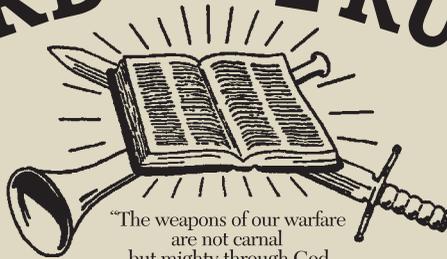


The SWORD and TRUMPET

“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



JOSEPH C. FRETZ

OCTOBER 2006

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

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Person of the Month:

Joseph C. Fretz (1885-1956)

Joseph C. Fretz was born September 25, 1885, in Markham, Ontario, Canada, to Manasseh and Mary Ann Fretz.

Brother Fretz accepted Christ as his Saviour when he was a young person and subsequently joined Wideman Mennonite Church in his hometown of Markham.

In addition to his normal schooling he also graduated from Goshen College. He had gone to Goshen to prepare for a life of service to the Lord as a teacher.

Joseph married Martha Reesor who was also from Markham. In the course of time God blessed their family with four children: two boys and two girls.

Fretz taught for 20 years in various schools and communities in Ontario. Teaching, however, was not his only love. He had a desire to see good Christian literature available in his province, so in 1937 the Lord answered his prayer when Mennonite Publishing House bought a Christian bookstore in Kitchener and made him the manager. He worked hard at building up the business throughout Canada. He traveled the length and breadth of the country promoting quality Christian literature, and as a result he came in contact with many Mennonite groups and developed many friendships. He served as manager in Kitchener until 1953.

With Joseph's great interest in education and the well-being of children he turned his attention in other directions as well. During this period in his life he also held the position of field secretary of the Sunday school conference until 1946. He did much to promote summer Bible schools throughout Ontario as well as summer camps for children. He was greatly concerned about children who were orphans or who came from broken homes. He worked with the state welfare agencies in an effort to get these children placed in good Christian homes.

Brother Fretz had an interest in missions and was therefore appointed as secretary of the Mennonite Board of Missions of Ontario, serving in that position until 1952.

The conference also made him conference historian. He kept this position up until the time of his death.

In 1953 Joseph Fretz was ordained to the office of deacon at Shantz Mennonite Church near Baden, Ontario. He also served faithfully in this position until the Lord called him home.

A layman for most of his life, he spent his years in active service for the Lord he loved.

Brother Fretz died as a result of a heart attack as he was driving his car on the evening of August 22, 1956, just one month short of his 71st birthday. He is buried in the Wideman Mennonite Church cemetery in Markham.

—Gail L. Emerson

Suffering and Glory

The Bible holds a scale before us and we are given an exercise of faith—to weigh our suffering on one side, and eternity on the other.

by John Neufeld

Living in this world means suffering. But for the believer, suffering and glory belong together.

When Paul describes our suffering, he holds a scale before us. Not a bathroom scale, but an ancient scale: one that balances one weight against the other. On the one side, Paul places all the suffering that Christians will endure on this side of eternity. How heavy is that?

According to 2 Corinthians 4:17, it's "light and momentary" ("For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."*)

That might seem insensitive, even unrealistic. What's light and momentary about lifelong chronic pain? What's light and momentary about crippling arthritis? What's light and momentary about the death of a loved one?

Some religions teach that matter, including evil and suffering, is "*maya*," an illusion. But the Bible portrays a very different reality. Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane was real. It was horrible. And it was heavy. The Bible never sweeps our suffering away.

In fact, Philippians 1:29 asserts that it has been graciously granted to us that we should not only believe in Christ, but suffer for His sake. Some members of my church were disowned by their families when they confessed faith in Christ, and they have suffered under that burden.

The call to suffering may come because one takes the commands for

obedience seriously. But however it comes, it *will* come.

Furthermore, the Book of Hebrews tells us that suffering is actually God's discipline. Not punishment; discipline. In fact, the call to suffering is God's way of treating us as children; it's a mark we bear that identifies us as His own.

None of this belittles the suffering of the child of God. Indeed, it elevates it. But we must compare our present experience of suffering to the pleasure in eternity. And so the Bible holds a scale before us, and we are given an exercise of faith, to weigh our suffering on one side, and then on the other, eternity.

Let's consider this further in Romans 8:18-25.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

"I consider," says Paul. In the Greek, "consider" is a mathematical word, a word for calculating a sum. If one places on one side of a scale one's present suffering and on the other side the future glory and then calculates the difference, the present suffering would be so small as to render it inconsequential in comparison. When a believer passes through the portal of death, there is an outburst of inexpressible joy, delight, and soul rapture so profound and real and everlasting and heavy, the greatest suffering of this world is light in comparison.

This truth is intended to make us

*All Bible references are from the English Standard Version.

yearn for eternity. But, it is not only we who yearn for eternity.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

Many of us remember earlier space launches. The old Apollo spacecrafts included booster rockets, fuel tanks, and all sorts of things that were jettisoned after hurling the tiny manned capsule into orbit. Sometimes we think of eternity in that fashion. "It's all going to burn," we say.

But Paul speaks of an "eager longing" in creation. The root word here means "craning of the neck." I understand that word. Since I'm only 5'9", it seems that every time I'm in a crowd someone 6'1" is standing in front of me. It must be Murphy's Law. So I end up stretching my neck as far as I can, leaning from side to side, even jumping up and down to see what is partially obscured.

And that's precisely what creation is doing. It is craning its neck for an event still partially obscured.

But now comes the really stunning part. We might assume the event is the second coming of Jesus. But the text says creation is jumping up and down, straining its neck, for the "revealing" of the children of God. What believers presently are is not what they shall be, and this leaves creation trembling, anticipating, breathless!

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

But right now nature is unfulfilled and groaning. "Futility" speaks of the inability of something to fulfill its intended purpose. Creation is like the preacher in Ecclesiastes, groaning out the words "meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless."

After the fall, Adam was told the ground would now bear thistles. Now that sin has entered the world, creation bears other things as well. It bears earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, droughts, and famines. It bears viruses, bacteria, fungi, and parasites. It bears the seeds of suffering and death. Creation is unable to fulfill its purpose and, instead, militates against its purpose.

When the first explorers came down the St. Lawrence River, it was so abundant with fish they could lower a basket on a rope from the side of the boat into the water and lift it up full of fish. Imagine that! Today, the St. Lawrence is dead. And if one listens carefully, one can hear it groaning.

This is but a picture of a world pulsating with the dynamism of life now reduced to a faint image of its former glory, deliberately subjected to futility after the fall.

"The underdeveloped societies suffer from one set of diseases: tuberculosis, malnutrition, pneumonia, parasites, typhoid, cholera, typhus, etc.," Ralph Winter, founder of the U.S. Center for World Mission, has said. "Affluent America has virtually invented a whole new set of diseases: obesity, arteriosclerosis, heart disease, strokes, lung cancer, venereal disease, cirrhosis of the liver, drug addiction, alcoholism, divorce, battered children, suicide, murder. . . . Our affluence has allowed both mobility and isolation of the nuclear family, and as a result, our divorce courts, our prisons, and our mental institutions are flooded."

Can you hear the groans of futility? We live longer, but are more fearful of growing older. We worship sex, but fear pregnancy. We have more counselling, yet more divorce, depression, and suicide. Creation is groaning.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

However—and the distinction is vital—not all groaning and suffering are the same. It might be just as painful to be in labour as to suffer from cancer, but one is the groaning of death and the other the groaning of life.

Indeed, optimism is demanded of us. Second Peter 3:10-13 speaks of the renewal of the earth. Believers look forward to a new heaven and a new earth. One day, all creation will be gloriously in line with the purposes of God.

Why is this so important? It's important because, apart from faith, all suffering, evil, futility, and disappointment is meaningless and but a sign of death. But in Christ, sufferings are not the final cries in an empty universe. Rather, they are rich, anticipatory cries—the prelude to joy, life, freedom, and fulfillment.

And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved . . . we wait for it with patience.

Years ago, I read about a product being marketed that never quite took off. Individuals who were trying to diet but loved fattening foods could spray a little taste of ice cream, or pie, or chocolate onto their tongues. The idea was that one could have the taste without eating the food.

The taste of chocolate on my tongue, however, makes me want more and more. A foretaste never makes me say, "That's enough." It whets my appetite.

The word here is "firstfruits" but I have deliberately substituted "foretaste" so we get Paul's point. The idea of a firstfruit comes from the Old Testament idea of offering. At the beginning of the harvest, the first part of the crop was offered to God, in faith, knowing there was an abundance to come.

In the same way, having the Holy

Spirit in our lives is a firstfruit—or downpayment or foretaste—of an abundance to come. Earlier in Romans 6, Paul spoke of what the Holy Spirit gives: life and peace (v. 6), life (v. 10), putting to death the deeds of the body (v. 13), adoption and crying out Abba (v. 15).

All of that is just the beginning! And I am groaning—with joy and anticipation—until I get the whole thing. Anyone who has the Spirit cannot be satisfied with this world.

But it's amazing how many people are satisfied with this world. Their dreams are "this-worldly" dreams. They want houses, cars, a good income, an early retirement, and comfort. Or they want a good job and good health and a good marriage. And those who don't get the good life are groaning, in despair and hopelessness.

John Piper, in *Don't Waste Your Life*, says, "I will tell you what a tragedy is. I will show you how to waste your life. Consider this story from the February 1998 *Reader's Digest*: A couple 'took early retirement from their jobs . . . when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30-foot trawler, play softball, and collect shells. . . .' Picture them before Christ at the great day of judgment: 'Look, Lord. See my shells.' That is a tragedy."

It is a tragedy: a lifetime groaning for shells because you never had the Holy Spirit, who puts a taste in your mouth that you would be willing to suffer for here—just to get more of there.

That is the reason for our suffering. God doesn't want us to put our hope in things on this side of eternity, to spend our lives collecting shells. God would have us groan for eternity. Our suffering will seem light and momentary against that eternal weight of glory. ■

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From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

Radically Contagious

by John Sartelle

“When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

I have always been leery of vaccinations. The idea that bits of a serious disease are put into my body is disconcerting. The doctor may use medical terms like *pathogen* or *antigen*. He may say that it is only being scratched on the surface of the skin. The fact still remains that I am purposely being exposed by direct contact to bacteria or a virus from a dangerous disease. The medical explanation is that I am being exposed to weak or dead elements of the disease so that my body will build antibodies to combat the sickness. The vaccination makes me immune to the real disease.

That is what has happened with many Christians and churches. They have been vaccinated with dead or weak forms of Christianity. Thus, they have built up antibodies that combat the powerful, radical contagion of authentic

Christianity. They are going through the motions of being Christian, but their lives show none of the severe symptoms of true Christianity.

Make no mistake, the real disease of Christ is a virulent, extreme, revolutionary strain that kills the old way we live and gives birth to a new life that is a carrier of the infection. When Jesus said, “Follow Me,” He was not talking about trailing Him to a Sunday school class. When He said, “Follow Me,” He was saying, “Love your enemies. Pray for those who abuse you. Forgive the people who are driving the nails into your hands. If your eye leads you to sin, pluck it out. Love Me more than you love your children or parents. Rejoice even in suffering. Real strength lies in weakness, serving, fear, and forgiveness. Thieves and prostitutes are closer to the kingdom of God than the moralist. Don’t hide behind social propriety; confess your sin openly one to another. The morally pretentious must rely upon the grace of God just as much as a murderer.”

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Following the gigantic Christ that made such statements is not easy. However, anything less is not following Him. If we abbreviate these drastic precepts, we no longer have authentic Christianity.

Many churches today are no more than inoculation clinics run by the world and Satan. People go there to receive weekly vaccinations, so they won't come down with the real thing.

However, this extreme life called "Christian" not only flows from following Jesus; this life is empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit comes and lives in us.

May I ask you a logical question? If you are following Jesus and indwelled by the third person of the Trinity, how can your life not be radical? Paul said that the life anointed by the Holy Spirit would be marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Now immediately we recognize that many of those characteristics can be seen in the pagan. So how are love and joy different in the Christian than in the world? This love and joy are supernatural. This is love and joy taken to another level—a level that is alien to the world—a level that is impossible without the Holy Spirit. The same power that created the universe is empowering our hearts to love. The world has a right to ask us: "If the demands of Jesus are so extraordinary, and if you have God inside of you, how come you live such ordinary lives?"

Late in the nineteenth century, two men living in London went to a meeting of their geographical society to hear one of their members speak of his recent trip to China. During his report the man spoke of being in a village and inquiring if any Christians lived there.

The leader told him there was one Christian living in a village about fifteen miles away. One of the two men leaned over to his friend and said, "Ah, there was only one Christian and he was fifteen miles away. But they knew exactly where he lived!" Does the world know where we live because of the radical nature of our lives?

When someone is sick with the real form of a powerful disease, we stay away from him. That person is very contagious, and we don't want what he has. However, I have never stayed away from someone who has simply been vaccinated. That person is not contagious.

Just so, the world will never be infected by those who have a vaccination of Christianity. They can live next to them for years without any fear of catching the virulent strain of the true Christ.

Perfection in sanctification is impossible this side of glory. However, continual growth in Christ is attainable. Failure will happen. That is certain. Peter and John failed too. However, failure is an opportunity for repentance, and authentic repentance is an essential part of sanctification for the sinner. Don't give up. Remember this is the Gospel of grace. You are a work in progress.

Today, this week, once again read the Gospels. Listen to the voice of Jesus. Observe the way He lived. We cannot explain the lives of those first disciples apart from their association with Christ: "They recognized that they had been with Jesus." Today, this week, go to the Father in prayer and ask Him to fill you with His Spirit. Pray and pray again to be filled. Those are dangerous steps to take. You may contract a "disease" from which you will never recover. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Tabletalk*, September 2006.

If you are following Jesus and indwelled by the third person of the Trinity, how can your life not be radical?

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

OCTOBER 1, 2006

God Provides Deliverers

Judges 2:11-23

Today's lesson passage provides a sad commentary on the broken promises and waywardness of God's chosen people, Israel. In last Sunday's lesson (Joshua 24) Joshua, before his death, recounted to Israel God's works of deliverance and providence and called them to commitment. They responded positively, declaring that they would not forsake God for the gods of the nations, nor turn from following Him. (Read Joshua 23 and 24 and Judges 1 and 2 for background.) Now, just a few short years later, they had forsaken God and were following the gods of the people around them. Notice the sad words in verses 10-13.

What had happened? Perhaps a combination of factors was at work. The generation of those who had seen firsthand God's marvelous works of deliverance and providence were dead. And their failure to completely drive out the heathen inhabitants of Canaan caused them to intermingle with them and begin worshiping their gods. Absent strong leadership they fell into sin. And God had no choice but to punish them.

God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5; Isaiah 42:8). He will not share His glory with another, nor take lightly the departure of His people from their covenantal agreement. His holiness requires Him to punish those who betray their trust in Him. So God, in His anger (v. 14), allowed the nations round about them to vex them and spoil them as punish-

ment. His purpose in punishment was not vindicative but restorative. God desired that through punishment they would humble themselves and turn to Him in repentance.

Since the Lord God is also a merciful God, when Israel cried out for relief, He "raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them." In the approximately 350-year-period between the death of Joshua and the anointing of Saul as Israel's first king, fifteen judges served Israel. These judges were mostly common people called and anointed by God to deliver His people from their current distress.

The period of the judges was a dark period in the history of Israel. There seemed to be a never-ending cycle of sin, punishment, repentance, and deliverance. There was no central government and usually the judges served in only a local region. It was an unfortunate time of civil and spiritual free-for-all. (See Judges 17:6.) But in spite of Israel's continual waywardness, God did not abandon them. He continually wooed them back to a relationship with Him by providing a deliverer when they cried out for relief in their distress.

Unfortunately, victory was often short-lived. (See verse 19.) The people seemed bent on sin, on following their own stubborn ways. It seems human nature hasn't changed in the centuries since. Israel went against all warnings (Joshua 23:16) and reneged on their promise to obey and follow God (Joshua 24:24). God took this as a serious breach and moved to bring punishment for their sins.

God also allowed some of the

remaining nations to continue living among the Israelites as a test. God wanted voluntary obedience from His people and provided a test of their loyalty. (See 3:1-4.) Obedience to God does not come without effort and commitment on our part. God provides the incentives and the means, but man makes the decision and commitment. Are we living faithful to our commitment?

For thought and discussion

1. Discuss reasons why Israel failed to live up to their commitment to serve God. What warnings do they provide for our day?
2. Why do people of privilege seem to turn so easily from following God—whether then or now? What factors are at work to cause this departure? Discuss ways to avert spiritual decline.
3. Be sure to note from this lesson, as well as previous and subsequent ones, the important role of strong spiritual leaders.
4. Who were the gods of the land whom the Israelites worshiped? In addition to being a departure from the true God, what was so despicable about the worship of these gods?
5. This lesson should be a strong warning to us to maintain our commitment to God and to live in faithfulness to His will. To do otherwise is to place ourselves in a dangerous situation in regard to His protection and care, as did Israel. (See Hebrews 10:31 and James 4:4.)

OCTOBER 8, 2006

God Delivers Through Deborah

Judges 4:4-10, 12-16

One of the most prominent judges of Israel, and the only woman judge, was Deborah, described here in Judges 4:4 as a prophetess. In 5:7 she calls herself

“a mother in Israel,” no doubt in reference to her position of leadership and loving concern for her people. She, along with Barak as captain of the army, defeated the Canaanites under Sisera, and in so doing gave the land rest 40 years. (Read Chapters 4 and 5.)

Deborah, as the fourth judge of Israel, served at approximately the halfway mark of the 350-year-period of the judges. Unfortunately, as with the other judges, her leadership of Israel gave only temporary relief from their oppressors. The people’s hearts were not fully turned to God. They only called on Him when things got bad. But in spite of their history of unfaithfulness, God was always faithful in providing deliverance when they cried to Him.

Deborah had no doubt established herself as a person of wisdom and was respected by the people for her role. She was a person in tune with God and responded to His instruction to have Barak form an army to defeat Israel’s oppressors, the Canaanites. Her military strategy was designed so Barak could very easily defeat the superior army of Sisera. (See 4:7 and 5:20-22.)

Whether Barak was fearful or simply recognized the encouragement value of Deborah’s presence with the army we don’t know for sure. However, at his request, she agreed to go with him, but warned him that the greater glory of the victory would not go to him but to a woman. (Read verses 17-24 for the full picture.)

Strong leadership is essential in any undertaking, but cooperation is even more vital to success. And cooperation means not being concerned with who gets credit for the success of the operation. We see here a beautiful picture of cooperation in the pursuit of a common goal and for a cause larger than the participants. Notice, too (verses 6 and 7), that this whole undertaking was under the control and direction of God. He made the plans, He chose the players,

He directed the operation (v. 14), and He gave the victory (v. 15).

One of the lessons to be learned from this experience is that complete trust in God brings victory over greater and stronger adversaries. God can do what man cannot—or at times even imagine. In this case there was complete annihilation of Sisera's army in spite of their 900 chariots of iron, which became ineffective when bogged down in the sandy river-bottom soil at the river Kishon.

Other lessons to be learned from this passage are that disobedience to God always brings punishment and that obedience brings reward. The Israelites had allowed themselves to be drawn away from God to the worship of the gods of the Canaanites. God was displeased and sent a heathen nation to trouble them. However, when Deborah, in obedience to God's call, took action, victory resulted.

These principles still hold true. God is always faithful to rescue His children when they cry to Him in repentance and faith. Unfortunately, God's people here in the 21st century are still drawn away at times by the gods of the "Canaanites" among whom they dwell. These Old Testament stories have been preserved for our learning and benefit (Romans 15:4). Let's be sure to look at them as lessons and not just interesting stories. Then they will have served their purpose.

For thought and discussion

1. Deborah, as a woman, was somewhat of an anomaly in the leadership of God's people. There are other women who played significant roles in Israel's history. Examine their lives to determine what characteristics made them stand out.
2. We would understand that God's role for women has shifted somewhat in the New Testament era. In what roles do women today show their greatest strengths and usefulness in God's program?
3. One valuable lesson we learn from this passage is the value of cooperation in leadership. Discuss ways this can build the church today—and what happens when it is lacking.
4. What are some qualities of good leadership portrayed in this account?
5. Why are the lessons of history seemingly so difficult (for Israel and for us) to learn? Discuss ways we can benefit from lessons of the past.

OCTOBER 15, 2006

God Answers Samuel's Prayer

1 Samuel 7:3-13

The period of the judges was drawing to a close. Samuel, the last of the judges, was somewhat of a transitional figure, serving all Israel as prophet and priest. (See Acts 13:20.) Following the chaotic period of the judges when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes," Samuel brought a welcome level of cohesion and unity to the nation. He also anointed the first two kings of Israel in their transition to a monarchy. As background for today's lesson, read at least Chapters 3-7 to get a clear picture of Samuel's rise to prominence in Israel.

The ark of God had been captured by the Philistines in battle and because of God's punishment upon them, they had returned it to Israel. It ended up in the house of Abinadab in Kirjath-jearim where it stayed for 20 years. During this time of peace from their enemies Israel began to develop a hunger for the Lord (7:2).

In response to Israel's desire for a renewed relationship with the Lord, Samuel told them what they must do to effect that relationship. They must sincerely turn to God, they must put away the strange gods among them, prepare their hearts, and serve God solely. Then,

Samuel said, God will deliver you from your enemies, implying that He would then again be their God and protector. The people followed Samuel's instructions and prepared themselves for a service of renewal.

Samuel then gathered the people to Mizpeh, the place of national assembly, where they held a service of renewal. They fasted, confessed their sin, and poured out water in a symbolic act of repentance. Samuel then offered a burnt offering to the Lord and prayed to the Lord on behalf of the people. And God heard, and answered.

While Israel was gathered there at Mizpeh, the Philistines thought they saw a golden opportunity to attack and subdue them. In their fear, the children of Israel cried to Samuel to intercede with the Lord on their behalf, recognizing that He alone had the power to deliver them. Now that they were again in right relationship to God, He heard and honored their plea.

God's means of deliverance was through a powerful roar of thunder that put the Philistines to rout. Interestingly, now that Israel was once again on good terms with God, this unnatural phenomenon had no negative effect upon them. As the Philistines fled in panic, Israel pursued and smote them. "So the Philistines were subdued . . . all the days of Samuel." Later King Saul would again be confronted with them, but for now the nation had peace with God and victory over the Philistines.

To memorialize this double event, Samuel set up a stone monument and called it Ebenezer, saying, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." This stone would serve as a visible reminder, both of their triumph over the Philistines and, more importantly, their commitment of renewal with God. Once again Israel was on track. But, sadly, their oscillation between favor with God and following evil would continue to plague Israel for centuries to come. Victory is a

fleeting thing unless given constant attention. Therein lies a lesson for us today.

For thought and discussion

1. Study the life and background of Samuel. What influences made him the great man that he was?
2. What are the marks of true repentance? What does God require to restore a relationship with Him?
3. Reflect on the value and importance of corporate commitment. Wherein lies its strength?
4. Are there memorial stones in your life? Reflect on those experiences which made a major life-changing impact in your life. Then thank God for them and the resulting blessings.
5. To paraphrase Thomas Jefferson: "Eternal vigilance is the price of victory." Man does not need to cycle in and out of sin. Pray God to help you be vigilant and victorious—continually.

OCTOBER 22, 2006

God's Covenant With David

2 Samuel 7:1-17

Many years had passed. Samuel was long dead, the nation was established and unified under King David, and they were at peace. (See v. 1.). (Review the intervening years of Israel's history between last Sunday's lesson and today's for background.) Henrietta C. Mears in *What the Bible Is All About* says: "Under David's rule Israel reached its high-water mark. It has been called Israel's golden age. . . . Israel prospered in those days. When Israel was right with God, she was invincible against all odds."

With the nation at peace, and prosperous, David now turned his attention to matters of a religious nature. He thought it unfair that he was living in a

substantial house while the ark of God, the symbol of God's presence among them, resided in a house of curtains. So he proposed to the Prophet Nathan that he build a permanent dwelling place for God. However, God sent a message back to David through Nathan that he would not be the one to build this house. That would be the privilege of the son to follow him as king (1 Kings 5:2-5; 8:19; 1 Chronicles 22:7-10).

Though deprived of the privilege of building Him a house, God did give David assurance that He would establish the kingdom in his family forever, thus giving hint to the role of David in the line of the future Messiah. This was not a consolation prize, but an honor far greater than having his name attached to an earthly building. David was destined to be known for a far greater privilege, precursor to the Saviour of the world.

God let David down gently, recounting his rise from shepherd boy to king, His continual presence and protection, the victory He gave over his enemies, and David's rise to prominence among his people. He also told David that He would establish Israel as a nation and protect them from their enemies, and give them permanence in the land. And He assured him that his family dynasty would continue and that his son who would succeed him on the throne would build the temple he had so desired to erect.

God also assured David that He would look after his son as a Father, correcting him when necessary, but continually extending mercy. As we know from subsequent history, Solomon did fail and God did chasten him. But, in faithfulness to His promise to David, He did not cast him away as He had King Saul. God is always true to His promises.

God's covenant with David, that He would establish his family line and that his kingdom would continue in perpetuity, was simply a continuation of the

process He had begun with Noah many centuries earlier. Note carefully the continuity of God's plan in this quarter's lessons. He was preparing men and a nation for that great culminating event which comes to pass in next quarter's lessons—the coming of His Son to earth as man's Saviour.

David certainly did not understand the full implications of God's covenant or all that He would accomplish through him. But we see as we read verses 18-29 that David bowed in worship and humble acceptance and submission to God's plan. David's attitude should be a challenge for each of us.

For thought and discussion

1. What qualities in David's life earned him the honor of being called "a man after God's own heart"? (Note 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22.)
2. What characteristics define a good leader? Discuss.
3. What faults and failures is a leader especially susceptible to?
4. Man's disappointment can turn into God's blessing, as we see in today's lesson. Reflect on experiences in your own life where this has been true.
5. This lesson should renew our awareness of how God uses men to accomplish His purposes. And it should challenge us to live in such a manner as to be useful to Him as He desires.

OCTOBER 29, 2006

God Grants Solomon Wisdom

1 Kings 3:3-14

David's dynasty continued with the ascension of his son Solomon to the throne in Jerusalem in fulfillment of the promise God had made to him in 2 Samuel 7. However, because of David's sin with Bathsheba, his family went through some troublesome times. (It will be helpful to read the chapters

between last Sunday's lesson and today's.) But now the kingdom was firmly established in Solomon's hands (2:46), and he was seeking God's help in directing His people. (Read the parallel passage in 2 Chronicles 1:1-12.)

Though Solomon's later life was displeasing to God, he did make a good start as noted in verse 3. He loved the Lord and followed in the steps of his father David, showing the strong influence of a godly father on his posterity.

Since there was as yet no centrally established place of worship, the Israelites "sacrificed and burnt incense [to God] in high places." (See verse 2.) In Solomon's first public act of worship he went to Gibeon, where Moses' tabernacle was located (1 Chronicles 21:29), and there offered a huge and pleasing sacrifice to God.

In response to His pleasure and acceptance of Solomon's offering, God appeared to him in a dream and offered Solomon a blank check—"Ask what you will and I will give it unto you." Wow! Solomon could have run away with such an offer, but he did not respond selfishly. His interest was on behalf of God's people over whom he had been given the responsibility of ruling. Commandably, he used God's offer to their advantage, not his own.

Solomon recognized his privileged position (v. 6) and also his inadequacy when it came to governing this great nation (v. 7). So he asked for a wise and "understanding heart to judge thy people" with discernment and discretion.

God was pleased with Solomon's request, recognizing it as both personally unselfish and as beneficial for the nation. Then in addition, God, in His abundant generosity, gave Solomon what he could have asked for but did not—riches, honor, fame. As a bonus He would add length of life for an upright, godly, obedient, David-honoring life (v. 14).

Solomon is widely recognized as the

wisest man that ever lived. He understood people, science, and nature. He wrote poetry, songs, and proverbs. He was sought out by many for his wisdom, knowledge, and judgment. He expanded the kingdom, built a magnificent temple, expanded trade, and was held in respect and awe by the nations around him. However, Solomon, though he started out with an humble attitude and with the blessing of God, deviated in later life and fell under God's disfavor. He blatantly disobeyed God's commands. He became proud, was oppressive to his people, and dishonored the God who had so marvelously blessed him.

We learn from subsequent Scripture what went wrong. And while we hold up Solomon's humble attitude and selfless request at the beginning of his reign, we also take sober lessons from his subsequent downfall. With God's blessing there comes a corresponding responsibility. To fail to live up to that responsibility jeopardizes one's relationship to our beneficent God. Let's be sure to follow only the good aspects of Solomon's life.

For thought and discussion

1. David was not a perfect man, yet he positively influenced Solomon to walk with the Lord. What principles can you find in David's life that challenge fathers today?
2. Is it fair to expect that if we worship God He will bless us? Why, or why not?
3. How many of us could have handled God's offer in the manner Solomon did? Define the qualities in his life which enabled him to make the decision he did.
4. Where does wisdom come from? Note the tremendous promise in James 1:5, 6.
5. When God blesses, often far beyond our need or expectation, what should be our attitude and response? ■

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

Hezbollah Starts War in Middle East

On July 12th the Shiite terrorist organization and militia Hezbollah broke the relative peace of Israel's northern border with Lebanon by conducting a cross-border raid that killed 11 Israeli soldiers and kidnapped two more. Israel responded with an immediate rescue operation, which Hezbollah ambushed, killing five more Israeli soldiers. The Israeli Air Force began to drop bridges to prevent the kidnap victims from being taken out of Lebanon into Iran, which was the kidnapppers' intentions, according to Israeli intelligence.

In response Hezbollah began firing Qassam rockets into Israeli towns. They also fired an Iranian C-802 (which is a derivative of the Chinese Silkworm anti-ship missile) at an Israeli Sa'ar 5-class missile boat, killing four seamen and disabling the ship. This came as a total surprise to the Mossad and other western intelligence agencies. The C-802 is a very modern missile and it was not known that Iran had supplied such advanced technology to Hezbollah.

The Israeli ship's anti-missile radars and interception systems (CIWS guns and Barak missiles) were not activated. Israel continues the search for the missing soldiers, with frequent forays into Lebanese territory to destroy rocket launch sites and to engage Hezbollah militants.

These forays have been met with stiff resistance from Hezbollah and waves of

rocket attacks on Israeli cities. Hezbollah has launched over 1500 rockets into Israel since July 12th. Hezbollah has been demonstrating advanced rocket technology with rockets of expanded range. They have also "innovated" with the warheads by filling them with ball bearings to make them pepper the target with a deadly, anti-personnel hail. Hezbollah militants have been purposefully hiding among Lebanese civilians to maximize civilian deaths from Israeli strikes on Hezbollah.

The U.S. has staunchly maintained Israel's right to self-defense despite the world being diplomatically critical of Israel for use of "disproportionate force." James Toranto (a writer for the *Wall Street Journal*) dryly remarked that perhaps if Israel did a worse job of putting its citizens in bomb shelters, perhaps more Israelis could die from the rocket attacks and the casualties could be more "proportionate."

It is refreshing to see the governments of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates condemn the actions of Hezbollah as "unexpected, inappropriate, and irresponsible acts." Unfortunately, these nations have backpedaled publicly as a result of strong support for Hezbollah among their citizenry. However, they continue to indicate privately to U.S. and British diplomats that they want Hezbollah destroyed. Intelligence reports from the U.S. and Israel indicate that the Hezbollah leader, Nasrallah, is hiding in

the Iranian embassy in Beirut. If these reports are confirmed, Israel will likely strike the Iranian embassy which Iran will consider to be an act of war. Bush and Blair have advocated an International force to help Lebanon regain control of its southern portion.

—Sources: *U.S. News and World Report, Jerusalem Post, New York Times, AP, Wall Street Journal, Newsweek*

* * * * *

Palestinians Snub Autonomy; Attack Israel

The Israelis made record concessions by totally withdrawing from the Gaza strip and declaring it an international border, forming the first independent Palestinian territory the world has ever seen. Many Palestinian supporters hoped the Palestinians would show the world what they could achieve with this freedom. Unfortunately, they showed the world all too well: They looted greenhouses that had employed 4,000 Jews before being handed as a gift to them by Israel at withdrawal. They fired rockets at innocent civilians living in pre-1967 territory recognized by the U.N. as rightful Israeli territory. They elected Hamas, a radical Islamist party that doesn't recognize Israel's right to exist. Finally, they kidnapped two Israeli soldiers. Is this the kind of nation-state that the world wishes to be birthed in the already volatile Middle East? The absurdity of their actions has brought about one positive change: Worthy of note are the words of the leading Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram*, "The Palestinians must be aware that they can no longer count on Arab help, economically, politically, or militarily. . . . Arab nations have had enough. . . . of the slogans and rhetoric that have gotten us nowhere. . . . The Palestinians have lost Arab backing both on the official and nonofficial levels."

—Sources: *U.S. News and World Report, AP, Al-Ahram, Al Arabiya*

* * * * *

Floyd Landis, Former Mennonite, Wins Tour de France; Fails Drug Test

Floyd Landis, whose parents are members of a Lancaster Conference Mennonite Church, just won the Tour de France, the premier bicycle racing event in the world. He did this after a storybook-perfect comeback from an 8-minute deficit. However, he recently failed a drug test on a urine sample taken during the race. The test showed an unexpectedly high ratio of testosterone to epitestosterone. Testosterone is produced naturally by the body and also is available in synthetic form. Its synthetic form is banned by most sports. Landis has categorically denied taking testosterone and is preparing to take endocrine tests to show that he has a naturally higher than normal testosterone production. He says that high testosterone is not uncommon among cyclists and that "in hundreds of cases, no one's ever lost one." Mutual friends of Floyd's family and mine have decried the press's treatment of the family, which had to leave their home to escape. Floyd's sister Charity is currently attending Faith Builders. I think the words of *Sports Illustrated* writer Austin Murphy echo the sentiments of us all: "Floyd says he didn't do it, and I want very badly to believe him."

—Sources: *Sports Illustrated, Reuters, Mennonite Weekly Review, USA Today, firsthand interviews*

* * * * *

Kent Hovind, Creationist, Raided by the IRS

Kent Hovind, a prominent creationist that calls himself Dr. Dino, was raided by the IRS for an alleged \$470,000 in unpaid taxes. Hovind says that, "the church ministry and my wife and I obey all laws about taxes as far as I can tell, and that is what many lawyers and tax professional(s) who have examined our ministry have told me." He complained about the treatment

they received from the IRS saying that “they brought in a SWAT team to drag my sick wife out of bed and handcuffed her in her nightgown. They refused to let her get dressed, put on a robe, or even go to the bathroom, even though she begged for these simple courtesies.” He says the dispute arises because the IRS wants to classify ministry donations as his personal income. Hopefully time and the judicial process will reveal the truth of the matter. If the IRS is acting on trumped-up charges and an evolutionistic agenda, it stands as a stark warning. If Hovind has been cheating, it is hypocrisy of the most saddening kind. Unfortunately, this alleged conduct doesn’t seem to be out of the ordinary for some of the “finest” religious leaders of our country.

—Sources: *Pensacola News Journal* and *CSE blogs* (<http://tinyurl.com/lemvll>)

Canadian Women, Now Pastors

“The Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches opened the lead pastorate to women during its assembly July 6-8.”

—Excerpt from the *Mennonite Weekly Review*

Heat Wave in CA

Over 112 people died in the 100+ degree heat wave in California. The heat has caused many power grids to fail. These failures were caused by near max capacity electrical use caused by AC’s and heat-related transformer failure.

—Source: *Bloomberg Wire*

1000-Year-Old Book of Psalms Found in Ireland

A book of Psalms that is 1000-1200 years old was found at a construction site in Ireland. Irish archaeologists say it is a miracle the book survived the construction environment. What also seems to be an act of providence is the passage the book was found open to: Psalm 83, a

prayer for the protection of Israel.

—Sources: *Christian Broadcasting Network* and *AP*

Episcopal Church USA in Trouble Over Homosexual Bishops

The largest church of ECUSA has left the denomination saying, “The direction of the leadership of the Episcopal Church is different and we regret their departure from Biblical truth and the historic faith of the Anglican Communion.” Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, has outlined a plan to expel ECUSA from the worldwide Anglican church. The dispute was deepened by ECUSA’s appointment of a liberal, female bishop as its head. The African Episcopal churches have been especially orthodox in these matters.

—Source: *Christian Broadcasting Network* and *Reuters*

No Murders in DC During Prayer Vigil

July 21-26, during a round-the-clock prayer vigil, held on the National Mall, for a reduction in crime, there were no murders in Washington, D.C. This was in contrast to the 14 murders from July 1-13. Rev. Patrick J. Mahoney, Director of the Christian Defense Coalition, said, “It is important to remember during times of crisis, challenge, and adversity Americans should always turn to God in prayer. . . . Through the years, prayer has changed the course of history”

—Adapted from *Christian News Wire*

Chinese Sentence Four Pastors to Labor Camps

Four Chinese pastors were sentenced to two-year terms of “reeducation through labor” in labor camps. They were arrested while appealing to police for the release of 14 of their fellow believers.

—Source: *Fox News*

Rejoice!

by David L. Burkholder

This spring our local county high school baseball team won the state championship for the fifth time. The boys played hard and won 26 of the 27 games they played all season. The night they returned home from the championship game they were escorted through town by police and fire department vehicles—lights flashing, sirens screaming. There was a high level of excitement and celebration. And from certain perspectives they deserved it.

As I lay there in bed pondering the hullabaloo (we live just down the street from the high school), I couldn't help reflecting on some contrasts. First of all, the honor is short-lived, at least potentially. Next season the teams will battle again for the state championship. Secondly, the honor, though inscribed on a golden cup, pales in comparison to another and more lasting honor that came to mind.

We read in the Scripture (Luke 15:10), that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Just a few verses earlier we read that the repentance of one sinner produces more joy in heaven than the exultation over 99 righteous persons. In other words, when a sinner repents, heaven pulls out all the stops. It is an event that triggers a holy hullabaloo, the lights and sirens of heaven, if you please.

The reason for such joy is that genuine repentance from sin takes a soul from the grasp of darkness and death and places it in the kingdom of light and life. (See Colossians 1:12-14.) With continued faithfulness that transaction produces positive results for eternity. It saves a soul from the fires of hell and, in exchange, gives it a throne in heaven. Forever. And by the way, on entrance into those eternal, heavenly realms, an unfading (golden?) crown is presented to the victor over death, hell, and the grave (Revelation 2:10; 1 Corin-

thians 9:25). Impressive.

But wait, there's more. The experience of Dives in Luke 16 would indicate that upon death saints are escorted to those heavenly realms by the angels of heaven. (See verse 22.) Wow! An angelic escort, a permanent crown, and the privilege of basking in heavenly glory, not just for a season, but forever. What could be better? Makes the ball team's achievement seem trifling, doesn't it?

And then I had to wonder, do we not often misdirect our enthusiasm by placing undue emphasis on trivial, temporal issues or events to the exclusion of things of eternal value? We can get all excited about a ball game, but do we show even equal enthusiasm when a soul is born into the kingdom of God? It should be much greater, by all means. The things of the moment are not lasting. Why misdirect our rejoicing to such things when issues of eternal significance call for attention?

It should cause us to stop and think. An unconverted soul goes to hell when it dies (maybe while we're cheering at a ball game). But a soul who moves across the line from sin to salvation will live eternally in God's presence—freed from the death and torment experienced by the unsaved. And remember, this is forever. Eternally. No change. No end. The implications are sobering. And staggering. And cause for rejoicing when the spiritual transaction places a soul securely in Jesus' arms.

So, No. 1: We on God's side of the ledger should be more concerned and active in doing all we can to move more souls across that line. And, No. 2: We should rejoice with unbounded joy when a soul does make the transition and move into the heavenly camp.

So, let's loosen up and rejoice, to high heaven, if you please. After all, the angels do. ■

The Anti-Attitudes

by Simon Schrock

Periodically my memory takes me back to when teenage rebellion had a tight grip on my life. Those were the days when I thought I saw some things more clearly than some of my elders did. I wasn't alone in my outlook. We rebels made up a song that went to the tune of "The Old-Time Religion." It expressed our feelings toward our Amish upbringing. We sang it this way:

'Tis the Old Order Amish; 'Tis the Old
Order Amish,
And it's pretty tough for me.
It was tough for our fathers; it was
tough for our fathers,
And it's pretty tough for me.

This song was an expression of attitudes rather than facts. Insight into Scripture and hindsight now tell me my attitude was not right. I regret it. I believe I have repented and have God's forgiveness. It was an "anti-attitude" that was expressed against something. It saw the weak side and failed to appreciate the blessing side.

Sometimes I think I hear that attitude coming through expressions of older people and people in leadership. Maybe that's why my heart "ouches" when I think I hear it expressed by others, especially when it comes from the lips of older folks.

Being brought up in an Amish church, I thought Mennonites would be happy in their not-so-strict tradition. Years ago I was in discussion with a young Mennonite about remarriage after divorce. My point was that the Scripture teaches against it. He referred to my position as being "just Mennonite." I discovered the anti-attitude was alive in the hearts of people from other backgrounds.

A friend expressed frustration over how some church brothers in his Mennonite congregation respond when they discuss certain issues they face. One of the strings they pull to relax a standard is the expression, "That's just Amish."

Because of the fellowship of believers I am a part of, I frequently hear the expression about some of our practices, "That's just Beachy." It comes from inside and outside our fellowship of churches. The expressions of, "That's just Amish" . . . "just Beachy" . . . "just Mennonite" are expressions of attitudes. Actually, they seem like "anti-attitudes" to me.

What is the meaning behind these expressions? As I hear them, they often come with a slight tone of arrogance, the flavor of a sneer, the feel of contempt and criticism. The impression comes through that, "I'm fed up with the system; I know a better way. You are on the wrong track."

When I examine my attitude when I sang the old song, it is clear that it reflected more rebellion and pride than a true desire to please God. It said, "I think I know what's best."

Why do I let you get a peek into the darker side of my history? It was not a joyful time. It did damage to the church of God. It pains me now when I hear it, and I believe it pains God. Therefore, I will point to some good reasons to repent.

The anti-attitude closes the opportunities of fellowship with those you oppose. It hinders your freedom in fellowship.

The "anti" attitude closes the window of coming to a greater knowledge of the truth. The anti-Mennonite attitude about remarriage after divorce basically says, "You are wrong and I am right. Do not confuse me with the facts."

The anti-attitude can be an expression of one's own blind pride. It is veiled in such self-righteousness that the person comes to believe it is the right way. The Scripture reminds us that "*God resisteth the proud*" (1 Peter 5:5). If it has the taint of pride in it, expect God's resistance.

The anti-attitude toward others does not bring you the blessings of the Lord. It

does not make you the relevant church in the community. It doesn't put you on the cutting edge of being God's people in a mixed-up world.

A church brother did me a favor by reminding me that my anti-attitude would probably be picked up by my children. The anti-attitude usually shows up in one's posterity. Your children will find it useful to turn it against you when it becomes convenient in order to get their own way.

The anti-attitude may have some blind spots in it. Could you miss seeing a Biblical truth by writing it off as "just Amish, . . . just Beachy, . . . just Mennonite," or even "just the conservative way," or whatever your favorite "just" pet peeve may be? What is the chance of it being "**just the Bible way**"?

I made a note during John Smucker's winter Bible school teaching. "A people not at peace with their past cannot have a meaningful future." That says it well. I needed to repent of my attitudes toward

my roots and my upbringing. The anti-attitudes were blocking my joy and my service for the Lord and the church. I now see my roots and stricter upbringing as a positive influence on my service to the Lord and witness to the world.

If your mind is fogged over with resentment toward your strict upbringing and your attitudes have gone "anti," God would be pleased with repentance and an attitude that builds up all believers. I know that some methods of counseling people's problems places blame on how others treated you. I believe that must be balanced with what the Bible says in Romans 14:12, "*So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*"

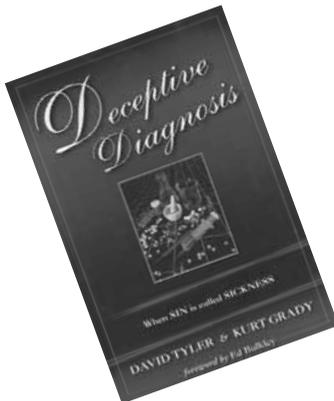
If you really want to help people, encourage others, and build up the body of Christ, then repent of anti-attitudes. Remember, "*God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble*" (1 Peter 5:5). —Fairfax, VA

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Deceptive Diagnosis

When Sin Is Called Sickness

by David Tyler & Kurt Grady



From the Foreword by Ed Bulkley:

"I believe that if you will examine the arguments and evidence that Dave and Kurt provide in this book, your faith in God's Word and His power to transform lives will be strengthened. Your confidence to help others with their problems of living will be enhanced as you realize that our Lord is more than able to heal confused minds and wounded hearts."

**Great Buy!!
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The Day of a Risen Christ

Why We Worship on the Lord's Day Instead of on the Day When Christ Lay Dead in the Tomb

by Keith L. Brooks

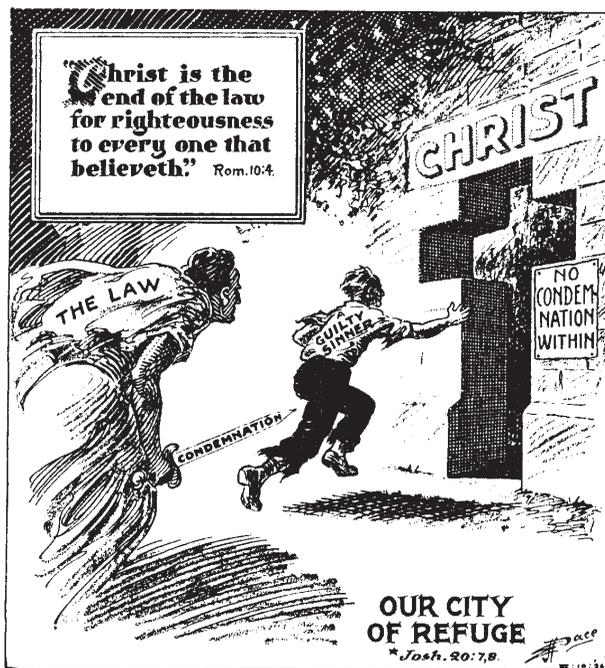
Some kind of friend has been regularly furnishing us with Seventh-Day Adventist literature devoted to discussion of the question, "Was the Sabbath ever changed from Saturday to Sunday?" At great length the writers relate the acts of Christ on the Jewish Sabbath and His approval of that day of worship. They point out that Jesus never gave instructions for the change and that not until the day of Constantine was the Lord's Day kept as the worship day of the Christian church.

But why all these words? No intelligent Bible student contends that the Sabbath was ever changed to Sunday or that Christ did not approve of the Jewish day of worship.

There is not the slightest warrant for changing the Sabbath from one day to another. Such a thing was never done. From that glorious first day of the week when Christ came forth victor over the grave, Hades, and Satan, two days were observed side by side—one by those who stood for a dead Christ, and one by those who gloried in a risen and exalted Christ. While the Jews continued to observe the day of a dead Christ (a day appointed to commemorate a finished creation), the Christians began to observe the day of a risen Christ (commemorating a finished redemption). The Jews continued to worship beginning at sundown on Friday and finishing at sundown on Saturday, and they kept the day in every particular in strict accordance with the commands of the Israelitish Law (something our Adventist friends,

strange to say, do not do).

No one denies that Christ, who was born under the Law and who came to fulfill the Law, kept the Jewish Sabbath, even though He shocked His own people by not keeping it according to their ideas. He went into the synagogues and taught on the Jewish Sabbath, and how better could He reach those He came to reach as the Messenger of Jehovah? But is it not rather peculiar, in view of the Adventist argument, that there is nowhere found among His commandments any word as to the observance of the seventh day Sabbath nor anything that implies the wish that the church should observe the Jewish Sabbath? Nor did any of the apostles command or teach his people to observe it. We may safely conclude that if the keeping of the Sabbath, or any other part of the Jewish system, was among the "necessary things" (Acts 15:28, 29) for Gentiles believers, it would surely have been emphasized in Christ's messages to the churches (see Colossians 2:12-16). Jesus hallowed the new day by meeting with the saints in His resurrection body, and never did He hint that they were out of order in observing that day instead of the Jewish Sabbath. On the contrary, there is in the New Testament the most positive teaching as to the relation of the body of Christ to the whole Law given to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. As to this teaching our Adventist friends plunge us into the strangest confusion, for they attempt to bind the church with some few of the Levitical



laws while totally ignoring the balance.

As to the charge that it was Constantine who caused the change of order, someone has recently done a great service to the church by compiling from patristic sources the testimony of seven church fathers (outside of the New Testament record), all but one of whom antedate the reign of Constantine. These testimonies show that the early church universally observed the first day of the week while the Jews still held to the seventh day. They follow:

Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of John who survived him only a few years, wrote, in 101: "Those who were concerned with old things have come to newness of confidence, no longer keeping Sabbaths but living according to the Lord's Day, on which our life as risen again through Him depends. Let us no more Sabbathize."

Barnabas in a letter dated at the beginning of the second century wrote:

"We keep the eighth day with joy on which day Jesus also arose from the dead."

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons who had associated with the apostles, wrote in 167: "On the Lord's Day every one of us Christians keeps the Sabbath."

Clement of Alexandria wrote in 194: "The old Seventh Day has become nothing more than a working day."

Tertullian wrote in 200: "The Lord's Day is the holy day of the Christian Church. We have nothing to do with the Sabbath."

Origen in 225 wrote: "To keep the Lord's Day is one of the marks of the perfect Christian."

Augustine declared that "the Lord's Day was established by Christ. The Lord's Day was by the Resurrection declared to Christians and from that very time it began to be celebrated as the Christian festival." ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Foundation*, Nov./Dec. 2005.

“The hostile nations can torture us, imprison us, and starve us, but they can do no more than we already experienced in our country for many decades. We are not afraid to bleed, for our bodies are merely temporary tents to be used in the Lord’s service. We are not only ready to die for the gospel, we are expecting it.”

A Distant Thunder

by Bill Commons

Several years ago researchers discovered that, for the first time in modern church history, the total number of career missionaries from North America was in decline. In stark contrast, the numbers from the developing world were increasing exponentially—far surpassing the total of Great Commission ambassadors from the West.

Beyond the shores of affluent, western democracies there has been a spiritual stirring, a spreading flame of fervor for world evangelism—the kind of missions passion that fueled the proliferation of missionary-sending churches in America during the twentieth century but is now fading.

In the two-thirds world (Asia, Latin America, and Africa), where persecution has often purified the churches, believers are moving out for God in unprecedented numbers to reach the world for Christ. The patient plodding of non-western feet, bringing the gospel from churches in the developing world, is growing from a muted shuffle to a distant thunder.

In fact, researcher and evangelical missions leader Larry Keyes states that “during the last three decades, two-thirds world missionary growth has increased almost five times faster than the missionary gain in the West.” He further expects that “the bulwark of mission leadership and resource in the years ahead will come from the two-thirds world.”

Independent churches planted by missionaries over the past eighty years are sending and supporting their own indigenous church planters across national boundaries and often into hostile territory. Some ambassadors for Christ from small

or poor churches, which cannot support them, are going to resistant cultures as bivocational missionaries, supporting themselves through various occupations. These pioneers from distant homelands are becoming leaders in twenty-first-century gospel advancement.

A key strategic objective is starting national church-planting movements on every field that launch national missions movements, which in turn send and support their own church planters.

Taking the gospel to restricted access nations (RANs), which are closed to traditional missions work, looks different from missions in traditional access nations (TANs) that enjoy religious freedom. In RANs, church planting means reaching and discipling people and forming house churches that function out of public view.

We learn much from other mission agencies, and especially from suffering churches in restricted countries, which send missionaries despite much hardship. We gain wisdom and courage from those whose faith has been tested in the fires of official opposition and by persecution at the hands of fanatical religious leaders in their countries.

Remarkable chapters in God’s modern history book of redemption are being “written” by courageous witnesses deployed by house churches in RANs. One example is an atheistic Asian country where, though pressured and persecuted by hostile authorities, the joy of salvation burns in the hearts of humble believers, compelling them to spread the gospel at any cost.

For decades those house churches in

RANs have been sending out their men two by two, on foot or bicycle, from their village to unreached villages where there are no believers. Traveling light, these evangelists usually carry only a bag of rice over their shoulder for the journey. In each village they find a family prepared by God to provide housing and nourishment while they preach and disciple those who respond. After a nucleus of believers has formed, and leaders have been trained, these “home missionaries” move on to the next villages to repeat the process over and over again.

Eventually, those weary witnesses return to their home village, stopping back in the towns along the way to encourage the emerging house churches they started. Back home they report to their sending church, are refreshed and taught more from the Scriptures, then are sent out again. Thousands of house churches have thus begun, and millions have come to Christ in that vast land.

This is just one example from the two-thirds world where the first-century explosion of biblical faith is being echoed in the twenty-first century, in regions where the gospel evidently never penetrated before. Despite the occurrence of charismatic error and confused doctrine in some movements, saving faith in Christ and the joy of His salvation is an unquenchable flame, an unstoppable force delivering millions from spiritual ignorance and propelling them to continue spreading the Good News.

In one East Asian RAN, gospel ambassadors already seasoned by persecution in their home country are crossing their national borders and bringing the message of Christ to surrounding nations that violently oppose Christian conversion. They accept risk and danger and are willing to lay down their lives to bring salvation to the regions where more than 90 percent of the world’s unreached peoples live—including more than 5,000 tribes and ethno linguistic groups with little or no gospel witness.

The weakness of many house-church

movements in RANs is that due to lack of Bibles and theological training, doctrinal error is prevalent, and false teaching threatens to derail believers. “Millions of . . . Christians are just one unanswered prayer away from moving on to another religion,” warns an Asian missions executive. Their greatest needs are Bible study tools and theological training for the new believers who are infants in the faith.

And for our USA churches where the passion for world evangelism has cooled, listen to the voices of suffering church missionaries:

“Evangelism is for the glory of God. It is the reason we exist on this earth; it is our main act of worship.”

“If we lose our first love and start to focus on our own needs, our spiritual life will shrivel up and die.”

“When you make missionary outreach to the nations that have never heard about Jesus the priority of your church, you will not fail to be blessed and revived.”

“If you haven’t discovered something you are willing to die for, then you haven’t yet found anything worth living for.”

“When offerings are received during house-church meetings in (our officially atheistic country), evangelists sometimes find they have absolutely nothing to put into the bag. So they step into the offering bag themselves and unconditionally offer their whole lives as a living sacrifice to the service of God.”

From the two-thirds world churches we learn that it is possible for every local church, in every circumstance and in every place, to send ambassadors of the cross from the local congregation, on the same economic level as the average wage-earner in the church. No church is too small, too weak, or too oppressed. As in the first century, risk and danger are inevitable and expected. Fear is overcome by faith expressed in obedience.

Listen to the distant thunder. Will we hear it from our American churches again? ■

—*ABWE Message*. Used with permission.

Comfort in the Night of Weeping

by Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

“For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” —Psalm 30:5.

To bring many sons unto glory was the end for which the Son of God took flesh and died. This was no common, no inferior object. So vast and worthy did Jehovah deem it that it pleased Him for the attaining of it to “make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2:10). It was an object worthy of the God “for whom are all things, and by whom are all things.” It was an object glorious enough to render it “becoming” in Him to make Jesus pass through suffering and death and to justify the Father in not sparing His only begotten Son.

They, for whom God has done all this, must be very precious in His sight. He must be much in earnest indeed to bless them and to take them to be with Him forever. As He so delighted in Enoch that He could no longer bear the separation and the distance, but took him to be with Him without tasting death, and long ere he had run the common race of man, so with His saints. He is making haste to bring them to glory, for the day of absence has been long.

The glory which He has in reserve for them must be surpassing glory, for it was to bring them to it that He was willing to bruise His Son and to put Him to grief. Eye hath not seen it; ear hath not heard it; it is far beyond what

we can comprehend, yet it is all reality. God is not ashamed to be called our God because He hath prepared for us a city. Were that city not worthy of Himself, He would be ashamed to have called Himself by the name of “our God.” For that implies large blessings on His part, and it leads to large expectations on ours, expectations which He cannot disappoint.

He did not count this glory to be bought for us at too dear a rate, even though the price was the sufferings of His only begotten Son. If, then, God thus estimated the glory of which we were to be brought, shall not we do the same? If He thought it worth all the sufferings of His Son, shall we not think it worth our poor sufferings here? Shall we not say, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18)?

This is *consolation*.¹ It is that which most naturally occurs to us, and it is both scriptural and effectual. This is what is usually presented to the afflicted saint, and it is what he feels to be very precious and suitable. But though the most common and the most natural consolation, it is by no means the only one. Let us suggest a few others.

1. Jesus weeps with us. “In all

1. **consolation**—to comfort in sorrow or distress of mind; the act of lightening someone’s sorrow, grief, or troubled mind.

[our] affliction he [is] afflicted” (Isa. 63:9). He knows our sorrows, for He has passed through them all, and therefore He feels for us. He is touched with the feeling of our griefs as well as of our infirmities. Man—very man—man all over, even in His glory, He enters most fully into the fellowship of our burdens and sorrow, whatever these may be; for there is not one which He did not taste when He “dwelt among us” here. His is sympathy—deep, real, and true. It is no fiction, no fancy.² We do not see His tears falling upon us; neither do we clasp His hand nor feel the beating of His heart against ours.

But still His communion with us in suffering is a reality. We may not understand how it can be. But He understands it; and He can make us feel it, whether we can comprehend it or not.

2. We are made partakers of Christ’s sufferings. What honor is this! We are baptized with His baptism; we drink of His cup, we are made like Him in sorrow as we shall hereafter be made like Him in joy! How soothing and sustaining! If reproach and shame and poverty are ours, let us remember that they were His also. If we have to go down to Gethsemane or up to the cross, let us think that He was there before us. It is when keeping our eye on this that we are brought somewhat to realize the feeling of the Apostle when he “rejoiced in his sufferings” for the Church, as filling “up that which is behind [literally *the leavings of Christ’s sufferings*] of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24). To be treated better than Christ is neither what a thoughtful soul could expect nor what a loving

heart could desire.

3. Suffering is the family lot. This we have already dwelt upon, and we recur³ to it simply to present it more prominently as a consolation. The path of sorrow is no unfrequented way. All the saints have trodden it. We can trace their footprints there. It is comforting, nay, it is cheering to keep this in mind. Were we cast fettered⁴ into some low dungeon, would it not be consolation to know that many a martyr had been there before us, would it not be cheering to read their names written with their own hands all round the ancient walls? Such is the solace we may extract from all suffering, for the furnace into which we are cast has been consecrated by many a saint already.

4. All things work together for our good. Nothing is unsuitable, unseasonable, or unprofitable. Out of all evil comes good to the saints; out of all darkness comes light; out of all sorrow comes joy. Each pang, sharp or slight, is doing its work—the very work which God designs, the very work which we could not do without. The bed of sorrow is not only like Solomon’s chariot, all “paved with love”; but, like it, it moves on with mighty swiftness, bearing us most blessedly onward to the inheritance of the undefiled. The forces of earth, unless they all bear in one line or nearly so, tend to counteract each other and arrest the common impulse. But the forces which God brings to bear upon us in affliction are all directly and necessarily impulsive.⁵ Come from what quarter they may or from opposite quarters all at once, they still bear us successfully forward. “All things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28). “All things are ours”

2. **fancy**—fantasy; delusion of the mind.

3. **recur**—return to; go back to.

4. **fettered**—bound with chains.

5. **impulsive**—having force or power to impel or to drive.

(1 Cor. 3:21, 22).

5. There is special grace for every trial. As trials bring to light the weakness that is in us, so they draw out to meet the strength of God new resources of strength and grace which we never knew before. In affliction we may be quite sure of learning something more of God than we were acquainted with before, for it is just in order to furnish an opportunity for bringing out this and showing it to us that He sends the trial. How little should we know of Him were it not for sorrow! What fullness of blessing comes out to us, what riches of love are spread out before us in the dark and cloudy day!

6. Affliction is our fullest opportunity for glorifying God. It is on earth that He expects to get glory from us, glory such as angels cannot give, glory such as we shall not be able to give hereafter. It is here that we are to preach to angels; it is here we are to show to them what a glorious God is ours. Our whole life below is given us for this. But it is especially in sorrow and under infirmity that God looks for glory from us. What a God-honoring thing to see a struggling, sorrowing child of earth cleave fast to God, calmly trusting in Him, happy and at rest in the midst of storm and of suffering! What a spectacle for the hosts of Heaven! Now then is the time for the saints to give glory to the Lord their God. Let them prize affliction as the very time and opportunity for doing so most of all. Let them use such a season well. And oh, what consolation to think that affliction is really such a season! Ah, surely it is one which an angel might covet, which an archangel would gladly stoop to were that possible! They can glorify God much in Heaven amid its glory and blessedness, but oh, not half so much

as we can on earth amid suffering and shame!

7. We are getting rid of sin. Each pain is a nail driven through some sin, another blow inflicted on the flesh, destroying the very power of sinning. As we entered on our first life, sin fastened its chain upon us, and link after link twined itself about us. When we commenced our second and better life, these began one by one to untwine themselves. Affliction untwined them faster; and though it is not till we are laid on a deathbed or till Jesus comes that the last link of earth is thoroughly untwined or broken, still it is consolation to think that each successive trial is helping on the blessed consummation. A lifetime's sufferings would not be too long or too heavy, if by means of them we got rid of sin and sinful ways and tempers and became more holy, more heavenly, more conformable to the image of the Lord. When first we believed in Jesus, we were delivered "from this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4). Yet this deliverance is not complete. The world and we have not yet fully parted company with each other. And, therefore, God drives affliction like a wedge between us and the world; or He sends it like a plowshare⁶ right across our most cherished hopes and brightest prospects till He thoroughly wearies us of all below. "He hath made me weary," said Job (Job 16:7). Nor do we wonder at the complaint. Wearisome nights were his. "The plowers plowed upon [my] back" and drew many a long furrow there (Psa. 129:3). He might well be weary. So with us. God makes us weary, too, weary all over—thoroughly weary. We get weary of a present evil world, weary of self, weary of sin, weary of suffering, weary of this mortal body, weary of these vile hearts, weary of earth—weary of all but Jesus! Of Him no trial can weary

6. **plowshare**—the large pointed blade of a plow.

us. Suffering only endears Him the more. Blessed suffering—that makes Him appear more precious and the world viler; that brings Him nearer to our hearts and thrusts the world away!

8. We are preparing for usefulness while here. We have but a few years below, and it concerns us much that these should be useful years. We have but one life, and it must be laid out for God. But we need preparation for usefulness. We need a thorough breaking down, a thorough emptying, a thorough bruising. God cannot trust us with success till we are thus laid low. We are not fit to receive it; nor would He get the glory. Therefore, He sends sore and heavy trials in order to make us vessels fit for the Master's use. And oftentimes we see that the heaviest trials are forerunners of our greatest usefulness. When we are entirely prostrated⁷ and crushed, then it is safe to grant us success, for God gets all the glory. And oh, what wonders has God often done by bruised reeds! Yea, it is the bruised reed that is oftenest the instrument in His hand for working His mighty signs and wonders. What consolation is this! Suffering is stripped of half its bitterness, if it thus brings with it a double portion of the Spirit and fits for double usefulness on earth.

9. We have the Holy Spirit as our Comforter. He is mighty to comfort as well as to sanctify. His name is "the Comforter." His office is to console. And in the discharge of this office, He puts forth His power, not only mediately⁸ and indirectly through the Word, but immediately⁹ and directly upon the soul, sustaining and strengthening it when fainting and troubled. It is consolation unspeakable to know that there is a hand, a divine

and omnipotent hand, laid upon our wounded spirit, not only upholding it, but drying up, as it were, the very springs of grief within. In the day of oppressive sorrow, when bowed down to the dust, what is it that we feel so much our need of as a hand that can come into close and direct contact with our souls to lift them up and strengthen them? For it is here that human consolation fails. Friends can say much to soothe us, but they cannot lay their finger upon the hidden seat of sorrow. They can put their arm around the fainting body, but not around the fainting spirit. To that they have only distant and indirect access. But here the heavenly aid comes in. The Spirit throws around us the everlasting arms, and we are invincibly upheld. We cannot sink, for He sustains, He comforts, He cheers. And who knows so well as He how to sustain and comfort and cheer?

10. The time is short. We have not a pilgrimage like Seth's or Noah's, or even like Abraham's to pass through. Ours is but a handbreadth in comparison with theirs. We have not many days to suffer, nor many nights to watch, even though our whole life were filled with weary days and sleepless nights. "For our light affliction . . . is but for a moment" (2 Cor. 4:17). And besides the briefness of our earthly span, we know that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. This is consolation, for it tells not only of the end of our tribulation, but of the beginning of our triumph; nay, and not only of our individual rest from trouble, but of the rest and deliverance of the whole Church together. For then the whole "body of Christ," waking or sleeping, shall be glorified with their glorified Lord; and everlasting joy shall be upon

7. **prostrated**—to reduce to extreme physical exhaustion.

8. **mediately**—acting through the means of.

9. **immediately**—acting without the use of means.

their heads.

In the day of bereavement, the day of mourning over those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, this consolation is especially precious. Them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. And if the Lord be near, the time of reunion may not be far off. They that lie down at evening have a whole night's slumber before them; but they who lie down toward morning have, it may be, but an hour or less till the dawn awakes them. So with the dead in Christ in these last days. They will not have long to sleep, for it is now the fourth watch of the night, and the day-star¹⁰ is preparing to arise. What consolation! How it soothes the pain of parting! How it cheers the wounded spirit! "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust" is now our watchword every day (Isaiah 26:19). We take our stand upon our watchtower and look out amidst the darkness of night for the first streaks of morn. We lay our ear to the ground and listen that, amid all the discord of earth, the uproar of war, the tumults of the nations, we may catch the first sound of our Lord's chariot wheels—those chariot wheels that are to sweep in vengeance over the field of Armageddon, crushing the confederate nations leagued against the Lord and His Anointed, and also to bring to the bosom of the long betrothed Bride, the Husband of her youth, the desire of her soul, for whom, amid tears and loneliness, she has waited for many a generation, many a century in vain.

11. All is love. Affliction is the expression of paternal¹¹ love. It is from the deepest recess of the fountain of love that sorrow flows down to us. And love cannot wrong us. It blesses, but cannot curse. Its utterances and actions are all of peace and gladness. It

wants a larger vessel into which to empty itself, and a deeper channel through which to flow. That is all. It seeks to make us more susceptible of kindness, and then to pour that kindness in. Yes, love is the true, the one origin of the sharpest stroke that ever fell upon a bleeding heart. The truth is, there is no other way of accounting for affliction but this. Anger will not account for it, forgetfulness will not account for it, chance will not account for it. No. It is simply impossible to trace it to any cause but love. Admit this as its spring, and all is harmonious, comely, perfect. Deny it, and all is confusion, cruelty, and darkness. Chastising love is the faithfullest, purest, truest, tenderest, deepest of all. Let this be our consolation.

Beloved, "It is well." It is good to be afflicted. Our days of suffering here we call days of darkness; hereafter they will seem our brightest and fairest. In eternity we shall praise Jehovah most of all for our sorrows and tears. So blessed shall they then seem to us that we shall wonder how we could ever weep and sigh. We shall then know how utterly unworthy we were of all this grace. We did not deserve anything, but least of all to be afflicted. Our joys were all of grace—pure grace—much more our sorrows. It is out of the "exceeding riches of the grace of God" that trial comes. ■

From *The Night of Weeping, The Morning of Joy* by Horatius Bonar. This title is available as a paperback book published by Chapel Library.

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889): Scottish Presbyterian minister whose poems, hymns, and religious tracts were widely popular during the 19th century. Born in Edinburgh, Scotland.

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

10. **day-star**—the sun; metaphorically, the dawning of the world to come.

11. **paternal**—characteristic of a father; fatherly.

The Things We Used to Do

We were looking for expression of our Christian View
That matched up with the Bible—and then we came to you.
It seemed the way you did things was the best way we could find,
We'd hungered for it and now we were inclined,
To leave behind so many worldly ways and friendships too,
In order to become a part of the best way—which was you.

'The church has done things just this way for many, many years
We can not understand what brings to you so many fears
When we want to update and revise our standards here.'
You told us it was the best way and then you chose to do
The things we did before you'd let us be a part of you.

And now there is a crossroads of our former 'worldly' view
We're not so sure if we still want to be a part of you.
We saw the safety of refraining from so many Earthly ways
To put them aside was a small thing to do for all our days.
God's kingdom was the thing we'd gain—'twould help keep our faith in check.
It was a real adjustment, when we stuck out our neck.

Our friends all thought it unnecessary to do,
The things we chose to do just to be a part of you.
We were sure God showed us a way that we could go,
But now it seems we're not sure of what we've come to know.
We're kind of like a hole in the road that throws you for a loop.
And so you take to driving 'round it to avoid that messy soup.

As you progress and become so knowledgeable in your travels,
The fabric of the separation is beginning to unravel.
The lines are blurred because now you tell us it's okay to do
The things we used to do before we became a part of you.

You tell our children it's okay to do these things we used to do;
Even though we raised them to be a support to you.
You're very close in your relationships within the church.
If someone else is doing it, we see you almost lurch—
To get ahead the way they are and leave your point of view
In order to become the way we were before we met you.

And you would never realize these things you choose to do
Will lead you from the Kingdom to another point of view.
'Give them up?' Oh, NO! Not you!
You are the church progressing!
With your new instruments you're toting you now are stressing:
That we are quite naive and uneducated in our view;
To think it's dangerous to do the things we used to do!

It's not just that we blindly do the things we chose to do.
It was our choice to become a part of you
Putting aside our worldly ways God showed us was so right—
It was small stuff to obtain the Kingdom afar in sight.
Now we see you are in the same fix that we were in,
And we're the ones who have to convince YOU to give in.

—Anonymous

Expositional Preaching Changes Lives

by John Meador

Expositional preaching has fallen on hard times. In an entertainment-hungry world, and with an increasingly entertainment-hungry church, it would appear that there is just too much serious stuff in exposition for it to appeal to anyone today. We think it doesn't have the pinpoint "zing" that we can create by delivering "message candy" of hot topics and controversial issues, so pastors are rejecting exposition in growing numbers, it seems.

One state-wide church leader of a major denomination recently shared with me that he could name only three pastors in over 1,000 churches in his state that to his knowledge used exposition on a regular basis. The result, he says, is growth without depth. It means a growing number of people are not being equipped to deal with life, yet are in church week after week.

It means that Christ-followers have little more success than the world in overcoming the challenges of life, because their leaders are doing little more than touching the surface of the truth that sets men free. Believers cannot handle the serious stuff of life, because they aren't hearing the serious stuff of the Scripture. Faith does still come by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

It is hard to argue with the statistics that demonstrate how little difference there is between the world and the church in America. The George Barna Research Group reveals an alarming trend. When surveying "born-again" Christians, that is those who state that they have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and who believe they'd go to heaven when they die because of

Christ's death on the cross for them, here are the results:

- Half of born-again Christians (46%) agree that Satan is "not a living being but is a symbol of evil" (2005).
- About one-third of born-again (33%) believe that if people are good enough they can earn a place in heaven (2005).
- 28% of born-again agree that "while He lived on earth, Jesus committed sins, like other people," compared to 42% of all adults (2005).
- Born-again Christians are more likely than non-born-again individuals to accept moral absolutes. Specifically, 32% of born-again said they believe in moral absolutes (2002). Source: www.barna.org

As leaders, we must answer to that problem, one way or another. These are the kinds of people that are in our churches, so why would *less than half* believe that Satan is a literal being, and *over a third* believe that works will get one into heaven? How could *over one-fourth* of those folks surveyed believe that Jesus committed sins? Why is it that *only one-third* of those who are born again believe in moral absolutes?

Need I answer that question? Oh, well, I will anyway: they are not being taught what the Scripture says by their pastors and leaders where they worship. And, by default, if it is not important to the leaders, the followers don't believe it is important for them to go to the Scriptures at home for themselves.

Years ago, while pastoring a church that was experiencing slow, but steady growth, I found myself at the crossroads

of life and ministry. Just down the road, less than one mile away was a burgeoning mega-church that was doubling in attendance every year. I knew the pastor was a good man, as creative a communicator as you can find, and I knew their growth was at least in part due to his style of communication.

I found myself wanting to either criticize his methods or copy them. Why? Because I wanted his results, that's why! My ultimate decision, however, was not to criticize him, nor to emulate him, but to ask: "What has God called ME to do? What has He promised to bless?"

The conclusion, brought on by many other factors as well, was life-changing, both for me and the people I led. Isaiah 55:11 was a verse God branded onto my heart: "*So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding*

in the matter for which I sent it." Reading the entire passage, Isaiah 55:6-13, brought me to realize that God's ways of reaching and changing men are far better than mine. His thoughts have far more significance and power than even the best of my ideas and efforts. His Word is like the seed that is planted—it sprouts true fruit that demonstrates changed lives.

His Word does what only the Word can do. The Word builds faith, it increases one's knowledge of God, it builds endurance in times of temptation, it gives direction and guidance for everyday living. It convicts of sin and corrects into the right way of living. In a word, it transforms.

My challenge to you is to ask the two questions that changed my ministry: "What has God called ME to do? What has He promised to bless?" ■

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Worship

by Delmas Gehman

"I'll worship the Lord in a way that makes me feel good." Words such as this seem to be the general feeling across the land for many people across the religious spectrum. Some want the traditional service, some prefer the contemporary service, and some would rather not come to church at all, but say they can worship best by going to the mountains. Many have the idea they can do almost anything in a church service, as long as they claim this is the way they like to worship. They somehow expect that God will be pleased to accept their expression of worship no matter how

out of line it is. But as we remember the account of Cain and Abel, and how God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's, it makes us think that maybe God does have something to say about how we worship.

What is worship? Is worship something where we can decide how we like it best? It depends on whom we are worshipping. If we are worshipping God, He has some things to say about worship. Worship is the voluntary response of the human heart in adoration, praise, and reverence toward God. True worship involves the innermost being and

will be expressed in a life that is obedient to God. Worship is really a heart that is submitted to God, and which accepts what God says as absolute truth. Therefore, if we worship God, we come to Him on His terms, not ours.

Some people think of worship as going to a beautiful building where the windows are very expensive stained glass, where soothing music plays, and where emotions are stirred. This is not worship of God, necessarily. We often think of worship as going to church services, listening to preaching, singing, reading the Bible, etc. But these things can be entered into without ever truly worshipping. Singing, praying, and listening to Bible preaching are expressions of our worship, but they are not necessarily worship. Worship is an attitude of the heart toward God. It is turning our heart toward Him, reverencing Him, thanking Him, adoring Him.

Worship causes us to voluntarily deny ourselves, turn from sin, and take up our cross and follow Jesus all the way through. Too often folks see worship as a Sunday morning experience and then they go away and forget about it the rest of the week. True worship is not a Sunday morning experience only. True worship is a way of life. It must carry all the way through our experience seven days a week or else it is not genuine worship.

I am reminded of the words of the Psalmist. "*O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth*" (Psalm 96:9). This verse teaches us that holy living in the fear of God is a vital part of true worship. If we truly love the Lord and reverence Him, we will live a holy life by His grace. This causes us to realize that all that claims to be worship is not true worship. Much of what passes for worship today is nothing but a flurry of activity.

Today, the true worshiper must worship the Father in spirit and in truth. "*God is a Spirit: and they that worship*

him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). This means our spirit yields to the Holy Spirit. We read God's Word. We accept the truth with our spirit saying "Yes" to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as we read the truth. As we say "Yes" to what God says, that is true worship. And it results in a holy life by God's grace.

True worship involves reverence before a holy God. We realize His greatness, and that He is worthy of all the honor and praise we can give. This brings us to a realization of who we are and who God is.

This attitude should affect us as we collectively worship in the assembly of the believers. We should conduct ourselves reverently and quietly. As we arrive at the meeting house, we should enter quietly and reverently. We can teach our children at a young age to walk quietly into church. This should cause us as parents to be careful to teach our children reverence in church services. At a young age they can begin to learn not to be noisy. The gentle finger on the mouth can begin the teaching process. As time goes on, and the children grow, they need to be taught not to talk aloud in church. This takes time and perseverance on the part of parents. It does not all happen at once. And certainly, we expect that older children and young people would not use the church service to visit with each other. Gum chewing during church services also detracts from the atmosphere of reverence. Reverence before a holy God and reverence for His Word requires that we be silent before Him in order to hear what He has to say to us through those who are preaching or teaching. As parents we have a God-given calling to require our children to be reverent in church services. May we, by example, precept, and nurture teach our children to be reverent before God. ■

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The Protocols of the Elders of Zion

by Steve Herzig

“God is the author of Klanism,” and Jesus Christ was the Klan’s “first real member.” So said the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in 1925.¹

“Just like Christ, I have a duty to my own people. . . . What Christ began, I will complete.”² So said Adolf Hitler.

“Jesus Christ was a Palestinian.” So said Yasser Arafat on Christmas Eve in Bethlehem in 1995.

What do these three messages have in common? All invoke the name of Jesus Christ, yet none is in any way Christian.

The KKK has routinely used the name of Jesus to try to legitimize its racist code of beliefs. It was, and still is, actively anti-black and anti-Semitic. Hitler, chancellor of the Nazi Third Reich, saw himself as Germany’s messiah and manipulated the Bible to suit his grand delusion and that of his followers. Yet between 1933 and 1945, he presided over the slaughter of 6 million Jewish people. Arafat, the late Muslim-terrorist chieftain, incited jihad suicide-bombing attacks on innocent Jewish people in the name of religion.

These three belief systems—the KKK, Nazism, and Islam—rely on many resources for justification. However, one source common to all has been *The Protocols of the (Learned) Elders of Zion*, described even by the *Encyclopedia Britannica* as a “fraudulent document that served as a pretext and rationale for anti-Semitism in the early 20th century.” Though its original messengers are gone, the message remains. The book is still widely distributed today. Major bookstores sell it on their Web sites.

Originally written by French satirist Maurice Joly in 1864 to outline Napoleon’s desire for world domination,

the document was later refashioned into the sinister *Protocols* by several revisions that, in part, involved substituting the word *Jewish* for *French*.

Protocols describes a Jewish conspiracy to rule the world, luring readers with fabricated tales of secret meetings attended by elitist, rich Jews who control economies, thereby controlling nations. American automotive giant Henry Ford, a diehard anti-Semite, published excerpts in his newspaper, *The Dearborn (Mich.) Independent*. He apologized in 1927 but remained anti-Semitic to the bitter end.

Although the courts have proven the *Protocols* false and the overwhelming majority of American and European historians reject it, the book still flourishes today, particularly in Islamic countries where it is a runaway best seller endorsed, in some cases, by the governments themselves.

In Saudi Arabia

King Faisal, ruler from 1964 to 1975, avidly read *Protocols* and financed its distribution throughout the country and greater Arab world.³ In fact, the book plays extremely well there, and schools teach its content as fact. Saudi children learn that:

- Jewish people control the news media worldwide. (In truth, the majority of the secular press is hostile to the Jews and favors the Palestinians.)
- Zionism is the root of the world’s system today. (In truth, Zionism pertains only to the desire for a Jewish national home in the tiny land of Israel. It is Islam that overtly seeks world domination and currently controls 51 of the world’s 204 countries.)

- The Jewish people seek to eliminate nationalities and religions, especially the Christian nations.⁴ (In truth, it is the Muslims who use torture, jihad, and terrorism to force worldwide conversion to Islam.)

In Iran

Protocols has been printed in Persian every decade since 1978, when it was used to attack the shah, Israel, and the Jewish people.⁵

The Anti-Defamation League stated, “In 1985 a new edition of the *Protocols*, printed in Iran, was widely distributed by ‘the Islamic Propagation Organization, International Relations Department’ in Tehran.”⁶

The terrorist organization Hamas, dedicated to Israel’s destruction, states in its charter, “All Palestine is Islamic trust land, can never be surrendered to non-Muslims and is an integral part of the Muslim world.” Writer Ami Isseroff elaborated: “It cites the forged *Protocols* of the Elders of Zion as legitimate documents, declares that negotiations and international conferences are a waste of time, and blames ‘Zionists’ for the French and Russian revolutions.”⁷

Article 32 of the *Hamas Covenant* declares outright that “World Zionism” is “embodied” in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.⁸

The Palestinian Authority

Despite its attempt to present a politically correct exterior to the Western world, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is wholly anti-Israel, is anti-Jewish, and uses the *Protocols* to justify its position:

On February 20, 2005, the Mufti of Jerusalem Ikrima Sabri appeared on Al-Majd Saudi Arabian satellite TV to comment on the assassination of Rafik Hariri, the former Lebanese Prime Minister. Sabri stated, “Anyone who studies The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and specifically the Talmud will discover that one of the goals of these Protocols is to cause confusion in the world and to

*undermine security throughout the world.”*⁹

PA Minister of Information Nabil Shaath even had an Arabic translation of *Protocols* available on his Web site. According to *The New York Times*, he removed it on May 19, 2005.¹⁰

In Egypt

Part of the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1979 was that neither party would incite its people against the other. Yet Egypt aired a “documentary” on *Protocols*, presenting it as truth on prime-time television. Millions of Egyptians sat glued to their sets, watching this series each week and believing it.

Protocols is a lie. It has been proven so time and time again. But that fact does not matter to anti-Semites because truth and integrity are not virtues they highly esteem. They will use whatever expediency requires to spread their venom—including invoking the name of a Jew named Jesus—God incarnate—who loves His people and came to save “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:6).



ENDNOTES

1. David A. Rausch, *A Legacy of Hatred* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 95.
2. Erwin W. Lutzer, *Hitler’s Cross* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 62.
3. “Faisal of Saudi Arabia,” Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faisal_of_Saudi_Arabia>.
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5. “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion—The Iranian Version (10)” <www.adl.org/css/proto-iran.asp>.
6. Ibid.
7. Ami Isseroff, “A History of the Hamas Movement” <www.mideastweb.org/hamashistory.htm>.
8. “The Avalon Project at Yale Law School,” *Hamas Covenant 1988* <www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/mideast/hamas.htm>.
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—Reprinted with permission from *Israel My Glory*, March/April 2006, published by The Friends of Israel.

Cyberspace: Hook, Line, and Sinker

by Dan Croy

We may not believe everything we hear, but why do we believe so much of what we read on the Internet or receive in e-mails?

Jim: “They say hanging a compact disc from your car’s rearview mirror will foul up police radar guns.”

Andy: “They also say aluminum foil in your hubcaps will do the job.”

Bob: “Where’d you hear this? Who are ‘THEY?’”

Jim: “A friend of a friend sent me an e-mail with an attachment.”

Andy: “Jim forwarded it to me.”

It seems “They” are still at work passing along all sorts of information that may or may not be true. It is true that most of us appreciate the work of our local law enforcement personnel—until they stop us for a speeding violation. Actually, none of the earlier mentioned strategies will fool a radar device used to measure your speed. Each was scientifically tested to prove that none of them work.

Why do we need a “They” in our lives? What does that say about us? Whether we use the Internet or not, such information gets passed into all arenas of society.

Information: A Blessing and a Curse

In 1989, Richard Saul Wurman wrote a book called *Information Anxiety*. He predicted we would experience “anxiety” as an ever-increasing amount of information overwhelmed us. This information overload has two sides:

The blessing of continuous knowledge updates means we can obtain just-in-time information to help us live better lives. We can search on the web for research being conducted on a particu-

lar health concern. We can find out what is happening on the other side of the globe in seconds. The curse is realized when our tendency to believe whatever we read, regardless of the source, finds us repeating misinformation to others and falling for the devious plots created by criminal minds.

Scams, Shams, & Shysters

You receive an e-mail from your bank warning about identity theft and requesting your personal information be entered on-line for the purpose of a security check. It looks official—as though it came from the bank. It even displays the bank’s logo.

This message did not originate from your bank. Indeed, this came from identity thieves scamming you into giving them your personal information.

None of us likes to look dumb. Yet the same people who are cautious and vigilant regarding the possibility of crime or misfortune in their daily lives can become unusually gullible while reading their e-mail. We tend to fall too often for various scams, shams, and shysters.

What compels us to believe something when we don’t know who said it or even if it’s true?

Why Do We Believe These Stories?

Social scientists suggest that people:

1. Have a need to know, understand, and make sense of their world, which is often used as a means to reinforce and defend the way we presently view the world.

2. Need a metaphor or symbol to represent their fears, and some manner in which they can deal with those fears.
3. Have the predisposition to believe anything anyone says as long as the source is perceived as credible and the message was sent on a personal basis.

Making Sense and the Need to Know

Think of the Internet as the world's marketplace. It's an arena where people gather, talk, and exchange information. It's as natural as a person with car engine problems seeking out Bob down the street who "knows all about engines." In a world that changes so fast it is easy to feel lost, confused, and "behind the times." Admit it. How are you going to teach yourself the latest features on your computer when your old VCR is still repeatedly flashing "12:00"?

In our desire to make sense of the world in this environment there is a temporary comfort experienced when we get the "inside word" about a topic from the Internet. This is especially true when the message matches our own worldview or addresses a societal fear such as terrorism or safety.

We also tend to overlook the fact that a forwarded e-mail was sent to 80 people because the address line contains our name. Add to this dynamic that we received the e-mail from someone we know and trust. *It must be true!*

A Christian Response

God's standard for His people is found in the Scriptures. As members of the Body of Christ we are to grow up and mature in the faith. "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14).

We are, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to become as "wise as serpents" and as "harmless as doves" (Matthew

10:16, KJV). As mature followers of Christ we can be wise enough not to believe everything we read and possess a gentle, simple, childlike faith as we "walk in the light, as he is in the light" (1 John 1:7).

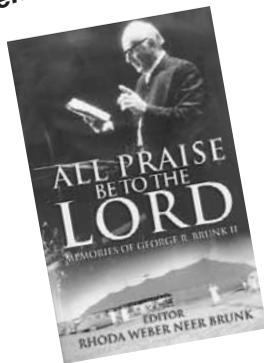
The old saying is true. "If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything." Did you get that e-mail? ■

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It's Not Fair!

by Aaron Lapp, Kinzers, PA

Last evening my wife said, "Look at the parade coming down Newport Road." There they came—fire engines and ambulances and other equipment with lights flashing. Approaching Pequea Valley High School driveway, they turned in with sirens and air horns going full blast.

I threw open the bedroom window to see this strange sight. For nearly five minutes, nonstop, they gave it all they had with lights, sirens, and air horns. Marian asked, "What's going on?"

I replied, "Probably the students won something big." Then I blurted out, "It's not fair!"

What was I thinking? About my wife's suffering with cancer. I suffer too. But poor, little, old, selfish, proud me—most of all I was thinking about me. Shame on me! Like the prodigal son's brother, Lo these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet you never threw a party for me with lights and sirens and air horns, that I might be held in high esteem by my friends.

God Is Fair

God is fair, but life does not always seem fair, even to mature Christians. God, however, is fair. He chooses. He seeks our good. He enables. He disposes. It is we who are not fair, and are always the ones to bring up the subject. It is we who want glory and honor and power. It is we who equate pay with work. We are the ones with that keen sense of justice, tipped in our

favor. "Yet ye say, the way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? Are not your ways unequal?" (Ezekiel 18:25)

It is we who want more than we deserve, more honor than is appropriate, more pay than we are worth. Absolute fairness would require every failure to be publicized, every flaw in character to be highlighted, every mistake to be noted, every ill-spoken word to be remembered.

God Is Fair, Yea, More Than Fair

Our transgressions, our sins, our iniquities are forgiven when we confess our sinfulness. God in Christ remembers them no more. "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8:12). God is more than equal, more than fair. His love and forgiveness to the penitent are much more than our failings. Why do we remember our service and sacrifice rather than our misdeeds and times of overstepping God's will?

God is fair. His magnificent creation brings daily benefits. The sun rises and we go about our day's labor. It brings increase. We plant fields and gardens. The benevolence of sun and rain causes the earth to bring forth. Health and well-being allow us to live and work day by day. The sun sets. We turn on the lights. We go away in our vehicles to the places of choice. We go home and retire to comfortable beds. We sleep in peace and are surrounded by security. In the morning the sun rises again.

God is fair. Most of us live in relatively good health for 60, 70, even 80 years. Health-care professionals are available for minor complaints and most major calamities. We tend to forget the many good years God has already given us.

God is fair, yea, and again I say, more than fair.

God has the last word. God has a victory homecoming planned for the redeemed! Since Jesus said that the angels rejoice over one sinner that repents, what must it be like to actually come home to the Father in heaven!

I remember hearing the powerful song at Calvary Bible School the students sang, "When the ransomed get home, what a joy that will be!" Poets speculate that the angels are the personal escorts to heaven for the children of God. Like earthly fathers, our Heavenly Father is keeping the best for last.

God Is Much More Than Fair

He remembers. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10). I have often marveled how ministers, Christian workers, and missionaries persevere in the midst of trial, physical and financial setbacks, and opposition from outside the church. But sometimes the strongest and most discouraging opposition comes from within the church. God sees.

He is fair. He is not unrighteous to forget. He will reward the good and punish the evil. God remembers our needs and forgives our misdeeds. He gives us what we don't deserve and forgives the recompense of the punishment we deserve.

Going home to heaven, we will not be forgotten bystanders, lost in the

crowds. God will no doubt give all of us the equivalent of a front row seat. We will see Jesus and we will sing and shout the victory. Not for five minutes for some district championship. He will be King of kings and Lord of lords forever.

Here is a little preview of the elegant pageantry awaiting us in heaven. "After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues stood before the throne, and before the Lamb" (That must be the front row, brother!) "clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and **cried with a loud voice**, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9, 10). Samuel Beazley in the above quoted song says very aptly, "What a shouting will sound through heaven's fair dome, on that beautiful shore when the ransomed get home."

I'm letting Pequea Valley High School have their flashing lights, their screeching sirens, and their blasting air horns. I'm waiting for an eternally glorious city whose builder and maker is God. And it will be grander than any of us will deserve, or could imagine.

The entrance that is to be administered to us abundantly into Christ's everlasting kingdom will, I believe, be replete with more splendor than any party thrown together here on this earth. "When the saints go marching in" they will get to see and forever be with their Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ in person. That will really and truly be the grand finale.

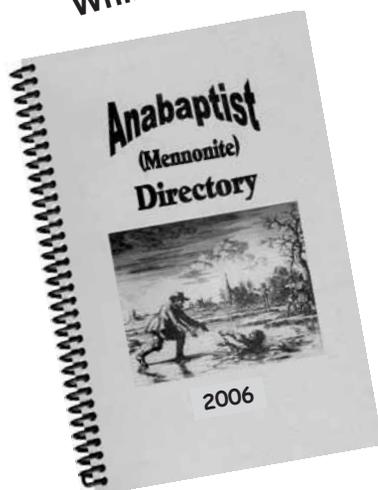
The Bottom Line is that heaven will surely be worth it all! ■

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