
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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Israel's Shalom Ministry **Prophecy Conference**

Theme: Israel in God's Plan

November 30–December 2, 2007

**Oak Hill Mennonite Church
Cumberland, VA**

Friday, November 30—7:00 p.m.

Welcome Steve Ulrich
ISM Introduction Art Hershberger
Message: *God's Call and Promise to Abraham* Wayne Yutzky

Saturday, December 1—9:30 a.m.

Message: *The Unfolding of God's Plan* Paul Emerson
Message: *The Unfaithfulness of Israel* Wayne Yutzky

Saturday, December 1—1:30 p.m.

Message: *The Result of Israel's Unfaithfulness* Paul Emerson
Report from Israel Missions Rhoda Nisly
ISM Volunteer—Israel/NYC
Question and Answer Session

Saturday, December 1—7:00 p.m.

Message: *God's Plan Undeterred* Clarence Bontrager

Sunday, December 2—10:00 a.m.

Message: *A Jewish View of Prophecy* Clarence Bontrager
Message: *Prophetic Overview* Art Hershberger

Lodging: Lodging is available in area homes. Registration is requested.
For information or to register please e-mail: artjanehersh@juno.com or call
(434) 983-9696.

Full programs are available at: www.israelsshalomministry.org.

Person of the Month:

Jacob A. Shenk

(1900-1950)



Born February 17, 1900, at Denbigh, Virginia, to Abram P. and Fannie Coffman Shenk, Jacob Andrew Shenk was the fifth of seven children. His mother, however, died when Jacob was only four and his father eventually remarried. From the second marriage Jacob gained four more brothers and sisters making the family total of eleven children.

Jacob received the Lord as his Saviour at the age of 12. He then became a member of the Warwick River Church.

He apparently enjoyed music because in his teen years he joined an established quartet. He also led singing classes for youth in his community.

He had a good mind and was able to invent ways to speed up his tasks or lighten his workload.

In 1920, at the age of 20, he became a student at Eastern Mennonite School in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Two years later he graduated from the elementary Bible course. He continued his studies there in order to complete high school. While going to school he worked part-time at a hatchery to help pay his school bill. Eventually his part-time job became full-time and he worked for the hatchery for a total of ten years.

On December 8, 1926, he married Lucy B. Wenger. The next year, 1927, Jacob graduated from high school at Eastern Mennonite School.

Brother Shenk was a good husband and father. He was concerned for the spiritual growth and welfare of his children. His love for his family kept him from allowing church and business matters to sidetrack him from his family duties.

Having enjoyed his work in the hatchery earlier, he bought a small hatchery of his own. Seventeen years later it was one of the largest such operations in the Harrisonburg area of Virginia.

By this time in his life Jacob Shenk was busy faithfully teaching Sunday school or being the Sunday school superintendent in his home district as well as sometimes performing these functions in the mountain churches.

Living in the Shenandoah Valley, he had become a member of Lindale Mennonite Church. In 1940 he was ordained a deacon. He took great interest in the work at Lindale.

During the years of 1942-50 Shenk served on the Board of Trustees of Eastern Mennonite College as well as the Virginia Board of Missions and Charities. He was also chairman of the Building Committee of EMC.

In 1943 Jacob Shenk became president of the Virginia Mission Board. During his time as president the work in Kentucky, Tennessee, Newport News, Harrisonburg, and Richmond was expanded. He did a good job of looking out for the needs of the missionaries on the field as well as seeing to it that there was a good mutual relationship between the mission board and the church at large.

Probably the most far-reaching effects of Brother Shenk's life are due to his faithful testimony as a Christian businessman. He practiced fairness and understanding when working with poultry flock owners, his employees, and his customers. He was always ready with

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THE QUEST FOR A CALLING:

What Is Mine, and How Do I Find It?

by Dr. Daniel Doriani

“To do what we love for people we love” could be the motto for the ideal job. Musicians love to perform, bakers delight to make breads and pastries, and engineers yearn to solve problems. But how do we find jobs we’ll love? Is there a “perfect job” out there waiting for each of us—a job that God has specifically designed us individually to do? If so, how can we know what it is?

To answer these questions, we must first understand the biblical concept of calling. The Bible speaks of calling in no less than three ways, each of which is important in seeking to understand God’s will for our lives.

First Calling: The Call to Christ

In centuries past, people did not switch jobs every few years. Farmers generally remained farmers for life. After the Reformation, pastors studied the biblical teaching on calling afresh and discovered that God calls His people to more than work. First and foremost He calls them to Himself. This is our “general call”; it is not unique for anyone. God calls all believers to the same faith, obedience, and godly character.

As Paul the apostle reminds us, we are “called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2). This point is essential. Whatever the differences between our gifts and work, God has the same basic purpose or “call” for every believer—to know God and be like Him.

God also issues a “particular call” to everyone. He has distributed singular gifts to each of us and designed a specific role for each of His children. This is unique for each person. For example, Paul says he was “called to be an apostle” (Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1), to carry God’s name to the Gentiles.

Second Calling: The Call to Work

God also called prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos to their positions (Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1; Ezekiel 2–3; Amos 7). God calls national leaders as well: He chose Moses to lead His people out of Egypt (Exodus 3–4); and He called Saul (1 Samuel 9–10), David (1 Samuel 16), and Jehu to reign as kings (1 Kings 16) in Israel. He even appointed pagan kings such as Hazael, king of Aram (1 Kings 19); and Cyrus, king of Persia (2 Chronicles 36; Isaiah 44) to their posts.

We may observe that this list runs from spiritual callings (apostle, prophet) to noble ones (deliverer, king) but does not mention farmers, shepherds, merchants, or other less “exalted” positions. This is because the Bible primarily records the history of redemption in the events of which prophets and kings often loom large. Yet God certainly notices the work of those who are engaged in more humble pursuits. This work matters to Him, as do all our deeds and words.

Unfortunately, our society—and sadly even many Christians—do not understand this. In our blindness, we tend to see various professions in light of their

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perceived value to the rest of us, counting some as more necessary or worthy than others. We believers are even guilty of making such artificial distinctions between different types of Christian work. Yet, if we think about it carefully—and biblically—we discover that we very much need the services of every legitimate vocation and that before God no honest calling is intrinsically superior to any other; all true vocations are equal. Cashiers and corporate leaders, cabinetmakers and ice-makers, are all one before God.

Some jobs may seem merely frivolous to most of us—like the selling of cotton candy, for instance—but may be legitimate ways of earning a living or supplementing an income for those who do them. Other jobs, however, not only fail to help others in any appreciable way, but also may actually hurt them—such as work in the gambling and abortion industries, for example.

At this point, we might be tempted to say, “If your work does not bless you and mankind, you should look for a new job.” But we must not be too quick to say this. Frivolous work and evil work are not the same thing. We are also inclined to doubt that “humble” work constitutes a calling the way “noble” work does. Is this the right way to think of such things? Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians helps us address such questions.

***Third Calling:
The Call to a Place***

Life in Corinth

To follow Paul’s thought, we must first learn something about the Corinthians. Some Christians in Corinth were dissatisfied with their places in life. They saw that people in the city practiced all sorts of sexual aberrations and wondered if it were best for them as believers to avoid sexual relations altogether. Abstinence is good, Paul replied, especially if one has self-control, but marriage and sexuality are good too (1 Corinthians 7:1-9). Other Christians, who had married pagans before

converting to Christianity, wondered if divorce was the best option. No, Paul says, marriage is permanent; believers should fulfill their marital duties (1 Corinthians 7:10, 11). They should take comfort, for God sets apart the whole family if just one spouse believes (1 Corinthians 7:14, 15).

Life Assignments: Marriage, Heritage, and Work

What does this have to do with work and calling? Paul’s conclusion is startling and has implications far beyond marriage alone. He says, “Each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him . . .” (1 Corinthians 7:17). That is, we have no right to improve our lot by fleeing a hard marriage if God has called us while in it. We cannot compel a spouse to change either. Thus, even an unsatisfying marriage is a calling assigned by God.

The call to a place in life is different from the call to Christ. It is a “life assignment.” God posts us to relationships and tasks, beginning with those we had when we came to faith. Some people think a change of circumstances will cure their problems, but Paul says no man need change his place to please God. Next he addresses work directly, using the extreme case of slavery. He asks, “Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so” (1 Corinthians 7:21). In other words, Paul tells slaves, “Don’t let that bother you,” as if slavery were no problem. Given what we know about the mostly deplorable conditions of slaves in antiquity, this is astonishing. How can Paul say such a thing?

First, Paul is not endorsing slavery. He is telling believers how to live within a pervasive, entrenched institution. Second, Paul says everyone belongs to someone. Believers are “bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 6:20). As a result, even freeborn men are now “Christ’s slaves” (1 Corinthians 7:22). Yet slaves who belong to Christ are spiritually free. Our

spiritual liberation is so radical that, by comparison, even enslavement matters little. God may summon us to new occupations, but even if He does not, He gives our old ones new meaning.

Thus, the Bible instructs us not to think first of changing locations to new jobs, cities, or social circles when we are in distress. Rather, it says, think of your call to Christ. If we belong to Him, our circumstances almost fade into irrelevance. And if this is true of slavery, then it is true as well of every boring, dead-end job, every foolish boss, and every impossible task. There is room to serve God even in cramped places. We can remain in our places if we remain with God because He provides for us there (1 Corinthians 7:24).

Our impatient generation, quick to flee unsought burdens, would do well to ponder this. Yet, if Paul had said no more, he could be accused of Stoicism, even fatalism. But remember, he also told slaves: “If you can gain your freedom, do so.”

Improving One’s Calling

This statement seems to contradict Paul’s command that everyone remain in his or her place. Yet a second look shows Paul’s flexibility. The unmarried and the widowed should not marry—unless they find celibacy unmanageable (1 Corinthians 7:8, 9). The married should not divorce—unless the partner is an unbeliever who insists on leaving (1 Corinthians 7:10-16). Slaves should remain in their places—unless they can gain their freedom by legal means (such as manumission or by purchasing it).

The principle here is that we may not leave a position if leaving violates a law, abandons a duty, or breaks a promise. Promises are sacred, even if we later regret making them. We have no right to question bedrock duties to family, friends, or employers, however painful the discharge of those duties may be. But we may also work for someone new if we violate no God-given duties in the process.

But how do we know when it is time to

make such a change? How can we be sure God is calling us to something new? Basically, how can we be confident that we have found our true calling?

Finding Our Particular Calling

Law and Experience

As we mentioned earlier, this problem of “finding a calling” was less visible in past centuries when most people had fewer options. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Bible does not contain a text that tells one exactly how to find his or her particular calling. Still, there are two principles that can lead us to the right occupations.

First, the law of God limits our options. God commands us to serve others in our work. Therefore, we cannot earn a living through immoral acts—such as prostitution, being an assassin, or selling dangerous and addictive drugs. Second, a proper respect for experience leads us to choose work that we know something about. We also need to know ourselves in order to choose well. A few people seem to know their gifts and callings from the very beginning and never waver. But for others, self-knowledge often unfolds slowly, by trial and error. An awareness of one’s true calling may not dawn on that person until halfway through life—or even later. It takes experience to recognize it when it arrives.

Desire, Fruit, and Employment

To the two prerequisites of obedience to God’s will and the self-knowledge that comes through experience, we can add three other elements that will help us as we seek our callings. These three—desire, fruit, and employment—form a sturdy triangle in which each leg strengthens the others.

“Desire” is the thrill an engineer feels as he solves a problem, the satisfaction a diagnostician knows as she labels a disease and prescribes the remedy, the elation a performer has when he gets it exactly right for an attentive audience. Desire declares, “I would do this job for

free if money were no object.” The Bible says it this way: “Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God” (Ecclesiastes 5:19).

By “fruit” I mean that the engineer’s solution works, the doctor’s patient improves, and the entertainer’s crowd goes home enriched. When there is fruit, recipients often thank the worker and say, “This was just what I needed.” The Bible encourages us to seek this kind of productivity and to pray for fruit: “May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands” (Psalm 90:17).

By “employment” I mean that someone asks the worker to perform his service again, commonly (but not always) in a paying job. Employment means someone believes that you can bear fruit continually and wants to secure your services. As Proverbs says, “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men” (Proverbs 22:29).

These three elements fortify each other. Desire for a task improves the quality of our work, making it more fruitful. If desire flags, it is rekindled when we see the fruit of our labors. Fruit also leads to employment as employers think, “We could use his or her talents here.” Employment multiplies fruit as the worker hones and practices his craft through the guidance of mentors. Finally, employment reinforces desire as a worker sees his gifts confirmed.

Gathered Wisdom

As a further aid to our quest for the perfect calling, we can also gather wisdom from past Christians. They often counseled fathers to take unsettled sons to visit men at work in various trades: to the sea for sailing or to the market for trading. Fathers would watch their sons for sparks of interest, then let them explore their chosen fields—perhaps as appren-

tices—before they settled on a calling.

This is wise, for however much we may change over the years, the child is still father to the man. What interests us at age 15 or 20 is connected to what interests us at age 30 or 50. It is also wise to recall that parents and friends often know us better than we know ourselves. They may occasionally misdirect us, of course, especially when their own desires cloud their judgment, but even the self-interest of others can be illuminating for us. People ask us to do what they need and expect from experience that we will do well. If we know what discerning people habitually ask us to do, we can be fairly certain that we are in the neighborhood of our callings.

Living Our Callings

Ideally, then, we get paid for work we love, our gifts deepen, we help many, and the hours fly by. When we “do what we are,” our spirits flourish. When we use our highest gifts, our community grows stronger. Then we hold the highest position—the one for which God has gifted and called us.

In the midst of our searching, let us remember that the summons to Christ is the most blessed calling of all. No matter what our current circumstances, we are to seek contentment in the place where God has assigned us, understanding that there is no hierarchy of callings. If we use our gifts to serve our neighbors and honor God, He is pleased, whether we are carpenters or kings. Contentment lets us pursue our dreams with calmness, not desperation. Then, drawing on the wisdom of others, we can search for the place where desire, fruit, and employment meet. In that place, we work best doing what we love for people we love. And, Lord willing, though we may sometimes grow tired in our work, we will never grow weary of it. ■

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From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

Cast-Out Christians

by Arlin Weaver

The New Testament frequently speaks of Christ casting out demons. But did you know that Christ also spoke of casting out Christians?

Let me explain. Jesus, in Matthew 9:37, 38, told His disciples, “*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.*” Beyond the mild King James English of “send forth” is the original word meaning of “to eject”—the same word that is used when we read that Christ *cast out* demons.

In other words, when God sends Christians into the harvest, this *sending forth* is actually an act with violence in it. More than a mere commissioning for the harvest field, it is the dramatic and often painful act of the Master placing His servants in the exact places where they need to be to be most effective in His work.

Christ’s word choice implies a number of things:

First, it implies that the terms of harvesting are completely up to the Lord of the Harvest. As *cast-out reapers*, we do not choose the field in which we are to labor—whether it is near or far, pleasant or unpleasant, rich or poor, or whether it brings apparent results. God makes that placement, and when He has placed us in His field we have no protest about His placement or complaints about how hard the work is. The harvest belongs to Him; and even more, the harvesters are His.

Sending forth also implies that what happens to the laborers is not the primary concern of harvest. Not that God does not care about His laborers, but the overriding goal of harvesting is to get the harvest in while the harvest is ready. When the harvesters share this vision, they are going to accept a few sleepless nights, and endure the pain of being cast out into unpleasant harvest fields.

Harvesting hurts. It requires commitment, dedication, and sacrifice. It often

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brings separation, misunderstandings, and it involves us in others' pain in ways we have never been pained before. Perhaps this is why God needs to use a touch of violence to get us into His harvest field—we are comfortable within our homes and churches, and suddenly God orders us into a field with a command to reap. But because we love the harvest—and even more, the Lord of the Harvest—we work wherever He has cast us out.

Have you been praying for God to cast out laborers into His harvest fields? The Lord of Harvest may answer your prayer by placing you among people, needs, and circumstances where He wants you to reap. When He does that, accept the pain that casting out brings as a small sacrifice for the Master, and . . . reap. ■

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JACOB A. SHENK . . . cont'd.

a word of testimony to those who inquired about his walk of faith. He was even so bold as to voice his personal convictions when asked to speak at a poultry association meeting. He expressed his belief that the Lord's Day should be honored and placed ahead of our work if we were to maintain a Christian testimony.

His responsibilities in the church and his business began to increase so he took lessons and became a pilot to cut down his travel time away from home. On March 24, 1950, he and Melvin Weaver flew to Knoxville, Tennessee, to fulfill responsibilities they had as members of the Virginia Mission Board. Tragically, something went wrong—possibly violent air turbulence—which caused Jacob to lose control of the plane. The aircraft broke up while in the air and both men plummeted to their deaths.

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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

NOVEMBER 4, 2007

Joseph, the Dreamer

Genesis 37:5-11, 19-28

The saga of Abraham's descendants and the growth of the nation of God's chosen people continues. November's lessons focus on Joseph, his sale into slavery, his rise to prominence in Egypt, and his dying father's blessing upon his sons. Again, context is very important to a full understanding of these lessons. Read from 33:16 to the end of

the book. This month will conclude our study from Genesis. These chapters contain one of the most dramatic stories in the entire Bible, the story of Joseph and his brothers. Study these lessons together to get the relationship and full impact of the happenings.

The first four verses of Chapter 37 give the background and set the stage for today's lesson. Joseph's brothers hated him for being a talebearer and were jealous of his position as the favored son. Therefore, when Joseph told them his dreams, which

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suggested their subservience to him, they became enraged. Their hatred grew with the passing of time and became such an obsession that their first thoughts on seeing him were of murder.

Even Joseph's father rebuked him for his dreams and the suggestion that he and his sons would one day bow down to him. However, Jacob did "observe the saying" and no doubt reflected on its accuracy as events unfolded years later. Likely no one at this point saw these dreams as prophetic statements which they would one day play a vital role in fulfilling. But God was at work preparing the way for Israel's family to go to Egypt where they would develop into a great nation.

Seventeen-year-old Joseph was sent on an errand by his father to bring a report on his brothers and the flocks. Even from a distance he was recognized by his brothers (v. 18), likely by his "coat of many colors." Seeing him, they conspired together to do away with him and his dreams. Only by the intervention of his oldest brother, Reuben, was he spared certain death. Reuben's intention (v. 22) was to secretly rescue Joseph and send him back to his father. However, for some reason he was not around when the other brothers carried out their scheme to rid themselves of Joseph, the dreamer.

The brothers showed their callousness by calmly going about their routine while their younger brother languished in the pit, awaiting his fate. The passing of a caravan of Midianite merchantmen presented the brothers with a solution to their murderous intent—sell Joseph to be taken to slavery in faraway Egypt. This time it was Judah who intervened, although his suggestion was certainly not totally aboveboard, but at least Joseph's life was spared.

So Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery. And thereby hangs a tale. Never in their wildest imaginations could the brothers have dreamed the outcome of their action. But God was at work, behind the scenes, yes, but very much in charge of unfolding events. He was with Joseph (39:2), but the brothers suffered years of

guilt for their dastardly deed. Joseph, the dreamer, protected and directed by God, was vindicated in the end, and became the saviour of his family.

For thought and discussion

1. Notice again in this lesson how parental favoritism played a significant role in the outcome of events. Determine not to allow that to destroy relationships in your home or in your church family.
2. Certainly not to fault Joseph, but isn't it better at times to keep our thoughts and our "dreams" to ourselves? Have you ever run into a situation similar to Joseph's where what was real and close to you was misunderstood by others? How did you react? What was the outcome?
3. Reuben was not necessarily a model person. But here his integrity shone through. How else did Reuben prove himself in this on-going saga? What does that tell us about people? and about God's mercy?
4. God can, and does, turn bad situations into good. And while that does not give excuse for doing evil, it does show that God can override our failures and cause good to result. Have you experienced this? Maybe you would want to discuss this with your class.
5. Can you imagine the thoughts going through young Joseph's mind? What sustained him throughout this experience?

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Joseph's Rise to Power

Genesis 41:25-40

Chapters 39 and 40 tell the story of Joseph's first 13 years in Egypt, first as a slave, then as a wrongfully incarcerated prisoner. His interpretation of the dreams of fellow prisoners, the king's butler and baker, set the stage for his eventual release and rise to power after he also interpreted

and explained Pharaoh's dream (Chapter 41). Today's lesson text opens with Joseph explaining Pharaoh's dream and affirming it to be a message from God.

Pharaoh's dream was perplexing. He didn't understand what it meant, and neither did his magicians. When Joseph was called in he readily acknowledged that: "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." Therein lies the secret to Joseph's life and success: his complete dependence upon God.

God's message to Pharaoh was that Egypt would suffer seven years of famine, but that those years would be preceded by seven years of plenty. The message was couched in Pharaoh's dream of the poor and good cattle and ears of grain. The urgency of the situation was emphasized by the twofold repetition of the dream. What was no doubt looked upon as simply a natural disaster by many was indeed the hand of God instituting but another facet of His overall plan. God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform, as the hymn-writer informs us.

Joseph's diplomatic aptitude was shown by the fact that he did not stop with an interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, he also outlined a solution. His plan (God's plan) was that in the seven years of plenty one-fifth of the harvest should be gathered and stored as provision for the lean years. Done under the hand of Pharaoh, this would strengthen his control over his people and over the land of Egypt, as we note from Chapter 47:15-20.

"And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh." Pharaoh was relieved, not only to have a full understanding and explanation of his dream, but to also have an unparalleled plan to deal with the situation suggested to him. Pharaoh's commendation of Joseph as "a man in whom is the spirit of God" is outstanding in that Pharaoh himself was regarded as a god by his people. Here he was acknowledging a superior power as exhibited in and through Joseph.

Did Pharaoh know that when Joseph was called in to interpret his dream, he came

direct from prison? In any case that did not deter Pharaoh from appointing him to carry out the plan for saving Egypt from ruin. He recognized him as "discreet and wise" and promoted him to a position in the kingdom second only to himself. (See verse 40.)

Joseph's life of steadfast integrity and patient trust in God resulted in his elevation from prison to the king's court. God was at work. And this situation did not primarily have to do with saving Egypt, but was simply another phase in God's long-range plan to establish His people as a nation. Joseph and Egypt were only tools in His hand.

For thought and discussion

1. What is the sustaining factor in times of distress and discouragement? What was it for Joseph? How can we develop a deeper understanding of this factor?
2. Isn't it marvelous how God employs unusual circumstances to bring His purposes to pass? Can you give examples from your own life?
3. Note that Joseph did not use his standing before Pharaoh to plead his own case. This speaks loudly of Joseph's character. How can we develop such discipline and clarity of purpose?
4. Joseph was not only "discreet and wise," he was also humble. How would you have handled the situation he was thrust into? What was the secret of Joseph's success?
5. Be sure to not look at this story as an isolated event, but to see it as part of God's overall plan. See 45:5; 46:2, 3; 50:24.

NOVEMBER 18, 2007

Joseph and His Brothers

Genesis 45:1-15

From Chapter 41:41 on to today's lesson we have the record of the years of plenty, the beginning of the lean years, and the introduction to today's text where Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. Read it all,

but be sure not to miss verses 42:6 and 43:28. Joseph put his brothers to the test to see if they were indeed the “true men” they professed to be (42:11). The brothers also revealed something about themselves in 42:21-23. Judah, at least, proved his integrity by offering surety for Benjamin when the brothers returned to Egypt for food on their second trip.

One can only imagine what all went through the brothers’ minds as they faced situation after troubling situation in Egypt, especially on their second trip. Who was this man? Why was he picking on them? Did it have anything to do with their mistreatment of Joseph? It was all very perplexing—and troubling. Whether they totally realized it or not, they were indeed suffering for their misdeed of the past.

At the culmination of the last test Joseph gave his brothers (Chapter 44), he could no longer refrain himself before them. After putting all others out, Joseph revealed himself with these simple, yet shocking words: “I am Joseph.” To say that the brothers were terrified is probably an understatement. All the remorse, the hidden feelings, the covered guilt, the deception, all came rushing back and flashed before their eyes in stark detail. Suddenly everything began to make sense. They undoubtedly realized through it all that they were getting their just due.

But notice Joseph’s kind words. He hastened to inquire first of their father, and then immediately comforted them by saying that it was all God’s doing and he held no animosity toward them. Then he fell on their neck and kissed them all, these rapscallion brothers of his who had done him so much harm. He forgave them, realizing that God had orchestrated events for the preservation of the family. What a man, this Joseph!

But it didn’t stop there. Joseph said, “Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay.’” Joseph did more than just send supplies back to keep the family

alive, he invited them, at Pharaoh’s command (verses 17-20), to move to Egypt with the promise of the best of the land for their flocks and herds. Joseph warned them that the famine had only begun. They would need sustenance to stay alive. And it was in his hands to provide it. Joseph: generous, forgiving, magnanimous.

It seems (verse 12) that Joseph had again to assure them that it was indeed he, their long-lost brother, that stood before them as lord of Egypt and their preserver. He also instructed them to tell their father of his glory, to reassure him that his son Joseph was indeed alive.

Again, one can only imagine the scene when the brothers returned, told their father what they had learned and, no doubt, confessed to him their transgression and years of deception. We can readily imagine that tears flowed again.

Joseph and his brothers—lessons in forgiveness, mercy, generosity, and release from guilt.

For thought and discussion

1. This lesson proves again that God can make good things happen out of bad situations. Has He done that in your life? How?
2. Another lesson we learn from this story is the devastating burden of harbored guilt. It never goes away. Don’t allow it to entrap you and ruin your life.
3. When things go awry do we blame it on circumstance, or do we look for deeper causes or purpose? What does God have to do at times to get our attention?
4. Do you think Joseph had forgiven his brothers before their meeting? Why, or why not? What does forgiveness do for the soul?
5. To the players in this story, it was all about survival. However, God was working behind the scenes to accomplish His purpose. What was His purpose? Find Scriptures to back your claim. Are we alert to background reasons for situations we go through today?

NOVEMBER 25, 2007

Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons

Genesis 48:8-21

Jacob's life was drawing to a close. He and his family had now been in Egypt seventeen years and had grown into a large group. Realizing his impending death, he called Joseph in to give instructions for his burial (see 47:29, 30; 49:29-33). Jacob realized that they were only strangers, sojourners, in Egypt and that eventually the family would return to the land promised by God to their forefathers (see verse 21 and 50:24).

Also before his death, Jacob blessed Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, elevating them to a status equal with his other sons as heads of tribal families and inheritors of Jacob's estate. This act gave Joseph a double blessing, confirming him as the favored son (see 48:4 and 1 Chronicles 5:2). This also, in effect, made 13 tribes, but since the tribe of Levi received no land grant in the division of Canaan, there were only 12 tribes allotted land.

The setting for today's lesson is found in the first seven verses of Chapter 48. (Chapter 49 also adds understanding to today's lesson.) Joseph took his sons to visit their dying grandfather. In that setting Jacob not only adopted Joseph's sons as his own, he also reiterated the promise God gave him at Luz regarding the inheritance of that land. The Abrahamic promise was being faithfully passed on from generation to generation.

Israel's question (v. 8) regarding Joseph's sons was likely due to his failing eyesight as noted in verse 10. Jacob embraced them, kissed them, and proceeded to bless them as his sons. Jacob seemed overwhelmed that not only had he gotten to see Joseph again, whom he had given up for dead these many years, but was now also able to see Joseph's sons. Jacob had given a succinct review of his life when Joseph introduced him to Pharaoh (see 47:9). He had had a difficult life. Here (v. 11), he was expressing perhaps one of his life's greatest joys.

Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons was cer-

tainly God-directed, for he purposely, though he could not see, crossed his arms to bless the younger above the elder. In response to Joseph's remonstrance, Jacob responded that he knew full well what he was doing. Manasseh, the elder, would become great, but Ephraim, the younger would become greater, both in number and in influence.

Verses 15 and 16 comprise Jacob's blessing upon Ephraim and Manasseh. He gave recognition to the God of his fathers as the One who had led him through life and called on Him to "bless the lads" and make them great. He adopted them as his sons, and as inheritors of the Abrahamic promise.

Jacob was a man of vision and faith. He had experienced God's blessing, protection, and direction throughout his life and he could say to Joseph with confidence, "God shall be with you." He also looked forward to the time his family would leave Egypt and settle in the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and himself (see 28:13, 14; 46:2-4).

And so the story of God's chosen people, begun with Abraham many generations prior, continues. The nation is established in a favorable position to grow, the promise is in place, and God is in control.

For thought and discussion

1. Review passages that confirm Joseph as Jacob's favorite son and explain why he was chosen above the eldest son in the family.
2. Do we exhibit as much faith in God's promises as did the patriarchs of old? Many died without ever seeing fulfillment. What kept the promise alive for them? for us?
3. One incentive for faithfulness is the realization that we are simply a link in the chain God is forging. We have no idea what He may accomplish in the future as a result of our faithfulness. Be faithful!
4. What are some of the outstanding qualities we observe in the life of Joseph and Jacob? What was their secret?
5. God has purpose beyond our comprehension. How should we react to situations we question or do not fully understand? ■

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Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

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

U.S. Government Ordered to Pay in Cover-Up

A federal judge ordered the federal government to pay four men—two of whom died in prison—\$101.7 million because the FBI withheld information that would have exonerated them. The FBI did this to protect an informant that was helping them dismantle the Mafia. The innocent men had spent nearly three decades in prison.—

Source: *CNN*

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Marijuana Shown to Be Harmful

Those that seek to legalize marijuana say that marijuana has not been scientifically shown to cause anything beyond intoxication. However, a massive new study sponsored by the British government shows that smoking just a single joint causes a 40% increase in the likelihood of mental illness. Smoking joints on a regular basis doubles one's risk.

—Source: *UK Daily Mail*

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South Korean Missionaries Kidnapped

The Taliban recently kidnapped twenty-three South Korean missionaries who were doing aid work in Afghanistan. Two have been released because they fell ill; two others were shot. Talks with the South Korean government have failed to bring about a resolution—the Taliban is demanding the release of eight Taliban prisoners by the Afghan government. A Taliban spokesman

said they are trying to decide what to do with the hostages now that the talks have failed.

Several weeks ago I was surprised to meet a South Korean missionary here in Thailand; I was even more surprised to learn while researching this story that South Korea is second only to the U.S. in sending out missionaries. The U.S. has about 46,000 missionaries (0.02% of American Christians) and South Korea has about 16,000 (0.1% of SK Christians). That is six times as many missionaries per Christian as the U.S.

—Sources: *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, *Al-Jazeera*, *Wikipedia*

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Bangladesh: Christians Beaten, Mob Threatens to Burn Homes

Muslim villagers armed with bricks and wooden clubs savagely beat ten Christian converts in Nilphamari district, Bangladesh, on Tuesday (June 26) and threatened to burn down their homes if they did not leave by [June 28].

Muslim extremists also threatened to kill two Christians.

A human rights advocate working on behalf of the Christians said he had contacted local police and government officials, but “they are very slow to respond.” Police rejected the Christians’ attempt to file a complaint, instead threatening to arrest them for “converting Muslims.”

—Excerpt from “Bangladesh: Christians Beaten; Mob Threatens to Burn Homes” in *Compass Direct News* (<http://tinyurl.com/2b6f8c>) (via *Kuepfer Kronicle*)

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Only 15-20% of U.S. Soldiers Fired Weapons in WWII

Former Army Ranger and paratrooper Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, who taught psychology at West Point and was a professor and department head of military science at Arkansas State University, wrote an article in the *Greater Good* quarterly published by the Institute of Human Development of UC Berkeley entitled “Hope on the Battlefield.” Its foundation rests upon historical work done by U.S. Army Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall who was a U.S. Army historian in the Pacific theater during WWII and later was named the official U.S. historian for the European theater. Marshall found—through mass interviews of soldiers that had been in close combat with enemy troops—that an average of only 15-20% of U.S. troops actually used their weapons. They did not turn tail and run, but rather rescued comrades, ran messages, and fetched ammo. However, most refused to fire their weapons.

Col. Grossman asks, “Why did these men fail to fire? As a historian, psychologist, and soldier, I examined this question and studied the process of killing in combat. I have realized that there was one major factor missing from the common understanding of this process, a factor that answers this question and more: the simple and demonstrable fact that there is, within most men and women, an intense resistance to killing other people. A resistance so strong that, in many circumstances, soldiers on the battlefield will die before they can overcome it.

“Indeed, the study of killing by military scientists, historians, and psychologists . . . reveals that almost all of us are overwhelmingly reluctant to kill . . . Yet this understanding has also propelled armies to develop sophisticated methods for overcoming our innate aversion to killing, and, as a result, we have seen a sharp increase in the magnitude and frequency of post-traumatic response among combat veterans. Because human beings are astonishingly resilient, most soldiers who return from war will be

fine. But some will need help coping with memories of violence. When those soldiers return from war—especially an unpopular one like Iraq—society faces formidable moral and mental health challenges in caring for and reintegrating its veterans.

“Thus the evidence shows that the vast majority of combatants throughout history, at the moment of truth when they could and should kill the enemy, have found themselves to be ‘conscientious objectors’—yet there seems to be a conspiracy of silence on this subject. In his book *War on the Mind*, Peter Watson observes that Marshall’s findings have been largely ignored by academia and the fields of psychiatry and psychology.

“But they were very much taken to heart by the U.S. Army, and a number of training measures were instituted as a result of Marshall’s suggestions. According to studies by the U.S. military, these changes resulted in a firing rate of 55 percent in Korea and 90 to 95 percent in Vietnam.”

He goes on to say that the lopsided military victories (18 U.S. soldiers against 364 Somali soldiers in one example) that comes as a result of this desensitization—quenching the natural aversion to killing—comes at the “hidden cost” of “severe psychological trauma.” He cites a study that “found that the victims of [post-traumatic stress disorder] are almost solely veterans who participated in high-intensity combat situations. These veterans suffer far higher incidence of divorce, marital problems, tranquilizer use, alcoholism, joblessness, heart disease, and ulcers.”

Col. Grossman finishes by expressing appreciation for the hope brought to humankind by this mysterious force that creates in humans an aversion to killing. As Christians it is clear to us that Col. Grossman is only discovering God’s law written on each human’s heart (Romans 2:15).

—Source and excerpts from: “Hope on the Battlefield” by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman in *Greater Good*, Summer 2007 (<http://tinyurl.com/2hawub> or <http://tinyurl.com/238c81>)

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Aluminum Doesn't Cause Alzheimer's or Cancer

It is a common myth, because of certain scientific studies, that aluminum—especially that aluminum found in antiperspirants—can cause Alzheimer's. These studies have indeed shown correlations between aluminum and Alzheimer's, but it has been shown that Alzheimer's causes high aluminum levels in people, not the other way around. In fact, it is impossible to get away from aluminum (it's the third most common element in the earth's crust) as it is in the air we breathe and most of the food we eat—even in organic, garden-grown vegetables.

—Source: *Scientific American*

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More Government Waste

In the latest example of rampant government waste, increasing corruption, and poor cost controls, a small parts supplier was convicted of charging and receiving payment from the U.S. Army for \$998,798 in “shipping costs” for two 19¢ washers from South Carolina to a base in Texas. This company had been fraudulently billing the government for seven years (since 2000). In all, this single case of fraud cost the government \$20.5 million.

—Source: *Bloomberg Wire*

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Iran Shells Iraqi Villages

In the latest act of defiance against the U.S. and Iraqi governments, Iran shelled Kurdish villages in Northern Iraq, which is a clear violation of Iraqi sovereignty and an act of war. Iran did so while fighting the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), a pro-democracy, anti-Iranian guerrilla organization. Iran claims the U.S. is supporting PJAK militarily and *The New Yorker* and Rep. Dennis Kucinich concur. However, *Slate* magazine and the *UK Guardian Unlimited* have cited evidence that the U.S. is not supporting PJAK.

U. S. Major-General Rick Lynch announced that nearly 50 members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards are in Iraq training anti-Iraqi insurgents.

—Sources: *UK Guardian Unlimited*, *Wikipedia*, Kucinich.House.Gov, *Slate*, *The New Yorker*

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Islamic Militants Bomb Hyderabad

Two bombs exploded killing forty-four people on August 25 in the southern India city of Hyderabad. Twenty-one more bombs were found and defused. The bombs exploded around 7:45 p.m. At that same time, my family (Marvin and Lois Mast and children) was in the Hyderabad airport, having flown there to visit Sam and Becca Gunti (missionaries with Faith Christian Fellowship of India, a mission supported by our eponymous congregation). They were there until 8:30. According to Sam's local sources, two of the unexploded bombs were located in the airport and had been set to go off at 9:30 and 10:30.

—Sources: *The Hindu*, *London Times*, *Times of India*, *IBN Live*, local sources

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Hindu Leaflets List Christian Crimes

Hindu leaflets, recently distributed by the thousands in Chitradurga district of India's Karnakata state, threaten death to Christians and demand that they leave India. They are, however, a source of great irony as they list crimes committed by the Christians: “Helping the poor and converting them, educating the orphans and converting them, promoting the freedom to marry, and organizing free medical care while ignoring the caste system.”

—Source: *Christian Post*

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U.S. Presidential Race Shaping Up

Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator Barack Obama lead the Democratic primary race polls with 37.8% and 22.2% respectively according to the RealClearPolitics.com poll average. Former NYC

Mayor Rudy Giuliani, former Senator Fred Thompson, and former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney lead the Republican polls with 27.7%, 17%, and 13.5% respectively (according to RCP averages). Giuliani is a very worrisome candidate to Christian conservatives as many of his positions (which are reversals) on moral issues came only after it became clear that he would seek the nomination and would need social conservative support. Even with his reversals, he remains extremely socially liberal for a Republican. Fred Thompson seems to be the Republican candidate (with a chance at nomination) most in line with Christian values. He had prominent roles in investigating both the Watergate scandal and the 1996 Clinton campaign finance corruption and was equally harsh on both Democratic and Republican corruption. He just received a glowing review in the *New York Times* (of all places!) for his fair-mindedness, anti-waste, and anti-corruption stances. He received a 0 rating from Planned Parenthood and an F from NARAL; his voting record in the Senate was 100% pro-life. In short, Thompson is a strong conservative (in nearly every area) who is not afraid to expose wrongdoing in Republican ranks. Throughout his political career he fought for transparency of the political process. This is important as our political system continues its downward descent into ever-increasing corruption and partisanship.

—Sources: *New York Times*, RealClearPolitics.com, OnTheIssues.org., Wikipedia

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



What Is Wrong With American Education?

by Haven Bradford Gow

Bruce Short, a Harvard Law School graduate and an attorney in Houston, TX, tells us in his book, *The Harsh Truth About Public Schools* (Chalcedon Foundation): “Contrary to the happy-talk from the education industry and media that today’s children—are the best educated ever, few public school children can read or write proficiently, let alone do mathematics or science at an advanced level. Indeed, many schoolchildren would have trouble finding Chicago on a map, and by the 12th grade American children are math and science dunces by international standards.”

Moreover, “American education is now aggressively anti-Christian, both spiritually and morally. Government schools have effectively become parochial schools for secular humanism and many varieties of New Age spirituality.” Also, “for decades the unacknowledged moral code of government schools has been moral relativism.”

The sad truth, says Mr. Short, is “government schools are killing our children, spiritually, morally, and intellectually . . . In essence, we have abdicated our responsibility to educate our children. As a consequence, we have simultaneously put our children in harm’s way and have failed to notice that the ‘little red schoolhouse’ has effectively become a pagan seminary nurturing our children in alien creeds and infusing them with false values. This, in turn, is transforming our families, our churches, our culture, and our society.”

Even so, many persist in arguing that the problem with public education is a lack of adequate federal funding of education; however, this urgent question remains: Would an increase in government spending on education necessarily improve the quality of public education, or are there moral and cultural factors that impinge upon the quality of education?

The United States spends \$536 billion a year on education, which amounts to more than \$10,000 per student per year. Even with the War on Terrorism, we spend more on education than we do on national defense (\$486 billion). We spend more on education than any other nation in the world. Yet, test scores reveal our students do less well than students in other nations that spend considerably less than we do on education.

As Texas high school teacher Paul Zoch points out in *Doomed to Failure: The Built-In Defects of American Education* (Chicago: Ivan Dee), even though Japan spends much less than we do on education, its students do much better than our students on test scores. Why? According to Mr. Zoch, Japan's educational system emphasizes character as well as intellectual development; its school system teaches young people that it is a matter of personal and family honor to behave and do well in school, and that doing well in school requires study, hard work, self-sacrifice, and cooperation in the learning process. Unlike too many modern educators in America that insist that education should be "fun," Japanese educators and parents teach children that behaving and doing well in school demands a moral commitment on their part to develop their characters and intellects.

According to Vernie Schoor, president of Character Choice (1545 Tanake Drive, Erie, CO 80516), American schools also must stress character as well as intellectual development; the purpose of education should be: Help young people become good human beings, not just good students. She observes: "For children to take morality and character development seriously, they need a trusted adult or role model in their lives who also takes morality and character development seriously. Children need to see parents, grandparents, relatives, teachers, coaches, and others live out constructive character virtues and Biblical principles and experience their example of choosing the difference between right and wrong."

Miss Schoor notes that "the most impor-

tant responsibility we have as trusted adults is the moral education of our children and youth . . . There are many non-controversial ethical, moral, and character truths: it is wrong to mistreat a child, to humiliate someone, to torment an animal, to think only of yourself, to lie, to steal, to break promises. And on the positive side, it is right to be respectful and considerate of others, to be responsible, to be charitable and generous."

Miss Schoor adds: "Children may become acquainted with their moral heritage in literature, art, science, religion, and philosophy. Developing character and conscience in young children involves being a person of high moral character before attempting to impart it to others."

C. Brett Bode, a family court judge in Pekin, Ill., echoes the above sentiments about teaching virtue and good character through example, saying: "Children, for the most part, will live up or down to the expectations of their elders, revealed not by what their elders say but by the way their elders live."

The late G. H. Wang, who was the president of an educational/cultural affairs foundation in Chicago, likewise insisted the best way to teach virtue is through personal example. We best can teach virtue by displaying in our personal and professional lives such values as moral and intellectual courage and integrity.

For example, if someone is being unjustly persecuted and abused, a person of moral courage will stand up and defend the victim of unjust treatment. If one finds the evidence shows his previous position on, say, abortion was mistaken, a person of moral and intellectual integrity will acknowledge his error and change his position. A person of moral and intellectual courage and integrity will speak out on behalf of what is right (for example, on behalf of racial tolerance and understanding), even though his stand may cause him to lose money or friends or even his job.

Concerning the connection between
(continued on page 20)



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.

A Formula for Success

Steps to Success in the Christian Life

by David L. Burkholder

Text: Joshua 1:1-9

Introduction

No one wants to be a failure. As a nation we are obsessed with success. Check any bookstore or booksellers catalog and you'll find a plethora of books and programs on success: “How to Have a Successful Marriage,” “How to Build a Successful Business,” “How to Be a Successful Builder, Salesman, Realtor,” etc. Or “How to Invest for Success,” or “How to Dress for Success.” We are obsessed with success. We want to make our mark in this world, to achieve a position that others look up to, that others respect—and maybe envy. And there are people out there very willing to give us advice, for a fee of course, which simply enhances their success.

But have you ever seen a book on “How to Become a Successful Christian”? Do we pay as much attention to that aspect of life as we do to those pursuits intended to provide success in the monetary or social realm? Are our priorities skewed? Do we spend more time and energy on getting ahead in this world than on developing a meaningful relationship with God and thus assuring success in the spiritual realm?

Well, if you are concerned, there is help. There is a book which if followed will guar-

antee success in the Christian life. That book, of course, is the Bible. However, just as with all self-help books, its advice must be followed carefully to be of benefit. It will do you no good on the bookshelf. It must be studied and its principles carefully applied in order to achieve success.

We want to look at the life of Joshua in this study to see an example of one who had a close relationship with God and who found success by following the principles in this book. We will focus on the first nine verses of Chapter 1.

Joshua's Dilemma

Joshua, as Moses' successor, had big shoes to fill. Moses was a great man. He had accomplished many outstanding works for the children of Israel on God's behalf. Notice what is said of him in Deuteronomy 34:10-12: “*And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and the wonders, which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, and in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel.*” Moses was an outstanding leader

and a personal friend of God. They talked together. He would be a most difficult act to follow. Joshua knew this. But Joshua was not going into this task unprepared.

In Exodus 17:9, 10 we note where Joshua was appointed Moses' righthand man. As commander of Israel's army he defeated the Amalekites at Rephidim. He also accompanied Moses to Mt. Sinai when God gave Moses the tables of stone bearing the commandments to govern His people (Exodus 24:12, 13). He was one of the twelve men sent to spy out Canaan (Numbers 13) and one of only two who brought back a favorable report. During these years Moses served as mentor and Joshua was learning strategies of leadership and ways of dealing with people. God was all this time preparing him for the eventual role of leadership of His people.

In Numbers 32:12 we note of Joshua that he "wholly followed the Lord." That attitude put him in a position where God could use him. He was a committed follower of the Lord. We also note in Numbers 27:15-23 that before Moses' death, and at his request for God to appoint a successor to lead the children of Israel, God instructed Moses to lay hands on Joshua and appoint him as his successor. He was God's chosen man.

So Joshua was a man appointed by God, trained by Moses, and full of God's Spirit. Those were the positives going for him. But he was now 85 years old. The conquest and settling of Canaan would consume the next 25 years of his life until his death at the age of 110. How could he be assured of success? Could he stand up to the many challenges that lay ahead?

God's Challenge

In verses 1-4 we see Joshua's commission. Forty years after God had originally intended for the Israelites to enter Canaan, they were now ready. God's command to Joshua was to lead His people into the Promised Land. "Arise, go" were God's instructions to Joshua. We notice in verse 4 that God outlined the borders of the land to

be conquered: South, North, East, West—all within that scope was to be their land.

In verses 5 and 6 we note God's promise to be with Joshua: "I will be with you." There was security in God's promised presence and protection. How comforting to Joshua. And who better to have on your side in any endeavor. We also note in verse 6 God's implicit promise to assist Joshua in the division of the land. The task at hand was large and would take years, but God promised His presence and help.

But there was responsibility on Joshua's part as well, as we note from verses 7 and 8. He was to be "strong and very courageous." The task at hand was not for the faint-hearted. It would take skill and effort to move approximately two million people across the Jordan, into Canaan, conquer the land, and divide it among the tribes of Israel. It would take strength and courage. That was Joshua's part.

Joshua was also to follow Moses' instructions and the law of God explicitly. There was to be no deviation. When doing God's work it must be done God's way. There is no room for personal opinion or experimentation with other plans or procedures. The book of the law was to be Joshua's constant companion. He was to live and lead by its precepts. That law book encompassed worship restrictions and obligations. It also dealt with civil matters and interpersonal relationships. The law covered all governing matters, both religious and civil. It was to be Joshua's guidebook. He was to know its contents thoroughly, and follow it strictly. He was to meditate on it continually. "For then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (v. 8). There were consequences to Joshua's obedience to God's way. Only by strict adherence to the law of God would Joshua be guaranteed success as he led Israel into the Promised Land and divided the land among the tribes.

In verse 9 the Lord again encourages Joshua to be strong, courageous, fearless, and undeterred. He was to rest secure in the fact that regardless of what he might

face, God would be with him and enable him. In verse 5 God told him: “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life.” God assured Joshua of His continuing presence and protecting care.

Joshua’s Success

Several factors led to Joshua’s successful life and leadership. First of all he was assured of the cooperation of the people. See verses 16-18. That was important. A leader cannot lead if he does not have willing and dedicated followers. There followed the successful spying out of Jericho, the crossing of Jordan, the conquest and settling of the land, all under the direction and leadership of Joshua, with the cooperation of the people.

Then as Joshua approached the end of his life he called the people together and recounted all that the Lord God had done for them during his leadership. We read of that in Chapters 23 and 24. He also urged their continuing faithfulness to God. Then Joshua passed off the scene. But his influence lived on after his death. In Chapter 24 we read in verses 29-31, that “Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua.” His life and leadership were such that they impressed others to faithful living. They were a tremendous testimony of God’s blessing on a faithful life.

Lessons for Today

At times God may ask us to do things which we feel are beyond our capacity or ability. Humanly speaking, Joshua would certainly have had reason to feel that way about God’s assignment. But when God calls a person to a position He also gives the assurance of His presence and provides mentors to train in the work. He always equips the person for the task to which He calls him. You can be assured of that.

Joshua “wholly followed the Lord.” His commitment was not halfhearted. That is the secret to success in any endeavor—wholehearted dedication and involvement,

total immersion in the task. We also noted that Joshua was “full of the spirit of wisdom.” Moses had laid hands on him, ordaining him to the task of leading God’s people. He had God’s blessing and God’s power at his disposal. Note also, that for Joshua this was a full-time, lifelong assignment. When God equips a person He calls him to lifetime service.

God also assures the person He calls to service of His continuing presence and guidance. That is invaluable. God told Joshua, “As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.” We can rest assured that as we do God’s work He will not forsake us—just as He promised Joshua to be with him, so He will be with us. Joshua had observed God’s faithfulness to Moses. That gave him confidence. And it gives us confidence as we observe God at work in the lives of others.

To be assured of success in the Christian life we must strictly follow God’s law. We dare not deviate or allow human reasonings to deter us from strict adherence to God’s instructions and directions, as so many are doing today. We need to apply ourselves to an understanding of God’s Word and then make application of its principles to life. And that means spending time with it. Notice that Joshua was to meditate on God’s law “day and night.” It was to be his constant companion and resource. And it must be ours if we want to be successful in the Christian life.

As we closely follow God’s direction for our lives and faithfully and obediently live within His will, our influence will also affect others, both in our lifetime and even beyond our life span, as did Joshua’s. What better understanding of success than to realize that by following God’s will and way our lives can not only impact others now, but have a lasting influence on others, even after we are gone.

Conclusion

So, what did God say to Joshua as He called him to service? “*Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which*

Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”

God wants each of us to be a spiritual success. And He has given us a formula to achieve that goal: commitment, courage, obedience, adherence to God’s directions, faithfulness. He has done His part. The question is: Are we willing to do our part? Success depends on it. Remember that. ■

WHAT IS WRONG WITH AMERICAN EDUCATION? . . . cont’d.

character, morality, and education, an article in the May 8, 2006 *America* quoted these words of a holocaust survivor: “My eyes saw what no man should witness—gas chambers built by learned engineers, children poisoned by educated physicians, infants killed by trained nurses, women and babies shot by high school and college students. So I am suspicious of education (divorced from morality and character education). My request is: Help your students become humane. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane.” ■



Kickball and Peacemaking

by Bruce Hamsher

I still remember today what recess felt like when I was in the third grade. That year the game was kickball. More pointedly, I remember the awesome red ball we used. It was the kind of ball which was somewhat solid, yet *spongy* enough that when it hit that sweet spot on your foot, it seemed to soar in the air for a mile. I also vividly remember the classmate who never thought he was out. (You probably remember this guy too. Every class had one.) The play didn’t even have to be close, but regardless, he would dispute the call if he was out. After weeks of this behavior, another classmate and I decided that it was time for *us* to become the *teachers*, so we made up our own *lesson plan* to teach this guy a lesson. Thus, the

push technique was applied. The push technique was done very quickly, succinctly, and successfully. I engaged *the whiner* in a conversation while my buddy slowly walked behind him and proceeded to get down on all fours. Once the whiner was in place, I gave a quick push and watched as he tumbled backward over my accomplice’s back and onto the ground. We had a good laugh . . . until he started writhing around on the ground in pain. His cries and groans caught the attention of the teacher on duty and our laughs quickly turned to concern and to that “oh, no” feeling deep in the pit of one’s stomach. As we weren’t able to go out to recess for a while after this, we realized very quickly that our reactive, aggressive

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behavior certainly didn't solve the problem. A peaceful solution wasn't tried and things only got worse.

My denomination is a historic peace church. One of our doctrines states that we do not go to war. We believe that the way of Jesus is the way of peace. In our past, when a military draft has been enacted, many have chosen to give of their time and service in what we would consider to be possible "life giving" ways, rather than possible "life taking" ways. We grieve the reality that in the past, an American Christian would've killed a Vietnamese Christian and that an Iraqi Christian has no doubt killed an American Christian, all in the name of Civil Religion. We would see the entire world as the potential "Kingdom of God," one that can't be divided by national, man-made boundaries.

Obvious questions arise when statements like these are made. One I've heard often is, "What would you do then if someone was about to harm your wife and children?" To be honest, I'm not sure exactly what I would do in that situation, but I can't imagine that I would passively sit back and do nothing. Another question I've heard is, "Shouldn't Hitler have been wiped out?" One thing is for certain . . . he should've been intensely prayed for. The Apostle Paul was no better of a man than Hitler was. He was the self-proclaimed, "Chief Sinner and Murderer of Christians" prior to his conversion!

The point here is that too often, both nationally and personally, we take matters into our own hands *first* and then beg and plead with God to bless our efforts. We can go back and forth on these things, but the one thing we can all agree on is that Jesus modeled for us a "Ministry of Reconciliation" and a "Peace-Giving Lifestyle."

This then poses another question. As a historic *peace* church, then why are we no different from other denominations when it comes to our internal "warring" and squabbles, our church splits, and our

inability to, as Paul says, "Live at peace with everyone"? (Romans 12:18). Why is it easier to agree with this in *doctrine* than in *practice*? I do believe that the way of Jesus is the way of peace. In Matthew 5:9, Jesus tells us it is a blessed thing to be a "peacemaker." In other words, we will experience a deep sense of satisfaction and joy if we are peacemakers and we'll be labeled as "children of God." I wonder then, when will we live out this *lifestyle of peace* in all of life, not just in convenient, isolated segments?

Paul says in Romans 12:21, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." He also states in Romans 14:19, ". . . let us make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification." We must be willing to share the peace we have with Christ with others in *loving* and *creative* ways. I recently listened to an Indonesian pastor tell of the time when his church was unjustly shut down by the local Muslim officials. This would now cause a huge problem as the only water well in that small community was located on the church property. What would their response be? If they would withhold water from the other villagers, chaos would erupt. It would be tough but they decided that even though they were unjustly shut down, they would continue to let the local Muslims freely use their water supply. After eight months, the Muslim officials peacefully let them reopen their church.

I'm coming to realize more and more that *peacemaking* is not merely a concept or a doctrine, it's an activity. It's not passive, it's active. It's not so much something we are, it's something we do . . . in our homes, in our work, and in all of life! A myth abounds about peacemakers which needs to be clarified. Peacemakers love peace, but they do not passively accept trouble. They are persons who are strong in the Lord and who do not remove themselves from conflict and adversity. Think about this *verbally*
(continued on page 23)



Counseling From the Word

Tough Times Lead to Better Living

by James Rudy Gray

It is likely that when we counsel someone, we are dealing with a person who is going through some tough times. Most of us do not like pain and seek rewards from life, not punishment. However, pain does come. How can you help a person who is hurting and wants the pain to end?

Job had some counselors surrounding him. Some of what they shared with Job was good. Some of it was not. Some of it was just not timed very well. But one bit of advice that Eliphaz shared in Job 5:7 is relevant and true: *"Man is born for trouble; as the sparks fly upward."* Job was going through some tough times and Eliphaz shared with his friend that this is part of the journey of man. It still is today.

Is God sovereign? Is He sovereign over everything? If He is, then nothing happens without His direct intervention or permission. God had a plan for Job. Job had something to learn. God's plan was accomplished and Job learned something vitally important. The process Job went through in his personal growth and development was not pleasant but it was productive. He learned that God is sovereign and man is not.

In the process of undergoing his pain, Job heard the counsel of friends and even his wife. In the end, it was the voice

of God that led him forward. What happened to Job in his difficulty? I believe he did four things: he accepted the reality of the moment; he adapted to the situation at hand; he adjusted his life to learn; and finally, he advanced in faith. Job became a wiser and better person because of the experience through which he traveled.

Counseling provides the environment in which we can help our counselees see that God is in control and has a plan. We can encourage them to grasp the truth that adversity or tough times do not destroy them but can actually make them stronger and better.

Marian Eberly reported in *Christian Counseling Today* that in a 1994 study of resilient adults that hardiness was developed in these people "because [they] were sorely tested and emerged stronger than they believed they would have otherwise. As a result, they valued life greatly. Their behaviors reflected this change. . . ."

Tough times do not mean God does not love us. They do not imply that suffering is the result of wrong. Sometimes we suffer because we do what is right. How can we help hurting people make some sense out of the tough times? We can hear their story, share God's truth, and point to the opportunity they have

because of the difficulty. God is not simply observing our lives from far away. He is in control and He is involved. Romans 8:28 says: “*We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.*”

If our counselee is a Christian, we can help him or her trust God in the midst of trying circumstances. God does direct His people. Proverbs 16:9 says, “*The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.*” God uses various tools as a means of grace in accomplishing His purposes in our lives. Our counselees will be empowered the most when they are enabled to see that God is the author and director of life’s events. They may appreciate our counsel or support, but it must not stop there. We must work to help them see something bigger and greater at work in their lives than our counsel. God used Job’s counselors but He also worked His will in spite of Job’s counselors. Those who turn to us for help can see the hand of God when they are looking through the eyes of faith. As Christians who counsel, we have the great privilege of sharing the truth of God so that the people we attempt to help can better see God at work.

Tough times are not usually the end times. They generally are passages that have a beginning and an end. A crisis is a time of danger and opportunity. People are more likely to make changes in their lives during a time of crisis than at any other time. What a person learns in the time of crisis can help him continue the changes that he or she began to make because of the crisis. Behind the crisis is God and He has a purpose for His children. He is molding and shaping our lives. God is always at work in His world and in the lives of His people. Learning, growing, and changing may not always be pleasant but when God is directing our ways, they always bring about good. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Pulpit Helps*, September 2007

KICKBALL AND PEACEMAKING . . . cont’d.

and how it’s so much easier to shoot someone down with your words, than to deal with the situation at hand. However, if you’re seeking a “peaceful” solution, you will assume the hard work of conflict resolution. You will be proactive, will stand strong in the face of the adversity, and will not run away from the problem. You will face it and address it in a bold and righteous way.

As we look into the purpose of His ministry, we see that Christ sought to bring *peace* to a hurting and needy world. He saw us trapped in our sin, with no way out. He saw the *warring* and the *pain* within our souls. He saw us in our war and in His compassion, He longed to bring us His peace. This verse from Isaiah 53:5 sums it up well where it tells us how, “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” Hallelujah and amen.

Oh, and the next time your “classmate” is insistent about being safe at first base . . . let them be safe and keep on playing the game. And at that moment when they do stumble, remember that helping them up is always better than causing them to fall. Trust me, I learned this the hard way. ■

—Bruce Hamsher lives in Sugarcreek, Ohio, and is currently the Associate Pastor at the Berlin (OH) Mennonite Church.



JACOB A. SHENK . . . cont’d.

Although Brother Sherk’s life was seemingly cut short, he left behind a good testimony of faithfulness. He saw every aspect of life as service to the Lord. He was a good steward and gave himself and his time only to those endeavors, which he felt, would bring glory to the Lord.

Although short, the life of Jacob A. Sherk was well lived in the things that really matter—those things of *eternal* value. —Gail L. Emerson



Song of the Month

Douglas A. Byler, Music Editor

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

Now Thank We



by Rinkart/Crüger

Lyrics: Although we are aware that we must be thankful all the time, this month serves as a special reminder to give thanks to God for His blessings. There are many hymns that are sung at this time of year that are designated as “Thanksgiving” hymns, but “Now Thank We” is one of the oldest and most well-known of them all. On the surface it appears to be a rather light-hearted and carefree expression of thanks for all the nice things that we enjoy from day to day. However, a look into the setting in which it was written will reveal a much deeper side of this hymn.

During the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), the small city of Eilenburg, Germany, saw many refugees seek shelter behind its walls. When the Swedish armies laid siege to the city, food ran low and many people began to starve. The pastors of the local churches were kept busy conducting funerals, and one by one they also died. Only one Lutheran pastor named Martin Rinkart was left, and he sometimes conducted as many as fifty funerals a day. One of these funerals was for his own wife. Rinkart himself left the city walls to plead with the Swedish commander for mercy, who listened to him and lowered his demands. It was in 1636, while still under siege in Eilenburg, that Martin Rinkart penned the words of this hymn.¹

Obviously, Martin Rinkart had found out

how to experience the real joy that comes from knowing Christ, even in very unfavorable circumstances. The focus of this text is almost entirely on the greatness of God and His goodness to us. The only hints that he gives us about his current suffering are in the second stanza: “And guide us when perplexed / And free us from all ills . . .” Hopefully we can all learn to trust God and have the joy and thankfulness that this hymn speaks of, not only during the last week of November, but all year round. Although not many of us are conducting fifty funerals a day, we still go through times when it is difficult to be as thankful as we should be. “Now Thank We” is not only an exhortation to do so, but excellent proof that such joy is possible.

Music: This music is usually attributed to Johann Crüger, because it was first published in a book of his hymns in 1647. However, Catherine Winkworth, who translated the German text into English, believed that Rinkart himself wrote the tune a few years earlier.

No matter who wrote the music, we must concede that it was very well done and fits the text quite splendidly. The music for the first two lines is joyful and very well settled in the home key of F major, which corresponds to the general mood of the text for those lines. At the beginning of the third

Now Thank We

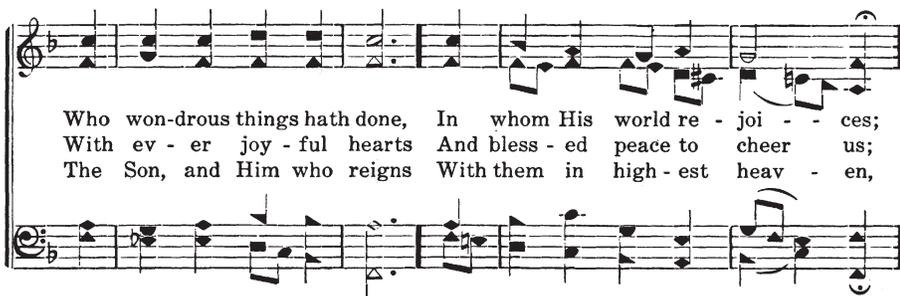
O magnify the Lord with me. —Psalm 34:3

MARTIN RINEKART, c. 1636

JOHANN CRÜGER, 1647



1. Now thank we all our God With heart and hands and voi - ces,
2. O may this boun - teous God Thro' all our life be near us,
3. All praise and thanks to God, The Fa - ther, now be giv - en,



Who won - drous things hath done, In whom His world re - joi - - ces;
With ev - er joy - ful hearts And bless - ed peace to cheer us;
The Son, and Him who reigns With them in high - est heav - en,



Who, from our moth - ers' arms, Hath blessed us on our way
And keep us in His grace, And guide us when per - plexed,
The One E - ter - nal God Whom earth and heav'n a - dore;



With count - less gifts of love, And still is ours to - day.
And free us from all ills In this world and the next.
For thus it was, is now, And shall be ev - er - more.

line, the tonal center of the music begins to shift a little, making us feel like we are not quite sure where we are in relation to F major. This corresponds nicely to the journey referenced in the first stanza and the perplexity in the second. With the last

phrase of the hymn, the music settles back into the home key, making us feel like we have arrived at the end of our journey, or that the confusion has been cleared. ■

1. <http://www.covchurch.org/cov/news/item3366.html>.

The Overthrow of Straight America

by Steve Gallagher

“All churches who condemn us will be closed,” boasted Michael Swift in a February 1987 issue of the *Gay Community News*. He went on to write, “We shall sodomize your sons. . . . We shall seduce them in your schools, in your dormitories, in your gymnasiums, in your locker rooms, in your sports arenas, in your seminaries, in your youth groups . . .”

The outrageous claims of this now-infamous article were dismissed by most readers at the time as so much bombastic nonsense. However, exactly one year later, a “war conference” was held outside Washington, D.C., by 175 of the nation’s leading homosexual activists to lay out a strategy to *homosexualize* America.

Among those in attendance were two men who believed they knew how to accomplish this goal. Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen laid out what they considered to be a surefire method of overcoming all opposition to the total acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle.

“Kirk and Madsen were not the kind of drooling activists that would burst into churches and throw condoms in the air,” writes David Kupelian for *World Net Daily*. “They were smart guys—very smart. Kirk, a Harvard-educated researcher in neuropsychiatry, worked with the Johns Hopkins Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth and designed aptitude tests for adults with 200+ IQs. Madsen, with a doctorate in politics from Harvard, was an expert on public persuasion tactics and social marketing.”

Kirk and Madsen emerged from the conference with a mandate to lay out their

strategy to the homosexual community. Their original article was developed and expanded into a best-selling book entitled, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the '90s*.

“The campaign we outline in this book,” they write, “though complex, depends centrally upon a program of unabashed propaganda, firmly grounded in long-established principles of psychology and advertising.” Their book became known as the *Gay Manifesto*.

Winning the Public

The strategy that Kirk and Madsen devised called for three basic steps: desensitizing, “jamming,” and converting.

Desensitization required presenting a constant, positive image of homosexuals to the American public. This tactic has been successfully employed in, and assisted by, the media. TV programs such as “Will and Grace” and “Queer As Folk” have presented likeable gay characters that win the hearts of their viewers. In short, television producers have effectively sold the American people on the idea that gays are really no different than “straights.”

“The main thing is to talk about gayness until the issue becomes thoroughly tiresome,” Kirk and Madsen write. “If you can get [straights] to think homosexuality is just another thing—meriting no more than a shrug of the shoulders—then your battle for legal and social rights is virtually won.”

Just as important in their overall scheme has been the ploy of “jamming” their opponents; in other words, discrediting and

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defaming anyone who disagrees with them. “We intend to make the antigays look so nasty that average Americans will want to disassociate themselves from such types.” Exactly how would they accomplish this feat? They would characterize conservatives and Christians as “homohating bigots.” Kirk and Madsen write: “[Our propaganda] can show them being criticized, hated, shunned. It can depict gays experiencing horrific suffering as the direct result of homohatred—suffering of which even most bigots would be ashamed to be the cause.”

A perfect example of this is the movie “Philadelphia,” in which actor Tom Hanks plays a suffering homosexual who is being egregiously persecuted by fellow lawyers. Hanks played the part so effectively that audiences were left feeling overwhelming sympathy for the plight of homosexuals and tremendous disdain for those who oppose their lifestyle. The film industry rewarded Hanks with an Academy Award for his stellar performance.

Finally, according to the strategy developed by Kirk and Madsen, people must be converted from merely sympathizing into overtly supporting the gay community. The activist-writers predicted there would be a mass public change of heart, “if we can actually make them like us.”

“We mean conversion of the average American’s emotions, mind, and will, through a planned psychological attack, in the form of propaganda fed to the nation via the media,” they continue. “We mean ‘subverting’ the mechanism of prejudice to our own ends—using the very processes that made America hate us to turn their hatred into warm regard—whether they like it or not.”

Attacking the Church

The temptation at this point is to accept at face value the claims of gay activists that

all they want is equal protection under the law. However, they have long since won that battle. The truth is, they want much more: the complete silencing of opposing voices.

Kirk and Madsen call for a two-pronged approach to neutralizing the Christian-led opposition.

First, they must “muddy the moral waters . . . [by] publicizing support for gays by more moderate churches” and “raising theological objections of our own about conservative interpretations of biblical teachings.”

“If you can get [straights] to think homosexuality is just another thing—meriting no more than a shrug of the shoulders—then your battle for legal and social rights is virtually won.”

“This has been done with amazing success in mainline Protestant denominations, such as in the Episcopal Church USA, United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Presbyterian Church USA,” writes Ed Vitigliano of the *American Family Association*. “Homosexual activists in each of these major denominations have so clouded the issues regarding the biblical view of homosexuality as to threaten each with schism and ruin.”

Ultimately, conservative denominations and organizations which continue to resist this denigration of moral values must be viciously defamed: “At a later stage of the media campaign for gay rights—long after other gay ads have become commonplace—it will be time to get tough with remaining opponents,” write Kirk and Madsen. “To be blunt, they must be vilified.”

Hate Crimes

The final step in the strategy to silence all opposition is to push for legislation that will actually criminalize criticism of the homosexual lifestyle. In this aspect of the plan, gay activists have a willing supporter in the mainstream news.

For example, after the tragic 1998 murder of homosexual student Matthew Shepherd, Katie Couric of NBC’s *Today Show*

interviewed Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer. She asked, "Some gay rights activists have said that some conservative political organizations like the *Christian Coalition*, the *Family Research Council*, and *Focus on the Family* are contributing to this anti-homosexual atmosphere by having an ad campaign saying if you are a homosexual you can change your orientation. That prompts people to say, 'If I meet someone who's homosexual, I'm going to take action to try to convince them or try to harm them.' Do you believe that such groups are contributing to this climate?" It goes without saying that the posing of a question like this on the national media has a tremendous impact on the public's perspective of the Church.

The accumulated impact of Kirk and Madsen's highly successful strategy has brought our nation to the brink of passing the "Hate Crimes" bill. It is no longer a matter of *if* this bill will be passed, but *when*.

One opponent of the bill, Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.), explained that ". . . certain provisions of this bill would inhibit the free practice of religion and compromise First Amendment rights." Christians agree. In a poll of over 4,000 website visitors conducted by the American Family Association, 91% believed that the "hate crimes" law would be used to intimidate Christians. And it appears to me that the lopsided majority has good reason to support the conclusion represented in this poll.

Sweden's parliament, on the cutting edge of homosexual rights, passed a similar bill in 2002. This law criminalized "hate speech," including anything expressed in "church sermons."

The following year, a Pentecostal pastor named Ake Green delivered a message to his congregation in which he described homosexuality as "abnormal, a horrible cancerous tumor in the body of society." He went on to say that they were "perverts, whose sexual drive the devil has used as his strongest weapon against

God."

While his wording may be harsh, Pastor Green should still have the right to rail against the evils of the day in his own church. Public prosecutor Kjell Yngvesson disagreed, reportedly saying: "One may have whatever religion one wishes, but [the sermon] is an attack on all fronts against homosexuals. Collecting Bible [verses] on this topic as he does makes this hate speech."

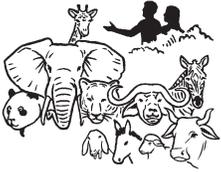
This is the legal environment to which America (and indeed, all of Western Civilization) is quickly heading. What can Christians expect to face in the future? "Their campaign," states David Kupelian, "will not end until Christians and other traditionalists opposing homosexuality are shut up, discredited, and utterly silenced . . ."

Steve Warren, a spokesman for the homosexual group ACT UP, wholeheartedly agrees: "We have captured the liberal establishment and the press. We have already beaten you on a number of battlefields. And we have the spirit of the age on our side. You have neither the faith nor the strength to fight us, so you might as well surrender now."

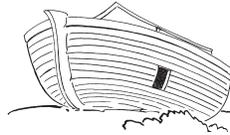
While his conclusion is unthinkable, his analysis of our condition may very well be accurate. I pray that there will be those who will continue to stand for righteousness, fighting for lost souls and speaking the truth about sexual sin. But I fear that too many will remain silent, cowering in the face of homosexual intimidation. May God grant us courage to withstand this rising tide of evil. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Unchained!*, a publication of Pure Life Ministries, Summer 2007, www.purelifeministries.org.





Beginning Issues



The Dating Methods: Do They Really Work? (Part 2)

by John Mullett

In last month's article we looked at some of the key problems with the radiometric dating methods. One of the dating methods I didn't have room to talk about was Carbon-14 Dating (C^{14}) so I want to take a closer look at that in this article. One of the first things I want to establish about C^{14} dating is it has nothing to do with millions of years. The half-life (decay rate) of C^{14} is 5,730 years. Based on the assumption (and it is only an assumption) that the ratio of C^{14} to C^{12} has always been the same as it is today then this method's accuracy is limited to about 80,000 years. Even with significant changes in the C^{14} to C^{12} ratio it would still fall far short of having anything to do with millions of years and finding C^{14} in a specimen should cause it to be considered as evidence against it being millions of years old.

The way the C^{14} dating method works is this: Cosmic rays from outer space collide with atoms in the atmosphere and cause these atoms to come apart. When neutrons from these fragmented atoms collide with Nitrogen-14 (N^{14}) they combine and convert into C^{14} atoms (a proton changes into a neutron). C^{14} combines with oxygen (as does C^{12}) to form carbon dioxide (CO^2). CO^2 is then incorporated into plants. Living things that eat plants have the same ratio of C^{14} to C^{12} as the air

we breathe. C^{14} is not stable (it's radioactive) and decays into C^{12} which is stable. Therefore when a living thing dies the "clock" begins as the C^{14} is no longer replenished, but continues to decay into C^{12} and the ratio of C^{14} to C^{12} begins to change. This creates a reliable clock *if* the ratio of C^{14} to C^{12} is and has always been constant. There is our key *assumption*. As mentioned earlier, if the ratio has been a constant, extent of the C^{14} dating method's accuracy is about 80,000 years. But has the ratio always been constant?

Dr. Willard Libby, the founder of the C^{14} dating method made the assumption that this ratio had been constant. However in his original work he found the universe did not appear to be in equilibrium. This spelled trouble for his old-age beliefs since his calculations showed if the earth would start with no C^{14} in the atmosphere it would take up to 30,000 years to build to a steady state (equilibrium). Having not yet reached equilibrium it would indicate the universe to be rather young, contrary to the beliefs of Libby. He contributed his findings to miscalculations, but it turned out he was right. If it takes the atmosphere about 30,000 years to build up to equilibrium, and it's not in equilibrium, then it seems like just one more indication of a young Earth.

As always, when it comes to events in the past, unless there is an eyewitness account we are forced to make assumptions in interpreting them. That is why it is so vital to have a standard of truth we can always rely on. That is just what we have in the Bible: an eyewitness account of one who was there (the Creator—God Himself). We can and should

always trust the Bible regardless of how science may seem to contradict it. ■

*Note: The information for this article was taken from Chapter 7 (Doesn't Carbon-14 Dating Disprove the Bible?) of *The New Answers Book*—Ken Ham, General Editor (*Answers in Genesis* 2006—Master Books). For a more detailed report on this subject be sure to read the aforementioned chapter.



In Good Hands

by Wayne Stiles

One of my daughters used to come to me as a toddler and request, “In the air, Daddy, in the air!” She wanted me to hurl her up and catch her. I did so to her utter delight.

My other daughter saw this and asked me to toss her too. Yet as she leveled off, her face contorted into sheer terror. When I caught her, she clung to me with all four limbs and begged, “No, Daddy! Not again!” Later I considered why the same flight gave joy to one and terrorized the other. One focused on my ability to catch her, and the other focused on her inability to control the flight.

As my children develop more independence, I find myself in a similar situation. I still see them hurled in the air, but instead of me doing the tossing and catching, God flings them while I helplessly watch from a distance. In those moments I become acutely aware of the struggle between my confidence in God’s ability versus my own.

Every parent faces this tension. We want our children to follow God, but we hesitate to let God lead them. We want to

provide, protect, and direct them so that they will receive the good we desire for them. And so in a strange irony the very love that wants the best for them becomes the barrier that keeps them from receiving it.

Jacob faced a similar challenge. In Genesis 37 we read that old Jacob dearly loved his sons—Joseph, in particular. Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery and smeared his garment with a goat’s blood to fool their father. Seeing the blood-soaked clothes, Jacob exploded in grief: “It is my son’s robe. Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces” (v. 33). Yet God superintended all events in expectation of a great famine that would soon ravage the earth. Though Joseph suffered as the victim of foul play, the Bible repeatedly notes, “The LORD was with Joseph” (39:2, 3, 21-23). Joseph rose to become Egypt’s second-in-command and stored up grain in preparation for the famine.

When Jacob heard of the grain in Egypt, he sent his sons. But “Jacob did

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others because he was afraid that harm might come to him" (42:4). In Egypt the brothers did not recognize Joseph, and the very one Jacob refused to release into God's control, Joseph required before they could purchase more grain. (See the irony in God's sovereign plan?) When the brothers reported to their father, Jacob clung to Benjamin: "My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow" (42:38).

Three decades earlier Jacob wrestled with God for control of his life, and before God could bless Jacob, He had to cripple him. Now Jacob found himself again wrestling with God, afraid this time to trust the Lord with his son.

Each parched day of the famine followed another until finally Jacob surrendered. "If it must be," he conceded, "take your brother also and go back to the man at once. . . . As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved" (43:11, 13, 14). God's sovereign orchestration of events wrenched Benjamin from Jacob's arms and forced him to do what he would never have done otherwise: trust God with his son. John Calvin wrote of this passage, "From the example of Jacob let us learn patient endurance, should the Lord often compel us, by pressure of circumstances, to do many things contrary to the inclination of our own minds; for Jacob sends away his son, as if he were delivering him over unto death."

We can hold nothing—not even a child—more dear than our trust in God. If we authentically trust God's sovereignty and power, we will rest in the assurance that our sons and daughters remain as safe in harm's way as in their beds at home. On the other hand, if God allows them to go before us to heaven, no amount of protection will prevent such circumstances.

We will seldom experience the peace we seek without surrendering to God that for which we pray. Ultimately our comfort cannot come from the assurance that God will protect our children, ironic as it sounds. Our comfort comes by trusting a God who remains in complete control and who will accomplish His good purposes even in the worst circumstances. That cannot change, even when evil appears to have won the day.

Jacob enjoyed not only the restoration of Benjamin, but much more than he could have imagined. "I never expected to see your face again," Jacob told Joseph, "and now God has allowed me to see your children too" (48:11). Jacob seemed almost ashamed he ever doubted God's grace and sovereignty. Though Jacob stood powerless to shelter his son from harm, "The LORD was with Joseph," and so we know God remains with our children whether in our care, or far removed from the safety we can provide.

I confess these principles come easier to write than to do. As I watch God toss my daughters in the air, I tend to focus on my inability to control the flight instead of God's ability to catch them. In this I find a gnawing conviction that I would rather feel in control than allow God to guard and guide the future of my children. Such is the challenge of all believing parents.

Our love for our children grows to resemble God's love for them when we allow the Lord to lead them as He chooses. And we find as God leads them, He also takes us to new levels of faith. Giving God the freedom to rule the lives of our children provides us the peace our own wasted efforts for control fail to furnish. God's sovereignty demands our surrender, yes. But in surrendering to God, the humble parent bows not in an admission of defeat, but in an act of worship. ■

—This article first appeared in *Kindred Spirit* magazine. Wayne Stiles is the author of *Going Places With God: A Devotional Journey Through the Lands of the Bible*

Only a Christian Can Mortify Sin

by Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

“How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” —Romans 6:2.

Before I can live a Christian life, I must be a Christian. Am I such? I ought to know this. Do I know it, and in knowing it, know whose I am and whom I serve? Or is my title to the name still questionable, still a matter of anxious debate and search?

If I am to live as a son of God, I must be a son, and I must know it. Otherwise my life will be an artificial imitation, a piece of barren mechanism, performing certain excellent movements, but destitute of vital heat and force. Here many fail. They try to live like sons in order to make themselves sons, forgetting God’s simple plan for attaining sonship at once: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12).

The faith of many among us is, after all, but an *attempt* to believe; their repentance but an *attempt* to repent; and in so doing they only use words that they have learned from others. . . . God’s description of a Christian man is clear and well-defined. It has about it so little of the vague and wide that one wonders how any mistake should have arisen on this point, and so many dubious, so many false claims put in.

A Christian is one who “has tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Peter 2:3); who has been “begotten again unto a lively hope” (1 Peter 1:3); who has been “quickened together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5); made a partaker of Christ (Hebrews 3:14); a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4); who “has been deliv-

ered from this present evil world” (Galatians 1:4).

Such is God’s description of one who has found his way to the cross and is warranted in taking to himself the Antiochian name of “Christian,” or the apostolic name of “saint.” Of good about himself, previous to his receiving the record of the free forgiveness, he cannot speak. He remembers nothing lovable that could have recommended him to God, nothing fit that could have qualified him for the divine favor, save that he needed life. All that he can say for himself is that he has “known and believed the love that God hath to us” (1 John 4:16), and in believing has found that which makes him not merely a happy, but a *holy* man. He has discovered the fountainhead of a holy life.

Have I then found my way to the cross? If so, I am safe. I have the everlasting life. The first true touch of that cross has secured for me the eternal blessing. I am in the hands of Christ, and none shall pluck me out (John 10:28).

The cross makes us whole: Not all at once indeed, but it does the work effectually. Before we reached it, we were not “whole,” but broken and scattered, nay, without a center toward which to gravitate. The cross forms that center, and in doing so it draws together the disordered fragments of our being. It “unites our heart” (Psalm 86:11), producing a wholeness or unity which no object of less powerful attractiveness could accomplish. It is a wholeness or unity that, beginning

with the individual, reproduces itself on a larger scale, but with the same center of gravitation, in the church of God.

Of spiritual health, the cross is the source: From it there goes forth the “virtue” (*dunamis*, the power, Luke 6:19) that heals all maladies, be they slight or deadly. For “by his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5); and in Him we find “the tree of life” with its healing leaves (Revelation 22:2). Golgotha has become Gilead, with its skillful Physician and its “bruised” balm (Jeremiah 8:22; Isaiah 53:5). Old Latimer¹ says well regarding the woman whom Christ cured: “She believed that Christ was such a healthful man that she should be sound as soon as she might touch Him.” The “whole head [was] sick, and the whole heart faint” (Isaiah 1:5); but now the sickness is gone, and the vigor comes again to the fainting heart. The look, or rather the Object looked at, has done its work (Isaiah 45:22); the serpent of brass has accomplished that which no earthly medicines could effect. Not to us can it now be said, “Thou hast no healing medicines” (Jeremiah 30:13), for the word of the great Healer is, “Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth” (Jeremiah 33:6). Thus, it is by the abundance of that peace and truth, revealed to us in the cross, that our cure is wrought.

The cure is not perfected in an hour. But, as the sight of the cross begins it, so does it complete it at last. The pulses of new health now beat in all our veins. Our whole being recognizes the potency of the divine medicine, and our diseases yield to it.

Yes, the cross heals: It possesses the double virtue of healing sin and quickening holiness. It makes all the fruits of the flesh to wither, while it cherishes and ripens the fruit of the Spirit, which is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentle-

ness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22). By this, the hurt of the soul is not “healed slightly,” but truly and thoroughly. It acts like the fresh, balmy southern air to one whose constitution the frost and damp of the far north had undermined. It gives new tone and energy to our faculties, a new bent and aim to all our purposes, and a new elevation to all our hopes and longings. It gives the deathblow to self; it mortifies our members that are upon the earth. It crucifies the flesh with its affections and lusts. Thus, looking continually to the cross, each day, as at the first, we are made sensible of the restoration of our soul’s health; evil loosens its hold, while good strengthens and ripens.

It is not merely that we “glory in the cross” (Galatians 6:14), but we draw strength from it. It is the place of weakness, for there Christ “was crucified through weakness” (2 Corinthians 13:4); but it is, notwithstanding, the fountainhead of power to us. For as out of death came forth life, so out of weakness came forth strength. This is strength, not for one thing, but for everything. It is strength for activity or for endurance, for holiness as well as for work. He that would be holy or useful must keep near the cross. The cross is the secret of power and the pledge of victory. With it, we fight and overcome. No weapon can prosper against it, nor enemy prevail. With it, we meet the fightings without as well as the fears within. With it, we war the good warfare, we wrestle with principalities and powers, we “withstand” and we “stand” (Ephesians 6:11-13); we fight the good fight, we finish the course, we keep the faith (2 Timothy 4:7).

Standing by the cross, we become imitators of the crucified One. We seek to be like Him, men who please not themselves (Romans 15:3), who do the Father’s will, counting not our life dear to us, who love our neighbors as

1. **Hugh Latimer** (c. 1485/90-1555)—famous Anglican reformer and martyr.

ourselves and the brethren as He loved us; who pray for our enemies; who revile not again when reviled; who threaten not when we suffer, but commit ourselves to Him that judgeth righteously; who live not to ourselves and who die not to ourselves; who are willing to be of “no reputation,” but to “suffer shame for His name,” to take the place and name of “servant,” nay, to count “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (Hebrews 11:26). “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin [has died to sin as in Romans 6:10]; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God” (1 Peter 4:1, 2).

Standing by the cross, we realize the meaning of such a text as this: “Knowing this, that our old man [was] crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Romans 6:6). The crucifixion of our old man, the destruction of the body of sin, and deliverance from the bondage of sin are strikingly linked to one another and linked, all of them, to the cross of Christ. Or we read the meaning of another: “I [have been] crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Here the one Paul—not two Pauls or two persons—speaks throughout as completely identified with Christ and His cross. It is not one part of Paul in this clause and another in that. It is the one whole Paul throughout, who is crucified, dies, lives!

Like Isaac, he has been “received from the dead in a figure”; and as Abraham would, after the strange Moriah transaction, look on Isaac as given back from the dead, so would Jehovah reckon and treat this Paul as a risen man! Isaac would be

the same Isaac, and yet not the same; so Paul is the same Paul, and yet not the same! He has passed through something which alters his state legally and his character morally; he is new. Instead of the first Adam, who was of the earth, earthy (1 Corinthians 15:47), he has the last Adam, Who is the Lord from heaven, for his Guest: “Christ liveth in him”; “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (just as he says, “yet not I, but the grace of God in me”); and so he lives the rest of his life on earth, holding fast his connection with the crucified Son of God and His love. Or again, we gather light upon that text: “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24); and that: “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14).

Standing by the cross, we realize the death of the Surety, and discover more truly the meaning of passages such as these: “Ye are dead [ye died], and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). Ye died with Christ from “the rudiments of the world” (Colossians 2:20). His death (and yours with Him) dissolved your connection with these. “If one died for all, then [all died]; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14b-15). “For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living” (Romans 14:9).

Romans 6:7-12, “He that [has died] is freed [justified] from sin [i.e., *He has paid the price*]. Now if we be dead with Christ [or *since we died with Christ*], we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ [having been] raised from the dead dieth no more [*He has no second price to pay, no second death to undergo*—Hebrews 9:27, 28]; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that

he died, he died unto sin once [*His death finished His sin-bearing work once for all*]; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body [*even in your body*—Romans 12:1], that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.”

There is something peculiarly solemn about these passages. They are very unlike, both in tone and words, the light speech which some indulge in when speaking of the Gospel and its forgiveness. Ah, this is the language of one who has in him the profound consciousness that severance from sin is one of the mightiest, as well as most blessed, things in the universe. He has learned how deliverance from condemnation may be found and all legal claims against him met. But, more than this, he has learned how the grasp of sin can be unclasped, how its serpent-folds can be unwound, how its impurities can be erased, how he can defy its wiles and defeat its strength, how he can be holy! This is, to him, of discoveries one of the greatest and most gladdening. Forgiveness itself is precious, chiefly as a step to holiness. How any one, after reading statements such as those of the Apostle, can speak of sin, pardon, or holiness without awe seems difficult to understand. Or how anyone can [think] that the forgiveness which the believing man finds at the cross of Christ is a release from the obligation to live a holy life is no less incomprehensible.

It is true that sin remains in the saint, and it is equally true that this sin does not bring condemnation back to him. But there is a way of stating this that would almost lead to the inference that watchfulness has thus been rendered less necessary; that holiness is not now so great an urgency; that sin is not so terrible as formerly. To tell a sinning saint that no amount of sin can alter the perfect standing before God, into which the blood of

Christ brings us, may not be technically or theologically incorrect; but this mode of putting the truth is not that of the epistle to the Romans or Ephesians. It sounds almost like, “*Continue in sin because grace abounds,*” and it is not Scriptural language. The apostolic way of putting the point is that of 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. . . .” “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). [EDITORIAL COMMENT: Consistent known sin in a professing Christian’s life without repentance is a clear indication that the person is lost.]

Thus, then, that which cancels the curse provides the purity. The cross not only pardons, but it purifies. From it there gushes out the double fountain of peace and holiness. It heals, unites, strengthens, quickens, blesses. . . . But we have our cross to bear, and our whole life is to be a bearing of it. It is not Christ’s cross that we are to carry: that is too heavy for us. Besides, it has been done once for all. But our cross remains; and much of a Christian life consists in a true, honest, decided bearing of it. . . . The cross on which we are crucified with Christ, and the cross which we carry are different things, yet they both point in one direction and lead us along one way. They both protest against sin and summon to holiness. They both “condemn the world” and demand separation from it. They set us upon ground so high and so unearthly that the questions which some raise as to the expediency of conformity to the world’s ways are answered as soon as they are put; and the sophistries of the flesh, pleading in behalf of gaiety and revelry, never for a moment perplex us. The kingdom is in view, the way is plain, the cross is on our shoulders; and shall we turn aside after fashions, frivolities, pleasures, and unreal beauties, even were they all as harmless as men say they are? ■

—From *God’s Way of Holiness*

The Blame Game

by Amos Kauffman

If a person slips and breaks his leg on an icy spot on my driveway, who's responsible? If my neighbor's child is injured on my play set, who's responsible? If a man develops lung cancer after years of tobacco use, who's responsible? If I fall asleep in church, who's responsible? The list of possible scenarios is endless. Historically, the role of judges and juries has been to sort out facts and attach responsibility accordingly, but it seems too many times justice has been perverted by political or monetary factors.

When there's injury or loss, we can gain a lot more sympathy, and sometimes money, by portraying ourselves as victims rather than foolish or careless. It feels a lot better to have support and the sympathy that goes with being abused rather than the reproof for a poor decision or wrong action. We love a shoulder to cry on, but don't always want the effort and discipline of a responsible life.

Politicians have learned there are votes to be gathered by encouraging a victim mentality. Attorneys have learned there is big money to be made by blaming others for our own foolish actions. When politics and money are involved, we really can't expect things to change "out there." The trouble is, what's out there makes its inroads into our lives as well.

The real problem is that man is first of all a sinner, long before he ever becomes a victim. But as long as we can blame our problems on our past, our parents, our pastors, other people and even God himself, we let ourselves off the hook. The "blame game" becomes a substitute for godly repentance. Unless a person is willing to accept responsibility for his own wrong actions and forgive those who have wronged him, the blame game will continue. According to 1 Corinthians

10:13, there's no circumstance that falls outside of God's permission; there's no abuse, hardship, or knock in life that can't be worked through by the grace of God.

When I've wronged someone, I have a problem that needs to be dealt with. It's taken care of through repentance, confession, and restitution. When I've been wronged by another, I may not be responsible for the wrong, but my response becomes my problem. An unwillingness or a supposed inability to forgive can soon become a more serious problem than the wrong itself. A child of God is called to be an "overcoming victor," not an "undergoing victim."

Personal responsibility includes:

- accepting sole responsibility for your choices and actions
- accepting responsibility for your feeling and thinking, even when you've been wronged by another
- refusing to blame others for the situation you find yourself in
- refusing to wallow in self-pity, no matter how difficult the circumstance
- realizing that God allows nothing greater than you can bear with His help

When we face our final test at God's judgment throne, all our excuses will sound pretty lame. God knows and understands our circumstances, perhaps better than we do ourselves, but the blame game will not stand before Him.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). ■

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