Chapter 12), and prior to instruction on the comparative value of the gifts of tongues and prophecy (Chapter 14), Paul inserts this "Hymn of Love" defining "the more excellent way," in which he portrays the manner in which these various gifts are to be used. Pure

love is to be the most prominent aspect and over-riding principle in the exercise of these gifts. Without love as the basis, the gifts fail to accomplish their intended purpose, that of building the body of Christ.

This chapter is easily divided into three sections: verses 1-3 speak to the necessity of love; verses 4-7 to the character of love; and verses 8-13, the permanence of love. The spiritual gifts, as we have observed in Chapter 12, are severally divided by the Holy Spirit for the good of the body, not the elevation of one gift or one member above another.

One may exercise outstanding abilities or make supreme sacrifices and thereby impress others (1-3), but if done only to draw attention to oneself these demonstrations become only hollow, meaningless displays. It is only the motivation of Christ-like love which adds meaning to these expressions and sacrifices. Love lifts the purpose above selfish interests. So, Paul says, love is indispensable in the exercise of one's spiritual gift.

After qualifying the necessity of love, Paul moves on to explain how love behaves. True, self-giving love is patient, kind, non-envious, not boastful or proud, not rude, self-seeking or easily angered. Love keeps no record of wrongs done against it, is sorrowful over iniquity, rejoices in truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. That is the nature of love. It does not seek its own interests, but gives the benefit to others, always seeking the best in every situation and every relationship.

Charity is the consummate Christian attribute. Jesus told His disciples (John 13:35) that, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another." Charity is not fleeting. Prophecies, tongues, knowledge—all will eventually cease to exist. But love will live on because love is the essence of God. And God is eternal.

So, should we seek anything but love? Chapters 12:31 and 14:1 both say we should desire spiritual gifts. They are the

resources God has established for the smooth functioning of the church. And, as these various gifts are exercised within the framework of unselfish Christian love, the church, the body of Christ, will accomplish the purposes for which it was established. It will grow, it will attract others and, most importantly, it will bring honor and glory to God its Sovereign head.

Love never fails.

For thought and discussion

1. Read Chapters 12, 13, and 14 in sequence to observe how they fit

together, and especially to note the importance of Chapter 13 in the total scheme of Paul's teaching.

2. Explain the difference between the world's concept of love and the Christian concept.
3. Be sure to study the fifteen individual characteristics of love outlined in verses 4-7.
4. Why does love outlast all other spiritual qualities?
5. How is this self-giving, Christ-like love acquired and maintained in the believer's life? Discuss. ■

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

A Dying Race

Ed Vitagliano in an article from Agape-Press gives a startling description of a dying race. This race is not some ancient historic people who were wiped out by disease or war. This dying race is European. He quotes Mark Steyn from the book, *The New Criterion*, "Much of what we loosely call the Western world will not survive this century, and much of it will effectively disappear within our lifetimes, including many if not most Western European countries.

The problem: Birth Dearth. Europe, he says "is slowly dying simply by refusing to have enough children to replace the people who die each year." Catholic scholar George Weigel, from the Ethics and Public Policy Center and author of

The Cube and the Cathedral, says Europe is "committing demographic suicide, systematically depopulating itself."

Vitagliano tells us that "for any population to remain stable, it must maintain a birthrate of 2.1 births per woman. That rate provides a replacement for both mother and father, while the .1 covers infant and child mortality. When the birthrate falls below that number, a population goes into decline—unless it invites in large numbers of immigrants. "The 'birth dearth' is what demographers call plummeting birth rates in most of the industrialized world," says culture critic Chuck Colson. "Throughout Western Europe and East Asia, the birth rate is well below 2.1 births per woman . . ."

One sociologist, Ben Wattenberg, says that "never in the last 650 years, since

the time of the Black Plague, have birth and fertility rates fallen so far, so fast, so low, for so long, in so many places.” And Patrick Buchanan in *The Death of the West* says that by 2050 Europe (from Iceland to Russia) will see its population drop from 728 million (in 2000) to 600 million—and perhaps 556 million. And if current trends continue, by the end of the century Europe’s population will stand at 207 million.

A related problem lies in Europe’s choice to bring in cheap labor from North Africa and the Middle East. Because of this “millions of Muslim immigrants have been flooding the continent for a half century.” Now the Muslim population in Western Europe has increased from 250,000, 50 years ago, to around 20 million today.” And unlike Europeans, Muslims typically have large families. As a result, Colson says flatly, “[d]emographics may bring about what the Moors and Ottoman Empire couldn’t: a Muslim Europe.”

—from *Crosswalk.com*

Religious Freedom and Islam

An article in *Christianity Today* tells us that “only 3 of 46 Muslim majority countries can be classified as free in regard to political rights and civil liberties.” Though freedom is growing around the world, in most Muslim countries, persecution and coercion (often extreme) continues. An interesting but sad example can be seen in a recent case in Afghanistan. The convert from Muslim to Christianity, Abdul Rahman faced the death sentence for defecting from his native Muslim faith to Christ. Afghanistan, though nominally affirming the United Nations’ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” which states a person’s rights to change belief, still holds to Shari’ah law which calls for the death sentence upon those who abandon Islam. So in actuality, Afghanistan allows freedom of religion to non-Muslims, but because of Islamic law, still holds to the

illegality of conversion away from the Muslim faith. Rahman escaped the death sentence. But the court deftly dismissed the case against Rahman, on grounds of insufficient evidence and insanity of the defendant, neither of which was true. This was simply a dodge from the real issue, and because of international outcry, Afghan leaders were pressured to make this decision. Rahman safely found refuge in Italy on March 29. So what will happen to the next convert?

—adapted from *Christianity Today*

Catholic Church and Sexual Abuse

The Catholic Church has spent 1.19 billion on clergy sexual-abuse lawsuits and therapy since 1950. Most of this has been spent in the last few years. Approximately 5000 accused priests and 12,537 alleged victims (most of them minors) have been identified.

—from *Christianity Today*

Morning-After Pills

In March, Wal-Mart announced that all of its pharmacies would carry morning-after contraceptive pills. This was a reversal of an earlier decision not to carry the product because demand was not significant enough, though two states, Illinois and Massachusetts, had required Wal-Mart to carry the pill. The “Plan B” pill works by restricting ovulation. Opponents say the method can prevent uterine implantation, thus aborting an embryo.

—from *Christianity Today*

On the Spiritual Sense of Bible Interpretation

“The spiritual sense is the literal sense correctly understood.”

—Charles Wood in *An Introduction to Theological Study*, p. 102

While Reading Commentaries Don't Forget the Text

Gordon Clark says this to the reader of his commentary on Colossians: "One piece of advice, above all others, must be followed: always keep the Bible open before you; never shut it for a minute; otherwise you will be lost. The text is the word of God, and God requires our best efforts." —from *Colossians*, p. 12

* * * * *

On Changing the World

"If you want to know how to change the world, pick up a broom."

—Mother Theresa

* * * * *

Ree, Rees, Erm, and Heteronormativity

Alan Sears from the Alliance Defense Fund tells us that the next push in the Politically Correct Movement is radical gender neutrality. "Terms like *man*, *woman*, *boy*, *girl*, *male*, and *female* have not only outlived their usefulness, but are borderline 'intolerant.' "

One leader in this movement "to strike down Joe and Jane is none other than atheist Michael Newdow, the infamous atheist who not only sought to have the word *God* removed from the Pledge of Allegiance, but now wants 'In God We Trust' removed from American currency."

Sears says that "Newdow, who claims the pledge ruling was only the beginning of his campaign to eliminate references to God in the public square, wants to replace the male and female pronouns of *he* and *she* with the gender-neutral *ree*, *rees*, and *erm* as a means of promoting 'gender equity.' "

Another PC buzz term: *heteronormative*. What does *heteronormative* mean? "This new, ridiculously 'PC' term refers to a person's 'misguided' reinforcement of the traditional gender roles of man and woman—the ones practiced by the majority of Americans. In other words, don't assume that when someone is referring to their

'date' that that person is of the opposite sex from the speaker . . . or that there's even an opposite sex." This new term was put to use by the editorial board of a school newspaper at Pomona College on November 14, 2005. An article urges the college "to stop being 'heteronormative' and install 'gender neutral' bathrooms at a campus center." —from *Crosswalk.com*

The Loneliness of the Christian

by A. W. Tozer

"The loneliness of the Christian results from his walk with God in an ungodly world, a walk that must often take him away from the fellowship of good Christians as well as from that of the unregenerate world. His God-given instincts cry out for companionship with others of his kind, others who can understand his longings, his aspirations, his absorption in the love of Christ; and because within his circle of friends there are so few who share his inner experiences he is forced to walk alone. The unsatisfied longings of the prophets for human understanding caused them to cry out in their complaint, and even our Lord Himself suffered in the same way.

"The man [or woman] who has passed on into the divine Presence in actual inner experience will not find many who understand him. He finds few who care to talk about that which is the supreme object of his interest, so he is often silent and preoccupied in the midst of noisy religious shoptalk. For this he earns the reputation of being dull and over-serious, so he is avoided and the gulf between him and society widens. He searches for friends upon whose garments he can detect the smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces, and finding few or none he, like Mary of old, keeps these things in his heart.

"It is this very loneliness that throws him back upon God. His inability to find human companionship drives him to seek in God what he can find nowhere else."

“Growing Christians Are Reading Christians”

Author Unknown

In 1886, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote *Kidnapped*, a tale of adventure set in the Scottish Highlands. He dedicated the novel to his good friend, Charles Baxter, and confidently asserted it was a book to be savored: “This is no furniture for the scholar’s library, but a book for the winter evening schoolroom when the tasks are over and the hour for bed draws near . . .”¹ Well over a century later, the prospect of a young man or woman choosing to spend an evening in the pages of a well-worn epic is more remote. So says a National Endowment for the Arts’ report, “Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America.”²

The study, based on 2002 Census Bureau data, indicates that, for the first time in modern history, fewer than half of all adults now read literature (defined as any fictional story, play, or poetry). Furthermore, adults reporting to have read *any* book in the last 12 months dropped from 61 percent in 1992 to 57 percent in 2002. And the rate of decline is increasing. Between 1982 and 1992, literary reading dropped five percent; by 2002, it had dropped another 14 percent.³

Some see disaster. In a *New York Times* op-ed piece, Andrew Solomon tied a decline in reading to a rise in depression and Alzheimer’s disease. Persuaded that television watching bred mindless passivity, he concluded that “the crisis in reading is a crisis in national health.”⁴ Others are less anxious. Columnists George Will⁵ and Joseph Epstein⁶ presented a number of qualifying points: 1. The report ignores literary non-fiction (e.g., biography, history, theology) and generates absurdi-

ties (e.g., a pulp romance outweighs Augustine’s *Confessions*); 2. It ignores quality; most fiction is mediocre or worse (e.g., Oprah Winfrey’s book club serves us a steady diet of victimology, reinforcing the reader’s “own self-pity or self-righteous anger”);⁷ 3. Deconstructionist literature professors bear much of the blame, in that they have defamed great works of literature; 4. Ninety-six million serious readers is nothing to sneeze at, and “Serious reading has always been a minority matter.”⁸

Some of the blame for a fall-off in literary reading is laid at the feet of “distractions of the electronic culture.”⁹ Televisions, radios, computers, Palm Pilots, iPods, VCRs, DVDs, and CDs are everywhere and multiplying, as is their use.¹⁰ According to George Will, the din of these technologies deprives us of two treasures that reading affords—solitude and silence.¹¹ Of course, internet reading *is* reading,¹² but it is generally more hurried, and something is lost when books fall by the wayside. As Joseph Epstein observes, “Sustained reading, sitting quietly and enjoying the aesthetic pleasure that words elegantly deployed on the page can give, contemplating careful formulations of complex thought—these do not seem likely to be acts strongly characteristic of an already jumpy new century.”¹³

For the “people of the Book,” there is no substitute for the written word, and woe is the culture that counts reading, including Bible reading, an antiquated method of learning. Who will relish the allegory of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*? Who will take the time to appreciate the example set forth in

Corrie ten Boom's biography, *The Hiding Place*. Who will bother to read Isaiah or Acts or Revelation in a sitting?

In his *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Don Whitney argues that "growing Christians are reading Christians."¹⁴ Indeed, for it is hard to imagine effective and joyful discipleship without the "solitude and silence" of reflective reading.¹⁵ And how can those unaccustomed to "contemplating careful formulations of complex thought" as found in books sustain enough of theology and biblical ethics to confront the culture in the name of Christ? Simply, they cannot. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Kairos Journal*

ENDNOTES

1. Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped or the Lad With the Silver Button*, ed. Barry Menikoff (New York: Random House, 1999), 5.
2. National Endowment for the Arts, *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, (Washington, DC, 2004), ix, <http://www.arts.gov/pub/ReadingAtRisk.pdf>.
3. *Ibid.*, ix., x.
4. Quoted in Joseph Epstein, "Is Reading Really at Risk? It Depends on What the Meaning of Reading Is," *The Weekly Standard* (August 16/August 23, 2004): 21.
5. George Will, "The Decline of Reading Is Unsettling," *The Sacramento Bee*, July 22, 2004, <http://www.sacbee.com/content/opinion/national/will/story/10066037p-10987114c.html>.
6. Epstein, 19-23.
7. *Ibid.*, 22.
8. *Ibid.*, 23.
9. *Ibid.*, 19.
10. National Endowment for the Arts, 5.
11. Will.
12. See Charles McGrath, "What Johnny Won't Read," *The New York Times* (July 11, 2004): 4.3.
13. Epstein, 21.
14. Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 231.
15. See *Kairos Journal* article, "Fighting Truth Decay: J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)."

Following Christ With a Whole Heart

by Mark Bailey

This message could be subtitled, "Frustrations to Following Christ," because this is a bottom-line issue that Jesus addressed with His disciples as they prepared for His departure.

I want to be the kind of disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ who follows Him with my whole heart, holding nothing back. And because I trust and believe that this is also the desire of your heart, let me share some thoughts with you from Luke 9:51-62—a very challenging account from the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Importance of Following Jesus

Many scholars believe that Luke 9, and in particular the text we are consid-

ering, forms a dramatic turning point in the story of Jesus' earthly ministry. According to verse 51, when "the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." From this point on, He would head straight for Jerusalem and what He knew awaited Him there, which was His death on the cross, His resurrection, and His departure back to the Father.

As we read Luke 9 and the following chapters through to Luke 19 when Jesus actually entered Jerusalem, we discover a section of Scripture filled with His teachings to His disciples while He was on the road between Galilee and Jerusalem. Not surprisingly,

these teachings focus on the importance and the cost of following Jesus, because those who followed Him all the way without quitting or turning back were also going to wind up in Jerusalem and face the reality of Jesus' arrest, trials, and crucifixion.

The fact that Jesus "resolutely set out for Jerusalem" meant that He was all business about the business of discipleship. We also see in this section that He was now turning to the Gentiles, not only because Israel had rejected Him but also because Jesus had a much broader mission that reached beyond Israel to the world.

Who Will Follow Jesus, and How Will They Follow?

Not everyone wanted to follow Jesus, however, so immediately in Luke 9:52, 53 we read about His rejection by the people of a Samaritan village. Just prior to this incident, Jesus had told the crowd following Him, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Most of the people around Jesus didn't understand at this point that He was going to Jerusalem to be crucified. But they knew what a Roman cross meant: a most excruciating death.

So with that imagery lingering in people's minds, Jesus set out for Jerusalem. And as He met people along the way and taught the disciples, the question became *who* would follow Him and also *how* they would follow Him. It is in this setting that we meet three would-be followers of Jesus in Luke 9:57-62.

This section explains my subtitle to this message, "Frustrations to Following Christ." I call these frustrations not because following Jesus is frustrating. On the contrary, I'm using the word

frustration to refer to those excuses that prevented these three potential disciples from following Christ with their whole hearts.

Before we meet these individuals, allow me to pause and ask you some questions that all of Christ's followers need to ask themselves regularly. What are the frustrations that might cause you to turn aside from being a fully devoted follower of the Saviour? Will you have the Great Commandment to love God and others as yourselves as your abiding motivation, and will you have the Great Commission to take the gospel into all the world as your all-consuming mission?

As you contemplate these questions and formulate your answers, let's meet three men, and examine what about them frustrated a whole-hearted commitment to follow Jesus.

Many have written about these men, and even more have preached about them. For this article I am adopting three "names" that one of my favorite mentors used when he taught this passage. To Dr. Stanley A. Ellisen I owe so much for igniting my passions for discipleship.

Meet Mr. Too-Hasty

The first man was actually a volunteer. "As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus replied, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head'" (Luke 9:57, 58).

Let's call this man "Mr. Too-Hasty." He was too hasty with his commitment, which he made on his own. But Jesus "dropped the other shoe," so to speak, and replied that following Him meant no guarantee of "creature comforts" such as soft beds and hot showers every night.

**THE CRITICAL ISSUE
FOR YOU AND ME AS
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TODAY IS NOT WHAT
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We can infer that this was the man's interest by the nature of Jesus' answer as He knew his heart and mind. This man was only interested in going with Jesus if he could stay at the Hyatt. Mr. Too-Hasty was saying, "Lord, I'll be glad to be Your disciple. But can I see the accommodation and amenity list first?"

This would-be disciple's response to Jesus' challenge is not stated in our text. In fact, this is the case with each of the three incidents recorded in Luke 9:57-62. I believe this is for a reason. The critical issue for you and me as Jesus' followers today is not what these men did about Jesus' call, but what we are going to do. Jesus is asking us to identify and correct whatever issue or attitude may be keeping us from following Him unreservedly.

One thing these men learned very clearly from their encounters with Jesus is that whatever was going to happen to Him might happen to them. Jesus was on His way to the cross, and the real question behind His words is, "Can you follow Me to the cross?"

The core requirement here is *identification* with Christ. Are we willing to get past the frustration of what others think of us, where we might stay, what the salary level might be, or anything else and say, "Wherever Jesus leads we will go"? Mr. Too-Hasty failed to count the cost of following Jesus.

Meet Mr. Too-Hesitant

The second reluctant disciple Jesus met on His resolute way to Jerusalem is a man we will call "Mr. Too-Hesitant." We read, "He said to another man, 'Follow me.' But the man replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God'" (Luke 9:59, 60).

The first man was a volunteer, but this guy was a recruit. Now I don't know about you, but his request sounds reasonable to me, especially given the fact that Jesus made the first move. It's as if this man was saying, "Lord, I realize I may not have a place to sleep if I follow You, and I'm OK with that. But are You telling me that I can't even attend my father's funeral?"

This is a fascinating scene because the proper burial of a family member was very important in Jewish tradition. So important, in fact, that the Talmud said a person who had this responsibility was relieved of his obligation to pray or even obey the commands of the *Torah* until the burial was complete.

Thus, the task of burying his father was the most important thing in this man's life—as far as he was concerned.

That's why he was no doubt startled by

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Jesus' answer. This man was all caught up in the cares and the responsibilities of this life, and I think what Jesus was telling him was similar to what He said to the crowd later in Luke: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes,

even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

Jesus was saying that following Him in the proclamation of the gospel supersedes all other obligations, relationships, and traditions, even those that seem most important to us here on earth.

Much of the speculation about this part of the story centers on whether this man's father was already dead or whether he wanted to wait around to receive his portion of the inheritance. But I believe those aren't the most relevant issues. The message Jesus conveyed is that our highest priority is absolute obedience to Him.

If the first frustration or hurdle to following Jesus is the issue of our comfort, the second is the issue of our earthly cares. By Jesus' drastic statement "Let the dead bury their own dead," He is telling us that the mission is not changed because we have other obligations. We are still to take the gospel to people in all nations, even to the uttermost part of the earth.

Meet Mr. Too-Homesick

The third character Jesus encountered was a mixture of the first two. He volunteered like the first man, but he also drew back and made conditions like the second one. "Still another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.' Jesus replied, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God'" (Luke 9:61, 62).

This fellow was saying, "All right, Jesus, I understand the residency and responsibility parts. But are You telling me that I can't even kiss my loved ones good-bye before I leave?" We will call him "Mr. Too-Homesick."

Did you know that Jesus never told us to choose Him over the devil? But He did tell us to choose Him over family. Now we know that in the rest of the New Testament God doesn't excuse us from caring for our families. But if your family comes before the Lord and your commitment to Him, then you have a misplaced priority system.

The problem with this third man was not that he loved his family. The issue was one of loyalty to Jesus. The Lord's famous statement about the person who looks back after deciding to follow Him speaks of distraction and preoccupation with what was left behind.

The wording of this passage is an allusion to Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings

19:19-21). Elijah had just killed all the prophets of Baal at the base of Mount Carmel, and then he ran from Jezebel all the way to Mount Horeb.

But Elijah left there and found Elisha plowing with 12 pair of oxen. Elijah went up to Elisha and threw his mantle over him. Elisha wanted to follow Elijah, but he said, "Let me kiss my father and mother good-bye." Interestingly, Elijah allowed Elisha to go. He must have known that Elisha would come back, which he did.

Jesus Wants to "Rattle Our Cages"

Jesus, however, did not give the man who approached Him that option—no doubt because He knew that the man would get homesick if he went back and would never return. This may be the most radical of the three rebuking

responses Jesus made. These are simple but profound illustrations of the importance and the cost of discipleship. Jesus used them as radical ways to "rattle our cages"—to jar us a bit or a lot to help us understand the seriousness both of His calling as well as a

warning not to allow any frustration to sidetrack us from being the faithful followers of Jesus.

If I may suggest three applicational thoughts from these accounts, they would be these: First, a disciple of Jesus Christ must be prepared for hardship, even rejection. Following Christ is no easy feat. Second, obedience must not be delayed for any reason. It is incongruent for a follower of Christ to say "Lord," and then say "No." That is an oxymoron. Third, the kingdom of God is to be the disciple's highest priority. No one who has taken hold of the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom.

Seek first and foremost the kingdom of God—and don't look back! ■

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

**SEEK FIRST AND
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AND DON'T LOOK
BACK!**

What About Cremating the Dead?

by Harold S. Martin

Most funeral directors can arrange for the cremation of bodies at the time of death, and people are asking about the biblical view of cremation. The body is placed in a container and is burned in a special oven for several hours at about 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. The bones that remain are then crushed into white powdery ashes. The ashes are placed in an “urn” and are given to the relatives of the dead person. They keep the ashes in their home or bury them or scatter them or do with them as they wish.

Cremation increasingly accounts for disposals of dead bodies, and is less expensive than burial. It is easier to send the remains to distant places, and the remains consume less space because the ashes take up only the size of a small shoe box. Is cremation something we should consider as an alternative to the more expensive burials?

Three Non-Biblical Observations

1. Cremation is heathen in origin. The idea of reducing human bodies to ashes originated in ancient heathen lands. The Romans, the Hindus of India, and many other pagan peoples—burned their dead. The Egyptians were an exception because they embalmed the dead, soaking the body in a solution, and filling the cavities with tars and resins. Pagan people believed that burning the body somehow purified the soul, and released it from the earthly shell.

2. Cremation has been an aid to crime. In the past, before the common use of DNA testing, if a person was poisoned before death—a proper analysis of what had happened could not be made after cremation. Thus, to cremate a body was one way to try and hide a

crime. In modern times, autopsies often reveal the cause of death, before cremation or before burial.

3. Cremation seems like a cruel barbarous act. Cremation involves the incineration of the human body at high temperatures. When the heat becomes intense, the body twitches and moves due to the contraction and expansion of the muscles. It just seems like a gruesome and unkind thing to do to the body of one’s mother or husband or child. It is repulsive to think of the body of a friend being treated like a beef roast at the time of death.

Three Biblical Principles

1. Cremation dishonors the created human body. In Romans 12:1 we are told: “present your bodies” as a “living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” In 1 Corinthians 6:19 we are told that the body of the Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and this places great importance on the human body. That’s why we try to preserve the body by clean habits and good living. That’s why we show respect for the human body at the time of death. The body may become old and wrinkled and scarred, but it will be raised someday and transformed so that it is without blemish (Philippians 3:12).

2. Cremation does not follow the example of Jesus. When Jesus was crucified, His body was lovingly and tenderly prepared for burial according to the Jewish custom (John 19:38-42). Throughout the Bible, *burial* is considered the proper manner of laying away the body. It was a dishonor and a curse for a person not to have a burial. In Jeremiah 22:19, King Jehoiakim was to be “buried with the burial of a donkey,”

which meant no *burial at all*. Most of Israel's kings were buried, including Manasseh (2 Kings 21:26) and Josiah (2 Kings 23:30)—but for Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:6), there is no mention of burial. The text simply says that he “slept with his fathers.” The Prophet Amos (Amos 2:1) spoke against the people of Moab because they burned the bones of the king of Edom to *lime* [to powder]. For the Christian—Jesus Christ is to be our example in all of life, and it certainly is proper to follow Him in the way we dispose of our bodies.

3. Cremation tends to destroy the sacred memory of the dead. The ashes of cremated bodies are often not even claimed by the family. Funeral directors say that hundreds of urns are never picked up by family members. Usually the ashes are not buried, and so there is no grave to visit, no sacred

spot where the remains of a friend lie. Cremation becomes a quick way of destroying the memory of the dead. Proverbs 10:7 says, “The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot.”

The Bible does not directly say “You shall not cremate bodies”—thus one can hardly say that it is a sin to cremate, but it is fairly clear what God thinks about cremation. There are those who have blatantly said that they want to be cremated and have their ashes spread over the countryside—with the belief that by this means they can avoid any future accountability. The idea that, if cremated, one can escape the resurrection is purely a rebellious thought against God! ■

—Reprinted with permission from the *BRF Witness* (Vol. 41, No. 1).

Death and Life

by J. Mark Horst

Springtime is a time of hope, a time of expectation. Winter's icy grip is slowly but surely broken by the warming rays of the sun. Things that not long ago seemed lifeless and dormant respond by reaching eagerly toward those warming rays of life. And from the very womb of death, new life springs forth.

Ever since mankind sinned in the Garden of Eden, this thread of truth runs throughout the Scriptures: death precedes life. Animals had to die in order to provide the “covering” for Adam and Eve's nakedness. In Egypt, the passover lamb, with its blood applied to the door frame of the house, meant the difference between death

and life. Later, God gave specific instructions to Moses concerning the sacrificial system and how the blood of the sacrifices would atone for the sins of mankind. Death precedes life.

Then, in the fulness of God's timing, He sent His own Son to be the ultimate sacrifice for sin. This would be a sacrifice to end ALL sacrifices! Jesus, the Lamb of God, would offer Himself “without blemish and without spot” to the Father (1 Peter 1:18-21).

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He spoke about this reality of death and life. In John 12 we read of certain Greeks who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. Evidently, they had heard of Jesus'

ministry and desired to see Him. When Andrew and Philip told Jesus about this, He said, *“The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”*

We know from the Scriptures that the disciples envisioned Jesus’ glorification as that of a conquering king, freeing them from the hated Roman occupation. They saw Him as one who would restore Israel to prominence, to her rightful place among the nations.

But Jesus pointed to a simple law of nature in an attempt to correct their thinking. Here was an illustration that even those with the simplest understanding could relate to. Living in an agricultural economy, the people were well acquainted with the natural laws of sowing and reaping. Planting comes before harvest. Death precedes life.

Jesus then went on to make sure that no one misunderstood what He meant. *“He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also.”* Jesus would demonstrate with His own life the reality of this principle.

Death is painful. Death is unpleasant. But, it is unavoidable. One cannot truly live until he or she has first died. Romans 6:3-5 reminds us, *“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection . . .”*

Notice how verse five speaks of our being “planted together in the likeness of his death.” Salvation comes as a

result of death: His death for us and our death to self in response. At conversion we are “planted” together with Him. The shell of self is broken by identifying with His death, and then, the new life created by the Spirit can spring forth. Praise the Lord! We who were once dead in trespasses and sins are made alive by the Living Spirit. Death precedes life.

However, we would be less than truthful to leave ourselves or others under the impression that our death to self is a once-for-all experience. It is true that our initial experience of salvation is death to self. But because there is not a total eradication of our sinful nature, we, in the words of the Apostle Paul, need to “mortify [put to death] the deeds of the body” in the power of the Spirit. I personally find this to be a daily exercise.

This is the process of “working out” our salvation. That is not working to earn it, but cooperating with the Holy Spirit to authenticate the reality of it. It is exercising those spiritual disciplines that will assist us in *“[crucifying] the flesh with its affections and lusts.”* The necessity of this action is affirmed by Jesus in Matthew 7:21: *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven.”*

For the believer, when physical death finally claims our bodies, we will be fully delivered from the effects of sin. We will experience the ultimate fulfillment of this principle: death precedes life. We will live no more to die. Hallelujah! We will enter into a state of existence that is beyond anything we can even imagine. We will rejoice “. . . that in the ages to come he [will] show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Hope Horizons*, March 2005.

Simplicity in Christ

by Dwayne Martin

*“Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, **so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.** For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom ye have not preached, or if you receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him” (2 Corinthians 11:1-4).*

What is this simplicity that is in Christ? What is it that can corrupt our minds? Does this deception pose a threat to me, or was it only the Corinthians that had a problem? Let us see what we can learn from God’s Word.

This simplicity refers to singleness and sincerity of heart. It is the opposite of divided loyalties. There is a very apt illustration given in the above passage, of the godly young woman about to be married. She has eyes for only one man, her fiancé. In the same way, the Apostle Paul’s desire was for the Corinthians to seek Christ with their whole heart. In their single-minded devotion to Christ, they would avoid the defilements Satan tried to place in their pathway.

We all know the story of Eve, as referenced in this account. Before Satan approached her, she had no intentions of disobedience. Eve was sincerely serving the Lord. But the devil craftily turned her aside from the truth of God’s Word to another way that sounded more attractive. The result was death. We too face the same Master Deceiver who is ever trying to convince us that there must be an easier way, a way with less trouble and conflict. If Eve and the Corinthians were con-

fronted with temptations to try another gospel, we are only fooling ourselves if we think we are immune.

Many of these “gospels” are very close to the truth, with what seems like only minor points of difference with the Word of God. However, Satan is happy if he can persuade us to sidestep the truth even in small areas, because he is starting us on a path away from God. In 1 Timothy 4 Paul warns Timothy of the false teachers who would threaten the church in the last days. Among other things, they would give heed to doctrines of devils. Those doctrines include the practice of forbidding men and women to marry so that they might be more holy unto God. While it is not necessary to marry to be under the blessing of the Lord, God has ordained the institution of marriage for the good of mankind. Another false doctrine is the abstaining from certain kinds of food for religious purposes. Paul points out that God has designed all meats to be received with thanksgiving.

Denying legitimate desires of the body to please the gods is part of many pagan religions. Remember how the prophets of Baal leaped on the altar and cut themselves in an attempt to awaken their god? Sometimes worship of the gods required offering babies as a sacrifice to appease the anger of the gods. Man is still the same today and thinks he needs something tangible to prove he is under the blessing of the Lord. These doctrines have appeal since they give him reason to feel he is accepted by God. However, they undermine the plan of salvation. Salvation is only by grace through faith, and good works can never put us one step closer to the Lord. Self-discipline and self-righteousness earn us praise of men but not of the Lord.

If we become snared by these cheap gospels, we no longer have that single-

hearted desire to please Christ. We are now going about to establish our own righteousness just as the majority of the Jews were doing in Paul's day (Romans 10:1-3). There are many good works' religions in our day and age. If you do enough good, it will outweigh the bad and God will allow you into heaven, they say. But the Word of God strongly refutes this false teaching. *"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one"* (Romans 3:10-12). *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). Isaiah 64:6 refers to our own righteousness being as filthy rags. It is as Peter told the Jewish rulers, *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

Good works will proceed from the life of the one who is born again. They are not done to obtain merit with God; rather, they are a result of the work of God in the heart of the believer. God gives the saints the power to live holy lives. Ephesians 2:10 explains that God designed this salvation plan to result in good works coming from the life of the believer.

Our lives will show forth either the fruit of the Spirit or the works of the flesh. There is no in-between. There is no option given in the Scriptures of being born again and not having the Spirit. Thus if someone claims to be serving the Lord, we can rightly expect that he will be leaving a testimony of a life filled with the Spirit. We should be able to see love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance in his dealings with his fellowman.

One common belief in our day is that many roads lead to God. That sounds so good, but it is totally foreign to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Scripture says in Acts 4:12, speaking of Jesus, *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men,*

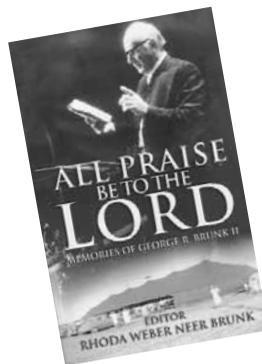
whereby we must be saved." Our only hope of salvation is in the One who says, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (John 14:6).

In closing, I would like to emphasize the necessity of a close acquaintance with the Bible. There is no way to detect false doctrine other than to be familiar with the truth. So let us daily read the Word of God, rejoicing in the precious promises and believing that what God has said will come to pass. ■

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The Pursuit of Holiness

A life of holiness is required of all believers

by David L. Burkholder

In Leviticus 11, God gives instruction to Moses and Aaron for the children of Israel regarding clean and unclean animals. He describes those which may be eaten, and those which may not. In verse 44 God gives the reason for these restrictions: *"I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy."*

In 1 Peter 1:16, after speaking of the great salvation available through Jesus Christ in the previous verses, Peter repeats God's injunction: *"Be ye holy; for I am holy."* While Israel was to be kept from physical defilement as children of the holy God, the New Testament believer is to be kept from spiritual defilement for the same reason. God's statement in those two verses immediately reveals two things: that God is holy, and that He expects His children to also be holy. This brings several questions immediately to mind. What is holiness? How is it achieved? How is it demonstrated in the life of the believer?

We normally, and rightly, equate holiness with God, and recognize that it exists in the realms of the divine. Therefore, we may feel it is out of reach for sinful man. But God says to His children, *"Be ye holy,"* and certainly God would not demand of His followers that which was beyond their ability, with His aid, to achieve.

In 1 Peter 1, Peter calls the believer to a life of obedience, carefulness of life, separation, holiness, and perseverance. His argument is that if the believer calls upon a holy God (v. 17), he must be obedient to God's wishes and separate from all unholiness (v. 14). His recognition of the cost of his redemption (v. 19) will spur him to emulate the character of Christ (v. 15), the holy Son of God.

What then do we mean by holiness? Holiness is the essence of God. God

reminds His children a number of times in the Old Testament that *"I am holy."* While we do not fully understand the character of God, we do have at least a general understanding of what He means when He says, *"I am holy."* Holiness means purity, that quality which is without taint of evil. Holiness means separation from defilement, and separation equates with sanctification, which means being set apart from evil, cleansed, made pure. The cleansing of sanctification is required of God's children in order to achieve holiness.

The root word of *holy* means to be different. Holy people are different from unholy people. In Leviticus 20:26 God says to the children of Israel: *"And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine."* Holiness requires separation from all that is unholy. Holiness equates with moral uprightness and integrity, the consistent doing of what is right, with no shading of moral character. There dare be no questionable areas in the life of the one who calls himself a child of the holy God. So holiness means purity, separateness, integrity, and uprightness.

That explains holiness, but how then is holiness achieved? It is only a fair question in light of man's fallen nature and moral corruptness. We know that God *is* holy. But how do we *become* holy? Romans 6:19 provides a basic part of the answer: *"As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness."* Romans 6 is all about being freed from sin. Verse 18 reads, *"Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."* Once being freed from sin, the goal of life must be the pursuit of holiness. There must be a noticeable change of direction and motivation in

the life—from unrighteousness to holiness, purity, and uprightness.

Verse 14 in 1 Peter 1 says that the one who chooses to be obedient to Christ will no longer pursue the fleshly lusts of the former life. So, the pursuit of holiness begins with a change of attitude, a change of life-direction, a yielding to God. Second Corinthians 7:1 tells us that we must perfect, or complete holiness in our lives. *“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”* The pursuit of holiness begins with a mind-set that results in a discipline of life which moves one away from ungodliness and toward holiness. Notice the aspect of cleansing spoken to in this verse. It requires personal effort. We must cleanse *ourselves* from all wickedness, flesh and spirit, inner life, outer life. That effort is ours to perform.

Second Corinthians 10:5b speaks to the discipline of mind necessary to the pursuit of holiness. *“Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”* The thought life must be purified through the exertion of personal discipline. While the saving, justifying work is God’s, the work of perfecting holiness rests on our shoulders. It’s an effort we must make individually in response to the justifying work of God. Note too that this verse from 2 Corinthians 7:1 follows Paul’s call in Chapter 6 for the separation of the believer from all that is opposite of God and His holiness. Holiness means being unashamedly different, separate, having a change of life-direction that is evident and noticeable. First Peter 1:15 tells us to *“be holy in all manner of conversation.”* All we do, all our conduct, all our behavior must be within the framework of holiness. Every area of life will be affected.

Is holiness an option for the believer? Look at what the writer of Hebrews has to say about holiness in 12:14: *“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”* There it is. It is both a command of God and a require-

ment for access to His presence. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: *“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”* Holiness is not an option for the believer. There are requirements for entering the presence of a holy God: purity of life, personal holiness. There is no third way. There is nothing between an evil life and a holy life. We either follow evil or we pursue holiness. It’s that clear.

So then, how is holiness demonstrated in the life of a believer? What are its practical outworkings? How can we tell when a person is serious about living a holy life? First of all there must be a complete and noticeable separation from all evil, from even the appearance of evil. First Thessalonians 5:22 says, *“Abstain from all appearance of evil.”* The next verse says, *“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* That speaks to the totality of life, every aspect. The NIV says, *“Sanctify you through and through.”* Every area of life will be affected and must be brought under the sanctifying influence of our holy God and made pure and separate from evil. Spirit, soul, and body—all are involved. Note again what God said to Israel in Leviticus 20:26: *“And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.”* First of all God establishes Himself as the substance of holiness. Then He says, since I have called you to be mine, you also must be holy, totally separate from those who are not holy.

The pursuit of holiness will therefore automatically rule out certain things in one’s life as it establishes a definite purpose and direction for life. It will affect the places we go. We need to ask, Will my presence, wherever it might be, enhance my pursuit of holiness, or will it hinder it or compromise it in any way? Attendance must be decided on that basis. It will affect the things we read or listen to or watch.

All must be gauged by the standard of holiness. The temptations of the ungodly world are close and strong. The one pursuing holiness will not push the envelope to see what he can get by with. He will stay as far away from evil as possible. It's a serious business. We must continually evaluate our choices in light of God's standard of holiness, and remember that He sees all we do and the places we go.

The pursuit of holiness will affect our expenditures. Do we spend the resources God has entrusted to us to advance His kingdom, or for personal pleasure or gain? It's a question we must ask ourselves. The use of leisure time also falls within the scope of a life of holiness. Are we more intent on living to please self, or living to please God? Which comes first: the use of time for the pursuit of self interests, or for the work of the church? A life dedicated to holiness will also affect our speech. There will be no questionable language out of the mouth of one professing to be a child of the holy God, one engaged in the pursuit of holiness. It will affect our personal appearance. The person concerned about projecting holiness of life will present himself modestly and simply to a watching world. Separation affects the inside and the outside of life.

The determination to follow God and to pursue a life of holiness will affect every area of our lives. Everything we do must be examined under the searchlight of God's standard. Are we willing and eager to live by the standards of God's Word, or do we try to see what we can get by with? Or worse, do we simply disregard those standards which we feel are an infringement on our personal life? Note that our text in 1 Peter (v. 14) equates the pursuit of holiness with obedience. We may not pick and choose which of God's requirements we will follow. We should live in total obedience to all of His commands in order to qualify as His children.

Is the pursuit of holiness easy? Not necessarily. However, it becomes immeasurably easier once we have determined

within ourselves that holiness will be the goal of life. Once that decision has been made, the effort becomes easier. Will we ever fail? Yes. But when we do we must pick ourselves up and move forward with renewed resolve and determination. Holiness involves effort. It does not come automatically. It means diligently pursuing those qualities which define God's character. As fallen creatures, that requires first of all determination, then effort, coupled with perseverance. That's why Peter says (1:13): "*Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober; and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" It is necessary to reinforce one's mind for the struggle. Note, too, that the reward of a life of holiness comes at the end of life, or when Christ returns for His faithful followers—those who have walked in obedience to His will, in holiness of life. The promise of eternal reward provides incentive for present holy living.

In summary, holiness identifies the character of God—pure, upright, separate, different. Our holiness is achieved through struggle. It is not automatic. It does not come easily. Our sinful nature and our soul's adversary work against our best intentions. It is only through the grace of God and our personal diligence that we can achieve holiness. And since it is God's will, He will aid our pursuit, and give motivation and strength for the struggle.

So, how do we stack up? Are the everyday actions of our lives demonstrating the desire for and the pursuit of holiness? Jesus said that only the "*pure in heart shall see God.*" The challenge for us is to a thorough examination of life and motive. And then to engage ourselves in a diligent pursuit of holiness. We must be willing to give up selfish desires and pursuits and make the pursuit of holiness the sole aim and goal of life if we intend to make it to glory.

God says: "*Be ye holy, for I am holy.*" It is possible. And it is required of those who call themselves His children and who hope to be with Him in His eternal glory. ■

God Never Wastes Pain

by James Wagler

Why does God allow homes to be broken? A child's glory to be taken away? (Prov. 17:6) Why does God allow a child to be abused, taken advantage of by others? If He is such a loving God, why doesn't He stop the pain? Why does He allow parents to destroy each other? Couldn't He intervene and stop all of this?

The answer of course is, yes, He could. But God has created us with a free will. He has given us the ability to choose between right and wrong—the choice to do either good or evil. God will never violate our will, else we would be puppets on a string.

I believe God allows us to go through difficult times for a couple of reasons. Number one, it allows us to be transformed into His image. The gentleness, love, and patience of God is shaped and molded in us as we go through difficult times. The opposite response makes us angry and bitter. A hurting person hurts others. It is difficult for me to sit in my office and see someone who has been hurt deeply attack the spouse over and over. Out of the pain in his/her own heart, they attack and try to destroy the one who initially hurt them.

Until a person can see how he or she is playing into the picture by retaliating for the wrongs, you cannot help that person.

Secondly, God always has a purpose in the trials. Some of the most beautiful people in the world are those who have been through very deep waters. Instead of becoming bitter, they grow through the experiences. Because of the past experiences the person can identify with others in the same situation.

A person who has lost loved ones can identify with others in the same situation. A person who has been ridiculed a lot in life will understand those who are belittled. A person who has been taken advantage of sexually will see the abuse on another person's face, and reach out to care. A rejected person will pick out every lonely heart in the crowd.

Once we allow God to use the past to reach other people, we come to the third and final reason I have for why God allows pain. Number three: there are always eternal values attached.

If we allow God to work through us to touch the life of someone we can identify with, we make a difference for God's kingdom. We would not be able to identify with the person if we would not have walked through a similar trial. Hebrews 2:17 tells us that it was essential that Jesus was made like His brethren in every respect so that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in the things related to God.

As we find answers in our own lives, we begin to reach out and touch others in ways that have an eternal impact. A cup of cold water in His name, an encouraging word for a downcast person, a helping hand in time of need, or a touch of love for a lonely one will not be forgotten for all eternity.

God allows the difficult times because He wants what is best for us. If we allow the trial to do its perfect work, there is a purpose (James 1:2-5). And in the end we find that God never wastes pain. It's our choice. Will we become bitter or will we become the better for it? Don't give up! ■

—Reprinted with permission from the April 2006 *Walnut Creek Freedom Hills Ministries* newsletter.

Teaching Manners to Your Children

by Mary June Glick

Manners are a part of godly family living. The Bible teaches us to be kind to each other, to do to others as we would have them do to us, to show respect and honor, and to esteem others better than ourselves. As we teach manners to our children, we are teaching them to place value upon another person created by God.

Manners are taught best by example. Each family has its own code of what is important but we also want to be conscious of things that are important to the church and to society as a whole. Treat your children with respect and courtesy. Our children observe our manners in the home. They see how we respond to each other. They will also see the way we respond to others on the road, and even how we relate to others in the grocery store. Do we try to get the best at a yard sale before someone else gets it? When there are limited supplies available on sale in the store, are we kind and courteous to the sales clerk or the person in line ahead of us? We all forget at times, but our goal should be to show God's love wherever we go and to remember someone is noting our example.

Even very small children can learn to be polite. They can say, "Yes, thank you," or "No, thank you." Mealtime is a wonderful time to teach manners. Make it a fun experience; don't become angry when they mess up. We can approach this systematically. First, they wash their hands, then set the table properly. There's no respect conveyed in just dropping things haphazardly on the table. Teach the correct manner of placing the silverware with a napkin and arranging the dishes attractively. Let them fix a little centerpiece.

Pass all dishes in the same direction. Chew with mouths closed. Mealtime should be pleasant, not a time for scolding

and reprimands in the presence of all. Children should learn to taste everything and NOT grumble about what they don't like. They should remain seated until everyone is finished or else ask to be excused. Boys should be taught to remove caps or hats during mealtime.

Practice hospitality in your home. Visitors give children a good opportunity to put to use the things they have learned. Let them help you serve the guests. Teach children to relate to adults and to carry on a conversation, but not to monopolize it. They also need to learn not to interrupt when you are speaking with someone. Teach them to look at people when they talk to them. In the South, children are taught to say "Yes, ma'am," and "No, ma'am." Such manners are expected in public.

When you are visiting in a home, teach them to say, "Thank you" and to write a thank-you note when they receive a gift. It is good manners to speak graciously on the telephone, and to take a message correctly.

Siblings must learn to be kind to each other. They should not be allowed to call each other demeaning names or to belittle each other. People have been scarred for life by a name given in childhood. Make sure your child is kind to others, not making fun of anyone or forming a clique where someone is excluded. Teach them to say, "I'm sorry," when appropriate or, "Please forgive me."

I know this seems like a big order and I wish I had done a better job of it myself as a mother, but it is good to reach for a high goal and to keep striving. Remember that we are working with future adults who will someday face a big world of their own. They will thank us for what we taught them. ■

—Reprinted from the March 2006 *Calvary Messenger*.

MISSIONS: MARATHON OR HIGH HURDLES?

by Bill Commons

The short answer? Both. Missions is a long and tiring race with many obstacles to overcome. Some acclaimed “runners” drop out from fatigue or trip over a hurdle after taking their eyes off the goal. The race is not for wimps, nor for heroes, but for committed servants prepared to endure—no matter what.

Yet there is another side—missionaries have a lot of fun! Wonderful people join us in the journey. Churches and supporters are generous and thoughtful. Nationals become our closest friends—more precious to us than we ever dreamed possible. There is no more boisterous laughter than when a bunch of missionaries get together and let their proverbial hair down.

So now that we have balanced the picture somewhat, consider the obstacles in the entry process:

- ◆ determining “the call”
- ◆ choosing a mission agency
- ◆ meeting the qualifications (completing education, etc.)
- ◆ selecting a field
- ◆ deciding when to attend Candidate Seminar
- ◆ determining when to quit work and do full-time, pre-field ministry
- ◆ discerning where and how to discover the support team God has planned for us
- ◆ researching how to move goods and family across the globe

Sometimes the qualifications require more time in preparation before attending Candidate Seminar. A field survey may result in changing location. Pre-field may take longer than anticipated. To gain experience, a short-term assignment may be recommended before gain-

ing career status. *Flexibility* becomes a prominent component of completing the race to the field.

Motives for Missions

Candidates often mention having missionaries as guests in their home during the growing-up years, reading missionary biographies, going on mission trips during student years, and experiencing personal crises in which God touched their lives providentially, any or all of which contributed in moving them to consider missions.

Some international ambassadors for Christ said they never experienced a particular “call,” but simply followed Christ wholeheartedly and learned to share His Calvary love for a lost world. Missions for them became an extension of discipleship. God’s hand directing them was not evident until they could look in the rearview mirror and see how He led step-by-step.

For others, learning about their spiritual gifts, and how they could be used in international ministry, was the key in discerning God’s direction. “How can my giftedness be used by God to spread the gospel worldwide?” was the question that opened the door to missions for them.

Other missionary veterans testify that they simply heard of a need for the gospel in a certain country and determined before God to head in that direction unless He closed the door, which He never did. For them, a commitment to missions was a logical choice in light of the disparity between the number of Christian workers in the homeland and the lack elsewhere.

So what is the role of “need” in discerning strategic life investment for the glory of God? Need does not constitute call, but it does demand an investigation. How can a thoughtful Christian not consider the 10,000 still-unreached people groups that have no Bible, church, Christian, or missionary to share Christ with them?

Those who become missionaries often discover a contentment and fulfillment they never knew before. “Missions is what I always wanted, but didn’t know it,” said a veteran ruefully. Despite the long journey and daunting obstacles, there is no greater joy.

When major life decisions (such as a commitment to missions) seem complex and overwhelming, it can be helpful to consider how God led others in sorting things out and taking steps of faith in obedience to the Great Commission.

On Reaching the Field

There is no single proven way of getting there, of completing the “high hurdles” on the way to the field. God is unique in every life. He alone is Lord, and we walk with Him by faith and not by sight. He is the author and finisher of our faith and our life’s journey. Each of us is totally dependent upon Him. We dare not presume to reduce His ways to a system or program. Yet after decades of observing His ways, we can discern some common ingredients in the missionary process.

The local church is the key. What makes some local churches effective in getting their missionaries to the field without undue delay? The primary factor is the sending church taking on a major chunk of support. Assuming thirty to fifty percent of required support is the sending church’s announcement of confidence in the missionary, and indicates a level of commitment that inspires other churches to partner in the process.

Consortiums are increasingly popular

as several churches band together to get their missionaries to the field, each committed to assume a certain percentage of the total support package. Pastors are stepping forward to lead the way, taking responsibility to get their missionaries to the field rather than sitting back to see if the missionary “makes it.”

It takes a committed sending pastor who will rally other pastors to get his missionary to the field by helping to schedule meetings in those churches, and then following up to gauge interest and motivate pastor-friends and their churches to team up in this adventure of faith.

So behind every effective long-term missionary is a committed sending pastor, along with other devoted supporting pastors, in the homeland.

Is the pre-field process distasteful? “I don’t believe in begging for money,” some say. Missionaries go to give, not get. As they serve local churches through ministries of education, inspiration, and information, God raises up the support team He planned before we ever started. It is an adventure of faith, a marathon with many hurdles that build spiritual muscle. We learn to trust God for the “impossible” now, before we go, not only after arriving on the field.

Hurdles on the Field

Once the obstacles have been overcome in getting *to* the field, new mountains confront us when we get there:

- ◆ surviving culture shock
- ◆ gaining language fluency
- ◆ adjusting to the climate, food, and living conditions
- ◆ becoming part of a team made up of colleagues who are flawed like us
- ◆ enduring long-term culture stress
- ◆ overcoming government hassles and red tape
- ◆ developing close relationships with nationals
- ◆ learning cultural effectiveness in ministry

- ◆ supporting a spouse who struggles to adapt to difficult conditions or can't seem to understand the language
- ◆ guiding children through homesickness and health crises
- ◆ coping with homesickness and fear of failure
- ◆ wanting a hundred times to quit and go back home to the "easy life" (greener-grass syndrome)
- ◆ finding furloughs the hardest part of missionary life, after the adopted country and people become "home"

A marathon? For sure, but the journey also includes endless hazards and hurdles. Each of the above obstacles merits serious discussion and requires sincere preparation.

Some rare missionaries say they never experience such overwhelming exhaustion or discouragement that they were strongly tempted to throw in the towel, but an informal survey conducted with several hundred overseas personnel indicated that most nearly gave up and quit during a crisis—some in their first term, others in the second or third. Most of us reached the cliff of despair and nearly went over the edge, at least once in our missionary experience.

Going through the decision-making process in entering international ministry, followed by the daunting procedures of application, screening, training, approval, and pre-field ministry, test and prove the new missionary's mettle. It is a faith-building venture that transforms us from tentative, insecure wanna-bes into tested and proven servants of God who are ready for the greater challenges ahead on the field.

Some prefer the "normal" professional process of becoming a salaried missionary, as with a denominational board, to the more difficult and daunting procedures with a "faith-mission." But we who have endured the marathon

testify that the pre-field experience was necessary in building a walk with God that would carry us through the struggles and crises of missionary life. The contrast is amazing between the tentative new appointee starting out on pre-field and the proven, confident missionary at the end of pre-field as he leaves for his adopted homeland overseas.

Besides, beloved churches and supporters become true partners in the testings and triumphs of serving Christ as He builds His church among the nations. Often church missions teams consisting of laypeople come to the field to assist with various projects, resulting in lifelong friendships—sometimes producing new missionaries who come out of those teams and return to the field long-term.

In fact, the faith-mission dynamic has proven so effective in producing quality missionaries, along with helping local churches get involved with their overseas personnel, that some denominational churches have moved toward individual missionary support and away from reliance on a denominational missions budget alone.

What Should I Do Now?

If God led you to read this article, perhaps He is moving you towards investing part of your life in international ministry. Start investigating. Knock on the door of missions—not timidly, but boldly. Seek information. Make yourself available and see what God will do.

We are in the race together. It is a team effort. You will never run alone. When one of us trips on a hurdle, the rest rush to the rescue. The race is hand-in-hand, arm-in-arm, heart-to-heart (Phil. 3:13, 14, 17).

COME, RUN WITH US! ■

—Reprinted from the Summer/Fall 2005 issue of the *Message*.

Curing Disease at the Price of Our Souls

EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH AND HUMAN CLONING
ARE A PART OF BIOTECHNOLOGY'S FAUSTIAN BARGAIN.

by James Tonkowich

Scientists who want to do research on cloning and embryonic stem cells could not be more optimistic. And that goes double for the politicians who support them. Human beings began as a single cell, a fertilized ovum. That single cell divides and becomes a ball filled with embryonic stem cells. The stem cells are all identical and yet will, after about the 14th day after conception, begin to differentiate, becoming bone cells, nerve cells, heart cells, liver cells, skin cells—in short every type of cell that exists in the human body. Contemplating these wonders of creation, we can only bow down and say with the psalmist:

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:13, 14a).

AND YET . . .

The use of embryonic human beings in lethal scientific research is, to say the least, disconcerting. It challenges what a friend in government calls a "bright line" of ethical boundaries: "We should not end the lives of some for the medical benefit of others."

Ever since scientists discovered the remarkable ability of embryonic stem cells to differentiate into every sort of cell (what is called their "pluripotency"), they have wondered how embryonic stem cells could be used to cure disease. As an article in the July 10, 2005, *Parade* magazine says:

"If we can control the incredible morphing power of these progenitor cells,

scientists reason, the sky's the limit. Stem cells could be used to replace damaged cells with new ones, opening the door to cures for diabetes, for example, or Parkinson's and genetic blood diseases. Failing organs could be restored through drug therapies that reinvigorate stem cells. Paralyzing injuries might be reversed through stem cell injections."

The *Parade* article is not exaggerating. If embryonic stem cells can actually be coaxed into becoming insulin-producing cells, diabetes could be cured. If they can become heart tissue, heart disease would be reversed. If they can become neurons in a damaged spine, the lame will walk. All we need, say the scientists, is federal funding for embryonic stem cell research and human cloning—and for those pro-life people to get off our backs.

You see, there is a catch. Embryonic stem cell research and human cloning are part of biotechnology's Faustian bargain. We may gain the knowledge required to cure all of those diseases at the price of our souls.

To understand why this is the case, we first need to define our terms. This is especially the case with this subject because those who favor an unlimited scientific license for biotech research have done a great deal to sow confusion in this already complex area.

Embryonic stem cells are harvested from blastocysts. To obtain the cells, the blastocyst, which would continue to

grow into a fetus and eventually a baby, is “disaggregated,” that is, destroyed for the parts usually seven to eight days after conception. And yet there are other ways to obtain stem cells. Umbilical cord blood contains lots of stem cells. So many, in fact, that, while the cost is steep, parents can elect to freeze their child’s umbilical cord blood to save the child’s stem cells should the child need stem cell therapy in the future, or the blood can be donated to private banks for patients looking for a genetic match. Stem cells are also available in adult bodies. Bone marrow, fatty tissue, and organs contain stem cells, and therapies have already been developed using these cells.

But adult stem cells and cord blood stem cells are not the same as embryonic cells. The embryonic cells alone are believed to be pluripotent, able to become every type of cell in the body. Adult and cord blood stem cells may be less versatile or multipotent, able to become many, but not all types of cells. Having said that, a recent article in the journal *Science* reported that researchers at Harvard University have shown that pluripotent (embryonic-like) stem cells can be produced from adult cells.

Nonetheless, scientists still want to use embryonic stem cells in their research and potentially in therapies. This means they need human embryos that come from only three possible sources.

First, thousands of embryos remain frozen in clinics. These are the “leftovers” from in vitro fertilization (IVF). In IVF, a course of powerful hormones causes a potential mother to superovulate, releasing as many as 10 eggs from her ovaries. These are removed surgically and, in a lab, fertilized by her partner’s sperm. Human beings in embryonic form are the result. Some of the eggs, but not all, are introduced into her uterus for implantation. This leaves

extra embryos who are either discarded or frozen and may be thawed out later.

Proponents of embryonic stem cell research have claimed that all they want is access to the leftovers. After all, these embryos are extra, unwanted, and will probably die or be discarded anyway. Why not put them to good use?

This is the line of reasoning being used to attack President Bush’s policy concerning embryonic stem cell research. Often condemned by the media for his “stem cell research ban,” Bush is the first president to fund *any* embryonic stem cell research. His policy, however, restricts federally funded research to embryonic stem cell lines derived from embryos killed prior to August 2001. This means that no federal money may go toward the destruction of additional embryos. State and private monies may be used and are being used liberally for embryo-destructive research, but not federal money. There is no “ban” at all.

The second method of obtaining embryos is to harvest eggs and fertilize them for research. This is simply IVF with no intention of implanting the embryos in a womb. In the history of this issue, this represents “scope creep” that is about to get creepier because embryos can also be cloned. This is where “linguistic cloaking devices”—euphemisms—get especially thick.

Finally, there is cloning. Cloning is shorthand for somatic cell nuclear transplantation (SCNT). Sheep, cows, cats, rats, dogs, and now in South Korea and Great Britain, humans have been cloned. The process begins with an egg and a somatic cell, usually a skin cell. The nucleus of the egg is removed and replaced with the nucleus of the somatic cell. The new cell is stimulated with electricity and begins to divide. At that point the cloning is complete and the growing embryo, if implanted in a womb, will develop and be born.

Cloning has the advantage of being

able to create embryos that are genetically identical to the donor of the somatic cell. This would allow personalized embryonic stem cell therapies—stem cells that perfectly match the patient’s DNA and presumably would be accepted rather than rejected by the body.

Much of the cloning debate centers around a distinction that cloning advocates want very much to make: reproductive cloning versus therapeutic cloning. Reproductive cloning creates a human embryo and then implants it in a womb. Nine months later, a human child is born. Everyone on Capitol Hill claims that this practice should be banned. Therapeutic cloning seeks to clone human embryos for research and therapy only. Implantation would be illegal.

In truth the distinction is utterly false. Cloning creates a human being and thus all cloning is by definition reproductive. Legislation that supports “therapeutic” cloning and bans “reproductive” cloning has been correctly called “clone and kill” legislation since it requires the death of the embryo—usually within 14 days.

William Saletan, hardly a pro-life advocate, writing for *Slate.com*, notes that “research advocates swore to use only embryos left over from IVF; now they’re proposing to clone embryos for research. You can argue the merits of these shifts, but the bottom line is that the only constant in the ethics of embryo research is change.” Saletan argues that the 14-day rule is arbitrary. What began as six days is now 14 and with the advent of the artificial womb (no, I’m not making this up after watching too much science fiction), this will most certainly be pushed to allow scientists to grow fetuses for experimentation and organ tissue harvesting. As Robert

P. George, Princeton University professor and member of the President’s Council on Bioethics, writes, “. . . [B]ased on the literature I have read and the answers given by spokesmen for the biotechnology industry at meetings of the President’s Council on Bioethics, I fear that the long-term goal is indeed to create an industry in harvesting late embryonic and fetal body parts for use in regenerative medicine and organ transplantation.” He is referring to fetal farming. The nightmare has hardly begun.

Destructive embryonic stem cell research and cloning have a wide range

of opponents. Environmentalists and many feminists have joined religious conservatives in an attempt to rein in the scientists. Environmentalists worry about unintended consequences and their impact on nature. Feminists know that the high demand for human eggs will invariably result in the exploitation of poor women. And the status of embryos, as it turns out, is not merely a religious question; it is a profoundly human question: Ought we to sacrifice embryonic human beings so

that human beings who are older, larger, and more powerful may live longer, healthier lives?

Much of the opposition has argued this in prudential terms. First, embryonic stem cell research and human cloning are ethically questionable since they involve the making and killing of embryonic human beings. Second, embryonic stem cells will not yield useful therapies for decades—if ever. It is more prudent, therefore, to avoid ethically dubious research and concentrate on adult or cord blood stem cells where real advances have already been made.

Testifying in the Senate, Rep. David Weldon, M.D. (R-Fla.), entered 80 articles from top medical journals into the

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record of the hearing. Those articles document peer-reviewed studies on human therapies using adult stem cells. He defied those who talk about the “remarkable promise” of embryonic stem cells to cite even one peer-reviewed study indicating that there is “hope” for cures using embryonic stem cells. No one took him up on it because there are no such studies, though there are a few indicating that embryonic stem cells might be useful in the distant future—perhaps 30 to 50 years from now. In fact, after more than 15 years of work on embryonic stem cells, researchers have yet to develop anything approaching a cure. Adult stem cell and umbilical cord stem cell research has yielded advancements in the treatment of 65 diseases, including Parkinson’s, spinal cord injuries, and juvenile diabetes.

The counter argument is the one you would expect: “We have not had enough time, money, or freedom. Lift the president’s funding restrictions on embryonic stem cell research, allow us to clone, and all the good things we have promised—and more—will begin to happen.”

The prudential argument, while worthy of consideration, will never win the day. The critical question to argue is this: What does it mean to be human?

In May, four-year-old twins celebrated their birthday at the White House with 19 special guests. The twins and other guests are “snowflakes.” Leftover embryos from IVF, these 21 children spent the first years of their lives frozen. Then they were adopted, thawed out, implanted in their adoptive mothers’ wombs, and born into loving families. Earlier in the day the snowflakes and their parents had been part of a press

conference announcing their concern about proposed legislation that would overturn the president’s policy and allow federal funding for destructive embryonic stem cell research.

Writer Anne Morse, who attended the party and wrote about her experience in *National Review Online*, met Steve Johnson, father of Zara, a little snowflake in a pink flowered dress. Johnson is a paraplegic. “My soul aches for a cure for my paralysis,” he told Morse from his wheelchair, “but not

through embryonic stem cells. Would I kill my daughter so I could walk again? Of course not. Then why do we think it’s okay to kill someone else’s child?”

As Eric Cohen of the Ethics and Public Policy Center writes, criticizing a position favoring embryonic stem cell research using extra embryos, “Human dignity does not depend on being wanted by others; and being doomed to death does not make human beings into things—otherwise the terminally ill would be in danger of being turned into ready sources of organs. In the end, the moral question hinges on the moral standing of human embryos themselves—on what human embryos are and what we owe them.”

What is an embryo? An embryo is one of us, and we owe our fellow humans respect, protection, and care. They are persons. George Weigel of the Ethics and Public Policy Center writes, “A human embryo is not merely ‘capable of life.’ It is human life. That tiny organism is not . . . ‘a microscopic clump of cells.’ It is precisely what a human being looks like at that point in its life. It’s precisely what [you] looked like at that point in your life.” And Christians understand that it is precisely what

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Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, looked like at that point in His life. The doctrine of the Incarnation speaks loudly of how we treat human beings at every stage of life and in every phase of life.

The 21st century has already been called “The Biotech Century.” As scientists unlock what are quite literally the secrets of life, the possibilities for curing disease, alleviating human suffering, and doing good are astronomical. Yet the prospects of a dehumanized future filled with suffering and evil due to a loss of human dignity and the sanctity of life seems to loom on the horizon. There is no point in finding cures for man’s ills if what C. S. Lewis called “the abolition of man” is required to find those cures.

After I spoke recently to a college audience on this subject, one student told me that she had been part of the pro-life movement for years. She had heard of stem cells and cloning and knew the issues were somehow connected to being pro-life, but “it was all kind of complicated and so I didn’t pay much attention. I just concentrated on abortion.” Then she went on, “But now I can see that this is an even bigger issue than abortion!”

Exactly. Unless we realize that and act now, this whole battle—and human dignity along with it—will be lost. ■

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Postmodernizing Christianity

Postmodernism is creeping into the church. If it continues to do so, Christianity will lose its meaning and have to reinvent itself.

Before postmodernism, there was modernism. This thought system, developed from the Enlightenment, sepa-

rated itself from magic and the supernatural and embraced a philosophy of reason that Christians were initially amicable with. After all, didn’t Isaiah 1:18 say, “Come, let us reason together”? With reason and then science and then technology partnering together, modernists looked for generally applicable theories in everything. They believed that systematic scientific reasoning would result in material, objective truth to which all could ascribe. In studying scientific and literary texts, they would search for the authors’ meanings and then apply them to the “big picture.”

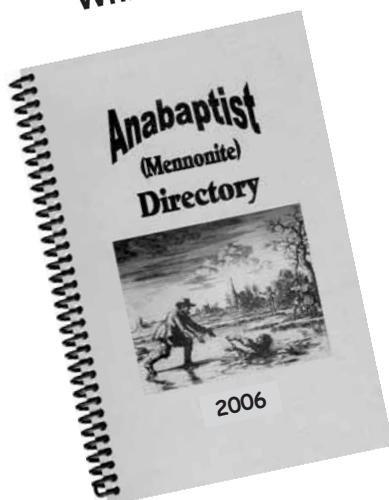
Postmodernism or “hyper-modernism” evolved after World War I. With its focal points of cognitive and moral relativism, postmodernism rejected the classical concepts of truth and objectivity. In postmodernism, there is no “big picture” that relates to all. Instead, each person has his own picture of what is right. Reality and truth are found not in authors’ meanings but in readers’ responses. Fearful of any notion that could appear wrong, postmodernists concentrate on “differences without correctness.” Anything that works is true; everyone’s personal account is correct.

Christianity conforms to a higher standard. In postmodernism there is no higher standard from which to evaluate others’ reality. As postmodernism creeps into our churches, we Christians must ask ourselves some questions. Can God see a big picture in our lives? “Does the church determine what it ought to be, or does it receive what it ought to be from the perspective of One who transcends our knowledge and our relationships?” Must people rely only on their stories or can they truly speak the truth? Which course will the church take—postmodernism or truth? ■

—Summary of “Moderns, Postmoderns, and the Christian Faith,” by Harold Orndorff in *Restoration Herald* (Nov. 2002). Reprinted with permission from *Current Thoughts & Trends*.

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