

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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Thorn in the Flesh

(from 2 Corinthians 12:1-10)

Craig Eicher, Butler, IN

A shadow falls across my life, imposing its cruel power,
I sigh; I know it well; it's with me every hour.
A hindrance, an obstacle, and a cruel pain has taken its toll.
The pain! The pain! I cannot bear it—I cry and lose control.

I ask my Lord to vanquish it lest I should die in vain;
I asked Him once; I asked Him thrice; His words to me are plain.
“My grace is sufficient for the day, My strength in weakness glows,
As in your pain you serve Me still, in you My power grows.”

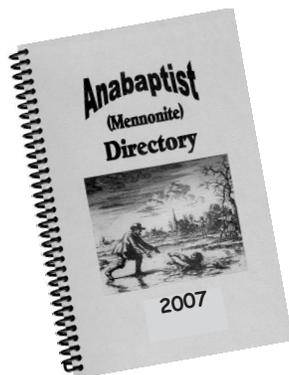
A shadow falls; it pains me still, yet cannot kill my joy,
Despite the grief that Satan brings with all he can employ.
I'm saved by grace; on my way home and Christ's power rests on me;
All Satan's power—this shadow, too, was nailed upon His tree.

This shadow falls by God's decree lest pride should lift its voice,
Though once I struggled 'neath its weight, I bear it now by choice.

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Person of the Month: *John R. Shank* (1877-1958)



John R. Shank was born August 10, 1877, near Versailles, Missouri, to Lewis and Mary (Wenger) Shank.

During his middle teen years he was led to the Lord due to the influence of J. S. Coffman. He was subsequently baptized and joined the Mennonite Church.

Brother Shank attended the Bible Department of Elkhart Institute and then went on to Goshen College for further studies. He was especially interested in the study of God's Word. He studied Greek so that he could more clearly understand the New Testament. During those years of schooling he was also a member of a literary society so that he could develop proper public speaking ability.

His studies were curtailed when in 1905, at the age of 28, he answered the call to take charge of a small mission outpost at Pea Ridge near Hannibal, Missouri. He was ordained to the ministry there. It was difficult for the people in the Pea Ridge community to make a living due to the rough terrain, but as a person who was used to a life of self-sacrifice Brother John was able to be of help and service.

By 1908, when John was 31, the mission church was well established with 40 members. Since John W. Hess was available to come and pastor the congregation, Brother Shank was able to accept a call from conference to minister in the Osage River district south of his home area of Versailles. This region of the state was very hilly and the dirt roads in this section were very poor for vehicle travel, so Brother Shank traveled mainly by horseback or walking. He visited many preaching points some distance away as well as visiting in people's homes where his witness was much appreciated.

John served alone all these years until 1925, when at the age of 48 he married Clara M. Brubaker of Birch Tree, Missouri, on March 8. They never had children of their own but over the years of ministry they nurtured many others.

In 1941, at the age of 64, John was ordained bishop with oversight in southern Missouri.

At some point during Brother Shank's forty years of ministry in Osage the whole region changed due to the construction of a large dam and a man-made lake known as Lake of the Ozarks. People had to pull up stakes and move so that the area could be flooded to make the lake. As a result, beautiful new homes sprung up, paved roads were built, and communities were established, but the church community was scattered because the lake divided the whole region in two. Life on the Osage would never be the same again.

John and Clara had to sell their home as well and move upland. Now they had to start from the beginning to build a new church community. John was now past 60 years of age and this contributed to the work being difficult and discouraging. With the lake in the middle, it was impossible to give the same kind of pastoral care, as he had done previously, to the various church groups that had been formed in the area years before.

(continued on page 6)

Thoroughly Engaged and Utterly Distinct

by Denis Haack

What does it mean to be in the world, but not of it?

Sometimes a simple idea is hard to define—at least in a way we can all agree on.

An example is the seemingly simple truth that God’s people are to live *in* the world but not be *of* it. Even Christians who share a common theological heritage often differ sharply over what that looks like in practice. And sometimes we differ so sharply that we actually question the faith of those who think differently. Specific issues shift over time and across generations, of course, but it isn’t hard to find a hot button.

“In the world but not of it” goes back to something Jesus said. In the hours before His crucifixion, He prayed for all who would believe in Him. “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world,” John records Him saying, “but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it” (John 17:15, 16). A simple prayer, yet within a century of His resurrection Christians argued about how to apply it.

This is not a theoretical issue for me. The theological tradition in which I was raised takes holiness seriously, and it instilled in me a longing to please God. That tradition, however, sees engagement with culture as being “of the world.”

How we understand Jesus’ prayer has a profound impact on our lives. Loving the world and loving God are mutually exclusive. “Do not love the world or anything in the world,” John writes. “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). And Paul directly warns us: “Do not be conformed . . . to the pattern of this world” (Romans 12:2).

Since the stakes are so high, it would be wise to think the matter through. And to do that, we need to go deeper into the Scriptures.

Life Since the Fall

Beginning with the story of the Fall, the Bible reveals three sources of temptation: the flesh, the devil, and the world.

Sometimes the word *flesh* (*sárx*) in the new New Testament refers to the physical body. John 1:14, for example, refers to Christ’s incarnation as the “Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” Paul uses *sárx* to mean the bodies of human beings, animals, birds, and fish (1 Corinthians 15:39). When the context places *sárx* in contrast with God’s will or spirit, however, it refers to man’s fallen nature. Paul says, for example, that “the sinful nature [*sárx*] desires what is contrary to the Spirit” and then contrasts the “acts of the sinful nature” with the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:17, 19-22). Thus, in this sense, the flesh is that inner array of weakness and evil desire which is drawn to sin.

The devil, in contrast, represents an outer source of personal corruption. “Be self-controlled and alert,” Peter says, “your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith” (1 Peter 5:8, 9). The devil is “our accuser” (Revelation 12:10), speaking foul of us to our Father. Sometimes we can hear echoes of his accusations when doubt or a sense of abandonment suddenly weighs us down, sapping our assurance. The attack seems to come from outside us, striking like a

PAGE 2

SWORD AND TRUMPET

dart. By grace we have armor that enables us to “stand against the devil’s schemes” (Ephesians 6:11).

Then there is the world. The *world* (*kósmos*) sometimes refers to the earth or to all of humanity, as when John says Christ came into the world He created (John 1:10), a world that God loves (John 3:16). *Kósmos* is also used in a distinctly negative way, referring to the systems, values, and ways of life woven into human society that actively oppose God, His Word, and kingdom. This is the world we must not love, since “everything in it,” John tells us, “comes not from the Father” (1 John 2:15-17).

This is the Bible, then, on living in the world but not being of it. Now we need to reflect on what it means so we can apply it to daily life. We will consider two unfortunate reactions, one subtle myth, and then eight practical questions.

Two Unfortunate Reactions

In *Chameleon Christianity*, Dick Keyes, the director of L’Abri Fellowship in Southborough, Mass., points out that Christians are tempted to react to a fallen world in two unbiblical ways.

The first is to withdraw into a subculture where life seems safer and purer. Daily life is busy, and involvement in Christian activities keeps us in a closed circle, safe from the corrupted world.

The second is to accommodate, to simply go with the flow, to quietly blend in, convinced that we aren’t “worldly”—we’re just careful to make sure non-Christians aren’t turned off to the gospel.

But if the gospel is the power of God, then there is no reason to withdraw—or accommodate (Romans 1:16). “Like rocks dropped into a pond,” Keyes says, “Christians are dropped into society. What kind of waves do they make? Jesus calls us to make waves that are positive and transforming while we keep our distinctively Christian identity.” To withdraw is a practical refusal to be in the world. And to accommodate is a refusal to stand apart

from it.

One Subtle Myth

A common myth among evangelicals confuses the issue. As Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs demonstrate in *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience*, this myth actually comes from pagan Greek beliefs; it says that life is divided between the spiritual and the material, and that only the spiritual is eternally significant. In this view, things like Bible reading, prayer, and evangelism are spiritual; things like cooking, carpentry, and selling cell phones are material. Why read *that* book when you could be reading the Bible? Fiction may be “good,” but there is “something better.” Your problem can be solved by, say, witnessing while you work as a carpenter, or composing music that is sacred instead of secular. It can be solved by spiritualizing the less spiritual things. But the truth, as Francis Schaeffer once said, is that for the Christian all of life is not only spiritual, it is *equally* spiritual.

Jesus calls us to make waves that are positive and transforming while we keep our distinctively Christian identity.

Human culture began not at the Fall, but in Creation. God called all things into existence in a riot of beauty and creativity and called it very good (Genesis 1:31). Human beings are made in the image of the Creator, and thus are creative. When God brought Adam and Eve together, the result was poetry (Genesis 2:23), which God was pleased to include in His written Word. Our first parents cultivated God’s good earth, tenderly caring for it and adding their creativity to the world He made (Genesis 2:15). Culture!

When a carpenter finishes his Bible reading and sets about to build a wall, this

too is done to God's glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). As Hans Rookmaaker used to say about art, work well done needs no justification. Jesus Christ is not just Lord of the new creation (Colossians 1:18-20), He is Lord of all creation (Colossians 1:15-17).

***Being "in the world"
slides into "of the world"
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intentionally or not,
to walk into situations
where our flesh uses the
world as an excuse to sin.***

There is great freedom in this. If we are called to vocational ministry, we can be thankful. If our calling is to something else, it is not a lesser calling. Every legitimate vocation can be pursued to God's glory, and can be offered in gratitude and worship.

Eight Questions

And so, with that as background, here are a few questions that might help us determine whether or not we are both transforming the world around us—and maintaining our Christian identity.

1. Does the wonder of grace shape all I am and do? If we fail to understand our sinfulness we will fail to live humbly before God and our neighbors. If we fail to understand grace we will fail to have a quiet confidence in the gospel of Christ. There is no reason for defensiveness or fear as we live in the world, because Christ has overcome it (John 16:33). And there is no reason to act aggressively superior, as if we have everything together, because we are called to humility (1 Peter 5:5).

It is God's grace that makes faithfulness possible in a fallen world. Grace to forgive and be forgiven, grace demonstrated when it isn't deserved, grace which gives the gift of listening to people living sadly fragmented lives, grace to enter the lives of lost

people who doubt any real hope is possible, grace to find creative ways to push back against the sorry effects of the Fall.

Only grace is sufficient to get us past our timidity, fear, and defensiveness so that our lives can exhibit something of God's love, power, and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). Only if we believe what the Bible says about grace will we risk fleshing out the gospel in a world which will try to destroy us.

2. Am I living with integrity, given the weaknesses of my flesh? Taking sin and temptation seriously is freeing because we were made for holiness. "Just as he who called you is holy," Peter writes, "so be holy in all you do" (1 Peter 1:15). This is not an impossible standard, but an invitation to life at its richest.

Jeremiah reminds us of our tendency to self-deception when he says our hearts "are deceitful" (Jeremiah 17:9). Christian community is a grace that allows us to be in relationship with those who love us enough to listen, who will walk alongside us, and call us to account. Being "in the world" slides into "of the world" when we allow ourselves, intentionally or not, to walk into situations where our flesh uses the world as an excuse to sin.

For example, because my wife and I know our weaknesses, there are catalogs we won't keep in our home because they make us discontented with what we have.

3. Am I growing more discerning in our increasingly pluralistic world? Our neighbors, co-workers, and friends do not necessarily share our convictions. As beliefs and values proliferate we'll need to be more biblically discerning, since faithfulness requires thoughtfulness, rather than merely reacting according to how we feel at the moment.

Sometimes, for example, we find ourselves in situations where Christians disagree. Such as when a Muslim neighbor asks us to drive him to the mosque for prayers. Such situations are uncomfortable because there is no text that specifically addresses them. Still, God's Word must be

the light for our path in every circumstance, not just those for which we can find specific texts (Psalm 119:105). It's easy to simply react in such situations, but far better to grow in discernment, creatively applying God's truth to all of life and culture.

4. Am I nourishing my mind, heart, conscience, and imagination in God's Word? If we are to be discerning, we need to not only be familiar with the Bible, but steeped in it. As the Scriptures are our delight, they keep us from being swept away by the ideas, lifestyles, and attitudes of the fallen world (Psalm 1:1, 2). As God's written Word reveals the living Word, it provides "training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Withdrawn Christians rarely know any non-Christians as good friends. Accommodating Christians rarely have anything distinctive to say. The New Testament allows us neither option.

The only way to be sensitive to the lies and temptations of the world is to reflect deeply on their opposite, that which is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8). But must we think only about such things and thus withdraw from the world? Paul says certainly not! Otherwise, we couldn't have thoughtful relationships with sinners—after all, Paul's description of them runs directly counter to this list (Romans 3:9-18). But Paul isn't demanding withdrawal. In fact he specifically commands us not to withdraw, or even to judge non-Christians for their sins. Rather, he calls for preparation, and then engagement. The seductiveness of a fallen world fades when we are passionately in love

with holiness and overwhelmed by grace.

5. Am I mindful of my involvement in the systems, institutions, and values of the world? All of the world's systems and institutions are tainted by the Fall. Or, as John puts it, "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). But like a fish in water, we get used to them—they're simply there—and so we fail to notice how they affect us.

Hard questions reveal our blind spots: How am I shaped by consumerism? Do I ever buy stuff to feel better after a stressful day? Is it ever wise to turn stewardship into a form of therapy? How does advertising make me discontented with what I have? Even if I claim to reject standards of attractiveness, how do they affect the way I respond to people? Does a biblical concern for the earth shape my political involvement? When people sit in my living room do they see a decor shaped by thoughtlessness, or the latest fashion, or a creative attempt to make people feel welcome?

6. Am I intentionally redemptive in my vocation? Regardless of our vocation, we can push back against the effects of the Fall. I met a nurse who worked in the same department as a Christian physician. When I mentioned his name she brightened. "He is an excellent doctor," she said, "but he is more than that. He even takes time to meet the lab technicians and knows them by name—most physicians never notice them." Scripture lights the way, remedying the Fall step by step.

7. Am I engaging our postmodern world with the Gospel? Withdrawn Christians rarely know any non-Christians as good friends. Accommodating Christians rarely have anything distinctive to say. The New Testament allows us neither option.

When Paul visited Athens he was among people who didn't share his Christian faith. Luke's report in Acts 17 shows how Paul intentionally found ways to understand what the Athenians believed. He used their authorities to begin a conversation about

the things that matter most. He used a shrine (17:23) and a truth about God from a pagan poet (who was referring to Zeus) to winsomely engage the Athenians with the gospel.

So another question is, *Am I gaining insight into the beliefs, values, fears, and dreams of those I live and work with?* Windows such as books, papers and magazines allow us to understand another person's world from the inside—without for a moment compromising our Christian convictions.

And a follow-up question is, *Am I using points of contact to engage non-Christians about the big issues of life?* Paul spoke the truth, but from an Athenian perspective. He didn't repeat the same presentation he made in Antioch where people accepted the Bible (Acts 13:13-52). My wife and I have found, for example, that many of the postmodern generation, who have contempt for Christianity, are eager to talk about the music and films that touch them deeply. Good art probes into the big issues of life.

Popular culture is not the only point of contact, though it is the primary one for the postmodern generation. But popular art isn't the issue. The issue is: Are we dis-

covering the best way to present the gospel to our non-Christian friends? Not the way that's most comfortable for us, but the way that's most comprehensible for them?

8. Where do I need to grant freedom to my fellow believers? We don't all have the same weaknesses. We pursue different vocations, though each is enmeshed in some way in the world. Unique callings require different points of contact. Therefore, though we are all to be holy, faithfulness will look different for each believer. It is not diversity, but sin that is forbidden.

In the World But Not of It

Living out Jesus' prayer in a fallen world is imperative, but it is not tidy. We dare not get swept in, and we dare not be aloof. We must be separate while being in the thick of things. And this requires walking by faith together as the community of God's redeemed. ■

Denis Haack is director of Ransom Fellowship, which helps Christians develop skill in discernment.

—Reprinted with permission from *By Faith*, June/July, 2007.

— JOHN R. SHANK . . . cont'd. —

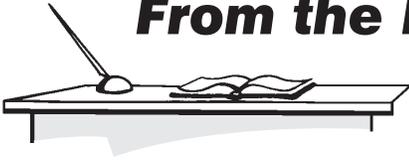
Brother John worked part-time for Mennonite Publishing House. All through those years of ministry in Missouri, John Shank had the opportunity to spend much time in the study of God's Word as he prepared the Adult Teacher's Sunday School Lesson Quarterly from 1915-1950 and as editor of the youth section of *Christian Monitor*. His conference responsibilities included being a member of the Mennonite Commission for Christian Education, secretary of Young People's Bible Meetings, and secretary for conference in the South Central Conference district.

John was faithful to the principles of the Word of God and was diligent in his work. His love and appreciation of people made him well-suited for the ministry that he did in Missouri all those years.

Although married later in life, John and Clara had 33 good years together. Tragically, Brother John R. Shank died in the hospital, at the age of 80, on April 26, 1958, after undergoing a serious operation.

—Gail L. Emerson

From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

The Master's Heartbeat

by Clifford Schrock

Former Vice-President and presidential nominee Al Gore is widely known for his environmental activism. He preaches the need to care for the earth and reduce man-made pollution, especially carbon emissions. He advises people to fight global warming by discovering what their so-called "carbon footprint" is and to calculate their personal impact. He exhorts all to learn how we can take action to reduce or even eliminate emissions of carbon dioxide.

However, records obtained by The Tennessee Center for Policy Research show that the electric bill for Gore's 20-room mansion and pool house averaged \$1359 per month in 2006. During the same period he paid \$536 per month for the main house and \$544 per month for the pool house in gas bills. That totals \$29,268 in gas and electric bills for the Gores in 2006!¹

Obviously there is a major disconnection between Al Gore's preaching and practice. It is an almost laughable irony, were it not so serious. However, this story motivates me to look at my own words and way of living. Specifically, it causes me to ponder my discipleship of the Master.

It is not difficult to see that there is a serious problem within western Christianity. In the United States more than 80% of adults consider themselves to be Christians, but there is a stark lack of evidence consistent with that claim.² The claims of Christianity have little impact on the lifestyle choices of those claiming to be Christian. It is easy to point fingers and say, "If only they would be like

Christ." However, we cannot make disciples until we are one!

Are you a disciple of Jesus? I, and most

... we do give ourselves to the pursuit of treasure, whether it is an inheritance, bigger barns, food, clothing, raiment, or Him. He wants to be the treasure that captivates our attention.

of you as readers, will quickly answer “yes” to this question. But what does this question really mean? What is a disciple? Let’s first ask: Who *were* the disciples? Of course, the first disciples that come to mind are the twelve disciples of Jesus. But there were also other disciples. There was Joseph of Arimathea, Ananias, Paul, Dorcas, Timothy, and many others.³ There were not only disciples of Jesus, but disciples of John the Baptist, Moses’ disciples, and even the Pharisees’ disciples.⁴ It is clear that this term was used in Scripture to describe a specific mindset or a particular type of person.

A study of the twelve or of the other disciples mentioned soon reveals that they had one common cause. They were students and learners of their master. They were pupils who sat at the feet of their master and were consumed by his teaching. Their highest goal was to think and act like the master and feel his heartbeat. In the case of Jesus’ disciples, they became so absorbed in their discipleship that it became their entire life and passion, and eventually, for most of them, their death. For them, it was much more than a theological truth to affirm; it was a lifestyle to be lived.

Too often, I, and perhaps you, have quickly claimed discipleship while actually living out of a box-checking, compartmentalized Christianity. Sometimes, I look over my list of theologies and applications:

- Nonresistance
- Justification
- Sanctification
- Seven Ordinances
- Respect for Authority
- Giving
- Simplicity
- Voluntary Service
- Dress Code
- _____

Hmm, that looks pretty good as I check off the list. But, as I ponder further, I begin to wonder of what or of whom I am a disciple. Remember, there were many disciples in

Jesus’ day; only a few were disciples of Him.

At other times, I sense the fog of an optional, super-Christian mentality clouding my vision. Yes, I accept the teachings of the Master, but His most radical teachings are only for the radical disciple. His teaching on how to treat those who use and abuse us or His teaching on economics are not really practical for everyday living. Those principles are only for the select few who are “called” to that life. I want to be a disciple, but . . .

You may have other things that skew your perception, but the simple question is not quite so easy to answer any more. Just because I claim to be a disciple does not mean I am one!

***We . . . have ways of
rationalizing the
disconnection between
theology and practice.***

We also have ways of rationalizing the disconnection between theology and practice. For example, by buying “green credits” such as parcels of forest that eat up carbon Al Gore can pollute to his heart’s content. He excuses his excesses by saying that his carbon credits offset the emissions and excesses for which he is personally responsible.⁵ You and I would never be guilty of this, would we! Or would we? “Well, I gave \$_____ to missions so it’s okay if I am a little (or a lot) extravagant with _____.” “But, I did my two years of service, now I can get on with life.” “I put in my time, now I can squander my golden years in pleasure.”

Brothers and sisters, I believe Jesus calls us to much more than “lip service.” He calls us to discipleship. He calls us to truly know and live in harmony with His heartbeat. He invites us to discover the treasure of Himself.

In Luke 12, Jesus responds to one who came and addressed him as “Master.” He was in pursuit of something—an inheritance. Jesus responded by warning him of covetousness because there is more to life than the “stuff” that a man accumulates. He followed that response with the parable of the rich fool who had many goods and determined to build bigger barns to contain them. He was in pursuit of treasure, but it wasn’t Jesus. Jesus concludes the parable

by saying, "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." The language in this conclusion suggests that while he was providing for his earthly treasure, he was at the same time depleting his spiritual treasures.

Jesus continues His comments by addressing His disciples. He gives His famous discourse on not worrying about food, raiment, clothing, and all the cares of tomorrow. Instead of seeking these things, His disciples are to seek the kingdom of God. We are to pursue the treasure of His heart as an ongoing action. Jesus calls His disciples to sell out and follow Him. In so doing, they will provide for themselves a treasure that is far beyond any that could be stored in bigger barns. They gain a treasure that cannot be taken away or diminished in any way—a treasure reserved for those who will become His disciples.

His next comment is soul-searching. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Here, and in other places, Jesus refers to Himself as "The Treasure." The implication is that we *do* give ourselves to the pursuit of treasure, whether it is an

inheritance, bigger barns, food, clothing, raiment, or Him. He wants to be the treasure that captivates our attention. He desires to be the focus of our affections. He longs to be the motivation that gets us out of bed in the morning and shapes our days. He yearns to be the "Someone" for whom we are willing to leave all others. He wants to be the prize that drives us beyond our limits and comfort zones. The Master wants you to be His disciple!

It is easy to say "yes" to that invitation. But it is an invitation that will consume our lives. We can be like Mr. Gore and pretend, while in reality we reject our own message. Or we can be disciples and allow the Master's heartbeat to become our own. *Whose disciple are you?* ■

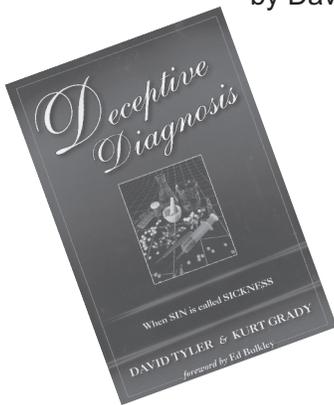
1. Reagan, Michael, "Gore Is a Hypocrite on Environment." *Public Opinion*, March 16, 2007.
2. Barna Research Group.
3. Matthew 27:57; John 19:38; Acts 9:10, 26, 36; 16:1; 21:15.
4. Mark 2:18; Matthew 9:14; John 9:27-30.
5. Reagan, Michael. *Ibid.*

—Reprinted with permission from *The Monitor*; April-June, 2007.

Deceptive Diagnosis

When Sin Is Called Sickness

by David Tyler & Kurt Grady



From the Foreword by Ed Bulkley:

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

Great Buy!!

Only \$10.00 postpaid

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

Introduction

The lessons for the Fall Quarter, September-November, are all taken from the Book of Genesis. You will do well to familiarize yourself with the entire book as you begin these studies. Genesis is referred to as “The Book of Beginnings.” Here is the account of the beginning of the world, of mankind, of the special people of God, and the laying of groundwork for the nation of Israel.

Genesis contains foundational truths regarding the nature of God, the nature of man, and other facets of truth which help to guide us toward a proper worldview and perspective of history. One overriding theme is the method of God’s dealings with man and the many provisions He has made for man’s welfare, both material and spiritual.

While God’s chosen people, the Jews, are a primary focus of the book, there are principles and guidelines which are applicable to all people of every era of time. Study the book with these principles in mind and allow them to speak to your heart. Also allow these studies to create a renewed appreciation for the special people of God and of their place in the history of mankind. Remember, it was through that nation that our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, came in human form to earth to accomplish God’s great work of redeeming lost and helpless mankind.

May God bless and enrich you as you delve into this Book of Beginnings.

SEPTEMBER 2, 2007

God’s Marvelous Creation

Genesis 1:1-25

Today’s lesson covers the creation of the material world with its panoply of plant and animal life, and the celestial universe with its variety of bodies and elements. Genesis 1 presents us with some very profound concepts and information with far-reaching implications. And it forces us to make some very basic assumptions about how we view God and the world He created.

Rather than follow strictly the selected verses chosen for this lesson by the International Lessons Committee, we are using the entire first 25 verses of Genesis 1 to give a more complete and comprehensive view of God’s creative acts. You will then, of necessity, need to focus more on the larger concepts rather than minute details in your study. Keep in mind that what we see in these first 25 verses is all preparation for the advent of man, the crown of God’s creation and the focus of next Sunday’s lesson.

Genesis 1 begins with the statement that when recorded time began, God was there, preexistent to that event. We also recognize that all that follows was by the creative act of God. He needed no preexisting material with which to form the universe and its contents. The phrase “And God said, let there be” recurs repeatedly throughout this chapter. God

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created by divine fiat, of His own will and by His own power. It is beyond human comprehension, but we accept it by faith as fact.

Another thing we note by careful analysis of the sequence of God's creative acts is the order and plan of creation. For instance, dry land was formed, then plant life, then animal life which depended on the plant life for food. Also, inherent in each category of life was the built-in ability to reproduce itself, thus guaranteeing ongoing life and the stability of species.

While some argue for the "days" of creation being long periods of time to allow for the development of species and formation of landforms, we hold to a strict interpretation of 24-hour days. For instance, how could plant life created on Day 3, have survived a long period of time until the creation of the life-giving sun on Day 4? And what would be the implications for the seventh day of rest had it been instead an age of time? God intends for us to take His Word at face value.

Note that after every creative act "God saw that it was good." Good here means pleasurable, favorable, pleasant, beautiful. Everything was complete and fulfilling of the purpose for which God had made it. Everything was the best it could be—good in the widest sense of the word. It was so because it was created by an omnipotent and omniscient God, and it is not being facetious to say that God was pleased with what He had created.

What we wish to establish with this lesson is to affirm the complete power and sovereignty of God; that He in His Trinitarian form created out of nothing a perfect and complete world for the habitation of man; and that having set the universe in motion, continues to rule and overrule its subsistence. Establishing and accepting these bases gives us the proper foundation upon which to move forward in our study of the rest of Scripture. May God give us understanding.

SEPTEMBER 2007

For thought and discussion

1. Consider the profundity of the opening words of Genesis 1: "In the beginning God."
2. How would you argue against those who claim the "days" of Genesis 1 were long periods of time instead of actual 24-hour periods?
3. Have you ever wondered why God created such diversity in plant and animal life? Think about it. Does the recurring phrase "and God saw that it was good" have significance here?
4. Without getting hung up in philosophical debate, ponder, briefly, the possible meaning of verse 2.
5. How would you use Genesis 1 to refute the claims of the evolutionists? Also, be careful with the theory of "Intelligent Design." Affirm your belief in the creative acts of God in bringing forth a mature world.

SEPTEMBER 9, 2007

Man: The Crown of God's Creation

Genesis 1:26-31

Once God had the material world in place He was then ready to populate the earth with humankind. Provisions were in place for man's sustenance and pleasure. God had planned a caretaker for His creation. That creature was to be a person of intelligence and ability, able to control and manage the material world for his benefit and for God's glory. The stage was set for man.

In verse 26 we again have the phrase "And God said." It was the authoritative voice of the sovereign God who made all things by the counsel of His own will. We also have here in verse 26 reference to the plural nature of God. "Let *us* make man." God in His three persons was engaged in all aspects of creation. (See

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Colossians 1:16 and context; Hebrews 1:2; John 1:1-3; etc.)

Much debate has ensued over the meaning of man being created “in the image and likeness of God.” The most satisfying explanation seems to be that man, patterned after God, resembles Him in the areas of intellect, will, emotions. Since God is Spirit, we dare not limit Him to the anthropomorphic form of man. God in His totality far exceeds the bodily form and function of man. Man’s body decays (see 2:7 and 3:19), but God is eternal.

We also note in verse 26 (and 28) man’s God-given responsibility over the rest of creation. Man was created to be a steward and manager of the lesser forms of creation—the earth, sea and land animals, the birds. (See further expansion in Chapter 3, verses 8-25.) The fact that God created mature human beings also argues well for the creation of a mature earth.

There is some speculation on verses 29 and 30 regarding the nature of food allowed for man and beast. While it is true that original creation was indeed a “peaceable kingdom,” it is also clear that man was given dominion over all animal life. Whether or not meat was part of man’s diet prior to the fall or the flood is unclear. However, after the flood God explicitly stated to Noah (Genesis 9:3) that animal life was allowed for food, with the specific restrictions against eating blood.

We note that God’s blessing of man in verse 28 includes the command to “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish [fill] the earth.” As God’s creation covered the earth, so a large population of people was needed both to fill the earth and to care for it as God’s stewards. We note in following chapters of Genesis the longevity of man before the flood, allowing for rapid increase of the race.

Upon completion of His crowning act of creation on the sixth day of the creation event, God rested, or ceased from His work. It was now complete. Every-

thing was in order. (See 2:1-3.) And, as we noted in last Sunday’s lesson, we believe these days to be actual 24-hour periods which God established with the beginning of recorded time and which set the pattern for man’s labor and day of rest.

“And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” God does all things well. His perfect creation is proof of His power and majesty. Let us rejoice in His creation and willingly accept our role in His plan.

For thought and discussion

1. As you think about the creation of man, reflect again on the order and sequence of the total creation narrative.
2. Think carefully through the issue of man being created in the image of God. What implied responsibilities does this carry for man?
3. How well has man carried out his stewardship responsibilities of earth? In what areas can improvement be made?
4. We believe the natural world is on a downward spiral because of man’s sin. Does that give us any excuse for the unrestricted exploitation of its resources? What should be the Christian view of the earth and its resources? Discuss.
5. As you study this lesson keep the long view in mind. God was at work through the ages preparing for the eventual highlight of man’s existence, the coming of the Saviour.

SEPTEMBER 16, 2007

God Chooses a Family

Genesis 15:1-6; 18:11-14; 21:1-8

In the ongoing plan of God, after cleansing the earth with the flood and allowing time for repopulation, He

continues the development of His plan by choosing a man to be the progenitor of a race through whom He would bless the world. That man was Abraham. His story is told, beginning in the latter part of Genesis 11. Today's lesson outlines God's promise to Abraham regarding a son who would be born of Sarah and become the heir of God's promise.

Today's three Scripture texts can be identified as: 15:1-6, Promise; 18:11-24, Doubt; and 21:1-8, Fulfillment. It will be helpful to read Abraham's entire history to get the full story. You will note also that between our texts from Chapters 15 and 18 God changed Abram and Sarai's names to Abraham and Sarah to better reflect His purposes for them.

Chapter 15:1-6—Promise. God had promised Abram about ten years earlier that he would become the father of a great multitude. But he was still childless and Abram was suggesting that he adopt his servant Eliezer as his heir. But God said, No, it would be a son fathered by Abram. Then God called Abram outside and told him to look up and count the stars, if he could. Then God said, "So shall your offspring be." Numberless. Then we have the statement that sets Abraham apart as "the father of the faithful." He believed God, accepting His statement as fact, even in the face of uncertainty. And God counted that to him for righteousness. The promise was in place.

In Chapter 18 God visits Abraham again, enroute to the destruction of Sodom. In the meantime Abram and Sarai had taken into their own hands to fulfill God's promise (next Sunday's lesson), and thereby set the stage for problems which still affect the world today. On this visit, God confirmed His former promise and assured them that no situation was too difficult for Him to overcome. Sarah was well past child-bearing age, but the One who created the numberless stars certainly also had power to enliven Sarah's womb. Though here Sarah expressed doubt, we are told in

Hebrews 11 that she did lay hold of God's promise by faith to conceive and deliver a child in her old age. She learned that "nothing was too hard for the Lord" to perform.

In Chapter 21 we have the follow-up to what we read in Chapter 18, and the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah. Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90 when Isaac was born—a miracle of God.

We note that Abraham followed through with the covenantal requirement God established with him (Chapter 17) to circumcise all male children on the eighth day. We note, too, that Sarah's previous laugh of incredulity (18:12) was now turned into a laugh of joy (21:6). It was almost too wonderful for her to comprehend. "Who would have thought?" she asked.

At the weaning of Isaac, likely at two to three years of age, Abraham made a great feast to initiate him into the larger family group. God's overall plan had taken another step forward.

For thought and discussion

1. Reflect on the qualities found in Abraham that made him God's choice to father His chosen nation.
2. Examine the faith of Abraham. What evidences did he have of God's faithfulness? What hurdles did his faith need to overcome?
3. God, in His Word, has made many promises to us. Do we at times think they are too hard for God to fulfill? Think of some experience where God proved Himself true in fulfilling a promise in your life.
4. One thing we learn from the experience of Abraham and Sarah is that we cannot force God's timetable. Have you learned that lesson in your life? In what way?
5. Be sure to grasp the significance of today's lesson in relation to God's overall plan for mankind.

SEPTEMBER 23, 2007

Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael

Genesis 21:9-21

Today's lesson text follows immediately after the text of last Sunday's lesson, but the situation described here finds its roots in Chapter 16 where Sarai and Abram took things into their own hands to bring about the fulfillment of God's promise. Seemingly they became impatient with God's timing and set about to produce an heir for Abram, using Hagar, Sarai's maid, as a surrogate mother. Their scheme produced a child who became an antagonist to Abraham's rightful heir and a thorn in his side to this day. The on-going Arab/Israeli conflict and the clash between the religions of Islam and Judaism have their source here in the story of Ishmael and Isaac.

We are not sure of the situation where Sarah observed Ishmael mocking (v. 9). Perhaps it was at the feast Abraham threw to establish Isaac as part of the family and heir to his position and possessions. Or perhaps he mocked Sarah as an elderly mother with a young child. In any case, it became for Sarah an unbearable situation and she urged Abraham to get rid of Hagar and her son.

Ishmael was also Abraham's son, and he loved him and was concerned about his welfare (see 17:18). However, God spoke to Abraham and told him to follow Sarah's advice and send Ishmael away. God again confirmed to Abraham that Isaac was the child of promise, but that He would also bless Ishmael and make him great, because he, too, was the seed of Abraham. This shows, among other things, the great respect God had for Abraham.

Abraham outfitted Hagar for the journey and sent her away with her troublemaking son. Some suggest that she lost her way to a supposed destination and therefore her provisions ran out. Whatever the case, she assumed that death would overtake them there in the harsh desert environment and seemingly abandoned her son to his fate. But God had not abandoned them. He

heard Ishmael's cry—and Hagar's—and came to their rescue. It is interesting to note that the name *Ishmael* means "God hears." It should also be noted here that Ishmael was not a helpless lad, but a youth of approximately 17 years.

God heard their cry for help and directed Hagar to a well of water from which they assuaged their thirst. God also reminded Hagar at that point that He would make a great people from her son. That gave Hagar assurance of God's ongoing care and protection in her now difficult circumstances. She was an outcast and on her own to provide for her son.

But God was with them and watched over Ishmael as he grew and developed survival skills. He became a hunter in the wilderness of Paran, in the northeastern part of the Sinai Peninsula. Hagar, now the protector and provider for her fatherless son, took a wife for him from among her own people, the Egyptians.

Though God had chosen Isaac to be the son of promise and the link in God's ongoing chain, out of respect for Abraham He did not abandon his other son, Ishmael.

For thought and discussion

1. Certainly God was not pleased by what Sarai and Abram did, and one can only imagine the difference in world history without Ishmael. Remember, however, that God is sovereign. And note, too, His care of the child Ishmael.
2. Have you ever run ahead of God, then found yourself in a difficult situation? What was the outcome? What did you learn from the experience?
3. Have you observed how God often allows us to come to the end of our resources as He did Hagar, before He steps in to give aid? What lessons does He wish us to learn from such experiences?
4. Have you ever had to do something difficult as Abraham did? If so, what was your sustaining strength?
5. Truly God works in sometimes mysterious ways. How should we respond to situations which defy human logic?

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SEPTEMBER 30, 2007

Isaac and Rebekah

Genesis 24

Time moved on. Sarah had died and Abraham was now an old man, concerned about wrapping up the affairs of life. His primary concern, as we look at Chapter 24, was over finding a suitable wife for his son and heir, Isaac. Chapter 24 gives us that story. Instead of using only selected verses for the lesson text, we will focus on the entire chapter in order to get the complete picture. The chapter can be divided into three broad themes: Command—verses 1-9; Search—verses 10-49; Reward—verses 50-67.

We have in this account a tremendous example of God's leading and providing. It was essential for the fulfillment of God's plan for mankind that the family line He had chosen remain faithful to His principles. Abraham understood the significance of finding the right wife for Isaac and sent his servant (Eliezer) on a 500-mile journey to Mesopotamia in search of his kin. The servant's entourage reflected both Abraham's wealth and the provisions needed for such a long journey. He was given explicit instructions and swore to abide by Abraham's demands.

It is interesting to observe the "fleece" which the servant established as a guide for finding the person he was seeking. Yes, he was depending on God, but the young woman herself needed to show initiative and a willingness to work hard. Rebekah met those requirements and the servant observed in silent wonder whether his journey had been successful. Only after her task was finished (v. 19) did he express his satisfaction over the turn of events (v. 27).

We also notice in this account a beautiful example of mideastern hospitality. Abraham's servant was openly welcomed and generously provided for in the home of Rebekah's family. We note also (v. 33) the urgency and importance he placed on his mission. He needed to unburden his

request before satisfying personal needs. Note, too, the thoroughness with which he presented his mission. He spelled it out in detail, no doubt as a means of impressing upon Rebekah's family the God-directed purpose and fulfillment of his mission.

Having presented his request, he awaited their response. The response from Rebekah's family proved that he was on the right track. They recognized as they fit the pieces together that "this thing is of the Lord." But would Rebekah be willing to go with this stranger to meet and marry a man she had never met? "And she said, I will go" (v. 58). Even though this whole experience was credited to the Lord, there certainly must have been on the human level some uncertainty and trepidation. This daughter was leaving, never to return. She was going into an unknown situation.

The story reaches its conclusion, after perhaps a year of uncertain waiting, as the servant nears home and Isaac and Rebekah meet for the first time. After hearing the servant's account of his mission, Isaac and Rebekah are married, thus fulfilling another step in God's long-range plan.

For thought and discussion

1. Why was Abraham so concerned that Isaac not get a wife from his ancestral country or from among the people where they now lived? What lesson does this hold for us?
2. As servants of God, what lessons can we learn from Abraham's servant? Discuss.
3. Is it appropriate in our day to put out a "fleece" to determine God's leading? What do you think? Have you tried it?
4. There are many lessons we can glean from this account: dependence on God, hospitality, dedication to an assignment, trust, openness, etc. Reflect on these, especially as effective in your own life.
5. When we face uncertainties in life, what comfort can we find from the experience of Rebekah and her family? ■

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Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

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experiences crises adventures transactions meetings tragedies scoops reports conferences happenings
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Ethiopian Evangelist Beaten to Death by Muslims

An Ethiopian street evangelist walking through the city of Jimma, Ethiopia, walked past a Wahabbi Muslim mosque. A group of men came out of the mosque, dragged him inside, and beat him to death. They had heard he was doing evangelism and wanted to send the message that evangelism was not going to be tolerated.

—Source: *Mission Network News* (via *Kuepfer Kronicle*)

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Arabic Gospel Broadcast Finds Ripe Fields in U.S.

Norway-based evangelist Aril Edvardsen has a ministry of Arabic language Gospel broadcasts (via radio, TV, and internet) into Arabic Muslim countries. However, to his surprise, he has received a huge response from Muslim communities in the United States. Over 30,000 people have responded with interest in becoming a Christian in the last several months. Edvardsen says of the U.S., “It’s a ripe field. We can bring them the Gospel and the Gospel makes people peaceful. So, I have been a little surprised that few Americans—great television evangelists—are not focusing on these people.”

He goes on to describe his broadcasts, “It’s mostly true life stories of true life people that have experienced a miracle. The program is called ‘Miracle.’ And, the miracle is basically the miracle of salvation. And, we have many Muslims that have experienced that miracle.”

Where I live when in the U.S., I interact with many Muslims on a regular basis. Unfortunately, many of the tightly-packed, rural Mennonite communities aren’t ideally

situated to take advantage of this opportunity due to their location. What are we doing to reach this ripe, multi-cultural field right on our doorstep?

The most effective way to reach other countries is through native missionaries. These Arabic-American Muslims have their feet in both cultures—American and Arabic/Muslim. Thus, they are much easier for us to reach than someone living in Saudi Arabia. However, they can then return to their home countries and serve as very effective evangelists. God has given us an amazing opportunity. What are we doing to take advantage of it?

—Source: *Mission Network News* (via *Kuepfer Kronicle*)

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China Arming Terrorists in Iraq, Afghanistan

China has been arming terrorists in Afghanistan and Iraq on Iran’s tab. Iran has been paying China for the weapons, which in some cases China has been delivering directly to the Taliban in Afghanistan. They’ve been sending modern small arms, large-caliber sniper rifles, components for roadside bombs, rocket-propelled grenades, and anti-aircraft missiles. Pentagon sources assert that the Bush administration is downplaying the evidence because it harms their pro-China business stance.

—Source: *Washington Times*

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China Gearing Up for Taiwan Confrontation

For almost six decades, U.S. military power has frustrated the ambition of China’s ruling Communist Party to unite Taiwan with the mainland.

But, an increasingly wealthy China is now building a military force tailored specifically to challenge any attempt by the United States to intervene in a conflict over Taiwan, Western and Chinese military analysts say.

Without attempting to match the overwhelming U.S. military might, experts say, the army has developed a strategy of “area denial,” where an array of precision weapons would be deployed in an attempt to keep U.S. forces, particularly aircraft carriers, at a distance for long enough that China could overwhelm Taiwan’s defenses.

“The plans that China has to develop a submarine force, to develop long-range strike capability in its air force and deploy better ballistic missiles means it will be increasingly more difficult for the U.S. to guarantee the security of Taiwan,” said Allan Behm, a Canberra-based security analyst and former senior Australian Defense Department strategic planner.

If China’s strategy were successful, U.S. forces could face defeat without suffering major military losses.

“A weakened initial U.S. response to a Chinese assault on Taiwan, for example, could result in the collapse of Taiwan’s military resistance,” said a Rand Corporation study for the U.S. Air Force published late last month. “The island might therefore capitulate before the United States could bring all its combat power to bear.

“If that were to happen, it seems unlikely that the United States would continue the conflict, even though U.S. military power would largely be intact,” the study said.

—Excerpt from “China appears to confront U.S. defense of Taiwan” (<http://tinyurl.com/282222>) by David Lague in the *International Herald Tribune*

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China Arming Iran

The U.S. has placed sanctions on Chinese companies for selling missile and chemical weapons material to Iran. Beijing is stonewalling Washington’s request for cooperation in stopping the proliferation. China is also supplying Tehran with anti-ship missiles (which Iran is in turn supply-

ing to Hezbollah terrorists) and many small naval boats. Iran is getting a strategy of having many, many naval cutters with missiles. In the event of a war, they would simply swarm the U.S. Navy. In 2004, they had over 1000 naval craft and they have been engaging in steady accumulation since then. They are also creating a naval buildup in the strategic Straits of Hormuz where a large majority of the world’s oil passes. Naval experts expect that sinking civilian merchantmen is a part of Iranian naval strategy, as well.

—Source: *Washington Times*

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Mobs Attack Churches in Egypt

Muslim rioters attacked Christian shops and churches near Alexandria two times in two weeks. The first time, police let the rioters freely vandalize Christian shops and churches. The second time, the police responded quickly, preventing much damage. Local politicians blame the violence partially on the government because in the past they have left past attacks by Muslims against Christians go unpunished.

—Source: *Compass Direct News*

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Gallup Poll: Majority of Republicans Don’t Believe Evolution

A recent compilation of data by Gallup News Service of a series of recent Gallup polls shows that 68% of Republicans do not believe in evolution. In contrast, 57% of Democrats do.

Also included was an interesting trend: 74% of people that attend church weekly don’t believe in evolution. Among those that attend church monthly and seldom/never, it is 45% and 26% respectively.

Sixty-six percent of Americans believe in “creationism, that is, the idea that God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years.” It was also interesting to notice that 81% of people in the U.S. believed in either creation or theistic evolution.

—Source: *Gallup News Service*

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Hamas Storms Gaza Strip

Hamas—the terrorist organization that recently won the Palestinian elections—stormed Palestinian Authority compounds throughout the Gaza Strip. They systematically executed Fatah personnel not killed in the fighting. President Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah (which is relatively moderate compared to Hamas) dissolved the Fatah/Hamas unity government (with its Hamas Prime Minister) and declared a state of emergency, installing a Fatah prime minister. The Israeli army says it’s not a matter of “if,” but “when” and “how” they invade the Gaza Strip to crush Hamas. They are also considering turning off all electricity and water to the Gaza Strip. The EU has suspended aid to the Gaza Strip because of the fighting. The U.S. had already suspended aid because Hamas is a terrorist organization. However, now that Hamas has ejected itself from the Palestinian government, the U.S. is restoring aid to the Palestinian Authority.

—Sources: *The London Daily Telegraph*, *The Jerusalem Post*.

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Country in Profile: Thailand

The nation of Thailand is a bit larger than California, but has half its population density.

Thailand is experiencing great turmoil as the military recently took over in a coup. They also disbanded the nation’s largest political party and banned the former prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, and 110 associates from political involvement. The junta government has banned all political activity, heavily censored the press, and set up a puppet government.

The junta government is in the process of drafting a new constitution and 5,000 Buddhist monks are praying, fasting, and lobbying the government that the new constitution would recognize Buddhism as the official religion.

95% of the population is Theravada Bud-

dhist. The Theravada strain of Buddhism is not the “pure” Buddhism that Siddhartha Gautama (a man referred to as “the Buddha”) founded and has heavy syncretism (mixing of religions) with Hindu gods and ancestor worship.

There is an active Islamic insurgency in the southern part of the country. The terrorists have killed 2,300 people via bombings, shootings, beheadings, and burnings since the insurgency started in January 2004. The northern part of the country has so far been untouched.

A fellow IGO student, Dru Lattin described in a newsletter the people of Thailand concisely and well, “In Thailand, the people are incredibly polite, smiling, and well-mannered—but hard to really connect with.” The Thai greeting is a little hands-folded-in-front-of-face bow along with a polite “Sawati Krup” (or “Sawati Kaa” if you’re a lady). The king is very well-respected and is also on all the currency, so money must be handled with both hands. Insulting the king is worthy of jail time. Wearing shoes in the house or pointing the bottom of your feet at someone is rude, but picking your nose is not.

Thailand has a (Purchasing Power Parity adjusted) GDP per capita of \$7,901, 72nd in the world of 192 countries. Only 10% of Thai people live below the poverty line, 2% less than the U.S.’s 12%.

If you want to support conservative Mennonite missions in Thailand, contact Global Tribes Outreach (PO Box 130, Washingtonville, PA 17884; 570-437-9020) or the Institute for Global Opportunities (198 West Lexington Rd., Lititz, PA 17543).

Suggested Reading: *The Lotus and the Cross* (a dialogue between Buddha and Jesus) by Ravi Zacharias. (It’s a very small, accessible book; I read it in under an hour.)

—Sources: *Reuters*, *Wikipedia*, *Bangkok Post*, *International Herald Tribune*, personal experience, interviews with local missionaries, *The Lotus and the Cross*.

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

Time and Eternity

by David L. Burkholder

I was reading recently in Genesis 1 and several things impressed me. One was how God simply spoke the worlds into being—He used no raw materials, no existing matter; He simply spoke creation into existence out of nothingness. Another thing that laid a deep impression on me was the relationship between time and eternity. In the beginning, at the start of recorded time, God was already there. He pre-existed in eternity past. We understand time because it is the substance of our existence. Everything we do is regulated by time. Time is the very essence and controller of our lives.

Eternity, however, is vastly different. Eternity always was. It never began, it will never end. Due to the finite nature of our minds, we cannot comprehend what lies beyond the limits of our minds. Our understanding stops when we reach the definable limits of our intellect. When God created the observable world He also instituted the element of time so man would have a sense of definable being.

God does not need time. He exists outside the sphere of definable limits. And herein lies man's dilemma. We simply cannot grasp that there was existence forever before time began and that after time ceases eternity will continue on, unendingly. And while only God existed before time began, man, along with God, will continue to exist in the eternal continuum.

I believe that, among other reasons, God has established the element of time to instruct man regarding eternity. When the two are put in juxtaposition man begins to comprehend several things. He realizes that time is finite, short, limited, and that eternity is both limitless and beyond his ability to grasp. God wants

man to come to that point—for a reason.

At conception man is endowed with a soul that will never die. The house of that soul, the material body, has a limited time span allotted by God, up to 100 plus years in some cases. As man grasps the limits of life he begins to understand the limitlessness of eternity. The body-life will one day come to an end, but the soul-life will continue living on forever. We call that eternal life.

Because of man's disobedience to God, resulting in the condition of sin, man now has two options for eternity. If he refuses God's offer of pardon for sin and continues to live throughout life in a state of rebellion against God and rejection of His offer of salvation, the soul of that man, upon the death of the physical body, will go into an eternity of torment and separation from God. If, on the other hand, that individual accepts God's proffered salvation, resulting in release from the bondage of sin and Satan, that soul, upon death of the body, is ushered into an eternity of bliss. The end results are opposite. And the choice is man's.

The soul of man was created for eternal existence. The component of time was provided for man in order to prepare his soul for eternity. God has given to man the freedom of choice. While He does not impose His will upon man, He has nevertheless provided opportunity and incentive to man for making the wise and intelligent eternal choice. In John 3:16 we read that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." In 2 Peter 3:9 we read that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance." In Ezekiel 33:11 the Lord God says: "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but

that the wicked turn from his way and live.”

It is God’s will that all men, of every era of time, make the eternally satisfying decision to accept His offer of salvation and live, truly, joyously live—forever. Unfortunately, some do not stop to consider the end result of the choices they make, or fail to make, in life. Others are careless, putting off, neglecting, or failing to consider the seriousness of the eternal decision with which they are confronted. So time moves on, and someday they will discover it is too late to make a rational choice—it will have been made for them by default, to the eternal detriment of the soul.

God’s call is clear. In Hebrews 3:15 He admonishes that whoever hears His voice not harden his heart against His plea. In Hebrews 4:1 we are encouraged that while the opportunity of salvation affords we should not fail to take advantage of it and thus to secure our eternal rest.

We must remember that time is but for a span, but eternity is forever. The eternal destiny of the soul is decided in time. So, reader, think seriously about the brevity of time and the length of eternity. It goes on forever and ever. Unending. Then examine your soul. Is it in tune with God, prepared for an eternity with Him? If so, guard it well. If not, time is still on your side. So while you still have time, take the necessary steps to secure your eternal well-being. The consequences of spending eternity under God’s judgment instead of basking forever in His bliss, is too horrible to contemplate. But contemplate we must, if we are to take steps to avoid it.

Life is serious. And short. Eternity is even more serious, and will go on forever. Spare yourself an unthinkable, eternal tragedy. Make the timely choice to accept God’s offer of unspeakable eternal joy and happiness. That is a choice you will never regret—for eternity. ■



Counseling From the Word

Not All Christian Counselors Are Church Counselors

by Lloyd Jonas

Services presenting themselves as “Christian Counseling” include a wide range of settings in which counsel is offered by Christians. Here are some common examples:

1. Institutional models: public and private school counselors, college and

seminary counseling services, hospital and prison chaplains.

2. Parachurch models: public counseling offices, counselor(s) serving several churches, independent counseling centers, multi-church-sponsored counseling centers.

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

3. Local church ministry of counseling and discipleship: Christians may counsel in any of the above models. However, the local church, motivated by the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), will be a counseling/discipling ministry. With a good balance of both public and private ministries of God's Word, a nouthetic pastordology undergirds its preaching and counseling. Paul commended the church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:7), seeing leadership with a balanced ministry of managing church affairs and nouthetically counseling its members (1 Thessalonians 5:12). That local church was responsible for providing nouthetic counsel, encouragement, and support in shepherding the flock (1 Thessalonians 5:14). The counselor serving in any of the other categories described earlier may minister more biblically in, and under the authority of, the local church.

In a biblical sense, categories 1 and 2, above, are not church counseling. Dr. William W. Goode, writing in "Introduction to Biblical Counseling" (page 302), points out that a loving church will counsel and disciple its people consistently and faithfully:

Counseling must never be thought of as an independent ministry conducted aside from the church. Preaching, teaching, evangelism, discipleship, and counseling are all integral parts that make up effective, biblical ministry. The local church is the only organization—or better, organism—He promised to build, sustain, and use.

Counseling is an essential part of the local church's ministry as it disciplines and helps believers mature in Christ's image.

Differences appear when the counseling of Institutional and Parachurch models is contrasted with the Church Counseling Ministry. Such comparisons must be honest, recognizing that God works where He wills and as He wills. Christian men and women effectively

minister God's Word in models other than God's local church. Commenting on Mark 9:38-40, Jay E. Adams notes how Jesus rebuked John for resenting the ministry of some of God's people who ministered in a manner different from theirs.¹ Admitting that no one Christian has a corner on the truth, Adams still cautions that tensions between Christian workers who do not always see eye-to-eye may produce additional hurtful problems in the lives of counselees seeking help. To return to comparisons, when one studies the importance of involvement in counseling, the value of involving other members of the local body is quickly evident. Pastor Paul pleads for prayer support needed in day by day counsel of the members of his flock. As he evangelizes and disciples, his counseling is in the context of the body of local believers who add to the workforce, provide money and materials, encourage him, and pray for his ministry. The local church is always incomplete without its work of "crisis discipling," while the training of counselors constitutes an integral part of its life and ministry.

An example of total church involvement appears in the case of "Marsha." Friends brought her to the counseling ministry of their local church during her three-hour pass from the psychiatric ward of a nearby hospital. Her concern over counseling costs were allayed by the explanation the church counselors do not charge for ministering God's Word. Diagnosed as "bipolar" due to "chemical imbalance," Marsha was heavily medicated. She reported years of bizarre behavior, including several nearly successful suicide attempts. Now she responded to the love of Christ, taught and exemplified by her counselors and the church members. In time she was blessed with a full rehabilitation, changing and growing in Christ by faithful obedience to Him. Marsha was dismissed by her medical professionals

who gladly freed her of all medications. She functioned well in the church and in new employment for which she received training.

God has used His Word by His Spirit. His human instruments were a counseling pastor, a church deaconess, church families who drove her to and from the hospital, a church Deacons' Fund that met some material needs, some church business people who arranged for job counseling, interviews, and eventual placement in employment, and (most importantly) a church prayer meeting and prayer chain that constantly kept Marsha's needs before the Lord. That illustrates a nouthetic pastorology in action, a church which is a counseling ministry. The contrast with any of the other settings in which Christians may counsel is enormous! A Christian counselor in any other model simply would not have had available the majority of those Christian resources which are naturally present in church counseling.

Recognizing the place of the church in God's plan for counseling/discipling His people, we still may ask who are the people who will carry out such a ministry. Biblically, one can quickly identify three major groups within the church's membership who must counsel.

First, church members at large, each and all of them, are included in the teaching of Galatians 6:1-5. There we see any person who has received the Holy Spirit in salvation is instructed to counsel any sinning members with the goal of restoring them. A classic example of this is found in Paul's commendation of the local church in Rome in which he praised them for being competent to counsel (Romans 15:14). Also important is the requirement for leaders in the church, elders and deacons, to be diligent in their counseling ministry. Scripture shows how the church members grow in their love and appreciation of their leaders because of two ways they minister: they manage the church's

affairs and they nouthetically counsel the membership (1 Thessalonians 5:12-14). Most important, thirdly, is the pastor's involvement and leadership in the way his church functions as a counseling ministry. It is basic to his ministry of equipping the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12, 13). None of this is attained where the Christian counselor is not a church counselor.

To see how these responsibilities are met in church counseling, consider who is doing what in a biblically balanced church. If you are the pastor, you will be devoting part of your work week to the counseling room. Your co-counselors will be training as they minister beside you. Pastor Paul counseled his flock and, as he and Timothy established new churches, they trained other leaders to carry some of the counseling burden. As the pastor today uses various means to train his leaders, more and more of them will supplement his ministry. Lay people trained in biblical counseling can carry the bulk of the counseling work. Training church women to counsel other women is also important. In most churches today, the majority of those requesting counsel will be women. All together, they enable the local church to fulfill the Great Commission for the glory of God! ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Biblical Counselor* published by NANC (317-337-9100, www.NANC.org)

1. Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Commentary: The Gospels of Matthew and Mark* (Timeless Texts), p. 284.



Saved by Amazing Grace: The Story of John Newton

by Bruce Scott

When John Newton composed the words to what has perhaps become the most widely recognized hymn of our day—“Amazing Grace”—he was the pastor of a growing congregation in Olney, England. Newton loved the country setting. He had a loving wife, a thriving ministry, and pleasant surroundings. Life was good. But 25 years earlier, John Newton’s life had been a wreck.

Newton was born in London on July 24, 1725. His father, a merchantship captain, loved John but was stern and aloof. John’s mother, on the other hand, was attentive and nurturing. She taught him Scripture—entire chapters at a time—along with hymns and poems. Unfortunately, John’s mother died two weeks before his seventh birthday, and his father remarried shortly afterward.

When the new couple had a son of their own, they centered their affections more on him than on John, and John drifted into the company of nefarious boys and learned their nasty ways. At age 11, he took the first of five sea voyages with his father, learning quickly to swear and curse with the best of sailors.

Over the next five years, however, John occasionally was forced to reflect seriously on the condition of his soul. Once he barely missed boarding a warship carrying a friend, only to learn later that the ship had overturned and his friend and several others had drowned.

About this time, Newton also had a disturbing dream in which he threw away a ring representing all of the mercy God had in store for him. These experiences greatly convicted Newton’s conscience, prompting him temporarily to take spiritual matters more seriously.

But after a few days, he quickly forgot what had caused his sobriety, and he continued his downward spiral into wickedness. Newton said, “I often saw the necessity of religion, as a means of escaping hell; but I loved sin, and was unwilling to forsake it.”¹

At 19 Newton was forced to enlist as a midshipman on the *HMS Harwich*. He later deserted and was caught, placed in irons, publicly stripped on board the ship, whipped with a cat-o’-nine-tails, and demoted. Newton then fell into dark depression and despair, wanting at times to throw himself overboard and scheming of ways to murder the captain who had humiliated him. His situation soon changed, however, when his captain swapped him for sailors from a ship bound for West Africa to procure slaves.

Slave-Trading Days

The slave trade was a lucrative business in the mid-1700s. More than 100,000 slaves came to the New World on English ships.² Wrote William E. Phipps: “The average death rate of slaves on the middle passage [from Africa to port of sale in the Caribbean or North America] in English ships in the eighteenth century was about fifteen percent.”³ Approximately 15,000 Africans died at sea as slaves on English ships during this time.

In his new environment, Newton did nothing to endear himself to the ship’s officers. He concocted a little ditty ridiculing the captain and taught it to the entire crew. After six months of snatching a profitable stock of slaves, Newton gained permission to stay in Africa along the Guinea coast, where he worked for an English slave trader who kept an African

mistress. This mistress disliked Newton. So when Newton contracted malaria, she treated him pitilessly, insulting him and half-starving him.

Later Newton was unjustly accused of stealing from the Englishman. He was put in chains on the deck of the Englishman's boat with very little food, water, or clothing. In effect, he became the man's slave, ironically being treated in the same manner as the people he had been helping to acquire.

For a year this torment continued until Newton convinced his master to transfer him to another slave trader. The new master treated Newton kindly and placed him over the "factories" (holding pens for slaves).

Despite the watchful eye of his previous slave-trader master, Newton had been able to send off a few letters to his father, pleading for rescue. One day a merchant ship named the *Greyhound* appeared. It had been sent at the behest of John's father. At first, Newton hesitated to leave his now profitable business, but he finally agreed to return to England. All told, Newton had been held captive in Africa 15 months.

On his return voyage on the *Greyhound*, Newton proved to be the most profane, debauched man on the ship. One night Newton got so drunk that when his hat blew overboard, he would have dived in after it had not another sailor grabbed hold of his clothing.

Later on the voyage, Newton leafed through one of the few books on board—*Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. Newton read it as pure fancy but then began to question what would happen to him if it were true. It scared him, and he closed the book.

Caught in the Storm

That night, on March 21, 1748, a fierce storm overtook the ship, almost swamping it. Men, animals, and provisions were swept overboard. Newton prayed for the first time in years. He feared he was

going to die, and if the Christian faith was true, then he surely would not be forgiven. He reflected on all he had done over the past few years, including mocking the historical facts of the gospel; and it disturbed him.

After four days the storm abated. In God's providence, the beeswax in the ship's hold helped to keep the boat afloat. Newton attributed the deliverance to God. He began to read the New Testament with more interest. When he came to Luke 15, he observed remarkable parallels between his life and that of the prodigal son.

The ship drifted for a month. Provisions were running out. The captain blamed Newton's blasphemy for the problems and considered throwing Newton overboard, like Jonah. The crippled ship finally made its way to Northern Ireland just in time before another great wind began to blow. Newton acknowledged that God had answered his prayer.

Upon reaching shore, Newton resolved to swear no more. He even went back to church. However, he was not yet a Christian. He said later, "I consider this as the beginning of my return to God, or rather of *his* return to me; but I cannot consider myself to have been a believer (in the full sense of the word) till a considerable time afterwards."⁴

Converted Through Faith

In 1749 Newton sailed as first mate on another slave-trade ship. By this time, Newton had forgotten his vows and slipped back into his old, sinful ways. While collecting slaves along the west coast of Africa, Newton came down with malaria again, which caused him to reflect once more on his life. In light of the mercies God had shown him, he felt great conviction over his recent failures. Half delirious, Newton dragged himself off his bed and trudged his way to a remote part of the island. There, realizing the futility of making more self-reliant resolutions, "he cast himself upon

the Lord,” wrote Richard Cecil, “to do with him as he should please. It does not appear that any thing new was presented to his mind, but that, in general, he was enabled to hope and believe in a Crucified Saviour.”⁵ God’s amazing grace precisely appeared the hour John Newton first believed.

From that point on, Newton’s life gradually changed. As with most believers, Newton did not see at the outset all of the areas of his life God’s grace needed to transform.

For example, he struggled for five years to have assurance of his salvation. But through the encouragement of another Christian ship captain, Newton said, “I begin to understand . . . and to expect to be preserved, not by my own power and holiness, but by the mighty power and promise of God, through faith in an unchangeable Saviour.”⁶

The most glaring change in Newton’s life was in the area of the slave trade. A year after trusting Christ, Newton became captain of a slave ship. Within the next four years, Newton made three voyages to obtain slaves in Africa and take them to the Caribbean for sale. During those trips, Newton led his crew in prayer and worship. Yet he also forcefully put down slave insurrections, even using thumbscrews on occasion to obtain confessions.

Later in life, Newton viewed the slave trade and his participation in it with disgust and moral outrage. “Custom, example, and [commercial] interest had blinded my eyes,” he said.⁷

Once the Holy Spirit convinced Newton of the evils of the slave trade, he worked tirelessly for decades to ban it. He mentored a younger Christian named William Wilberforce who served in the British Parliament. Wilberforce became the most noteworthy and effective abolitionist in British history. A few months before Newton’s death on December 21, 1807, the British Parliament passed the Act for Abolition of the Slave Trade,

much to Newton’s satisfaction.

The Sweetness of Grace

Before experiencing God’s saving grace, John Newton had no qualms about swearing up a blue streak, blaspheming the God of heaven, jeering the Bible, scoffing at piety, engaging in vile practices, and buying and selling human beings like chattel.

Yet after his conversion, John Newton changed completely. He later pastored for 23 years, constantly punctuating his sermons with the theme of God’s grace. He wrote and published hundreds of hymns, including “How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds” (a marked contrast from his earlier blasphemous days) and displayed unending hospitality in his home.

He fellowshipped with such revival notables as George Whitefield and John Wesley; taught and strengthened such influential people as the great missionary William Carey, the poet William Cowper, and the abolitionist William Wilberforce; and became one of Britain’s great anti-slavery advocates.

How do we explain such a difference in one man’s life? Old and frail, Newton explained it this way weeks before he died: “My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.”⁸ ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Israel My Glory*, March/April 2007

ENDNOTES

1. Richard Cecil, *The Works of the Rev. John Newton*, 3rd ed. vol. 1 (1824: reprint, Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 1:4.
2. William E. Phipps, *Amazing Grace in John Newton: Slave-Ship Captain, Hymnwriter, and Abolitionist* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 63.
3. *Ibid.*, 60.
4. Cecil, 33.
5. *Ibid.*, 37.
6. Phipps, 66.
7. *Ibid.*, 202.
8. *Ibid.*, 238.



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 I Survey the Wondrous Cross



by Watts/Mason

Lyrics:

Isaac Watts was a prolific hymn writer who lived in England from 1674 to 1748. He grew up in a very strong “Nonconformist” family, during a time when relationships between the state church and the Dissenters were very stormy. Several times his father went to prison on account of his beliefs, and the principles he stood for became dear to his son as well.

Watts was a very prodigious youngster, and was begging for books almost as soon as he could talk. He was educated in his father’s boarding school, and then sent away for a time to study with Thomas Rowe, the pastor of an independent church in London. When Watts returned home, he was appalled at the poor quality of the hymns which were being used in his father’s church. Using his gift with words, he set to work composing hymns to be used in the church. Before long, he was appointed pastor at an independent church just north of London, a position that he held for forty-six years.¹

“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”

was written for communion services, and was first published in 1707 as part of a book called *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*.² The text is a simple yet profound reflection on the suffering and death of Jesus. The idea of the hymn is to help us realize how important and life changing the death of Christ is for the Christian. The first verse speaks of the cross, and how all our accomplishments and good works are nothing by comparison to its importance. There is also a reference to Philippians 3:7, where Paul says, “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.” The focus of the second verse seems to shift to distracting material objects, and how these “vain things” are to be sacrificed, and the focus of our lives turned to “the death of Christ my Lord.” The third stanza calls us to actually visualize Christ on the cross, and see the blood as a dual symbol of Jesus’ sorrow and His love for us. The fourth verse finally calls us to the logical conclusion of this type of love; that it “Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

By whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.—Galatians 6:14

ISAAC WATTS, 1707

HAMBURG L. M.

ARR. BY LOWELL MASON

1. When I sur-vey the won-drous cross On which the Prince of glo-ry died,
 2. For-bid it, Lord, that I should boast, Save in the death of Christ my Lord;
 3. See, from His head, His hands, His feet, Sor-row and love flow min-gled down;
 4. Were the whole realm of na-ture mine, That were a pres-ent far too small;

My rich-est gain I count but loss, And pour contempt on all my pride.
 All the vain things that charm me most, I sac-ri-fice them to His blood.
 Did e'er such love and sor-row meet, Or thorns com-pose so rich a crown?
 Love so a-maz-ing, so di-vine, De-mands my soul, my life, my all.

Music:

Lowell Mason was an early American musician who wrote over 1600 hymns.³ He was strongly influenced by the European classical tradition, and tended to look down on early American music like the music of William Billings. He was an important music educator, and established many singing schools. It is also largely due to him that music found its way into the public school system.

The music for this particular hymn was not actually composed by Mason, but instead had its origins as a Gregorian chant.⁴ Mason simply took the basic idea of the chant, and arranged and harmonized it to get this tune. ■

ENDNOTES

1. www.wholesomewords.org.
2. www.cyberhymnal.org.
3. www.en.wikipedi.org.
4. www.loveallpeople.com

More Than FIG LEAVES

by Steve Miller



*A message
on the
Biblical theme
of modesty.*

**The January 2007
S&T Sermon of the Month
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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 expository sermons for consideration. Please send typewritten copies by “snail mail” or email to: Editor, Sword and Trumpet, Box 575, Harrisonburg, VA 22803; swandtrump@verizon.net.

Turn From Sin and Believe the Gospel

by W. C. Moore

“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” —1 Peter 4:17

Jesus never preached an easy Gospel, a soft, compromising way of salvation. Before we are saved, we live to please ourselves. When we get saved, we give up our own ways and seek to please God.

“No man can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24). “Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24). This last was in answer to the question, “Lord, are there few that be saved?” (Luke 13:23).

It is not in any sense a hard thing to get saved when a person comes wholeheartedly to the Lord and is willing to forsake sin and trustingly surrender his life and his all to the Lord. But there must be this wholeheartedness before a person can be saved.

It is easy enough to get saved when a person is willing to give himself, and all that he has, over unreservedly to the Lord

and to trust the Lord for salvation. But without this surrender, any person is deceived if he thinks that by a mere intellectual assent to certain truths of the Bible he is therefore a saved person. People talk about believing on the Lord Jesus Christ when they have never truly repented of their sins. A mere mental assent to the truths of the Bible never saved anybody and never will. Even the devils do more than that—they believe “and tremble” (James 2:19) but they are not saved.

Jesus put repentance before believing: “Repent ye, and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15). After His resurrection He still commands that “Repentance and remission of sins . . . be preached . . . among all nations” (Luke 24:47).

Paul follows his Lord, “testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

Christians, too, if they sin, must repent. Jesus the Son of God, the Head of the

Church, speaks from heaven and to a very zealous and strongly orthodox church He commands repentance: "Thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (Revelation 2:4b, 5).

Multitudes Deceived

That many are already fearfully deceived and will continue in a state of almost unthinkable delusion right up to the very day of judgment, is revealed by the startling words of the Son of God:

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Jesus came to save His people *from* their sins (Matthew 1:21), not *in* their sins.

Vance Havner, American revivalist, wrote: "The great awakenings of the past have been accompanied by preaching against sin—and preaching for conviction, repentance, godly sorrow, confession and forsaking of sin, restitution, return to first works, return to the Scriptures; and praying and witnessing, and godly living."

E. E. Shelhamer, writing on "Shallow Revivals," sounds forth a mighty warning that is sorely needed in this day when there is such a widespread misapprehension as to what real salvation is.

He says, "No wonder Wesley cried out and said, 'How terrible is this! When the ambassadors of God turn agents for the devil! When they who are commissioned to teach men the way to heaven, do in fact teach the way to hell.'

"If ever asked, 'Why, who does this?'"

I answered, "Ten thousand wise and honourable men, even all those of whatever denomination, who encourage the proud, the trifler, the passionate, the lover of the world, the man of pleasure, the unjust or unkind, the easy, careless, harmless, useless creatures, the man who suffers no persecution for righteousness' sake, to imagine he is in the way to heaven.'

"These are false prophets in the highest sense of the word. These are traitors both to God and man . . . They are continually peopling the realms of night; and whenever they follow the poor souls they have destroyed, hell shall be moved from beneath to meet them at their coming.' "

Warning Every Man

Paul "ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). He says, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord; we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5:11). There is not enough terror of the Lord today, either in the pulpit or in the pew, either among professing Christians or among out-and-out sinners who make no profession.

God is indeed holy, just and good, merciful and kind; but He hates sin. The fact that He gives human beings space to repent, by no means implies that the most terrible judgments are not coming on those—all those—who despise His mercy.

It is an awful thing to trample underfoot the Blood of the Son of God and to ignore the mercy of the Almighty.

It is impossible to "fully preach" the Gospel (Romans 15:19) and to "declare . . . all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27)—without warning men of judgment to come! Even Felix trembled when Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come" (Acts 24:24, 25).

Anyone who goes about lulling Christians into a yet deeper spiritual sleep than they are already in, is not a disciple of Christ—but rather, a wolf in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). Jesus says, "Why sleep ye? Rise and pray" (Luke 22:46). Jesus tells His own, "Take heed to

yourselves . . . watch ye therefore, and pray always" (Luke 21:34, 36).

Unless we want to be "cut asunder" and have our portion appointed with the hypocrites, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:51), we must heed the warning of our Lord and "Watch"—be alert, be aroused, be awake spiritually, and "Be . . . ready"—for the second coming of Jesus! (Matthew 24:42-50).

The least thing God wants us to do is more important than anything else in all the world! It is better to miss any thing than to become careless and fail to be ready at the coming of the Lord. "In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44).

Some might say that Jesus only spoke these warnings to His disciples of that day, but Jesus is the Head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23). "The church is subject unto Christ" (Ephesians 5:24). He taught His disciples to teach all nations to observe all things whatsoever He had commanded them (Matthew 28:18-20).

Jesus is the Mediator of the New Testament (New Covenant), under which we now live, as Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:8, 13; 9:11-15).

Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit is come, "He will reprove [convict] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). There will be conviction of sin when the Holy Spirit is freely moving in the midst.

God does not tell us to go about trying to make things nice and comfortable and pleasant for the people, so they may enjoy themselves and be self-indulgent. He says, "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1).

Jesus says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

Consider what it means to follow Jesus. Was He trying to get all the enjoyment out of life He could? Was He self-indulgent?

"Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). "Exhort one

another daily" (Hebrews 3:13). "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12).

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Today many people are deceived, actually imagining that they can give some kind of mental assent to the truth of the Bible, and then live in sin openly and flagrantly and expect to get to heaven when they die!

The rich man in hell was told: "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted and thou art tormented" (Luke 16:25).

Unless you repent of your sins, you will certainly reap what you sow! Let us quit living for self and for sin now and repent, and cry unto God before it is too late for forgiveness, in Jesus' name. Jesus says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). "This commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto My name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings" (Malachi 2:1, 2). ■

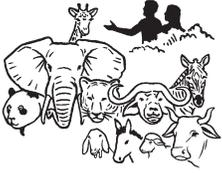
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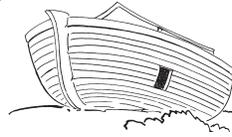
Implications . . . cont'd.

Over the past 50 years or so, however, there has been a literal flood of new findings in science confirming Biblical faith as one that can be defended logically after all. We (the Church) should be red-faced (and repentant to be sure) as we realize our mistake for not trusting the Word of God as completely true just as God has told us it was from the beginning. ■

1. G. Richard Bozarth. "The Meaning of Evolution," *American Atheist*, p. 30. 20 September 1979.



Beginning Issues



Implications of an Old Earth

by John Mullett

Over the last 150-200 years the majority of the scientific community has committed itself to the idea that the earth is several billion years old (current prevailing thought is about 4.5 billion years). The Church was forced to make a choice of its own; would it stand solely on the Word of God during a time when science was continually publishing its "findings" and "confirmations" of an Old Earth or would it compromise to accommodate this new "scientific evidence" much of which is based on speculation/assumptions about the past. Unfortunately the Church (in general) has compromised and tried to fit the Bible to the evidence instead of the evidence to the Bible. As a result the Church has frequently found itself scrambling to defend doctrines that had no logical foundation outside of a literal Genesis. Let's look at one of the more crucial of these doctrines.

One of the foremost problems for Christians who accept a history of millions of years is that they are forced to harmonize a history full of death, disease, and struggle for survival before the presence of original sin with the Bible. If that were the case (death before sin) then the question arises, What is the penalty for sin? To have death before sin is to deal biblical Christianity a fatal blow. Christianity is built entirely around the doctrine of death being the penalty for sin with a perfect (sinless)

sacrifice being the only sufficient price that could be paid for the redemption of mankind. If death is not the penalty for sin then why all the bloodshed of innocent animals under the Old Covenant to provide a covering for sin and pointing forward in faith to the perfect sacrifice of the New Covenant? If death is not the penalty for sin then why did Jesus bother to pay the price of death as that perfect sinless sacrifice on the cross? Many atheistic evolutionists seem to know and understand this better than Christians judging by their ardent efforts in the battle over science. Consider the following quote by G. Richard Bozarth: *"Christianity has fought, still fights, and will continue to fight science to the desperate end over evolution, because evolution destroys utterly and finally the very reason Jesus' earthly life was supposedly made necessary. Destroy Adam and Eve and the original sin, and in the rubble you will find the sorry remains of the Son of God. If Jesus was not the redeemer who died for our sins, and this is what evolution means, then Christianity is nothing."*¹ If death is not the penalty for sin then Christianity and its foundational doctrines are rendered meaningless. Either there was death before sin or there is biblical Christianity, not both; the latter simply becomes an illogical and blind faith if the former is true. *(continued on page 30)*

One Hour and One Dollar

by Ben Bergen

At 8:00 a.m. I drove out of my driveway with a green, 1992 Mazda van, headed south and focused my mind on one thing: I needed to write an article. It was due, way past due, and despite wrestling with it for days, all I had to show were two half-baked ideas in the wastebasket. And those sacked ideas and blank ideas clouded my mind as I drove past lush meadows sprinkled with flowers and beneath birds playing in the morning sky.

But first, there was the green van. It needed a safety sticker. Two weeks ago the local mechanic slapped a pink reject tag on the windshield, and it was time to show him the new tires and wiper blades. And I hoped he'd be quick, because I had an article to write. So ten minutes later I strode into the garage with my pink tag.

I should have noticed the two men in the parking lot, hands in their pockets, with nothing to do. Soon I realized their intention. They wanted inspection stickers too, and they were ahead of me. It's amazing how other people can influence our lives. Two men show up, and my schedule shifts one hour.

A minute later I leaned against the green van contemplating my situation. This just wasn't my day. I watched the mechanic, methodically checking a Ford pickup, oblivious to my urgency. I felt a pressure rising. *I've got to get to that article*, I fretted.

Five minutes later I pulled a book from the green van. "Might as well utilize my time." As I read, one of the gentlemen in the parking lot came towards me. We greeted each other. Then he wandered back to the shop.

One hour later I stood inside the

garage. The mechanic inspected the green van. He checked the tires and the wipers, filled out the paperwork, wiped his hands and said, "That's one dollar." I pulled out my billfold and froze. It was empty. Definitely, this just wasn't my day.

"I'm sorry, I don't have any money. But wait, I can write you a check." I grabbed my briefcase.

"No, sir. Just forget it. Don't write no check for one dollar," he insisted. I felt embarrassed. I told him that I'd bring the money later. He nodded, and I left.

I headed west towards the Blue Ridge Mountains a sober and thoughtful man. That billfold was empty, and it was empty for a reason. It was time to find out why. Driving can be a good time to pray.

"Lord, you really reminded me of my frailness today. You have my attention now."

With each turn I felt drawn to the scenery. My eyes roved over trees, flowers, rock formations, and animals.

God is the Creator of all these wonderful things.

Up I climbed. The light shone brighter and the air smelled sweeter.

And not only is God the Creator, He is in control of all His creation, I thought. In my mind I pictured animals and rivers and trees and light—all controlled by Almighty God.

And not only does He control creation, he is in control of time, my thoughts continued. *Time? Whose time was that while you waited in the garage? Yes, it was God's time. Really, this is God's day—not my day.*

Over the next hour God continued to show me how I needed to grow in trust. But He also showed me something else.

He reminded me of that man in the parking lot, how he'd wandered near my van, turned, and walked back. Suddenly it hit me. I think he wanted to chat, and it didn't happen because I was stewing. For that I'm ashamed, more ashamed than not having the dollar.

Tomorrow I can return to that garage and pay that dollar, but I may never meet that man again. The opportunity is lost. When Jesus says, "The cares of this world choke the Word," He's not only referring to Bible memory, He's thinking about people. God wants us to love and engage with *people*. When anxiety chokes

the Word as it did within me this morning, it affects the way I relate with people.

So I pray that any day I wait somewhere, I will be like Jesus at the Samaritan well. I pray that I will be free to engage; because it's amazing how we can influence the lives of other people, especially when we realize that it's just not our day.

Oh, yes. Later that day, at 8:06 p.m., I shut down my computer and rose from my desk. The article was written. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *CLP News Release*, May/June, 2007.



Who Can Stand Before Envy?

by Jason H. Martin

The Bible asks this question: "*Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?*" (Proverbs 27:4). Envy is harder to root out in our lives than many other evil passions. We cringe when someone has a fit of anger, or run and hide when they give vent to their wrath, but who can stand before envy? Envy is very deeply rooted and subtle. It seeks to kill. *Webster's* says envy is a feeling of antagonism toward someone because of some good he is enjoying but which one does not have oneself.

According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* there is a difference between jealousy and envy. The distinction lies in this, that "jealousy" desires to have the same or the same sort of thing for itself, whereas "envy" desires to deprive another of what he has. Covetousness is simply a desire for more. So we see that envy is different in that it seeks to take away the good

that another is experiencing.

May God help us not to get tangled in this sin. Saul had the problem of envy. "*And Saul was very wrath, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom?*" (1 Samuel 18:8). We know that many times Saul tried to deprive David of what he had. We see it so clearly in Saul but maybe not in our own lives.

God has a place for each of us to fill in the church; why should we waste time envying the role someone else is called to fill. Have we learned like Paul to be content in whatever state we are in? Yes, we must learn it and learn it again sometimes.

"Does the place you're called to labor seem too small and little known? It is great if God is in it and He'll not forget His own. Little is much when God is in it. Labor not for wealth or fame; There's

a crown and you can win it. If you go in Jesus' name" (Kittie L. Suffield).

Envy nailed Jesus to the cross. They sought to deprive Jesus of what He had. Even Pilate "knew that for envy they had delivered him" (Matthew 27:18).

Nations have fallen before envy. One has to wonder how many church problems today would be fixed if all envy were removed? *"For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour"* (1 Corinthians 3:3-8).

Too many times we are as naive as the people of Lystra who thought that Paul and Barnabas were gods who came down in the likeness of men. They even named Paul and Barnabas after their gods. But they were just men ministering the gospel. He that plants and he that waters are one. We are thankful for the teaching of equality in the church. Never should we exalt one office above another; we are all laborers together with God.

"A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones" (Proverbs 14:30). A person filled with envy will lack in strength. Envy fills our life with bitterness. We become upset and miserable and do not know why. It appears that envy can even sap us of physical strength.

The prodigal son's elder brother said to his father, *"Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this*

thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf" (Luke 15:29, 30). The elder brother was so caught up in adding up all his faithful years of service, he overlooked mercy and forgiveness. His father reminded him that "all that I have is thine." So we see that he was more upset over his younger brother's acceptance than over something he himself was being deprived of.

"And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day" (Matthew 20:11, 12). Here it is again. They were more upset over the last receiving just as much as they, than about themselves receiving what they had formerly agreed upon. May God help us to never wish evil on anyone, but rather rejoice with them that do rejoice.

The struggle in the Middle East has to do with envy. It appears that before the Jews became prosperous in the land of Israel, the neighboring countries were not so driven to take over the land. It could also be that they are envious of the covenants that God made with Israel.

How to overcome envy. Rejoice with them that do rejoice. God is good to all of us. Be content with your lot in life. Why do we want to appear big and important anyway? The Lord takes delight in small insignificant things. Who cares if others are way ahead of us?

Jesus said, *"Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"* (Luke 12:15). He said take heed **and** beware; a double warning. Take heed means "to stare at," "to discern clearly." Beware means to watch and be on guard.

Let us ever watch unto prayer that we might be kept from secret sin. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Watchword Messenger*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2007.

Honesty Punished

by James Wagler

Jesus says the truth will set you free. The Apostle James, in Chapter 1, verse 16, also says we should confess our faults (the specific things we have struggled with) one *to* another, and pray one *for* another that we may be healed. Notice that he doesn't say forgiven; he says healed.

Many people in our churches today have confessed the sin to God, asked for forgiveness, but are still living under the bondage or guilt of that now-cancelled sin—why?

Confessing our sin to God brings forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Many times, however, the guilt and shame of that sin remains with the person. The thing I need to do is to be honest (the truth will set you free) with another person. Tell him specifically what I have done, and then I can be free of the guilt and shame.

This poses an interesting question. Why do so many people in our churches today refuse to be honest with the struggles that so easily beset them? I believe, and you may differ, that there are several reasons for this:

1. Being open and honest makes us very vulnerable. We actually give people the information they need to hurt us deeply—we place it right into their hands. Unfortunately, true to human nature, so often they will hurt us. No regard is given to the damage in the person's heart as the condemnation and criticism is dished out.

2. Openness and honesty is usually punished. Punishment comes in many forms; the condemnation and criticism mentioned above is one form. Sometimes the honesty is punished in a corporate setting. An individual within a church body repents of a sin and confesses it in a public way, which promptly brings disciplinary action from the church. Memberships are taken away and proving time is "needed."

I struggle to see Jesus laying this out in

Scripture. Yes, there are sins I can commit to disqualify my ability to serve in certain offices in a church body. Furthermore, some people do confess simply to avoid the consequences of their actions. Lip service without repentance of the heart must be addressed. True repentance, however, calls for restoration and acceptance. The individual will automatically suffer the consequences of his behavior.

Making a safe place where I accept another person—not defend him in the sin, but accept him for who he is—will open his heart to me. Every Monday in my office, I tell a couple, "Look, I'll accept you for who you are. I'm not here to criticize or condemn you. I'm here to help you." As I open my life to the couple and share some of my weaknesses and struggles, all of a sudden they open their hearts and share things with me that they have never told anyone in their life. But why would they do that? For one simple reason. If I open my heart, it will open another person's heart. If I close my heart or place myself above another, it will always close that person's heart.

Finally, once the person is open with me and has shared his heart and confessed the struggles or sin, then I need to respect his honesty, and healing will come. Condemning or criticizing the person at this point would cause the person to bury the guilt and shame deeper than before, making it much more difficult to find the next time. The freedom will not come and the problems in the person's life will be compounded as a result of their honesty being punished.

Today, as you interact with people, protect them. Respect the honesty. Clothe the person with dignity as he or she exposes the shame of their life, and the healing will come. May God bless. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Freedom Hills Ministries Newsletter*, June, 2007.

The Crowning Glory of God's Creation

by Paul W. Brubaker

Regarding the sixth day of creation, Genesis 1:27 simply states, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." What must have been going through the mind of Michelangelo, the famous Italian artist, as he lay on his back, suspended on scaffolding high above the floor of the Sistine Chapel? History tells us that Michelangelo, beginning at age 33 in 1508, was obsessed with the idea of representing God's interaction with man. For four years, from 1508 through 1512, the artist fixed his eyes on the ceiling as he worked on the scene known as "The Creation of Adam." Here God is shown reaching out, and with the touch of His finger, giving life to man, the crowning glory of His creation.

Even though a human artist such as Michelangelo used color and brush to capture the form of man, he could never do justice to what God the Creator had done! God had skillfully woven together 206 bones with muscles that could extend or distend in perfect harmony, allowing the framework to maneuver with amazing agility. He used an intricate system of over 60,000 miles of arteries, veins, and capillaries to tie together a well-coordinated system of organs capable of sustaining the life that He Himself would provide. And He covered His creation with a skin made of common elements, a skin that was able to heal itself when cut or bruised.

God also gave His creation a brain whose 250,000,000 axons control both functions and creative activities. He designed a spiraling link that defined unique characteristics of individuals and allowed those individuals, with a mate, to

recreate other persons who are both like and unlike each of their parents!

As David considered human creation, no wonder he felt compelled to cry out, "Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out. You formed me in my mother's womb. I thank You, High God—You're breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvelously made! I worship in adoration—what a creation! You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body. You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something. Like an open book, You watched me grow from conception to birth. All the stages of my life were spread out before You, the days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived one day!" (Psalm 139:13-16/The Message). ■

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Student Opportunities at Faith Builders

There are a few fall openings for full-time students in the *Ministry Apprentice Program* at Faith Builders Educational Programs, Guys Mills, PA. Interested persons please call Faith Builders at (814)789-4518 and ask for Stephen Russell or Ryan Zook, e-mail at fbep@fbep.org or find the application form at our website: www.fbep.org.