

# The Sword and Trumpet

Founded in 1929 by Geo. R. Brunk I

Vol. LXXV

DECEMBER 2007

No. 12

**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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## IN THIS ISSUE

1. Person of the Month: John N. Hyde . . . . .	1
2. A King in Bethlehem’s Manger . . . . .	3
3. Gabriel’s Story . . . . .	4
4. From the Editor’s Desk:	
How Will You Celebrate? . . . . .	7
5. The Sunday School Lessons . . . . .	9
6. Newslines . . . . .	14
7. America’s Golden Calf . . . . .	18
8. The Importance of a Literal Interpretation . . . . .	21
9. Song of the Month:	
“Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming” . . . . .	22
10. Sermon of the Month:	
Chosen by Grace and Called to Faith . . . . .	24
11. The Power and Permanence of the Printed Page . . . . .	28
12. Beginning Issues:	
Races or People Groups? . . . . .	30
13. OVEREATING: A Weighty Subject . . . . .	31
14. Counseling From the Word:	
COUNSELORS: Created to L.E.A.D. Through and to God’s Image . . .	35
15. Index . . . . .	39

THE SWORD AND TRUMPET (USPS 615-540) is published monthly by *The Sword and Trumpet, Inc.*, P. O. Box 575, Harrisonburg, Va. 22803-0575. Periodicals postage paid at Harrisonburg, Va. SUBSCRIPTION RATES: 1 year US \$15.00, 2 years US \$25.00. Bulk rates on the basis of US \$12.00 per year. Add US \$3.00 per year for countries outside USA and Canada. Telephone (540) 867-9419 or 867-9444. FAX (540) 867-9419. E-mail address: swandtrumpet@verizon.net.

Sarcasm—Fun Loving or Unloving?, Aug 37  
**Miller, Steve**  
 More Than Fig Leaves, Jan 20  
**Mohler, R. Albert Jr.**  
 Christian View of Beauty, A, Part 1, May 16; Part 2, Jun 32; Part 3, Jul 34  
**Moore, W. C.**  
 Turn From Sin and Believe the Gospel, Sep 28  
**Morris, Henry M.**  
 Light of the World, The, Oct 16  
**Morris, John D.**  
 Why Did God Give the Rainbow Sign?, Feb 44  
**Moyer, Robert L.**  
 Our Duty of Contention!, Feb 36  
**Mullett, John—Beginning Issues**  
 Accuracy of Genesis, The, Jan 30  
 Age of the Earth, The; Is It Important?, Jul 32  
 Axioms, Presuppositions, and the Evidence, Feb 35  
 Dating Methods, The: Are They Reliable?, Oct 32; Do They Really Work?, Nov 29  
 Genetic Mutations, Jun 30  
 Implications of an Old Earth, Sep 31  
 In the Beginning God, Mar 33  
 Mechanisms of Evolution: Do They Exist?, May 36  
 Races or People Groups?, Dec 30  
 Rocks Cry Out, The, Aug 31  
 What Is Evolution?, Apr 37  
**Myers, Craig Alan**  
 Biblical Church Membership, Jan 32  
**Myers, Timothy J.**  
 Worship and Music, Jan 16  
**Neuenschwander, Jacob**  
 Planning Family Evenings, Aug 38  
**Olinger, Dan**  
 Internet Safety, Part 1, Jan 36; Part 2, Mar 39  
**Piper, John and Noel**  
 Family, The: Together in God's Presence, May 26  
**Poirier, Alfred**  
 Peacemaking Pastor, The, Feb 18  
**Rainey, Dennis**  
 Building a Great Family by God's Standards, Feb 2  
**Reed, John**  
 Gabriel's Story, Dec 4  
**Rudolph, Titus**  
 Childishness or Childlikeness, Feb 23  
**Russell, Stephen**  
 What Motivates Our Changes?, May 37  
**Schoap, Tim**  
 Why Join a Church?, Aug 20  
**Schrock, Clifford**  
 Master's Heartbeat, The, Sep 7  
**Schrock, Simon**  
 Has the Vision Died?, Jul 3  
**Scott, Bruce**

Importance of a Literal Interpretation, The, Dec 21  
 Saved by Amazing Grace, Sep 23  
 William Cowper, Jun 1  
**Shelly, John**  
 Dangers Confronting Preachers, Apr 16  
**Shetler, Mel**  
 Is the Confession I Just Heard for Real?, Apr 20  
**Shirk, Leon**  
 In Defense of a Lost Ordinance, Aug 32  
**Shirk, Paul**  
 Chosen by Grace and Called to Faith, Dec 24  
**Spurgeon, Charles Haddon**  
 Whole Machinery of Salvation, The, Mar 23  
**Stauffer, J. L.**  
 Does Bible History Give Us Any Clue to the Interpretation of Prophecy?, Apr 38  
**Steele, Richard**  
 Wife's Respect for Her Husband, A, Oct 33  
**Stetler, Dan**  
 Follow Me . . . I Will Make You!, May 5  
 Truth and Facts, Feb 6  
**Stiles, Wayne**  
 In Good Hands, Nov 30  
**Street, John**  
 Effective Counsel for Christians Tempted by Homosexuality, May 30  
**Swartz, John**  
 Power and Permanence of the Printed Page, The, Dec 28  
**Swindoll, Charles R.**  
 No Fear?, Jan 13  
**Taylor, Steve**  
 America's Golden Calf, Dec 18  
**Tozer, A. W.**  
 Our Most Critical Need, Jan 2  
**VanBilliard, Jason D.**  
 Do You Hate Math, Too?, Oct 9  
**Wagler, James**  
 Honesty Punished, Sep 35  
**Weaver, Arlin**  
 Cast-Out Christians, Nov 6  
**Weaver, Chester**  
 Have We Missed It?, Apr 2  
**Weaver, Ethan R.**  
 Planning a Budget, May 40  
**Wenger, Robert E.**  
 Are Absolutes Obsolete?, Mar 2  
**Whitefield, George**  
 Duty of Searching the Scriptures, The, Feb 25  
**Williams, Sam R.**  
 How Christian Is "Christian Counseling"?, Jun 13  
**Wiseman, Cathy**  
 His Divine Power Has Given Us Everything . . . , Feb 16  
**Zuck, Roy B.**  
 Trusting in Deep Distress, Oct 14

# Person of the Month:

*John N. Hyde*

**(1865-1912)**



John Nelson Hyde was born into the home of a Presbyterian minister, Smith Harris Hyde, on November 9, 1865, in Carrollton, Illinois.

Along with John there were three girls and two boys in the Hyde household. John's parents loved the Lord and trained him in the ways of the Lord, as well as living a godly example before him.

In 1882, when John was seventeen, the family moved to Carthage so John's father could pastor a church there. His father faithfully proclaimed the Word of God and challenged his congregation, and his children, concerning the call of missions and the salvation of the lost.

Brother Hyde enrolled as a student at Carthage College. He did so well in his studies that after his graduation he was elected to become a member of the faculty. Feeling called to serve the Lord, Hyde resigned his faculty position and enrolled in McCormick Seminary to prepare for the Lord's service as a foreign missionary. John looked up to his eldest brother, Edmund, who was also a student at McCormick. Edmund also felt called to serve the Lord and upon graduation accepted a charge in Montana, preaching the Gospel. Tragically, Edmund contracted a fever and died suddenly. John was devastated and wondered if he should fill the place left vacant by his brother's death. Being in his senior year, and feeling that the Lord would have him serve on the foreign field, Brother Hyde sought counsel from a fellow student as to what he should do. That night his call to the foreign field was confirmed.

After graduating from seminary at the age of twenty-seven, in the spring of 1892, Hyde left for the Punjab area of India in October of that same year. While aboard the ship John received a letter from a friend that offended him. The friend promised in his letter that he would pray that Brother Hyde would be filled with the Holy Spirit! Feeling that he already possessed God's Spirit, John threw the letter down in anger. However, in rethinking his friend's words, Hyde humbled himself before the Lord and asked God for His help. As the result of a Gospel service he attended once he arrived in India, John repented of sins over which he had not had victory and asked God to fill him with His Spirit. God answered and Hyde knew that he had the power of the Gospel in his life.

At the time of his arrival Brother Hyde was only one of five missionaries in the area of one million unsaved people.

Learning the language took longer for John because he was partially deaf. He also felt that spending large amounts of time in God's Word was of utmost importance for success as a missionary.

Hyde, now thirty-three, was seriously ill for seven months in 1898 from typhoid, abscesses in his back, and nervous depression. Although he was hindered from his work, God used this time of being "laid aside" to bring spiritual growth to Brother Hyde's life and to make him willing to accept God's will over his own.

The following year was the beginning of a deeper prayer life for John Hyde. Discouraged over only a few converts and concerned that the heathen should be saved, John would sometimes pray until midnight or get up before sunrise to pray. Sometimes he would spend all night in prayer entreating God to shed His grace on the people of India.

In 1904, after Hyde's return from furlough (due to his poor health), John saw that God was beginning to answer his prayers. There was a revival in the girl's school in the part of India known as Sialkot (now Pakistan). Sin was confessed publicly and conversions were genuine. As a result, the missionaries felt there should be a yearly convention for the pastors, teachers, and evangelists, both native and foreign, consisting of Bible study and prayer that would encourage a deeper spiritual life. People were asked to come together to pray for the convention which would be held. Not many responded but three men came together and spent thirty days and nights in prayer for revival. This was the beginning of the Punjab Prayer Union. Revival broke out, believers spent all night in prayer, and the effects were felt all across India.

At the 1908 Sialkot Convention, Hyde began to pray personally for one soul a day in India. God answered and by the end of the year there were four hundred genuine new believers. The next year he asked for two souls a day and God gave eight hundred. At the convention in 1910 John asked for four a day and God again answered his prayer!

Due to major health concerns this convention would be his last. Upon examination the doctors had found that Brother Hyde's heart had moved from the left side to the right side, causing great problems and concern. Also, he was diagnosed with a brain tumor. In March of 1911 he returned to Carthage, Illinois, to be with his sister. John Hyde died February 17, 1912, in Clifton Springs, New York, at the age of forty-seven, and was buried in Moss Ridge Cemetery.

John Nelson Hyde is known today, as he came to be known, as "Praying" Hyde, an apt nickname for a man so full of compassion for lost souls and thoroughly convinced of the power of prayer to accomplish their salvation.

What an example and challenge to all of us!

—Gail L. Emerson

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## *Do Right!*

by Bob Jones, Sr.

*"A deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul"*

—Isaiah 44:20.

If you will ask just one question about any matter— "Is this right?"—and then act on the honest answer to that question, it will turn out all right in the end. Recently a fine Christian lady asked, "Should I get married?" She asked the right question. The question should not be, "Do I want to get married?" The question should be, "*Should* I get married?" I asked her if the young man she was considering marrying was a Christian. The Bible says that a Christian is not to be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever. You as a Christian have no right to get married if the person to whom you are to be married is an unsaved person.

When you feel you want to do something, check your feeling against that which is sensible and right. If your feelings are contrary to the light, then follow the light. When feelings and light go arm in arm down the street, it is all right. Young people, there is only one question for you to ask about anything. That question is: What is right?

**PAGE 2**

**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

# A KING IN BETHLEHEM'S MANGER

by Mark D. Avery

Let's take a trip to Bethlehem. Arriving during the darkness of night, we notice first a quiet tension. The tension is understandable when we remember the taxation ordered by a foreign government. The overcrowded conditions, the many strangers around town only add to the tension. Uncertainty abounds. What of the future? How long will foreign domination continue? When will freedom come?

Second, we hear a whispered rumor of unfortunate circumstances: A baby was born in a stable. The rumor grows, as rumors often do, and now includes the mention of angels appearing to shepherds who went to see the baby. Somewhere in the mix of things the rumor includes the idea that the new baby is the Messiah. The angels, speaking to the shepherds, said, "For unto you is born . . . a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

Investigation soon confirms that a baby was born in a stable. Today, this baby has so influenced the world that more than 2000 years later, the world thinks about Him, some in anger, others in love.

We must hurry to investigate. The stable is dimly lit. We enter quietly, because we do not want to disturb the baby. Today, we sing, "No crying He makes," but wonder if that could be true. Our eyes quickly take in the surroundings. In a protected corner of the stable is a happy mother, a nervous step-father, a few shepherds, and a newborn baby boy.

The baby is wrapped in a blanket. His mother has made Him as comfortable as possible, and as clean as possible in those circumstances. We get to look at Him. He is obviously newborn. His face is red and wrinkled, likely not too different in appearance from any other baby born around that time.

His mother, whose name is Mary, offers to let us hold Him. The men in our group

stand around with their hands in their pockets. The ladies jump to be first. All of us get to look into the face of the baby. Then we understand the message of Charles Wesley's Christmas hymn:

*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;  
Hail th' incarnate Deity!  
Pleased as man with men to dwell,  
Jesus, our Immanuel!*

We begin to celebrate immediately. Our celebration song goes like this:

*Hail, the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings,  
Ris'n with healing in His wings.  
Mild He lays His glory by,  
Born that man no more may die;  
Born to raise the sons of earth,  
Born to give them second birth.*

But as healthy spiritual celebrations do, ours quickly turns to prayer.

*Come, Desire of Nations, come,  
Fix in us thy humble home;  
Rise, the woman's conquering Seed,  
Bruise in us the Serpent's head.  
Adam's likeness now efface,  
Stamp thine image in its place:  
Second Adam from above,  
Reinstate us in thy love.*

This is Christmas!

*There's a tumult of joy  
O'er the wonderful birth  
For a Virgin's sweet boy  
Is the Lord of the earth.  
Ay! The star rains its fire while the  
beautiful sing,  
For the manger of Bethlehem cradles  
a King! —Josiah G. Holland*

—Reprinted with permission from *The Church Herald & Holiness Banner*, December 2006.

# Gabriel's Story

by Dr. John Reed

*God's plan of salvation is miraculous. Listen in as the archangel Gabriel witnesses the unfolding plot of the old, old story.*

When I saw the first light of God's creation, I burst with joy. It was the joy of the Father's presence and the fellowship of His eternal Son. I sang with the other angels and all of us, every rank, praised the triune God, whose power had made us what we are.

He uniquely designed each one of us, and I became His messenger, going wherever He instructed. Lucifer held an exalted position as prince of angels and anointed cherub. He delighted in worshiping and serving God. Michael, who became my devoted friend and protector, was appointed archangel.

## CREATION

With awe we beheld the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the creation of the boundless reaches of the universe. Power beyond all power called into being the whirling galaxies. When God rested in His work, praise broke forth from every sector of heaven's broad expanse. Our joy knew no bounds.

God paused over a spot in space and spoke into existence a tiny planet called Earth. So insignificant was its size that I thought it of little importance in the immensity of God's creation.

## REBELLION

Then in the midst of order and tranquility came the hiss of rebellion.

An angel cornered me and said, "Lucifer has found what he calls a better way! He wants to establish a new domain. He's chosen you for an important post in the new order. But you need to swear allegiance to Lucifer. You will no longer deliver messages; instead, you will devise them."

The angel was right. I had lived under God's complete control, but this had never

caused me concern before that moment's subtle temptation. But my joy came from fellowship with God and obedience to His will. I could not ask to be other than what He formed me to be.

Some of my friends disagreed, and an insurrection swept our ranks. I fled to God for protection when Lucifer, his face distorted, attacked with his cohorts. For the first time ever, I felt the flush of fear.

But perfect love casts out all fear, and I soon knew that God would triumph. No created force could usurp the place of its Creator. The rebellion must fail!

With a final burst of willful pride Lucifer stormed the heights. But such heights he never found again. He was cast downward in judgment, along with his legions.

Heaven grew quiet and stood cleansed.

## CONFIRMATION OF ANGELS

We angels who remained were ready to serve throughout a universe infested with the fallen angels.

God judicially hardened the fallen angels in perpetual evil. Lucifer, disgraced, became Satan, the accuser, whose every activity carries deceit.

## EARTH AND ADAM

With heaven cleansed, the Spirit of God hovered over the earth's surface, and He spoke it into being—a brilliant shining globe that teemed with life.

In rapt attention we watched God's unique creation unfold.

A man. A woman.

"They are almost what we are," Michael said. What joy to see the sweet communion between these two and God in the paradise of Eden.

PAGE 4

SWORD AND TRUMPET

## THE FALL

Then Satan slithered into the Garden, beguiling the man and the woman, and they sinned. God's friends were fallen.

"Where will they fall when they are cast down from the earth?" I asked Michael.

No one spoke. God was pronouncing judgment on the man and woman, but a judgment that was softer than what the fallen angels had received. They were not hurled from the planet. Instead God expelled them from the Garden.

"I have made you and the woman enemies," God said to Satan. "The child of the woman will be the enemy of your kind. The child of the woman will crush your head and you will bruise his heel."

We looked forward to this mortal combat, but wondered why God had not crushed Satan at the time of the rebellion.

Michael stood by me as we beheld the birth of earth's first son. Eve called the child Cain. Michael laughed at the infant and cried, "How could anything so insignificant hope to defeat the power of the great dragon?"

When Abel, the second son, was born, Michael proclaimed, "I do not understand the plan of God. If all of earth were covered with these children, they would be no match for Satan and his legions."

Then Cain killed Abel. Yet when Seth was born he—and his immediate descendants—worshiped God.

## THE FLOOD

We saw the mingling of the lines of Seth and Cain. Demonic consorts sought a super race. Earth was flooded with evil until in the flood of waters God's grace was exhausted and only Noah and his family lived.

## ABRAHAM AND ISRAEL

In the new generations God called a people to be faithful to Him through Abraham. And Michael was appointed as the protector for the new nation.

We saw the giving of the Law and the Law broken by the new family of God's people. We marveled at the beginning of animal

sacrifices for the forgiveness of human sins.

We beheld the rise of Israel's kings and their demise. And we heard the promise of a perpetual King, the Messiah, who would come through King David's royal line. Michael fought against Satan's efforts to destroy the line and abort God's promise.

Israel, adulterous and rebellious, was captured by surrounding nations.

## DANIEL

In Babylon God sent me twice to deliver messages to Daniel, a man of prophecy and prayer. First, I went to him during the reign of the evil Babylonian King Belshazzar. Then in the first year of Darius, the king of the Medo-Persians, God heard Daniel's prayer and sent me to arrive before the prayer ended with the prophecy of the seventy "weeks" of years about the future of Israel.

## ZACHARIAS

As the prophecy unfolded more than four hundred earth years later, I was sent to announce to the aged priest Zacharias the miracle birth of his son, John, who would serve as the Messiah's forerunner. Heaven stirred in anticipation.

## MARY

Six months later God sent me to Nazareth to a humble virgin.

"Greetings, Mary, you have found favor with God! The Lord is with you."

Startled, she jumped away from me.

"You have nothing to fear," I said, "because the favor of God has found you. God has a wonderful surprise for you. You will conceive and give birth to a son. You will name Him Jesus, and He will be proclaimed the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His ancestor David, and He will rule over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will have no end."

"How can this be possible, for I am a virgin?"

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Your child will be holy and will be called the Son of God. Your cousin Elisabeth

is pregnant with a son in her old age. People called her barren, but she is now in her sixth month. For with God nothing is impossible.”

“Yes, I am the willing bonds slave of the Lord,” she said. “Let everything happen to me just as you have said.”

### **THE BIRTH**

I returned to God’s presence. A hush passed over heaven as the holy Son—in perfect obedience to the Father’s will—stepped aside from His royal position and power. Much as the Spirit had hovered in creative power over the world, so now He hovered over the young virgin. Divine majesty was confined as an embryo within the virgin’s womb. The Creator became one with His creation.

God dispatched us to earth to announce the Messiah’s humble birth. We sang in praise and adoration, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests!”

### **MINISTRY OF CHRIST**

In humility the young child lived in submission to Mary and Joseph. Jesus toiled in common labor in Joseph’s carpenter shop. At Jesus’ baptism God the Father confirmed Jesus’ messiahship by sending the Holy Spirit on Him in full measure. After Jesus, our Lord, had proven His character by defeating Satan on the Mount of Temptation, some of us were allowed to minister to His physical exhaustion.

It was then I realized Jesus was the one spoken of when the man and the woman were expelled from the Garden. He was the seed of the woman who would deal Satan a mortal wound. He had defeated Satan in heaven; now He would defeat Him on earth. You understand that we angels love to look into such things.

### **CHRIST’S DEATH AND RESURRECTION**

Yet none of us could comprehend why so many of earth’s people treated Jesus as they did. They arrested, falsely accused, and crucified Him. He died and was buried. We had

been prepared to sing anthems at His coronation as King of kings, but instead gloom settled over us.

The demons laughed and taunted us with vile suggestions. “The tide has turned! We have launched a counteroffensive! Watch now for our new assault on the throne!”

Then we beheld the glorious resurrection of the slain Son of God. One of our angels rolled the stone from the tomb and cried in triumph, “He is not here! He is risen just as He said He would!”

Heaven erupted in praise. Satan, the prince of death, had received the mortal wound.

### **CHRIST’S RETURN TO HEAVEN**

We awaited the return of the Son to His seat at the right hand of God the Father and were amazed at the new splendor the Father showered on the Son at His return.

“When I think of Satan and his pride,” Michael said, “and remember the humility of Jesus, my heart almost bursts with love.”

“I saw the Saviour go forth from heaven knowing what He must face on earth,” I said. “He desired only the joy of doing the Father’s will. He became one of them so that He might serve and save them. Now I understand the importance of the animal sacrifices. Every animal the people sacrificed pointed to Jesus, the Lamb of God who died for the sins of the people. He became the final sacrifice. No more animals had to die. What a wonderful plan!”

Michael and I, along with all of heaven, rejoice now when sinners believe that Jesus died for them and rose from the dead for their salvation. We often remind ourselves, and we remind you, that joy in its deepest sense comes only from the worship of God and obedient service to His will. So has it been from the beginning. So will it ever be.

If you could see as we see the agony of despair on the faces of Satan and his legions, you would never seek for joy in sin again. You would find true joy in fellowship with God and obedience to His will. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Kindred Spirit*, Winter 2006.

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



Paul M. Emerson

**GUEST EDITORIAL**

# **How Will You Celebrate?**

by John Coblentz, Sr.

We are entering the season that celebrates the miracle of the incarnation—when God became man.

Unfortunately, for many people—perhaps most—the celebration has come to outshine the Person we celebrate.

The celebration, of course, is fun. It includes music, food, family gatherings, special events, shopping, gifts, bells, lights, vacation, and parties. The excitement is literally in the air.

But when celebration is our focus, the fun is over all too soon. After the party comes the hangover; after the buying comes the paying; after the vacation comes the drudgery of work again.

So, let's talk about Jesus.

Jesus came to earth. Though He was God, He came as a baby—small, weak, and dependent. Though He made all things, He came with virtually nothing—

born into a poor family, born away from home, born in a place—made for animals. Though He had been surrounded with glory and though He received the honor of the highest celestial beings, He came to obscurity. No one important knew Him. He came at night in the middle of a national census when people's minds were busy with things more important than babies.

Why did God arrange such a huge event to happen in such an unassuming way? Why was such a wonderful person attended with so little fanfare?

Perhaps it was exactly because people easily make much ado about what is not important and make so little about what is truly important.

If Jesus had come in a chariot of fire, would people have turned their attention to chariot design?

If Jesus had come wearing the finest royal clothes, would people have sought after certain fabrics or styles?

If Jesus had lived in a fine house, would people have structured theirs accordingly or perhaps built miniature models for their children?

If Jesus had done all these things that we associate with greatness, in other words, would people have truly sought Him or would they have missed Him? Would they have focused on what He had and what He looked like, or would they have focused on Him?

Now, the real question is not what people did or might have done when Jesus was born. The question for us is what are WE doing with Jesus?

Do we see Him as the Son of God?

Do we love Christmas or do we love the Christ?

Do we celebrate the season or do we celebrate the Son of God?

Are our hearts fired up with fun or are they warmed with the wonder of God coming to earth?

Are we drawn to the excitement or are we moved to know Him better?

Here are a couple of practical pointers for keeping our focus on Jesus:

1. *Take time to ponder.* “Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). The incarnation is a miracle, an event that staggers the mind and overwhelms us with its implications. “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh!” (1 Timothy 3:16). Don’t be so busy—so caught up in running, doing, going, and getting—that you have no time to contemplate this stupendous event and what it means to you.

2. *Take opportunities to worship.* “And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen” (Luke 2:20). “And when [the wise men] were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him” (Matthew 2:11). The Son of

God who came to earth is worthy of our praise. He came for us, He lived for us, He died for us, He rose for us, He ever lives to make intercession for us, and He has promised to come again for us! A thousand hallelujahs leap from those events, and if we do not shout them out, the stones surely will. Sing the songs! Affirm the messages! Bow down and worship Jesus of Nazareth, Christ the Lord, King of all Ages!

3. *Give to those in need.* “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). “And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:11). No action more accurately celebrates this event than the act of giving to those in need. Jesus later clarified such giving: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40). It is not wrong to give gifts to family and friends, but I urge you to look around you this season with the eyes of Jesus. Can you see the homeless, the lonely, the naked, the hungry, the weary, and the prisoner? How will you show your love for Jesus?

When our focus is truly on Jesus, the celebration of His birth is rich with meaning. There is no hangover and no emptiness afterward. When we ponder His coming and worship Him from the heart, we are inspired to live well and love freely. When we give as He gave, we have the joy of sacrifice, the thrill of meaningful living, and the pleasure of His ongoing presence.

And so I ask you, Will you simply celebrate the season, or will you truly celebrate the Son of God who came to earth to save lives? ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Deeper Life Ministries Newsletter*, December 2006.



# THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



## *A Devotional Commentary*



by David L. Burkholder

**DECEMBER 2, 2007**

### ***Zacharias and Elisabeth: Called to Believe***

Luke 1:5-25

The winter quarter lessons, December, January, and February, are all taken from the Gospel of Luke. You will want to familiarize yourself with the entire book as you begin these studies, and as you trace the theme of “God’s Call to the Christian Community” as lesson builds upon lesson. We have here in the Gospel of Luke a carefully researched and accurately written account of Jesus the Saviour. Luke was a Gentile, the only Gentile writer of the New Testament. In contrast to the other gospels written to specific classes of Jewish people, Luke’s gospel is written for every man—easily understood by all.

Today’s lesson focuses on the promise of Messiah’s forerunner, the son to be born of Zacharias and Elisabeth. Zacharias and Elisabeth are called to an active belief in God’s promise of the coming Messiah and their role in that glorious event. Though theirs was a secondary role in this drama, it was a vital one, one which called forth a large measure of faith in this elderly, childless couple.

While Zacharias was performing a once-in-a-lifetime ritual of burning incense on the golden altar prior to the morning sacrifice and the hour of prayer, he was visited by a messenger from heaven. Zacharias was understandably troubled, but the angel Gabriel responded, “Fear not.” His message was that he was to have a son who would be the forerunner of Messiah. Not only would Zacharias and Elisabeth be overjoyed at this birth, many others would also rejoice as

they understood the implications of the birth of this child, destined to become the herald of a new era in God’s relationship to His people.

The angel informed Zacharias of the character and mission of this special child to be born into their home. In addition to the restrictions of a Nazarite, he was also to be filled with the Spirit of God from birth. His mission was to prepare the way for the Lord by preaching repentance and change of heart. He was to be the “Elijah” prophesied by Malachi (4:5, 6).

Not only was Zacharias frightened, he was incredulous: “How can this be? I and my wife are both old!” Had Zacharias forgotten what God did for Abraham and Sarah? As a rebuke for his unbelief he was stricken with dumbness (v. 20). While this encounter was taking place, the worshippers in the temple court were beginning to wonder what had happened to delay Zacharias. When he did emerge, using sign language to communicate, they understood that he had seen a vision while ministering on their behalf.

After Zacharias’ term of ministry in Jerusalem was completed he returned home to the hill country of Judea, there to set in motion events leading to the fulfillment of God’s promise and plan. Elisabeth’s immediate joy was over the removal of the stigma of childlessness. Every couple in Israel harbored the secret desire of being the ones through whom Messiah would come. Barrenness eliminated that potentiality.

Zacharias and Elisabeth were being blessed with more than a son. He was to be a special messenger from God, preparing the way for the coming of His Son, the long-awaited Messiah, the Saviour of mankind. Their acceptance of God’s will prepared

them for this great honor. It was a reward of faith.

***For thought and discussion***

1. Though there had been a heavenly silence of 400 years between Malachi and Luke, don't fail to see God's ongoing program at work for the benefit of all mankind. Malachi predicted. Luke recorded.
2. What characterized Zacharias and Elisabeth that they, old as they were, should be chosen as parents of Messiah's forerunner?
3. Do our human limitations at times cause us to disbelieve God's promises? This lesson should give us help in this area.
4. Has God ever asked you to perform some difficult, if not seemingly impossible, task? What was your response? How did it work out?
5. Have you ever considered that you may simply be a bridge generation and that your faithfulness today may result in God's blessing on others in the future? Think about it.

**DECEMBER 9, 2007**

***Mary: Called to Be a Vessel***

Luke 1:26-38

Last Sunday's lesson focused on the forerunner of Messiah. Today's lesson focuses on Mary, the mother of the Messiah. Three months prior to the birth of John, the announcing angel, Gabriel, appeared to Mary, a betrothed virgin in Nazareth. Again, as with Zacharias, the appearance of the angel was troubling to Mary, but he allayed her fears with the comforting phrase, "Fear not." Furthermore, the angel assured Mary that she was a chosen vessel of God, called to the very special role of being the earthly mother of God's Son, the Messiah.

Mary's betrothal to Joseph was a binding contract that could be broken only on cer-

tain terms. As we note from Matthew's gospel the news of Mary's pregnancy created a deep and troubling concern for Joseph. (Read Matthew 1:18-25 for his perspective.) Momentous things were happening to this young couple, things difficult for them to comprehend and accept. But again, God chose people in whom He saw a willingness to commit to His plan.

One can only imagine the flood of questions coursing through Mary's mind. How could she have a child, never having had relations with a man? And who indeed was this son to be born of her, called the Son of the Highest? What was this about David's throne? And of His endless kingdom? It was all very perplexing to this quiet, unassuming country girl from the nondescript town of Nazareth.

But God saw something in Mary that perhaps she did not see in herself. She had "found favor with God" because of her obvious deep religious experience and submissive attitude. An ordinary person, but with extraordinary qualities. The type of person God knew He could use to birth and nurture His Son. What a tremendous responsibility for Mary, yet also what a distinguished privilege and glorious blessing would be hers. Mary would be a vessel for God's blessing upon mankind.

In response to Mary's question to the angel, "How shall this be?," Gabriel responded that it would be through the agency of God's Spirit, by the overshadowing power of God. To confirm the reality of this unusual event, the angel informed Mary of her cousin Elisabeth's situation and added as a clincher that "with God nothing is impossible." What comfort this must have been to Mary, even as questions and concerns continued to roll through her mind. She was certainly not unaware of the stigma this situation would place upon her and the potential misunderstanding, even from her betrothed.

Mary models the submission necessary for every child of God to be useful in His work: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord: let it be to me according to your

word.” Eerdman says: “Those who believe most firmly in the promises of God, submit most patiently to His providences.”

Let Mary’s response be ours as we willingly give ourselves as a channel for God’s blessing upon others.

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

1. As a sidelight to these two lessons, you might want to do a bit of study on the role of angels in God’s work. Are they still active on man’s behalf? Have you experienced their ministry?
2. Again with Mary (and Joseph) God chose obscure, unnoticed people to be players in His drama of redemption. Why so?
3. Think about the deep commitment and total submission necessary from Mary to be eligible for her role. Then match your commitment and submission to that of hers. Do you, do I, meet the test? God still needs people of integrity to work on His behalf today. Determine to be such a person.
4. Have you experienced God’s grace in response to a difficult experience He has led you through? Perhaps some class discussion would be enlightening.
5. Think about the function of a vessel. Which is more important: the vessel, or what it holds? Apply this to today’s lesson, and your own life.

## **DECEMBER 16, 2007**

### ***John: Called to Proclaim***

Luke 1:57-80

Today’s lesson covers the birth and mission of John the Baptist, forerunner of Jesus, the Messiah. God’s timetable was moving forward. The time for the birth of John, the last of the Old Testament prophets and herald of the Messiah, was at hand. After a silence of 400 years, God was once more speaking to His people. Our lesson two weeks ago initiated us to the events happening in today’s text.

On the day of John’s circumcision, when he was also to be named, friends and family gathered for the festive occasion. “The rite (circumcision) effects admission to the fellowship of the covenant people, and secures to the individual as a member of the nation his share in the promises God makes to the nation as a whole” (*Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*). John’s parents were strictly following the Law in regard to their son. This was necessary in preparation for his role as Messiah’s herald.

When there was controversy over the baby’s name, father Zacharias affirmed his confidence in God’s predictions by boldly writing, “His name is John.” Upon that confession his tongue was loosed and he broke out in praise to God. The gathered crowd was amazed and pondered “what manner of child this shall be.” This baby became the talk of the community.

Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to prophesy regarding this child, his work, and of the coming Redeemer. He recognized this event as preparatory for the coming of the long-awaited Saviour, and fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham and many generations of the faithful.

Zacharias first of all blessed God for visiting His people and providing a Saviour from the line of David. He knew that Old Testament prophets had long predicted His coming. As a priest and as a righteous man he was familiar with the scriptures and was now overjoyed to realize their imminent fulfillment and that his son would play a vital role in ushering in the long-awaited Redeemer.

Zacharias’ paeon included the theme of deliverance from enemies under the merciful hand of God. He spoke of a peaceful time when worship would not be hindered by their foes, when holiness and righteousness would prevail under the protection and deliverance of God. Zacharias was totally absorbed in his praise to God.

He then turned to recognition of the role of his son, prophet of the Highest, who would prepare the way for Jesus’ ministry. John’s message would be of repentance and

explanation of the coming One and His mission. He recognizes again God's tender mercy upon His people, providing light in their darkness, guiding them in the way of peace.

"And the child grew and became strong in spirit and was in the desert until the time of his public appearance." John had a mission. He spent time in isolation until God's timing was right and the people were ready for his message.

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

1. Names have meanings. Does the name make the person, or the person the name? What do you think?
2. Check out some Old Testament prophecies relating to the coming Messiah. Note the thread of promise running throughout the Old Testament.
3. Some lessons for us from this text include patience in waiting on God's promises, His mercy on our unbelief, the joy of fulfilled promises, the certainty of God's promises, and His use of man to forward His program. Think on these issues.
4. Allow this lesson to challenge you to an awareness of your potential usefulness to God. He uses ordinary people. Does He have access to your life?
5. Remember to see this lesson in its larger context. And marvel again at the thoroughness of God's planning for mankind.

## **DECEMBER 23, 2007**

### ***Called to Rejoice (Christmas)***

Luke 2:1-14

Today we study one of the most beautiful stories of the entire Bible, and the one with the most profound and far-reaching effects for mankind. The birth of Jesus, the Saviour, forms the platform for our Christian faith and provides hope for a lost and dying world. It was an event of world-changing proportions, but transpired in extremely humble surroundings.

**PAGE 12**

God used an interesting and diverse cast of characters in this advent drama: an emperor, a carpenter, a young maiden, a group of lowly shepherds, a host of angels. Each had a special role to fill, and each performed according to God's plan to accomplish His purposes.

Joseph, of the lineage of David (v. 6; Matthew 1), responded to the emperor's census decree and made the 80-mile trip to his ancestral city, Bethlehem, "to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child." This was no small undertaking, considering Mary's condition, but it shows something of the obedient character of this yet-to-be-married couple. They were submissive to God and to civil authority.

Mary's maternity ward was not some sterile environment, but a dusty stable with an improvised cradle and no professional assistant. But this was God's Son and He was keeping watch. He was orchestrating events and covering the details. This birth of God's Son, though in an obscure place and unnoticed by the crowds, was following God's timetable. He had all the arrangements under control.

Mary and Joseph were not the only ones awake that eventful night. Nearby, shepherds were "keeping watch over their flock by night." One can only imagine their conversations during the long night watches. But one could well imagine that since God chose to give them first notice of the birth of Messiah that they were cognizant of His coming and living in anticipation of that event.

But imagine the fright of these herdsmen when suddenly heavenly light illuminated the dark night and the heavenly messenger appeared to them. Once again in this ongoing narrative we have the angel's comforting words: "Fear not." Then came the long-awaited announcement: "Unto you is born this day a Saviour, Christ, the Lord." The angel then gave further directions for finding this newborn babe, the hope of Israel and of all people. The angel's identification of the child affirmed the shepherd's belief.

**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

The theme of today's lesson is rejoicing. Here the heavenly host was first to rejoice as they lifted praise to God and extended peace and good will to men on earth. Though they did not comprehend the impact of this birth as man was to understand it, they recognized it as an important, heaven-initiated event.

The record of the shepherds' visit to the newborn Saviour and their joy and rejoicing at this event are found in the verses following our lesson text. (Read through verse 20.) Here was an event with worldwide implications. The message was first announced to humble people, representative of those throughout the ages who would be most accepting of the Saviour. As heirs of this blessing let us rejoice with them.

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

1. Be sure to note, and marvel, how only God could have worked in all the details of time and place to bring about the advent of Christ.
2. How does man's free will correlate with God's choice of people to do His will? Discuss.
3. Jesus, the Christ, the sinless Son of God was born of a virgin by miraculous conception. That understanding is fundamental to our faith. Think it through and reaffirm your belief in that fact.
4. Don't fail to notice the continuing and ongoing ministry of angels in the narrative of Christ's coming. Are angels still active on man's behalf today? What is your proof?
5. Discuss appropriate ways of celebrating the Christ-event in our day. Does this text give us some clues?

## **DECEMBER 30, 2007**

### ***Simeon: Called to Witness***

Luke 2:22-35

The activities of Joseph and Mary in these verses show their devotion to God by

their strict obedience to His Law. Though they were ushering in the author of the New Covenant, they were still living under and subject to the requirements of the Old. Their obedience says much about their character and why they were chosen from among the many in Israel for this important task of rearing the Son of God.

Jesus was circumcised and named on the eighth day. Then after 40 days He was taken the five miles from Bethlehem to the temple in Jerusalem for His presentation to God as a firstborn son (see Exodus 13:2, 12). Interesting, and fitting, that this very Son of God as a human baby be dedicated to God and His service.

The offering of the two pigeons signified the poverty of Joseph and Mary (see Leviticus 12:6-8). The one, a burnt offering, signified the complete dedication of the offerer to God. The second was offered in expiation for sin. This was an experience of purification and worship for Mary.

A major player in this temple drama was Simeon, a devout, God-fearing Jew who was "waiting for the consolation [Comforter] of Israel." As a reward for his faithfulness, he was promised by God's Spirit that he would get to see Messiah before he died. That same Spirit directed him to the temple at the time when Jesus was brought in by His parents to perform the rituals required by the Law.

Taking the child in his arms, Simeon broke into a hymn of praise to God for providing a Redeemer. Simeon recognized that the impact of Messiah would go far beyond the nation of Israel. He would be for all people, every tribe, tongue, and nation. He would be the light of life to Gentiles and the glory of Israel, with which nation He identified. Simeon, this devout, God-fearing man, understood the Scriptures. He had eagerly awaited the promised Messiah, and now he held Him in his arms. His anticipation was complete. Now he was ready to die, for he had seen "the Lord's Christ."

Simeon then turned to Joseph and Mary and blessed them, no doubt invoking God's protection and guidance for the task of rais-

ing and nurturing this special child. He mentioned also the division this child would bring to the nation—predicting His rejection as well as His acceptance by those He came to minister to. That separation would be the result of Christ’s probing and revealing of the thoughts of men’s hearts. Some would repent at His scrutiny of their lives. Others would become hardened and combative.

Then for Mary, Simeon had a final word: “A sword shall pierce thy own soul also.” He was given to understand the trauma she would suffer as she saw her son rejected, mistreated, crucified. Is it any wonder that Joseph and Mary marveled at the things told them concerning this child?

But Simeon was a faithful witness. He spoke the message revealed to him by God’s Spirit.

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

1. To enhance your understanding, look up the Old Testament passages referenced in today’s text.
2. The experience of Mary (and Joseph) at the temple tells us that strict obedience to God’s will and way is an essential for being used by Him. Let’s reaffirm that principle in our lives.
3. What was the significance of Simeon’s visit? How did it impact Joseph and Mary? and us?
4. Notice how God rewarded Simeon’s faithfulness and expectation. In what ways can Simeon’s experience challenge us?
5. Simeon was a faithful witness. How can we be more effective witnesses to what God has revealed to us? Discuss. ■

## ***Newslines . . .***

**by Hans Mast**

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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

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### **Nepal Airline Sacrifices to sky god**

Nepal’s state-run airline recently experienced technical problems with their two Boeing 757s. They had to suspend service as a result. In response, company officials sacrificed two goats to the Hindu sky god Akash Bhairab on the tarmac in front of the planes.

—Source: *Reuters* (Hat tip to Tim Stoltzfus for this story)

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### **The French Shift**

In recent years, France has had a liberal government that has been quite antagonistic toward proactive U.S. policy around the globe and quite conciliatory toward such states as Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Syria, and Palestine. They have been proponents of Chamberlain-style appeasement and diplomacy, even in the face of Hitler-like rhetoric from Iran (denying the Holocaust, kill the Jews,

etc.). However, in a recent election, the liberal party was swept from power and a conservative party has taken its place. France's foreign policy has taken a dramatic 180 as a result and now France's new prime minister Nicolas Sarkozy is warning Iran that unless it ceases its nuclear program, air strikes are inevitable. This is a dramatic shift from the previous administration's stance of condemning the U.S. for even considering military action. An excellent analysis of France's new foreign policy in light of history can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/3xpytn>.

—Sources: *YNet News*, *Pajamas Media*

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### **Israeli Planes Bomb Syrian Nuclear Materials?**

In a mysterious incident over Northern Syria, Israeli jets made an incursion into Syrian airspace and came under fire from Syrian air defense systems. Apparently (the jets dropped fuel tanks in Turkey) they also violated Turkish airspace in the process. Syria has said that Israel bombed Syria, but both Syria and Israel have been tight-lipped about what exactly was bombed. However, sources in the Israeli military and U.S. intelligence say that the Israelis bombed a Syrian bunker with nuclear materials obtained from North Korea. A ship carrying the nuclear materials arrived recently in Syria from North Korea. An Israeli Special Forces team infiltrated Syria and painted the target with lasers for the F-15s to drop bombs on. Intelligence experts speculate that one of three things is occurring: Syria is serving as a conduit of nuclear materials from North Korea to Iran; Syria is hiding nuclear materials for North Korea while it pretends to give up its nuclear program; Syria is purchasing nuclear technology from North Korea to develop its own nuclear program. Military analysts also speculate that part of the Israeli raid's

rationale was to test the new air defenses that Syria recently purchased from Russia. Iran has also purchased the same system and Israel needs to know the system's capabilities before they launch a long-distance raid on Iranian nuclear facilities—something they will undoubtedly do if the international community or the U.S. doesn't act.

—Sources: *YNet News*, *London Times*, *TIME Magazine*

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### **Obscure Technocrat Appointed Russian Prime Minister**

Vladimir Putin, president of Russia, appointed an unknown official as the new Prime Minister of Russia. Putin is coming up on a constitutionally imposed term limit and has to step down. He can return to office, however, in 2012 (or sooner if he properly orchestrates events). Proponents of democracy in Russia said, "Under the political regime created by Vladimir Putin, everything is possible, and a completely obscure person can be named defense minister or prime minister. And Putin may say at any moment that he has changed his mind. There is only one politician in this country: Vladimir Putin." Another opposition leader said that the nomination of a person "without a political face" to be prime minister "means that the president is the only source of power."

—Source: *TIME Magazine*

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### **Former Enemies Kiss in "Triangle of Death"**

Until recently, Yusufiyah was among the most dangerous places in Iraq.

But today, Sunni tribal leaders in this town cooperate with U.S. forces in their battle against foreign fighters and al Qaeda in Iraq.

Col. Michael Kershaw, commander of the Second Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, now greets his former enemies with

kisses, hears their grievances, spends time in their homes, and even shares meals with them.

As happened in Anbar province to the west, local Sunni leaders from this town south of Baghdad finally turned on the al Qaeda extremists in their midst when the death and destruction became too much to bear.

“Killing people, stealing goats, everything, you name it,” said Sheik Hamid Karbouli, when asked why he and his men now oppose al Qaeda. Karbouli has recruited some 150 volunteers to man checkpoints and carry guns.

—Excerpt from: “Former enemies kiss in ‘triangle of death’ ” in *TIME Magazine* (<http://tinyurl.com/yrkbjg>)

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### State Senator Sues God

State Senator (NE) Ernie Chambers sued God, in an effort to draw attention to frivolous lawsuits. His lawsuit accuses God “of making and continuing to make terroristic threats of grave harm to innumerable persons, including constituents of Plaintiff who Plaintiff has the duty to represent.” The lawsuit accuses God of being responsible for “fearsome floods, egregious earthquakes, horrendous hurricanes, terrifying tornadoes, pestilential plagues, ferocious famines, devastating droughts, genocidal wars, birth defects and the like.” Chambers says that God “has manifested neither compassion nor remorse, proclaiming that defendant will laugh” at calamities. I sent this story to my email list, asking for responses.

Caleb Bontrager wondered how the court would enforce a ruling against God and also what the reaction would be if God dropped by to testify. While God did not drop by to testify, He did file a legal response. (Or at least one of His ambassadors [2 Cor. 5:20] did.) The clerk of the Douglas County District Court said that the court filing mysteriously appeared “poof” on the counter. God argued that

the defendant (Himself) is immune from earthly laws and the court lacks jurisdiction.

It adds that blaming God for human suffering misses the point. The response reads, “I created man and woman with free will and next to the promise of immortal life, free will is my greatest gift to you.” No contact information was left with God’s filing, but Michael the Archangel was listed as a witness for the defense.

—Source: *KETV of Omaha, AP*

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### Hindu Ganesh Festival in India Dunks Elephant Gods

I watched as hundreds of thousands of devotees of the Hindu elephant god—the god of the harvest—flooded the streets of Hyderabad, India, on Tuesday, September 25, 2007. Covered in pink dye and dancing frantically to beating drums, the worshipers rode and followed caravans of trucks carrying humongous elephant gods to the river. Cranes lined the waterfront to lift the gods off the trucks and place them in the water. Hindus sent tens of thousands of little elephant gods arcing through the air to land kersplash in the water. Street vendors hawked their snacks while Hollywood stars and politicians arrived to soak up the adulation of the crowds. The 30% Muslim population walked by the outskirts of the festival in hurried silence, pausing every now and again to offer a quiet “Salaam Walekhum” to my bearded and apparently Muslim figure.

Terrorism concerns—44 people were killed last month in terrorist bombings and 9.5 kg of RDX explosive is still missing—and rain (we got drenched on our motorbikes) made the festival minuscule compared to its usual size. Normally 23,000 gods are dumped in the river, but this year it was only 1,467. Thirty thousand police (some in riot gear) filled the streets, blocked off roads, and in some

places outnumbered the devotees!

Seeing such fervent devotion to these dead idols not only brings to mind Isaiah 44:8-19, but also brings a deep sadness that so many are deceived.

The mission organization in India that our church supports—Good Life Ministries—has just launched a website in which you can learn all about what they do: <http://good-life-ministries.org>.

—Sources: Personal witness, *Deccan Chronicle* (an Indian newspaper)

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### Brutal Crackdown in Burma

The military dictatorship in Burma initiated a brutal crackdown on peaceful protests led by Buddhist monks. Nine people were killed (including a Japanese photographer) and eleven seriously injured as security forces systematically went from monastery to monastery beating monks.

*The London Times* writes, “In the Mwe Kya Kan pagoda in the South Okkala district of Rangoon, it began at 2 a.m., but seven hours later the evidence was plain to see—a dozen thick patches of congealing blood and human tissue splashed about the yard. The windows of the monks’ dormitories were smashed jaggedly by the impact of rubber bullets—hard, round spheres fired from green cartridges that the monks had carefully gathered up and put on display.

“Inside everything had been smashed—the thin plywood walls, the monks’ plaster statues of the Buddha—and the thin mattresses were soaked with blood.”

Citizens are pleading for U.N. or U.S. intervention. A westerner in Burma describing public sentiment said that people don’t like U.S. foreign policy, but for the opposite reasons of many. He said, “Burmese wanted to know why

George Bush hasn’t invaded their country yet.”

—Source and excerpt: *The London Times* (<http://tinyurl.com/ytnnlx>)

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### Fred Thompson Announces Candidacy, Jumps in Polls

After announcing his candidacy for the Republican nomination for president, former Senator Fred Thompson jumped to second place, a mere 4.8% behind Rudy Giuliani. The RealClearPolitics.com poll average has the standings thus: Giuliani 27.2%, Thompson 22.6%, McCain 14.6%, Romney 9%, Huckabee 4.5%. The Democrats are at: Clinton 40.5%, Obama 23.3%, Edwards 13.8%, Richardson 3.6%. In a number of “general election” polls that pit a certain GOP candidate against a certain Democratic candidate, Democrats have tended to lead with their most popular candidates with a 12% margin and with their least popular candidates by a 2% margin.

—Source: *RealClearPolitics.com*

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### Recommended Read

A recommended read is “Medical Sleuth” (<http://tinyurl.com/3yftxh>) by Tom Schachtman in *The Smithsonian Magazine*. It is a long (4,000-word) article about a doctor who specializes in hereditary genetic diseases in Amish and Mennonites. These diseases occur more often among Amish and Mennonites because of intermarrying. He has done much to help Amish and Mennonites and runs a clinic in Strasburg, Pennsylvania, to research and treat these illnesses.

—Hat tip to Marvin Beachy for this article

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

# America's Golden Calf

by Steve Taylor

Moses went up into Mount Sinai to meet with God for forty days and to receive the two tables of testimony from God.

Meanwhile, the Israelites down below did an astounding thing. Having just promised to obey God, the people grew impatient with Moses for his delay in coming back down off the mountain (Exodus 32:1).

They demanded Aaron to make an idol to worship. Aaron complied and soon presented the people with a golden calf, complete with an altar and feast day for reveling. When God reported to Moses that the people were corrupting themselves with idolatry, Moses and Joshua quickly descended the mountain to restore order.

When Moses confronted them, the children of Israel employed human reasoning that is prevalent even today. Their efforts to justify themselves may have sounded something like this: "We weren't really worshiping that calf. No, we just wanted something to look at while you were away. It helped us to remember God. It gave us something to celebrate about, to have fun and pass the time. We didn't mean to do evil. And besides, Aaron gave us permission."

Now to someone who knows little about the holiness and jealousy of God, those excuses might have sounded reasonable enough. But to God, this was a terrible breach of trust, a downright betrayal to go a whoring after some homemade god. This wasn't innocent fun. This was serious. These people were God's chosen people, set apart to be holy unto God, a light to the world, completely devoted to the Most High God, without

reservation and second to none. What were they thinking to provoke God like that?

After God's wrath fell upon them for this great sin, God again made it very clear to them that they were to worship no other god, and that He is a jealous God and would not share their devotion with any other god.

That calf was robbing God of something that was rightfully His—the hearts of His people. Can you sense the holy jealousy that was aroused in God's heart as He watched His beloved people enthusiastically cavorting with another god?

In this country, worshiping graven images and golden calves isn't something we are confronted with, nor do we even observe others worshiping idols in pagan shrines. But, sad to say, idolatry is still something we are tempted with today. The devil has always promoted idolatry and so it should come as no surprise that he still promotes it today; yes, even in our own country. In our time, of course, we are much too wise to fall for the old-fashioned idolatry of Old Testament times; we would never even consider such foolishness as to bow down before a stone, brass, or even a golden object. Or would we?

In the past one hundred years, a new idol has emerged from the dust. This idol has grown to such immense proportions that it now occupies prime real estate in nearly every city and town in America. Billions of dollars are sacrificed to it every year. The enormous amount of money spent serving this idol is seen as but a small sacrifice in exchange for the benefits it has to offer. Worst of all, professing Christians have bowed to this idol

PAGE 18

SWORD AND TRUMPET

in staggering numbers. Many churches are so steeped in this idolatry that only a martyr would dare raise any objection against it. What idol am I referring to? I am referring to . . .

*Professional Sports.*

Who will sound the trumpet on this menace to the church? It's not one of those passing fads believers mistakenly dabbled in, but then recognized the danger and discarded it. This activity has become one of the biggest moneymaking industries in the country, with no abating, and now has a firm foothold, both among professing Christians and unbelievers.

Let's examine sports for a moment and notice some things about it. The first thing that stands out about sports is the rules. You can't play a game without rules. Sports would quickly lose their appeal if the rules were not enforced or if there were no rules at all. The reason is obvious. Rules and standards are imperative to make the game work. A team has no use for the player who plays by his own set of rules. Each player is expected to play by the rules for the good of the team. Here's a question that comes to me: Why is this principle so easily understood in sports, but so sharply criticized in church?

The second thing to notice is that sports have universal interest and unite people. One reason sports are able to do that is because it makes no moral demands on a person. That means it doesn't tell us how to live; it accepts us just the way we are. But people and societies that are united by an interest and devotion to sports are depriving themselves of something vital. They are substituting discussion of eternal consequence with temporal issues. Not that talk must always be serious, but the sports enthusiast betrays what he loves most by what he talks about most. Why are so many people enthusiastic about a ball game and are willing to discuss it at

length with a total stranger, but the things of God are an embarrassment? So instead of seeking God, and discovering what He requires of us, they squander away their lives discussing the merits of different players and teams, and so on. It is disgraceful that Christians are so united with a lost world when it comes to its sports, but are unwilling to share those things which are above (Colossians 3:1).

A third thing to notice comes as a question: What is it about sports that makes it so popular among unregenerate people? At the top of the list must be the suspense it offers, wondering who is going to win. Second must be the euphoria or psychological high it gives when "my" team wins. It has a vicarious effect on the spectator—when his team wins, he feels exuberant. The huge popularity of professional sports is undeniable, but since when do Christians support something because it is popular? In fact, Scripture warns us not to "follow a multitude to do evil" (Exodus 23:2).

Excellence in sports is not just a goal but a requirement. There is no room for mere good intentions or honest effort. The reward goes to "the best." But when it comes to our walk with God, the urgency for excellence is strangely missing in spite of what the Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3:14 about pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. When was the last time you heard someone confide with you that Paul's goal was their goal too? If anything, it would probably raise some eyebrows. And then in verses 17-19, Paul says to follow his example in contrast to those who are "enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things."

While it is true that sports isn't the only idol that threatens to supplant the church today, this one has managed to worm its way into many churches with

little resistance and found a safe haven where it has been able to launch its destructive work. Without exception, it will cool the hearts of earnest Christians and leave them with a divided loyalty at best. God is no more content with a divided loyalty than a husband would be if he discovered that his wife is on very friendly terms with a neighbor man. We would call that adultery. The same sin against God should be called idolatry or spiritual adultery.

As Christians, let us consider a few things:

1. Can I sincerely sit on those stadium bleachers or wherever, and shout and root along with someone else over some game, yet know full well that most of them, including the players, will eventually spend eternity in hell? Perhaps it would be more appropriate to weep and mourn for their lost souls.

2. Can I honestly say that God means more to me than sports? If so, let's ask some soul-searching questions: Do I spend more time reading my Bible than the sports page? Do I spend more time on my knees in intercessory prayer than I do watching and supporting my favorite team? Have I memorized more Scripture verses than players' names and batting averages? Do I look forward to church services more than to a game? Am I as glad when the preacher goes overtime as when a ball game does? Can I honor the Lord's Day by not giving sports a thought, much less a viewing?

3. Can it be right to support an activity that pays each of its members millions of dollars every year just for entertainment, while many pastors in poor foreign countries must walk many miles to spread the Good News, because they can't even afford a bicycle?

4. Are these millionaire athletes presenting a godly role model for my children, in light of the example Jesus gave us?

5. Does it trouble me that the biggest sponsors of professional sports are the

tobacco and liquor industries?

Several years ago, a movie honored two Olympic athletes who refused to race on their respective Sabbath days. In the 1920s, they had become heroes because they would not compromise their faith for the sake of the sport. Today, so-called Christians are as likely to be in the stadium or in front of the TV as they are to be in church on Sundays. Their faith apparently makes little difference to them anymore.

Jesus lamented that the church at Ephesus had left her first love (Revelation 2:4). Surely if we would return to our first love and give God back His rightful place in our hearts and lives, sports would lose their attraction. That we even try to fit sports into our lives only gives indication that God doesn't have all of our heart.

Can we see the adulterous love affair that Christians have with sports and how it has robbed God of that special place in our hearts, which should belong to Him only? When God becomes number one in our lives again, perhaps He will return and give the church the New Testament power and revival which so many people are now crying for. Can we muster the courage to tear down this golden calf which we have helped to erect, lest Christ come and remove our candlestick and give it to a people more worthy? ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Fellowship Contributor*; March, 2006.



# The Importance of a Literal Interpretation

by Bruce Scott

*Hermeneutics* is the art and science of interpretation. When most readers open a newspaper or book, they assume the author intends for them to understand what he is saying. They also instinctively assume that, to understand what the author is saying, they must use a literal, or normal, hermeneutic: They must interpret the text literally or naturally, unless the context indicates otherwise.

Interpreting the Bible is no different. The goal is to understand what the human author, as he was moved by the Holy Spirit, intended to say. We do so by using a literal hermeneutic (even with passages dealing with endtimes prophecies), unless the context indicates otherwise.

Unfortunately, much of Scripture, especially the Old Testament, is interpreted by replacement theologians who use what is known as the allegorical method. It assumes there is a deeper, more spiritual or mystical, understanding of Scripture beyond the mere literal understanding and that this hidden understanding is found only by those who are able to search out its secrets.

This mindset is especially prevalent when it comes to prophecy. With the allegorical method, prophecy is not to be taken literally but, rather, figuratively and symbolically.

The allegorical method, however, leads to several major errors:

**1. Jesus' Comings.** It is hermeneutically inconsistent. Replacement theologians interpret prophecies related to Jesus' First Coming literally, but prophecies related to His Second Coming they interpret figuratively.

**2. Israel.** The allegorical method fails to make clear, biblical distinctions between Israel and the church. Even though there are scores of biblical passages declaring that God has a distinct future for Israel, replacement theologians either ignore those pas-

sages or explain them away or apply them figuratively to the church.

They are eager to apply Israel's blessings to the church, but not so eager to apply Israel's curses to the church.

Additionally, if the church is now "spiritual Israel," as Replacement Theology claims, who is now spiritual Edom, Moab, Ammon, Philistia, Egypt, and all the other nations mentioned in the Old Testament?

**3. God's Character.** The allegorical method also raises serious questions about God's veracity. If, in the Old Testament, God promised Israel a literal, earthly Kingdom, but He really meant a figurative, immaterial kingdom, what does that say about God's character? Does God deceive His people with literal promises and then hold them accountable for not recognizing that they were actually figurative?

In contrast, when a literal hermeneutic is used consistently, there results a consistent understanding of Scripture as a whole. Separate administrations of God's rule on Earth come to light. A distinct program for both Israel and the church is revealed (not two ways of salvation, but a distinct plan and program). New Testament revelation does not redefine Old Testament concepts.

In addition, a massive amount of unfulfilled, prophetic Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, is faced squarely and addressed. Endtimes events begin to take shape and fall into their proper chronological places. And God's character is not impugned, but vindicated. His glory is seen as the chief goal of all of history.

A literal hermeneutic does not make these things so. Rather, it reveals them to be so. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Israel My Glory*, May/June 2007.

# 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.*

## Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

by Anon./Praetorius

**Lyrics:** “Lo, How a Rose” presents a unique perspective of the Christmas story that is quite different from many other favorite Christmas songs. Many of the other songs that surface at Christmastime are exciting songs that speak of angels and stars and wise men and all the other exciting things that the Bible tells about. Although the angels, stars, wise men, and many more exciting things are actual facts about the birth of Christ, most of the world was oblivious to His arrival. In that sense, the Incarnation was much more like a rose that quietly comes into full bloom, without anyone’s noticing, than the noisy and celebratory event that many Christmas songs portray it to be. This is the perspective from which this month’s hymn is written.

Since no one really seems to have any idea who actually wrote these words, a lengthy narrative of the poet’s life is not an advisable undertaking for a column of this sort. However, the text itself provides significant material for discussion. The poet quite skillfully weaves the idea of the Messiah’s being like a rose into a hymn that is both attention-getting and thought-provoking.

Of course, we have the advantage of knowing the hymn and know from the beginning of the song what type of rose we are singing about. However, for the first listeners, it may

have had a different effect. The first line begins quite simply by telling of a rose that has come into bloom. At this point we may not be sure if we are hearing a religious motet or if some young man is about to notice the rose and take it to his sweetheart. It very quickly becomes apparent that this is not a secular madrigal as the rose begins to take on some rather unusual characteristics. First of all, we notice that the “rose” comes from the lineage of Jesse, and that it has been foretold by prophets. It is also strange that a rose should bloom in the middle of the winter, as this one does. The poet goes on to talk about the virgin mother giving birth to a Saviour, but it is not until the last verse that we find out for sure who the “rose” is. “True man, yet very God, / From sin and death He saves us / And lightens every load.”

**Music:** Michael Praetorius was a German composer who lived from 1571 to 1621. In addition to composing and playing the organ, he published a three-volume work detailing musical practices and instruments of his day.<sup>1</sup> Praetorius himself did not actually write the tune for “Lo, How a Rose”; he merely filled in the harmony.

It is interesting to see that the melody line is essentially the first line repeated

PAGE 22

SWORD AND TRUMPET

# Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Köln, 1599, St. 1 and 2; Berlin, 1844, St. 3

*Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen*

Tr. Theodore Baker, 1894, St. 1 and 2  
and Harriet R. Spaeth, 1875, St. 3

*Alte Catholische Geistliche Kirchengeseng.*

Köln, 1599

Harmony by Michael Praetorius, 1609

1 Lo, how a rose e'er bloom-ing From ten-der stem hath sprung,  
2 I - sai - ah 'twas fore-told it, The rose I have in mind,  
3 This flower, whose fra-grance ten-der With sweet-ness fills the air,

Of Jes - se's lin - eage com - ing, As men of old have sung.  
With Ma - ry we be - hold it. The Vir - gin moth - er kind.  
Dis - pels with glo - rious splen - dor The dark-ness ev - ery - where.

It came, a flow - 'ret bright, A - mid the cold  
To show God's love a - right She bore to them  
True Man, yet ver - y God, From sin and death

of win - ter, When half - spent was the night.  
a Sav - ior, When half - spent was the night.  
He saves us And light - ens ev - ery load.

twice, with two measures of something different between the second and third repetitions. Praetorius skillfully uses the

harmony to keep the piece moving and interesting. ■

1. <http://en.wikipedia.org>



## 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.*

# Chosen by Grace and Called to Faith

by Paul Shirk

There are two predominant themes in the New Testament which relate to our salvation—the one is *grace*, and the other is *faith*. **Grace**, as it relates to our salvation, can be defined as the *unmerited love, favor, and enabling power which God has chosen to extend to unworthy sinners through Jesus Christ*. **Faith** is spoken of in Scripture as *man’s personal decision to obey the call of God to trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation*. There are certainly other aspects of both grace and faith, but we will focus our thoughts in this study on these two concepts. We will first consider the divine side of salvation (which pertains to grace), and the human response to grace (which is faith)—and then we will notice how they correlate.

### **1. God Has Graciously Chosen Us to Salvation From Eternity Past.**

God’s plan of salvation, as portrayed in the Scriptures, originates in the grace of God from eternity—before the creation of this world. The grace of God in salvation is from eternity, yet it was revealed to us in time by the manifestation of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 1:9, 10). Paul says in Ephesians 1:4 that we were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.

We can know God only because He has graciously planned from eternity past to reveal Himself to us in time. He did it in a personal way, through Jesus Christ. God has desired this relationship with us before we were born, before Christ came, before man sinned, and before the world was created. It is with this concept in mind that we begin to get a glimpse of the magnitude of God’s grace to sinners. God loved us and chose to save us already in the eternal ages past. There is nothing that we can do in time which would merit God’s grace. In this respect, salvation is all of grace. Had God not chosen to extend grace to us, we would have been doomed for eternity by our sin. Salvation is ascribed to God’s grace in the following Scriptures:

*“Being justified freely by his **grace** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). “That being justified by his **grace**, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7). “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by **grace** ye are saved)” (Ephesians 2:5). “For by **grace** are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).*

PAGE 24

SWORD AND TRUMPET

If God had not chosen to extend His grace to us in salvation through the gift of His Son, we would not have a choice at all in the matter of salvation, for there would be nothing to choose. Therefore, God's choice to save us precedes our choice to be saved. Without God's grace there could be no faith, for *we love Him because He first loved us*.

## **2. Election and Predestination Are Terms in Scripture Which Express God's Gracious Choice to Save Us.**

There are many who shy away from these terms which are given in Scripture because of the way some people have chosen to interpret them. Both terms are only used in the positive sense in the Bible. The purpose is to declare the security of the believer in Christ and to show God's eternal plan for their lives. The following Scriptures reveal this:

*"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied"* (1 Peter 1:2). *"Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God"* (1 Thessalonians 1:4). *"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified"* (Romans 8:29, 30). *"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will"* (Ephesians 1:5).

If God had not chosen to save us, there is nothing we could have done to save ourselves. Election refers to God's choice to save us, and predestination implies God's plan and destiny for the believer's life. Ultimately our salvation was not an invention of man, but the plan of God. It is God's choice for us which empowers us

to choose Him by faith.

Since our relationship to Christ in the Church is compared to a marriage, we will look at an illustration about marriage to help us understand the concept of the election of grace.

I chose my wife potentially for marriage before she ever knew that I had any interest in her. Before I expressed my interest to her, she had no knowledge of my choice of her as a potential partner. When I expressed my desire to her, she had a choice to make, based upon the choice which I had already made. My choice of her did not take away her ability to choose, but rather enabled her to make a life-changing choice. If I had not chosen her first, her choice of me would not have been effectual. By my choosing her first, she was empowered to make an effectual choice to be married. My choice of her is a picture of grace (though mine was not unmerited as God's is), but her choice of me was a response of faith—that I would be the type of husband she desired. When she accepted my choice, by choosing me, she became my chosen bride. She could not be my elect bride without choosing me (accepting my choice), though her election was initiated by my choice and not hers.

In like manner, God's election of grace (to enter into a relationship with us from eternity), empowers us in time, by faith, to respond to His choice of us and become one of His elect. Though we become one of the elect by faith in time, yet our election to salvation was of grace before we were born. It is only through faith that we receive God's saving grace, yet His grace flowed to us from His eternal election to save us through Jesus Christ.

## **3. It Is the Will of God to Save All Men Through Jesus Christ.**

Some people suppose that since God is all-powerful He can do anything, but in reality He can only act in harmony with His own nature. God cannot lie, for He is truth. He cannot sin, for He is holy. God

also has bound Himself to honor His own Word, so that it cannot be broken (Psalm 138:2; John 10:35). Therefore, God's will for man's salvation is always consistent with the expression of His gracious nature. God has made His will plain concerning the salvation of all men in His infallible Word.

*"Who **will** have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not **willing** that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).*

If the will of God is to save all men, then that would suggest that He has given His grace to all, so that they can believe in the gift of His Son. The concept of God's saving grace being extended to all is expressed in the following passage: *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11).*

If it is the will of God to save all men, and the saving grace of God has appeared to all for this purpose, then it would also follow that Christ died for all. If Christ is the only way of salvation, then His death for all men is essential, if all can be saved. The Scriptures contain some key passages which irrefutably prove that the atonement of Christ has reached all men to the same extent as the curse of sin. Notice this thought identified in the following texts:

*"**All** we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned **everyone** to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us **all**" (Isaiah 53:6). "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon **all** men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon **all** men unto justification of life" (Romans 5:18). "For God hath concluded them **all** in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon **all**" (Romans 11:32). "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for **all**,*

*then were **all** dead" (2 Corinthians 5:14).*

In these texts the word *all* is used to show that the grace of God through Jesus Christ has reached to the full extent of Adam's curse, so that none might question whether God's grace has been extended to them. In fact the Apostle Paul goes one step further and says that grace has exceeded the extent of sin—*"where sin abounded grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20).* Grace abounds to all that all men might be without excuse to believe the gospel. Nor should anyone be fearful that he is beyond the reach of God's grace. It is God's will to save all; He has extended grace to all, and has given His Son for all. Yet God has chosen to make personal faith a necessary response to His grace in order to be saved.

#### **4. Faith Is a Gift of God's Grace Which Makes Us Accountable to Believe in Jesus Christ.**

God has extended to fallen man the ability to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. Faith does not come from our own nature, for our carnal nature is in rebellion against God (Romans 8:6-8). We are children of disobedience by birth (Ephesians 2:2; 5:6). Our human will is in bondage to our fallen nature so that it cannot overcome our sinful depravity (Romans 7:18). In our natural state we are unable to respond to God's grace for we are dead (unresponsive) in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Because of our sinful depravity, God's grace is needed to "teach" us of our sin and the way of salvation. This thought is expressed in Titus 2:11, 12 where we read, *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, **teaching** us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."*

Furthermore, faith comes to us from God's grace as a divine gift and not from within us. The Scripture is clear in

portraying our faith as that which is “given” to us as a gift.

*“John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be **given** him from heaven” (John 3:27). “And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were **given** unto him of my Father” (John 6:65). “For unto you it is **given** in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1:29). “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath **given** us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).*

We have now identified that both grace and faith are unmerited gifts from God. However, God requires us to exercise the gift of faith—that is, to believe in Jesus Christ. Unbelief alone is sufficient to damn our souls (Mark 16:16; John 8:24). God holds human beings accountable to believe the gospel. God does not, and will not, believe for us. He has given to all humanity the ability to respond to His grace by believing. God, by His sovereign will, has chosen to limit salvation by grace to those who exercise personal faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

##### **5. Faith Is the Means Through Which We Receive the Grace to Obey the Commands of God.**

The Scriptures we have examined have declared that salvation is by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ alone. However, there are two errors concerning faith which must be avoided in our understanding of salvation.

*The first error* teaches that faith is nothing more than a mental persuasion to believe in Christ without any obligation to obey His commandments. James 2 unequivocally declares that a faith which has no works is dead, useless, and no greater than demonic faith.

*The second error* takes the same teachings from James and asserts that both

faith and works are essential for salvation, if the right mixture of the two is obtained. This is a distortion of what James is actually teaching, for James is not saying that faith plus works equals salvation, but rather is illustrating the difference between a true and false faith, a dead and a living faith, an active and an inactive faith. James is telling us how we may discern what true faith really is. True faith is alive and working. To interpret James 2 in such a way as to make good works essential for salvation would be to contradict the other Scriptures which emphatically state that we are *not* saved by good works (Romans 4:1-5; 11:6; Ephesians 2:9; Titus 3:5). Those that are yet in the flesh before salvation cannot please God by *any* good works. Good works are not the *cause* of our salvation but the *fruit* of our salvation.

It is by faith that we pass from death to life and experience the grace of God working in us to obey the commandments out of a heart of love. Through faith our rebellious old man is crucified with Christ and we rise in newness of life to live in a completely different manner (Romans 6:1-7). The commands which we once could not keep are now fulfilled in us who walk in the power of the Spirit. By faith we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Good works are the inevitable fruit of living faith. It is the grace of God, working in us mightily, which constrains us to obey God’s Word. It is impossible to be saved by grace through faith, and still choose to willfully live in disobedience to the commandments of Christ (1 John 2:3-5). It is the grace of God, received by faith, which inwardly motivates us to obedience and good works.

*“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). “Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily” (Colossians 1:29). “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I*

*laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10).*

All that we can ever accomplish for the glory of God is based solely on His grace working in us. Let us choose to reach out to Him in faith, that His eternal purposes for us (in our predestination) may be manifested in our works. What greater motivation can we have for living by faith, than by knowing that God has from eternity past extended His grace to work in us both to will and to do His good pleasure!

### **6. Concluding Thoughts**

Perhaps the reader is thinking that the concepts and relationships of faith and grace are beyond his ability to fully grasp. It certainly is beyond the comprehension of the writer. It is this mystery and wonder which makes it “marvelous grace.” Our finite minds will never fully understand the magnitude of God’s infinite grace—else it would no longer be grace. Nor can we fully describe why we feel compelled by God’s grace to put our faith in Jesus Christ. But He draws us to Himself. Grace by its very nature far exceeds reasonable understanding and explana-

tion. God does not ask us to fully understand His grace, but rather by faith to receive it, by accepting Jesus Christ into our lives. Christ is the personal manifestation of the grace of God.

Without Christ coming in the flesh to die for our sins, we could never experience the grace of God. Only by believing in Christ do we enter into God’s grace.

*“For the law was given by Moses, but **grace and truth came by Jesus Christ**” (John 1:17). “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his **grace**” (Ephesians 1:7).*

Those who experience God’s grace through the gift of His Son will have a spiritual transformation. By faith we can know for sure that God’s grace has saved us and is working in us His eternal purposes for His glory. To receive God’s grace is to find meaning and purpose in living. It is a wonderful thought to know that God has planned from eternity to graciously give us eternal life by sending His Son. God has not required us to fully understand His grace, only to receive it by faith. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Bible Helps*, November 2006.



## ***The Power and Permanence of the Printed Page***

by John Swartz

Did you know that God is a writer? God Himself wrote the Ten Commandments. Why did He *write* them? Word of mouth is changeable. It becomes distorted. The printed page stands. God wanted the basic moral code in writing.

Thirty-two times in the Bible we find

the command to write. “And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book” (Exodus 17:14). Chapter 6 of Deuteronomy commands parents to write, in the context of their own homes, so their children might be impressed with the truth.

**PAGE 28**

**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

“Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man’s pen” (Isaiah 8:1). “Write it in their sight.” Why? “That they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them” (Ezekiel 43:11).

Jude “gave all diligence to write.” There is a sense of urgency in the way he found it needful to write. And this urgency does not diminish. Twelve times John, in writing the Book of Revelation, was commanded to write. What would we know today about the teachings of Jesus and the apostles if no one had written?

The power of the pen is proven by history. Civilizations have been molded and shaped by literature. Their moral standards have risen and fallen with their literary diet. Empires rose and fell, borne on the waves of their writings. The Dark Ages were dark partly because of a dearth of good literature. And we dare not overlook the influence of the Bible in ending this dark period. Wycliffe’s Bible in the language of the people appeared about 1382.

The Reformation was certainly carried forth on the wings of literature. For years Luther averaged a book or pamphlet a week.

If our Anabaptist forefathers would have been as indifferent to Christian writing as most of us are, we would hardly know there were Anabaptists. All we would have today would be the distorted views of their enemies. Twenty-five years after the Anabaptist movement began, five Anabaptist hymnals had appeared. When the authorities raided the print shop at Lubeck in the early 1550s, they found ten tons of books. From 1536 to his death, Menno Simons wrote numerous books and pamphlets. Most of this time there was a price on his head and a death penalty for aiding him in any way. What dedication!

Consider the permanence of the printed page. The printed page preserves precious pearls, perilous propa-

ganda, and pertinent doctrine. Foremost of these precious pearls is the Word itself. The tables of stone on which God engraved the Ten Commandments are a classic symbol of permanence. “Now go, write it before them . . . in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever” (Isaiah 30:8). The Bible is a miracle of preservation. It is a proof of God’s interest in the written Word.

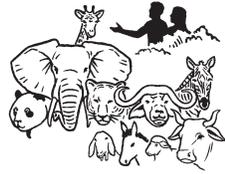
Printing also preserves perilous propaganda. Do false teachers use literature to better advantage than the children of light? Each year Jehovah’s Witnesses spend about 1.2 billion hours distributing Watchtower publications. The blasphemous *Da Vinci Code* has sold over 40 million copies. What a challenge to meet these lies with Christian literature!

We need to produce Christian books and periodicals to develop and stabilize our own Biblical faith and to win others to the faith of Christ. Johann Gutenberg, the father of modern printing, wrote: “God suffers because of the great multitudes whom His sacred Word cannot reach. Religious truth is captive in a small number of manuscript books which guard the treasures. Let us break the seal which holds the holy things, give wings to that truth that by a means no longer written at great expense by the hand that wearies itself, but multiplied by an unwearied machine, it may fly to every soul born into the world.”

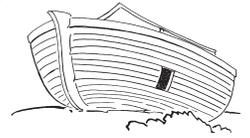
Too long our literature interests have lagged behind. We let the psychologists write our “meeting emotional needs” books. We let the world write the textbooks for our schools. We may not have much time anymore. Our prospect for the future is the Second Coming of Christ. While we wait, let us publish and promote literature that builds the church. We will pray, preach, write, and proclaim until Jesus comes.

***Maranatha!*** ■

—Reprinted with permission from *CLP News Release*, January/February, 2007



## *Beginning Issues*



# **Races or People Groups?**

by John Mullett

One of the ongoing struggles of our culture is to find answers for the racial tension and violence that keeps rearing its head. Even as I'm writing this, news headlines of the "Jena 6," the beating case in Mississippi, are almost a daily occurrence. Professional athletes frequently blame various adversities (real and perceived) of their profession on racism. America has seen civil rights movements in almost every aspect of society, out of which we've certainly seen much improvement in how the various groups of people are treated, but we've also seen the flip side, where almost every conceivable societal ill has been blamed on racist attitudes at one time or another. Our society has become a blame society and personal responsibility is rarely entertained as the first solution to a problem if it is entertained at all. So the power struggles, legal battles, and civil spats continue. Often we're left wondering, Is there a solution that can bring harmony to a culture of mixed ethnicities?

I'd like to suggest there is an answer, a solution for all of man's ills, including racism. The church should have the answer, but unfortunately, and far too frequently, we find the church struggling with the same attitudes and looking for the same answers. The answer is found in the Bible, but since we (the church) have compromised so much on the accuracy and historical significance of the Book of Genesis we've undermined the very foundation for the answer to our

problems with racism. If we accept the Bible as the standard of truth, the determining factor for what is truth and what is not, and then put on our "biblical glasses" and view our world (past and present) through them, the answer becomes startlingly clear.

According to the Bible there really is only one race: the human race, with all people being descendants of Adam and Eve, as recorded in the first two chapters of Genesis. In Acts 17:26 the Apostle Paul mentions that all nations were created of one blood by God. That leaves us with the question: How does the Bible explain all the differences we see in the various people groups? There certainly are differences, at least in what meets the eye. While there are exceptions there are different characteristics (e.g. different shades of skin, hair type and color, facial features, eye shapes, etc.) that are common to specific people groups. The question is, Are the differences significant and how did they arise? Does the Bible record any event(s) that could explain the diversity we observe? I believe it does. If we understand anything about genetics, and how different changes and even species (at least in the animal world) can arise from within the same biblical kind, we can soon see that the incident at the Tower of Babel, recorded in Genesis 11, when God confused the languages of the people, and the world's population was broken into small groups, can explain the distinct physical traits we see in the different people groups today. As scientists

**PAGE 30**

**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

# OVEREATING: A Weighty Subject

by Harold S. Martin

The holidays are coming. For many of us, food will be plentiful. It would seem that this is an appropriate time to consider what God says about overeating. Overeating is “living to eat” instead of *eating moderately to live*. Gluttony is an uncontrolled preoccupation with food.

Obesity is one of the nation’s greatest health problems. In spite of all the emphasis on thinness, and on diet formulas, and on exercising—the average American is twenty pounds overweight. Former U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. C. Everett Koop, a few years ago (in an address given at Messiah College near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), said that “*obesity is the second most preventable cause of death in the United States. Three hundred thousand people die every year because of being overweight—but often it is not put on the death record so as not to embarrass the family.*”

Many of us have more to eat than any other people in the history of the world, and it is easy to eat much more than is necessary. We are aware that this is a touchy subject, but the Bible says that “*whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*” (1 Corinthians 10:31). To stumble away from the table and spend half

the afternoon in misery and pain because we have eaten too much, certainly does not glorify God. In Proverbs 23:21, gluttony is placed on an equal basis with drunkenness.

Gluttony is hard to define. Thomas Aquinas used to say, “*It is eating too soon, eating at the wrong time, eating with no power to stop, and eating with no self-discipline.*” It is not wrong to eat well, but what the Scripture condemns is excessive indulging, eating much more than is necessary to sustain the body.

Gluttony is a sin we cannot hide. We can be envious and lustful—and at least to a degree, we can hide the sins—but one who overeats is eventually exposed. Even nature tries to help us not to eat too much, because as one writer says, “The more we overeat, the harder it is for us to get close to the table.”

In these days of Big Macs, Double Whoppers, and large fries, architects are finding that seats in community buildings are too small. Builders of sports arenas and movie theaters are building bigger seats to accommodate larger people. A number of airlines have begun charging obese people the price of two seats, because they take up so much room. Medical equipment manufacturers sell heavy-duty commodes and wheelchairs and mechanized beds that can hold up to 1,000 pounds. As Americans get bigger, car seats, door openings, and even caskets are being made in wider sizes in order to accommodate the larger people. A February 23, 2002, news report says that “an astonishing 26 percent of all adult Americans are now obese, up from 15 percent in the 1970s.”

There is a website ([www.overweightpeople.com](http://www.overweightpeople.com)) that sells XXXL sizes, including bathroom scales that record weights up to 500 pounds and an extra-long shoehorn for

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## RACES OR PEOPLE GROUPS? . . . cont'd.

continue to progress in their study of genetics they are finding more and more evidence indicating all humans are closely related. As it turns out, the so-called racial characteristics we’ve been trained to notice are actually rather insignificant at the genetic level.

In this article I’ve merely introduced this subject, so be sure to check back next month for more on the issue of race. ■

those who can't bend over to put on their shoes. Some auto manufacturers (in 2003) began making their seats an inch wider to provide for wider people; some heated seats in the luxury cars have shorted out because heavy people pushed too hard on the wires in the seats. These are factors that are causing the word *obesity* to appear in 56 bills currently before the U.S. Congress.

Perhaps more and more citizens of the Western world should pray the early Christian's prayer: "Lord, give me day by day my daily bread—and not one crumb more."

### 1. *Chemical Imbalances*

It is easy to condemn people who are overweight in unfair and cruel ways. We must gracefully take into consideration such factors as bodily constitution, genetic structure, and chemical imbalance. It is *not* true that *all* obese and overweight people are gluttons. A predisposition to obesity can result from genetics or from some diseases. An imbalance in body chemistry can lead to obesity, and thus some people who are overweight have not come to that state as a result of willful and careless habits on their part. Some of those who have an abnormal craving for food need our support and not our condemnation.

People who are overweight are often viewed as persons who are jolly, happy-go-lucky, and laid-back kinds of people who may not be dependable employees, and thus need not be taken seriously by the community. *Time* magazine reports that marketers and manufacturers are often reluctant to cater to overweight people because "*many national and global brands—whether cars or sneakers—want to be seen as young and hip, and fear that any association with overweight customers will muddy their expensive image making.*" On the other hand, as Americans grow heavier, attitudes seem to be changing. The *Time* article is concluded by citing a recent survey which indicates that 75 percent of the people surveyed felt that it is okay to be overweight, up from 45 percent twenty years ago.

Still, there is widespread discrimination against fat people which violates the laws of

societal justice. Obese people are frequently refused employment opportunities because of their appearance. Many overweight people have very few friends because there are some who simply do not want to be seen with them.

### 2. *Physical Fitness*

Excess weight can increase the likelihood of developing diabetes, and it can put an additional strain on the heart. Weighing too much is a major factor not only in diabetes and in causing heart problems; it is also linked to various cancers and to other physical woes.

Restaurant meals are getting bigger and bigger, but no matter how big they get, the one who ordered the meal needs to push the plate away, or share it with another person, or ask for a box to take part of it home. The desserts are loaded with calories; for example, one of Cinnabon's *pecanbons* has 1,100 calories—and that is considered a mere snack! The hottest new hamburger at one of the fast-food chains is an unhealthy mountain of meat (with four strips of bacon)—called a "monster burger." Back in the 1950s, when McDonald's got its start, the average soft drink contained seven ounces; today the average drink is a twenty-ounce size. French fries used to sell in packets of two ounces; today the size averages six ounces.

Snacking between meals often includes doughnuts and cookies and gourmet muffins and pastries and specialized coffee drinks that are loaded with whipped cream. School health classes talk about eating fruits and vegetables, and then sometimes the youth are served French fries, cheese pizza, and soda pop in the cafeteria. One report says that it seems like candy bars, French fries, and pizza are becoming the cigarettes of the 21st century.

Michael Berman, in *Living Large*, reports that many "financially strapped schools are getting rid of their physical education programs and playgrounds, even as they allow vending machines and food advertising in their buildings; and [they permit] computer and television programs that ensnare [youth] who might otherwise be playing outside."

Former President Bill Clinton said, “*The truth is that the children who are born today could become part of the first generation in American history to live shorter lives than their parents, because so many are eating too much of the wrong things and are not exercising enough*” (Fox News, May 12, 2005).

It is time to focus on shutting down the computers, and turning off the TVs, and trying regular exercise along with eating moderate amounts of food.

### 3. *Spiritual Well-Being*

Overindulging in food not only leads to larger waistlines and clogged arteries. It can also lead to spiritual disaster. Frederica Mathewes-Green says that “food is an intoxicating pleasure. . . . ‘What is so bad about engaging in a little gluttony anyway? It’s not one of the bad sins like adultery or stealing. . . . It’s the cute sin’” (*Christianity Today*, November 13, 1995).

While Christians generally frown upon smoking and alcoholism and sexual promiscuity, they are slow to speak out against overeating. The words *fat* and *gluttony* are seldom used in the newer translations of the Bible. In a *Christianity Today* article (January 11, 1999), entitled “The Fatted Faithful,” Virginia Stem Owens says that Eglon, the king of Moab, is the only person specifically described as “fat” in the Bible. Ehad, under the guise of bringing tax money to the king, plunged his dagger into the king’s stomach, and the fat closed over it.

There is really very little biblical evidence to indicate that being obese is in itself a sin. What happened to Eli, however, should be a good lesson for us (1 Samuel 4:18). And there are other warnings in the Bible, such as:

—“Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly” (Philippians 3:19).

—“Whether you eat or drink . . . do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

One of the sobering scenes which demonstrates the displeasure of God toward those who disobey His laws is found in the Book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 21:18-21 says, “If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his

father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; *he is a glutton and a drunkard.*’ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear.”

Psalm 78 tells about the Israelites who were calling for meat (instead of the manna). Verses 29-31 say that God “*gave them their desire . . . but while their food was still in their mouths, the wrath of God came against them, and [He] slew the stoutest [KJV “fattest”] of them, and struck down the choice men of Israel.*”

In light of these Scriptures, the early church fathers listed *gluttony* as one of the “Seven Deadly Sins”—the root sins that gnaw away at our spiritual vitality. It is proper to be physically fit, but it is even more important to be spiritually fit (1 Timothy 4:8).

Elisabeth Elliot, in one of her newsletters, comments: “I do not speak as a doctor or weight loss expert. I leave to professionals matters of metabolisms and compulsions. I speak merely as a woman who loves God and wants to do what He says. His Word tells me to present *my body* as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is my ‘spiritual’ (or reasonable) ‘act of worship’ (Romans 12:1). It is a marvel to me to realize that this body of mine (which happens to be tall, white, Anglo-Saxon, female, and old), can actually become holy and pleasing to God as I present it to Him. It is thereby set apart just as the vessels of the tabernacle were made holy by being set apart. This physical body becomes a spiritual act of worship. I must give serious thought to the *stewardship* of that body. I am told that I am not my own. Once I have presented this body to God, it is no longer mine. It is His. Yet I live in it and I am made the ‘custodian’ (the caretaker, the keeper) of it. I am responsible to treat it as His property, which means that I must exercise control.”

Elisabeth Elliot continues, “Some years ago I became aware that I had gained more weight than I should be lugging around; I was ashamed. It did not occur to me to try any program or buy any special low cal foods. I did not begin counting calories or refusing desserts. I did two things which seemed sensible: I bought a scale and determined to monitor my weight, and I cut the usual portions of food in half. Do I offer this as the perfect ‘solution’? No. There is no perfect solution. But *motivation* is what matters. Whose am I? Is this body mine, or does it belong to Another? Has He promised to help me? He has—over and over again. *‘The Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded. Therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed’* (Isaiah 50:7, KJV).”

The following paragraph is adapted from Elisabeth Elliot’s essay on “Weight.” The Lord God will help us, but we must take responsibility. *Nehemiah* both prayed and set a watch. *Noah* built an ark, but God gave him the plans and the strength to build the vessel. *David* chose five stones and stretched the slingshot, but God saw that the stone reached its target. *Moses* lifted up the rod that was in his hand, but God parted the waters. This God is our God forever! He knows how to make the sun stand still if He needs to do it for the sake of one of His servants. He knows how to help us conquer self-indulgence, but *we must make up our minds to do* what needs to be done. It will not all be accomplished in a day. It is not *merely* a matter of willpower. Children of God come to Him in helplessness, yet offering their bodies as an act of spiritual worship—one day at a time and one meal at a time—trusting a merciful and loving Saviour to send all the help His servant needs!

Sometimes sermons on “temperance” (self-control) center on the use of tobacco and alcohol, and say nothing about overeating. The congregation feels good because most of the members “don’t drink, smoke, spit, or chew—or associate with people who do.” Yet they think nothing of feasting on a big meal of mashed potatoes and ham loaf and gravy—

topped off by a piece of chocolate cream pie!

Many church members are finding that their church-related activities seem to promote higher body weight! Very few board meetings and Bible study groups can gather these days without having some food on which to snack. Church socials usually have far too much food. Should we just say “no” to church carry-in meals? That does not seem to be the answer. Jesus attended so many dinner invitations that He was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard and “a friend of sinners” (Matthew 11:19). Novatian, a third-century church leader commented: “Although in the Gospels, the use of meats is universally given to us, yet it is understood [that they] be allowed use only within the law of frugality and self-control” (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, David W. Bercot, ed., page 283).

In our day there are people who laughingly speak about how they have overstuffed their stomachs, but few consider it a sin. Gluttony seems like a private vice—a cute sin—but it is undisciplined indulgence in eating! It dulls the mind; it ruins our powers of concentration; it hobbles our bodies at an early age.

The key concept in dealing with the problem of overeating is self-control. Gluttony is not wrong because it makes an individual fat; it is wrong because an inordinate consumption of food is one of the marks of self-indulgence. *We will never conquer gluttony until we stop making it a joke, and start making it a moral issue—a matter of right and wrong.*

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23), and mealtime is a good time to put the virtue of self-control into practice. Mealtime is a human necessity; it represents what is meant by our “daily bread.” There may be no better time to impress children and youth with the importance of self-restraint, courtesy, and gratitude than when we gather around the table to partake of food. Also, it is spiritually healthy for God’s people to practice periodic fasts, and donate more of our resources to meet the needs of the hungry of the world. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *BRF Witness*, November/December, 2006.



## Counseling From the Word

# COUNSELORS: Created to L.E.A.D. Through and to God's Image

(Genesis 1–11)

by Sid Galloway

### **Creation Questions for Biblical Counselors:**

1. Does it matter whether Genesis 1–11 is literal history or symbolic fable?
2. What does Genesis 1–11 teach us about God's purpose and plan for "people-problems"?
3. How should counselors LEAD counselees according to God's design?

#### **1. Does it matter whether Genesis 1–11 is literal history or symbolic fable?**

Jesus Christ is the Creator (John 1:1-3), and the truth of creation is a cornerstone doctrine, especially in Christian education and counseling. It directly impacts the truth about who Christ our Creator really is, so it inescapably must be a foundational doctrine. As the Genesis record unfolds, the personal histories of the men and women mentioned provide rich and practical examples of how to deal with real life: temptation, marriage, parenting, anxiety, anger, depression, lack of self-control, etc.

**God's Character**—Adam was designed to reflect God's "image" for his Creator's glory and the blessing of others (Genesis 1:26-31). One of the most agreed upon central meanings for "image" is moral character. As counselors, our role is not only to model, but to LEAD counselees toward maturity in Christ, manifested as the fruit

of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25).

In order to help our six children understand my parental responsibility as head of our home, I put together a little memory aid using the word *L.E.A.D.* Each letter stands for a biblical principle for balanced leadership: Loving, Equipping, Accountability, and Discipline. As you can imagine, my children asked a lot of questions about the "D" part. Some counselors overemphasize either the loving/equipping or the accountability/discipline. Either pair without the other is an unbalanced emphasis that seems good to man, but leads to suffering (Proverbs 14:12).

Hitler was a good example of effective leadership, but what kind of leader was he? He "loved" his followers, equipped his government and army well, held them to a clear standard of accountability, and consistently disciplined them into an amazingly cohesive "body" of "believers" in his "truth." He simply took the philosophy of evolution to its logical conclusion and led accordingly.

In contrast, our Creator is the perfect example of balanced leadership, even though the world often mischaracterizes the God of the Bible as unloving. Biblical counselors need to help counselees fully understand that our God's love surpasses ours, not only in His concern for suffering people, but even for all *nephesh* (thinking/feeling) creatures. Our counselees need to know and trust that

His kind of love created an original Eden where all *nephesh* creatures lived in harmony without any suffering, eating only vegetation, not each other (i.e., organic machines that cannot think or feel, Genesis 1-3; 9:3).

The error of theistic macroevolution (vertical change from an amoeba to Adam, led by a god) claims that a Creator/Leader desired and designed “survival of the fittest” as His “Way” to create His global society. Unwittingly, yet unmistakably, this portrays God as a monster, not the Good Shepherd (John 10). The compromising theories of theistic evolution and progressive creation are blasphemous, not just minor theological errors. Yes, this fallen world of creatures now groans and longs to be set free from the current corrupted condition (Genesis 1:29; 9:3-17; Romans 8:18-25). The full good news for suffering counselees is God’s promise to so fully restore creation that the lion will again lie down with the lamb in peace (Isaiah 11 and 65).

**God’s Word**—If counselors and counselees reject the normal, literal reading of Genesis as historically and scientifically inerrant, then they will begin to doubt what the rest of the Bible says about moral, spiritual things as well. Jesus said, “If I told you of earthly [physical] things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly [spiritual] things?” (John 3:12).

**God’s Gospel**—If death were always present from the beginning instead of being the result of Adam’s sin (Genesis 3; Romans 5), then it cannot be “the wages of sin,” Jesus died for nothing, and the gospel is bad news. Not only salvation, but God’s promise of progressive sanctification (the objective of biblical counseling) is destroyed if Genesis 1-11 is not historically and scientifically true. Should we be helping counselees to progress in the “way” of survival of the fittest, coolest, and cruelest? Such a way would be the opposite of the cross (Luke 9:23-26) that sacrifices self for the true needs of others. “Evolution’s” way sacrifices others for the desires of self.

## 2. What does Genesis 1-11 teach us about God’s purpose and plan for people-problems?

Adam, our forefather, was created to exercise delegated authority—ruling over God’s creation—God’s way. It’s not coincidence that man’s initial roles, ranks, and responsibilities as zookeeper helped prepare leaders to serve as their brothers’ keepers (consider Adam, Noah, Moses, David, Solomon, and others). Similarly, the way children are taught to empathize with God’s animal creatures can significantly affect how they later treat people. How much more must be the effect of violent, virtual reality video games? As a former, now semi-zookeeper, biology teacher, and family counselor, I see that the parallels are many and striking. Even Jesus used the term *sheep* to describe us in order to contrast His gracious love with our stubborn, sinful tendency to foolishly follow the crowd.

This is especially true of social discipleship counseling. Have you ever noticed that when one person yawns, many others around him also begin to yawn? Our Creator designed us to be, in a sense, socially contagious. This works great when surrounded by committed believers; but now, after the fall, it can be dangerous. Contagious yawning is funny, but contagious cruelty can be tragic. The interrelationships among Lucifer, Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Seth, Enoch, etc., reveal how certain kinds of socialization can lead to doubt, disobedience, disorder, dysfunction, disaster, disease, death, and ultimately dishonor of our Creator.

## 3. How should counselors “L.E.A.D.” counselees according to God’s design?

The following is merely a small sampling of the vast resources recorded in God’s Word, beginning with the cornerstone of creation in Genesis 1-11.

• **Love** (Genesis 1-3; 6; 9; Matthew 22:36-40; John 13:34, 35; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14)

If love is not clear, central, and free, then our soul-care merely mirrors the money motivation of secular psychotherapy. People

receive counsel much better from someone they know to be a friend. God met Adam and Eve's immediate, even physical, needs. A biblical counselor must be connected to a local church that can minister to the whole person and family. God's method met many needs: food (the "tree of life"/our church pantry), friendship (walked together/personal time), clothing (animal skin for the bad weather to come, as well as a picture of the sacrifice for sin), and most importantly the gospel ("bruised heel" vs. "crushed head," i.e., a self-sacrificing plan to deal with our counselees' enemies—abusive spouse or parent).

• **Equipping** (*Genesis 1–3; Romans 1:12; Colossians 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 3:1, 2; 5:14*)

God taught Adam what was good, what was bad, and the consequences of both. Adam was given homework to practice, learn, and mature (managing Eden, zookeeping, reflecting God's character). Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8), but the counselee should be held accountable for his sins, especially the failure to responsibly complete biblical counseling homework.

• **Accountability** (*Genesis 3–6; 2 Timothy 2:1–4; Titus 2:3–5*)

God, sensitive to preserve the love/trust nature of His relationship with Adam and Eve, began with questions to make them think. Where, in what condition, do you find yourself? Who told you that you were naked, i.e., how do you know that something is wrong? What have you done? Can you describe your behavior patterns? When God asked Cain why he was angry, He encouraged self-confrontation of inaccurate beliefs and wrong motives that were producing certain feelings and Cain's downcast countenance.

• **Discipline** (*Genesis 3–11; Matthew 18:15–20; 28:18–20; 1 Corinthians 5:9–13; 10:13; 2 Timothy 2:23–26*)

God's confrontations of Adam, Eve, and Cain are useful examples for us as "biblical" counselors. These people had chosen to love self more than God and neighbor. God's counsel clearly expected genuine repen-

tance, *metanoia*, an about-face turn of the mind and will. Today, just as in the first family, counselees facing tough consequences must learn to discern among the three dimensions of any problem: symptoms, temptations, and causes. This is essential in order for the turn of repentance to go beyond a mere worldly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:8–10).

1. Symptoms are like fruit on the vine (Galatians 5:16–25), revealing the heart by manifesting either the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace . . . , self-control) or the fruit of the flesh (selfishness, self-pity, anxious self-protection, etc.) Adam knew he was exposed, afraid, and in conflict with God and his wife. God lovingly led Adam into a right understanding of, and the right responses to, his symptoms.

2. Temptations are only potential influences interacting with our heart desires. The good news is that they cannot force anyone to believe or behave in an ungodly way. As counselors, however, we need to sensitively understand that some situations (especially abuse and organic factors) can be powerful temptations for a counselee., especially circumstances that we have never personally experienced and cannot fully appreciate.

Most people incorrectly assume temptations to be the cause, when the real "root" is the will following a desire contrary to God's way (James 1:13–15). Eve's desire, just like our counselees', was drawn by the three potential pulls of any temptation: the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). As counselors, we can help counselees understand this common pull of all temptations (1 Corinthians 10:12, 13) by comparing Eve's desires with their own. Eve was tempted by potential physical pleasure (taste), the beauty of "things" (eyes), and the pride that wanted her to be her own boss ("like God"), independently deciding what she felt was right or wrong.

3. Causes of the lack of the Spirit's fruit can be either ignorance or rebellion or both. When the cause is ignorance, a counselee

needs loving and equipping. Rebellion is when self is chosen over God and others (Genesis 3; 1 John 2:16). Accountability and discipline are necessary in response to rebellion. When counselees are unwilling to repent from serious sin, it's vital to the health of the Body of Christ for church discipline (Matthew 18:15-20) to be applied ([http://www.soulcare.org/Church/church\\_discipline.htm](http://www.soulcare.org/Church/church_discipline.htm)). Sadly, few churches are willing to apply God's full provision of biblical counseling by enacting biblical church discipline.

Counselors often hear things like, "My wife makes me miserable." Adam, like all of us, blamed others, including God. Counselors need to help counselees see beneath temptations to the "idols of the heart." Scriptural Q and A allows God's Word, not the counselor, to do the convicting. For example, "in light of Genesis 1-4 and Galatians 5:16-25, do your symptoms best match the fruit of the flesh or the Spirit?" "What circumstances and people seem to tempt you the most?" "Based on the three sub-

roots revealed in Genesis 3 and 1 John 2:16, which of these most often contributes to your problem feelings and actions?" As counselees come to understand God's answers, from the beginning of His Word, homework can then build on this foundation to establish new desires and patterns of attitude, action, and godly affections.

Learning to put off the habits of the old Adamic nature and progressively transform beliefs and behaviors for our Creator's glory is the goal of biblical counseling. Therefore, a literal interpretation of the first eleven chapters of Genesis is essential for a proper understanding of, and trust in, God's holy and loving character. That portion of Scripture also contains some of the most practical passages for overcoming real life problems. Biblical counselors must know them well, study them diligently, and use them regularly to help counselees grow in the character of their Creator, the Good Shepherd. ■

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STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 USC 3685)

1. Publication Title: *The Sword and Trumpet*
2. Publication Number: 6155-4000
3. Filing Date: October 1, 2007
4. Issue Frequency: monthly
5. Number of Issues Published Annually: 12
6. Annual Subscription Price: \$15.00
7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 6083 Mt. Clinton Pike, Harrisonburg, VA 22802. Contact Person: Paul Emerson. Telephone: 540-867-9419
8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher: Same.
9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: *The Sword and Trumpet, Inc.*, P. O. Box 575, Harrisonburg, VA 22803. Editor: None. Managing Editor: Paul Emerson, 6083 Mt. Clinton Pike, Harrisonburg, VA 22802
10. Owner: *The Sword and Trumpet, Inc.*, P. O. Box 575, Harrisonburg, VA 22803.
11. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities: None.
12. Tax Status: The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes have not changed during the preceding 12 months.
13. Publication Title: *The Sword and Trumpet*
14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: October, 2007
15. a. Total number of copies printed (net press run): average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 3,356; actual single issue nearest filing date, 3,450. b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation: 1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales, None; 2. Mailed subscriptions: average number copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 3,118; actual single issue nearest to filing date, 3,183. c. Total paid and/or requested circulation: same as preceding. d. Free distribution by mail (samples, complimentary, and other free): average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 100; single issue nearest to filing date, 75. e. Free distribution outside the mail (carriers or other means): None. f. Total free distribution: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 100; single issue nearest to filing date, 75. g. Total distribution: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 3,218; actual single issue nearest to filing date, 3,283. h. Copies not distributed: 1. Office use, leftovers, spoiled: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 50; actual single issue nearest to filing date, 50. 2. Returns from news agents: None. i. Total: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 3,356; actual single issue nearest to filing date, 3,450. Percent paid and/or requested circulation: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 95%; actual single issue nearest to filing date, 96%.

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. Paul M. Emerson, Editor, Oct. 15, 2007

PAGE 38

SWORD AND TRUMPET

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# Index, Vol. LXXV, 2007

## Index by Title

- Accuracy of Genesis, The, John Mullett, Jan 30  
Achan—How Sin Lost a Battle, Clarence E. Macartney, May 21  
Age of the Earth, The: Is It Important?, John Mullett, Jul 32  
America's Golden Calf, Steve Taylor, Dec 18  
Are Absolutes Obsolete?, Robert E. Wenger, Mar 2  
Axioms, Presuppositions, and the Evidence, John Mullett, Feb 35  
Biblical Church Membership, Craig Alan Myers, Jan 32  
Blame Game, The, Amos Kauffman, Nov 36  
Broken Things, Dale Byers, Oct 2  
Building a Great Family by God's Standards, Dennis Rainey, Feb 2  
Cast-Out Christians, Arlin Weaver, Nov 6  
Childishness or Childlikeness, Titus Rudolph, Feb 23  
Chosen by Grace and Called to Faith, Paul Shirk, Dec 24  
Christian Vision of Beauty, A. R. Albert Mohler Jr., Part 1, May 16; Part 2, Jun 32; Part 3, Jul 34  
Christian Woman's Veiling, The, Harold S. Martin, Mar 11  
Christ's Substitutionary Atonement, John J. Forry, Jul 37  
Climbing Mount Everest—The Future of Menonite Education, Steven Brubaker, Apr 22  
Clinics Use Tissue From Babies Killed in Abortions for Cosmetic Injections, *lifeneews.com*, Oct 25  
Cost of Discipleship, The, Randy Alcorn, Oct 26  
Counseling From the Psalms, Bob Burrelli, Mar 14  
COUNSELORS: Created to L.E.A.D. Through and to God's Image, Sid Galloway, Dec 35  
Crowning Glory of God's Creation, The, Paul W. Brubaker, Sep 36  
Dangers Confronting Preachers, John Shelly, Apr 16  
Dating Methods, The: Are They Reliable?, John Mullett, Oct 32; Do They Really Work? Nov 29  
Developing Servant-Leaders, Robert Burns, Oct 29  
Discerning the Times, J. Mark Horst, Jan 3  
Disobedience or Misunderstanding, Elvin Kauffman, Jun 28  
Do You Hate Math, Too?, Jason D. VanBilliard, Oct 9  
Does Bible History Give Us Any Clue to the Interpretation of Prophecy?, J. L. Stauffer, Apr 38  
Duty of Searching the Scriptures, The, George Whitefield, Feb 25  
Effective Counsel for Christians Tempted by Homosexuality, John Street, May 30  
Evaluating Religious Reconciliation Efforts, Glenn E. Auker, Oct 18  
Family, The: Together in God's Presence, John and Noel Piper, May 26  
Five Minutes After I Die, Norman Lewis, Jun 23  
From *Observations*, David L. Miller, Aug 41; Oct 23  
Follow Me . . . I Will Make You!, P. Daniel Stetler, May 5  
Formula for Success, A, David L. Burkholder, Nov 17  
Gabriel's Story, John Reed, Dec 4  
Genetic Mutations, John Mullett, Jun 30  
God Builds Fences, Mark D. Avery, Aug 6  
Greatest Danger Facing the Church, The, James Hamilton, Jr., May 2  
Has the Vision Died?, Simon Schrock, Jul 3  
Have We Missed It?, Chester Weaver, Apr 2  
Health Care Ethics, Nolan Byler, Aug 28  
Healthy View of Technology, A, Samson Eicher, Jun 2  
Hell Forever?, H. A. Ironside, Apr 32  
His Divine Power Has Given Us Everything . . . , Cathy Wiseman, Feb 16  
Honesty Punished, James Wagler, Sep 35  
How Christian Is "Christian Counseling"?, Sam R. Williams, Jun 13  
How Do We Manage Stress?, Matthew Martin, Feb 41  
How to Respond to Tragic Loss, Joshua Hess, Oct 22  
How Should Christians Respond to Those That "Come In"?, Harris Guidroz, Mar 18  
How Will You Celebrate?, John Coblenz, Sr., Dec 7  
Implications of an Old Earth, John Mullett, Sep 31  
Importance of a Literal Interpretation, The, Bruce Scott, Dec 21  
In Defense of a Lost Ordinance, Leon Shirk, Aug 32  
In Good Hands, Wayne Stiles, Nov 30  
Internet Safety, Dan Olinger, Part 1, Jan 36; Part 2, Mar 39  
In the Beginning God . . . , John Mullett, Mar 33  
Is the Confession I Just Heard for Real?, Mel Shetler, Apr 20

Kickball and Peacemaking, Bruce Hamsher, Nov 20  
 King in Bethlehem's Manger, A, Mark D. Avery, Dec 3  
 Last Surrendered Outpost, The, Author Unknown, Jun 4  
 Legal or Legalist, E. O. Jack Jones, Jun 35  
 Light of the World, The, Henry M. Morris, Oct 16  
 Master's Heartbeat, The, Clifford Schrock, Sep 7  
 Mechanisms of Evolution: Do They Exist?, John Mullett, May 36  
 More Than Fig Leaves, Steve Miller, Jan 20  
 My Menno Simons Mouse Pad, David L. Burkholder, Aug 18  
 No Fear?, Charles R. Swindoll, Jan 13  
 Not All Christian Counselors Are Church Counselors, Lloyd Jonas, Sep 20  
 "Nothing But the Blood . . .," J. Mark Horst, Jul 7  
 Old-Fashioned Parents and Jet-Age Teenagers, David W. Lehigh, Jun 20  
 One Hour and One Dollar, Ben Bergen, Sep 32  
 Only a Christian Can Mortify Sin, Horatius Bonar, Nov 32  
 Ordinance of Feet Washing, The, Dwayne Heatwole, Mar 37  
 Our Duty of Contention!, Robert L. Moyer, Feb 36  
 Our Most Critical Need, A. W. Tozer, Jan 2  
 Overeating: A Weighty Subject, Harold S. Martin, Dec 31  
 Overthrow of Straight America, The, Steve Gallagher, Nov 26  
 Peacemaking Pastor, The, Alfred Poirier, Feb 18  
 Peter, Paul, Apollos, and Christ, David L. Burkholder, Feb 40  
 Planning a Budget, Ethan R. Weaver, May 40  
 Planning Family Evenings, Jacob Neuen-schwander, Aug 38  
 Power and Permanence of the Printed Page, The, John Swartz, Dec 28  
 Quest for a Calling, The, Daniel Doriani, Nov 2  
 Races or People Groups?, John Mullett, Dec 30  
 Revelation 22, David L. Burkholder, Jul 40  
 Right Thinking Better Than Drugs, James Rudy Gray, Aug 17  
 Rocks Cry Out, The, John Mullett, Aug 31  
 Sarcasm—Fun Loving or Unloving?, Paul L. Miller, Aug 37  
 Satisfied, William Lister Krewson, Oct 19  
 Saturation of Cynicism, The, Jerram Barrs, Aug 2  
 Saved by Amazing Grace, Bruce Scott, Sep 23  
 Sharing the Mission, Bill Commons, Aug 16  
 Simplicity in Christ, Dwayne Martin, Oct 3  
 Some Things ARE Certain, James Rudy Gray, Oct 24  
 SPORTS-A-NOMA, Paul M. Emerson, Mar 32

**PAGE 40**

Standards of Moral Purity, John Coblentz, Mar 5  
 Sunday Clothes, David L. Burkholder, Jan 28  
 Teaching Your Daughter Modesty and Responsible Consumerism, Shannon Ethridge, Feb 31  
 Then the Devil Came, Harold S. Martin, Jul 18  
 Thoroughly Engaged and Utterly Distinct, Denis Haack, Sep 2  
 Time and Eternity, David L. Burkholder, Sep 19  
 To Boil a Frog, David L. Burkholder, Apr 29  
 Tough Times Lead to Better Living, James Rudy Gray, Nov 22  
 Trusting in Deep Distress, Roy B. Zuck, Oct 14  
 Truth and Facts, Dan Stetler, Feb 6  
 Turn From Sin and Believe the Gospel, W. C. Moore, Sep 28  
 What Is Evolution?, John Mullett, Apr 37  
 What Is Wrong With American Education?, Haven Bradford Gow, Nov 15  
 What Motivates Our Changes?, Stephen Russell, May 37  
 What the Bible Teaches About the Unseen World, George R. Brunk II, Aug 26  
 When Borrowing Money, Clair Hursh, Jan 18  
 When Motherhood Became a Mountain, Name Withheld, Jun 16  
 Who Can Stand Before Envy?, Jason H. Martin, Sep 33  
 Whole Machinery of Salvation, The, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Mar 23  
 Whose Standards of Modesty—God's or Man's?, Alvin Mast, Apr 5  
 Why Did God Give the Rainbow Sign?, John D. Morris, Feb 44  
 Why Join a Church?, Tim Schoap, Aug 20  
 Wife's Respect for Her Husband, A, Richard Steele, Oct 33  
 Wrapped Wireless, Jennifer Frentz, Mar 34  
 Worship and Music, Timothy J. Myers, Jan 16

### *Index by Subject*

#### **Apostasy**

Our Duty of Contention!, Robert L. Moyer, Feb 36

#### **Beauty**

Christian Vision of Beauty, A, Part I, R. Albert Mohler Jr., May 16; Part II, Jun 32; Part III, Jul 34

#### **Beginning Issues**, John Mullett

Accuracy of Genesis, The, Jan 30

Age of the Earth, The; Is It Important?, Jul 32  
 Axioms, Presuppositions, and the Evidence, Feb 35

Dating Methods, The: Are They Reliable?, Part 1, Oct. 32; Do They Really Work?, Part 2, Nov 29

**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

Genetic Mutations, Jun 30  
 Implications of an Old Earth, Sep 31  
 In the Beginning . . . , Mar 33  
 Mechanisms of Evolution: Do They Exist?, May 36  
 Races or People Groups?, Dec 30  
 Rocks Cry Out, The, Aug 31  
 What Is Evolution?, Apr 37

**Christian Life**  
 Are Absolutes Obsolete?, Robert E. Wenger, Mar 2  
 Blame Game, The, Amos Kauffman, Nov 36  
 Broken Things, Dale Byers, Oct 2  
 Discerning the Times, J. Mark Horst, Jan 3  
 Formula for Success, A, David Burkholder, Nov 17  
 How Do We Manage Stress?, Matthew Martin, Feb 41  
 Last Surrendered Outpost, The, Author Unknown, Jun 4  
 Only a Christian Can Mortify Sin, Horatius Bonar, Nov 32  
 Our Most Critical Need, A. W. Tozer, Jan 2  
 Quest for a Calling, The, Daniel Doriani, Nov 2  
 Standards of Moral Purity, John Coblentz, Mar 5  
 Sunday Clothes, David Burkholder, Jan 28  
 What Motivates Our Changes?, Stephen Russell, May 37  
 Who Can Stand Before Envy?, Jason H. Martin, Sep 33

**Christmas**  
 Gabriel's Story, John Reed, Dec 4  
 How Will You Celebrate?, John Coblentz, Sr., Dec 7  
 King in Bethlehem's Manger, A, Mark Avery, Dec 3

**Church**  
 Biblical Church Membership, Craig Alan Myers, Jan 32  
 Developing Servant Leaders, Robert Burns, Oct 29  
 Evaluating Religious Reconciliation Efforts, Glenn E. Aufer, Oct 18  
 Greatest Danger Facing the Church, The, James Hamilton, Jr., May 2  
 How Should Christians Respond to Those That "Come In"?, Harris Guidroz, Mar 18  
 Our Most Critical Need, A. W. Tozer, Jan 2  
 Why Join a Church?, Tim Schoap, Aug 20

**Church Leadership**  
 Dangers Confronting Preachers, John Shelly, Apr 16  
 Developing Servant Leaders, Robert Burns, Oct 29  
 Peacemaking Pastor, The, Alfred Poirier, Feb 18

**Confession**  
 Honesty Punished, James Wagler, Sep 35

Is the Confession I Just Heard for Real?, Mel Shetler, Apr 20

**Counseling From the Word**  
 Counseling From the Psalms, Bob Burrelli, Mar 14  
 Counselors: Created to L.E.A.D. Through and to God's Image, Sid Galloway, Dec 35  
 Effective Counseling for Christians Tempted by Homosexuality, John Street, May 30  
 His Divine Power Has Given Us Everything We Need . . . , Cathy Wiseman, Feb 16  
 How Christian Is "Christian Counseling"?, Sam R. Williams, Jun 13  
 Is the Confession I Just Heard for Real?, Mel Shetler, Apr 20  
 Jesus Christ: Self-Denial or Self-Esteem?, David M. Tyler, Jul 23  
 Not All Christian Counselors Are Church Counselors, Lloyd Jonas, Sep 20  
 Right Thinking Better Than Drugs, James Rudy Gray, Aug 17  
 Some Things Are Certain, James Rudy Gray, Oct 24  
 Tough Times Lead to Better Living, James Gray, Nov 22

**Current Issues**  
 Clinics Use Tissue From Babies Killed in Abortions for Cosmetic Injections, *Lifenews.com*, Oct 25  
 My Menno Simons Mouse Pad, David L. Burkholder, Aug 18  
 Overthrow of Straight America, The, Steve Gallagher, Nov 26  
 Saturation of Cynicism, The, Jerram Barrs, Aug 2  
 Some Things Are Certain, James Rudy Gray, Oct 24

**Deception**  
 Simplicity in Christ, Dwayne Martin, Oct 3

**Discipleship**  
 Cost of Discipleship, The, Randy Alcorn, Oct 26  
 Master's Heartbeat, The, Clifford Schrock, Sep 7

**Doctrines/Ordinances**  
 Christian Woman's Veiling, The, Harold S. Martin, Mar 21  
 In Defense of a Lost Ordinance, Leon Shirk, Aug 32  
 Ordinance of Feet Washing, The, Dwayne Heatwole, Mar 37  
 Thoroughly Engaged and Utterly Distinct, Denis Haack, Sep 2

**Education**  
 Climbing Mount Everest—The Future of Mennonite Education, Steven Brubaker, Apr 22  
 Do You Hate Math, Too?, Jason D. Van Billiard, Oct 9  
 Has the Vision Died?, Simon Schrock, Jul 3

Power and Permanence of the Printed Page,  
The, John Swartz, Dec 28

What Is Wrong with Education?, Haven Gow,  
Nov 15

#### **Eternity**

Five Minutes After I Die, Norman Lewis, Jun 23  
Hell Forever?, H. A. Ironside, Apr 32

Time and Eternity, David Burkholder, Sep 19

#### **Gluttony**

Overeating: A Weighty Subject, Harold S. Mar-  
tin, Dec 31

#### **Grief and Suffering**

How to Respond to Tragic Loss, Joshua Hess,  
Oct 22

Tough Times Lead to Better Living, James Gray,  
Nov 22

#### **Health**

Health Care Ethics, Nolan Byler, Aug 28

#### **Hermeneutics**

Does Bible History Give Us Any Clue to the  
Interpretation of Prophecy?, J. L. Stauffer,  
Apr 38

Duty of Searching the Scriptures, The, George  
Whitefield, Feb 25

Importance of a Literal Interpretation, The,  
Bruce Scott, Dec 21

#### **Home and Family**

Building a Great Family by God's Standards,  
Dennis Rainey, Feb 2

Childishness or Childlikeness, Titus Rudolph,  
Feb 23

Disobedience or Misunderstanding, Elvin Kauff-  
man, Jun 28

Family: Together in God's Presence, The, John  
and Noel Piper, May 26

Old-Fashioned Parents and Jet-Aged Teen-agers,  
David W. Lehigh, Jun 20

Planning Family Evening, Jacob Neuenschwan-  
der, Aug 38

When Motherhood Became a Mountain, Name  
Withheld, Jun 16

Wife's Respect for Her Husband, A, Richard  
Steele, Oct 33

#### **Jesus Christ**

Light of the World, The, Henry M. Morris, Oct  
16

#### **Legalism**

Legal or Legalist, E. O. Jack Jones, Jun 35

#### **Miscellaneous**

Crowning Glory of God's Creation, The, Paul W.  
Brubaker, Sep 36

Follow Me . . . I Will Make You!, P. Daniel Stetler,  
May 5

God Builds Fences, Mark D. Avery, Aug 6

Have We Missed It?, Chester Weaver, Apr 2

Our God's Great Program, Clarence Martin, Jul  
26

Peter, Paul, Apollos, and Christ, David Burk-  
holder, Feb 40

Revelation 22, David Burkholder, Jul 40

Sarcasm—Fun Loving or Unloving?, Paul L.  
Miller, Aug 37

Saved by Amazing Grace: The Story of John  
Newton, Bruce Scott, Sep 23

To Boil a Frog, David Burkholder, Apr 29

Why Did God Give the Rainbow Sign?, John D.  
Morris, Ph.D, Feb 44

#### **Missions/Witnessing**

Cast-Out Christians, Arlin Weaver, Nov 6

Sharing the Mission, Bill Commons, Aug 16

#### **Modesty**

More Than Fig Leaves, Steve Miller, Jan 20

Teaching Your Daughter Modesty and Responsi-  
ble Consumerism, Shannon Ethridge, Feb  
31

Whose Standard of Modesty—God's or Man's?,  
Alvin Mast, Apr 5

#### **Money**

Planning a Budget, Ethan R. Weaver, May 40

When Borrowing Money, Clair Hursh, Jan 18

#### **Music**

Worship and Music, Timothy J. Myers, Jan 16

#### **Newslines, Hans Mast**

Jan 10, Feb 13, Mar 11, Apr 13, May 12, Jun 10,  
July 14, Aug 12, Sep 16, Oct 11, Nov 12, Dec  
14

#### **Nonresistance**

From Observations, David L. Miller, Oct 23

Kickball and Peacemaking, Bruce Hamsher, Nov  
20

#### **Person of the Month, Gail Emerson**

Elmer N. Beachy, Oct 1

John F. Bressler, Apr 1

Thomas Chalmers, Jan 1

John W. Hess, Aug 1

John N. Hyde, Dec 1

Ira S. Johns, Mar 1

Bishop Eugene Owen "Jack" Jones, May 1

John R. Shank, Sep 1

Jacob A. Shenk, Nov 1

R. G. LeTourneau, Feb 1

William Holmes McGuffey, Jul 1

#### **Poems**

Thorn in the Flesh, Craig Eicher, Sep 37

Would I Be Called a Christian?, Mrs. J. F. Moser,  
Jan 41

#### **Sacrifice**

Christ's Substitutionary Atonement, John J.  
Forry, Jul 37

"Nothing But the Blood . . .," J. Mark Horst, Jul  
7

#### **Salvation**

Chosen by Grace and Called to Faith, Paul Shirk,  
Dec 24

Turn from Sin and Believe the Gospel, W. C. Moore, Sep 28  
 Whole Machinery of Salvation, The, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Mar 23  
**Satan**  
 Then the Devil Came, Harold S. Martin, Jul 18  
**Sermon of the Month**  
 Achan—How Sin Lost a Battle, Clarence E. Macartney, May 21  
 Duty of Searching the Scriptures, The, George Whitefield, Feb 25  
 Five Minutes After I Die, Norman Lewis, Jun 23  
 Follow the Lamb, Horatius Bonar, Jul 27  
 Formula for Success, A, David Burkholder, Nov 17  
 Hell Forever?, H. A. Ironside, Apr 32  
 How to Respond to Tragic Loss, Joshua Hess, Oct 22  
 More Than Fig Leaves, Steve Miller, Jan 20  
 Turn from Sin and Believe the Gospel, W. C. Moore, Sep 28  
 What the Bible Teaches About the Unseen World, George R. Brunk II, Aug 26  
 Whole Machinery of Salvation, The, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Mar 23  
**Song of the Month**, Douglas A. Byler  
 Be Still, My Soul, Jun 18  
 Like Wandering Sheep, Mar 16  
 Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming, Dec 22  
 Make Me a Captive, Lord, Jan 14  
 My Children, Now Attend, Aug 24  
 Now Thank We, Nov 24  
 O Love That Will Not Let Me Go, Feb 21  
 O Word of God Incarnate, May 19  
 The Risen Lord Is Here, Oct 20  
 Welcome, Happy Morning, Apr 30  
 When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, Sep 26  
 When Peace Like a River, Jul 24  
**Sports**  
 America's Golden Calf, Steve Taylor, Dec 18  
 SPORTS-A-NOMA—The Malignancy of the Sports Craze, Paul M. Emerson, Mar 32  
**Sunday School Lessons**, David L. Burkholder  
 Jan 5, Feb 8, Mar 7, Apr 7, May 7, Jun 5, Jul 9, Aug 7, Sep 10, Oct. 5, Nov 7, Dec 9  
**Technology**  
 Healthy View of Technology, A, Samson Eicher, Jun 2  
 Internet Safety, Part I, Dan Olinger, Jan 39; Part II, Mar 39  
 My Menno Simons Mouse Pad, David L. Burkholder, Aug 18  
 Wrapped Wireless—The Illusion of the Age of Communication, Jennifer Frentz, Mar 34  
**Trust**  
 In Good Hands, Wayne Stiles, Nov 30  
 No Fear?, Charles R. Swindoll, Jan 13

Satisfied, William L. Krewson, Oct 19  
 Trusting in Deep Distress, Roy B. Zuck, Oct 14  
**Truth**  
 Truth and Facts, Dan Shetler, Feb 6  
**Witnessing**  
 One Hour and One Dollar, Ben Bergen, Sep 32  
**Youth**  
 From Observations, David L. Miller, Aug 41

### *Index by Author and Source*

**Alcorn, Randy**  
 Cost of Discipleship, The, Oct 26  
**Auker, Glenn E.**  
 Evaluating Religious Reconciliation Efforts, Oct 18  
**Author Unknown**  
 Last Surrendered Outpost, The, Jun 4  
 When Motherhood Became a Mountain, Jun 16  
**Avery, Mark D.**  
 God Builds Fences, Aug 6  
 King in Bethlehem's Manger, A, Dec 3  
**Barrs, Jerram**  
 Saturation of Cynicism, The, Aug 2  
**Bergen, Ben**  
 One Hour and One Dollar, Sep 32  
**Bonar, Horatius**  
 Only a Christian Can Mortify Sin, Nov 32  
**Brubaker, Paul W.**  
 Crowning Glory of God's Creation, The, Sep 36  
**Brubaker, Steven**  
 Climbing Mount Everest—The Future of Menonite Education, Apr 22  
**Brunk, George R. II**  
 What the Bible Teaches About the Unseen World, Aug 26  
**Burkholder, David L.—Articles**  
 Formula for Success, A, Nov 17  
 My Menno Simons Mouse Pad, Aug 18  
 Peter, Paul, Apollos, and Christ, Feb 40  
 Revelation 22, Jul 40  
 Sunday Clothes, Jan 28  
 Time and Eternity, Sep 19  
 To Boil a Frog, Apr 29  
**Sunday School Lessons**  
 Jan 5; Feb 8; Mar 7; Apr 7; May 7; Jun 5; Jul 9; Aug 7; Sep 10; Oct 5; Nov 7; Dec 9  
**Burns, Robert**  
 Developing Servant-Leaders, Oct 29  
**Burrelli, Bob**  
 Counseling From the Psalms, Mar 14  
**Byers, Dale**  
 Broken Things, Oct 2  
**Byler, Douglas A.—Song of the Month**  
 Be Still, My Soul, Jun 18  
 Like Wandering Sheep, Mar 16  
 Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming, Dec 22  
 Make Me a Captive, Lord, Jan 14

My Children, Now Attend, Aug 24  
 Now Thank We, Nov 24  
 O Love That Will Not Let Me Go, Feb 21  
 O Word of God Incarnate, May 19  
 The Risen Lord Is Here, Oct 20  
 Welcome, Happy Morning, Apr 30  
 When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, Sep 26  
 When Peace Like a River, Jul 24  
**Byler, Nolan**  
 Health Care Ethics, Aug 28  
**Coblentz, John**  
 How Will You Celebrate?, Dec 7  
 Standards of Moral Purity, Mar 5  
**Commons, Bill**  
 Sharing the Mission, Aug 16  
**Doriani, Daniel**  
 Quest for a Calling, The, Nov 2  
**Eicher, Samson**  
 Healthy View of Technology, A, Jun 2  
**Emerson, Gail L.**  
 Elmer N. Beachy, Oct 1  
 John F. Bressler, Apr 1  
 Thomas Chalmers, Jan 1  
 John W. Hess, Aug 1  
 John N. Hyde, Dec 1  
 Ira S. Johns, Mar 1  
 Bishop Eugene Owen "Jack" Jones, May 1  
 R. G. LeTourneau, Feb 1  
 William Holmes McGuffey, Jul 1  
 John R. Shank, Sep 1  
 Jacob A. Shenk, Nov 1  
**Emerson, Paul M.**  
**Articles**  
 SPORTS-A-NOMA, Mar 32  
**Ethridge, Shannon**  
 Teaching Your Daughter Modesty and Responsible Consumerism, Feb 31  
**Forry, John J.**  
 Christ's Substitutionary Atonement, Jul 37  
**Frentz, Jennifer**  
 Wrapped Wireless, Mar 34  
**Gallagher, Steve**  
 Overthrow of Straight America, The, Nov 26  
**Galloway, Sid**  
 COUNSELORS: Created to L.E.A.D. Through and to God's Image, Dec 35  
**Gow, Haven Bradford**  
 What Is Wrong With American Education?, Nov 15  
**Gray, James Rudy**  
 Right Thinking Better Than Drugs, Aug 17  
 Some Things ARE Certain, Oct 24  
 Tough Times Lead to Better Living, Nov 22  
**Guidroz, Harris**  
 How Should Christians Respond to Those That "Come In"?, Mar 18  
**Haack, Denis**

Thoroughly Engaged and Utterly Distinct, Sep 2  
**Hamilton, James Jr.**  
 Greatest Danger Facing the Church, The, May 2  
**Hamsher, Bruce**  
 Kickball and Peacemaking, Nov 20  
**Heatwole, Dwayne**  
 Ordinance of Feet Washing, The, Mar 37  
**Hess, Joshua**  
 How to Respond to Tragic Loss, Oct 22  
**Horst, J. Mark**  
 Discerning the Times, Jan 3  
 "Nothing But the Blood . . ." Jul 7  
**Hursh, Clair**  
 When Borrowing Money, Jan 18  
**Ironside, H.A.**  
 Hell Forever?, Apr 37  
**Jonas, Lloyd**  
 Not All Christian Counselors Are Church Counselors, Sep 20  
**Jones, E. O. Jack**  
 Legal or Legalist, Jun 35  
**Kauffman, Amos**  
 Blame Game, The, Nov 36  
**Kauffman, Elvin**  
 Disobedience or Misunderstanding, Jun 28  
**Krewson, William Lister**  
 Satisfied, Oct 19  
**Lehigh, David W.**  
 Old-Fashioned Parents and Jet-Age Teenagers, Jun 20  
**Lewis, Norman**  
 Five Minutes After I Die, Jun 23  
**lifeneews.com**  
 Clinics Use Tissue From Babies Killed in Abortions for Cosmetic Injections, Oct 25  
**Macartney, Clarence E.**  
 Achan—How Sin Lost a Battle, May 21  
**Martin, Dwayne**  
 Simplicity in Christ, Oct 3  
**Martin, Harold S.**  
 Christian Woman's Veiling, The, Mar 21  
 Overeating: A Weighty Subject, Dec 31  
 Then the Devil Came, Jul 18  
**Martin, Jason H.**  
 Who Can Stand Before Envy?, Sep 33  
**Martin, Matthew**  
 How Do We Manage Stress?, Feb 41  
**Mast, Alvin**  
 Whose Standards of Modesty—God's or Man's?, Apr 5  
**Mast, Hans—Newslines**  
 Jan 10; Feb 13; Mar 11; Apr 13; May 12; Jun 10; Jul 14; Aug 12; Sep 16; Oct 11; Nov 12; Dec 14  
**Miller, Paul L.**  
 From *Observations*, Aug 41; Oct 23