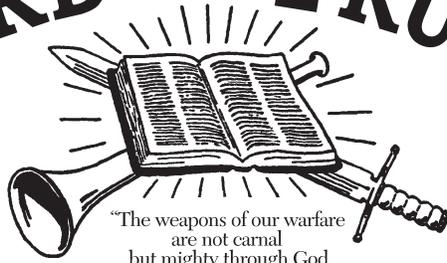


# The SWORD and TRUMPET

“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.”

APRIL 2007

# The Sword and Trumpet

Founded in 1929 by Geo. R. Brunk I

Vol. LXXV

APRIL 2007

No. 4

**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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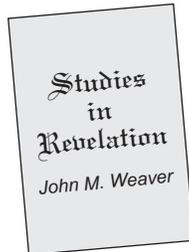
His return is a subject of prophecy (Ezekiel 9:3; 10:1, 4, 18, 19; 11:16-23; 36:24-32; 43). We know that the Spirit departed literally from the earthly temple in the city of Jerusalem. If we accept history, we cannot consistently or Scripturally deny His return as predicted.

The hook of God is a subject of history and is also a subject of prophecy (2 Kings 19:28; Isaiah 37:29; Ezekiel 38:4). The writer's purpose in calling attention to these Scriptures is to show that here symbolism is used, and not explained, but the hook and bridle literally worked and accomplished all that was predicted of them no matter what kind of symbolism was used. We believe that the hooks of God will likewise work on Russia when the time comes that they will invade Palestine to take a spoil.

We have selected some of the most outstanding instances where the historical and the prophetic mesh. May the Lord help us to have them mesh in our thinking so that we will accept Bible prophecy as wholeheartedly as we accept Bible history. ■

## *Studies in Revelation*

by John M. Weaver



*Highly recommended resource*

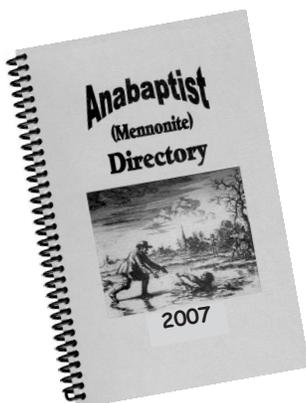
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# Person of the Month:

## *John F. Bressler* (1881-1949)



John F. Bressler was born July 31, 1881, to William Z. and Sarah Catharine (Sierer) Bressler in Juniata County, Pennsylvania.

He completed his education in the public school and then went on to two years of college.

In 1897, at the age of 16, he was converted to Christ and was subsequently baptized in April of that year.

From 1898-1899 he taught at Evandale during the day while tutoring algebra students in the evening. In April of 1899 he went to Elkhart Institute.

From there he worked in missions in Philadelphia and also in Chicago. In July of 1903, while still in Chicago, he was made the first superintendent of the mission in Fort Wayne, where he was ordained on December 4th of that year.

On January 29, 1905, at the age of 23, John married Anastasia Watson in the town of Fort Wayne where they had met. In July of that year Brother Bressler and his wife moved to Idaho and then to Oregon, opening the first mission in Portland in 1908. Things were very difficult financially, as there were no mission funds, so the couple was forced to break up housekeeping and move back to Pennsylvania. Bressler's diary during this difficult period of his life indicates that he was desirous of a closer walk with God. He was also willing to labor and sacrifice much for the cause of God's kingdom.

In 1916-1917 he was in demand for revival meetings, which at that point in time were a new thing in the Lancaster Conference. He held meetings in six different conference churches those years with good results.

1919 proved to be a year of both joy and sorrow. They decided to move to Lancaster but they also, tragically, buried two infants. Happily, in 1922, when Brother Bressler was 41, he and Anastasia adopted a son.

John was again involved with mission work as he assisted in the opening of the new Columbia Mission in 1922.

The years from 1925 until the early 30s found John Bressler as pastor of the Oak Shade work. While pastoring he also helped in the first Summer Bible School of the Lancaster Conference in 1927, as well as later with many others around the conference.

Brother Bressler was a learner and a very capable Bible teacher. In his writing and his preaching he relied upon the writings of English and German authors. He also did some studies in Greek. God blessed John with a great memory. Studying diligently, he correctly expounded God's Word.

He authored two booklets for the General Sunday School Committee to be used in teaching the doctrines of the faith. These booklets of questions and answers were entitled, "God's Plan of Salvation" and "Divine Ordinances and Sacraments."

Readers were probably most familiar, though, with his "Nuggets of Truth Found in Our Sunday School Lessons" printed regularly in the *Christian Monitor* from 1932 until 1949. (*cont'd p. 29*)

# Have We Missed It?

by Chester Weaver

I am deeply grieved. I fear that we have squandered opportunity and are now reaping the consequences. The blood descendants of the Anabaptist people from both the Amish and the Mennonite side have largely lost sight of their own historic vision. Neither side really seems to care. I believe we are in the process of throwing the “baby out with the bath water.”

For some, Anabaptism is beards and plain clothes. For others it is interesting history, but not to be lived today because it is too extreme for today. But for most Anabaptist descendants, Anabaptism means little more than *Martyrs Mirror* and scary stories.

How did we end up in a situation like this?

I see several reasons. **First** and foremost, we did not tell our own story. To our shame, the unbelieving Jews have done better than we have. They diligently teach their story. We seem to have forgotten ours. Nor do many of us even want to hear it. Why? It is too convicting. Formerly, we were a force that changed the course of Western history. Today we do not seem to know or care.

**Secondly**, we have adopted another vision. We have adopted largely a Protes-

tant theology on one hand and a Roman Catholic-like sacralism on the other. We seem to like it this way. The truth lies on the ground under our feet crying out to us, but we don't hear.\*

**Thirdly**, we have become so materialistic that Anabaptism seems like a far-off dream. We are so busy trying to keep our heads above water materially that we dare not take time to dream. If we dream, we will lose a step, falter, and fall behind. No, we may not dream, even of our own story, let alone live it.

The result is that many people get disillusioned. They know somehow that there must be more than they are observing. Many young people are bored. Middle-aged parents are slaving at their material concerns, wearing away a little at a time. Middle-aged parents thought there was more to it than this but cannot figure out what. Old people cry—disappointed old people, scared old people who no longer know what to do. Some of them pray.

It is time to repent as a people—both Amish and Mennonite. It is time to strengthen the truth that remains. It is time to rediscover what we have forgotten.

---

\*[Chester Weaver further explains what he means by #2: God's truth stands on two feet. Catholicism holds an un-biblical view of salvation—no legs are present. Martin Luther got one foot on the ground when he understood and promoted justification by faith.

Roman Catholics did not want their people to read the Bible for themselves. They were not qualified to interpret it. Some Old Order groups discourage Bible reading today because the reader will likely become “confused.” . . .

Anabaptism, however, went one step further than Luther to point out that the doctrine of salvation includes the second leg of practical evidence of justification. In other words, a man is not justified by faith unless his life demonstrates it . . .

On the other hand, Anabaptist groups who understand the error of such thinking have reacted and created a sacral system of doctrine and practice so rigid that often the life gets squeezed out of it. These groups lose the doctrine of justification unwittingly by so emphasizing obedience, conservatism, and outward practice that many people conclude that life is found in the form. These groups would also deem it necessary to pressure people to obedience. The fear of church discipline keeps them in good order. In these settings church leaders are feared and respected. Church leaders are understood to be the guardians of the faith (culture) . . .

Somewhere along the line Anabaptist descendants borrowed the sacral system and applied it to church life. They found it to work well. It solved many problems. It reduced Christianity to a formula. Once you get the formula right, you are “on a roll.” . . . “Those who are well need no physician.”]

It is time to stir up the old fires. But as history indicates, only a few will have enough desire. Too many are fat and happy. Most Anabaptist-descended people do not even know that they should repent. Others would say we must not repent because it would upset the system. And God waits to see what we will do.

Consider for starters, both the following excerpts from longer monographs. The first offers a glimpse of the original vision, and the second the relevance of the Anabaptist Vision today. The first was written by Donovan Smucker and published in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* in 1945. The second was written a few years ago by James Lowry of Hagerstown, Maryland.

#### 1. THE THEOLOGICAL TRIUMPH OF THE EARLY ANABAPTIST MENNONITES

##### *The Rediscovery of Biblical Theology in Paradox*

by Donovan E. Smucker

What was the supreme triumph of the original Anabaptists? What was the glorious heritage carried forth by the best Mennonite interpreters of this discovery?

In answering these queries the sympathetic sociologist points to mutual aid brotherhood, thus concluding that the supreme achievement was in the realm of social ethics. Or, again an answer comes from the student of the peace principle and its historical development. This interpreter would say that the prime contribution of original Mennonitism was Christian nonresistance. Still others, both in and out of the Mennonite community, would place the center of gravity at the point of nonconformity and withdrawal, implying a kind of Protestant monasticism. Then, there is the theory that this great movement of 400 [460] years ago, whatever it set out to be, really was the seed-plot of the free, democratic societies which have developed in the past two centuries. Finally, *and unquestionably most common*, is the conception of original Anabaptism as dangerous heresy and corrupting treason, fatal alike to both church

and state. At various times since the inception of the movement 465 years ago, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed theologians have followed this line of interpretation; although, to be sure, it is relatively uncommon in the twentieth century.

In each case, these interpreters have focused their analysis on part of the truth. "The Anabaptist Vision," to use Harold Benders' excellent phrase, certainly did include a mutual aid brotherhood; it did make much of Christian nonresistance; it did have a doctrine of nonconformity (though it was not the ridiculous caricature often suggested by destructive critics); moreover, Anabaptism did make a great contribution to the development of free, voluntaristic institutions; and the charges of "heresy" are true insofar as they suggest a sincere criticism of conventional orthodoxy, Roman, Lutheran, and Calvinist (or theological liberalism, ancient or modern), a criticism in the light of what was considered a more perfect orthodoxy, non-heretical and non-treasonable.

To discover the nature of this orthodoxy, it is necessary to ask once again the question with which this paper started: *What was the supreme triumph of the original Anabaptist-Mennonite declaration?* The answer is this: *These great Christians re-discovered the theology of the Bible!*

Because the Bible is the written Word of God, because it is that comprehensive revelation of God to man, because it is a Divine message from God *through* man, this central triumph includes all other partial, specific, or secondary comments which may be made in describing the "Anabaptist Vision." Note that I have used the word *re-discovered*. This suggests that their triumph was, in essence, nothing new. The following sentence of Harold Bender's, supported by at least seven other historians of Anabaptism, defines the issue at this point:

"... Anabaptism is the culmination of the Reformation, the fulfillment of the original vision of Luther and Zwingli, *and thus makes it a consistent evangelical Protestantism seeking to recreate without compromise the*

*original New Testament church, the vision of Christ and the Apostles” (Italics mine).*

Which is to say that the Anabaptists re-discovered the “faith which was once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). It is this faith which is recorded systematically and comprehensively in the Holy Scriptures.

Yet, how delicate has been that triumph! Again and again the evangelical churches in general and the Mennonites in particular have lost that magnificent theology of the Bible, thus illustrating Reinhold Niebuhr’s dictum that every great spiritual achievement is subject to perils—and deadly ones—at all times.

## **2. The Anabaptist Vision Today**

*by James Lowry  
Hagerstown, MD*

I want to ask, *What does the Anabaptist Vision have to offer mankind today?*

The Anabaptist Vision as it expresses basic Christianity has everything to offer which the Christian religion has always offered: on a personal level, forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, power to live a holy life, a living hope of heaven. But beyond these, it especially offers a solution to the evils which beset the human race at the end of the twentieth century, worse apparently than at most other times of human history.

How does the Anabaptist Vision relate to the following cluster of problems?

1) To modernity, to the post-Christian present with its scientific worldview, to the loss of traditional values in Western civilization, also spreading throughout the world;

2) To consumerism, materialism, “entertainmentism,” carnality, worldliness, pride;

3) To individualism, to the breakdown of community in urban areas, the breakdown of families, ethnic hatred, and violence.

1) Anabaptist primitivism which leaps from the corrupt present to the ideal past of the early church is an answer to the first set of problems.

Western society is similar to that of the first century where the tiny Christian

church confronted pagan society with an unknown message. In spite of widespread education, modern man is ignorant of the content of the Word of God, of what the early church believed, and of how the early Christians lived. Modern man substitutes new moral values, personal freedom, equality, feminism, advocacy of unspeakable sins, murder of infants and the elderly, and intellectual liberty. Anabaptism makes it possible to recover lost, forgotten values today as it did in Reformation times. Churches which have not compromised with worldly society, which have not forgotten traditional values, maintain a living witness to these values. They are as “a city that is set on a hill.”

2) The second set of problems, relating to the abundance of things and pleasures, is answered by traditional Anabaptist commitment to self-denial and simplicity, by the rejection of worldly lifestyles and entertainment, by the principle of discipleship and obedience.

3) The answer to violence, hatred, individualism, and the loss of community is the church, the colony of heaven, the loving brotherhood, where the will of God is done on earth. The church, the kingdom of God, is always at war with the kingdom of this world and suffers persecution. But here in the church, it is possible to live and grow in love, being transformed into the image of the Second Man, the Lord from heaven.

The Anabaptist Vision can answer the needs of man at the beginning of the 21st century.

**Editor’s note:** *I understand that examples of sacralism in the Roman Catholic church to which Bro. Weaver refers might be going to mass, confession to a priest, and other sacraments the church requires. This “church loyalty” often offers license for a lifestyle that is foreign to Christian discipleship.*

*Mere loyalty to the rules and expectations of Anabaptist churches, however, also fails to place a person’s hope of salvation on scriptural foundation and brings a false sense of security, because it springs from a lack of faithful commitment to the Lord of the church.* ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Calvary Messenger*, January 2007

## **From the Editor's Desk**



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

# **Whose Standards of Modesty— God's or Man's?**

by Alvin Mast

Ever since the Fall when Adam stood by and allowed Eve to be deceived, man has had problems with himself. Eve took the forbidden fruit and gave it to Adam. Adam handed it to his offspring, and it was handed from generation to generation since then. Today man still struggles with his fallen, rebellious, unregenerate nature.

Unregenerate man is primarily selfish. He is obsessed with fulfilling his own lusts and pleasing himself. Unregenerate man wants things that are not in tune with God. He communes with his own evil heart rather than with the God of heaven.

Unregenerate man pursues what is "right in his own eyes" rather than what is "right in the eyes of the Lord." "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). It seemed right to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah to indulge in their ungodly pleasure. It seemed like the right thing to Joseph's brothers to sell

Joseph into slavery. It seemed right to David to commit adultery with Bathsheba and have her husband killed. It seemed right to King Ahab to take the forbidden vineyard. Selfishness and evil seem right to unconverted people, but they always result in further spiritual decay and death.

The Bible warns about the expressions of man's evil heart. The Book of Genesis says that the heart of man was evil continually. The Book of Jeremiah says that man's heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. The Book of 1 Timothy says, "In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." Even Christians can be deceived if they allow society, rather than God, to control their hearts.

The farther away man gets from God, the farther away he gets from truth and knowledge. God is true knowledge, whether it is scientific knowledge of the universe or ethical knowledge of how to live. Job and

Moses both wrote about the universe in a way that was entirely impossible to know unless God taught them. The prophets spoke about things that no natural mind could know. If we want true knowledge, we need to get close to God. He is the total sum of everything that is good, moral, ethical, and true.

God's knowledge addresses practical issues, such as modesty and morality, and people who reject God also reject His knowledge. Since the heathen worship a god of wood and stone and are ignorant of the loving, holy God who is the essence of decency and morality, they go naked. The pagan Greeks and Romans were not concerned about God's thoughts, so they trained and ran naked in their obsession with sports. The English word for gymnasium comes from the Greek word that means "to train naked."

And as modern man drifts away from God, he loses his shame and sense of morality. Seventy years ago, people in civilized countries generally covered their nakedness. Women used to cover their head and their legs to go out in public. Then came the era of "enlightenment" when people began to wear less clothing and started wearing tight-fitting clothing to reveal their bodies. As Christians became lukewarm, they started looking at their unregenerate neighbors. In an age of tolerance, churches accepted unregenerate people into their midst. The unregenerate and lukewarm people began to wear less clothing, and mini-skirts even were worn to church. Today many modern professing Christians do not wear more clothing than do unregenerate people; these "enlightened" Christians refuse to obey God's commandments to cover their nakedness.

God has commanded that His people dress modestly and cover their shame. His Word refers to immodest dress as "the attire of an harlot" (Proverbs 7:10). He is especially concerned that "women adorn themselves in modest apparel" (1 Timothy 2:9) because their immodesty easily stirs men's passions. Immodest women are as guilty as the men who lust after them. Since Jesus

PAGE 6

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Christ describes this lustful gaze as adultery in the heart (see Matthew 5:28), conscientious Christian men and women will practice modesty. The Christian is called to be "a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2) and needs to dress accordingly.

The world is awash in lust, but God has a mandate that His people cover themselves. The children of God should be an example to the unbelievers in modesty. The Bible specifically tells us not to copy the world and not be conformed to it, but to be separate in our thoughts and in our actions. Shall we choose a standard of modesty based on forbidden fruit, on unregenerate hearts, on selfish pleasures, and on decadent culture? Or shall we choose a standard of modesty based on God's knowledge, morality, truth, and wisdom? Whose standard of modesty do you want in your life and family—God's or man's? ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Seed of Truth*, February 2007

**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

# THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



## *A Devotional Commentary*



by David L. Burkholder

**APRIL 1, 2007**

### *Christ the King*

Revelation 1:8; Luke 19:28-40

Today is Palm Sunday, recognized as the day of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, setting the stage for the events of Passion Week which culminated in His crucifixion. Our text begins with a verse from Revelation 1 where Jesus confirms His divinity, His completeness, and His eternity. The passage from Luke shows Jesus offering Himself one final time to the Jewish people as their Messiah. Barclay says: "Before the hatred of men engulfed Him, once again He confronted them with love's invitation."

As John opens the Book of Revelation (our study for April and May), he portrays Jesus Christ, the protagonist of the drama that is the Book of Revelation. (Read the first chapter.) In verse 8, Jesus declares Himself to be the pre-existent One, the eternal One, and the all-encompassing One. As Alpha and Omega He portrays completeness, the bookends, as it were, of knowledge and reality. When time for man began, He already existed. He exists now and will for eternity future. Neither His power nor His existence is in the least bit diminished by man's limited comprehension. He is the Almighty, the one and only power in heaven and on earth. (See Isaiah 44:6.) He is the One John writes about. He is the One Luke portrays as Israel's Messiah, riding in triumph into Jerusalem.

Jesus' depiction of Himself in Revelation 1:8 as the all-knowing One is proved by His control of events in Luke 19. He knew where He was going. He knew what awaited Him in the days ahead. He knew the ultimate outcome. He did not go blindly—He

went resolutely and resignedly to Jerusalem. (See Luke 9:51.)

Was the owner of the donkey upon which Jesus rode a disciple? Had Jesus made prior arrangements for its use? One can only speculate. But again it is but proof that Jesus was indeed the Almighty—knowing all, in control of all. The owners' willing compliance to the request of the disciples on behalf of the Lord, leaves a valuable lesson for Jesus' followers in every age. Generosity should be a distinguishing characteristic of those who have received so much at the hands of a benevolent God.

Notice how the disciples honored the Lord by girding the colt with their garments and spreading them on the ground for the donkey to walk upon. They had caught the significance of this special event and gave rightful honor to the Son of God, their King. (See Matthew 21:8, 9 and Zechariah 9:9.)

This was not some small, side-street event. This was an event of major consequence and the people rallied to the occasion with shouts of joy to God "for all the mighty works that they had seen" performed by the One they were now proclaiming their King, their Messiah. (Note Matthew 21:10.) All of this, the spreading of garments, the cries of exultation were expressions of homage to their sovereign. And when the Pharisees attempted to hush the crowd Jesus told them that if the people would keep quiet the very stones would shout praise to God. The time of His exaltation had come. Nothing could quiet the acclaim and laudation of the people. Their King was coming, "meek, and sitting upon a colt, the foal of a donkey." Prophecy had been fulfilled. Christ, the King, had come to His people.

### ***For thought and discussion***

1. Study the meaning of “Alpha and Omega” and how this relates to Jesus Christ.
2. Why the donkey? What was its significance in the tableau of the triumphal entry?
3. What is our response when asked to give up something of value for the use of the kingdom?
4. Obviously, there were misunderstandings surrounding Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. There are also misunderstandings regarding His return for His people. How can we avoid these and best prepare ourselves for that event?
5. What does it mean for Jesus to be King of your life? Discuss this with your class.

## **APRIL 8, 2007**

### ***Christ Is Risen (Easter)***

John 20:11-18; Revelation 1:12a, 17, 18

In this Easter lesson we first take a look at the historical event of Jesus’ resurrection and then in the passage from Revelation John’s personal encounter with the risen, glorified Christ. It will be helpful to read at least all of John 20 as context for our selected verses depicting Mary’s encounter with the risen Lord.

Mary had been early to the tomb (v. 1), and finding the tomb open ran immediately to tell Peter and John that something was amiss. Peter and John then ran to the tomb, and seeing for themselves that the tomb was empty, returned to their home (v. 10). By then Mary was back at the tomb, weeping over this unexplained and strange turn of events.

When Mary finally gathered herself to look into the tomb, she saw two angels, positioned head and foot where the body of Jesus had lain. Perhaps she was too distraught to be startled by their presence, for she answered their question without hesitation: “They have taken away my Lord, and I

don’t know where they have taken him.” We learn from other gospel writers a more complete account of their conversation.

When Mary turned away from the tomb she encountered a person she assumed to be the keeper of the garden where the tomb was located. Again, in answer to His question as to why she was weeping, she inquired where the body of her Lord had been taken. It was at that point that Jesus revealed Himself to her in the simple act of calling her by name. The recognition was instantaneous. Her response joyful.

Interpretations vary regarding the meaning of the first part of verse 17. It seems most likely from what follows, that Jesus was simply giving Mary assurance that His departure to be with the Father was not immediate, but that He planned to spend some time yet with His followers before going back to their mutual Father in heaven. Faithful Mary then reported Jesus’ words to the disciples.

Note also in this interchange that the risen Lord no longer referred to His followers as disciples, but as brethren (v. 17. See also Romans 8:29.) The relationship had changed with the resurrection. Before many days they would now take up the work He had begun and become truly co-workers with Him in the advancement of His kingdom.

It will be helpful to read the entire first chapter of Revelation to get the setting for our text verses. The risen Lord had a message to give to His people and He chose John to be the messenger. John, being in the Spirit (v. 10), heard a voice commanding him to write the message he would be given and send it to the seven churches of Asia. When John turned to see the source of the voice he was overcome with fright. He faced a majestic and awesome person who identified Himself as the eternal One. He further confirmed His identity as the One who was dead, now lives, and shall live forever and, because of His triumph over death now holds the keys of death and the grave.

This was the One Mary had seen in the garden, now reigning in majesty and proclaiming messages of encouragement and

warning to the churches of all ages. This was the risen Christ—the object of their, and our, adoration.

### ***For thought and discussion***

1. Explore the relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus. What motivated her intense love?
2. Why the angels at the tomb? What was the purpose for their presence?
3. Try to fit yourself into the wonderment surrounding Jesus' resurrection and subsequent other-worldly appearances to His disciples. Were ever more appropriate words spoken than by the angels, "Fear not"?
4. Why do you suppose Jesus appeared in the form and manner He did in Revelation 1 to convey His message to John for the church?
5. We serve a loving God, yet He is also a fearsome God. How then should we approach Him?

## **APRIL 15, 2007**

### ***Worthy Is the Lord***

Revelation 4:1-11

As we delve into the Book of Revelation we are confronted with highly figurative and often obscure language. As with many writings, we find here different levels of meaning: the more easily understood surface meanings and then the deeper, more ambiguous or less perceptible messages under the surface of the text. In our studies from Revelation these next seven weeks we will attempt to focus on the clear, obvious meaning of the texts, and leave to your own discretion and interpretation an understanding of the hidden meanings. The Scriptures are not meant to be controversial, but instructive.

As we look at Chapter 4, John had just completed recording Jesus' specific messages to the seven churches of Asia. Immediately after this, Jesus gave him a view into

the throne room of heaven. The risen Lord Himself invited John to "come up hither" and see "things which must be hereafter," to learn of future events affecting mankind. He was also instructed (1:19), to write what he saw, both as warning and encouragement to subsequent generations. Note that John was under divine influence as he was given these revelations (v. 2).

The first thing John saw in his vision of heaven was a throne with an indescribable figure seated thereon. This personage, to whom John ascribes no anthropomorphic form, was none other than the Lord God Almighty. John describes Him in terms of brilliant radiance, like gleaming, sparkling gemstones.

Around this great throne were 24 other thrones, occupied by 24 elders clothed in white garments with crowns of gold on their heads. These 24 elders undoubtedly represented redeemed saints. (See 3:4, 5; 7:9-27; 19:18.) Their submission to the Lord God and their worship of Him was symbolized by their bowing before Him and casting their crowns at His feet (v. 10. See also 5:8-10). Their worship of the One seated on the throne was in response to His redeeming love.

This scene in heaven was not totally peaceful, however. The lightnings, thunderings and voices emanating from the throne (v. 5) were symbolic of judgments to come. John also saw seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, depicting the seven Spirits of God, probably angels standing by to do God's bidding. (See 5:6 and 8:2.) This whole scene was bordered by a crystal sea, reflecting the purity surrounding the throne.

John also observed four living creatures in the immediate vicinity of the throne. Their description parallels that given by Ezekiel in his vision in Ezekiel 1. These creatures, due to their appearance and function (v. 8), were likely cherubim. Their incessant cry was praise and adoration to the thrice holy, Lord God Almighty—the Holy, Omnipotent, Eternal One.

The exultant cry of the four living creatures caused the 24 elders to bow before the Lord and to cast their crowns before Him in

an act of homage. They joined in worship of the Lord of glory, Creator and Upholder of all things. He alone is worthy. Let us join in worship and adoration of this holy, omnipotent Lord who sits upon the throne of glory.

***For thought and discussion***

1. As you study the Book of Revelation other Scripture passages will help to interpret its message. Compare Scripture with Scripture in your study. This will help you avoid some misguided theories in your study of the Book of Revelation.
2. Why was John given these revelations of future events? There was a purpose (or several). Search them out in your study.
3. Numbers carry significance in Scripture. You may want to do a supplemental study on the relevance of numbers as they are used in the Book of Revelation.
4. How can John's depiction of this scene in heaven guide and enhance our worship?
5. One thing we learn from this passage is that our God is an awesome God. How should this realization affect our approach to Him?

**APRIL 22, 2007**

***Worthy Is the Lamb***

Revelation 5:1-14

Today's lesson text is actually a continuation from last Sunday's. John is still in a trance, viewing happenings in the throne room of heaven. The focus shifts here in Chapter 5 from the Lord God Almighty seated on the resplendent throne (Chapter 4), to the Lamb standing before the throne. The Lamb, as here identified by His names, is none other than Jesus, the second person of the Godhead, the Redeemer.

In this scene John observes a book in the right hand of the Lord God Almighty. This book was filled with writing, sealed with seven seals, and held in the right hand, the hand of authority of the Lord God Almighty. John was deeply grieved because no man in heaven or on earth was found worthy to

open the book. John's intense interest in this book was because it contained an explanation of "the things which shall be hereafter" (4:1), which things he was promised to see. And now, seemingly, they were closed to him.

Then one of the elders (see 4:4) told John to stop his weeping, for One had been found who was capable of releasing the seals and opening the book. His description points to only one possible person, the God-man, Christ Jesus. As to His human lineage, Jesus was of the tribe of Judah and from the line of David. (See Matthew 1:1-6ff. Also Genesis 49:9, 10; Isaiah 11:1, 10.) Because of His redemptive work (v. 9), He was qualified to open the book revealing the plagues of destruction to be visited upon those who had spurned His offer of salvation.

The Lamb bore the marks of sacrifice. He also had seven horns, depicting power, and seven eyes, depicting infinite knowledge. When the Lamb received the book from the hand of the Father, it triggered a response of worship from the living creatures and the elders. This act of worship was directed toward the Lamb. (See 4:10). Their worship included the music of harps, and incense, representing the prayers of saints.

The singers in verses 9 and 10 would seem to be the 24 elders representing the redeemed of all ages and nations. Only the redeemed are capable of addressing the Lamb as their worthy Redeemer, of being made a kingdom of priests, and having the promise of reigning on the earth. Those for whom Christ died hold a special place in God's plan.

In verse 11 a myriad of angels join the elders and the living beings in exultation of the Lamb. His praise is not restricted only to those who have experienced His redeeming power, but by all created beings (see 4:11), in heaven, on earth, or wherever (v. 13). Note the sevenfold praise bestowed upon the Lamb in verse 12: power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing.

Since John is here viewing future events, the praise of created beings likely points to the redemption of the earth upon the

completion of God's plan in the endtimes. (See Romans 8:19-21; Colossians 1:20.) That will indeed be a glorious time when God's original order is restored upon earth and the redeemed serve with Him and worship and praise the Lamb for ever and ever.

Worthy indeed is the Lamb. And we need not wait for future glorification to praise and adore Him for His redeeming love. Let's do it now!

### ***For thought and discussion***

1. Search for other passages proving that Jesus was the Lamb depicted in our text.
2. Why was the Lamb the only one capable and worthy of opening the book?
3. Be sure to delineate the separate roles of the elders, the living creatures, and the angels as depicted in this passage.
4. Think through the seven attributes of praise offered to the Lamb in verse 12. What do they signify?
5. As people who have experienced redemption through the sacrificial death of the Lamb, should not we be praising and adoring Him now, in recognition of what that redemption means to us now, and what it will yet mean in the future?

**APRIL 29, 2007**

### ***The Redeemed of All Ages***

Revelation 7:1-3, 9-17

Chapter 6, between last Sunday's lesson and today's, portrays what happens as the Lamb begins opening the seals of the book. The opening of each seal unleashes a wave of destruction and tragedy upon the earth and its inhabitants. This chapter (6) should be read in conjunction with Matthew 24 where Jesus prophesies the events we see taking place in Revelation 6.

Chapter 7, our study for today, is interjected parenthetically between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals of the book. It seems that God had some-

thing more to say regarding the redeemed before unleashing the last plague of judgment upon the earth (see 6:17). Here in Chapter 7 we see the sealing of a (likely) representative number of the Jewish nation as well as an innumerable multitude from every tribe, nation, and language, speaking clearly to the universality of the Gospel message (see 14:1).

Chapter 7 opens with John's view of four angels under orders from the angel with the seal of God in his hand, restraining the winds of earth's destruction. There was a job to be performed before final destruction was unleashed upon the earth. Those to be sealed were called servants of God and represented the twelve tribes of Israel. They were still on the earth, in contrast to the multitude of the redeemed depicted in verse nine as standing before the throne and the Lamb in heaven. This sealing signifies ownership by God and the security that that ownership provides.

In verse 9 the scene before John reverts again to the throne room of heaven. This multitude, representing the world's people, were clothed in white raiment, denoting purity. The palms in their hands denoted victory. With a loud voice they expressed praise to God "which sitteth upon the throne" and to the Lamb for the salvation that had been provided for mankind.

Again in verses 11 and 12, as we have noted also in 4:9 and 5:8, praise begets praise. As the angels observe the praise of the redeemed, they, too, fall in praise and adoration before the throne of God. Again the praise is sevenfold, complete, all-encompassing.

One of the elders then poses a question which John turns back to him for an answer. "Who are these people arrayed in white robes, and from whence do they come?" In response to John's negative response the elder then explains, "These are they who have come successfully through the great tribulation, and have

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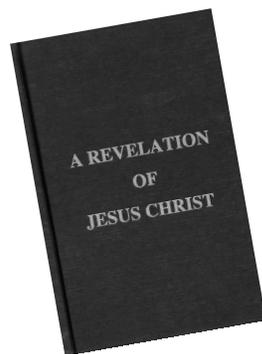
washed [purified] their robes white in the blood of the Lamb.” Were these, perhaps, the souls mentioned in 6:9-11? At least they were a group distinct from those John recognized in 5:9.

The picture in the remaining verses of the chapter (15-17), depict a future, glorious and peaceful scene in heaven. The redeemed surround the throne. They serve God continually in praise and worship. The Lord God Almighty is in their midst. He protects and cares for them—wiping away the scars and limitations of humanity. The Lamb, the One who sacrificed Himself for their eternal well-being, provides their every need. The struggles of life are over. The threats from the adversary are past. Climactic world events are no longer on the horizon. All has been changed. All is peace and joy. I want to be there, don't you?

***For thought and discussion***

1. Let me remind you again to compare Scripture with Scripture in your study of Revelation and to take the obvious and literal sense of Scripture when attempting to determine its meaning.
2. Search out other Scriptures that would indicate God's dealings with Israel in the endtimes.
3. What do you think was to be the function of the 144 thousand sealed from the 12 tribes of Israel? Of course we can only speculate, but were they, perhaps, to serve as witnesses to God's saving grace during the tribulation period?
4. John "saw" people from every tribe, language, and nation in the redeemed throng. Should not this challenge us to a deeper sense of responsibility to the world's lost, and yet unreached peoples?
5. Perhaps you have wondered, as I have, why God used such figurative and often difficult language to explain events which will take place in the endtimes. Is it designed, perhaps, to spur us to deeper study than would be necessary if things were more easily understood? What do you think?
6. Regardless of how you interpret the sequence of endtime events, several things should be clear: God's judgment upon those who spurn His offer of salvation will be severe and final, and God will protect and provide for the redeemed of all ages, for all eternity. ■

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# Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

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## The China Missions Shift

China is shifting from being a receiving country to becoming a sending country. In fact, many Christians in China have already been sent out as missionaries to places such as Jordan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Russia.

Today Chinese missionaries serving in Muslim countries have much more freedom to witness because they are not from the West. In 2005, teams of Chinese missionaries went into Pakistan after the December 2004 massive earthquake. They took blankets, tents, food, Bibles, and Christian literature in Urdu. The Pakistani people were very open to the gospel during this time. When the Chinese NGOs [Non-Government Organizations] would approach in their Jeeps (which had Chinese flags on them) the locals would yell, "The Christians are coming!" They would run toward the Jeeps, eager to receive the help that was offered in the name of Jesus.

Church leaders in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are asking for Chinese pastors and missionaries to come and teach on suffering. The years of suffering under the hand of the Communist government have placed Chinese church leaders in a unique place to help these young pastors who are facing arrest, imprisonment, and harassment in Central Asia.

—Excerpt from "China Sending: A Mission Force on the Rise" by J. Smith (pseudonym) in *Lausanne World Pulse* (<http://tinyurl.com/2zcx6a>) via Luke Kuepfer's (GTO) *Kuepfer Kronicle*

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## The Roe Loophole

Congressman Duncan Hunter (R-CA) has introduced legislation that defines a fetus from conception as a human being. Hunter says, "In 1973, the United States Supreme Court . . . refused to determine when life begins and therefore found nothing to indicate that the unborn are persons protected by the Fourteenth Amendment." He points out that "in the decision . . . the Court did concede that, 'if the suggestion of personhood is established, the appellants' case, of course, collapses, for the fetus' right to life would be guaranteed specifically by the [14th] Amendment.'" This bill, if enacted, would bypass the Supreme Court having to overturn Roe or a constitutional amendment. It would also bypass the necessity of states outlawing abortion because the Constitution's 14th amendment protects life nationwide. This piece of legislation has 101 co-sponsors, but has little hope of passage in a Democratic Congress.

—Source: *The Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* via *OneNewsNow.com*

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## No Spanking Bill in CA

A member of the California state legislature has introduced a bill that would criminalize the spanking of a child four years old or younger. Kelly Boggs (editor of the *Louisiana Baptist Message*) comments upon this law in the context of a couple and their three-year-old being booted off an AirTran

flight because of the toddler's temper tantrum and refusal to be buckled into her seat, causing a 15-minute delay in the flight. Boggs says, "Because of the hyper-sensitive, politically correct world we live in, the Kuleszas could not very well take little Elly and apply the board of education to the seat of knowledge . . . I am certain that had the Kuleszas swatted little Elly on the behind someone would have reported them to Child Protective Services."

—Source: *Baptist Press News*

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### **Florida Man Arrested for Witnessing**

John Shaffer was arrested outside a Jacksonville shopping center for witnessing about Christ. The Alliance Defense Fund has filed suit on his behalf citing the Constitutional right to free speech. I was kicked out of a mall two weeks ago for handing out tracts, but apparently he was only witnessing, not handing out literature. As Menonites, this raises the question: Many of us don't believe suing is right, but is there a difference between this case and Paul's "lawsuit" to Caesar in his own "wrongful arrest" case? I don't purport to offer the answer, but this is a question each of us needs to think through Scripturally and settle in our minds. Many of us will be faced with such a decision in the future.

—Source: *OneNewsNow.com*

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### **Gay Discrimination Banned for British Adoption Agencies**

Britain has put forth legislation that bans adoption agencies from discriminating against homosexual couples seeking adoption. Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Conner, head of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, has strongly objected to Prime Minister Tony Blair and has said that if Catholic adoption agencies are not exempted, they will be shut down. Blair is reconsidering and will announce a new plan next week.

—Sources: *The Economist*, *The Washington Times*, and *The UK Daily Telegraph*

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### **U.S. Has Evidence Proving Iranian Meddling in Iraq**

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Sean McCormack has announced that the U.S. has proof that Iranian agents are fomenting violence in Iraq. He said, "There is solid evidence that Iranian agents are involved in these networks and that they are working with individuals and groups in Iraq and that they are being sent there by the Iranian government. We will reveal, in [the] near future, about what we know of Iranian established network in Iraq and its involvement in Iraq conflict."

—Source: *All Headline News*

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### **Pakistani High Court Rules Construction of Church Not Un-Islamic**

The Pakistan High Court Chief Justice has ruled that a church within an educational institution in a Muslim country is not against the tenets of Islam, which teaches tolerance.

"There is no ban on the construction or reconstruction of a mosque in non-Muslim countries around the world. Being Muslim, we should be tolerant, as Islam teaches us the same," Tariq Pervez Khan, the Chief Justice of Peshawar High Court ruled on Tuesday, January 23, while hearing a writ petition filed by two students.

According to Salem Voice Ministries News Service, the petitioners, Salahuddin and Murtaza, had challenged the reconstruction of a church in a Christian colony inside the University of Peshawar campus. The church was damaged in the mid-80s when some students attacked it.

—Excerpt from "Pakistan High Court Rules Church in Muslim Institution Not Un-Islamic" by Michael Ireland from *ASSIST News Service* (<http://tinyurl.com/25wgst>)

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**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

## Pakistan Blasphemy Law Abused

A Christian woman in Pakistan went down the road to inquire about building materials some mosque-builders had borrowed. She got into an argument with a lady who then falsely accused her of having blasphemed the prophet Muhammad. A “large, furious mob” supported by police marched on their home and arrested her. One analyst is quoted in the *WND* article as saying, “Unfortunately very little evidence is needed to make a charge under the blasphemy laws and it is very difficult for non-Muslims to successfully contest the accusations.”

—Sources: *World Net Daily*, *Voice of the Martyrs*, *International Christian Concern*, and *ASSIST News Service*

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## Family Research Council Promotes Strong Marriages' Economic Benefits

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, has touted the economic benefits of a strong marriage of one man and one woman for life. He points to a study that concludes that child poverty costs the U.S. \$500 billion each year because those people are “less productive, earn less money, commit more crimes, and have more health-related expenses.” He says that lawmakers need to realize when addressing poverty that protecting and strengthening the traditional family structure will go a long way toward mitigating poverty. Tony Perkins says, “The research is indisputable. Stable, healthy marriages are the best, most effective defense against child poverty. Children living with single mothers are five times more likely to be poor than those in two-parent families. Growing up in a single-parent home roughly doubles the risk that a child will drop out of school or become a teen parent. Even children living with cohabiting couples suffer similar fates.”

—Source: *OneNewsNow.com* and the Family Research Council

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APRIL 2007

## New Nickel Mines School Under Construction

A new Amish one-room schoolhouse is being built within walking distance of the old schoolhouse, which was torn down after the shooting of ten Amish school girls. The schoolhouse is slated to be completed in March and will be attended by four of the girls who survived the shooting. The fifth survivor’s medical condition prevents school attendance.

—Source: *Washington Post*

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## Yoga Stretches Into Public Schools

In Tara Guber’s ideal world, American children would meditate in the lotus position and chant in Sanskrit before taking stressful standardized tests.

But when she asked a public elementary school in Aspen, Colorado, to teach yoga in 2002, Christian fundamentalists and even some secular parents lobbied the school board. They argued that yoga’s Hindu roots conflicted with Christian teachings and that using it in school might violate the separation of church and state.

Guber crafted a new curriculum that eliminated chanting and translated Sanskrit into kid-friendly English. Yogic panting became “bunny breathing,” and “meditation” became “time in.”

“I stripped every piece of anything that anyone could vaguely construe as spiritual or religious out of the program,” Guber said.

Now, more than 100 schools in 26 states have adopted Guber’s “Yoga Ed.” program and more than 300 physical education instructors have been trained in it.

The federal government gives grants to gym teachers who complete a teacher training course in yoga.

—Excerpt from “Yoga Stretches Into Public Schools” by Rachel Konrad in *The Washington Post* (<http://tinyurl.com/22g5g7>)

*Please send any tips, stories, opinions, suggestions, or corrections to: **hansmast** @hansmast.com*

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# Dangers Confronting Preachers

by John Shelly

Many times when we think about pastors, ministers, or preachers we think of someone who has been specifically called by God. Because we believe the calling is from God, we hold to the notion that the minister has his life all together. We believe that ministers have very few problems. We believe they have all their ducks in a row, and that everything is under control. Nothing could be further from the truth. Ministers face the same trials, temptations, and troubles that all dedicated Christians do. Surprised? We should not be. Ministers need to guard their hearts, actions, and thoughts just like everyone else must do.

We want to look at the account of Jesus' temptation in Luke 4:1-13. We know that Jesus was (and is) the only begotten Son of God, and that He was (and is) perfect and without sin. However, this did not prevent Him from being tempted and tried by Satan himself. Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days (4:2), and was tempted the entire time. Somehow we get the idea that as we grow in the Christian life, or as we mature, we will no longer face trials and temptations. However, we know that Jesus was tempted and that those temptations were real, just as real as those that we face every day.

Jesus faced the desire for food, for He had gone without food for 40 days. Jesus went without food for so long that He was enduring a ravishing hunger. Jesus also faced the desire for power, and for glory. Satan was offering Jesus the entire world without His needing to die a horrible death. What person in his right mind wouldn't jump at the chance? But Jesus saw the trap.

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*John Shelly is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren, serving in a team ministry at the Shank's Church of the Brethren.*

Jesus faced the temptation to prove who He really was. We face the temptation as well. Some say that "if you were a *real* Christian you would do this, or if you were a *real* Christian you wouldn't do that." The perfection and sinless character of Jesus did not prevent Him from being tempted by Satan. If that is true of Jesus, then we cannot expect that human ministers will be without temptations and trials. We need only to look at some of the ministers that we know from the past (and from the present as well), to note the trials and temptations they faced.

The following information was gleaned from a survey taken by The Fuller Institute of Church Growth: 90% of the ministers surveyed, work more than 46 hours a week; 80% believe the pastoral ministry has affected their families negatively; 75% reported a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry; 50% felt themselves unable to meet the needs of the task; 90% felt inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands; 50% reported serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month; 37% confessed to having been involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church. This is a sad and disturbing look at problems which ministers face. And many additional statistics could be quoted.

So then, where do we go from here? We certainly must not throw up our hands and ignore the problem. We need to be true, sincere ministers of God. Faithful ministers learn the skill of listening to God. In order to tell others about God, we must first listen to and know God ourselves. We must hear what He has to say to us through His Word. Ministry is being a *leader*, and being a *servant* at the same time. Those who aim to be great leaders must be willing servants.

Ministry includes enduring persecution, for all things will not always go well. And when things don't go well, true ministers are still seeking to be faithful in all things and at all times. Ministry is being pure in our relationships with others, and if married, ministry is also being a lover to one's wife and a lover of one's children.

The call to ministry is given to us by God. So then in reality our ministry really belongs to Him, and we are His servants just as the prophets of old were His servants. It is interesting that the word *minister* means "servant." The word *servant* is to be distinguished from a *slave* who works against his will, and from a *hireling* who works for wages.

### **1. One of the problems ministers face is pride.**

At times a minister may look back at what has happened in his life and think, "Look at what I have accomplished for God. What would God do without me?" And while it is true that God has called us, we need to recognize that our work is the result of what God has done through us, and not what *we* have done through our own ingenuity.

Ministers can overcome the problem of pride by realizing that we are God's servants; we are not His boss. Jesus has been the greatest Leader and the greatest Servant who ever lived. Look at John 13:1-20. Jesus and His disciples had gathered in the Upper Room for supper. Jesus left the table and girded Himself to wash the disciples' feet. But what makes this especially important, is that just prior to this event, the disciples had a heated discussion, an argument as to who was the greatest (Luke 22:24-27). The disciples had carried on this discussion and were now in the Upper Room for supper.

When someone came into a house in the Middle East, there was usually a servant present who would wash the feet of those who entered. But when the disciples entered this house there was no servant to wash their feet. They were all aware of this task, and any one of these men could have become the servant, but they didn't. The

disciples were more interested in deciding who was the greatest among them. So then Jesus, to teach them the true meaning of leadership, got up from the table, girded Himself, and washed the feet of those whom He had called to be His followers. Jesus could have said, "Well, I'm the greatest; I'm the one who should have my feet washed"—but Jesus did not respond that way. He simply, quietly, and humbly got up, willingly took the role of a servant, and performed the task.

Jesus told the disciples one time that "he who is the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled" (Matthew 23:11, 12).

### **2. Another problem ministers face is choosing what is important.**

Many times it is the "program" that is most important, and not the people. However, a godly minister will see the value of people. That is why Jesus came, to save people, not to make work for ministers. Ministers need to recognize that all people who are under their care and leadership have value, and that each individual is important. Again, Jesus is the best teacher of this characteristic.

There may be times when a minister is confronted with the temptation to allow persons to suffer pain in order to preserve *his own* reputation or *his own* comfort. We will look at John 8:11. Jesus was being pursued and agitated by the scribes and the Pharisees. They had found a woman who had committed adultery and brought her to Jesus hoping to trap Him. The scribes and Pharisees wanted a reason to accuse Jesus.

Jesus could have sacrificed this woman. He could have said, "Look at this wicked woman. She has committed sin. She was taken in the very act of committing adultery. Take her and do with her what Moses' Law commands." But Jesus knew that she was a typical human being, and that His purpose was to save sinners like this very woman caught in adultery.

The minister's *first priority* is to seek to bring sinners to Jesus Christ. We need to

realize that *all* individuals are important, no matter what their ability, their place in life, how great or small, whether male or female, or whether they are saved or unsaved. Jesus was willing to put Himself in danger, willing to sacrifice His security, all in order to save sinners.

In the days when an ice cream sundae cost much less than it does today, a ten-year-old boy entered a hotel coffee shop and sat at a table. A waitress set a glass of water in front of him. "How much is an ice cream sundae?" he asked.

"Fifty cents," replied the waitress.

The little boy pulled his hand out of his pocket and studied the coins in it. "Well, how much is a plain dish of ice cream?" he inquired.

By now more people were waiting for a table and the waitress was growing impatient. "Thirty-five cents," she brusquely replied.

The little boy again counted his coins. "I'll have the plain ice cream," he said.

The waitress brought the ice cream, put the bill on the table, and walked away. The boy finished the ice cream, paid the cashier and left. When the waitress came back, she began to cry as she wiped the table. There, placed neatly beside the empty dish, were two nickels and five pennies.

You see, the little boy couldn't have the sundae because he wanted to have enough left over to give her a tip. That is quite a lesson from one so young. How important, in your mind, are the seemingly insignificant people whom you meet in your daily activity?

### ***3. Another problem ministers face is modeling integrity.***

*Integrity* is defined as "being of sound moral principle, upright, honest, and sincere." There are going to be times in our ministry when it will be easier to not tell the whole truth, but we must not bow to that temptation.

The world today needs men and women who cannot be bought. Charles Swindoll says that there is need for men and women whose word is their bond; who put character above wealth; who possess opinions and a will; who

will be as honest in small things as in great things; who will make no compromise with wrong; who will not say they do it "because everybody else does it"; who are true to their friends through good report and evil report, in adversity as well as in prosperity; and who are not ashamed or afraid to stand for the truth even when it is unpopular.

Ministers need to stand unflinchingly for God, even in the face of persecution. Our greatest example is the Apostle Paul. The persecutions and trials that Paul endured for Jesus Christ are described briefly in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29. He had been beaten and bruised by Gentiles and Jews. He had been in prison, and he had been stoned. He had been shipwrecked again and again. He had known peril and weariness, pain, hunger, thirst, nakedness, and cold. His body had been so badly treated that he was a chronically sick man who was in constant need of a physician. But in all this, he never walked away from God. Rather, he walked closer to God. If we are faithful to God He will be faithful to us.

I would like to share this story that comes from The University of Southern California. This is a true account about something that happened a few years ago at USC. There was a professor of philosophy there who was a deeply committed atheist. His primary goal for one of the required classes which he taught, was to spend the entire semester attempting to prove that God could not exist. His students were afraid to argue with him because of his impeccable logic. For twenty years he had taught this class and no one had ever had the courage to stand against him. Some had argued in class at times, but no one had ever really gone against him, because of his reputation.

At the end of every semester on the last day, he would say to his class of 300 students, "If there is anyone here who still believes in Jesus, stand up!" In twenty years, no one had ever stood up. They knew what he was going to do next. He would say, "Anyone who believes in God is a fool. If God existed, He could stop this piece of

chalk from hitting the floor and breaking. It is such a simple task to prove that He is God, and yet He can't do it."

And every year, he would drop the chalk onto the tile floor of the classroom and it would shatter into a hundred pieces. All of the students would do nothing but stop and stare. Most of the students thought that God indeed couldn't exist. Certainly, a number of Christians had slipped through, but for twenty years, they too, had been too afraid to stand up.

A few years ago there was a freshman who enrolled in the professor's class. He was a Christian, and had heard the stories about his professor. He was required to take the class for his major and he was afraid. But for three months that semester, he prayed every morning that he would have the courage to stand up no matter what the professor said, or what the class thought. Nothing they said could ever shatter his faith . . . he hoped.

Finally, the day came. The professor said, "If there is anyone here who still believes in God, stand up!" The professor and the class of 300 people looked at him, shocked, as he stood up at the back of the classroom. The professor shouted, "You FOOL!! If God existed, He would keep this piece of chalk from breaking when it hits the floor!" He proceeded to drop the chalk, but as he did, it slipped out of his fingers, off his shirt cuff, onto the pleats of his pants, down his leg and off his shoe. As it hit the floor, it simply rolled away unbroken.

The professor's jaw dropped as he stared at the chalk. He looked up at the young man and then ran out of the lecture hall. The young man, who had stood, proceeded to walk to the front of the room and shared his faith in Jesus for the next half hour. Three hundred students stayed and listened as he told of God's love for them and of His power through Jesus. The question for us is this: Do we have the faith and the courage to proclaim the Truth of God, the Truth of Jesus before all whom we meet?

#### **4. Another problem ministers face is related to their families.**

It is vital that this problem be solved. A minister is to be a willing servant and a lover to his wife, and a lover of his children. First Timothy 5:8 says, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever." The primary focus in this text is on financial support. The passage speaks about supporting the members of one's own immediate family. But it can also be applied to supporting family relationships.

A man and a woman stand before God when they are married, and from that relationship comes a family. The man vows to love his wife through all that may happen to them, both good and bad. The wife does the same. Being a minister does not mean that he is any less accountable for the vows that he made. If anything, he is more accountable to his wife, to his family, and especially to God. He is married to his wife, not to the church, and not to the ministry. One thing that every church needs to see in a leader, is a strong family and a strong marriage. That can only happen if *both* husband and wife are totally committed to each other, and if *both* are committed to God.

Where can people look for a model if they cannot see the model in a man and woman of God? First Timothy 3:2 states that a minister is to be "the husband of one wife." There is a reason for that statement. They are not to act like animals with every female they meet or counsel. Our marriage relationships are to be a portrait of Jesus Christ's love for the Church.

One movie actor was asked the question, "What makes a great lover?" To the surprise of the audience, his answer went something like this: "A great lover is someone who can be satisfied to live with one woman all life-long. A great lover is not someone who goes from woman to woman. Any dog can do that." Our marriages here on earth are to be a little taste of heaven on earth, but that requires another lengthy article.

Every minister should remember that his wife is a very important asset to the ministry. Sometime ago I heard this statement: "No

amount of success can make up for failure in the home.” There is much truth in that statement. A good minister’s wife will be his protector, his prayer warrior, his best critic, and at times his most staunch supporter. The counsel to every minister is this—be a lover of your wife. And the counsel to every minister’s wife is this—be a lover of your husband.

So then where do we go from here? What can we do to help ministers? We can start with 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13. The NIV says, “Now we ask you brothers, to respect those

who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.” In addition, it is important for all the members of each congregation to pray for their ministers every day, and hold them continually before God. May God’s grace rest on each one who proclaims Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of humankind. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Brethren Revival Fellowship*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2005



## Counseling From the Word

### Is the Confession I Just Heard for Real?

by Mel Shetler

There are more manipulative games played in church with confessions than about any other aspect of our church life. Situations that call for church discipline can drag out for years because it is impossible to resolve sin issues by negotiation. Only true repentance and honest confession will bring true resolution. How many times do we set people up to repeat sin patterns by letting them get by with incomplete confessions? Often people who make attempts at confession are supported by their sympathizers in such a way that pastors feel obligated to accept the confession no matter how incomplete it seems. The leadership responsibility given to us in John 21:23 to forgive or retain sin is a weighty matter not given to one person but to the pastor/elder body to discern if we have in fact heard a real confession or not. Following are helpful principles to know:

***The confession should impact all the persons who have been directly affected by the sin.***

The offending person often wants to control the flow of information, *who* needs to know, *how*, and *when*. There are times when some “personal sins” need only to be confessed to God. These personal sins take place only in thoughts and do not directly affect others. But many sins affect the family and community. They are more public in nature in that they directly affect a single individual or a group of people. In this case, the confession should reach as far as the offense.

***The confession should never include words like, if, but, or maybe.***

“If I have done something wrong, will you forgive me?” The word *if* ruins this confession because the person does not own up to doing anything wrong. When the word

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*but* is used, as in “I was wrong, but so were you,” it has the strong tendency to cancel all the words that precede it. Words like *perhaps*, *maybe*, *possibly*, *I might have*—all should be struck from our heart and our vocabulary anytime we need to confess. If there is an *if*, *but*, or *maybe* in the statement, it is no confession!

***Be specific when making a confession.***

It is important to be specific about how our sin has violated God’s Word and affected other people. When we clearly identify our sinful behavior and attitudes we are more likely to be genuinely repentant. Here is an example: “I realize, since we have talked, how much my anger is in direct disobedience to God and how deeply I have hurt you.” This kind of statement leaves no doubt in the other person that you know your behavior was wrong and it is more likely to receive a positive response.

***Understand and accept the consequences***

My son, who is a psychologist, says that the majority of youth he sees at the detention center do not connect the dots between their behavior and the resulting consequences. Neither do many church people. When is the

last time you have heard the words, “When I get home this evening, I will call every person I talked to and let them know that my statements about you were not true?” That would be the normal way to accept responsibility for spreading false accusations.

***A change of behavior takes place***

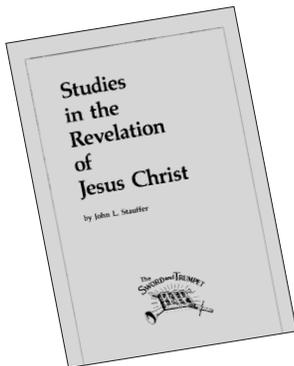
If there is not a forsaking of sinful ways, it was only words people heard. In all relationships sincerity is soon discovered by the desire for change. If we are in Christ there is the possibility of becoming a new creation and we can expect old patterns to pass away and new ones to form.

***Recognize your need to ask for forgiveness***

“I did it.” “It was wrong.” “I’m really sorry.” “Will you please forgive me?” These simple words are so hard to get out and mean it. People should not be put under pressure to forgive. Don’t have them stand. Don’t put forgiveness on display. If the elders/pastors believe there is true repentance and confession, then pronounce forgiveness on behalf of the congregation upon the individual. This is the most liberating road to genuine reconciliation. ■

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# Climbing Mount Everest— The Future of Mennonite Education

by Steven Brubaker

The highest point on earth—Mt. Everest. To climb to that summit has captivated the hearts and plans and pocketbooks of hundreds of adventurers over the years. One of these people is Jon Krakauer—journalist, outdoorsman, and climber. When *Outside* magazine gave him the opportunity to join a group attempting to scale the mountain, he said he answered yes without pausing to catch his breath. Then, as a journalist, he chronicled every grueling step of the way to the summit of Everest in a captivating account entitled *Into Thin Air*.

In this account, Krakauer describes a number of challenges Everest presents to the aspiring climber. First, the last road ends and you are still a hundred miles from where you are headed. Second, there is nothing within miles of the summit that can be used for food or fuel. And then there is the weather. The temperature at the summit can reach -100 degrees, with howling winds of 100 mph and more. And that is not all. The oxygen content at the summit is 1/3 of the amount in the air at altitudes where most of us live. In addition, the terrain can be treacherous (think *avalanche*), and the weather unpredictable.

How does one overcome these challenges? Krakauer tells us that the first task of the climber is to establish Base Camp. The Base Camp is several miles from the summit and provides a place to organize the assault to the top. This is never a solo effort but involves a large team of climbers and supporting people—often native Sherpas—who help transport the enormous amounts

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of food, fuel, oxygen, shelter, climbing equipment, radios, etc., needed for the month-long effort. Conquering Everest does not happen quickly. Ordinarily, a distance of several miles would not seem daunting, but place that at the top of the world with all of the challenges listed earlier, and the undertaking is monumental. Over the next weeks, the climbers climb during the day then come back down for the night, making an effort to acclimatize their bodies to the difficult conditions. After several days, another camp is established farther up the mountain, supplies are transferred, and the climbers who can stay there use that as the base camp. The process continues to a third camp and then a fourth and a fifth—the camp from which the final attempt will be made. After four or more weeks of grueling work, intense headaches, little sleep (because it is often difficult to sleep at high altitudes), hunger, intense cold, boredom, and overwhelming weariness, the pieces are in place to make the final push. Finally! The summit! Victory! Through careful planning, teamwork, and lots of grunt work, the seemingly insurmountable is accomplished.

As conservative Mennonite communities, we have our own mountain to climb.

God has blessed our churches and communities with numerous schools. Incalculable time and energy have been poured into our schools by our school boards, principals, and teachers. Our schools have been a blessing to our families and churches. Much good has been done. The Base Camp has been established. But our schools can be more, much more, and that is our opportunity. That is our mountain.

Our schools can be much more. It is not enough that our students score higher than

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the average public school student. Compared to the typical student in the public system, the students in our schools have been blessed with homes where there is much more discipline, much more love, much less fighting and abuse, much less relational friction, and much less mind and heart pollution. I suspect that public schools are doing better with the students they have to work with than we would if we were in their shoes. With our students, we should be well above average. Our schools can be much more academically.

We can grow in our capacity to assist, to partner with, the home and church. We can do better at integrating educational objectives with the mandates of the church and home. We do not have to pursue separate agendas. We can do better at helping our students value their homes and churches. Our schools can be much more in service to the community of believers.

Our schools can be much more. Our schools can do much more than fulfill the government requirements for education. Our schools can be more than a protection from the world. They can be a positive cooperative force for nurturing a generation that is committed to Jesus Christ, to His church, and to their families. Our schools can be much more in purpose.

We can do better at producing students who understand, who can articulate, and who are passionately committed to a Christ-centered life and worldview: students who embrace their primary identity as followers of Christ in contrast to a primary identity as Americans; students who actively participate in the calls to “subdue the earth” and “make disciples of all nations”; students who have an adequate base for developing in the trades, the sciences, business, and other vocations. Our schools can be much more in effectiveness.

But just as climbing Mt. Everest can't be achieved in one thrust for the summit, neither can our vision for better schools be achieved in one burst of effort. Climbing a

mountain, reaching the summit, takes a series of disciplined and measured intermediate steps. And so it will be for us. Our base camp is in place. We want to identify four intermediate camps that should be established to pursue this much-more of Mennonite education.

A first camp that must be established if we are to achieve the summit is a greatly enlarged pool of older, godly, experienced, and competent teachers. The single most significant human factor in the everyday success of our schools is the teacher. From all indications, we are suffering a severe lack of willing teachers, much less teachers who are equipped for the work.

We need godly teachers. When our schools are staffed by teachers whose years of enduring faith in Jesus Christ have allowed Him to transform them into wise, winsome, and Spirit-directed men and women, we will be closer to the summit. Our children are at stake here. Teachers influence children for hundreds of hours every year. Our children spend much more time in school than in church. We need godly teachers.

We need older teachers. When the average age of the teachers in our schools is closer to forty than twenty, we will be closer to the crest. An older teacher brings the priceless qualities of experience, wisdom, and gravity. The resulting stability could eliminate many of the problems that plague our schools and that disillusion students and parents. We need older teachers.

We need experienced teachers. When the average teaching experience of our teachers is ten years rather than three, we will be closer to the peak. Teaching is a vocation that requires a tremendous amount of learning. The learning curve is steep. It is the veteran teachers who can help our schools run smoothly and effectively. Unfortunately, the turnover of teachers in our schools is high, making it difficult to sustain a core of teachers with adequate experience. We understand this concept well in most other occupations.

Trying to establish a successful business will never work if most of the workers, including the one in charge, stay only two to three years. We need experienced teachers.

We need competent teachers. When our classrooms are filled with teachers who have paid the price to develop the knowledge and skills of effective teaching, we will be closer to the summit. The ability to teach effectively is a developed gift. There is so much to learn even for the most naturally formed teacher—so much to learn about the Christian worldview that undergirds and infiltrates everything that is studied in the classroom; so much to learn about the world God created; so much to learn about the mathematical framework for the universe; so much to learn about the diversity, beauty, intricacy, and enormity of the cosmos; so much to learn about the way God has been present in history; so much to learn about the needs and workings of our students; so much to learn about classroom management and lesson development; so much to learn; so much to become. We need competent teachers.

School boards, principals, churches—let us renew our commitment to identify, call, support, and equip the people from our communities who will teach for ten, twenty, thirty years. Who are the people among us that by their character and by their ability to communicate have earned the right to influence the next generation? Let us work to find ways to involve our seasoned citizens in the school. Let us work to keep effective teachers teaching.

Instead of spending all of our energy finding a teacher just for next year, let us invest energy in finding and calling teachers for service in three to four years and then help them walk the path to becoming a prepared teacher. Could we develop a long-term plan for developing the people we really want to be teaching rather than engaging in the annual frantic search for whosoever will? Until our vision grows from the immediate need of teachers for this year, we will be

locked in the energy-depleting cycle of (1) finally, after fifteen calls, finding a teacher; (2) only to have them stumble (often due to lack of preparation, experience, and age) and then needing to repeat the process. Identifying, calling, and equipping long-term teachers will cost us. However, when we don't need to find new teachers every year and when we enjoy the blessings of schools operated by seasoned, competent staffs, we will be delighted with the investment.

To those of us who are teaching, we too have a major role in establishing this camp. We should ask, "Is God calling me to make a long-term commitment to teaching?" When the question we ask is "Should I teach another year?" we never make the kind of commitment that energizes us to pay the full price required for growing and developing as a teacher. When we begin to think in terms of 10, 20, 30 years of teaching, then the need to study and learn and grow as a teacher becomes a motivating reality. Even if we are not able to make the long-term commitment, opening ourselves to the possibility of long-term involvement can net significant gains in personal growth.

Each of us should also be asking, "How can I develop into a teacher that has something to offer to the broader educational community—as a writer, curriculum developer, speaker, workshop leader, evaluator, or consultant?" Each of us can pursue some aspect of education in which we become proficient and knowledgeable so as to be able to serve other schools and teachers.

And let us as teachers recommit ourselves to everyday faithfulness in our calling. Perhaps our schools will not be filled with the kind of teachers described here until our communities value education and school to a greater degree. But our communities will be unable to value education and school as we ought until our schools and teachers have established a reliable track record of substantively blessing the homes and churches of our students. Establishing that track record is worth our best energies.

The first camp—committed teachers.

A second camp that paces our progress toward the summit is a set of clearly defined beliefs. Beliefs about the purposes of our schools—why we exist. Beliefs about what should be taught—the content.

From the early morning rituals (teachers greeting each other, final lesson preparations, copies made, arrival of the students) to the fabric of the school day (classes, recess, awards and punishments, lunchtime practices, tests, reviews, speeches, field trips, discussions) to the end-of-day procedures, school is a whirlwind of hundreds of activities, practices, procedures, sights, and sounds. But what are the beliefs that guide those practices? Why do we do school this way and not another? Do these practices flow from our beliefs and values or are they merely borrowed from everyone else who does school? We have our own schools, but why? How does God want us to do school?

What do we want for our students when they graduate? What kinds of character? What kinds of visions and desires and intentions? What kinds of skills? What kinds of knowledge? What kinds of attitudes? And how can we go about cultivating this in our students?

Anabaptism was a movement that included profound and far-reaching ideas—ideas anchored in God's Word—ideas that have given shape to a subculture, a heritage, a way of life. There is still a unique Anabaptist practice, but is there an Anabaptist mind? Is there a worldview that adequately supports the practice? What are the ideas, the truths, and the teachings that God has formed us as a people to see and to live? What kind of school and classes and teaching methods are consistent with those ideas? And how should these emphases shape our schools? How does an Anabaptist worldview impact our beliefs about why we would educate, about how we will educate, and about what will be included in education? What are the compelling beliefs that can give unique shape to all facets of our schools, the courses we require students to take, the

books we have them read, the projects, the assignments, the discussions, and the way we teach?

These questions need ongoing consideration in ways that discern the mind of Christ and begin to permeate our thinking, our planning, our teaching, our curriculum, and our activities.

If we don't think about these things ourselves, we will merely absorb practices that flow from ideas divergent to our own. This is hard work, work that we may prefer to leave to others, but work that is a part of faithfulness to Christ. In the absence of significant work on our part, we have no choice but to adopt the patterns of the schools around us. We will be schools with only cosmetic distinctives—different dress codes, no sports programs, no Harry Potter books in the library. We will not be schools with thorough, substantive emphases that flow from and reinforce our fundamental values and beliefs.

We need teachers, church leaders, students of the Word, thoughtful observers, and other interested individuals to pray, study, think, and write in these areas. We need to organize working meetings so that more of us can profit from the work that is being done. Each school needs to devote time and energy to a consideration of our beliefs and how they are fleshed out or are not being fleshed out in our schools. Our curriculum providers and larger schools can devote resources to the effort. Working on a variety of fronts, we can move toward a gathering consensus about what it means to operate our schools to the glory of God within an Anabaptist framework.

If our schools are to be much more, every facet needs to be thought through again and again from our bedrock beliefs. The opportunities here are exciting—God has blessed our heritage with some unique emphases that can equip us to bless our communities and the world. Without arrogance or embarrassment we can embrace the grace of God that has been present, form our schools in

ways that are consistent with that grace, and faithfully live out of that grace day by day.

The second camp—compelling beliefs.

A third camp that will move us toward our goal is curriculum. We need a course of study that has been carefully designed to accomplish the purposes consistent with our fundamental commitments. The camp of curriculum cannot be firmly established until the camp of beliefs is operational.

As the picture of what we believe about education becomes clearer, the hard work of translating that into a course of study is necessary. Some good work has been and is being done by our publishing houses. And there are many materials produced from outside of our tradition that have significant value for us. But there is also much that remains to be done.

I would like to suggest several areas for focused effort:

The first is curriculum designed for the small school. Many of our schools have less than fifty students. This will probably remain the norm because of our small communities. This is not a problem to be lamented but an opportunity to be embraced. We will need to have mixed classrooms. Our teachers will need to teach multiple subjects to multiple grades. Again, there are strengths here to be capitalized on. The problem is that so little work has been done in providing a curriculum that maximizes the inherent strengths and minimizes the accompanying weaknesses. Perhaps we need an entirely new approach to curriculum for our kind of schools, a curriculum that retains the dynamic interaction of teacher and students while minimizing the clerical aspects of the traditional curriculum, a curriculum that merges the benefits of the self-paced and conventional classroom models, a curriculum that frees the teacher to take responsibility for significant interaction with students in the areas where discussion and guidance are critical to the learning process, a curriculum that will make it possible for small schools to have a traditional classroom experience, a

curriculum that is specifically designed to make the most of multi-grade classrooms and small student numbers.

A second area for focused curriculum development is the preschool. Our schools have traditionally not encouraged preschool and kindergarten, and rightly so. The result is that when students start first grade, they are at widely divergent starting points. Additional work needs to be done in developing and communicating a baseline of first-grade readiness. In addition we must develop tools parents can use to help their children achieve those baselines prior to enrollment.

A third area for curricular development is grammar-intensive elementary courses focusing on essential knowledge. Classical education theory and the work done by the Core Knowledge Foundation have made a compelling case for content-rich elementary curriculums. There is a body of information that ought to be learned by all students. Children who do not know this information will be handicapped in their ability to live in, understand, and influence their surroundings. E. D. Hirsch and associates have identified what it is Americans need to know by the time they finish each grade. But what, in addition to that, do followers of Christ need to know? What is the essential information about Christianity, about Mennonite history and beliefs, about the Bible, and about the world that each one of our children needs to know? While there will be considerable overlap with the core knowledge identified by Hirsch, there is work to be done in identifying a Christian core knowledge and integrating that into the elementary course of study.

A fourth arena for curriculum development is the inclusion of age-appropriate logic and critical thinking instruction, particularly in the junior-high grades. Prior to some of the modern learning innovations, logic formed a part of the curriculum. It is time to bring it back. Learning the processes of clear thinking and how to avoid

thinking that obscures the truth will serve to move us and our children toward the One who is truth.

A fifth focus for curriculum work is history. Perhaps more than any other subject, history shapes the identity of our students. When we use materials that are designed to cultivate middle-class, Republican Americans with conservative values, it is not surprising to find that our young people identify more with that vision than the vision for the global body of Christ. History—the study of people and events that have influenced our world—is a powerful force in forming the vision and commitment of our children. We must emphasize the stories of men and women who overcome evil with good, whether as businessmen, doctors, farmers, inventors, or missionaries. We must begin telling the stories of Christian history at an early age. We must tell the stories from our Mennonite heritage early and often so that Dirk Willems and Michael Sattler, instead of Robert E. Lee and Norman Swartzkopf, capture the hearts and minds of our children. We must give our children ways to think about and understand the troubling aspects of history from a Christ-centered perspective. We must teach a positive vision of God’s sovereignty and how He wants to use each one of us to fill the earth with the knowledge of God. Developing a history curriculum with our values in place must happen.

The third camp—a consistent curriculum. Curriculum that intentionally grows out of and supports our beliefs and purposes will contribute greatly to our becoming much more as schools.

A fourth camp that marks the path to the summit in education is visionary, energized, and intentional leadership. For our schools to be more, they must be led by principals who devote time and energy to leadership of the school. For our schools to be more, they must be guided by boards that create a framework for growth and development and insist that it happen.

Our principals need energy. Our schools are often small, led by principals who must also teach. This is necessary and good. A teaching principal stays connected with the students and school. However, leading a school requires more time and energy than can be tacked onto the end of an already full day. It is imperative that our principals are given significant blocks of time when they are alert and energized to give attention to the overall vision and direction of the school. The principal must be given time to:

1. Pursue through prayer and study the blessing and direction of God for the school.
2. Work hard to establish an inviting, safe, and positive school culture.
3. Guide the school according to its philosophy and objectives.
4. Oversee the maintenance, review, and improvement of the school curriculum.
5. Dream and plan for the future.
6. Submit an annual school progress report and prospectus to the school board.
7. Facilitate training and equipping the teachers in the school.
8. Provide vision, motivation, and direction for the staff and students.

The responsibility for the life, health, and effectiveness of the school must rest squarely on the shoulders of the principal, and this will take time and energy.

Our principals need vision—a picture of how beautiful a quality Christian school really is, a picture of how much a school can bless the church and home, a picture of what God wants to do in the schools they lead. This vision has a chance to grow when principals spend time with other principals and visit other schools. This vision can grow as principals continue their own studies—reading, thinking, praying, taking classes, and attending seminars.

Our principals must be intentional. It is easy for small schools to operate primarily in crisis mode, solving the immediate problems and then having little energy left for the important tasks that don’t have

deadlines. But our schools will never become more without a significant investment in the long-term vision for the school. This will happen only as principals insist on creating space and time to develop and implement that vision.

Our school boards also play a pivotal role in our climb to the summit. They should not be expected to do the grunt work of educational development. This is the work of the principal and school staff. However:

1. School boards should expect and encourage their teachers and principals to keep growing and learning. They can write these expectations into job descriptions and employment contracts. The expectations should include reading, workshops, classes, and other forms of training. Financial assistance can also be offered to make continuing development more attractive and feasible.
2. School boards should expect growing excellence from the principal and school staff. The board can set the tone of expectation and vision. This alone begins to form a climate wherein principals and teachers can thrive.
3. School boards should provide a structure of clear purposes and policies in which the school is expected to function.
4. School boards should cultivate an atmosphere where the teachers, school, and students are valued and supported; where problems are dealt with face-to-face; where quality, competency, and faithfulness are practiced.

The fourth camp—the camp of leadership. This camp of visionary, energized, and intentional educational leadership must be established if we are to be much more than we are.

Four camps—committed teachers, compelling beliefs, consistent curriculum, competent leaders.

Much of the work we must do in our schools will not happen in our small schools. There is simply not enough time and energy available to teach fulltime and work at philosophy and curriculum development. We

need new models of forming, articulating, and disseminating vision, purpose, and philosophy that do not require each school to duplicate these efforts.

These challenges are conquered only by a community, not by individuals working alone. This effort to see the quality of our schools significantly improved will require us to work together. We will need to share resources and ideas. Our organizations will need to work together. Schools will need to partner. This will take a widespread cooperative effort—training, equipping, writing, teaching, thinking, publishing, supporting, brainstorming, praying, studying, envisioning, and planning. And with cooperation comes accountability. It is time for our older, experienced teachers and administrators to regularly evaluate every aspect of our schools and identify specific areas where the observed school needs to develop. Perhaps these teams of evaluators could guide us toward establishing the camps we have described.

Challenges like these take time. We must develop a patient twenty- to thirty-year vision, not the frenetic, stressful demands for things to change now. What is called for is hopeful, energized, and sustained faithfulness. This mountain will be climbed by the unsung heroes that day after day pour themselves out for their students and in so doing allow God to grow them into world-class teachers and leaders.

So what does it mean to climb this mountain? What will it look like when we reach the summit? The crest of our Everest is hundreds of Mennonite schools, effectively preparing our young people for visionary, God-centered, sacrificial service in every facet of life, including family, business, church, community, and world. The crest of our Everest is parents who are eager to partner with the school because the school has demonstrated effectiveness in supporting their goals. The crest of our Everest is graduates who demonstrate by their way of life the beliefs and values embedded in the community of home, church, and school. ■

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# To Boil a Frog

by David L. Burkholder

They say the best way to boil a frog is to put him in a pan of cold water, then gradually turn up the heat under him. Frogs are cold-blooded creatures, and as the water heats, the frog adapts, and by the time the water reaches a boil the frog doesn't know what happened. He's cooked. Just because he adapted gradually to the rising heat.

Sin works that way too. People dabble in sin or make incremental lifestyle changes that infringe on biblical principles. Nothing happens—no bolt out of the blue, no thunder from heaven, so they assume that what they have done is acceptable. But they are operating from wrong principles. They are operating on the what-can-I-get-by-with principle. Ecclesiastes 8:11 speaks to this point: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

Man, with assumed intelligence above that of a frog, can understand full well the words of God through Jeremiah (17:9): "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Man's natural tendency is to sin, to ignore God's dictates and follow his own willful ways. Somewhere in the back recesses of his mind he may realize the folly of this and its potential danger. But it feels good to be one's own boss and not have to answer to another. (Although eventually he will.) So he stumbles on. And the heat rises. And he doesn't notice.

The writer of Ecclesiastes goes on to say that "though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear

God, which fear before him. But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God" (8:12, 13).

In other words, payday is coming for the sinner. Judgment may not fall immediately, but it will come. One cannot defy God's laws and expect to get by forever. A day of reckoning will come eventually. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes is sure of that. And he is also sure that "it shall be well with them that fear God."

That's the other side, the mindset that says, what must I do to please the Lord, to walk in His ways? That's the person intent on avoiding compromise, fearing to deviate from God's revealed will, the one happily walking in uprightness. They are persons sensitive to the "heat" of the ungodly society around them. They understand the destructive fires of evil. And they avoid them.

The spiritually careless person will cook as he adapts to the heat of compromise gradually rising around him. And too late he will awaken to reality—he has suffered eternal destruction by fire. The spiritually alert person, by contrast, bends his energies to pleasing God, purposefully avoiding evil, constantly checking the temperature of his environment, and taking action to avoid the potentially destructive heat of sin.

So have you checked the temperature around you lately? Don't allow the increasing temperature of surrounding sin to dull your sensitivity to its destructive influence. Be alert. Don't become a worthless boiled frog. ■

## —JOHN F. BRESSLER . . . cont'd.

The last years of his life were devoted to teaching in Christian day school in West Fallowfield. During his last year he also taught in Meckville, after his wife's death.

An energetic servant of the Lord, he held revival meetings in Franklin County and in Parkesburg in the summer of 1949, but on August 10, while in Lebanon County, he was suddenly taken home to be with the Lord at the young age of 68. He was buried at the Mellinger church cemetery.

—Gail L. Emerson



# Song of the Month

Douglas A. Byler, Music Editor

*The primary purpose of this column is to give congregations fresh music to add to their worship, and/or insights into the origin and meaning of old hymns that have been around for centuries. It will (hopefully) focus primarily on original Mennonite hymns, although other hymns will be incorporated from time to time as well. We request your input for this column, particularly in the form of lyrics to be set to music and used for the column; but also if you know of a hymn that you would like to see published here with an explanation of its background. We specifically ask that if you know of composers who are qualified and willing to compose for this column, let us know about them. Please send your submissions to: Douglas A. Byler, Sword and Trumpet, Box 575, Harrisonburg, VA 22803*

## Welcome, Happy Morning



by Venantius Fortunatus and Arthur Sullivan

As the resurrection of Christ comes into special focus this month, it is important to not only make mental assent to the historical facts of the resurrection, but also to realize the implications for our lives today. This month's hymn makes it clear that the resurrection is something that will unequivocally affect the human race for the rest of history: "Welcome, happy morning! age to age shall say." The truth of this statement is made even more apparent by the fact that we are still celebrating this "happy morning" over fourteen hundred years after these words were written.

### **Lyrics:**

The text for this month's hymn was written (originally in Latin) in the sixth century A.D. by the great Italian poet Venantius Fortunatus. Little is known about the exact time or circumstances of the hymn's composition, but it is believed to have been written around the year 590, toward the latter part of Fortunatus' life. It was not until 1868 that the Rev. John Ellerton translated it into English.<sup>1</sup>

The first verse tells primarily about the magnitude of Jesus' resurrection. Since the resurrection will be celebrated from "age to

age," it is obviously very important. Fortunatus also uses stark contrasts to highlight this importance, such as "Hell . . . is vanquished, heaven is won," and "Lo! the Dead is living." In the second stanza, Fortunatus describes nature's joyous response to Jesus' victory over death. The most interesting part of this hymn is verse three, where Fortunatus utilizes a sort of flashback and jumps back to the incarnation. He tells how God saw "human nature's fall" and then how Jesus put on manhood, "manhood to deliver." The practical aspects of the resurrection are displayed in the final verse. While it is true that a literal resurrection from the dead is now possible for Christians, this hymn highlights the aspects of our current life that are changed. The "souls long prisoned" can now be loosed, and "all that now is fallen" can be brought to life again. In the same way that God raised Jesus from the dead, He can take lives of sin and despair and "resurrect" them.

### **Music:**

Arthur Sullivan is known primarily for his successful partnership with W. S. Gilbert, and "Gilbert and Sullivan" is still a household term in many places today. However, before the Gilbert and Sullivan operas

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

## Welcome, Happy Morning

I have the keys of hell and of death.—REV. 1: 18

VENANTIUS FORTUNATUS, c. 530-609 FORTUNATUS 11a. 51. ARTHUR S. SULLIVAN, 1872

1. "Wel-come, hap-py morn-ing!" age to age shall say: Hell to - day is  
 2. Earth her joy con-fess-es, cloth-ing her for spring, All fresh gifts re-  
 3. Mak-er and Re-deem-er, life and health of all, Thou from heav'n be-  
 4. Loose the souls long pris-oned, bound with Satan's chain; All that now is

van-quisht, heav'n is won to - day! Lo! the Dead is liv - ing,  
 turned with her re - turn - ing King; Bloom in ev - 'ry mead - ow,  
 hold - ing hu - man na - ture's fall, Of the Fa - ther's God - head  
 fall - en raise to life a - gain; Show Thy face in bright - ness,

God for - ev - er - more! Him their true Cre - a - tor, all His  
 leaves on ev - 'ry bough, Speak His sor - row end - ed, hail His  
 true and on - ly Son, Man - hood to de - liv - er, man - hood  
 bid the na - tions see; Bring a - gain our day - light: day re-

works a - dore! "Wel-come, hap-py morn-ing!" age to age shall say.  
 tri - umph now. Hell to - day is van-quisht, heav'n is won to - day!  
 didst put on. "Wel-come, hap-py morn-ing!" age to age shall say.  
 turns with Thee! Hell to - day is van-quisht, heav'n is won to - day!

became his main source of income, Sullivan wrote many hymns and songs, including "Onward, Christian Soldiers" and "Calm on the Listening Ear of Night."<sup>2</sup>

The direction that this music takes is a little unusual because of the odd number of phrases required by the text. If you are reading the poem without the music, the last phrase feels as if it does not naturally fit and was added on as an afterthought to reinforce the main idea (in fact, this is precisely what happened). If you look closely at the music, you can see how Sullivan expertly worked around this little problem.

In the second phrase, the music actually moves to a different key than the one we started in, and stays there through the end of the fourth phrase. At this point in the hymn it is obvious to everyone that we are not done yet because we have not heard the tonic chord of the "home" key. The final phrase brings us back to the home key and gives a satisfactory conclusion. ■

### Endnotes

1. Oremus Hymnal. <http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/w/w189.html>
2. <http://www.cris.com/~oakapple/gasdisc/sullhymns.htm>



## Sermon of the Month



*Each month we will feature a Biblical sermon in this column. We would like to emphasize expository preaching and ask our readers to submit good expository sermons for consideration. Please send typewritten copies by "snail mail" or email to: Editor, Sword and Trumpet, Box 575, Harrisonburg, VA 22803; swandtrumpet@verizon.net.*

# Hell Forever?

## Will a Loving God Permit Anyone to Be Eternally Lost?

by H. A. Ironside (1876-1951)

*"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).*

Our theme is in the form of a question, and the only place that we can find an answer to that question is in the Word of God. These poor minds of ours are utterly helpless in answering such a question. Men may reason as they will, but their reasonings will not change facts.

Apart from the revelation that God has given in His Word, we know nothing about what He will do in the eternal ages. One man may come to one conclusion; another may come to a different one. We may say, "I think," or "I do not think"; but our thinking will not alter the facts. It is in the Bible alone that this question is answered. Even if we fall back on mere human reason, it seems that no thinking person could come to the conclusion that a man could live in sin and die in sin without suffering for his sins. "Be sure your sin will find you out" is an unalterable law of nature and of God.

Any argument that might be brought against the idea that a loving God could permit men and women to suffer throughout eternity because of sin could also be brought against the idea that a loving God could permit men and women to suffer in this life because of sin.

Joseph Cook said something like this:

One might imagine two angels talking together before the creation of the world, upon learning the divine secret that God was shortly to bring a universe into existence, saying to each other: "You have heard that God is going to create a world?"

"Yes."

"That He is going to have moral and intellectual beings in that world?"

"Yes."

"Not purely spiritual beings like ourselves, but beings with material bodies, and yet with minds and wills even as we angels have minds and wills of our own?"

"Yes, I have heard that such is His purpose. But can you answer this question? Do you think that our God will ever permit unhappiness to come into

that world that He is going to create?"

"Oh, He certainly will not. Our kind, loving God will never permit unhappiness to come into the world that He is about to create."

"Do you think He will ever allow any of those creatures that He is going to bring into existence to act contrary to His holy will? Do you think He will ever permit sin to lift up its unholy head in the universe He is about to create?"

"Certainly not! Our God, our loving God, our holy God will never permit unholiness. He will never permit unrighteousness or wickedness to spoil that world that He is going to create."

"Do you think that God will ever allow man to suffer in pain and anguish in that world?"

"Oh, no! The world that God is going to create must of necessity be forever the abode of happy beings."

Can't you imagine angels reasoning something like that? But what are the facts? Six thousand years of human history, according to the chronology of the Hebrews, prove that a loving God did permit sin to come into the world, did permit wickedness to enter into this fair creation, did permit pain, suffering, sorrow, broken hearts, unspeakable anguish, and even death, to mar His fair creation.

### *The Reasonings of Men*

Now just as holy beings might have reasoned before the creation of the world that God, because He is loving, because He is good, because He is holy, would never permit sin to spoil this world and would never permit suffering and sorrow and anguish to come in, so men reason today that a good God will not allow the effects of sin to go on for eternity. But how can you and I tell what God will permit unless He is pleased to reveal Himself in His own Word?

People say today, for example, reasoning from man up to God, "You are a father; would you ever put one of your

children in a place of intense suffering if you could help it? Would you ever willingly expose a child of yours to a fiery flame?"

Of course I answer, "No."

Then they ask, and they think they have good ground for what they are about to say: "If you as an earthly father would not allow a child of yours to suffer in this way, can you believe that a loving God will cast people into everlasting fire because of their sins?"

And I have to answer, "The only way I have of knowing what God will do is by observing what He has done and by turning to the Word to see what He has to say."

He has permitted men and women and even little children, during the ages of time, to suffer unspeakable anguish. He has permitted innocent little children to be born into the world as victims of incurable diseases handed down from their parents, and these diseases are often the result of the sins of their forebears. Many of these little children come into the world and grow up never knowing a moment without suffering and pain. Would you have expected that of God, from your idea of who God is and what He should do? Yet here are the facts, and we have to face them.

The only way we can account for these facts is that God hates sin, and in order to make men realize what a fearful thing it is to sin against Him, He allows dreadful consequences to befall those who commit sin, consequences affecting not only the one who commits the sin but affecting generations yet to be born.

Men object to the statement in the law, "I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Deut. 5:9). And yet the facts prove that the Word of God is right, for He does this very thing.

Sin must be a fearful affront to a holy God, or He would never have allowed the

awful sufferings and horrors that have darkened the history of mankind. He wants us to understand that sin is the vilest, the blackest, the most dreadful thing in the universe. His Word says, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

Right in this world some men's sins are open, going before them to judgment. Some men suffer unspeakably during this life because of their sins; but on the other hand, there are other men of whom this is not true. They sin just as grievously, yet there is no evidence that their sin is followed with anything like proper judgment in this world.

There are men who live in luxury and pleasure upon the earth utterly indifferent to the conditions of those around them, living selfishly for themselves alone and indulging in all kinds of sins. Yet as far as this life is concerned, the punishment does not fall upon them.

But if they are not reaping due punishment in this life, depend upon it that in another world there will be a straightening up of the account; for it is written, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," and, "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after" (1 Tim. 5:24).

What does this sentence mean if God did not intend us to understand that men are not through with Him when they leave this world impenitent? Some men's sins follow after them, and like the bloodhounds of Hell which they are, they will track men down and drag them to the judgment bar of God where they shall give account of all the deeds done in the flesh.

#### ***The Time Element Involved***

But some say, "What sin can a man commit during his brief years on earth to deserve eternal judgment?"

Have you ever stopped to consider that a man can commit a heinous crime

in a very short time for which we think he deserves to be punished for all the rest of his natural life?

Not very long ago a man of over seventy years of age came out of a prison in New England. Fifty years before he had been sentenced to that penitentiary for the horrible crime of murder. Because of his youth, the law did not want to condemn him to be hung, so he was sentenced to prison.

Because of his desire for gain, he was stirred to anger and in a moment of time murdered a man. No doubt he had many a month and year in which to repent of that crime. Yet society felt that it was only right that he should be shut away for fifty years.

You see, there may be no connection between the amount of time in which a man can commit a crime and the punishment that befits it.

In Kentucky there lived one of those fine Southern gentlemen who had been left a widower. His wife, as she slipped away, left a darling baby who became all in all to him.

He watched that child grow till she was a beautiful girl, and then on to budding young womanhood. By and by she returned from college and was the very idol of his heart, the apple of his eye.

Then there came into that home a man who won the affection of that young woman and basely deceived her, lured her into grievous sin, ruined her sweet young life, then cast her off, a poor brokenhearted girl.

That father had been what is called a Universalist. But when that poor girl came sobbing, brokenhearted, seeking her father's house after weeks of wandering, during which she had been afraid to go home, and told him what had happened; and when he saw the wreck that had been made of the idol of his heart and life, he exclaimed with an oath, "If God Almighty hasn't a Hell for fiends like the one who has wrecked my happiness and ruined my child, He ought to

make one!”

This Book says He has one, and it declares that “whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars” shall have their part in it for all eternity.

Why is eternal punishment the result of impenitent sin? The man who dies rejecting the Holy Spirit’s testimony as to the Lord Jesus Christ is never offered forgiveness after that point. That is why Scripture holds out no hope for his salvation in another world. The man who refuses the testimony that the Holy Ghost has given concerning the Saviour’s love, His marvelous atonement and His wondrous grace has no other hiding place by which he may escape the wrath of a sin-hating God.

And so I come back to the text with which I began:

*“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).*

### ***Jesus Plainly Warns of Eternal Hell***

People say, “Oh, Paul or John or Peter may have believed this doctrine of eternal judgment for sin; but give me the words of Jesus, the loving, gentle, tender, gracious Galilean Teacher. Let me hear what He says; His Word will be enough for me.”

Listen, my dear friends! No one ever spoke as seriously and as solemnly of the eternal consequences of sin as Jesus did.

It is He who said, “If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire” (Matt. 18:9).

It is Jesus who speaks so solemnly over and over again of that awful pit of woe, “where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48).

It is Jesus who said of Judas, “It had been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matt. 26:24). If there is any possibility of Judas ever being saved

even after the lapse of countless ages of misery, I submit that it would be good for him that he *had* been born; but Jesus said it was not so.

That man sold his Saviour! He accompanied with Jesus for three and one-half years yet sinned against the Holy Ghost in rejecting Christ. Are you doing the same thing? You have heard the Gospel over and over again, and if you should reject Him too, could it not be said of you, “It had been good for that man if he had not been born”?

But it is also Jesus who utters these words: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.” You cannot find fault with the love of God, for it gave Christ and thereby provided a way of salvation.

God is not holding you responsible because you are a sinner; you were born a sinner. You are not responsible because you have a sinful nature; you cannot help that. God is not going to cast you away from His presence simply because that corrupt nature has manifested itself in sin; for Christ has put away sin, and any man who will, may be saved from his sin through the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and receive a new nature.

Why are men lost? The answer is clear: “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” You observe how this one sentence plucks up by the very roots two modern forms of error in regard to mankind’s destiny: universal salvation and annihilation.

Universalism teaches that one may be saved after death, but is there any hope that a man who dies rejecting Christ in this life may be saved in the life to come?

*“He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).*

Jesus Himself could not have put it more plainly than that.

In this world God is pleading with sinners and offering them salvation, but if men reject His Son, it is the solemn

declaration of Holy Writ that they “shall not see life.” There is no hope in another world for men who reject Christ in this world.

Those who teach annihilation believe that the punishment for sin is nothing more than ceasing to exist.

*“He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him”* (John 3:36).

You cannot couple annihilation with “abiding wrath.” The wrath of God abideth on men because they rejected their only hope of salvation, and in the last chapter of the Bible we hear the seer saying, “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still” (Rev. 22:11). Character tends to permanency.

Sow a thought; you reap an act.

So an act; you reap a habit.

Sow a habit; you reap a character.

Sow a character; you reap a destiny.

God meant men to understand, and it seems to me there can be no question about it: men who die in their sins have no hope that they will ever be brought into a state of harmony with Him whose grace they have spurned or with the Saviour whose blood they have trampled underfoot. And so we read, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

I know we live in a namby-pamby age when men make light of iniquity, but according to the Word of God, sin is a fearful affront to the Divine Majesty. To be uncleansed from sin means to die in sin, exist forever in sin, and be banished eternally from the presence of a holy God.

But, thank God, this is still the day of His grace. One would shrink from proclaiming a truth like this if he were not permitted to proclaim the other truth: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.”

Today, if you are unsaved, you may

have eternal life by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. To believe on Him is to trust Him, rest your whole soul upon Him as your Saviour, and take Him as your Redeemer.

My Redeemer, oh, what beauties

In that lovely Name appear;

None but Jesus in His glories

Shall the honored titled wear.

My Redeemer! Oh, how sweet to call  
Thee mine!

I was sunk in ruin and mis'ry,

Bound by Satan's captive chain,

Guided by his artful teach'ry,

Hurrying on to endless pain;

My Redeemer plucked me as a brand  
from Hell.

You can say this if you will come to Christ today. ■

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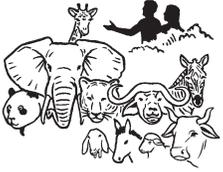


## What Is Evolution? . . . cont'd.

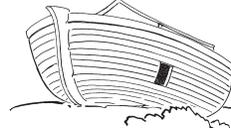
(e.g. logically) understood is a way to explain life without God and just like in the Garden of Eden man is “provided the opportunity” to be his own god, not having to answer to anyone. ■

### ENDNOTES

1. *Evolution and Creation, Science and Religion, Facts and Bias* by Jonathan Sarfati, Ph.D., F.M. found at: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/re1/chapter1.asp> originally taken from D.M.S. Watson, Adaptation, *Nature* 124:233, 1929.
2. *Evolution and Creation, Science and Religion, Facts and Bias* by Jonathan Sarfati, Ph.D., F.M. found at: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/re1/chapter1.asp> originally taken from Richard Lewontin, “Billions and Billions of Demons,” *The New York Review*, 9 January 1997, p. 31.



## Beginning Issues



# What Is Evolution?

by John Mullett

So what exactly is evolution? Isn't creationism a religious belief while evolution is science? Is evolution more scientific than creationism? What qualifies as science anyway? Some words that describe true, legitimate, *operational* science are testable, observable, and repeatable in the *present*. Science has its limitations; especially in regard to the past. In almost every case, if we want to interpret the *past* scientifically we must make certain assumptions which do not allow for any of the three characteristics just mentioned. We will be looking at that more when we talk about the various dating methods used when determining the age of things such as rocks and fossils. Remember, as we established in an earlier article, we do not live life based on the facts directly, but rather we live life based on our interpretation of the facts. Creationists don't deny that to come to a creationist understanding of the evidence you must (among other assumptions) begin with the assumption that God exists. Having an evolutionary understanding of our world's history is no different in that one must begin with certain philosophical assumptions in order to come to that (evolutionary) conclusion. The *a priori* beliefs of the interpreter will always affect his/her conclusions. Professor D.M.S. Watson, one of the leading biologists and science writers of his day, demonstrated the atheistic bias behind

much evolutionary thinking when he wrote:

*Evolution [is] a theory universally accepted not because it can be proven by logically coherent evidence to be true, but because the only alternative, special creation, is clearly incredible.<sup>1</sup>*

Professor Richard Lewontin admits:

*We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is an absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.<sup>2</sup>*

No other theory has been more widely accepted with less actual scientific proof than evolution has, and, like any other worldview, evolution is inseparably related to the philosophical assumptions of its proponents. Evolution consistently  
*(continued on previous page)*

# Does Bible History Give Us Any Clue to the Interpretation of Prophecy?

by J. L. Stauffer

One of the responsibilities of a minister of the Gospel is to “rightly divide the Word of Truth.” We understand that this does not give any license to read into the Scriptures some fine-spun theory of our own, or the theory of some theological professor, because no prophecy is of any private interpretation. Rather, it is the responsibility of the teacher before God to say what He says and not to dilute the Divine message in any way by human imaginations or human theories. Previously we have tried earnestly and conscientiously to allow God to interpret His own prophetic symbolism and then to accept it at face value. In this article we desire to call attention to the testimony of history and prophecy. We desire to note a number of Biblical incidents and events with which the men of God have associated an unfulfilled prophecy similar to the way in which our Lord associated with the Old Testament events some truth either of His first or His second coming. We shall begin by calling attention to some illustrations of the historical and the fulfilled predictions.

John 3:14, 15. As the brazen serpent was lifted up in the wilderness for the serpent-bitten Israelites, even so our Lord has been lifted up for sin-bitten people to lay hold upon by faith (Numbers 21).

Matthew 21:43: This verse tells us that as the kingdom of God will be taken from Israel, even so it will be given to a “holy nation” bringing forth the fruits thereof. Observe that Israel (the olive tree) has been cut off and the church, mostly Gentile (the wild olive branches), has been grafted in (1 Peter 2:7-9; Romans 11:15-25).

Jonah, a historical character, was a prophetic type of our Lord. “A *greater than Jonas is here*,” also, “*as Jonas was . . . so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*”

(Matthew 12:40, 41).

Solomon occupied the very summit of human glory and a queen came from afar to see his wisdom, but a “*greater than Solomon is here*” (Matthew 12:42).

Thus far we have tried to illustrate the relation between historical events and personages or events involving fulfilled Scriptures. Next we desire to notice the historical and the unfulfilled. The importance of this study lies in the fact that if we do not believe Divine history, we cannot consistently believe Divine prediction. If we can accept the actuality of the historical events that will be noted, then we cannot consistently deny the literalness of the prophetic event associated therewith.

The flood and the second coming of Christ (Genesis 6:1-3; Luke 17:26, 27). The historical violence and ungodliness of the antediluvians will be paralleled by endtime conditions. “As it was . . . so shall it be.”

The conditions in Sodom will be duplicated in the endtime (Genesis 19; Luke 17:28-30). Unspeakable immorality, defiance of God, and indifference to warnings of judgment describe the days of Lot. “As it was . . . so shall it be.”

The Egyptian exodus will be rivaled by a coming one (Jeremiah 16:14, 15; 23:7, 8). Anyone familiar with Jewish history knows that the Passover Feast was observed in commemoration of deliverance from the Egyptians. The prophet Jeremiah here informs us that the time will come when this deliverance will not be mentioned when compared with the exodus that will be accomplished from the north country and all the countries. This is universal dispersion such as we have now. There has never been an exodus that was worldwide in scale since their dispersion. If we believe in the reality of the Egyptian exodus, we dare not

deny the coming one.

The historical earthquake that occurred in the days of King Uzziah and the prophesied one that will occur at the Lord's return (Amos 1:1; Zechariah 14:4, 5). If we believe such an earthquake occurred in Uzziah's time, then we can expect that the coming one will be literal also.

The historical wars of the Lord and the prophetic war of the Lord that is coming (Zechariah 14:2, 3; Daniel 8:23-25; Revelation 14:14-20; 16:14, 16; 19:11-21; Isaiah 63:1-6). Numerous references in the Old Testament acquaint us with the fact that the Lord often fought in Israel's wars, and even commanded them. Note the following instances: Against the Egyptians (Exodus 14:27); Canaanites (Joshua 10:11-14); Sisera (Judges 5:19-23); Sennacherib (Isaiah 37:33-36). Now Zechariah the prophet informs us that when the nations are gathered around Jerusalem at the Lord's coming, that the nations will have the Lord to reckon with as other nations had Him to deal with in Old Testament historical times. One is as easy to believe as the other.

The historical King bringing salvation and the king of prophecy bringing international victory and peace (Zechariah 9:9, 10; Psalm 2; Daniel 2:44; 7:22-27; Zechariah 14:1-9). Is it more difficult to believe that our Lord would come from heaven to bring salvation, than to believe that He will yet come from heaven to judge the nations and rule them as King? Certainly faith can accept both, because He said so.

The ass of history and the horse of prophecy (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:1-5; Revelation 19:11-16). No Bible believer doubts the statement that our Lord rode into Jerusalem on an ass. No Bible believer should doubt the prophecy that our Lord will ride into the world at His second coming on a white horse. But someone may say, our Lord is now glorified and for Him to ride a horse is unthinkable. Faith does not stumble at such apparent difficulties. We do not attempt to say what material the horse is made of, but we do know that our Lord ate food after His resurrection and walked

as other men walked. Again, there are horses in heaven, but the Scriptures do not describe their biological makeup (2 Kings 2:11, 12; 6:17). Another interesting truth to note is that prophets rode asses, and kings rode horses. Horses are a symbol of warfare and the kings of Israel were forbidden to multiply them.

The history of the creation and curse of animals and their restoration is a subject of prophecy (Genesis 1:30, 31; 3:14; Isaiah 11:6-9). All animals were herbivorous in the creation. The beasts of the field became carnivorous. The Bible predicts the restoration of the beasts to a herbivorous state. Will it be more difficult for the Almighty to change them one way than it was the other? If we can believe Genesis, we can also believe Isaiah.

The historically downtrodden Jerusalem and the liberated Jews and dominated Gentiles of prophecy (Luke 21:24; Jeremiah 5:19; Isaiah 14:1, 2). Anyone familiar with the past centuries knows that Jerusalem has been trodden down by the Gentiles as our Lord has predicted. Can we believe the Lord's messages through Jeremiah and Isaiah as well regarding their restoration and the domination of the Gentile nations?

The spoiling of the Egyptians is a matter of history, and the spoiling of the Gentile nations is a subject of prophecy (Exodus 1:2; Genesis 15:14; Exodus 12:35, 36; Isaiah 60:5-7, 9; 61:4-6; Zechariah 14:14). Who would have believed that the Egyptians could have been spoiled by the Israelite slaves, but such is the record of history. We believe God's Word that the same thing will be possible on a larger scale as the Word predicts.

Israel, the tail of nations according to history, shall yet become the head of nations according to prophecy (Deut. 28:13-15, 43, 44; Jeremiah 32:42; Isaiah 60:9-16; Zechariah 8:21-23). Certainly it is no more of an impossibility that God's people should be the tail of nations, than that they should become the head of nations. They became the tail because they disobeyed God. They will become the head when they obey Him.

Past history also shows that when they were disobedient they were weak and when obedient they were invincible.

The division of the nation is a subject of history; their reunion is a subject of prophecy (1 Kings 11:29-37; Ezekiel 37:1, 11-13, 18-28). Both were the subject of prophecy. The one has since become history. May we not reasonably and just as consistently expect that in God's own time He will see that the other is fulfilled and the two kingdoms again become one?

God's unbreakable covenant with nature is a matter of history, and His unbreakable covenant with Israel is a subject of prophecy (Genesis 8:22; Jeremiah 33:19-26). How anyone could misinterpret what appears to be the very plainest teaching language is a mystery to the writer. Certain it is if we attempt to spiritualize the teaching regarding Israel, then we should also spiritualize the teaching concerning nature. This cannot be done and the teaching regarding Israel should not be done either.

The curse upon the earth and the entire creation is a matter of history. The lifting of the curse is a subject of prophecy (Genesis 3:14-19; Isaiah 32:9-15; Romans 8:18-23; Acts 3:19-21). Certainly it is not consistent to teach that while the curse came upon the earth, it cannot and will not be lifted, but that the Lord will destroy the earth because of the curse. The Bible teaches the restoration of all creation, except wicked men and the serpent, who remain eternally under the curse. As Christians we should believe that the benefits of the atonement reach as far as the results of the curse, otherwise we would limit God, and have to concede that the devil defeated God's work permanently in the world.

The wilderness of Egypt is a matter of history; the wilderness of the second exodus is a subject of prophecy (Ezekiel 20:33-44). The wilderness into which they went from Egypt was one of trees and brush, a desert place. The wilderness in which the Lord will discipline His people preceding their return to Palestine is the wilderness of persecution. The results will be the same. The first

is history, the second is as certain as the first because our God has said so.

The desolated land of Israel is a fact of history, and its fertility and coming fruitfulness is a subject of prophecy (Ezekiel 36:33-38). When Israel came out of Egypt, the promised land was a land flowing with milk and honey. As they became disobedient to God and became idolatrous, the land became unfruitful because the Lord withheld the latter rains. The land was also desolated by various pests from time to time. The same God rules still and can bless the land as the Word predicts.

The suffering of Christ is a subject of history and the glory of Christ at His second coming is a subject of prophecy (Luke 17:24, 25; 1 Peter 1:12, 16-18). The language is the same for each prediction. We believe the one in connection with this earth because it is history. God forbid we should doubt the other in connection with this earth because it is prophecy.

The sufferings of saints are a subject of history and experience; the reigning of saints is a subject of prophecy (2 Tim. 2:12; 1 John 3:1-3; Revelation 5:10; 19:1-10; 20:4). Will not the reigning be as real as the suffering? Should we not expect that the reigning would be manifest in the sphere where the suffering took place? Certainly it does not seem in harmony with the Scripture, and it is not, that our Lord should wear a crown of thorns in this world and be denied a crown of glory and rulership over the nations.

The captivity of Israel was first a subject of prophecy and now of history. Their return is a subject of prophecy (Jeremiah 30:3; Psalm 102:13; Jeremiah 31:8-10; 3:18). Is not one as certain as the other if God says it? Note the captivity had not yet taken place when Jeremiah wrote this prophecy, but everything came to pass as predicted. We believe God regarding the restoration. The restoration from Babylon does not answer to this prediction of one from the North Country.

The Spirit's departure from the temple and Jerusalem is a subject of history and