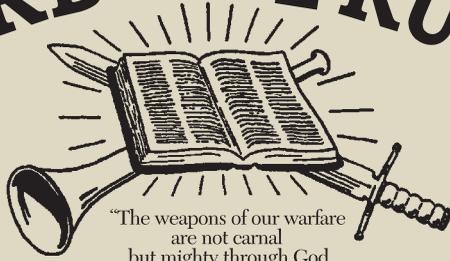


The SWORD and TRUMPET

“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



EVELYN "GRANNY" BRAND

AUGUST 2006

\$1.50

The Sword and Trumpet

Founded in 1929 by Geo. R. Brunk I

Vol. LXXIV

AUGUST 2006

No. 8

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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS — Sword and Trumpet, Inc.

Raymond P. Brunk, Chairman

John J. Forry, Vice Chairman

Stanley Good, Secretary/Treasurer

David L. Burkholder

Paul M. Emerson

Christian Good

James Hess, Honorary

Luke L. Horst, Honorary

Lee H. Kanagy, Honorary

Marcus Yoder

EDITOR — Paul M. Emerson

NEWSLINES — Hans Mast

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

David L. Burkholder

CIRCULATION — Ethel Rhodes

IN THIS ISSUE

1. Evelyn “Granny” Brand Cover
2. Person of the Month 1
3. Citizens of the Kingdom 3
4. From the Editor’s Desk:
 Guest Editorial: Theology: Bane or Blessing? 9
5. The Sunday School Lessons 11
6. Newslines 15
7. Supporting a United Effort Against the Drift 19
8. Glorifying God in the Fire 24
9. Menno Simons (1496-1561) 26
10. Israel “Will Be Removed” 30
11. A Body Divided 32
12. To a Young Mother 34
13. The Joy of a Repentant Lifestyle 35
14. Don’t Waste Your Cancer 40

THE SWORD AND TRUMPET (USPS 615-540) is published monthly by *The Sword and Trumpet*, Inc., P. O. Box 575, Harrisonburg, Va. 22803-0575. Periodicals postage paid at Harrisonburg, Va. SUBSCRIPTION RATES: 1 year US \$12.00, 2 years US \$20.00. Bulk rates on the basis of US \$9.00 per year. Add US \$3.00 per year for countries outside USA and Canada. Telephone (540) 867-9419 or 867-9444. FAX (540) 867-9419. E-mail address: swandtrump@verizon.net.

Person of the Month:

Evelyn “Granny” Brand (1879-1974)

Evelyn Constance Harris was born into the Harris home in London, England, in 1879. She was one of eleven children, being the ninth of nine girls and two boys. Her father, an honest man, was a wealthy merchant who provided a comfortable life for his family. That did not, however, have debilitating effects on their spiritual well-being. They were involved in charity work, missions, and work with people of the street with regard to their spiritual needs. Evelyn’s mother was a particularly godly woman, always giving to the poor and needy.

With a protective father, Evelyn felt secure and happy at home. Mr. Harris would have been happy to have had his children remain at home for the rest of their lives but eventually they left to begin their own families.

There was a good sense of sin in the Harris home but the atmosphere was not restrictive or repressive. Love was the heart of all of life both spiritual and domestic. Sunday was observed as the Lord’s Day and even the servants had the day off. In living out his faith, Evelyn’s grandfather had once turned down a job that required him to work on Sunday.

God worked in Evelyn’s heart and at the age of 11 she was baptized as a profession of her faith in Christ.

Having her father’s talent in art, she turned to painting but by the time she was in her twenties, art was not enough to fulfill her life. On a trip home from Australia, where she had gone to help her sister, Evelyn felt God’s call to missions. She did not know how she would break this news to her father. Evelyn was now 30 years old.

She attended a missionary meeting where a young missionary named Jesse Brand was telling of the work he was doing in the country of India. Then and there she felt God wanted her to go to India and share the Gospel, despite the hardships which that would bring. She believed God was able to take her through whatever difficulties and trials might lie ahead. She knew this would put an end to her frilly dresses and plumed hats but she was willing to give those all up to follow Christ. Now she was able to tell her father.

Her announcement was hard for Mr. Harris to receive. He tried to persuade her to be a missionary to the unsaved in London but Evelyn told him she had to obey the Lord’s calling. Finally, her father gave in but said she must allow him to provide for her financial needs on the mission field.

When she met Jesse Brand at the missions meeting he was not to her liking as a person. However, when she landed in India she was assigned to the plains in Madras. She discovered that Mr. Brand had been assigned there too. Her opinion of him soon began to change. She not only fell in love with him but also with his vision that he had for the lost souls living in the mountainous areas of India.

God worked in Jesse’s heart as well and before long they were married—the year was 1913. Their honeymoon was quite an introduction to life in the hill country. The treacherous trip to their destination included wild pigs, mud, thunder, steep precipices, and getting lost in the dark. Evie survived all this in her white wedding dress!

The following years were not easy ones but they were fulfilling. Their first convert to

Christianity was a dying man. It was seven years later before they saw anyone else accept Christ in that area.

Jesse's vision was to reach people in five ranges of hills. This was a hard area in which to labor for the Lord, not only because of the terrain but also because of spiritual darkness. However, Jesse and Evie were passionate about their work. Many people wanted to accept Christ but were afraid because of the resistance of the Hindu priests. The Brands went from village to village preaching, giving Bible stories, and healing the sick, as well as helping the people build their houses, do their farming, and help them fight their tax battles.

God blessed the Brands with two children of their own, Paul and Connie, as well as many orphan children over the years while in India. Paul and Connie would travel with them to the villages, and although they were very young, they would hand out tracts and Gospels as well as help their mother by holding the Bible pictures. At an early age they knew what it meant to be loyal to the Lord and His calling. This was part of their daily experience. As young children they caught the vision for missions.

Their father was very good to them and taught them much about God's world all around them. They had many animals and insects to "study" and from which to learn.

Evie knew that the time was fast approaching that they would have to take their children back to England for boarding school. This was her greatest test of loyalty to the Lord. Although it was hard, she passed the test with flying colors.

In 1922 the Brands planned to return to England on furlough, having waited an extra year before leaving. Unfortunately, before they could return, Evie received a telegram with the very sad message that her father had died.

Sadness again befell the Brand home when Jesse was stricken with Blackwater Fever and died. Paul and Connie received word in England that their father was dead. After Evie visited with the children, she determined to return to India to finish the work which she and her husband had begun. In some ways her story was just beginning.

Evelyn Brand believed that the missionaries in India would continue on with the mountain work which she and Jesse had started. However, this was not their plan. Sister Brand then petitioned the mission to open another mountain area to her where she could carry on the work. However, the mission denied this request in 1947—after all she was 68 years old!

"Granny," as she was affectionately called, was determined to keep the vow she and Jesse had made years before to reach five mountain ranges with the Gospel. Seeking for one last chance she approached the mission asking them to let her continue her work for one more year. They agreed but assigned her to the plains. During that year she had a little house built from scrap materials in the mountains. Any vacation time would be spent there.

At the end of the year her co-workers came to say good-bye and present her with a gift at her retirement. She happily informed them that although she was done with the mission she was going to work independently with the mountain people she loved. For Granny her life began at 70!

Granny took up the challenge and continued the work of evangelism. She still went from one village to the next on a pony. She would camp along the way teaching, dispensing medicine, and rescuing abandoned children. Due to her age and frailty the work was harder than before but she continued on. Due to an accident she lost her balance and used bamboo canes for the rest of her life in order to walk. She suffered fevers, broken bones, and other infirmities but did not give up.

God used His willing servant, "Granny," to evangelize seven mountain ranges in all with mission works established in five of the seven. She faithfully proclaimed the Gospel wherever she went, giving all the glory to God for the souls that were saved.

(continued on page 10)

Citizens of the Kingdom

by Glendon Thompson

The nine beatitudes that are presented to us in Matthew 5:1-12 have been subjected to various interpretations over the years. For some they have been moral instruction; for some the requirement for entry into the kingdom of God. I believe that we are given a sight of what it is to be children of God and to be a part of the kingdom of God, what it means to be a Christian.

Matthew 5:1-12

1. And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. 2. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: 3. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. 6. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. 7. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. 8. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Introduction

Matthew 5 must be read in the context of Chapter 4:17ff. A new section of Matthew begins here, "From that time Jesus began . . ." Prior to this we have seen the Lord's incarnation. We have seen His assuming of the Messianic role that He has been given, His baptism,

and His testing. Now He begins a ministry in Capernaum in fulfillment of the Prophet Isaiah. We are told in Chapter 4:12-16 that Jesus' presence ushers in the kingdom, and with the kingdom of God a light has dawned on those who are seated in darkness. Chapter 4:17-25 shows that the kingdom requires discipleship. At the heart of discipleship are commitment and cost. This kingdom requires commitment to Christ, so He calls these men, "Come, follow me." This is a radically new kingdom, in which something tremendous is occurring. Those who have been debilitated by sin are now being restored. Those who were afflicted with various diseases and tormented, those who were demon-possessed and epileptic, and those who were paralyzed, were being healed. *All of them!* This kingdom comes and brings light. It requires discipleship and it is bringing the power of God into the human dilemma.

Jesus then, perhaps with some reference to Moses, goes up to the mountain. Whereas Moses was given the law, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is greater than Moses, begins to describe what it means to be a part of the kingdom, what it means to be a true Christian. The Bible says, "*And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated, His disciples came to Him,*" and we ought to understand the beatitudes as particularly given to believers. It does not mean that there was not a larger crowd listening to the Lord, but the thrust of this address was given to the disciples. Jesus was speaking to those who are already part of the kingdom. "*He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in*

spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' "

Deeply, Permanently Happy

The beatitudes affirm that citizens of the kingdom exist in a state of deep and permanent happiness. It is possible to itemize the beatitudes verse by verse and to neglect that which is most obvious: the word *blessed*. "Blessed are the . . ." Nine times our Lord Jesus says this. It is a word that many of our translators seem to shy away from, but it means to be happy, deeply happy. In 1 Timothy 6 our Lord is called "the *blessed* God." God who is the deeply, permanently happy God. We can overlook the shock that this word connotes, because we do not associate happiness with those who are considered to be poor, or those who mourn, or those who are meek, or those who are hungry. But Jesus says with startling impact, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*" and, "**Blessed are those who mourn.**"

An Elusive Quality

One of the reasons that this is such a tremendous passage is because it deals with one of the most important pursuits of life. Happiness is the most desired and yet the most elusive quality in life. Whatever we may do for a living, we pursue happiness. I think it was Oscar Wilde who said that there are two tragedies in life: Not to get what you want and to get what you want! We can never be happy. We seek happiness and it flees from us. The unknown hymn

writer expresses it well:

I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,
But ah! the waters failed!
E'en as I stooped to drink they'd fled,
And mocked me as I wailed.
Now, none but Christ can satisfy,
None other name for me,
There's love and life and lasting joy,
Lord Jesus, found in Thee.

Our world pursues happiness. Some have come to the point where they believe that happiness cannot be found in this world. Everywhere we turn we are being bombarded by advertisements. "Taste me, touch me, buy me, eat me, drink me." And behind it all, we are being invited to taste happiness. If we are to understand Neil Postman saying that we are amusing ourselves to death, we must come to the realization that our society is a deeply bruised and hurt society, where men and women are seeking happiness in our various ways. By social elevation, we want to get better jobs, we want to be more educated, but at the end of the day, what we pursue is happiness. We recognize that everything that we touch sours, crumbles. Happiness eludes us. Then Jesus comes along and says to the disciples, "*Blessed*, highly favoured and deeply permanently happy, are those who are poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek."

Seeking in the Wrong Place

Solomon was perhaps the greatest and the wisest man that has ever come upon this earth. He had more wives than any other man it seems. He had more money and wealth and status. This man was a genius. He was a poet and an architect. He was a diplomat of the highest order. Where David had subjected the nations militarily, he conquered the nations economically. And yet having chased all of these things, he says all of it is vanity. "Vanity of vanities. Merely a chasing of the wind." Why is it that we cannot find happiness? It is because

first we seek it in the wrong place. Happiness is inextricably linked to our relationship to God. In the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve relinquished their innocence, they also relinquished happiness. What replaced that happiness was fear, guilt, anxiety, and shame. Michel Foucault, one of the leading architects of post-modern philosophy, would have us live in a morally neutered world. He said, "There are no absolutes. There is no foundation. Every claim at legitimization, every claim at having a standard that governs the world is only part in a power play trying to dominate." He would have us live in a relative world, where you can do as you please. In fact he says that the only thing that we ought to be pursuing is pleasure. This man committed himself to seek pleasure in a homosexual relationship, but he died of AIDS, a broken, bitter man.

We need to understand that happiness is inextricably linked to our relationship with God and particularly the kingdom of God. There can be no happiness without holiness. In Psalm 32 the Psalmist says, "*Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven.*" You can't have happiness until the sin question is dealt with. In verse 3, "*When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer.*" He is saying, "When I sinned and hid my sin I dried up; I was like a diseased man." In Psalm 51, having confessed his sins, he says, "*Restore to me the joy of the Lord.*" You see, happiness and holiness go hand in hand and you can't have one without the other.

In the Biblical perspective the greatest barrier to joy is sin. Jesus says, "But there are some people who are deeply, permanently happy." It is because the sin question has been dealt with. It is because they have been brought into a relationship. They have responded to the message of the kingdom to repent

and to believe. They have come into a kingdom where sins are forgiven. Yet these people who are happy are the most unlikely candidates for happiness you have ever found. Why? They are poor in spirit. They are those who mourn. You see, the happiness that our Lord announces is one which supersedes the emotions. It supersedes our physical circumstances. In Acts 16 Paul and Silas are in Philippi and have been beaten and cast into prison. What are they doing? Moaning and quarreling about how hard the road is? No. They are singing! They can sing because they have received the joy of the Lord. They belong to the kingdom of God. The Philippian jailer, when he turned and believed in God, the Bible says, "*he was filled with joy.*" Maybe you are seeking happiness in alcohol, or perhaps in a relationship; you are barking up the wrong tree. You will never find it there. It can only be found by belonging to a kingdom that has no end, a spiritual kingdom. You can only find it when you find God.

A Radically Different Character

The beatitudes affirm that the citizens of the kingdom exist in a state of permanent happiness. Not that God's children won't have sorrow or difficulties, but it is happiness from God which lasts in difficult times. Secondly the beatitudes are saying that the character of citizens of the kingdom is radically different from those who are citizens of this world. There is, underneath the beatitudes, a polemic against a different idea of righteousness and the citizens of the kingdom of God that existed in that time. Jesus Christ is going to redefine what it is to be true citizens of the kingdom of God.

Attitude to God

The first four beatitudes provide a dagger to the heart of Pharisaical righteousness. Those who belong to the

kingdom are distinguished by a particular attitude to God. How do we know who are children of God? How do we know that these who are blessed are children of God? He says they are poor! Not poor because they have no money in the bank, but poor because they are poor in spirit. They are not puffed up with smug satisfaction, after their own wisdom or righteousness, or any perceived advantage that they may have in life. In the account of the publican and the Pharisee, the publican who stood afar off in the temple and would not draw near, but struck himself on the breast saying, "Lord, have mercy upon me," is an example of a man who is poor in spirit. Poor in spirit does not mean weak-minded. It does not mean a person who is soft in the brain; it simply means someone who is humble. Those who are children of God, those who are subjects of the kingdom, are distinguished by this attitude to God. They recognize their utter dependence on God. They are humble and contrite in heart as we are told in Isaiah 66:2. I saw recently an advertisement on one of those billboards by the highway from a company advertising how well they have been doing. Here is what it says, "It is hard to be humble." Hard as it may be, the kingdom of God is for those who are poor in spirit. They are distinguished by their reliance upon God, recognizing that they are nothing in His sight.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Not only are the citizens of the kingdom of God poor and humble but they are those who mourn. They take God seriously. What are believers like? What are members of the kingdom like? They are known by humility. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. More than that they are those who are mourning. They understand the grievousness of sin. They recognize the terrible thing it is to rebel against the law of God. They

understand what it is to fail God. These are people who are sensitive to God and sensitive to sin. And so they are mourning, because it is their response to God, "Lord, I long to be perfectly whole." They continually mourn, asking God to cleanse them and to purge them from unrighteousness. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. A distinguishing sign of a member of the kingdom of God is that sin is taken seriously. And we long to be rid of it. We, like Paul in Romans 7, say, "Oh this body of death. Who can deliver me? The things I want to do I do not do, and those that I do not want to do, I find myself doing. There is another law within my members. There is a struggle within and we are pulled in two different directions, but, like the Psalmist David we cry, 'I want a united heart.' " Yes, those who are citizens of the kingdom are humble and they mourn over sin. We cannot sin lightly, because we have come to understand the holiness of God. They mourn, but it is not a mourning of despair, like that of Judas. It is not a worldly mourning. It is not a sorrow of the world. For there is hope in the sorrowing that one day there will be deliverance. Yes, those who belong to the kingdom are distinguished by their relationship to God, humble in His sight, mourning to be cleansed.

The citizens of the kingdom of God are meek. Meekness and weakness are not the same things. Meekness means they are submissive to God and they are gentle to others. They hunger and thirst for righteousness. Hunger and thirst are the two most powerful drives that we have. And the metaphors as we have them here, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, tell us that those who are children of God, citizens of the kingdom, are distinguished by their deep passion for God. They have this insatiable hunger and insatiable thirst for righteousness—personal righteousness and also righteousness in society. As

Jesus speaks to the disciples, He is saying, "This is not what you must *become* to be a member of the kingdom, this is what you *are*. You are happy, and you are those who are poor in spirit. You are those who are mourning for sin. You are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness and yes, you are those who are meek." These are indicatives. They tell us the status that we have, who we are. The indicatives here perhaps have an imperative force which also commands us to pursue these things.

Maybe you cannot say with honesty, "I have come to know this humility of heart, this sorrow for sin. This meekness in the eyes of God." Maybe you cannot say, "I have a hunger and thirst for righteousness." Then your task is to say, "Jesus, change my heart." You see, only those who have known the working of the Spirit of God can hunger for righteousness. Only those who have known the working of the Spirit of God can mourn for sin.

Attitude to One Another

Those who are members of the kingdom are not only distinguished by their attitude to God, they are distinguished by their attitude towards one another. This has been the emphasis of our brother, Dr. Fountain. "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers.*" I believe that these three verses, particularly v. 7 and v. 9, refer to our relationship with one another. Jesus looks at the believer's character in the vertical level, what we are in relationship to God. Now He looks at the believer, or the children of God, in the horizontal level, what we are to one another. He says that the sign that we are citizens of the kingdom is in how we treat one another. There seems to be action involved. "Blessed are the merciful." They are compassionate. They pity others in need. They are pure in heart—

meaning that they are single hearted, or single minded and that they are people of integrity and not hypocrisy. They are peacemakers. You should understand that there is this strong polemic in the sermon. For there were those who were always seeking to advance themselves—stepping on others to reach the top, not knowing mercy. There were those who were not peacemakers. You have, for example, the Zealots who were saying, "We have to use the military option to free ourselves from domination." Jesus comes along and says, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Right there He cuts the heart out of the Zealot mentality. This is not the way to advance the kingdom. No, children of the kingdom are known by peace. "*If it is possible, live at peace with all men,*" Jesus says. He is the great reconciler who brings peace to the world and His children are children of peace. What He is saying, therefore, in this beatitude is that there is a radical difference between members of the kingdom of God and those who are in this world. It requires humility of heart in God's sight, a passion for God and for holiness, a love for brothers, and a relationship with others that suggests that we have been changed.

Attitude to the Name of Christ

The final beatitude is, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God.*" It says that citizens of the kingdom are distinguished not only by their relationship to God, their attitude to God, and their attitude to one another, but they are distinguished by their attitude to the name of Christ. They are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Persecution for righteousness' sake is the same as being persecuted for the name of Christ. In verse 11 we are told, "*Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.*" We find the same thing in Matthew 10:22: they were perse-

cuted “for my name’s sake.” To be persecuted for righteousness is to be persecuted for the name of Christ. And citizens of the kingdom are distinguished by their attitude to the name of Christ. They show an abiding loyalty to Christ. They identify with Him, even when identification with Christ causes those around to be hostile to them, so that they are persecuted. The obvious question is simply this: Are you a citizen of the kingdom of God? Has there been a deep working in the heart that brings you to a sense of humility in the eyes of God? Do you know your sins? Have they cut you deeply and profoundly? Do you long for holiness, for righteousness? Has there been a change in your behavior to others? And does the name of Christ evoke loyalty deep in the heart at your work, at your home?

Manifold Blessings

These beatitudes list for us the manifold blessings that belong to the citizens of God’s kingdom. They tell us the state of blessedness in which we are. They give to us a description of the character of those who are citizens. But they also list the blessings that are ours if we are citizens of the kingdom. “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” What do we see in these blessings? “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.*” Jesus offers comfort—the removal of every discouragement and every pain. They will inherit the earth—the removal of every physical want—they will be filled. They will obtain mercy—they will see the Lord. The beatitude vision, they will be called sons of God.

What are these blessings? Our Lord lists them. They are the blessings that pertain to eternal life. It is a very rich concept in Scripture, for when you have received eternal life, the kingdom belongs to you. You are going to be com-

forted. You will be called “children of God.” You will be fully satisfied when you arise in His image. These are the blessings that pertain to eternal life. Every painful experience one day will be removed; every tear removed from the eye; every hunger for righteousness fully satisfied. But these blessings are for the present, because we have the present tense. For theirs is the kingdom. It is blessings for today! They have become inheritors of God’s kingdom with His glory and with His power. But these blessings are yet future and this is why we are told, “They will be comforted. They will inherit the earth. They will be filled.” We have the *now* and the *not yet*. Present blessings are a part of the kingdom, but we wait for future blessings. We have a down payment now—“Children of God.” But when we will be finally vindicated we will be called “sons of God.” Yes, these blessings are present tense and yet future. Inaugurated but waiting to be consummated. And these blessings are to be administered by God. This is what we call the divine passives here. “They shall be comforted.” That is passive. “They shall be filled.” Who will do the comforting? Who will do the filling? It is the Lord Himself! So we see blessings from God, complete blessings which express eternal life. He Himself will wipe every tear from the eye. He Himself will do the comforting. He Himself will call us “children of God.” He Himself will fill us. My friends, God holds out these blessings to you, if you are a child of God, blessings today and blessings yet to come. May the blessings of God, to see God, to be called “children of God,” to be filled with righteousness, may these blessings that are held out to you motivate you to live the Christian life as children and citizens of the kingdom of God. ■

—Reprinted from the April 2000 issue of *The Gospel Witness*.

From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

Theology: Bane or Blessing?

by John A. Knight

“Theology is what’s wrong with the world,” my friend commented as we amicably discussed a complex theological question.

If we carefully listen and observe, we can note a number of frightful views some people hold regarding the role and significance of theology. At times we can discern a simplistic viewpoint that assumes the only qualification for teaching theology is to be “saved,” or “born again.” This stance assumes that to arrive at sound theological positions, a person only needs to have a right relationship with God. This reasoning is similar to assuming that a person born in a barn instinctively knows how to *build* a barn.

We can also find people who fear either theology or fear those trained in theology. According to them, the safest action is to avoid anyone who may mislead you. People with this perspective tend to believe nothing good can arise from theological study.

Some people perceive theology as boring, unnecessary, or only for the clergy. In reality, we cannot escape theology. Every person, specifically a Christian believer, is a “theologian” of some kind by virtue of being human—no matter how elementary the level of understanding. When we face fundamental issues of life, meaning, and the significance of our existence, we automatically encounter theological questions. The issue is whether our responses to such questions are informed or lack substance.

A person does not have to be a trained theologian to have theological issues, but being trained should at least help someone arrive at more thoughtful answers. If a person needed a brain tumor removed, he or she would be unwise to have a plumber perform the surgery. The better choice would be a brain surgeon who is board certified and knows about the latest medicines and procedures.

AUGUST 2006

PAGE 9

Likewise, a theologian who is a practicing believer can better deal with the questions of faith than an uninformed believer can. This is not to say that such a specialist can never be wrong, but his or her study of the subject can help the degree of accuracy.

Rather than being feared, theology should be studied, mastered, and embraced. Theology involves words about man in relation to God. Neither God nor man can be known except in relation to the other. This means that one who is not a believer cannot claim to make accurate statements about God or his relation to man.

Every religion—Muslim, Jewish, or whatever—has its theology. Our concern is with *Christian* theology, which affirms that only one God exists. Christian theology is a study of the God whose character has been revealed in Jesus Christ through His life, death, and resurrection. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. No theological position is Christian that is inconsistent with the revelation in Christ.

Faith is the commitment of our entire selves to Christ. Theology is our careful, orderly thought about the revelation in Scripture of the God in whom we have faith. True faith seeks to understand its theological implications for right relationships with God and man. So theology must reveal what the eyes of faith see. Theology must conscientiously endeavor to set forth the meaning of Christian truth.

Theology must adhere to the biblical teachings and to the historical perspectives of the Church that conform to Scriptural affirmations. That is, theology must not become the private confession of a theologian or group of theologians. Theology, to be strictly biblical, should not confine itself to a narrow confessionalism, or set of beliefs. No doctrine can be accepted as

truly Christian simply on the basis of its confessional relations.

The role of theology must be to liberate the Christian message from all that obscures its fresh colors. This allows the message of Christ to appear in all its original power.

The trustworthy theologian knows that the ultimate aim of theological reflection is to aid the church's task of bringing about "obedience to the faith among all nations" (Romans 1:5, KJV). Christian theology is a task-oriented reflection upon Scripture, in light of the practical needs of ministry and mission. Its task is to serve the Church as it extends God's kingdom in the world and in believers' hearts.

And that is a *blessing!* ■

—Reprinted from the March/April issue of *Holiness Today*.



EVERLYN "GRANNY" BRAND . . . cont'd.

Beautiful as a young woman, the hot sun of India and the rigors of missionary life took their toll on Granny and robbed her of her physical beauty. However, in her old age she was more "beautiful" because the love of Christ shone brightly from her life.

Granny underwent treatment for torn ligaments but before she could return to her work her memory failed her and her speech was impaired. Seven days later, on December 18, 1974, she died in her beloved India and was buried there by the people for whom she had given her all. Granny Brand was 95 years old.

You may remember her well-known son, Dr. Paul Brand—leprosy doctor of India.

—Gail L. Emerson

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

AUGUST 6, 2006

Extending Forgiveness

2 Corinthians 2:5-11; 7:2-15

For the month of August we continue our study of Paul's letters to the Corinthian church, this month's lessons being taken from his second letter. The theme of these lessons focuses on the Spirit of Giving and its varied expressions in the life of the believer. Today's lesson focus is on giving forgiveness.

It is difficult to pinpoint Paul's exact point of reference here in Chapter 2 regarding the situation calling for a spirit of forgiveness. Obviously someone had sinned, been disciplined by the church, and had repented. Now, Paul says, don't hold that person at arm's length. Rather, forgive him, accept him, comfort and encourage him. He has suffered enough, Paul says. Don't overdo it, rather welcome him back into the fold.

Paul seems to say that even though the offense was not against him personally, he nevertheless suffered with them. But he says he has forgiven the offender and wishes them to do likewise. That was the purpose of his writing to them, to encourage obedience to the Christian principles he had taught. To fail in this matter would give Satan an advantage, an opening to destroy brotherhood cohesiveness.

Chapter 7 gives more details regarding the situation referred to in Chapter 2. Apparently Paul had written a rather sharp rebuke to the Corinthian church for what he understood to be a failure on their part to correctly deal with a sin situation in their midst. Then, after writing the letter, he was afraid he had been too

harsh with them and had, perhaps because of his harshness, estranged himself from them. In order to find out how things stood, both in the church and in regard to their relationship to him, he sent Titus to Corinth as his emissary.

Here in Chapter 7, Paul reaffirms his love and concern for the Corinthian church. He also expresses relief at the report of Titus—that they had accepted his letter of rebuke with open and receptive hearts and had acted in a right way upon his concerns. Paul also expresses joy that the relationship between him and the church was intact. And more, that they expressed concern for him in the trials and struggles he was facing (v. 7).

He also expresses that the spiritual welfare of the church was his sole concern. While he expresses regret at his harshness, he nevertheless rejoices at their obedience and repentance. There was a clearing on both sides. The offender had been disciplined and restored, and Paul and the church were at one. And so the work of the church could move forward unhindered by sin or damaged relationships.

We see here the Christian graces of love and forgiveness at work in the manner intended by Christ.

For thought and discussion

1. Why is it that we too often hold the repentant sinner at arm's length instead of wrapping him with arms of love? Discuss.
2. How does Satan work to destroy brotherhood?
3. What do we learn from this lesson about right and wrong ways to offer rebuke?

4. When relationships are broken, and it will happen, what is necessary to effect reconciliation? Discuss.
5. The matter of utmost importance for the church is to do the work Christ commissioned it to do. But why do we so often allow petty human grievances to interfere and stifle this great work? What are your answers?

AUGUST 13, 2006

The Grace of Giving

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Having cleared the air between himself and the Corinthian church (last Sunday's lesson), Paul now feels free to challenge them in the grace of giving. Today's lesson and next Sunday's, from Chapter 9, are very similar in theme. Today's, from Chapter 8, focuses on the responsibility of giving. Next Sunday's focuses more on the practice of giving. They both center on the same situation. Study them together, but keep the focus separate.

There was an obvious need in the mother church at Jerusalem. So Paul, in keeping with his all-inclusive concern for the life of the church, determined to raise financial aid for the needy saints in Jerusalem. However, this effort was to be much more than a mere money-raiser. He also saw this as a unique opportunity to foster bonds of Christian brotherhood between Gentile and Jewish believers, diverse in background, but members of the same body.

He begins his appeal by telling the Corinthians how God's grace had moved the churches of Macedonia to give. In spite of their poverty and trials, they had given beyond their means for their needy brethren. They did this joyfully, not with a sense of obligation, but out of genuine love and concern. Paul says, (v. 5), that the impetus for their giving grew out of their complete dedication to God and His will and purposes for them. Once God

gets the person, He also gets their resources. Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand this principle.

Then, Paul says to the Corinthians, since you have proved your faith and dedication in other areas of Christian endeavor (v. 7), "see that ye abound [excel] in this grace also." The Christian life touches all areas. Paul uses both the example of the Macedonian churches and that of Christ to challenge their generous response to the need of their brethren. Titus was Paul's representative in gathering their collection.

Apparently the Corinthian church had made a previous pledge to help (vv. 10, 11), but had neglected to follow through. Paul encourages them now to "perform," to put reality into their intentions. Good intentions must be acted upon to prove their validity. Paul assures them that he is not attempting to impose a burden upon them, but rather to give them opportunity to prove their love and good intentions.

Paul lays down another principle in verse 12. God's blessing is not determined upon the amount given, but upon the motivation behind the gift. (See also Mark 12:41-44.) God can multiply the gift far above and beyond the amount given, and the giver's blessing results from his willingness and generosity, not the amount of the gift.

Paul also reminds the Corinthians that their gift to meet a present need might well come back to them in some future time of their own need. In the Christian brotherhood there exists a concern for the well-being of each other. Each gives in time of need to meet the needs of their brother. Paul uses the example of the Israelites gathering of daily manna (Exodus 16) to demonstrate brotherhood sharing and the resulting equality.

For thought and discussion

1. Why is it that the subject of giving so often touches a raw nerve and puts people on the defensive? Discuss.

2. Is it easier to give to needy people you don't know, perhaps far across the sea, than to give to needy neighbors, or your needy brother/sister? Think about it.
3. Jesus teaches against ostentation in giving in Matthew 6:1-4. How reconcile this principle with Paul's using the Macedonian churches' example to challenge the Corinthians in giving?
4. How do we determine the level of our giving? What are some scriptural guidelines? Discuss.
5. If you have access to the book *The Challenge of Christian Stewardship* by Milo Kauffman (Herald Press, 1955), read it. It will challenge and stimulate you in the total areas of Christian stewardship.

AUGUST 20, 2006

The Joy of Giving

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

Here in Chapter 9 Paul continues his teaching on charitable giving. Last Sunday's lesson focused on The Grace of Giving. Today's focuses more on the mechanics of giving. In these two lessons we cover both the philosophical and practical aspects of charitable giving. We need to understand both the purpose and the method for sharing our resources with the less fortunate. In this lesson we also see the spiritual blessings that result from our benevolences.

In the opening verses of this chapter Paul uses a bit of reverse psychology to achieve his purpose. In Chapter 8 he challenged the Corinthians to give by citing the example of the Macedonian churches. Here in Chapter 9 he says he boasted of their readiness to participate in this relief collection to the churches of Macedonia. Then he goes on to say, Now don't let me down. Do what you have promised to save both me and yourselves embarrassment when Titus and the brethren come to

receive your gift.

Though Paul appears to be the instigator of this relief offering, he, wisely, left the collecting of the funds to other widely trusted brethren. In doing so he set forth a timeless principle, that church leaders must be careful to avoid suspicion in cases where conflict of interest or misappropriation would be possible. (See also 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.)

To encourage generous giving, Paul states another timeless principle: the resulting blessing from our giving will be in direct proportion to the spirit with which the gift is given. God does not bless according to the size of the gift, but in relation to the motivation which prompts the gift. Giving should not be from a sense of duty, but the response of a generous and joyful heart.

Paul also makes it clear that you cannot out-give God. His blessing in all areas of life will far outweigh any financial sacrifice you may make for His cause. If you share unselfishly back to Him, He will provide abundantly for you. And He will multiply your seed for sowing. And increase the fruits of your righteousness. All in all, it spells blessings.

What happens when we give? Several things. We are personally enriched (v. 11). The needs of others are met. And God and the giver are both thanked by the recipient. And, we might add, the bonds of Christian brotherhood are strengthened.

Several lines from James Russell Lowell's poem *The Vision of Sir Launfal* are apropos here. "Not what we give, but what we share, / For the gift without the giver is bare; / Who gives himself with his alms feeds three, / Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me."

Commentators disagree regarding the identity of the gift in verse 15. Some assure us it is none other than Christ. Others claim it to be the grace of God operating in the life of the believer, challenging and enabling him to give generously of his resources to aid his brother.

Both qualify. For without Christ the grace would not exist since He is the essence of both God and grace.

For thought and discussion

1. Is it appropriate in the Christian church to challenge giving by citing the efforts of others? Does it work? What do you think?
2. Discuss appropriate fund-raising measures for the church. Why are some appropriate and others not? Examine implications carefully.
3. We no longer live under the Old Testament law of the tithe, but under the grace of the New Testament. Does that mean the principle of the tithe no longer applies? Is grace less demanding than the Law? Think about it.
4. How should the handling of funds be managed in the church in order to avoid suspicion or potential misuse?
5. Discuss the issues of proportionate, planned, and regular giving. What should guide our giving? Is it legitimate, within the framework of the church, to give only to those needs which spark our special interest?

AUGUST 27, 2006

God's All-Sufficient Grace

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Sadly, Paul had his detractors, even within the church. He has spent effort here in the closing chapters of this epistle to defend himself—his integrity, his apostolic authority. Contrary to the boast of greatness by others, Paul affirms that he boasts only in his infirmities and weaknesses (11:30; 12:9, 10). Here in the first part of Chapter 12 he portrays a spiritual experience which resulted in a physical infirmity whose purpose was to keep him humble and dependent upon God for strength.

There is common agreement that the man Paul is referring to here in verses 1-

5 is none other than Paul himself. Why he refers to himself only obliquely is a matter of conjecture. Obviously the experience was too rich and sacred to reveal in all its parts. Also, as noted, Paul wanted to be careful not to boast about himself.

This ethereal experience of Paul was difficult for him to explain. He knew it far surpassed the ordinary. He knew he was in the presence of God. But was he in his body, or was it an extracorporeal experience? He didn't know. However, in that state, in the presence of God, he heard words expressly for his benefit, not to be shared with others. This whole experience was solely for Paul and him alone. But will he glory in it? No, not to others. Not to boast. It was too sacred for that. He wanted no one to elevate or form their opinion of him based on such experiences.

Furthermore, Paul says, in order to forestall any boasting there was given to him "a thorn in the flesh." There has been much speculation as to the nature of this "thorn." However, its nature is not as important as its purpose. Its purpose was to prove the operation of God's grace and strength in Paul's life. And whatever it was, he obviously saw it as a limiting factor in his ministry. That was the basis, no doubt, upon which he pled to God for its removal.

Here was a man living close to God, a very useful and dedicated servant, one who had healed another (Acts 28:8), but was helpless to secure healing for himself. How did God respond to his earnest and persistent request? With healing? No, rather with an adequate supply of grace, with a promise of sustaining strength.

So Paul says that he will gladly suffer whatever physical limitation is placed upon him in exchange for the transcendent power of Christ resting upon him. In fact, Paul says, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in persecutions." Because, when I recognize my own weakness and inabilities, then with an awareness of Christ's presence, I am strong.

Paul's attitude toward suffering lifts it

to a much higher plane than where most of us find ourselves. Let his life and commitment, and humility, serve as a challenging example. Then we, too, will be able to experience God's all-sufficient grace in the midst of our suffering and limitations.

For thought and discussion

1. Sadly, even great men are not universally liked. Notice how Paul handled criticism. Use that lesson for your own life (though none of us measure up to Paul's stature).
2. Is there purpose in ecstatic spiritual experiences? If so, what? Should we

seek such? Why or why not?

3. Look at verse 6. Paul here expresses true humility. What lay behind such an attitude? How can we develop that attitude in our lives?
4. Often it seems that highly qualified persons are hindered in their ministry either by physical limitations or by early death. Do you have answers as to why? Maybe discuss with your class.
5. Normally we tend to complain over our weaknesses and limitations. How can we develop the attitude of Paul who rejoiced in his weakness? What was the secret of his contentment? ■

Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

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

CHANGE IN "NEWSLINES" EDITOR

The *Sword and Trumpet* is announcing a change in editorial staff for the "Newslines" column. After several years of faithful service and excellent work, Christian and Rebecca Good have asked to be relieved from their responsibility. Readers will miss their unique contribution to the magazine. We express sincerest appreciation to Chris and Becky for their quality work.

The new editor for this column will be Hans Mast from Catlett, Virginia. Hans is a young man with interest in the subject and good ability. We welcome him to the *Sword and Trumpet* team.

The Da Vinci Code: Blow or Opportunity?

The Da Vinci Code is a hotly debated and controversial book that has been recently released as a movie. It contains many heresies that deny that Jesus is the Son of God, that says that Jesus married Mary Magdalene, and many other falsehoods. It wraps this all in the patina of proven historical fact. The problem is that the scholarship that backs this book up is so sloppy and inaccurate that even secular and atheist scholars and historians are condemning it as near fraud. Just as Paul was aware of the philosophy of the culture around him and quoted the

secular poets of the day in response to questions as to Jesus' authenticity and Godhood, so we must educate ourselves as to the fallacies of the Da Vinci Code and use it as an incredible, unprecedented opportunity to witness to those around us. The Da Vinci Code is such a widespread phenomenon that nearly everyone is eager to discuss it. It opens the door to showing them the truth of Jesus. Remember that truth always wins over deception. In this case, the deception is very clearly just that and we must seize this opportunity for evangelism!

Resources to learn more: Focus on the Family's response (<http://go.family.org/davinci/>); About.com's Top Da Vinci Code resources for Christians (<http://tinyurl.com/poabg>); "How to Leverage the Da Vinci Code" by Lee Strobel (author of *The Case for Christ*) (<http://tinyurl.com/h7fkr>); The Da Vinci Dialogue (<http://www.thedavincialogue.com/>); *The Truth Behind the Da Vinci Code* by Richard Abanes (<http://tinyurl.com/pc2vg>); *The Da Vinci Deception* by Pastor Erwin Lutzer (<http://tinyurl.com/e5qgp>). (Both books recommended by Choice Books reviewers.)

* * * * *

Younger DC Sniper Testifies

Malvo, the now 21-year-old DC area sniper, testified against his former "father-figure" Muhammad, who is 45 years old. He laid out in grisly detail each of the shootings that the two committed and also told about the much bigger plans of which the shootings were only a small component. They had planned to detonate bombs at schools and then start a training camp in Canada for 140 homeless children and train them to traverse America doing the same thing. (Whenever I go to town, I drive past the Sunoco gas station and Bob Evans where they murdered somebody. Over the time of the attacks, people would run in and out of stores and duck behind the gas pumps when they filled up.) Malvo told the jury how they took a sadistic delight in seeing the terror inflicted on the populace. Malvo currently has been sentenced to

life in prison without hope of parole and Muhammad is on death row. This sort of thing brings the balancing act, between the Sermon on the Mount and Romans 13, into our lives in a very personal way.

—**Sources:** *Washington Post* and *AP*

* * * * *

Iran Conducts Missile Test

Iran conducted a test of its Shihab-3 missile (range 810 miles) on Tuesday, May 23rd, which coincided with a meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Bush discussing the Iranian threat. If the U.S. or Israel attacks Iran, it is likely that Iran will fire chemical, biological, or nuclear-tipped missiles at Israel. In December, Israel just completed the most successful test of its Arrow 2 anti-missile defense system and defense officials express confidence that the Arrow system, coupled with the less accurate, shorter range American-made Patriot anti-missile batteries, will be sufficient to intercept any inbound missiles. The reason for the conflict lies with Iran's defiance of the international community's calls to halt its nuclear program. European officials are putting the finishing touches on a compromise proposal that they hope will lure the ever-obstinate Russian and Chinese governments into not exercising their Security Council veto on a measure to impose sanctions (enforceable by military action) on Iran. Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has recently denied the Holocaust ever occurred and called for mass slaughter of all the Jews. He has also hailed the coming of an Islamic Messiah within seven years whom some evangelical Christians speculate could coincide with the anti-Christ. While indeed these are times clearly spoken about in prophecy (Matthew 24:6), I would hesitate to subscribe to such theories, especially if done in a dogmatic way. I would also encourage adhering to Jesus' admoni-

tion in that same verse.

—**Sources:** *Jerusalem Post* and *AP*

* * * * *

Voice of the Martyrs Report

Muslim riot in Nigeria kills 51 Christians, injures hundreds, destroys 52 churches, 150 homes, and 85 shops. . . .

An Uzbekistan house church was stormed by police who held 40 believers for 18 days while feeding them only a single meal each day. They confiscated their Bibles, some of their passports, and fined them up to three months' wages.

Pakistani Christian Parvez Masih was just released and exonerated as innocent after five years in prison on false blasphemy charges. When he was arrested, police demanded at gunpoint that he renounce Christ. He was beaten thrice by police, and repeatedly assaulted by his eight cell mates.

A pastor and four deacons in Laos were arrested and released. Several months later the pastor was murdered on his way home after leading a Christmas service in a neighboring village. A former Laotian district governor came to Christ and led over 100 people to Christ; he was imprisoned without charges, abused, underfed, and then poisoned and buried without autopsy.

—Adapted from “*VOM Around the World.*” *The Voice of the Martyrs*

* * * * *

Muslims Burn Mennonite Church in Ethiopia

A Mennonite congregation of 250 is worshipping under a tarp in Kemise, Ethiopia, after Muslim militants burned their church down along with two neighboring churches. The MKC (Meserete Kristos Church, the Mennonite denomination of Ethiopia) called for a four-day, church-wide fast in response to the violence.

— **Source:** *Mennonite Weekly Review*

* * * * *

Suicide Bombings in Egypt

Suicide bombers from Tawhid wal Jihad (which is affiliated with Al Qaeda) executed five separate bombing attacks in the Egyptian Red Sea resort town of Dahab in the space of 48 hours. Twenty-one people were killed and more than 150 wounded. There were two additional bombers that failed to detonate. Tawhid wal Jihad is also blamed for attacks in the past year that killed 104 people.

—**Source:** *U.S. News & World Report*

* * * * *

NYT to Be Prosecuted in Leaks?

“Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales raised the possibility yesterday that *New York Times* journalists could be prosecuted for publishing classified information based on the outcome of the criminal investigation underway into leaks at the *Times* of data about the National Security Agency’s surveillance of terrorist-related calls between the United States and abroad.”

—“Prosecution of Journalists Is Possible in NSA Leaks.” —excerpt from *Washington Post*. 22 May, 2006, <http://tinyurl.com/oroya>

“Those editorial demands for leak investigations in the Plame affair were ill-advised, as many pointed out at the time [because those very editorials are now being used against the NYT now that they have done the same thing].”

—Professor Glenn Reynolds, *Instapundit*, 21 May, 2006, <http://tinyurl.com/m9rp3>

* * * * *

Housing Bubble?

Interest rates have gone up which have made buying a home via mortgage more expensive. The ratio of rent cost to ownership cost has dropped significantly. It is now more expensive to own than rent. Finally, home building has comprised 1/4 of the jobs created since 2001 and houses have been churned out at an unsustainable rate.

The market has reached near satiation with 30 percent more homes on the market than a year ago and houses remaining unsold for 40 percent longer than a year ago. A further exacerbating factor in precipitating a housing crash is the irresponsible “pop-up” mortgages that give an initial window of 3-5 years of unrealistically favorable terms and then drastically change to more normal interest rates and payments. \$2 trillion of mortgages are set to radically hike their monthly payments in this manner. This will force many irresponsible home buyers to quickly sell as they can no longer afford the payments. Twenty-two percent of home buyers in the last two years actually have negative equity on their homes; that is, they owe more on their homes than the home is worth. Forty percent have less than 10 percent equity; that is, they have only paid for 10 percent of their home.

—Adapted from *U.S. News & World Report*

Madonna Condemned

The Church of England and myriad other Christian and Muslim groups condemned pop singer Madonna for performing a mock crucifixion of herself during the debut of her latest tour.

Sources: *South African Independent* and *Miami Herald*

Anti-Slavery Petition Unearthed

“The manuscript of the first protest against slavery in North America—written in Germantown in 1688 by a group that included Quakers and former Mennonites—has been rediscovered more than 50 years after it was last seen. The document was uncovered this spring in the vault at the Arch Street Friends Meetinghouse in downtown Philadelphia, according to

Randy Nyce, director of the Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust. The text was composed by four men who wrote that they objected to “the traffick of men-body” in the colonies. According to retired Goshen (Ind.) College history professor Leonard Gross, one of the men was a Lutheran Pietist named Daniell Francis Pastorius. Two others—Derick and Abraham upde Graeff—were Quakers who had been Mennonites in Europe. The fourth, Garret Hendericks, was presumed to be of Mennonite heritage, Gross said.”

—excerpt from “Anti-slavery petition unearthed.” *Mennonite Weekly Review*.
<http://tinyurl.com/mlsrk>

Georgia to Teach Bible in Public Schools

The Georgia state legislature passed a bill by an overwhelming margin that requires the Georgia public school system to offer an elective course on the Bible. Republicans nixed a Democratic effort to use *The Bible and Its Influence* as the course’s textbook and instead prevailed that the Bible itself was to be the textbook. Christian leaders are split on the reliability of *The Bible and Its Influence* with some such as Chuck Colson supporting it and others condemning it as “deception, distortion, and outright falsehoods.” It is believed that this legislation will stand up in court because of Supreme Court precedent allowing the study of the Bible in an academic way, while prohibiting study in a devotional way. It would be great if we could get dedicated Christians to be the teachers of these new classes. A member of our church who is a public schoolteacher has shown that it is a great way for Mennonites who stay in their communities to have a job that has tremendous and daily evangelism potential.

Source: *Christianity Today*

Supporting a United Effort Against the Drift

by Nelson Kauffman (1904-1981)

From Gospel Herald, July 8, 1943. This article appeared during World War II (1939-45), a time of increased stress for "historic peace churches." Please note the impact of nationalism and patriotic fervor upon the church then. It is a condensation of the final address delivered at the annual ministers' meeting of the Virginia Conference held at Harrisonburg, VA, May 13, 1943. Bro. Nelson lived and served in a pastoral assignment in Hannibal, MO, for many years. His wife was Christmas Carol Kauffman whose life-based stories delighted and inspired many readers, young and old, of yesteryear and since. Gospel Herald Editor Daniel Kauffman commented that he was pleased to share this thoughtful message in 1943. We are likewise pleased to share it with today's readers.

Scripture Reference

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which were heard, lest haply we drift away from them" (Heb. 2:4; R.V.). "Lest at any time we should leak out," a metaphor of a vessel whose staves are not close together. "Superficial hearers will lose the benefit of the Word preached as an unseasoned vessel does its fluid; nor can any one hear to the saving of his soul, unless he give most earnest heed, which he will not do unless he considers the dignity of the speaker, the importance of the subject, and the absolute necessity of the salvation of his soul."

—Adam Clarke

Introduction

To speak intelligently on this subject we must first understand what we mean by the drift and what are the causes of

drifting. Drifting has been illustrated by a man in a boat with oars in a stream headed against the current but being carried along downstream by it. We would like to keep this illustration in mind as we think on this subject which is to be discussed under four points: (1) what we mean by drifting; (2) the cause of drifting; (3) a Scriptural effort against drifting; and (4) a united support of this effort.

I. What We Mean by Drifting

In the first place, by drifting we mean leaving unconsciously the anchorage of our faith. A point worthy of notice here is that it is an unconscious process. We think we believe and stand for certain Biblical truth. A crisis comes and we are awakened to a sense of our position and we find out, to our sorrow, that we are no longer anchored to the faith we thought held us.

For example, we thought we were, as a group, standing for nonresistance. Suddenly the test comes and we find that about 30 percent of our young men, upon reaching maturity, are not standing by this principle. [Boldface added here. All other boldface was in original.] We have ourselves, as older ones, failed to keep vital our anchorage and now lament the drift.

Another thing implied in drifting is a slowly diminishing intensity in our fight of faith. We have not been so zealous in contending for the faith as we should have been, possibly because we thought we were able to maintain it without a struggle, or a sacrifice of material things. We took our faith as a matter of course—thought it was ours, only to awaken suddenly and find we had drifted from it.

A third expression of spiritual drifting is a process of spiritual deterioration manifesting itself in growing disobedience to God's Word. Drifting is the outward expression of heart condition. We cannot detect a spiritual decadence but as it manifests itself in conduct. A decline of conscience against familiar and common sins speaks of a serious spiritual condition. This is usually accompanied by a growing love for world standards. Someone has said concerning one who drifts into sin: "First it startles him, then it becomes pleasing, then easy, then delightful, then frequent, then habitual, then confirmed." Spiritual drifting is an unconscious change from a struggle against sin to a defense of it in different forms.

II. The Causes of Drifting

Before we can make a successful effort against drifting, we must understand not only what it is, but its underlying causes. Thinking again of the illustration mentioned in the beginning, it is not the fault of the stream, for it has been moving downward from the beginning. It is not the fault of the boat, for it is under the control of the man in it; it was made to operate in a moving stream and so cannot be held accountable for any responsibility. Neither is drifting the fault of the oars, for they are mere lifeless instruments ready to be used to push the boat upstream if the man will use them. It is the fault of the man in the boat. If the man is weak, we may throw a rope across the stream and by such artificial means arrest the drift. This will help, but it gives only temporary relief.

One cause of drifting may be that **time, the current of the years, dulls the edge of appreciation of spiritual truth.** Great truth becomes commonplace. It may appear that we appreciate the truth as in former years but the spirit of appreciation is gone.

This condition brings about a second cause, **an indifferent attitude toward the truth.** Familiarity often tends to indif-

ference. We have become so accustomed to hearing about the great love of God manifesting itself on the cross that it arouses scarcely any emotions. It is said that John S. Coffman often wept as he preached on the crucifixion. How does it move us? Are we so familiar with the great truths of redemption that they no longer urge us enthusiastically to the oars?

A third cause of drifting may be the **pressure of daily anxieties and duties**, often righteous, godly duties. Some of us may become so busy with church work that before we are conscious of it, we have drifted far from our place of fellowship with our Lord. Absorption with secular duties and anxieties, which are good in themselves, may also cause us to drift into a cold, formal profession of Jesus Christ. The story is told in 1 Kings 20:40 of a man who was charged with keeping a prisoner. If the prisoner escaped, the keeper was to give his life or a sum of money. The keeper said, as the officer came for the prisoner, "As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." So we often are so busy here and there that God's presence is gone and we hardly realize it.

Again, **the opinion of people about us** may cause us to drift from God. Our associates do affect us. God made us people, susceptible to influence so that by fellowship with Him, His image might be impressed upon us. This great possibility for good brings a corresponding possibility for evil.

A fifth cause of drifting may be **the decadence of artificial means of preventing drift.** Their merits may be open to question, but we use them. We throw a rope across the stream to stop the boat. It works, but if the man in the boat fails to be revived and to become alive, the rope may deteriorate, and finally be worn in two by the constant pressure of the stream against the boat, and the boat against the rope. Some such means in our church work may be legislation, discipline, and restriction. They avert drifting

up to a certain point but are not a permanent solution for drifting, for that can be done only by putting life into the man, who will then use the oars.

Another illustration: When a person has heart trouble of a certain form, digitalis will prevent the heart from growing worse because it is a stimulant and will give temporary aid until nature rebuilds the defective parts. If nature fails, the effect of the stimulant fails too. Our restrictions are a splendid safety measure but will never in themselves be a permanent solution for drifting.

III. Scriptural Effort Against Drifting

This is an essential consideration in this whole problem. What does the Word teach us on this matter? (Heb. 2:1)

It seems to me that the text above suggests the first means to be used is an appreciation of the importance of salvation by a revitalized study of the Scriptures. We must give more earnest heed. Grace and peace must be multiplied through the knowledge of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:2). We may have lost our sense of God's holiness, righteousness, and love. We do not fear Him with a reverential fear, nor believe in Him as we should, for "how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" How can we keep from drifting unless we "grow in grace and in the **knowledge** of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?"

Paul pushed upstream in difficult times by determining to count all but loss that he might know Him. We often are not willing to lose even our magazine or newspaper in order to know Him.

Another Scriptural insurance against drifting is zealous obedience to all God's commands. We have been negligent in some of the "all things" while being zealous in obeying those that suit us best. Obedience is a matter of life principle as is faithfulness: Jesus said that one who is faithful in little is also faithful in much, and vice versa. So it is with obedience. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law,

and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). How zealous have we been in keeping the commandments in Galatians 6:1; 6:10; Matt. 18:15; 5:12, 16; Eph. 4:1, 17; 5:1, 8, and others?

To confirm a man in his creed, make it the law of his conduct. A man usually believes what he does, if he does it heartily. He believes in what he does when once he does it. We believe it is right to make lots of money, if, and because we are making it. Now, if we will obey God's Word sincerely, we shall have strong convictions for it and so will be kept from drifting into disobedience.

A third Scriptural means to prevent drifting is a life-and-death preaching of the Word. It really is a serious matter to preach the Word. Our text begins with the word *therefore*, calling for recognition of the dignity of the speaker and the gravity of the message. When the Son of God speaks, who can but take heed? Often we ministers read God's Word so indifferently that no one listening could ever conclude that it was an important message. We often preach with such little feeling and zeal that folks cannot recall our text or our message a half hour after our "message?" is delivered. It does not take education or talent to give zeal and a feeling of importance to a message. Elijah, a man from the wilds, gave a living message to Ahab. It burned itself into Elijah's soul and so he gave it with a burning passion. Men listen when a man with a message speaks, but they go to sleep during a sermon. Drifting men can hardly be awakened by a dull, dry, and dead presentation of even great truths. We, as servants of the Eternal God, with a message for drifting men, must speak with passion, dignity, and authority, as commanded of God Himself, if we would awaken the man in "the boat drifting to ruin." "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isaiah 58:1).

A fourth Scriptural means to prevent drifting is a positive, continuous discipline.

This will involve a conscientious application of Scriptural principles, such principles as stated in Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1; and 1 Corinthians 5:2-13. The purpose of discipline as given in these Scriptures is twofold: to win the drifting one, if possible, and to protect those who are making progress upstream. If the drifting ones cannot be won, it is far better to sever them from the Church than to allow the whole Church to be drawn downstream. The Word clearly teaches an endeavor to win a fellow brother first, but it just as clearly teaches that he be put away if efforts to win him fail. This is clearly taught to prevent the lump from being leavened, or, in other words, to prevent the whole church from drifting.

IV. A United Support of This Effort Against Drifting

Our problem is, How may we secure the effort of all to keep the church from drifting away from God? The Word has given us the means to prevent it, but how shall we secure the cooperation of the whole church in using these means? I wish only to suggest a few things which I feel will help. The responsibility lies with the individual ministers. We cannot secure a united effort by the passing of conference resolutions against the drift. Some ministers have almost demanded strong conference resolutions against worldliness, thinking that would solve the problem in their congregations—only to find out that it did not work. Conference cannot do what I, as a minister, fail to do. Conference resolutions will help, if I do my part faithfully. The whole problem, it seems to me, is largely one of leadership. Too many leaders become followers and surrender their leadership to drifters. Leadership is not only wielding authority, but it is cooperation with God and His people.

In securing a united effort against the present drift, it seems to me that first we must acknowledge and reckon with the fact that we as ministers are largely responsible. Somewhere we have failed.

We must ask ourselves whether we are leading the sheep under the Holy Spirit's direction, or if we are following the sheep. To see ourselves as God sees us, in our relation to the church, is our first step. The prophets have a great deal to say about pastors that "destroy and scatter the sheep" (Jer. 2:3).

A second need is that we recognize our high calling as ministers. We must realize how great and important is the truth entrusted to us. We must put dignity into our calling. Not the dignity of pride and egotism, but the dignity Paul manifested when, before Felix, he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come until Felix trembled. Such a result can only be secured by a minister when he realizes the greatness of his message and the importance of his calling.

We as ministers, if we expect to awaken men to ply their oars and go upstream, must become so possessed of the truth and the whole message of God to men that we will make a zealous, passionate declaration of the truth that is in keeping with its importance. The real consciousness of responsibility to proclaim divine truth makes men fearless and bold. With death-defying conviction they proclaim the Word of God. Daniel's three friends, as they were to be cast into the fiery furnace, told the angry king, "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter." The apostles, on threat of death for continued preaching of the gospel, "ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." The Church will drift into worldliness unless we ministers do life-and-death preaching of the whole truth of God.

The fourth need for a support of effort against the drift is a repenting for a policy attitude for position's sake. Men of policy are men of hypocrisy. They are men who are drifting and pulling others along. Men of principle are men of conviction who stand for the truth at all costs. To preach against certain things in certain communities to win favor and not because of definite conviction is demoralizing, to say the least.

To choose only spiritual men to fill places of leadership is an essential in a united effort against drifting. Men cannot be real leaders [in moving] upstream if their wives are not susceptible to their leadership. Young men who feel the call of God to places of leadership can hardly expect the Lord to convict the Church to call them to service if their wives are not standing faithfully for the standards of the Word.

The Church suffers untold, irreparable harm and drift when leaders use methods of selfish, worldly politics to gain or hold office in the church. Some of the most tragic and destructive drifting of the Church takes place because of this evil. From such sin, Great God, deliver us!

If the Church is to be kept from drifting, the minister first must be kept from drifting into coldness and formalism, which is often due, at least in part, to the fact that he has so many responsibilities in the Church that he takes too little time for developing his own spiritual life. There needs to be a greater distribution of responsibility. Just because a man is good for one office is not just justification for placing him in many other offices. We do gross injustice to good men and encourage drift by this procedure. The history of the Church is marked by heartbreaking tragedies which might have been averted by more careful consideration of this point. The minister cannot do the impossible thing of working at manual labor as many or more hours than his congregation, and in addition give the time necessary to the first work of his life—prayer and ministry of the Word. The early church leaders concluded such a program was against reason. It has not evolved to become reasonable by the passing of the years.

A seventh point I should like to suggest, which I feel would help to stem the drift, is more conscientious voting on conference or congregational resolutions. How often when a resolution is presented to the voting body of conference, the voting is so casual, indifferent, and heartless that one

wonders how God can endure it! Brethren, such support of resolutions to prevent drift is like endeavoring to stop the drifting boat by throwing a rope across the stream that cannot support its own weight. It is demoralizing to vote in favor of a resolution for policy's sake with the intent of ignoring it. We have too many such resolutions on our records. Resolutions stating our faith and standard of practice are definitely beneficial against the drift if they are passed by wholehearted, zealous, conscientious voting.

The drift cannot be averted by wholly negative efforts. The man in the boat must be awakened to take positive, active measures to improve his own condition. We as a church need an aggressive program of spiritual conquest right in our own homes and churches. We as ministers must show ourselves and our people our true condition! We must become assured of our own salvation and lead others to repentance and assurance. Until we appreciate our own salvation enough to endeavor to lead others into it, we shall be able to exert little effort against the drift.

Finally, a positive Scriptural program of discipline is necessary. It is possible to allow cold, carnal, worldly church members to pull the Church downstream if they are permitted voice in the organization of church activities and to hold church offices. The church is a spiritual organism and only spiritual men can have a voice in its decisions or teach others spiritual truth. The quality of the life of the Church dare not be sacrificed for numbers.

I do not propose to have suggested the total panacea for a drifting church, but only to have suggested a few measures to us as ministers which I feel will help the situation. It is my prayer that we, as ministers, may be faithful to the charge laid. ■

—Reprinted from the November 2004 issue of *The Calvary Messenger*

Glorifying God in the Fire

by George Whitefield (1714-1770)

Fire, my brethren, not only burns and purges but you know it separates one thing from another, and is made use of in chemistry and mechanical business. What could we do without fire? It tries metal to purge it: God Almighty knows, we are often purged more in one hour by a good sound trial, than by a thousand manifestations of His love. It is a fine thing to come purified, to come pardoned out of the furnace of affliction; it is intended to purge us *to separate the precious from the vile, the chaff from the wheat:* and God, in order to do this, is pleased to put us into one fire after another, which makes me love to see a good man under afflictions, because it teaches something of the work of God in the heart. I remember some years ago, when I first preached in the north of England, at Shields near Newcastle, I went into a glass house, and standing very attentive, I saw several masses of burning glass of various forms: the workmen took one piece of glass and put it into one furnace, then he put it into a second, and then into a third: when I asked him, Why do you put this into so many fires? he answered, O, sir, the first was not hot enough, nor the second, and therefore we put it into the third, and that will make it transparent. Taking leave of him in a proper manner, it occurred to me, this would make a good sermon: O, thought I, does this man put this glass into one furnace after another, that we may see through it; O may God put me into one furnace after another, that my soul may be

transparent; that I may see God as He is. My brethren, we need to be purged; how apt are we to want to go to heaven upon a featherbed; many go lying upon beds of pain and languishing, which is the King's highway thither. You know there are some ways in London called the King's road, and they are finely graveled, but the King's road to heaven is strowed with crosses and afflictions. We are all apt to think well of being Christians; it is very pretty talking of being Christians, till we are put into one furnace after another; *think it not strange,* saith the apostle, *concerning the fiery trial which is to try you.* What must I do? why, since I must be in the fire, I must thank my corruptions for it; God will not put you or me into the fire if there was not something to be purged away; the grand thing is to learn to glorify God in the fire. *Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires.*

When do we glorify Him? when we endeavor to get such grace from the Lord, that we may not dishonor Him when we are under the cross, and therefore we glorify God in the fire when we quietly endure it as a chastisement.

We glorify God in the fire when we bear it patiently. It is a dreadful thing when we are saying with Cain, *My punishment is greater than I can bear;* but the language of a soul that glorifies God in the fire is this, shall I, Lord, shall I a sinful man, complain for the punishment of my sins? It is a glorious thing when we can say with a good man, one of whose particular friends told me

more than once, that when he was racked with pain, and groaning all night with trouble, he would often say, Lord, I groan; Lord, I groan; Lord, I groan; but Lord Jesus, I appeal to Thee, thou knowest I do not grumble. Then we glorify God in the fire, when, though, we feel pain and anguish, we at the same time say, Lord, we deserve this and ten thousand times more.

We glorify God in the fire also, when we are really and fully persuaded, God will not put us in the fire but for our good, and His own glory.

We glorify God in the fire when we say, Lord, don't let the fire go out till it has purged away all my dross. Then we glorify God when we wish for the good of the fire, and not to have it extinguished; when the soul can say, *Here I am, my God, do with me as seemeth good in thy sight*: I know I shall not have one stroke but thou wilt give me a plaister and let me know wherefore thou contendest with me.

We glorify God in the fire when we are content to say, *I know not what God does with me now, but I shall know hereafter*. Do you tell your children that are five years old the reason of things, no; and do you think God will tell us? *What shall this man do?* saith the disciples, *what is that to thee?* saith Christ, *follow thou Me*. You glorify God in the fire, when you are content to walk by faith and not by sight.

You glorify God in the fire when you are not grumbling, but humbly submitting to His will; a humble spirit walks not in sulkiness and stubbornness: there are some spirits too stout, they will not speak. When that awful message was brought to Eli, what does he say? *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good*; let my children be killed, whatever be done it is the Lord's doing; only, Lord, save my soul at last.

We glorify God in the fire, when in the midst of the fire we can sing God's high praises. Thus the children of

Israel glorified the Lord; the song of the three children in the fiery furnace is a sweet song! as are all that are made in the fire, *O all the works of the Lord, praise and magnify him forever!* Then we glorify God in the fire when we rejoice in Him, when we not only think but know it best, and can thank God for striking us; can thank God for whipping us; can bless God for not letting us alone; thank God for not saying, *let him alone*: this is to glorify God in the fire. *Not only so*, saith the apostle, *but we glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience*.

In a word, we glorify the Lord in the fire when we have in exercise, patience, meekness, humility; learning more to distrust ourselves, having a deeper knowledge of our own weakness, and of God's omnipotence and grace. Happy when we can look back and say, thus have I been enabled to glorify God in the fire.

Happy you that have got into Christ's fire! happy you that have found His fires in your souls! I believe many souls have: O Lord Jesus Christ help you to glorify Him in whatever fires He shall be pleased to send you, and into what furnaces He shall be pleased to put you: we shall then sing "*the church triumphant*," much better than we sing tonight; we shall see Jesus Christ ready to help us when we are in the furnace: O that this thought may make every poor sinner say, by the help of God I will be a Christian; by the help of God, if I must burn, it shall be burning with the love of Christ. I will say then, O Lord, glorify thyself by snatching me as a brand from the devil's fire. O that this might be the cry of every heart! ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Free Grace Broadcaster*

Menno Simons

(1496-1561)

by John C. Wenger

Introduction

It is only natural for a group of people to be interested in their past. The record of the past is mostly a story of people who stand out for the special contributions they have made. Therefore, in the history books of the Mennonites, we are not surprised to find various biographies of Menno Simons. Menno was not the founder of the church group bearing his name. In fact, before Menno became their noted leader, the Anabaptists in the Netherlands were called Obbenites after Obbe Phillips, an early leader.

As you will see in this biography, Menno was not ambitious to become a famous leader nor to have a religious group named for himself. His desire was to be faithful to truth; God used that faithfulness and made Menno a leader in the church. God did not allow the memory of Menno's life and work to pass into oblivion. We can still be challenged by Menno's determination to do what he believed he should do, by his loyalty to truth once he had embraced it, and by his selfless sacrifice for the cause of Christ.

What did it take for a self-indulging Catholic priest to become a self-denying minister of the Gospel? Trace carefully the grace of God working through inner turmoil and outward incidents to change this moral weakling into a spiritual giant. The strength of his conviction, and the value he placed on the Bible can be seen in his own writings.

Menno Simons

In 1496 a Dutch couple of Witmarsum in Friesland named their infant

son Menno. Since the name of Menno's father was Simon, the custom of the day in Holland made the child's name Menno Simonszoon—called Simons for short. As a youth Menno received training for the Catholic priesthood, perhaps in the Franciscan Monastery at Bolsward, near Witmarsum. In the monastery Menno received training in reading and writing Latin and in a study of the church fathers, but he never read the Bible. In 1524 he was consecrated as a priest, and for seven years he served in the Pinjum parish near Witmarsum. In 1531 he was transferred to his hometown where he served for five more years. His work as priest consisted in the celebration of the mass, in offering prayers for the living and the dead, in baptizing infants, in hearing confessions of sin and, unfortunately, in playing cards and drinking. Until this time Menno had feared to read the Bible, for only the Catholic Church, Menno had been taught, could infallibly interpret the Scriptures.

The story of Menno's conversion is interesting. One day in 1525, during the first year of priesthood, while he was celebrating the mass, a doubt crept into his mind as to whether the bread and wine actually became divine. This doubt of the truth of transubstantiation was to lead to Menno's first soul-struggle. Menno first thought this was a suggestion from the devil, and he tried by using the confessional to get it out of his system. After much worry Menno finally decided upon a course of action. He resolved to study the New Testament. This was a most important decision, for in the end it was bound to lead him from the Catholic Church. He

finally had to choose between following the Word of God and following the church. For Menno this was a very hard decision. It was Martin Luther who helped Menno Simons solve his problem. For Luther (through his writings) taught Menno one great truth: A violation of human commands cannot lead to eternal death. And yet Menno did not become a Lutheran; he developed his own doctrine of the Lord's Supper. But it was Martin Luther who convinced Menno that the ultimate authority in all matters of faith was the Word of God and nothing else. Menno was convinced of this about 1528, but strangely enough he went right on celebrating the mass.

In 1531 Menno Simons heard of an incident which became the occasion for his second soul struggle. Jan Trijpmaker, a Melchiorite, had baptized a Dutchman named Sicke Freerks in 1530. Freerks was executed for his faith in Leeuwarden on March 20, 1531. Menno Simons was exceedingly astonished; the idea of a second baptism was for him completely new. To the horrified Menno now came the question: Is the Catholic Church also unbiblical as to baptism? Again Menno turned to the writings of the leading reformers. Luther said that infant baptism was justifiable because babies have "hidden faith," just as a believing adult is also a Christian even while he is asleep. Martin Butzer said that infant baptism was a pledge that the parents would give the child a godly training. Henry Bullinger, Zwingli's successor in Zurich, said that just as the Old Testament sign of the Covenant (circumcision) was performed on infants, so also the New Testament sign of the Covenant (baptism) shall be performed on infants. To Menno these arguments seemed logical enough, but he was not so much interested in logic as in the Word of God. And he could find nothing of infant

baptism in the New Testament.

Through all this strain and stress Menno remained a Catholic priest. He continued baptizing infants and saying mass. In fact he even accepted promotion to become headpastor at Witmarsum. Menno was thus living a double life. He was believing one thing and practicing another. What would it take to make Menno Simons follow the Lord in loving obedience? The answer came in 1534-35 when the Munsterites came to Holland teaching their abominable and fanatical views. Even Menno's own brother was swept along with the deluded folks, and lost his life in a little battle with the authorities on April 7, 1535.

Menno, of course, took up the literary fight with the Munsterites. And yet he was not a happy man. For in fighting Munsterism was he not defending Catholicism? And were not those 300 misguided souls, who perished when his own brother lost his life, more honorable than he? They gave their lives for their error; was he not willing to give anything for the truth?

About April 1535, Menno surrendered to God, crying for pardon and peace. What a decision this was for the Obbenites and for the future Mennonite Church! Strangely enough Menno apparently remained in the Catholic Church for yet another nine months, preaching evangelical doctrines from a Catholic pulpit. But this could not go on indefinitely, and in January 1536 Menno Simons renounced the Catholic Church and thus took the step which he had known for a long time was God's will for him. As was already mentioned, he was probably baptized by Obbe Phillips. Before we criticize Menno for his timidity, we should remember what this step meant for him. It meant that in the eyes both of the world and of the civil authorities he was a heretic of the worst sort, even more dangerous than an ordinary

criminal. While Luther and Zwingli timed and modified their programs to secure political protection, the Anabaptists went bravely ahead and organized a church which they felt was true to the teachings of the New Testament. For this step they were willing to part with possessions, friends, family, and even life itself.

Obbe Phillips and the Obbenites would not allow Menno to live a private life for any length of time. It is true that for several months he evidently devoted himself to quiet meditation and study. During this time he probably preached on occasion but had no pastoral oversight. But a number of Obbenite brethren felt that Menno Simons ought to assume the duties of an elder. Consequently a deputation of brethren called on Menno and pleaded with him to accept the leadership of the brotherhood. Menno hesitated. The brethren came a second time. This time Menno accepted the call. It was probably early in 1537, when Menno was ordained as elder (bishop). The ordination was assuredly performed by Obbe Phillips, the Leeuwarden surgeon and founder of Dutch Anabaptism. Incidentally Obbe himself later lost heart, laid down his ministry, and withdrew from the church; because of this Menno called him a "Demas." Menno now took the lead in building up the brotherhood and saving it from the radical movements of the day.

From 1536, until 1543, Menno worked in Holland. Soon after becoming an Obbenite he married a woman named Gertrude; her last name is uncertain; it may have been Hoyer. Menno's family did not take first place in his life, although he no doubt did all he could for them. His great work was the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. About 1539, he called himself a "homeless man." Menno's work was richly blessed of God; many souls were won and strengthened through his

ministry. One tribute to the effectiveness of his work was the opposition he received. On December 7, 1542, Emperor Charles V, ruler of Europe from the Netherlands to Austria, issued the following edict against him:

By the Emperor

To our worthy, beloved Mayors, Boards, and Counselors, etc., of our city of Leeuwarden, Greeting:

Whereas, it has come to our knowledge . . . that a man [named] Minne Symonss, . . . being polluted with Anabaptism and other false teachings, now sojourning, endeavoring at night and other unseasonable times and in diverse places to seduce by his false teachings and sermons the simple people, our subjects, and to lead them away from the faith and unity of the Holy Church; and that he also has undertaken to make a few books treating on his aforesaid erroneous teachings, and to circulate and scatter the same among our aforesaid subjects, which he has no right to do. . . . Therefore, to take appropriate steps in this matter, we ordain and command herewith, that ye everywhere in your jurisdiction do publish, cry out, and proclaim . . . that every one in our aforesaid land . . . should be on his guard not to receive the same man Minne Symonss into his house or on his property, or to give him shelter or food or drink, or to accord him any favor or help, or to speak or converse with him in whatever manner or place it may be, or to accept or keep in possession any of the aforesaid books published by the same man Minne, or any other books that he may publish at any future time—all on penalty of punishment on life and property, as heretics, . . . and further, . . . they may apprehend the same man Minne wherever they may be able to find him, no place or jurisdiction excepted, and send him captive to our court in Friesland; for which they, in case they accomplish this, shall receive for a recompense

besides the expense they have incurred in this matter, the sum of one hundred golden Karolus gulden, which shall be paid them by our General Treasurer of Friesland without any hesitancy. . . .

Given, in our city of Leeuwarden under our secret seal, published as a placard, on the seventh day of December, of the year 1542.

By the Emperor to his Majesty's Stadtholder, President and Counselors in Friesland. (Signed) Boeymer

During the years 1541-43, Menno labored in and about Amsterdam. In these years he also found time to do some writing. He published seven books and booklets from 1536 to 1543.

Menno spent a few months in east Friesland in 1543, then labored in northwest Germany for several years (until 1546). He engaged in a disputation with the noted Polish reformer, John a Lasco, 1499-1560, on January 28-31, 1544, at Emden. The two men agreed on original sin and sanctification, but disagreed on the incarnation of Christ, baptism, and the calling of the ministry. Without securing Menno's permission a Lasco published a statement of Menno's views. Menno then removed to the Rhineland and worked in the bishopric of Cologne for two years, 1544-46.

With his sick wife and children, Menno fled to Holstein in northern Germany, along the Baltic, in 1546. First he lived at Wismar, later at a place called Wuestenfelde. The latter was located between Hamburg and Leubeck. In 1550, Menno wrote his *Confession of the Triune God* against Adam Pastor, a Mennonite minister who had become unsound in his view of Christ. The last years of Menno's life were spent in writing. He revised a number of his earlier productions and translated them into the dialect of the region where he was then living.

The closing years of Menno's life

were also darkened by dissension within the church. The great problem was, How strictly shall the "ban" be observed? Some of the Dutch leaders were unreasonably harsh in their views, so much so that at the great Strasburg Conference of 1557, over 50 bishops dissented from the strict views of their Dutch brethren. The next year Menno wrote to Reyn Edes, his brother-in-law, "O Brother Reyn! If only I could be with you even a half day and tell you something of my sorrow, my grief and heartache, and of the heavy burden which I carry for the future of the church. . . . There is nothing on earth that I love so much as the church; yet just in respect to her must I suffer this great sorrow."

Menno Simons had no easy life. He was always poor in this world's goods, being forced to appeal to his brethren for financial help. Yet the Lord stood by him and preserved him from all his enemies. He died on his sickbed January 31, 1561, twenty-five years after his renunciation of Catholicism.

Menno Simons is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the history of the church which now bears his name. He had a sane and balanced program of promoting both an evangelical faith and holiness. He was a fearless leader who aimed at complete loyalty to the Word of God. ■

Menno Simons, 1496-1561 by John C. Wenger, Public Domain.

Introduction © 1996 Christian Light Publications, Inc. Translated and reprinted by permission.

—Reprinted from *The Seed of Truth*, October 2003



Israel “Will Be Removed”

by Delmas Gehman

So said Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in a speech at a mass demonstration in Tehran, Iran, on February 11, 2006. “We ask the West to remove what they created sixty years ago [referring to Israel] and if they do not listen to our recommendations, then the Palestinian nation and other nations will eventually do this for them,” Ahmadinejad said in a ceremony marking the 27th anniversary of the Islamic revolution.

But Mr. Ahmadinejad fails to reckon with the fact that he is not the only one who has something to say about the tiny nation of Israel. He fails to realize that Jehovah has something to say, not only about Israel, but about the nations who recklessly take it on themselves to meddle with Israel and plan her destruction.

These are big, strong words. But they are nothing new. In the Book of Psalms we have a similar situation expressed by the Psalmist. *“Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones. They have said, **Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance**”* (Psalm 83:1-4).

Down through the annals of history, many, many men have tried to do exactly what Mr. Ahmadinejad says needs to be done. Mr. Ahmadinejad is but another man in a long train of failed attempts to eliminate the Jewish people.

In Moses’ day Pharaoh tried to sys-

tematically eliminate the children of Israel. *“And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land”* (Exodus 1:9, 10). Pharaoh thought he was a wise man. But the Scripture tells us *“the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew”* (Exodus 1:12a). The Egyptians’ response was to make the children of Israel to serve with rigor (cruelty). They made their lives bitter but Israel still multiplied exceedingly. So Pharaoh came up with a new plan to kill all the baby boys; but his plan was thwarted there as well. You would have thought by now Pharaoh would have questioned why his plan was not working. But his heart was hardened and he really was set on getting rid of Israel no matter what else happened. We know Pharaoh’s schemes ended in disaster for Pharaoh and his armies.

Sennacherib, the Assyrian king and his general, Rabshakeh, told Israel they could not expect the Lord to deliver them. They noted the failure of the gods of other nations to deliver their subjects from the Assyrians and said that Israel would be the same. But God had something else to say. His Word to Sennacherib was that he was speaking proudly and blaspheming against the Holy One of Israel (2 Kings 19:22). And God sent His angel to the Assyrian camp that night and killed 185,000 soldiers.

There have been numerous men since

Pharaoh who have tried the same thing. Haman tried it and failed; he hung on the gallows for it. Adolph Hitler tried it. He came up with a systematic system for elimination of Jews. He said his kingdom was to last one thousand years. It was gone after only twelve years. Since then numerous groups of Arab nations have tried to wipe the newly-established State of Israel off the map. All have failed.

God has some things to tell the nations concerning Israel. *“For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land”* (Joel 3:1, 2). God says He will plead with the nations for the way they have scattered the Jewish people. This is not God saying “Please stop it!” This word means “to pronounce sentence.” God will “pronounce sentence” against all who scatter those who God says are “my people.” In plain words, **God will judge** those who scatter His people.

Moreover, God says it is “my land.” He will also pronounce sentence against the nations for the way they have “parted [divided] my land.” I cannot help but think of the way the nations are eagerly helping to decide that Israel should hand more and more land to the so-called Palestinians. The way the nations are handling Israel today has serious implications for them in the future.

In Joel 3:14 the situation is described as *“multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision.”* The multitudes will be gathered together, but the decision is not theirs to make. This is not a time when they can decide whether they will serve the Lord or not. Neither is it a time when they can decide whether they will stop meddling with God’s people and God’s land. By the time of this event the stage has been set and the die has been

cast. This is God’s decision against them! The word *decision* here really means a threshing sledge, having sharp teeth. At this time God will thresh the wicked for their wicked ways of handling His people and His land. This is divine retribution!

“The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem” (Joel 1:16a). I get the picture of a mighty lion, roaring until the very earth trembles! The Book of Revelation speaks of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. This is He who roars out of Zion, as a lion roars just before he pounces on the prey. God will judge the wicked. The heavens and the earth shall shake. What a terrible time it will be for the wicked! All the bold, heady statements they have made will be brought to nothing.

In this time *“the LORD [Jehovah] will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel”* (Joel 3:16b). Thank God for His Word! In His Word we find hope in the midst of what looks like a hopeless situation!

What is behind this desire by a multitude of nations to get rid of Israel? It is the same thing that was driving Pharaoh in Egypt, Satan himself! Satan knows that if he can rid the world of Israel, many of God’s promises will come to naught.

Will Israel be removed? We know that Israel is headed for the worst holocaust they have ever experienced. During the Great Tribulation two thirds of them will die (Zech. 13:8, 9), but God will miraculously preserve one third of them. We do not know whether Israel will continuously have a ruling government in their land without interruption all the way to the end of this age. But we do know that God will surely fulfill His Word. All the machinations and proud rhetoric of Mr. Ahmadinejad, and his ilk, against God’s people and God’s land will be dealt with by God Himself in His own perfect time.

Thank God for that! ■

—Reprinted from *The Watchword Messenger*

A Body Divided

by Wess Stafford

In 1996, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton brought an old Africa proverb to the forefront of many Americans' minds: "It takes a village to raise a child." Well, she was right . . . and she was wrong. I wholeheartedly agree with the sentiment but I disagree with Mrs. Clinton's idea of who the village is. The village is not the government. The village is us—the church.

I grew up in an African village and I was familiar with this proverb long before it ever rested on the lips of American lawmakers. My parents were missionaries. I spent most of my childhood on the Ivory Coast in a small, dusty village named Nielle. It was there that I experienced the true meaning of this powerful saying. We lived it every day.

In Nielle, there were no fences to separate properties. As you walked through the village, you would cross the courtyards of several families. There were no disputes about trespassing—the village belonged to everyone. If a person lacked something you happened to own, it was your obligation to share. If a woman's clay cooking pot broke, you readily loaned yours until she could make a new one. Every person in our tiny village knew that none of us could make it on our own. We relied on each other; we were interdependent and worked together. If one of us children fell and hurt himself, the closest adult was there to pick him up. They did not wait for our parents to show up—everyone was family.

It reminds me much of the early church. As you know, God used Peter to build His church and to set those pow-

erful early foundations as to what the church should look like. One of those foundations was clearly "community." We get a glimpse of this in Acts, Chapter 2: "*Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need*" (vv. 44, 45).

You don't have to look too far back to see when this was a way of life in our own country. Neighbors kept an eye out for kids playing stickball in the street. Children knew the names of their neighbors and knew they could go to any of their houses in case of an emergency. Families often gathered together with other families for dinner or conversation. It wasn't strange for a person down the street to stop by to borrow a cup of flour.

But something happened over the years. We began to put a lot more focus on self and individualism and a lot less value on others and community. In less than a century, we have become a segregated society of individuals. We build our houses closer to each other but we've never been further apart. We construct fences around those houses as if to say "this is mine and nobody else is allowed in." Instead of sitting on our front porches to share the sunset, we retire to our backyard decks where we sit in isolation from our neighbors. Or, worse yet, we close the curtains, lock the doors, and hide in our homes and trade sunsets for the latest television fodder. We have lost our sense of community, and we have lost the art of being a village.

I wish it weren't true but the same

thing is happening in our churches. Today, many churches don't even allow children into the sanctuary. As soon as a family arrives at their place of worship, the kids head off in one direction and the parents in another. Don't get me wrong; I'm a big supporter of Sunday school teachers, children's ministry workers, and nursery volunteers. They are essential heroes to the spiritual growth of our children. If I could, I'd give them all medals. As an educator, I know the value of age-graded curriculum for cognitive learning.

I just fear that the pendulum may have swung too far in that direction. In our effort to be good parents, have we taken away the chance for our children to see their parents worshipping God? I don't know about you but I'd love to hear little voices join in the chorus of worship in church—right along with the adults!

Some churches have taken the bold and revolutionary stance that learning does not need to be segregated. As one pastor of a thriving Seattle church told *Christianity Today*, "We pay as little attention to age as possible . . . the Bible doesn't even have a word for teenager. So when visiting parents come up to me or call the office and ask, 'What programs do you have for teenagers?' I smile and say, 'We have church!'"

We often hear people refer to children as "the future of the church." While that may sound like a great sentiment, I disagree. Children are part of the church **today**. They are souls that need to be fed just like everyone else who walks through the doors on Sunday morning. We're also kidding ourselves if we think they have nothing to contribute to the church. On the contrary, they are a vital organ. Imagine how much energy and life would be zapped out of a church if there were no children in its halls.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul teaches us that we are all part of the body of

Christ. What good are the hands if we keep them separated from the arms? Of what use are the feet if they don't interact with the legs? He makes no distinction between adults and children in his description. When we divide and separate the parts of our body we become ineffective. If you want to look at one of the greatest weaknesses of the church today, perhaps it's the fact that we've lost our sense of community.

Please don't misunderstand me. I know that the Sunday school classroom is one of the most powerful places for a child to learn the Bible basics. I know that one of the best ways to get your teen or pre-teen involved in church is to find one that has an active youth group. And I applaud those youth leaders who are doing more than entertaining children. I'm not advocating that we get rid of any of those wonderful resources. But it seems to me that there must be some way we can be a church and be a family at the same time. There must be a way that we can build community together, as families, with our children fully participating and worshipping beside us. If your church does not hold any event or gathering on a regular basis, where **everyone** takes part, you are missing out on a vital opportunity to strengthen the body.

We are in the business of kingdom building. And, just like you, I want my fellow saints to experience real community, powerful friendship, and heart-to-heart fellowship in a way that models what God intended His church to be: a safe haven, a place of learning, a spirit of sharing, and a village where believers of all ages truly do look out for each other's needs. ■

Reprinted from *Too Small to Ignore*. Copyright ©2005 by Compassion International, Inc. Used by permission of WaterBrook Press, Colorado Springs, CO. All rights reserved.

—Reprinted from *Pulpit Helps*, April 2006

To a Young Mother

Don't try to change him; look instead to Him.

by Janie B. Cheaney

Let me guess: ten years ago, you never expected to be where you are today. If you could have looked down the corridors of time and seen yourself with a thoughtless husband and screaming kids and a mortgage on a house filled with days too much alike—well, you might have croaked in your youthful bloom. But that's not the point. Where you are at age 29 depends mostly on circumstance. Where you are at 39 depends mostly on character.

Think about it: From birth to 18 or thereabouts, you're someone else's problem, namely your parents'. Then you slip the loop and become your own problem. From what I remember, the 20s are when things happen, often too fast: While you're making choices, the choices are also making you. Who is this I married? What am I good at? Who are these little beings that I gave birth to?

By the 30s, you know. All those choices, once so multisided, have hit the ground and flattened into their true shape. What now? A few ideas:

1. Don't waste time trying to change people, especially *that man*. Your husband. If you haven't wrought a transformation in him by now, it's not happening. I suggest that you not even ask the Lord to change him, because that prayer too often means, "Make him more acceptable to *me*." Instead ask the Lord to save him, and change you.

2. Allow no root of bitterness to spring up in you. So he's careless, lazy, dismissive and/or demanding? Has he mutated since courtship days, or merely allowed his less-attractive qualities to rise to the top and stay there? It was you who chose him, remember. Was that because you were heedless, hasty, possessive, and/or needy? And does that side of you show more often

now than your more admirable qualities?

3. Don't weaken him by disparaging words, which spring from disparaging thoughts. He is the head of your house, however well or poorly he performs. You need him; your children need him. "The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands [and her own unrestrained tongue] tears it down" (Proverbs 14:1). Don't dismantle your own roof! Part of being a helpmeet is to think as generously of him as you can; to put the best possible interpretation on his words and actions. Think of him better than he deserves, because that is how your heavenly Father thinks of you.

4. Don't identify so completely with your children that you make the same excuses for their behavior as you once did for yours. Sin is crouching at their door (Genesis 4:7); do not fail to warn them.

But what about me? you may be crying out inside. How long can I give and give and give with no return? Who takes care of my needs? Well, that's simple: "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). Are you suppressing an impulse to roll your eyes, thinking this is no time for platitudes.

It's no platitude; it's a promise from Almighty God. He will supply your *needs*, not (primarily) your wants, and what you need most is sanctification. The letter to the Philippians is such a treasure trove for praise choruses and inspirational greeting cards that we forget it was written in prison, by a man in chains. It's all about rejoicing in spite of circumstances, not because of them. That daily grinding you feel is God's sandpaper. Why are we surprised that it's so hard to sanctify stubborn, cross-grained knobs like us?

A truism, no less true: Character is always forged in adversity. Always. Adversity. As someone who's well beyond 30, I know what I'm talking about. Not that I've arrived: The relationship struggles are mostly over, but old age is coming, I can feel it in my bones. The "evil days" described in Ecclesiastes 12 are yet to come, when I go hand-to-hand with my failing flesh. But I do not fear, having

remembered my Creator in the days of my youth, and learned to trust Him.

Oh child, learn to trust Him. That's what He's teaching you. Stop looking back with regret or looking around with discontent. Look ahead to where you'll be in ten years, and set your course: dry and embittered, or a fruitful vine within your house? ■

—Used by permission. © WORLD magazine, all rights reserved.

The Joy of a Repentant Lifestyle

by Donald Hollinger

Job, an Example of Repentance

Job, of the Old Testament, often is studied in relation to suffering. Along with suffering he demonstrates for us five areas of repentance. These areas are conviction, contrition, confession, forsaking sin, and restitution.

Job also stands as an example of the New Testament believer's position in Christ. When God first introduced Job to Satan, His recommendation came clearly and without hesitation. *"And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?"* (Job 1:8).

Perfect and upright accurately describes our position in Christ today. We became new creatures with a brand-new nature. Romans tells us the old man is crucified with Christ. Galatians 2:20 explains further: *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*

Then, as God allowed Job to experience grueling tests under the hand of

Satan, Job finally humbled himself before the Lord in repentance, admitting his need and wrong. He had allowed God into his life and the light of God's presence shone into some dark corners of Job's perfect life. This clearly shows being perfect in Christ is not equated with sinlessness. Also, Job's example shows repentance monitors all of our life rather than being only a one-time experience.

Positive Conviction

Job was honest with God and others. His life illustrates how any one of us can have roots of sin in our lives and not be aware of them. Job was honest with these roots in his experience. As we continue to walk with God, He reveals more and more of these undercover sins to us through the light of His presence, the Holy Spirit. This includes testing at times. God desires us to be honest with ourselves. He looks for truth deep within our being. The Psalm writer says, *"Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom"* (Psalm 51:6).

Being in the light of His presence and

seeing more of our sinfulness is positive conviction from the Holy Spirit. This is so different from the guilt we experience while a sinner. We were not free to come to God because He was not our Father. As a child of God who seeks after God's will, who desires to walk closely to God, who keeps coming to God even in failure, I have now the freedom to come boldly to the throne of His mercy for forgiveness. *"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"* (Heb. 4:14-16).

The devil operates on condemnation and ungodly fear. He whispers, "You are a failure! You did it again. You'll never make the grade in the Christian life. Give up."

Jesus operates on a different plane. He says His job is not to condemn the world, but to save the world. *"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved"* (John 3:17).

Christ, through the Holy Spirit, brings conviction or awareness of a need in our life with a hope of changing. Conviction is the first step in repentance.

Sorrowing, Opening the Heart

Job shows by his response he truly sorrowed for his misjudgment of God's working in his life. The words, "I'm sorry," are not in the text, but "dust and ashes" expose his heart desires. He sorrowed to repentance.

Contrition is godly sorrow for sin. When allowed to finish His work, the Holy Spirit leads the way to repentance through contrition, seeing our sinfulness in relation to God's goodness. It includes a desire to change and have a close relationship with our Father in heaven. **Contrition chooses to turn to God, leaving cuddled sins behind. Contrition is more than a**

feeling; contrition is a choice. It is important to remember feeling always follows fact and faith. Sad feelings closely associate with contrition, but are a product of true spirit sorrow about choices against God's love. Nineveh's response to Jonah's prophecy is an example of this truth. Note that the account does not say they felt sorrow, but they acted and demonstrated godly sorrow. Jonah 3:5 tells us, *"So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them."* And verse 9 . . . *"Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"*

Contrition is then the opening of our hearts in response to God in His love wooing us from our beloved sin to His loving embrace. Feelings of sorrow will follow in due time and often soul-cleansing tears accompany contrition.

Clyde (not his real name) did not understand this. Many times he attempted to wrench his emotions to feel sorrow for his sin by thinking how badly this sin affected God. Finally, God opened his understanding, helping him simply come to a loving Heavenly Father leaving his sins behind and in that way living true godly sorrow. He found that deep feelings of sorrow followed as God healed his heart. Along with that deep feeling of sorrow, surging joy in Christ's freedom flowed as well.

There are times of deep and even extreme sorrow for sin. Such sorrow weeps from Psalm 51. David's penitence ran deep and thorough. But emotional sorrow is not necessarily God's focus. Many times we need to simply express our contrition with a simple bow of our heart. "Yes, Father. I am angry and I know it's wrong. Take over for me."

Godly sorrow for sin will lead us to our Father, God, causing us to let go of our clutch on our sin, thus opening our heart to His love.

A Lifestyle of Confession

The third step in repentance is confession. Again, Job gives the sense of the meaning of confession. **He faced his situation honestly.** At first and for many discourses, he could not see his part in the extreme trouble he faced. But at the end of the book he says exactly what God was saying about him. *“Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes”* (Job 42:1-6).

The Greek word for confess in 1 John 1:9 means to say the same thing as God says about my sin. The Greek tense and mood tell us that this condition, “if we confess” in 1 John 1:9, is a way of life for us and not a detailed confession of each minute sin. **In other words, when God convicts me I agree with God that He is right and I agree that He is Lord of my life. I will do what He says to do.** If we live this way, we walk in the light of His presence. Then 1 John 1:7 explains that a wonderful thing happens. We who walk in the light experience cleansing from all, yes, **ALL**, sin all the time. Also, 1 John 1:9 says we literally find purification from **ALL** sin all the time. So, in looking at it another way, if I make my practice to say what God says when He convicts me of sin and when I practice yielding my life to Him then He cleanses me before I even ask Him! Also, He clearly cleanses us from all unknown sin. Is this eternal security teaching? No. **The conditions for continual cleansing are walking in the light and a lifestyle of confession and repentance.**

To sum up what we have learned so far, please look at the words of Christ in Matthew 21:28-30. *“But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he*

came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.”

In this account the first son shows clearly the conviction and contrition he allowed to become part of his life. Five words reveal his heart. “Afterward he repented, and went.” How he confessed his sin is not described here so we turn to another one of Christ’s illustrations. Luke 17:3, 4: **“Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.”**

Two words of confession, “I repent,” open the heart of this offender, letting us see, as through a window, his desire to respond to a heart of love and to change his life.

How does God define confession? Look at these examples:

“Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 3:13).

“And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son” (Luke 15:21).

God’s Word tells us time and again through illustrations like these that God is most of all interested in our hearts being turned to Him. Confession has been worded many different ways in many different Bible accounts. But the goal always stays the same. Jesus points us to that goal when He says, **“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and**

learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Sometimes we misunderstand what confession is.

Confession does not save me. The work of Christ on Calvary provided my full salvation.

Confession is only an expression of my faith in His work. So even though my expression is imperfect, He takes that move of faith and cleanses me completely.

Confession does not disappoint God. He already knows all about it.

Confession should not happen only once a day. The closer we walk to God, the more we will see of our sinfulness. Confessing as the need arises is part of praying without ceasing.

Confession is saying the same thing God says about sin and yielding my life to Him as Lord.

Forsaking Sin

The fourth step in repentance follows quite naturally when the first are Spirit-directed in our lives. Forsaking sin happens the moment we turn to God from our sin. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 tells us, “*For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.*” Repentance is very positive. The theme of returning to God runs through the prophets of the Old Testament. Forsaking sin always balances with turning to God.

How do I know when I turn from sin? Maybe I failed twice or more in the same area recently. If I do not say anything wrong or in anger within five minutes, can I then say I have forsaken sin? If I do not fall into an old habit, say gluttony, within a week’s time, have I then forsaken my sin?

God shows us time after time that when we turn to Him in repentance He

forgives on the spot and forgives fully. That is the way we became a Christian and that is the way we stay a Christian. He doesn’t say, “Let’s see for one week if you are sincere. Then you can really feel forgiven.” No! He promises to forgive all the time when we walk in the light.

Forsaking sin then is turning from my wrongdoing to God moment by moment, day by day, week by week. And yes, the old sins will get less and less and some sins will be stopped instantaneously by the power of the Holy Spirit, but God will take us into new areas of growth, just like Job and we will need to repent again and then we will experience the joy of a close relationship again. We can experience both sorrow and joy in a lifestyle of repentance.

Do note this. **I am not suggesting we can dabble around with all kinds of sin and God will just keep on forgiving us. We can not sin like the devil and expect to be a child of God. First John says that a Christian does not sin the way the devil does.** The child of God does not practice sin, does not plan to sin willfully as a way of life, and does not live in sin. John 3:19-21 also describes the difference between a child of light and a child of darkness. “*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*”

The person who keeps coming back to God gives proof of his sonship even if he fails time after time. By God’s grace we can overcome our besetting sins, but letting failure drive us from our Father is listening to a lie from Satan.

Job, in all his hurt and sorrow, kept coming to God. When he finally realized his sin, Job turned from his wrong and

turned to God in true repentance.

Restitution

Job had one more step to fulfill which involved being reconciled to his miserable comforters. They caused him so much grief, why not leave them to themselves? We do not know what all they said to each other, but God asked Job to do something very special and that was to pray for those who offended him. The Bible says Job found a whole new measure of freedom when he prayed for his friends. Restitution is important.

The last step to consider is restitution. Probably the biggest question asked is, "When must I confess to another?" The word ***must*** reveals part of our confusion in this area. Our flesh recoils at the thought of showing our sin to another. But God wants us to want to open our lives to others, not with a "have to" attitude.

Here are a couple of suggestions for overcoming the fear of restitution. **First, remember that when we are walking in the light and have confessed our sin to God we are forgiven and ready for heaven.** We are free from condemnation. When the Prophet Nathan confronted King David about his sin with Bathsheba, David cried out, "I have sinned." Then Nathan responded, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin" (2 Sam. 12:13). We can pursue restitution and reconciliation with God's peace in our hearts. Satan's method drives us with guilt and fear of what will happen if we open up to others. Too many of us listen to his tactics and carry hidden sin for a long time. We must remember that to keep walking in the light, we need to follow up on the area of restitution.

Second, have an open life. Be willing to do whatever it takes to make things right. God has forgiven us so let's be willing to humble ourselves before others. Humbling ourselves surely brings the grace of God freshly into our

experience.

So if I need to avoid someone or avoid a situation, it indicates quite clearly that I need to open up and tell my brother, "I repent."

Being clear and factual when considering whether or not I need to confess to another will help a lot. Sometimes we may not be sure what we said was actually a lie. We may not be sure we hurt the other person. When we feel fuzzy about a situation it's a good indicator to make sure we are reconciled with God our Father first. Then sharing and praying with a trusted friend can help sort out what is fact and what is feeling. Going to another person and saying, "I didn't feel right toward you; I am not sure why. Will you forgive me?" will probably do more harm than good. Jesus said the truth makes us free.

It is very important to identify character flaws when asking forgiveness from another person. "I was impatient" or "I was not loyal" or "I was angry. Will you forgive me?"

A problem becomes increasingly difficult when we say, "I was wrong, but so were you."

When making restitution, using the right timing is important. Going at a time when you know the other person is too busy to talk can prove very discouraging.

Public confession, another aspect of restitution, helps heal the body of Christ. A true repentant confession before the congregation encourages all to open their hearts to the Lord.

Restitution is opening my heart to others in my failure, thus humbling myself so I can receive more of God's grace.

All five parts of repentance are found in the life of Job: conviction, contrition, confession, forsaking sin, and restitution. He exemplifies to us the test and the joy of a repentant lifestyle. ■

—Reprinted from the October 2004 *Mid-Atlantic Informer*

Don't Waste Your Cancer

by John Piper

Editor's note: John Piper wrote this column in February before he had prostate surgery. The surgery went well, and doctors reported finding no cancer spreading to surrounding tissue.

I write this on the eve of prostate surgery. I believe in God's power to heal—by miracle and by medicine. I believe it is right and good to pray for both kinds of healing. Cancer is not wasted when it is healed by God. He gets the glory and that is why cancer exists. So not to pray for healing may waste your cancer. But healing is not God's plan for everyone. And there are many other ways to waste your cancer. I am praying for myself and for you that we will not waste this pain.

You will waste your cancer if you do not believe it is designed for you by God. It will not do to say that God only uses our cancer but does not design it. What God permits, He permits for a reason. And that reason is His design. If God foresees molecular developments becoming cancer, He can stop it or not. If He does not, He has a purpose. Since He is infinitely wise, it is right to call this purpose a design. Satan is real and causes many pleasures and pains. But he is not ultimate. So when he strikes Job with boils (Job 2:7), Job attributes it ultimately to God (2:10) and the inspired writer agrees: *"They . . . comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him"* (Job 42:11). If you don't believe your cancer is designed for you by God, you will waste it.

You will waste your cancer if you believe it is a curse and not a gift. *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 8:1). *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us"* (Gal. 3:13). *"There is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel"* (Num. 23:23). *"The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly"* (Psalm 84:11).

You will waste your cancer if you seek comfort from your odds rather than from God. The design of God in your cancer is not to train you in the rationalistic, human calculation of odds. The world gets comfort from its odds. Not Christians. Some count their chariots (percentages of survival) and some count their horses (side effects of treatment), but we trust in the name of the Lord our God (Psalm 20:7). God's design is clear from 2 Corinthians 1:9: *"We felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead."* The aim of God in your cancer (among a thousand other good things) is to knock props out from under our hearts so that we rely utterly on Him.

You will waste your cancer if you refuse to think about death. We will all die, if Jesus postpones His return. Not to think about what it will be like to leave this life and meet God is folly. Ecclesiastes 7:2 says: *"It is better to go to the house of mourning [a funeral] than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart."* How can you lay it to heart if you won't think about it? Psalm 90:12 says, *"Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."* Numbering your days means thinking about how few there are and that they will end. How will you get a heart of wisdom if you refuse to think about this? What a waste, if we do not think about death.

You will waste your cancer if you think that "beating" cancer means staying alive rather than cherishing Christ. Satan's and God's designs in your cancer are not the same. Satan designs to destroy your love for Christ. God designs to deepen your love for Christ. Cancer does not win if you die. It wins if you fail to cherish Christ. God's design is to wean you off the breast of the world and feast you on the sufficiency of

Christ. It is meant to help you say and feel, “*I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*” And to know that therefore, “*To live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (Phil. 3:8; 1:21).

You will waste your cancer if you spend too much time reading about cancer and not enough time reading about God. It is not wrong to know about cancer. Ignorance is not a virtue. But the lure to know more and more and the lack of zeal to know God more and more is symptomatic of unbelief. Cancer is meant to waken us to the reality of God. It is meant to put feeling and force behind the command, “*Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord*” (Hosea 6:3). It is meant to waken us to the truth of Daniel 11:32, “*The people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.*” It is meant to make unshakable, indestructible oak trees out of us: “*His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; in all that he does, he prospers*” (Psalm 1:2, 3). What a waste of cancer if we read day and night about cancer and not about God.

You will waste your cancer if you let it drive you into solitude instead of deepen your relationships with manifest affection. When Epaphroditus brought the gifts to Paul sent by the Philippian church he became ill and almost died. Paul tells the Philippians, “*He has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill*” (Phil. 2:26, 27). What an amazing response! It does not say they were distressed that he was ill, but that he was distressed because they heard he was ill. That is the kind of heart God is aiming to create with cancer: a deeply affectionate, caring heart for people. Don’t waste your cancer by retreating into yourself.

You will waste your cancer if you grieve as those who have no hope. Paul used this phrase in relation to those whose loved ones had died: “*We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as*

others do who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). There is a grief at death. Even for the believer who dies, there is temporary loss—loss of body, and loss of loved ones here, and loss of earthly ministry. But the grief is different—it is permeated with hope. “*We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord*” (2 Cor. 5:8). Don’t waste your cancer grieving as those who don’t have this hope.

You will waste your cancer if you treat sin as casually as before. Are your besetting sins as attractive as they were before you had cancer? If so you are wasting your cancer. Cancer is designed to destroy the appetite for sin. Pride, greed, lust, hatred, unforgiveness, impatience, laziness, procrastination—all these are the adversaries that cancer is meant to attack. Don’t just think of battling against cancer. Also think of battling with cancer. All these things are worse enemies than cancer. Don’t waste the power of cancer to crush these foes. Let the presence of eternity make the sins of time look as futile as they really are. “*What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?*” (Luke 9:25).

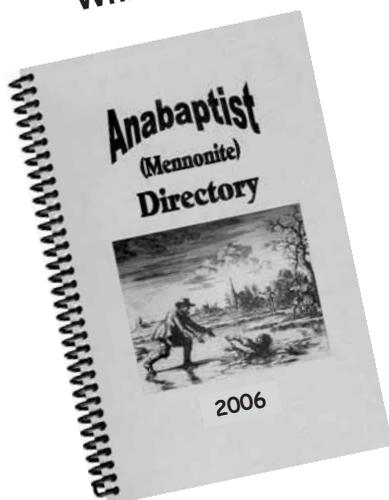
You will waste your cancer if you fail to use it as a means of witness to the truth and glory of Christ. Christians are never anywhere by divine accident. There are reasons for why we wind up where we do. Consider what Jesus said about painful, unplanned circumstances: “*They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness*” (Luke 21:12, 13). So it is with cancer. This will be an opportunity to bear witness. Christ is infinitely worthy. Here is a golden opportunity to show that He is worth more than life. Don’t waste it.

Remember you are not left alone. You will have the help you need. “*My God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 4:19). ■

—Via Baptist Press. Copyright 2006 John Piper. Used by permission.

Anabaptist (Mennonite) Directory 2006

**CLEARANCE—\$6.50 postpaid—
While Supplies Last!**



124 pages, listing churches and ministers not found in other major directories.

Based on adherence to an accepted doctrinal standard—Schleitheim, Dortrecht, 1921, 1963, or comparative.

Now available from:

Sword and Trumpet
P.O. Box 575
Harrisonburg, VA 22803-0575
at ~~\$11.99~~, postpaid.