

The Sword and Trumpet

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

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God (v. 7).

Verse 11 speaks to the fixation of destiny and implies that once the last trumpet sounds the possibility for a change of status will be over. The urgency is to heed the message and make that change now, while the day of opportunity is still open. Once Jesus appears in that sudden moment when time will cease, destinies will be fixed and rewards will be given according to one's current status (v. 12). Those who have lived in obedience to God's commandments will "have right to the tree of life, and . . . enter in through the gates into the city." Therein will be found a life of eternal bliss.

By contrast, those who have disregarded God's call to salvation and holiness of life will be found outside of God's favor. They are those who chose a life of pleasure, immorality, falsehood, and degradation (v. 15). Their "reward" is described in the last verse of Chapter 20: "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." There they will suffer the wrath of God forever, bearing the consequences of their foolish decision to reject the offer of life freely offered to all men while the door of opportunity was still open.

Then in verses 18 and 19 stern warning is given against tampering with this message from God, or refusing to take it seriously. Many would like to water down God's requirements for entering heaven, or diminish the severity of the judgment He has pronounced upon the unrepentant. And there are even those who scoff at the whole idea of the Parousia (see 2 Peter 3). But God's Word is sure. Man will be the loser for failing to comply with God's commandments or rejecting His gracious offer of life.

Again here in these closing verses Jesus authenticates the message of Revelation by identifying Himself as both Son of God

and Son of man. He, as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, serves as the bookends of man's history. He participated in creation; He will be the final judge of mankind at the culmination of earth's history. How dare mere man question the validity and truthfulness of His statements? Or ignore their clear warnings?

Before closing His revelation to man concerning those things yet to come, Jesus, along with His bride, the church, utters one final invitation: "Come." The door to heaven is still open, the path to eternal glory illuminated by the "bright and morning star." The water of life still flows freely and entreatingly from the fount of salvation. All preparations have been made for man's eternal enjoyment. God has done His part to redeem fallen mankind. All man needs to do is accept the terms to enter into life, eternal life. So, why do men hesitate? Why do they scoff? Why do they refuse? Sadly, they have been deceived by the enemy of their soul, the very enemy of God, the one bent on turning men away from God. And on that final day, when it is too late to alter their destiny, those who have been deceived will see him for what he is, a liar and a deceiver. Oh, the tragedy of that day!

John concludes his message as the spokesman for Jesus with a final word of blessing: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

Here, at the close of God's revelation to man, the all-important question facing each of us in the present age is, Am I ready for Christ's return? Have I accepted the message of the book, Am I living in harmony with God's commandments, and does the anticipation of that event thrill my soul and spur me on to holy living?

Finally, can I honestly say with the Apostle John, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus"?

Person of the Month:

William Holmes McGuffey (1800-1873)



William Holmes McGuffey was born to Alexander and Anna (Holmes) McGuffey September 23, 1880, in Wheeling Creek, Washington County, in western Pennsylvania. He was the oldest son and second child of the eleven McGuffey children. William's parents had a love for God and a strong belief in education.

When William was two years of age he and his family moved to new land that had been opened up by the government in Trumbull County in the Western Reserve area of Ohio. They settled near Youngstown and began farming. William was now living on the "frontier." It is felt that he probably would have endured much hardship and hard work along with his father in order for the family to survive.

William's mother had a great impact and influence on his life. She was a godly intelligent woman who knew how to read. It is felt that William learned much at his mother's side during those early formative years. Then William McGuffey was blessed with the opportunity to get formal schooling—a blessing not all frontier children could enjoy. As a result of this formal training McGuffey had more role models, experiences, skills, and interests than other frontier children his age. He attended a "subscription school" six miles from his home, founded and taught by Pastor William Wick. During the winter months of school McGuffey lived with the Wicks. However, in the summer he needed to be at home to help with the farm work there. That did not stop him from continuing his studies at home. He did so well in his schoolwork that before he was 14 years old, Pastor Wick gave him a certificate and encouraged him to become a roving teacher. William took his teacher's advice and at age 14, "Master McGuffey" held his first four-month session subscription school in Calcutta, Ohio. On the first day of September, 1814, forty-eight children arrived from twenty-three families to be tutored! The school term lasted from eleven to fifteen weeks. The school week consisted of eleven-hour days, six days a week! The children had to bring their own books—one of which was usually a Bible.

With a love of learning, William wanted to further his education so he went to live in the home of Pastor Thomas Hughes for the next four years while attending Hughes' school, the Old Stone Academy, in the town of Darlington on the Ohio border, some thirty miles away from McGuffey's home. Hughes had come across William while the pastor was traveling through the wilderness looking for students to attend his subscription school. Now 18, and at the end of his schooling, McGuffey was advised by Hughes to go back to teaching so that he could earn money to go to college. In 1820, at the age of 20, William entered Washington College in Washington, Pennsylvania.

At Washington, McGuffey lived with Pastor Andrew Wylie. William's mother, along with the three pastors mentioned, had the most influence on McGuffey's life, especially Pastor Wylie. Wylie's influence would have a major impact on William in the years to come.

In the winter of 1825 McGuffey needed more funds to complete his last term of college so

he opened a private school in Paris, Kentucky. Hearing of William's knowledge of the ancient languages, and also his teaching ability, the president of Miami University invited McGuffey to teach at Miami, to which William agreed. In 1826 William, accompanied by his ten-year-old brother, Alexander, headed for the university. Alexander attended the grammar school while William was a teacher at Miami. Thankfully, William was eventually able to receive his B.A. degree from Washington College.

While at the university, William met a lovely young woman of godly character named Harriet Spinning. McGuffey, now 27, and Harriet, age 23, were married April 3, 1827. God blessed their home with the births of five children: three boys and two girls. Tragically, two of the boys died as babies and the other son died at the youthful age of 16.

McGuffey's two passions were preaching the gospel and educating children. William fulfilled his mother's wish when in 1829 he was ordained to the ministry at Bethel Church, Indian Creek, Ohio. He loved to preach so when he was not preaching in rotation at the college chapel he was busy traveling the surrounding area preaching in country churches. His preaching style was conversational and he was quite capable of preaching without a written sermon. At that time he was one of the most popular preachers in Ohio.

In addition to being a good preacher, he was also definitely a good teacher. He taught languages full time at the university at first, then he taught moral philosophy and elocution. He was also the faculty sponsor for the university debating society. In a well-known debate of 1829 against two Universalists the Lord used McGuffey's dependence on the Greek New Testament and Pauline doctrine to defeat his opponents.

During McGuffey's ten years that he spent at Miami University he was considered to be at the top of his career, but although a man of godly character, who was a great preacher and teacher, these are not the facts that make his name a household word in some circles. The accomplishment for which he is probably best known is the production of his *McGuffey Readers* for children. He believed that religion and education were inter-related and of vital importance to a healthy society. He wanted to test his theories concerning how children read so before beginning his writing he researched his subject well. He believed that it was not necessary for a child to be able to spell first before reading. Gathering neighbor children around him on his porch he would try to determine which stories were readable and of greatest interest to children of differing ages. Then he went to work with his writing. The books not only taught children how to read but also contained much good literature with good moral values. Many of the selections were from the Bible. There were also questions to be asked in order to determine if the children comprehended what they had read. Another feature of the books was their emphasis on pronunciation and speaking well. The first *reader* was finished in 1833 when William was still a young man of 33. By 1857 there were a total of six *McGuffey Readers*.

From 1833 to 1873 William went on to publish a number of articles; was active in a teachers' organization to promote good teaching; became the president of Cincinnati College from 1836-1839; became president of Ohio University from 1839-1843; was professor of languages at a good classical high school called Woodward College; was professor of philosophy at the University of Virginia from 1845-1873. During these years his first wife passed away at the age of 46 in 1850. A year later he married again and had one child by his second wife but sadly the child died at the age of 4.

Godliness and family love were important to McGuffey. He emphasized the spoken word throughout his lifetime and spent his lifetime trying to pass on his convictions to the next generation. His work greatly impacted the schools of our nation.

William Holmes McGuffey died May 4, 1873, at the age of 73. He was buried in Charlottesville, Virginia.

—Gail L. Emerson

Has the Vision Died?

by Simon Schrock, Catlett, VA

The countdown is on. Calendar pages have been turning, and starting time is being counted in days. Now the clock is ticking.

Prayers have ascended. Phone calls were made. Not only is it a late-night hour, but it is getting close to the day school is to begin, and the staff is not yet hired. What will we do? Will we need to call a meeting with the parents and tell them we cannot have school?

The school board and ministers were involved in forming a list of possibilities, giving suggestions, and calling prospects. I was given a list of names and the calling began. My list of prospects came up empty. Then I called my preacher friends—probably close to a dozen of them around the country. School was to start in days and we still did not have a teacher.

I was reminded of a few things during my search. I called my preacher friends who listened to my desperate need and too often the comment came, “We’re still looking for someone to teach in our school.” I didn’t keep record of how many times I heard that, but I wish I would have. At least, it gave us a bit of comfort to know that we were not alone in our search.

That temporary comfort quickly turned into a cumbersome burden. “We’re still looking for a teacher,” came one reply. Others said, “We don’t have our staff yet. The school where he was does not have a replacement yet.” Another said, “I don’t know what to tell you; we knocked on so many doors and for some reason they all came up empty.” One person indicated it was “impacting” the mission work of AMA (Amish Mennonite

Aid). Not only was the response from my fellow ministers revealing—the responses from the list of possibilities became alarming. One person indicated that our offer was the third one. Another said it was the fourth time he had been asked to teach.

The search included calling Faith Builders Educational Programs. They were not able to give us helpful leads. Steve Brubaker’s comment was, “Alarming—has the vision died?” What can we do to change the situation? Maybe we should attempt to revive the vision. Might it be more accurate to say *resurrect* or *develop* a vision? Developing a vision requires essential ingredients. Let us consider several basic ones:

Vision of Ministry

We are the body of Christ traveling through a wicked world that Jesus would surely describe as a “sinful and adulterous generation.” God has graciously blessed us with children. One of the church’s major missions is to train our children in the ways of God and His Word. The Christian school is an aid to the church and home in preparing and equipping our children to live for God in this sinful world.

We may have become calloused to hearing Solomon’s proverb, “Where there is no vision the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). Whatever your explanation is of the meaning of that proverb, here is my paraphrase, as it relates to a Christian school, “Where there is no vision for a quality Christian education, the children suffer.” In my search for a teacher there were no indications that teachers are losing heart because they don’t sense a

vision from the church. Church schools should go beyond just fulfilling government requirements or keeping our children from the evils of public education. Perhaps we need to encourage one another in developing a vision for equipping our children with a quality, godly education.

Our congregation was blessed at a Sunday evening service with missionary Merle Beachy's report of the work in Kenya, Africa. Darrell Yoder, who had been on a mission endeavor to Pakistan, was also present that evening. Only brief mention was made of Darrell's presence. While this was significant, I thought of another mission Darrell had been on. He was formerly one of our schoolteachers. While he taught he was on a mission for Christ and the Church. The Christian school is a vital ministry of Christ's church. Let us cultivate that vision.

Vision of Affirmation

We need a fresh breeze blowing across the church. Maybe it could simply be called an attitude adjustment. Let us develop an atmosphere in the church that acknowledges teaching as an honorable vocation. Being a schoolteacher is as honorable as piloting a jet plane or building an upscale house. I wouldn't want to argue on this, but I wouldn't be surprised if committed Christian schoolteachers would have more stars in their crowns than do famous jet pilots.

Teaching in Christian education is helping direct our children to yield their lives to Jesus Christ and to develop their skills to be of service to Him. Christian education is spiritual child development. It is not meant to be "day care" to relieve parents of their "kids" for a while. Let us develop an attitude around the church that teaching is an honorable and appreciated vocation.

Vision of Development

Look over the little ones of the flock. God has a purpose for each of them. We

do not know what God wants them to do in service for Him. Until then, it is our responsibility to be role models, and teach so they will have the tools needed for their calling. Can you visualize the importance of equipping them with a solid Christian education for whatever God calls them to do? School, learning, and education—they are musts in preparing for their work in life. It is more than the golden opportunity "to shape lives for the glory of God." Let us set our sights for a high vision of a school that equips our children for challenging opportunities to serve the Lord.

One of my teachers must have had a vision of development. She told me that I was bad enough and good enough that someday I would be a preacher. She's been long gone from this earth, and I'm "still preachin'." The influence and life of a teacher lives far beyond the day of death. Never lose sight of what God can do with a naughty child who experiences God's saving grace and yields his or her life to Christ.

Vision of Joyful Participation

Joyful participation by the entire congregation at school meetings sends a powerful signal to staff and students. One seasoned teacher expressed disappointment at the lack of interest from the church. "If only more people would come to the school meetings!" was the lament. Members' non-attendance at school meetings is discouraging to staff and students.

When my children were students it meant a lot to me when members who did not have children in attendance came to school functions. Now I'm a grandpa and I get a warm feeling when I see others showing enough interest in "my wonderful grandsons" to attend the special programs put on by the students. School is the church's mission. Many of us like to sing, "I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God." Show your support for the school, even if you don't have children involved; after all, it's part of your family,

and that includes all the children.

Vision of Giving

School boards should not be handicapped for funds. The only earthly possession you can have in heaven is your children. Investing in our children should be a top priority. We are giving a message to our children when the board needs to keep reminding the congregation that funds aren't reaching. A truly Christian school is a powerful mission at our fingertips. Give generously!

Roy Lowrie wrote a brochure in 1988, entitled: "Giving to the Christian School." He pointed out that the "entire body benefits when a child or young person is trained for God." He further stated, "Developing and operating a good school takes more than parents can give in tuition." He encourages parents, students, grandparents, and alumni to give. "The church should give, for the school is a work for God which advances 'The Cause of Christ.'"

House payments, maternity bills, doctor visits, car repair bills, and school tuition payments are often heavy burdens for young couples with children. The body of Christ should be sensitive to the teaching of Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15: "For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: as it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing left over; and he that gathered little had no lack." It can be discouraging for young couples who cannot meet expected tuition, when the brothers they share the hymnbook with are able to take long trips, drive nice cars, eat out frequently, own recreational paraphernalia, and other things that go well beyond "food and raiment." (See 1 Timothy 6:8.)

To develop the vision of giving, consider this point from Lowrie, "People who love the Lord but do not have children in

school should give toward the godly training of the young."

Vision of Paying

This sobering comment from a teacher's wife was passed on to me: "His heart is still in the classroom, but we cannot afford to have him keep on teaching. He taught for 15 years. They feel like 15 years of VS!"

One teacher commented, "We do really appreciate decent pay. We're not just working at school, but after school, work is brought home, and we must sometimes work late into the night."

A former board member at our school frequently reminded us how one teacher approached them on the subject of pay. He told his board if they figure the income of each family and they pay him the families' average, he will be satisfied.

Vision of Participation

In my search for a principal, I heard some concerns and frustrations from seasoned teachers. From the teacher's perspective there is room for some parents to sharpen the vision of being partners in educating their children. Maybe hearing frustrations of teachers will help us listen and identify with the teachers' problems.

Here are some struggles and sorrows from the teacher's perspective:

- When a student does careless work time and time again and you know he can do better.
- When you feel a parent isn't wholeheartedly supporting you.
- When a student lets something slip that was said at home about school life. You check it out hoping it isn't true, but it is true.
- When the parents take no initiative to visit the school and check on the child's progress. A teacher gets tired of always making the first move to discuss a child's problem.
- When parents seem to be glad to have a place to put their children for several hours.

—When parents dispute and challenge the grading of a child’s work without getting a true picture of the situation.

—When students are habitually tardy. “It’s distracting when they come into the classroom when you’re halfway through devotions. School days are busy without the extra work of tardies.”

There is a significant number of former teachers scattered across the church. If you want to learn why so many decided not to stay with it, here is an idea for you. Invite a former teacher for coffee or dinner, with the understanding that you try to hear why teaching was not a career ministry they chose to continue. From a non-threatening, non-critical, honest, and humble heart seek to learn why some good teachers do not continue to teach. Do not be defensive or argumentative, but truly search for why effective teachers quit. Teaching is a difficult challenge. Hearing all angles of their frustrations will help us keep teachers teaching. Once we know why they don’t start or don’t stay we can begin responding with ways to sharpen and enhance a vision for teaching.

In my search and call to Faith Builders, Steve Brubaker and I exchanged some ideas. I suggested the problem may not be with young people not pursuing teaching, but numerous issues the church must address and make some adjustments. He responded with these thoughts: “The questions run deep, and the answer is even deeper. I suspect the answers have tentacles deeply embedded in who we have become. The answers are not only deep, they will take years to become operational. We are talking about a change of cultural values, not merely the bandaging of a superficial wound. Until we value the place of the mind in loving God, teaching and schools will be a place to meet government requirements and ‘do time’ until you can enter the ‘real world’ and make lots of money.”

The situation alarms me. Ask yourself and God what you can personally contribute to changing our values from band-

aging a superficial wound to a lively vision of the church’s vision for Christian schools.

Maybe this positive note from an active teacher will encourage us to sharpen our vision. “In my teenage years, I didn’t have a desire to teach. I was scared I couldn’t do it right. My biggest fears were that I wouldn’t be able to come up with a schedule that I could work in all the lessons, and I just simply couldn’t teach the lessons to where it would make sense to the children. I thought teachers were so tied down. All they do is sit at their desk with piles of work, answering hands—non-stop. I thought teachers were really ‘shut-ins.’ But I know now that they don’t have to be shut in. I enjoy playing with the children three times a day. I look forward to recesses. And we do get a lot of sunshine and fresh air. My eyes have been opened to a world I didn’t know existed. I’ve experienced the joy of a note saying, ‘I love you. You’re a good teacher; thanks for all you do.’ ”

Another teacher noted, “A mother sent a note saying she’d like to pack the teachers’ lunch tomorrow; an older single girl wondered if it would suit to bring soft drink floats to school one afternoon. Flowers from the backyard picked just for me, and yes, we teachers love to get snacks after school. Some days are trying and tiring and those are such day brighteners!”

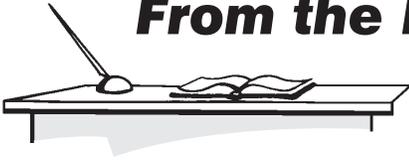
Alarming—Has the Vision Died?

There are rays of the vision around us. Can we revive it to the point of opening more eyes to the world “I didn’t know existed”? Can we restore the vision to where the joys outweigh the sorrows, and the rewards start here and now and last through eternity? ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Calvary Messenger*, April 2007

[Recommended reading: “Climbing Mt. Everest—The Future of Mennonite Education,” by Steve Brubaker, Faith Builders, Issue 82]

From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

“Nothing But the Blood . . .”

by J. Mark Horst

It's not something pleasant to think about, but one of the things a mortician does in preparing a body for burial is to remove all body fluids, including the blood. They are replaced by a formaldehyde-based fluid that disinfects and preserves tissue. These procedures slow the process of decomposition and allow time for the traditional “visitation” and funeral service.

Draining a person's blood is a sure prescription for death!

The removal of the blood is a sure indication of death. Scripture predates medical science in the understanding that “the life is in the blood.” A 19th century medical textbook mistakenly stated, “The danger of a large bleeding is less than the danger of the disease.” However, it is suspected that the practice of “bleeding” patients led to some premature deaths! No living creature can survive the repeated draining of

large quantities of blood from the circulatory system.

What's true for living creatures is true for the living organism we call the Church.

Teaching and preaching on the blood of Christ is being removed from the Church.

The health and vitality of the Church rises or falls on the importance given to the blood of Christ. Therefore, the current lack of emphasis on the blood of Christ in evangelicalism leads to spiritual weakness and premature death! By design or neglect, the blood is being systematically removed from the preaching, teaching, and music of the Church. It is being replaced by a sterile disinfectant that preserves appearance at the expense of life.

In the March 2007 issue of *Touchstone*, author Russell Moore suggests that “the eclipse of blood in American Christianity

has quite a bit to do, I suspect, with American prosperity. Contemporary spinners of Evangelical 'praise choruses' focus lyrically on God's glory, God's love, redemption through faith, and even on the Cross of Christ. What is absent is the previous generation's near-obsession in hymnody and popular devotion with *blood*." (Italics in the original.)

He continues, "The 'blood medleys' once so popular in Evangelical hymnals evoke something of the blue-collar, socially marginalized origins of conservative American Protestantism."

Many preachers fear the "Blood" is revolting to potential converts.

To sing, "Are You Washed in the Blood of the Lamb?" often seems too much of a reminder to upwardly mobile suburban professionals that their religion has "red-neck roots."

Many churches fear that preaching and teaching on the blood of Christ will be revolting to potential converts. But blood is very much a part of our contemporary society. Fascination with vampires in mass market romance novels, horror movies, video games, and the subculture of "cutting" and body piercing are all connected to the contradictory human fascination with and revulsion to blood. Of this Moore states, "There is power, wonder-working power, in the blood. Our culture already sees that. They're simply looking in the wrong veins."

The blood of Christ confronts me with the unwelcome fact that I am a sinner.

The main problem with the blood of Christ is that it confronts me with the fact that I am a sinner (another contemporary taboo word) and that His blood is the only thing that can erase that fatal flaw. The Bible explicitly states in Hebrews 9:22, "... without shedding of blood is no remission."

Somehow, we mistakenly think we can teach young Christians how to live, to

abstain from immorality, greed and violence, before we move to something that seems as arcane as blood sacrifice. However, the Scriptures teach us that personal morality is built on the knowledge that we were bought "with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:19).

The danger of a Christianity sanitized of the blood of Christ is, we raise a generation of self-righteous believers who believe their good works make them acceptable to God and insure His blessing. We perpetuate "a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof." In our preaching, teaching, music, and daily living, let's renew our belief in the words of the sacred hymn:

*This is all my hope and plea,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
This is all my righteousness,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.* ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Hope Horizons*, April 2007

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by Steve Miller



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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

JULY 1, 2007

What Does the Lord Require?

Micah 3:8-12; 6:1-8

Micah, from the southern kingdom of Judah, prophesied approximately 50 years, during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He was contemporary with Isaiah, also from Judah. His message, as we note in 1:1, was to both Samaria (Northern) and Jerusalem. His message was one of reproof to a corrupt, disobedient, and God-dishonoring people. (Read the entire book for context.)

Today's lesson text begins at 3:8 with Micah declaring his credentials and authority. He was speaking on the Lord's behalf and with His empowerment. This was in direct contrast to the false prophets mentioned in verse 5 who were encouraging God's people to err. Micah's message, expounded more fully in Chapter 6, was one of repentance and turning back to the Lord.

Micah's message was directed to the "heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel." Micah was aware of the timeless principle that as go the leaders, so go the people. If the leaders would see the error of their ways and repent, the people would follow. Micah outlines their obvious and grievous sins: miscarriage of justice, love of iniquity, murder, bribery, and greed.

These leaders were so deluded that, in spite of their gross sins, they were saying, "Is not the Lord among us? No harm can come upon us." How absurd to assume the Lord's presence when their actions were in such direct opposition to

His principles and character. That is the result of spiritual degeneration, spiritual blindness. The end result, says Micah, will be the utter destruction and destitution of their city and the temple. (See Jeremiah 26:18.) Fulfillment of this prophecy was accomplished by the Babylonians in 586 BC and the Romans again in 70 AD. (See Matthew 24:1, 2.) God's laws were not to be trifled with. He would visit judgment upon the disobedient.

As we turn to Chapter 6, we read of the Lord's controversy with His people. He calls upon the mountains to witness His testimony against His people, the people for whom He had done so much. His appeal to them is with tenderness and longing. The Lord asks, "What have I done that has caused you to turn away from Me? Speak up," He says. "Answer Me." He then reminds them how He brought them up out of Egypt, established them as a nation, and confounded the treacherous intentions of King Balak.

In verses 6 and 7 the people, at least touched by God's pleading if not totally repentant, ask what the Lord requires for a restored relationship. Is it burnt offerings, rivers of oil, or even the fruit of their body, their firstborn? It seems as though they were still not comprehending the depth of their departure and the simplicity of the Lord's requirement.

The Lord's requirement was a complete change of attitude and lifestyle. He did not so much want their offerings and sacrifices. He wanted them, personally, individually, in contrition for their sins and their waywardness. His requirements were mercy, justice, and humility—mercy

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and justice to define their interpersonal relationships, and an humble, contrite spirit to define their relationship to Him. These requirements still stand.

For thought and discussion

1. What qualities are essential to the success of a “prophet” today?
2. Think about the role of leadership and their potential for influencing their followers, for good or evil.
3. How can we recognize delusion? How can we combat it? Discuss.
4. Why do we so easily forget, or overlook, the good things the Lord has done for us, and turn to our own foolish and deceptive ways?
5. What does the Lord require of you and me? Do His requirements differ from age to age?

JULY 8, 2007

God Requires Righteousness

Zephaniah 3:1-9

The Prophet Zephaniah’s heritage and period of ministry are outlined in verse 1 of Chapter 1. He was very likely related to the kings of Judah and thus keenly aware of the deep-seated evil in the nation and among her leaders. His prophesy obviously predated Josiah’s reform in the 18th year of his reign. He was contemporary with Jeremiah during the early years of Jeremiah’s prophesy. Zephaniah inveighs against the spiritual degeneracy of Jerusalem and its leaders.

Our lesson text begins in Chapter 3 with Zephaniah pronouncing woe upon the morally corrupt city of Jerusalem. She was defiled, rebellious, and oppressive. She would not heed the voice of warning or correction. (See Jeremiah 25:3, 4.) Her face was turned away from her God. She was insensitive to His pleading.

Zephaniah’s next message, in verse 3, is a denunciation of the civil rulers, the

princes, and judges. They were like devouring beasts, ravening their prey, insatiable in their desires, destroying without mercy. They were responsible, in part, for the moral degeneracy of Jerusalem, for people do not generally rise above the moral or spiritual standards of their leaders.

In verse 4, the religious leaders are in focus. They also were not living up to the standards expected of spiritual leaders. They were without depth of character; they were treacherous, and arrogant. The priests did violence to the law by twisting its interpretation to suit their own pleasure. They polluted the sanctuary of God by their evil and unrestrained lifestyle.

Zephaniah reminds his hearers that although wickedness abounds and ungodliness defines the character of the leaders, the just and holy God is still in the midst of them. His judgments are true and unyielding, every morning a new day of mercy. But in spite of His holiness and justice, the unjust are not shamed into repentance. Their hearts are seared and unyielding.

This is the God who has destroyed nations, and He will not spare Judah if they persist in their sin. Will they not learn? Will they not observe and take lessons from other nations whom God has cut off and made desolate? This was God’s design, as we note from verse 7. He was not eager to destroy Jerusalem. Rather, He hoped they would learn from the fate of the nations around them and repent and be spared. Sadly, they would not. They continued in their corrupt and evil ways.

God makes His intentions clear: He will rise up against wicked nations, even those whom He allows to destroy His own people for their wickedness. A day of judgment is coming when the almighty, Holy God will pour out His wrath upon all evil nations. None shall escape His judgment.

Verse 9 seems to refer to a time of spiritual restoration for God’s chosen nation. However, the implications are much

broader, signifying a time of spiritual awakening for many peoples in the Messianic age. The God of judgment is also a God of mercy and forgiveness. That is the message of the Prophet Zephaniah.

For thought and discussion

1. Study the historical setting of Zephaniah's time of prophecy. It will help you understand his message.
2. Even today, church leaders are vulnerable to error and deviation from God's standards. What are some safety factors which can be put in place to guard against deviation and the detrimental influence of unwholesome leaders in the church? Discuss with your class.
3. It seems when people forget God's nearness it becomes easier to sin. How can we best cultivate a continual sense of God's presence?
4. Someone has said that the only thing we learn from history is that we don't learn from history. Judah was obviously in that situation. Are we alert today to the mistakes of the past, and are we making positive changes to avoid them and thus escape God's judgment?
5. God is a God of both judgment and mercy. It shouldn't be difficult to decide which side of God to be on. But why do so many people ignore the warnings and reject His mercy?

JULY 15, 2007

God Judges Wickedness

Habakkuk 2:1-14

Nothing is known about the Prophet Habakkuk except what we learn from this short book. He was from Judah and very likely prophesied during the reign of King Jehoiakim. Though not blind to the sins of his own people, his concern is that God proposes to use an even more wicked nation, the Chaldeans, to punish them. After voicing his complaint in Chapter 1,

Habakkuk then waits and listens for the Lord God's answer in Chapter 2. In short, the Lord's answer was that eventually the Chaldeans would also face punishment for their unbridled wickedness.

As with other prophetic passages, the prophecy of Habakkuk had an immediate meaning for the nation of Judah. It also has veiled reference to the Messianic age and God's dealings with His people in the New Testament era. Sin will not go unpunished in either case, and in both situations God will vindicate His love and concern for His people.

Chapter 2 begins with Habakkuk patiently awaiting the Lord's response to his complaint in Chapter 1. He ponders God's response. Then in verse 2, the Lord's answer came. And Habakkuk was instructed to write it plainly for all passersby to read and understand and to take action, perhaps to escape the coming invasion by the Chaldeans. God also assures Habakkuk (verse 3) that everything will happen according to His plan and timing. Man may become impatient while waiting for God to fulfill His promises, but, as verse 4b tells us, the righteous shall live by his faith and trust in God. This principle is carried over into the New Testament as a guiding tenet of the Christian life.

Although the message in verses 4-12 could well refer to any sinner, and may here refer to the wickedness prevalent in Judah, they are perhaps best understood as referring to Nebuchadnezzar and his wicked rapacity. The Chaldeans (Babylonians) under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar were ruthlessly conquering surrounding nations (see 1:6-11) and Judah lay in their path.

Though God planned to use Nebuchadnezzar and his army to punish His people for their waywardness, He will not overlook the wickedness of the Chaldeans. He promised to also visit them in judgment, which took place with the overthrow of the Babylonian empire by Cyrus the Persian some 70 years later. (See Jeremiah 51:58.)

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The message of Habakkuk is that God's judgments are sure and unwavering. He will not tolerate evil—among His people or from those who do not recognize Him as the sovereign Lord. Though His judgments may not always be swift, they are certain. Habakkuk was to rest in that assurance. And so can we.

Verse 14 seems to point to a future time, a time of spiritual restoration which one commentator described as a spiritual deluge engulfing all peoples. Undoubtedly it also had reference to the restoration of Israel which would be seen by all peoples as vindication of God's sovereign power and glory. Habakkuk 3 provides commentary on verse 14.

For thought and discussion

1. An understanding of the historical setting of Habakkuk's time will help you understand his message.
2. Does God still use wicked people/nations to punish the wayward righteous? Can you cite examples from history?
3. Do we at times become impatient with God's timing? How can we develop patient, trustful waiting for the fulfillment of His promises?
4. Do we at times presume upon God's mercy since His judgment is not always swift? What are the dangers with such an attitude? (See Ecclesiastes 8:11-13.)
5. Is there anything we can do to speed the fulfillment of verse 14, or is that work totally in God's hands? Discuss.

JULY 22, 2007

God Demands Integrity

Jeremiah 7:1-4, 8-16

Jeremiah was a great and important prophet. His ministry lasted approximately 40 years. But he had the thankless task of warning the city of Jerusalem of their impending judgment

due to their unfaithfulness to God. His life was one of turmoil and uncertainty. He was faithful to God, although his life was in constant jeopardy by the kings, rulers, and religious leaders who scoffed at and denounced his message of certain judgment. Jeremiah prophesied during the last years before Jerusalem was sacked and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. (A reading of the entire book will help to fix the overall situation in your mind.)

The prophecy here in Chapter 7 was given during the 13th year of the reign of King Josiah (see 1:2) before Josiah's reforms as recorded in 2 Kings 23. (Read also Chapter 22.) Jeremiah's message in our lesson text condemns the wickedness of Judah and especially the hypocrisy evident in their worship. Chapter 1 gives an excellent introduction to Jeremiah, his call, and his anointing by God for his difficult task.

Jeremiah was instructed by God to stand at the entrance to the temple and there proclaim God's warning to those entering to worship. Included was a promise of survival if they would amend their ways, and the threat of destruction if they would not. They were not to think that simply because the temple of the Lord was in Jerusalem that God would spare the city in spite of their wickedness and hypocrisy. (Verses 5-7 outline God's terms for their preservation. They also indicate the sinful ways of the people.)

Jeremiah's message is forthright and stern. He minces no words in condemning the people's wickedness and idolatry, while at the same time coming before the Lord in His house and calling on His name. Note that they were guilty of violating a number of the commandments given by God to guide the life of His people—both in worship and in interpersonal relationships. The Lord's eyes were not closed to the sins of His people.

God, through Jeremiah, calls them to remember how He allowed the taberna-

cle at Shiloh to be destroyed because of the sins of the sons of Eli. (See 1 Samuel 2-4.) The same would be done to Jerusalem and the temple if they did not repent. God had faithfully warned His people through the prophets. (See 2 Chronicles 36:14-16; Jeremiah 11:7, 8.) But they would not hear. Therefore God, ever true to His Word, had no choice but to deal with them through oppression, destruction, and captivity, just as He had the northern kingdom 136 years previously.

Judah had reached the limit of God's patience and mercy. He tells Jeremiah (v. 16) that it is useless to beg for mercy for these people, for He will not hear. How tragic! How sad that the people for whom God had done so much had so utterly rejected Him and His pleadings that nothing remained but for a just God to reject them and unleash punishment upon them. Neither nations nor individuals can trifle with God's laws and get by. He demands integrity.

For thought and discussion

1. What message would Jeremiah have for the so-called people of God today? Would it differ from his message to Judah? Would the church today be more responsive than Judah? Ponder. Discuss.
2. Jeremiah was hesitant to accept God's call (Chapter 1, as was Moses). But God always gets His man. Think about, and discuss, the blessing that comes from doing God's bidding, even in difficult circumstances.
3. Do the so-called people of God today trample God's laws and still expect a blessing in their worship? In what ways is this evident? Discuss.
4. This lesson should remind us that neither heritage nor pretense will override God's demands for integrity of life in moral and spiritual matters.
5. How can we be sure our worship is acceptable to God? Discuss.

JULY 29, 2007

God's Message to the Captives

Jeremiah 29:1-14

God had decreed 70 years of captivity for Judah as punishment for their iniquity (see Isaiah 39:6; Jeremiah 25:11). As the Babylonian empire rose to prominence and conquered surrounding nations, Judah fell under its control. There were three distinct deportations of the people of Judah and Jerusalem to Babylon. The first, in 605 B.C., included Daniel and his cohorts. The second included the group in focus in today's lesson (597 BC). The last was in 586 BC when Nebuchadnezzar totally destroyed the city (see 2 Kings 24).

The purpose of Jeremiah's letter (today's lesson) was to counteract the influence of false prophets among the Jews in Babylon who were saying that the time of captivity would be short (see verses 8 and 9). Jeremiah's encouragement to the people was to settle down and make themselves at home in Babylon and prepare for a long captivity. The letter includes the promise of future return and restoration to their own land after God's decreed period of captivity had been fulfilled.

The first three verses of the chapter provide the setting, lists the recipients of the letter, and identifies the couriers. Likely these men were on official business for King Zedekiah, perhaps carrying tribute, and Jeremiah sent the letter with them. Jeremiah makes it very clear that the message he sends is from the Lord, their God, and the One who caused their captivity. That authenticated the message.

The thrust of God's message to His people was to settle in for the long term in Babylon. They were to establish permanent dwellings, plant crops, and engage in normal life activities. God encouraged them to multiply and increase in number. They did, and at the end of the captivity 43,000 returned with Zerubbabel under the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 2:64). They were also instructed to pray for the peace of

Babylon for its peace would provide their security. They were warned against the destabilizing influence of the false prophets among them, prophets whom God had not sent (verses 8, 9).

Our lesson text closes on a promising note for the captives in Babylon. The Lord attests that after the 70 years of captivity have been fulfilled He will visit them and cause them to return to their own land. The Lord assures them that He has not forgotten them but that He has plans for their future which included their restoration to His favor.

The period of captivity for God's people was not merely punitive, but also corrective. During that time as they thought upon their past and the reasons for their removal from their homeland, they would become repentant and change their attitude toward God. God foresaw that this would happen and holds out hope for their restoration to His favor. "Then," He says, "I will hear your prayers, I will be found when you search for Me, I will gather you from your captivity and bring you home again."

God also makes it clear in this letter to

the exiles that He was responsible for their captivity (v. 14). Yes, He used the Babylonians, but He was the cause and mover. His purpose was to restore His people back into a close relationship to Himself, a relationship they had forfeited through unbelief and wickedness.

For thought and discussion

1. Judah's captivity was punishment for their wickedness and unfaithfulness to God. But why 70 years?
2. How do we discern between false and true prophets today? Discuss.
3. This lesson should remind us again that we dare not sin presumptuously, then assume that God will continue to be merciful. He does exact judgment for sin.
4. Are we not often slow to understand that God's corrective measures in our lives are really intended for our good? In what ways has He chastened you that led to a deeper, more meaningful relationship with Him?
5. When God seems distant, who moved? ■

Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

incidents events occurrences facts illustrations episodes committees vignettes proceedings problems
experiences crises adventures transactions meetings tragedies scoops reports conferences happenings
bulletins questions reports affairs dramas encounters personages actions tidings et cetera

Federal Judge Orders Discharge of CO

The stomach of a marine-in-training was so turned by the brutal desensitization that he was subjected to, he requested CO status and release from the Marines. He objected to the profanity and violence-laced speeches by his superiors. He was

shown a "motivational" video that featured gunfights and Iraqi corpses and was set to a heavy metal song whose lyrics included a line, "Let the bodies hit the floor." He applied for CO status and release, which the Marines denied. He then sued and a federal judge ordered the Marines to discharge him.

—Source: *San Francisco Chronicle*

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Teachers Dropping History Offensive to Muslims

A study commissioned by the British Department for Education and Skills has found that history teachers are dropping the Holocaust from their lessons to avoid offending Muslim students. Nazi Germany was much applauded in Muslim circles and was supported by Islamic troops. Also, the study found that teachers dropped or played down the Crusades in an effort to avoid controversy in the classroom. The study condemned this and said that history should be factual, not a vehicle for political correctness.

—Source: *The UK Daily Mail*

Hezbollah Admits Orders Come From Iran

Hezbollah's deputy secretary-general admitted in an interview with an Iranian TV station that Hezbollah clears all of its terrorist operations with Iran before carrying them out. It has been widely known that Hezbollah was funded and controlled by Iran, but this was the first public admission of such a relationship. This makes Iran undeniably responsible for the many suicide bombings and rocket attacks on Israelis and westerners.

—Sources: *Worthy News* and *al Qawthar*

Britain Adds to Security

Britain, which has a security camera for every 15 citizens—the highest ratio in the world—is adding loud speakers to the cameras. Officers monitoring the cameras can then verbally reprimand those that litter or vandalize. The average Londoner gets caught on a surveillance camera 300 times each day.

—Source: *AFP*

British Hostages Psychologically Abused by Iranians

The British marines and sailors who were captured by the Iranian navy while patrolling in Iraqi waters, have been released after they were forced to make fake confessions of being in Iranian waters. Now that they are back in Britain, they have told of their time of capture. The Iranians blindfolded them, lined them up against a wall, audibly cocked their guns, and then pulled the triggers. The firing pins clicked on empty chambers. They also simulated the sound of a fellow soldier's throat being cut. Then they put them into solitary confinement for six days without human contact. For days they told the only woman of the group that she was the only one left alive in Iran; they had sent the rest home.

—Source: *The UK Daily Mail*

Russian Opposition Rally Crushed

Russian police violently crushed yet another opposition protest in Moscow. President Putin has a near dictatorial grip on Russia—his party runs parliament, he appoints all the provincial governors, the government owns all but a couple of the media (TV, newspaper, etc.) outlets, and his police have been violently cracking down on the opposition political parties. It seems that the KGB also poisoned a dissident who spoke out against Putin and who was residing in Britain after seeking political asylum there. Former Russian President Yeltsin, who was the leader of the movement that overthrew the Soviet Union, died recently. Given the recent direction Russia has taken, that seems appropriate. Apparently Yeltsin's efforts at democracy were in vain and Russia is heading back to being a police dictatorship.

—Source: *AP*

Perils of Expiring Tax Cuts

Congress will have to steer carefully to avoid a shock to the economy as it strives to balance the budget by allowing tax cuts to expire in the next few years, economists say.

Studies show that economic growth accumulates over time from across-the-board rate cuts such as Mr. Bush's.

Despite mixed evidence on the effects of the Bush tax, economists say, congress should not allow them to expire all at once because the effect could be a \$200 billion tax increase.

"Such a huge increase in tax revenue would have an enormous contractionary effect on the economy, likely precipitating a recession in 2011 or 2012," said Roger M. Kubarych, economist with Unicredit Bank.

—Excerpt from "Economists warn of perils of expiring tax cuts" by Patrice Hill in *The Washington Times* on April 23, 2007 (<http://tinyurl.com/2j3hap>)

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Republicans Who Push Spending Get the Boot

The National Taxpayers Union has released their annual scorecard which rates congressmen on their fiscal conservatism. The vast majority of Republican congressmen that lost their jobs in the recent election were very liberal in their government spending. I personally doubt Republicans will regain power until they return to their core values of fiscal and cultural conservatism. When they tried to cater to both conservatives and liberals, they lost both. Kerry's most memorable gaffe, which contributed to his loss, was his flip-flopping—which was due to him governing via opinion poll rather than conviction. We need to pray for leaders who will stand up for righteousness and wise spending of our money.

—Source: *OneNewsNow*

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Israel Seeks Purchase of F-22

The most advanced fighter jet in the world, the F-22, recently entered service with the U.S. Air Force. It is a stealth fighter that cannot be detected by radar and cruises at Mach 1.7 without afterburners. In a recent exercise against F-15s, F-16s, and F/A-18s, a small group of F-22s, outnumbered 4 to 1, achieved a 144-to-none kill ratio. Congress maintained the law that the F-22 cannot be sold to foreign nations, despite a vote by the House Appropriations Committee to overturn the law. The Israeli Air Force is seeking to purchase the F-22 to maintain its military edge in the Middle East, especially in the face of Iran's race to obtain nuclear weapons. Also worrisome to Israel is the U.S.'s plan to sell precision-guided munitions (smart bombs) to Saudi Arabia.

—Sources: *Jerusalem Post*, *Aviation Week*, *Wikipedia*

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Persecution Coming for American Christians

Schools across America held an event promoting the homosexual lifestyle by encouraging students to wear duct tape over their mouths to empathize with homosexual students who are supposedly suffering in silence. (We'll let the strident pro-gay rhetoric drown out any thoughts of the absurdity of that proposition.) A young Christian man of 15, the son of a pastor, scrawled, "I'm straight," on a piece of duct tape and stuck it on his shirt. The school suspended the student for the day. Other students wore T-shirts that said, "Sodomy is sin." Hundreds of students were the recipients of disciplinary action for speaking out against homosexuality on that day.

Two members of Gideons International were arrested in Florida for handing out Bibles on a public sidewalk. The charges against them were dismissed, but the authorities have again brought

charges against them under a different statute.

Are we ready to be persecuted for the cause of Christ? An even more important question is, "Are we doing things that makes Satan want to persecute us?"

—Sources: *The Christian Post*, *OneNewsNow*

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Massacre at Virginia Tech

The Virginia Tech massacre was a school shooting that unfolded as two separate attacks about two hours apart on April 16, 2007, on the campus of the Virginia Tech university. A shooter killed 32 people and wounded a further 29 before committing suicide, making it the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

The shooter, Seung-Hui Cho, was a South Korean who had moved to the US. at eight years of age. At the time of the shootings, he was a senior majoring in English at Virginia Tech. He had a history of incidents at the school, including allegations of stalking, referrals to counseling, and a 2005 declaration of mental illness by a Virginia special justice.

Cho shot his first victims in a coed dormitory. A young woman and a male resident assistant were shot and killed in the lady's room. Cho left the scene and soon thereafter mailed a package to NBC News containing various writings and recordings.

About two hours after the initial shootings, Cho entered Norris Hall, which houses the classrooms, and chained the main entrance doors shut. He then went to the second floor and began shooting students and faculty

members.

By the end of this second attack, nine minutes later, 30 people lay dead in four classrooms and a second-floor hallway. Cho then shot and killed himself. Police reports indicated that Cho fired approximately 170 rounds in the attack at Norris Hall. Five professors were killed in the attack.

Several people tried to help others during the attack, including: Professor Liviu Librescu, a Holocaust survivor, held the door of his classroom, Room 204, shut, while Cho attempted to enter it. Librescu was able to prevent the shooter from entering the classroom until his students had escaped through the windows, but was eventually shot five times and killed. In Room 206, Waleed Shaalan, a Ph.D. student and teaching assistant from Zagazig, Egypt, though badly wounded, distracted Cho from a nearby student after the shooter had returned to the room. Shaalan was shot a second time and died. Also in Room 206, Partahi Mamora Halomoan Lumbantoruan protected fellow student Guillermo Colman by diving on top of him. Multiple gunshots killed Lumbantoruan, but Colman was protected by Lumbantoruan's body. Matthew Joseph La Porte, an Air Force ROTC student, is reported to have attempted to tackle Cho from behind but was fatally injured in the attempt.

—Excerpt and paraphrase of "Virginia Tech Massacre" from *Wikipedia* (<http://tinyurl.com/39axmx>)

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



Then the Devil Came

by Harold S. Martin

One of the speakers at the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference in 2005 used the word *pernicious* in the message. The use of that word brought back memories of one of the questions which over the years has been asked of applicants for baptism: "Do you willingly renounce Satan, with all his pernicious ways, and all the sinful pleasures of the world?" The question was formed at the Annual Meeting in 1848 and was still included in the 1948 edition of the *Minister's Manual*.

The writer of an article in *Time* magazine entitled "No Sympathy for the Devil," in essence says that literal belief in the devil is widely viewed by theologians "as a holdover" from the Dark Ages (March 19, 1990). A *Newsweek* writer in an article entitled "Giving the Devil His Due" says that "*belief in the devil is clearly embedded in Christian tradition. Jesus evidently believed in him; so did the early church fathers . . . but that belief has faded among many Roman Catholic and mainline Protestants today*" (August 30, 1982).

Most Christians would much prefer to speak about the Lord Jesus than about His enemy the devil. But God has revealed truth about His great adversary in the Bible, and every believer should be familiar with the biblical facts about his person, his power, and his activities. All of the New Testament writers refer to Satan. Of the twenty-nine specific references to the devil in the Gospels, Jesus is speaking in twenty-five of them.

Satan beguiles and seduces and opposes and deceives and tempts and blasphemes. He is a personal being, having his own synagogue (Revelation 2:9), his own gospel (Galatians 1:6), his own ministers (2 Corinthians 11:14, 15), and his own doctrines (1 Timothy 4:1). He even has his own communion service (1 Corinthians 10:21). Satan seeks to hinder our Chris-

tian testimony. Satan has often been made the butt of a joke, but in reality he should be taken seriously.

How the devil came to be the devil, is not quite as clear in the Scriptures, as is the fact that he definitely exists. When interpreting the parable of the tares, *Jesus* said, "The enemy who sowed them is the devil" (Matthew 13:39). *Jesus* taught that Satan is a real person.

Bible believers should have no question about the *existence of the devil*. *Jesus* taught that the devil is real (Matthew 25:41). The Apostle John writes about the devil (John 13:2). Paul speaks of "the wiles" of the devil (Ephesians 6:11) and of "the devices" of the devil (2 Corinthians 2:11). Early Brethren had no problem believing that Satan is a very real enemy of God. L. W. Teeter says, "Satan is the chief adversary," and then he continues by saying that *Jesus* gave the disciples a gentle rebuke, telling them that they were rejoicing that ordinary demons were subject to them, but *He* (*Jesus*) "had seen the chief devil fall" (*New Testament Commentary*, Volume 1, Brethren Publishing House, 1894, page 233).

We should be convinced also about the *personality of the devil*. Satan is a spirit being without a physical body. Personality can exist without a body. The devil has the characteristics of personality—*intelligence* (2 Corinthians 11:3), *emotions* (Revelation 12:17), and a *will* (2 Timothy 2:26). A concrete bridge does not have these characteristics, but then a concrete bridge is not a person either. The Apostle Peter uses a personal pronoun when describing the devil (1 Peter 5:8). The devil is a personal creature who has limitations that God placed upon him (Job 1:12).

1. THE NAMES AND CHARACTER OF THE DEVIL

There are a number of words used to

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describe the adversary—the enemy of God and of God’s people. The teaching of Jesus on the parable of the sower (and the soils) is recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In their parallel accounts, each designates the enemy by the use of a different name. Matthew says, “Then *the wicked one* comes” (13:19). Mark says, “Satan comes immediately” (4:15). Luke says, “Then *the devil* comes” (8:12). In the Bible, there are more than a dozen names for the enemy. Some of the more common titles used to describe him are these:

Satan—means “adversary” or “opponent” (1 Peter 5:8). Numbers 22:22 describes the word *adversary* as one who takes a stand against another. Satan is the adversary of both God and man.

The Devil—is a term that indicates “an accuser” or “a slanderer” (Revelation 12:9, 10). Satan slanders God to man (Genesis 3:1-5) and also man to God (Job 1:9-11).

The Tempter—means that Satan tempts and solicits men and women to sin (1 Thessalonians 3:5; Matthew 4:3). He is cunning and subtle and tempts human beings in their weak moments (Luke 22:40-46); he tempts after great successes (John 6:15); he tempts by suggesting the use of right things in the wrong way (Matthew 4:1-11); and by putting evil suggestions into the minds of believers (Acts 5:3).

The Wicked One—indicates the kind of work Satan does. He is the father of lies and a murderer (John 8:44). He is “the serpent,” “the god of this world,” and “the prince of the power of the air.” In order to promote his evil work he can appear as a serpent (Revelation 12:9), as a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8), or as an attractive angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). These abilities make him more deceptive in carrying out his program of evil.

There are far-reaching results *if we deny* the personality and activity of the devil. For example, if the devil is not real, then the Bible account of *the fall* (Genesis 3) is untrue, and so the Scriptures are invalid. If the devil is not real, man is not

incriminated in the fall of Adam, and therefore we are not sinners. It follows then, that humans do not have a depraved Adamic nature, but instead have something good within that only needs to be cultivated. If the fall in the Garden of Eden is a myth, there is no need for the atonement of Christ. And in the end, the doctrine of future punishment is a myth—no devil, no sin, no atonement, and no hell.

2. THE WORK AND ACTIVITY OF THE DEVIL

The devil is not the *imaginary* repulsive character that people often picture him to be. Satan is a real person who will do all that he can to bring defeat into the lives of others. He is constantly battling for the souls of human beings. He does his work primarily by using deception. He has many subtle devices and many cunning ways to do his job.

Toward Christ

Satan tempted Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11). Satan tried to sidetrack Jesus from achieving His true purpose, that of dying on the cross as a ransom for the sins of mankind (Matthew 16:23). Satan had part in the betrayal and the arrest of Jesus (John 13:27).

Among Nations

Satan has been deceiving the nations (Revelation 20:3). He places a demon in charge of the various nations. Note the “prince” of Persia (Daniel 10:13) and the “prince” of Greece (Daniel 10:20). These co-workers of Satan stand against the angels who are faithful servants of God (see Daniel 12:1 and Daniel 10:13b). Demons are responsible for turmoil within world governments and account for many national movements and national hatreds (for example, the deeds of Hitler against the Jews, the ethnic hatreds that exist in most every country, and some believe he was behind the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima when Japan was ready to surrender anyhow). The account

in Daniel 10 gives a brief picture of the struggles behind the struggles which are written on the pages of human history.

Revelation 16:13-16 describes how in the end-times Satan will gather the nations together to the Battle of Armageddon. A host of demonic spirits will assemble the kings of the whole world for battle on the great day of God Almighty. Satan in this age deceives the leaders of nations, but at some point in the future he will be chained in a bottomless pit so that he can no longer continue to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:3).

Among Unbelievers

Satan blinds the minds of the unsaved so that they will not accept the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4). He often does this by making persons think that there are many ways to heaven, and that one way is as good as the other. Also, when the Word of God is planted, then Satan comes and snatches it away (Luke 8:12). He takes away the Word from their hearts so that they will not believe and be saved. Jesus declares that the devil is a liar and “the father of lies” (John 8:44). He used the device of lying with Adam and Eve, and he has been using it effectively ever since. The unregenerate are deceived by Satan, who blinds their minds so that they will not see their need for salvation through faith in Christ. He frequently uses false teachers as his ministers to accomplish this goal (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Among Believers

Satan will hinder the Christian’s work for God in any way possible (1 Thessalonians 2:18). He tempts the believer to commit acts of immorality (1 Corinthians 7:5). He sows tares among believers in order to dampen their testimony (Matthew 13:38, 39). He tempted Ananias and Sapphira to lie, and he has used that tactic down through the years (Acts 5:3). Sometimes he incites persecution against believers to discourage them (Revelation 2:10). He causes strife and confusion among Chris-

tians to stifle their impact on others (James 3:15, 16). It is one of Satan’s primary ambitions to overthrow the good testimony of God’s people (2 Corinthians 2:11). The Apostle Peter declares that the devil is an adversary who “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

The devil is wicked and evil by nature (1 John 2:13). He is supremely subtle (Genesis 3:1). He is a great pretender (that is, he is not what he seems to be) (2 Corinthians 11:14). He is more powerful than we, but he is not *all* powerful. The devil aims to destroy everything that is right and good. Yet in spite of all Bible teachings about the devil, many dismiss the idea of the devil as a personal being who can influence our lives.

3. SATAN’S HOST OF DEMON HELPERS

Satan was not alone in his fall from an exalted position. Many angels were involved in rebellion and likewise fell. These became wicked angels and are identified as Satan’s angels in Matthew 25:41. Some were confined immediately to judgment (Jude 6). Others were given freedom to oppose God and His people (Revelation 16:14). The detailed information about their fall is shrouded in mystery, although Isaiah 14:12-17 may be related to their fall.

The Existence and Nature of Demons

Throughout the accounts given in the Gospels there are many references to evil spirits and demons. They, too, have the marks of personality. Though there is only one devil, there are multitudes of demons. They possess supernatural intelligence and strength.

Demons are very real (Deuteronomy 32:17; James 2:19). Jesus rebuked them (Mark 5:8) and spoke of their final doom (Matthew 25:41). Demons are spirit beings. The demon in Matthew 17:18 is called “an unclean spirit” in the parallel account in Mark 9:25. Demons have intelligence. They knew Jesus (Mark 1:24);

they know their own eventual doom (Matthew 8:29); they promote a well-developed system of their own doctrines (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

The Work and Activity of Demons

Demons extend Satan's activity. Their sheer number (Mark 5:9) makes Satan seem omnipresent. Satan is a created being and is not therefore omnipresent, but because of the large number of helpers, his activity can be worldwide in scope at any given time. Demons can inflict infirmities (Matthew 9:32, 33); they can subject human beings to temptation (2 Corinthians 11:3); they seduce humans into believing false teachings (1 Timothy 4:1). Demons promote the devil's program. They oppose God and His plan for human redemption. They oppress human beings. They oppose the saints of God.

We must guard against regarding demons as being unreal in the spiritual realm. On the other hand, we should be cautious about giving undue attention to demons. We should not see a demon behind every tree, and neither should we attribute every evil thing that happens directly to the work of demons. Demon activity seems to have the strongest influence in those lands where the Christian faith has not made deep inroads.

The Worship of Demons by Human Beings

It hardly seems possible that men and women anywhere would *worship* the devil, but nonetheless it is a fact that people do worship demonic beings. Men and women can be found in actual conscious submission to evil spirits. Thousands of adherents to the Satanist cult live on every continent. Their beliefs center around three emotions—lust, vengeance, and greed. Their principles include statements like the following: "*Be kind only to those who deserve it; seek vengeance when necessary rather than turn the other cheek; put yourself first and put others second.*"

Some False Concepts Incited by Demons

Necromancy is the belief that the spirits of the dead communicate with men. Attempts to communicate with the dead are expressly forbidden in Isaiah 8:19. God told Joshua to annihilate the Canaanites who practice necromancy (Deuteronomy 18:9-14). *Astrology* is the belief that if the moon influences the mighty oceans, then surely the stars and planets affect the tides of human lives. Astrologers claim that when a person discovers his place in the course of the stars, there will be a sense of order and peace in his life. Astrologers are ridiculed in Isaiah 47:12, 13. Astrology amounts to Satan's prognostication substituted for faith in a heavenly Father.

4. THE BELIEVER'S OPPOSITION TO THE DEVIL

Each of us is confronted daily with the snares, the tactics, the tricks, and the devices of the devil. He is "the god of this age" and walks up and down in this world seeking to drag men and women away from Christ. It seems that he is working overtime because he knows that his days are few. He is aware that shortly he will be cast into the Lake of Fire to be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Revelation 20:10). But until that time—how can believers overcome his onslaughts? What is our resource against the strategies of the devil? The answer is found in James 4:7, 8, where we read, "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands . . . and purify your hearts."

We Are to Submit Ourselves to God (James 4:7a).

No person can resist the devil in his own power. We must commit our lives to God and have the Lord Jesus Christ dwelling within (Galatians 2:20). The message of Christian believers found in 1 John 4:4 is this: "He who is in you is greater than he

who is in the world.” That is, Jesus Christ, who dwells within the believing Christian is greater than the devil who is the god of this world. W. H. Griffith Thomas told of an older man who was a helpless slave to alcoholic drinks, but one day he was converted and a wonderful change took place in his life. A friend who observed the change said to him, “So—you’ve got the *mastery* of the devil at last”—to which the older man replied, “No, but I’ve got the *Master* of the devil in my heart.”

The devil is a supernatural being, and it takes a supernatural power to respond to his devices. Jesus Christ is that power. It is impossible to overcome the devil without being a committed follower of Jesus Christ. We need to surrender our lives to God, and by faith become a new creation with new desires and new ambitions in life.

We Are to Resist the Devil
(James 4:7b).

We can resist the devil in the same way that Jesus resisted him when He was tempted in the wilderness. Jesus resisted Satan by appealing to the Scriptures. When the devil commanded Him to turn stones into bread, Jesus said, “It is written”—and He quoted the Scripture about not living by bread alone. When the devil told Him to jump off the pinnacle of the Temple, Jesus said, “It is written”—and He quoted the Scripture about not tempting the Lord God. When Satan offered Him all the kingdoms of the world, Jesus said, “It is written”—and He quoted the Scripture about worshiping and serving only the Lord God. At each temptation Jesus resisted the devil’s appeal by quoting the Scriptures. He could have summoned ten thousand angels to His side. He could have displayed His own supernatural powers, but Jesus used the same weapon that is available to every one of us—the Word of God.

This life is a testing ground, and the child of God is in conflict with the evil foes. God in sovereign wisdom allows Satan to head an army of demons to carry out a program

of wickedness against His people—but we are not left without resources to defeat the foe. We have the Word of God (Psalm 119:105). We have the indwelling presence of Jesus (Galatians 2:20). We are indwelt by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 6:19). We have the ministry of angels on our behalf (Hebrews 1:13, 14). We have the armor provided for the spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:10-20). To ignore the weapons of our warfare against Satan and his kingdom is spiritual suicide. There are resources designed to help us live more and more victoriously as we mature in the Christian faith.

We sing “This Is My Father’s World,” and so it is—by creation. All around us we can see the evidence and beauty of God’s glory, power, and wisdom. But during the present age, we can also see Satan’s work—what he does by fraud, deceit, and usurpation. I have at times *considered* doing wrong things; I have less frequently *actually* done bad things—but when I am struggling with temptation, I have a strong sense that I am being tempted by *someone*. This is not to say that Satan *makes* me do wrong things; I must make the choice, but the devil continues to goad and to show us the lure of the world and of fleshly desires. He is the “prince of this world” and “the god of this age,” one who is deceiving, lying, accusing, and tempting without ceasing.

With eyes wide open to the nature of things, we must constantly be aware that there are two realms—and that there is no excuse to stay in Satan’s world. As Christians, we have an obligation to live as children of light—being totally *aware* of the One who has redeemed us, and also *alert* to the deceptive tricks of the one who would damn the soul if we let him.

God is real. So are the devil and his army of demons. These enemies of God should not be made the subject of fun-loving jokes. Instead, we must do everything possible to deny these enemies the opportunity for gaining a foothold in our lives. ■

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Counseling From the Word

JESUS CHRIST: Self-Denial or Self-Esteem?

by David M. Tyler

Some of the most popular themes in psychology are that of self-image, self-esteem, self-worth, and self-love. The emphasis, regardless of the terminology used by a particular advocate of this movement, is on self.

Over the past twenty-five years, the concept of esteeming one's self has had a powerful influence upon the Church. Before the 1970s, the subject of self-esteem was almost unheard of in evangelical circles. Christians, who have generally thought of self-esteem as being a sinful attitude, have been encouraged by a myriad of books by beloved Christian authors to develop a "healthy" self-esteem. These authors have warned us that a negative self-esteem is the basis of most psychological problems and leads to sinful behavior. They have advanced the premise that an individual who does not love himself will find it impossible to develop genuine love relationships with God and others. Self-esteem has been said to be the key that unlocks the door to fulfillment, success, and happiness. It is the proposed answer to nearly all problems of living.

If the advocates of self-esteem are right, then we must reform our theology. We must change our emphasis from man's unworthiness and focus on man's worthiness and right to esteem himself. The Church will need to recognize the tremendous significance that this teaching will have in the lives of individuals, pastors, parents, children, schoolteachers, and others. Pastors will have a fundamental obligation to their congregations to instruct and nurture them in ways of esteeming themselves.

But if the advocates of self-esteem are

wrong, then it becomes apparent that the Church's fascination with self-esteem is heretical. Jesus called His followers to imitate Him in denying themselves (Matthew 16:24). The cross, with all that it symbolizes, permeates and gives meaning and unity to all the ethical teachings of Jesus. Jesus consistently tied together self-denial and the cross. The antithesis of the cross is self-love. Therefore, self-ism is classified as a "different gospel" (Galatians 1:6), and as such becomes competitive with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The enormous claims made by the self-esteem theorists must be tested by Scriptures. Did their teachings originate out of a new exegetical and theological study of the Bible? If not, where did they originate from? The answer to that question is that they originated with secular humanistic psychologists who studied man not from the viewpoint of God's Word, but from subjective observation of self and by the self. Their theories were accommodated and incorporated into the teachings of the Church.

Jesus taught and modeled self-denial as opposed to self-love. Jesus' focus was on God and neighbor. He placed God's will and the good of others ahead of His own (other-oriented). The love of God is the opposite of self-love. It is a sacrificial love. The dissimilarity between Jesus' focus on life and that of the self-esteem advocate is obvious. These two views, the other-oriented view and the self-oriented view are incompatible with one another. ■

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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

When Peace Like a River



by Spafford/Bliss

Lyrics: As with many hymn texts, this one arises out of a time of intense suffering, and it looks to God as the source of comfort. H. G. Spafford was a Christian lawyer from Chicago, who was a good friend of the great American evangelist, D. L. Moody. In 1871, the Great Chicago Fire swept the city, and Spafford lost most of his property. As a result of the fire, the Spafford family decided to go to England to enroll their daughters in the English Academy, because most of Chicago's schools had been lost in the fire. At the last minute, Spafford was forced to stay behind to tend to some business, but his wife and daughters went ahead to England. On their way to England, the *Villa du Havre* was struck by an English sailing ship and sank. Mrs. Spafford was spared, but all four daughters went down with the ship. There is some debate about when this hymn was actually written. Some sources say that it was on the way to England to join his wife,¹ while others say that it was not until after he had reached England.

Even though this hymn was written during a time of intense suffering for Spafford, the text is full of peace and joy. There are only two specific references to "sorrow" or "trials," and the rest of the song is devoted to praising God for deliverance from sin and

thanking Him for the peace that He gives to us. The last verse looks forward to the day when Christ will return, and Spafford was no doubt thinking of being reunited with his family as well.

Music: Philip Paul Bliss was a friend of Spafford's, and lived on the same street in Chicago. He had given up a successful career as a musician and turned to evangelism, singing and writing gospel songs. After Spafford finished his poem, he asked Bliss to put it to music, and he agreed.

During the last few days of 1873, the same year that he wrote this music, Bliss and his wife were riding a train, and the trestle collapsed just as the train was crossing it, pulling seven passenger cars into the river below. Bliss himself escaped being hurt in the crash, but reentered the burning cars to try to rescue his wife. He was unsuccessful, and both of them died.²

As this song illustrates, we can have peace even in tragic circumstances like the ones surrounding the origins of this hymn, because we know that God is in control. However, this song is not just for people who are suffering. It is important to celebrate the peace that we can have with God at all times, instead of just turning to Him when we think we need Him the most. ■

1. www.geocities.com/Heartland.

2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Bliss.

When Peace Like a River

H. G. SPAFFORD

P. P. BLISS

1. When peace, like a riv - er, at - tend - eth my way,
 2. Though Sa - tan should buf - fet, though tri - als should come,
 3. My sin— O the bliss of this glo - ri - ous thought—
 4. O Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,

When sor - rows like sea bil - lows roll; What - ev - er my
 Let this blest as - sur - ance con - trol, That Christ hath re -
 My sin— not in part, but the whole, Is nailed to His
 The clouds be rolled back as a scroll, The trump shall re -

lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is
 gard - ed my help - less es - tate, And hath shed His own
 cross and I bear it no more— Praise the Lord, praise the
 sound, and the Lord shall de - scend, "E - ven so"— It is

REFRAIN

well with my soul.
 blood for my soul. It is well..... with my
 Lord, O my soul!
 well with my soul. It is well

soul,..... It is well, it is well with my soul.
 with my soul,

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Our God's Great Program

by Clarence Martin

We praise God for His unfolding program of the future which we find in His Holy Word.

In Genesis we find that in six days God made this whole universe and everything therein and the Bible says He made it out of nothing. Man is the exception; He started with the ground of the earth. What a great God we have! In Colossians 1:17 it says, "*And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*" Yes, for 6,000 years everything He made is still functioning continuously.

We all know the sad story. Satan, a fallen angel, came into that perfect place and tempted our first parents; then sin, death, and a curse came to man and the earth. Yes, God cursed the ground for man's sake and mankind received death and the aging process began. But praise the Lord, it did not stop with this. He sent the last Adam which is Christ Jesus. With Him He will restore all things. "*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*" (Romans 8:32).

Those who are in Christ, and know Him, and are walking by faith, will someday be caught up. We will be translated into a new body at the sounding of the trumpet—like Christ has already been translated (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Notice, it all happens in a moment—in less than a second. All the dead in Christ will be raised and the living saints will be changed and so shall we ever be with the Lord. "*Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*"

In Revelation 4 and 5 we find the redeemed singing a new song ascribing

power, riches, wisdom, strength, glory, honor, and blessing to Christ the Lamb of God. Then in Revelation 11:15, when the seventh trumpet sounded, we have the announcement of the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever.

In Revelation 19 we have the door opened and Christ on a white horse and the armies of heaven following Him to bring judgment on this earth. The Bible says, "*For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*" (1 Corinthians 15:25, 26).

We find in Revelation 20 the great white throne judgment when all sinners will be judged by God and from whose face the old world will pass away or flee away. Then we find this new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven to this new earth.

God is a God of order and step by step He brings His program to pass. What did Jesus say we should pray? "*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:9, 10). We know that today that is far from reality. But praise the Lord, it will be accomplished in His time. Amen! ■

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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 expositional 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.

Follow the Lamb

by Horatius Bonar

Your life is a book; and conversion is but the title-page or the preface. The book itself remains to be written; and your years and weeks and days are its chapters, pages, and lines. It is a book written for eternity; see that it be written well. It is a book for the inspection of enemies as well as friends; be careful of every word. It is a book written under the eye of God; let it be done reverently; without levity, yet with-

out constraint or terror. Let me give you a few counsels:

1. Be Strong in the Grace of Christ Jesus

It was this grace or free love which first began with you, and with which you began. This grace of God is your strength, as it is your joy; and it is only by abiding in it that you can really live the life of the redeemed. Be strong, then, in this grace; draw your joy from it; and beware how you turn to anything else for refreshment, or comfort, or holiness.

Though a believer, you are still a sinner; a sinner to the last; and, as such, nothing can suit you but the free love of God. Be strong in it. Draw continually on Christ and His fullness for this grace. If at any time you are beguiled away from it, return to it without delay. To recover lost peace, go back to where you got it at first; begin your spiritual life all over again.

2. Keep Your Conscience Clean

When you first saw the cross and understood the meaning of the blood, you got your conscience "purged from dead works" (Hebrews 9:14); and it was this cleansing of the conscience that gave you peace. It is by keeping constantly before your eyes this blood of propitiation that you will keep your conscience clean and your soul at peace. This blood alone can wipe off the

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889) was born at Old Broughton, Edinburgh, Scotland. His brother was Andrew Bonar, likewise a noted preacher. Following his education at the University of Edinburgh, Horatius maintained an active and powerful ministry for more than half a century pastoring churches in that area until his death. Throughout his life Bonar avoided all sensationalism and was calm, patient, sincere, solemn, and a steady writer. His tracts and books are well-received and well-read in all Christian circles. He wrote well over 600 hymns of which more than 100 are still in use. Bonar has been described as "the prince of Scottish hymnwriters." The following lines taken from one of his hymns express Bonar's view of the work of his glorious Saviour, Jesus Christ—
"Glory be to Him who loved us,
washed us from each spot and stain.
Glory be to Him who bought us,
made us kings with Him to reign!
Glory, glory, to the Lamb that once was slain!"

continual sins that are coming across your conscience—which, if not wiped off immediately, will stain it and cloud your peace.

Cultivate a tender conscience; but beware of a diseased and morbid one. The former takes an honest, straightforward view of truth or duty, and acts accordingly. The latter is always on the hunt for trifles, quibbling and questioning about things of no importance. Thus a stiff Christianity is produced, an artificial religion (cf. 1 Cor. 8:9-13). Certainly beware of little sins; but be sure that they are sins. Omit no little duties; but see that they are duties. A tender and tranquil conscience makes a man frank, cheerful, brotherly, and obliging, in the family, in the shop, in the congregation, in the marketplace, “*adorning the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things*” (Titus 2:10).

3. Hold Fast That Which You Have Received

Be not carried about with diverse and strange doctrines. It is a bad sign when a man is frequently shifting his ground and adopting new opinions. “*It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace*” (Hebrews 13:9); and it is good to hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end (Hebrews 3:14). God’s reckoning your sin to Christ, and His righteousness to you was joy and peace, when you found the burden of your grief too great for you to bear. Never let go your hold of this truth.

When a man gets wearied of what is old, and is always catching hold of what is new, it looks as if he had been beguiled from the simplicity that is in Christ; nay, almost as if he had never been “*rooted and grounded in love*.” Love of novelties has been the shipwreck of many a soul. Beware of “*itching ears*” (2 Timothy 4:3), and of “*heaping to yourselves teachers*” (2 Timothy 4:3).

Almost equally pernicious is the love of controversy, even when it takes the side of truth. The man who likes fighting about his food better than eating it, is likely to remain lean enough. Yet if error does assail you, “*contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*”; “*that which ye have*

already, hold fast, that no man take thy crown.” Don’t dally with error, and don’t tamper with truth.

4. Deal Honestly With Yourselves

“*If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged*” (1 Corinthians 11:31). Strange that in spiritual things we should try to cheat ourselves as well as others! Yet so it is. We are loath to take the worst view of our own case; to think evil of ourselves; to act the stern censor in regard to our own omissions and commissions. We have few excuses for others, many for ourselves. This dishonest dealing is destructive both of peace and progress. And when we remember that all dishonest dealing with ourselves is in reality dishonest dealing with God, the evil is seen to be the more hateful and the more inexcusable (Hosea 11:12). Don’t flatter your own heart, nor tell a lie to conscience, nor think to deceive God (Psalm 101:7; Jeremiah 9:6; 17:9; Galatians 6:3; James 1:22; 1 John 1:8).

5. Keep Company With God and His People

Intimacy with God is the very essence of religion, and the foundation of discipleship. It is in relationship with Father, Son, and Spirit that the most real parts of our lives are lived; and all parts that are not lived in fellowship with Him, “*in whom we live, and move, and have our being*,” are unreal, untrue, unsuccessful, and unsatisfying.

Understanding doctrine is one thing, and intimacy with God is another. They ought always to go together; but they are often seen asunder; and, when there is the former without the latter, there is a hard, proud, hollow religion.

Beware of going through prayer in a perfunctory way, like a hireling doing his work in order to get done with it. “*Pray in the Holy Ghost*” (Jude 20). “*Pray without ceasing*.” Pray with honest fervor and simple faith. Few things tend more to deaden the soul, to harden the heart, to drive out spirituality, than cold, formal prayer.

Be much alone with God. Do not put Him

off with a quarter of an hour morning and evening. Take time to get thoroughly acquainted. Unbosom yourself wholly—every thought, feeling, wish, plan, doubt—to Him. He wants not merely to be on “good terms” with you, if one may use man’s phrase, but to be intimate. Shall you be satisfied with mere acquaintance?

Do not shrink from being alone. Much of a true man’s true life must be so spent. David Brainerd thus writes: “My state of solitude does not make the hours hang heavy upon my hands. Oh, what reason of thankfulness have I on account of this retirement! I find that I do not, and it seems I cannot, lead a Christian life when I am abroad and cannot spend time in devotion, in conversation, and serious meditation, as I should do. These weeks that I am obliged now to be from home, in order to learn the Indian tongue, are mostly spent in perplexity and barrenness, without much relish of divine things; and I feel myself a stranger at the throne of grace for want of a more frequent and continued retirement.”

Much private fellowship with God will give you sevenfold success. Luther used to say, when an unusual press of business came upon him, “I must pray more today.” Be like him in the day of work or trial.

6. Study the Bible

Study it, every word of it; the whole Bible, Old Testament and New—not your favorite chapters merely, but the complete Word of God from beginning to end. Do not trouble yourself with commentators; they may be of use if kept in their place, but they are not your guides; your guide is “the Interpreter,” the one among a thousand (Job 33:23), who will lead you into all truth, and keep you from all error.

Let your other reading be always select; and whatever you read, begin with seeking God’s blessing on it. But see that your relish for the Bible be above every other enjoyment, and the moment you begin to feel greater relish for any other book, lay it down till you have sought deliverance from such a snare, and obtained from the Holy

Spirit a keener appetite for the Word of God (Jeremiah 15:16; Psalm 19:7-10).

7. Take Heed to Your Steps

“Walk *circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise*”; like men in an enemy’s country, or like travelers climbing a hill, slippery with ice, and terrible with precipices, where every step may be a fall, and every fall a plunge into a chasm. Beware of little slips; they are the beginning of all backsliding, and they are in themselves hateful to God. Keep your garments undefiled (Revelation 3:4); and the moment you discover any speck, however small, go wash in the fountain, that your “*garments may be always white*” and so pleasing in the eyes of Him, whose you are, and whom you serve. “*Crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts*” (Galatians 5:24). “*Mortify your members which are upon the earth*” (Colossians 3:5).

Walk “straight up,” along the path of life, like a forgiven man, with God at your side (Genesis 5:24; 6:9), and with the joy of the Lord for your strength (Nehemiah 8:9; Ecclesiastes 9:7); doing heartily your daily work, whether sacred or common, with an unshaded brow and an earnest but cheerful face. In short, watch against your old self at every point.

8. Put Away Boastfulness and Love of Praise

God’s aim in all His doings of grace is to hinder boasting; to keep the sinner humble. All that the old Christian can say is, “*By the grace of God I am what I am*”; and the youngest has no other confidence or boast. All “*confidence in the flesh*” (Philippians 3:1, 3), all trust in self, all reliance on the creature, are set aside by that great work of the Divine Substitute, who did all for us, and left us nothing out of which to extract a boast (2 Corinthians 12:9; Galatians 6:14; Isaiah 41:16; 45:25).

What things before were gain to us, these we then counted loss for Christ; and we ceased for ever to glory in the flesh, or to be debtors to anything but the blood and righteousness of the Son of God. We learned to

say, “*God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Gal. 6:14).

Let us fling away self-esteem and high-mindedness, for it is the very essence of unbelief. Put away all envy, and jealousy of others, as well as all malice and evil-speaking (Ephesians 4:31). Don’t grudge a brother a few words of honest praise, unless you have very special reasons for disallowing the eulogy.

If God puts work into your hands, do it faithfully, through good report or bad report. Do not fret when things go wrong with you or your schemes. If called to preside or manage, do it; and do it with energy and authority, as one who has a trust to fulfill. But “*seek not great things for thyself*” (Jeremiah 45:5); “*He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve*” (Luke 22:26).

9. Watch Against Satan

He is above all others your enemy. It is with him that you are to fight, “*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*” (Ephesians 6:12). The world tries to bewitch and beguile us; but it is the “*god of this world,*” that so especially lays snares for us, making use of the world’s beauty, and pleasure, and vanity for leading us captive at his will.

We know that through his successful wiles, perilous times are to come, when many, while lovers of self, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure, are still to have the “*form of godliness*” (2 Timothy 3:1-4); and we know that the last days are to be like the days of Noah and Lot (Luke 17:26-32), days of revelling, and banqueting, and luxury. Let us be wary, lest, standing as we do on the edge of these days, we be drawn away into the sins of an age led captive by Satan at his will.

10. Beware of One-Sided Truth

There are few things more dangerous or more likely to lead into open error. Take

care, for instance, of misunderstanding what the Scripture says about the old man and the new man, the flesh and the spirit, and so making void your own personal responsibility for all you say and do, and also setting aside the necessity for the blood of Christ, as daily needed for our whole person, and the power of the Spirit, as needed constantly for our whole being, as long as we live.

Beware specially of this one-sidedness in everything connected with Christ Himself. Faith connects us with the Person of Christ in all its parts and aspects, from the cradle to the throne, from Bethlehem to the heaven of heavens. It connects us with His birth, His life, His death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension, and glory. Out of all these it draws life and strength. This is the heritage of faith.

11. Do Something for God

You were neither born nor re-born for yourselves alone. You may not be able to do much, but do something; work while it is day. You may not be able to give much, but give something, according to your ability, remembering that the Lord loveth a cheerful giver.

Do something, then, for God, while time lasts. It may not be long; for the day goeth away, and the shadows of evening are stretched out. Do something every day. Work joyfully and with a right good will, as men who love both their work and their master. Be not weary in well-doing. Work, and work in faith, in love, in patience, and in hope. Don’t shrink from hard labor or disagreeable duties, or a post trying to flesh and blood. “*Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*” (2 Timothy 2:3). Be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). Don’t give way to slothfulness and flesh-pleasing, saying to yourselves, “I can get to heaven without working.”

12. Live Waiting for Your Lord

He that loves Christ will long to see Him. The lover seeks the absent loved one, the

wife the husband, the child the mother, so do you your Lord. It is not enough that you can communicate with Him daily by the epistles which faith brings and carries; you must see Him face to face, otherwise there is a blank in your life, a void in your existence, a cloud over your love, and a faltering in your song. The saved one desires to meet his Saviour, and feels that his joy must be imperfect till then. It is the mark of a disciple that he "waits for the Son of God from heaven" (1 Thessalonians 1:10); that he loves, looks for, longs for the appearance of Christ.

13. *The Lord Our God*

"*I am the Lord your God,*" was God's greeting of love to Israel (Leviticus 11:44); it is no less now His salutation of grace to every one who has believed on the name of His Son, Christ Jesus. God becomes our God the moment that we receive His testimony of His beloved Son. This new relationship between God and us, in virtue of which He calls us His, and we call Him ours, is the simple result of a believed gospel.

When God said to Israel, "*I am the Lord your God,*" He added this, "*Ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves; and ye shall be holy, for I am holy.*" God calls us to be holy. He becomes our God to make us like Himself.

He glorifies Himself in our imperfect bodies; in an imperfect Church, on an imperfect earth. His object here is to glorify Himself in imperfection and growth, as He is hereafter to glorify Himself in perfection and completeness of every kind.

He expects us to grow in unlikeness to this world, and in likeness to that world which is to come. He expects us to follow Him who did no sin, even though the attainment of perfection should not be in a day or a year, but the growth of a lifetime.

Let us grow daily and hourly.

14. *Hindrances to Avoid*

Many things can hinder growth and fruit-bearing. Mark the following:

Unbelief: "*So we see they could not enter in because of unbelief*" (Hebrews 3:19). This poisons the tree at its very root. Christ can do

no mighty works in us, or for us, because of unbelief (Matthew 13:58; compare John 7:38).

Want of love: No love, no fruit; much love, much fruit (Hebrews 10:24). Love is by its very nature fruit-bearing. When we "*leave our first love*" (Revelation 2:4), then everything that deserves the name of fruit dies away. Get more love by dealing more with Jesus personally, and then love will set you on fire. You will work unbidden; you will work in the liberty of fellowship and in the joy of love (1 Thessalonians 3:12; Galatians 5:6; 2 Corinthians 5:14).

Selfishness (Mark 8:34): Self in all its forms is a hindrance to our growth (Romans 14:7). Self-will, self-sufficiency, self-indulgence, self-importance, self-glory, self-seeking, self-brooding—all these mar fruitfulness. Denying self is the beginning, the middle, and the end of our course here, as followers of Christ. Selfishness takes the form of covetousness, or love of money; of luxury, or love of meats and drinks, and the good things of this life. These are some of the forms of selfishness which destroy both growth and fruitfulness.

Pride: Self-satisfaction in any shape, or self-admiration of any kind, in regard to person, or property, or accomplishments, or position; these are immensely hurtful to spiritual life. True godliness prospers only in the lowly heart; the heart which, in proportion as it becomes more and more satisfied with Christ, becomes more and more dissatisfied with itself. If the Master was meek and lowly, shall the disciple be anything else?

Easy-mindedness: To take things easy is by some reckoned a great virtue; and not to get warm or excited or zealous, is regarded as proof of a noble and well-balanced mind. This be the case in worldly matters. To lose a fortune, and yet be calm, is well. But to take religion easy is not to be commended. Easy-going religionists are strangers to the fervor of John or Paul. The good-natured formality of thousands is just the hateful lukewarmness of Laodicea.

15. *Be of Good Cheer*

Though we bid you count the cost, yet we

say to you, as God said to Israel, “Behold, the LORD your God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged” (Deuteronomy 1:21).

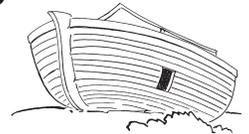
Be of good courage. You have God upon your side. You have Christ to fight for you. You have the Holy Spirit to sustain and comfort you. You have more encouragements than discouragements. You have the example of millions that have gone before you. You have exceeding great and precious

promises (2 Peter 1:4). You have many fellow-travelers and fellow-soldiers on the right hand and on the left. You have a bright Kingdom in view which will compensate for all trial and conflict here. And the way is short. The toil will soon be over. The battle will not last forever. Greater is He that is with you than all that can be against you. Be strong in the Lord. Be strong in His love and in His power. Take to you the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10, 11).■

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Beginning Issues



The Age of the Earth; Is It Important?

by John Mullett

Over the next several articles we will be looking at the age of the Earth and its importance. The majority of scientists have for the past 150-200 years declared the Earth as being old to the tune of several billion years. The current generally accepted age of the Earth is about 4.6 billion years. The church universal has largely accepted the long ages and rather than using the Bible to refute the long ages has instead tried to modify/reinterpret the Bible to fit the “findings” of science. But is this justifiable? Is it even important? Does it really matter what happened in the beginning if indeed there was a beginning? Isn't the most important thing that we get right

what we believe about the here and now? Why bother with debates about something that happened 4,000-6,000 years ago even by a biblical time-scale?

I have heard Ken Ham of *Answers in Genesis* relate how one of the frequent positions taken by Christians is that of “why can't we just agree on the essentials” referring primarily to the New Testament doctrines and Christ's birth, death, and resurrection and how that relates to us and our sin. Ken then raises questions such as, “What is sin?” In order to find the meaning and significance of sin we must look at Genesis 3. When we examine the Scriptures we find that every Christian doctrine

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

either directly or indirectly finds its foundation in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. If Christianity does not accept a literal interpretation of Genesis then it has no foundation or logical basis for its beliefs.

Once we truly grasp the significance of Genesis' foundational nature to the rest of the Scriptures we soon understand it's not a battle of young earth vs. old earth. What is at stake is the authority of God's Word. The age of the earth in and of itself would be an insignificant issue if God wouldn't have given us the historical account that He did in Genesis. Many argue for various re-interpretations of Genesis allowing for the millions of years but when asked about the meaning of Genesis, Oxford Hebrew scholar, Professor James Barr, had this to say, "... probably, so far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Genesis 1-11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that:

1. creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience.
2. the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the

world up to later stages in the biblical story.

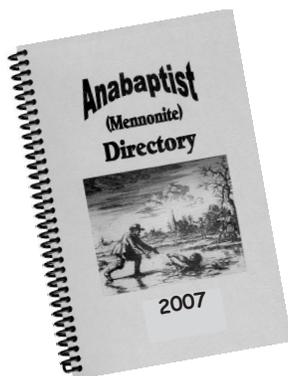
3. *Noah's flood was understood to be world-wide and extinguished all human and animal life except for those in the ark."*¹

When we examine the text for ourselves it is quite clear what the writer/s of Genesis' intent was. It is only as we bring in opinions and interpretations from outside of Scripture that we see the need for re-interpretation. The obvious principle violated here is the words of men are being esteemed more highly than the Word/s of God. And that is why the age of the Earth becomes a significant point. God has revealed to us how and when He made the Earth and all of its inhabitants in the Bible and especially the Book of Genesis; for us to say it was in any other fashion is rather arrogant indeed. For much more on this topic visit www.answersingenesis.org. Click on the answers tab and look for Creation: Why It Matters. You may wish to check out the Institute for Creation research website: www.icr.org as well and browse their article section. ■

ENDNOTES

1. <http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/tools/Quotes/barr.asp>

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A Christian Vision of Beauty

Part 3

by R. Albert Mohler Jr.

The Christian vision of beauty not only tells us why the world is beautiful—but not quite. Secondly, the Christian worldview explains why the face of a child with Down's syndrome is more beautiful than the cover girl in the fashion magazine. The unity of the good, the beautiful, the true, and the real calls us to look below the surface and to understand that the ontological reality of every single human being is that we are made in the image of God. The *imago Dei* is the beauty in each of us, and the rest is but of cosmetic irrelevance.

Just as we, in our fallenness, are likely to see the fallen aspects of creation as beautiful, we are also likely to try to validate ourselves in an artificial humanism of worshiping the creature. When we look at our fellow human beings, or frankly, when we look in the mirror, we are likely to be led astray by prevailing concepts of prettiness and attractiveness rather than to gaze into the mirror or to gaze into our neighbor and see one made in the image of God. The *imago Dei* is the complete and transformative category here, and without it we are left with nothing but the superficial. The *imago Dei* explains why the child with Down's syndrome is far more beautiful in herself than the cover girl in the fashion magazine.

First of all, let us remember that one of the transcendentals is the *real*. What does it say of us that we live in a culture in which the cover girl is the ideal, and yet no one actually looks like that? The *Times* of London recently forecast that eighty percent of all women will have cosmetic surgery at some point. What kind

of world is this? Now, most of us, and I am the first of sinners in this category, would not want to answer the door to face a television camera first thing in the morning. We get dressed. We use various techniques and technologies. We are at least somewhat attuned to the fashions of the day. So if we suggest that we Christians are completely without concern for attractiveness, we lie. But at the same time, we ought to be the people who understand that this is mere window dressing. This is an apron of fig leaves, placed upon our nakedness in the garden.

In reality, a Christian worldview that takes full account of human sinfulness is the only way that we can understand how prevailing cultural standards tend to dehumanize our fellow human beings. We delude ourselves into thinking that attractiveness means beauty. Just as nature can lie with its attractive creatures, so also we can lie with the attractiveness we try to portray on the news stands, on the television, in Hollywood, or in the mirror. An entire industry of billions of dollars is built upon the lie that one can buy enough or endure enough, suffer enough or apply enough, to be genuinely beautiful. The whole category of pornography is one big mutual co-conspiracy to deny the beautiful in favor of a perverted ideal of attractiveness. The real is denied, because given the insatiable desire of the sinner toward erotic attractiveness, the real no longer suffices. Thus the imagined and the fantasized become the hunger that is the appetite to be met.

Let me return to the child with Down's syndrome. In what way is every single

human being beautiful? First of all, it is by virtue of the very fact that every individual is made in the image of God. What if an individual fails to meet up to current cultural or even scientific or medical definitions of what it means to be adequately human? We are the people who must say this person is still beautiful, still true, still good—not in the sense that we would bless a disease, but in the sense that we would bless the individual who is made in the image of God. Our societal failure to see this is a symptom of something gone terribly wrong in us.

Life is not usually a pretty process. It is not an attractive process. But in its own way, it reflects the beauty of the Creator and His perfect justice, His absolute goodness, and His determination to bring glory to Himself. We should be able to look at the face of a senior saint and see scars and wrinkles and blemishes that have been won through the engagement with the realities of life, and say, “You are beautiful!” Remember the good, the beautiful, the true, and the real? We should not wish to hide this. We should not wish to turn away.

I was approached some time ago by a young minister—a new pastor—who made a call upon an elderly lady who was in the hospital. Being like so many young pastors, as all of us who have been in that position can well remember, he was confronted with someone who needed more than he knew how to give. This elderly church member turned to him from her hospital bed and said, “Am I pretty?” He told me, “I lied and said ‘Yes.’” The woman was suffering in the last stages of a degenerative disease, and she wasn’t pretty. So that pastor’s answer was probably the wrong one. I understood his heart, but I told him, “You need to change *pretty* to *beautiful*. This isn’t pretty, but it is beautiful.” Thus, we can speak of beauty recovered even in that moment when, in a countercultural move, we say pretty really isn’t important. In reality, pretty wasn’t important

when this woman was twelve. Pretty really wasn’t important when she was twenty. Pretty is not important now. In heaven, there will be no pretty people, only beautiful saints, made beautiful by the grace of God and for God’s glory alone.

The Christian worldview and the Christian vision of beauty explains why the world is beautiful but not quite, and why the face of a child with Down’s syndrome is more beautiful than the face of the model on the fashion magazine, but thirdly, the Christian understanding of beauty explains why the cross is beautiful and not tragic. Here redemption comes full circle, and our conversation about beauty is directed towards the One who is beautiful and His beautiful cross.

How dare we sing a song like that—about the beauty of the cross? Nietzsche would identify that as one more embrace of weakness by a decadent people who are so delusional that they would give themselves even to embracing the sign of their own vacuous hope. But once again, we are reminded that the beautiful is the good, and the true, and the real. The incarnation is a demonstration of God’s beautiful love, and the One who was born in Bethlehem’s manger was a beautiful babe. Thus John will say, “We beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Now this glory—this beauty—that is explicitly and wondrously ascribed to the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ is not attractiveness. It is not prettiness. Indeed the Prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 53:3, “He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

The cross is beautiful, not tragic. As Isaiah 53:3 reminds us, there was no prettiness in Jesus, and the cross itself certainly is not pretty. It is a symbol of execution. Yet we know the reality. We know the truth, and thus we embrace the cross as a beautiful cross on which hung

a beautiful Saviour, whose death was a beautiful death. In terms of humans, there are no beautiful deaths. Only one death was beautiful, and that was the death of the One who died for our sins.

In 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul says, “For God, who said light shall shine out of darkness, is the one who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” Thus we who have been called to faith, who have come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, and who have been transformed by the grace of God, now see the Lord Jesus Christ and His cross as beautiful.

In Revelation 22, we are reminded of how God will one day bring beauty to perfection. “Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, on either side of the river, was the Tree of Life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse”—there’s the corruption reversed—“and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and His bondservants will serve Him, they will see His face, they will gaze upon Him. And His name will be on their foreheads, and there will be no longer any night and they will not have need of the light of a lamp, nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them and they will reign forever and forever.”

Let me conclude by suggesting that for Christians, beauty is an evangelistic category. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky put in the mouth of one of his characters this phrase: “Beauty is the battlefield where God and Satan contend with each other for the hearts of men.” And thus it is. In one sense, the evil one tempts with prettiness, and lies about beauty, and corrupts the good, the beautiful, the true, and the real, sundering them from each other and celebrat-

ing the confusion. He celebrates whenever something ugly is called true, when something unreal is called beautiful. Evangelism, then, is a matter of restoring the unity of the transcendentals. The unity that has been sundered, however, can only be put back together again by the one who created the world, and thus redeems.

It is no accident when we are told in Romans 10 that the one who carries the Gospel has beautiful feet. A recovery of beauty can only come by recovering humanity. It can only come by recovering truth, and it can only come by recovering the good and the real, by the power of God.

Beauty is for us an evangelistic mandate, a missiological purpose. We are the people who know what beauty is—not that we have seen it yet with our eyes, but we have seen it in a foretaste, and we have been promised it with an assured promise. In this life, we live amidst the pretty, the corrupt, and the artificial. We live among those who do not believe beauty exists, and among those who think beauty can be manufactured. In such a context, we are the ones who have to say we know beauty, and it is none other than Jesus Christ the Lord. ■

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Church Sign Quotes

Wise men think before talking. Others reverse the order.

As we grow older and wiser, we can talk less but say more.

Wisdom is least heeded when most needed.

Knowledge comes but wisdom lingers.

—From *Pulpit Helps* with permission by W. Clayton Brumby

Christ's Substitutionary Atonement

by John J. Forry

There is one amazing fact discovered since the fall of man; God did not abandon man in his sinful state. The effect of sin upon the human heart was of such a serious nature that God provided the remedy which, if man accepts, will bring him back into fellowship with Him. To prove His supreme love, He gave His only begotten Son as a sacrifice to take away man's sin. While the term "substitutionary atonement" is not used in the Bible, the concept is seen many times. It means that Jesus Christ died upon the cross in man's place. His death was "for" us and it was "instead" of us. He endured all that belonged to us as sinners, so that we might stand as free from guilt and condemnation as the Son of God.

The theme of salvation is woven like a scarlet thread throughout the entire Scriptures. The doctrine of substitution unfolds, beginning at Genesis and ends in Revelation. Note carefully in Genesis 22:8, Abraham responds to Isaac's question: "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" by saying "God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering." The lamb was a substitute for a **person**. In Exodus 12, a lamb was slain; the blood was applied on the doorposts and on the lintel of the house to spare them from the death angel. The lamb was a substitute for a **family**. In Leviticus there were many sacrifices of animals and lambs. The substitutionary principle is for a **nation**. In Isaiah 53 there is a change in reference to the substitutionary lamb. Before this passage, the lamb is referred to as an animal, but in this passage and beyond, the lamb refers to the person of Christ. Coming into the New Testament, we have the lamb identified by John the Baptist as the Lord Jesus Christ. He says, "Behold the Lamb

of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He is the substitute for the whole world! In the eighth chapter of Acts, we see how the lamb is **exemplified** in the heart of the Ethiopian eunuch. Finally, in Revelation 5, the Lamb of God is **magnified** by the entire host of heaven and later He is **glorified**—seated upon the throne of God (Revelation 22:1).

Dear reader, it is this Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who was willing to come into this world and die as your substitute and mine before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20). His death was an appointment, not an accident. Because God is eternal, the ransom paid for our release has to be eternal. We read in Scripture that our Lord suffered in three dimensions. He suffered socially, spiritually, and physically for us.

He suffered socially. Isaiah says, "He was despised and rejected and forsaken by men" (Isaiah 53:3, AMPLIFIED). John 1:11 says, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." The first usage "His own" likely refers to mankind in general, while the second refers to the Jewish nation, His own people. Also, He lost the support of those near Him. The Prophet Isaiah spoke prophetically that the Messiah would suffer internal grief over the lack of response from those He came to serve. Matthew 26:56 states when Jesus was arrested, "all the disciples forsook Him and fled." Judas Iscariot betrayed Him and the others deserted Him, including Peter who boasted saying, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death" (Luke 22:33).

Christ also suffered spiritually. While He was hanging on the cross, at high noon, the land suddenly became dark (Matthew 27:45). It was during this

period of time that God's wrath of divine judgment fell upon our Lord. He suffered intense agony and terrible isolation. At three o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus cried with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). It was at this moment He became our sin offering. As the Father looked and saw our sins placed upon the sinless Substitute, He withdrew from the Son; and He bore your sins and mine **alone!** There seems to be different views about these words of Christ on the cross. *Vine's Dictionary* of Old and New Testament words defines the word *forsaken* to mean "abandonment, leave in straits, or helpless." John MacArthur made a clear comment on these words, "At that period of time when Jesus took our sin upon Himself, the Father withdrew Himself from the Son. Christ did not cease to be a member of the Trinity, but for a period of time, the intimacy of fellowship with His Father was separated and He hung there alone." George R. Brunk II once paraphrased it this way, "My God, my God, why have you taken away the hedge?" He was fully exposed to demons and devils. He truly suffered spiritually; and when He shouted, "It is finished! Father, into Thy hands I commend my Spirit!," it indicates that He was in complete control of His faculties (John 19:30; Luke 23:46).

He suffered physically. The Prophet Isaiah also wrote about the sufferings Jesus took upon Himself that we deserved. In verses 5 and 6: "He [Jesus] was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, . . . and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." The term *wounded* means "pierced through." His hands and feet were pierced by the nails and His side by a spear. On the cross, our Lord was "bruised" which means He was "crushed under the weight of a burden." Obviously that burden was "the iniquity of us all" (v. 6). Sin is a burden that grows heavier the longer we resist God. He was "chastened" by many "stripes" on the way to the cross. That

punishment brought us healing, spiritually because of the forgiveness of sins. Thank God for the cross; for it is God's remedy for the sin of the world, the very best God could do.

The great truth of substitution shown in the death of Christ on the cross "the just for the unjust," means God, Himself, holds His integrity as Judge, while being at the same time the Justifier of those who believe in Jesus. First Peter 3:18 tells us, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." Christ died vicariously, "taking the place of another." He stood before God as the Perfect and Ideal man. Being that Ideal man, He was made the perfect sacrifice that satisfied the righteousness and justice of God and has become acceptable to God. Romans 3:26 says all this happened that God might be just (that sin might be punished) and yet at the same time, become the justifier of him who believes in Jesus (that He might declare sinners, "not guilty"). Because of Christ's work on the cross, atonement has been made possible between sinful man and a Holy God.

Atonement means, setting "at one" those who had been separated from God. That alienation has been ended. The Old Testament word for atonement is *Kophar* which means "to cover." Psalm 32:1 tells us, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered [*kophar*]." Sacrifices only held back and restrained God's judgment, but "God in Christ reconciled the world unto himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). His was a work of expiation, meaning sin and its guilt was removed. Every blot of sin was forgiven. It purges and cleanse every heart who comes to Christ by faith. The Apostle John says, "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

When Jesus died for the sins of the world, it was like putting forgiveness on deposit; so that whoever wants to can

draw from it for personal use. The atonement is sufficient for the sin of all mankind, yet it must be appropriated on an individual basis and openly confessed for absolute salvation.

With these precious truths in Scripture, a concern arises; why do so many professing Christians live as if we must add more to complete our salvation? Paul wrote about the rise of another gospel, which in reality wasn't a gospel (Galatians 1:6). One problem today is a mere works religion. Some very conscientious Christians labor through life by an effort of good morality, while having great difficulty appropriating the grace of God. Many people, conservative or modern, believe they establish saving merit by moral exactness, charity involvement, active in church programs, and displaying memorial projects to a good cause. The Biblical account of Cornelius says that he was a devout man, but it was not enough. Peter had to lead him to personal salvation (Acts 10).

The social gospel has gained prominence in many church circles and has

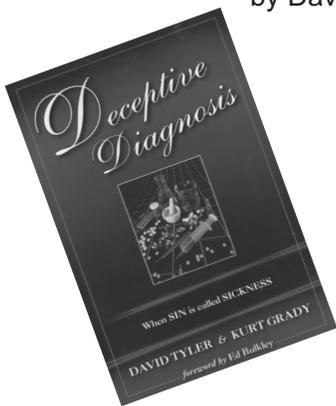
become a substitute for the genuine. Our church colleges have offered special courses and graduated people for recognized social vocations. This has affected the mission zeal of the Church by eroding the more spiritual and Biblical doctrine of salvation from sin. To support the social gospel, the modern church is being challenged to become politically involved. John Howard Yoder's book, *The Politics of Jesus*, portrays Jesus as a political figure above and beyond our Redeemer. This problem of equating the political and social action to that kind of salvation has placed the interest of salvation at a lesser point. The message emphasized is—We are saved in "vocation" and not by the "blood of Christ." It is the power of God in social efficacy. Peace, instead of salvation by Jesus Christ, has become the motive of the Gospel.

May God spare us from these modern religious themes. Let us teach and preach as the Apostle Paul, "Jesus Christ, and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). ■

Deceptive Diagnosis

When Sin Is Called Sickness

by David Tyler & Kurt Grady



From the Foreword by Ed Bulkley:

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

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Revelation 22

by David L. Burkholder

Regardless of one's eschatological viewpoint, there are some certainties upon which all biblicists are in general agreement. Several of these are highlighted here in Revelation 22. This chapter tells us: 1) that Jesus is coming, and 2) that He is coming soon. Three times that message is repeated in this passage. Furthermore, the angel told John that "these sayings are true and faithful." They were so because they came straight from the Lord God Almighty. They are not to be trifled with. They are sure. The clear message to man is to pay attention to "the words of this prophecy," for therein lies the answer to his destiny.

In the very first verse of the Book of Revelation we are informed of the origin of the message, its purpose and the method of its delivery. The Father gave the message to the Son who gave it to an angel to deliver to His servant John who was instructed to write and send forth the message. The purpose of the message was to reveal to "his servants things which must shortly come to pass." A blessing also is pronounced upon those who read and obey "the words of this prophecy." There again we are informed of the nature of the book, that it contains a prophetic message to God's people concerning events yet in the future.

After verifying the source of the message in Chapter 1, and recording specific messages to the seven churches of Asia in Chapters 2 and 3, John, in Chapter 4, launches into an explanation of a series of visions given to him depicting the "things which must be hereafter." These visions contain descriptions of the state of evil, God-rejecting mankind, punishments to be meted out upon the unrepentant, and the ultimate triumph of the church. The book is written in highly figurative and descriptive language. And

while some of the scenes portrayed by John are cloaked in ambiguity and difficult to comprehend given our limited human understanding, we do need to remember as we read that God gave this message to "show to his servants things which must shortly come to pass." So, in spite of our limited understanding, or tendency to spiritualize what we do not understand, or to ignore it because of its difficulty, we must be aware that through it all God is attempting to communicate issues of importance to His people. It is our duty to study until the intended message becomes clear in relation to its effect upon our lives and our eternal destiny.

Throughout the book we see the hand of God at work, providing for His people, visiting wrath upon those who refuse His mercy, ravage His people and attempt to thwart His plans and purposes. Then in Chapter 19 the scene shifts and we begin to see the triumph of the church, the people of God who have been redeemed out of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and peoples. The book concludes by depicting the great contrast between the final state of God's people and those who reject Him. Heavenly bliss awaits the one; eternal damnation and torment the other.

Here in these last verses of the book (6-21) we are reminded again of the authenticity and urgency of the message. It is from God. He is the authority behind the message. Urgency in proclaiming this message is expressed by the angel's command to John (v. 10) to publicize the message, for the events spoken of are close at hand. Warning has been given, two destinies are clearly outlined, and a final appeal is given to those on the wrong side of God's favor (v. 17). We are reminded of the imminency of Christ's return and informed of the blessing to be given to those who obey the commandments of

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