

# The SWORD and TRUMPET



“Blow ye the Trumpet and warn the People.”

“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.”

“Take the Sword of the Spirit which is The Word of God.”

Founded in 1929 by Geo. R. Brunk I

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

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The sickness of our children may reveal a need in our life. It may show a raised-up idol in our experience. The desires for comfort (I need my sleep), the desire for freedom (I want to go, see, and do), and other desires can lie hidden in the heart. It is these interruptions which display my true colors. Times like this reveal some of the hidden agendas of a partially sanctified heart.

When our children's sickness wears us down and some surprising carnality shows itself, then what? First, let us be thankful that we are no longer deceived. It is a part of continuing deception for us to conclude that our negative reaction is a result of tiredness, high pressure, or exception. We may be tempted to think (and say) that what we just displayed was an exception and "you would have done the same thing if you had faced the same thing." While this

statement may be accurate, it is not redemptive. Let us be honest with the exposures of these true colors. With this honesty, redemption and sanctification can take place.

This honesty will move us to a visible repentance. Can we see the value of repenting from this selfish outburst, the short words, or the hot, loud command? If we are sensitive and sensible in this area, we may take the courage to clear this thing before God and the child. Parents who make these choices will become better and more effective parents.

Actually, this is part of the whole picture of parenting. In this sense, parenting is one generation helping another while they both grow up. May God give grace to be His helpers when we have sick children. ■

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# Person of the Month: *Gladys Aylward* (1902-1970)



## Part 2

*Continued from the March issue . . .*

In 1933 the Mandarin arrived at Aylward's door again. This time he had a prison riot on his hands and wanted Gladys to go talk to the men and try to stop the riot! She had been proclaiming that those who trust Christ do not need to fear. Her faith was being put to the test. She did as asked and found that the men were rioting because they had nothing productive to do, no food, and no money with which to buy food. God used Gladys in this situation to supply the needs of the prisoners and to solve the problem. As a result the people gave Gladys the name of "Ai-weh-deh," meaning "Virtuous One." This became her name from that time on.

Aylward came in contact with several orphaned children whom she adopted as her own.

In 1936, at the age of 34, she became a citizen of China. This, along with the fact that she dressed like the Chinese and was frugal, went a long way in making her witness for the Gospel effective.

In 1938 war broke out between Japan and China. The city of Yangcheng was bombed and many people fled to the mountains. At the same time the Mandarin announced to Gladys, in front of his friends, that he had accepted Christ as Saviour; what an answer to prayer!

The Japanese believed she was a spy and had a price on her head of \$100, dead or alive. It was time to flee. By this time there were 100 children in her care. She set off with the children in tow and started across the mountains. It was a grueling trip but the children did not give up, the older ones helping the younger ones make the journey. After twelve days of walking they reached the Yellow River but there was no way they could cross without a boat. The children, who had listened well to "Ai-weh-deh," encouraged her to ask God for a boat, which she did. After they were finished praying and singing, God sent a Chinese officer their way. He was able to get a boat and all arrived safely at their destination, the orphanage at Sian. However, Gladys was very ill with typhus fever and was delirious for several days.

She was able to return home for a while to gain back her health. She later returned to China and continued her witness and acts of mercy but in 1947 the Communists evicted her from the country.

When asked one time as to why she was not married, she replied that at one point she had asked the Lord to bring a single male missionary from England to China who would make a marriage proposal to her. She went on to say that since she knew that the Lord answers prayer, the Lord "called him, but he never came."

In 1953, she went to Taiwan where she established an orphanage in 1958. It was there, on January 3, 1970, that she went to be with the Lord. She was buried in a cemetery on the campus of Christ's College, in Guandu, Taipei County.

—Gail L. Emerson

# When Good Things Happen to Bad People

## *Lessons from Psalm 73*

by Harold S. Martin

The 73rd Psalm is attributed to a man named Asaph. He was the chief leader of music in the house of God. His name is mentioned in connection with music in 1 Chronicles 16:4, 5 and in 2 Chronicles 5:12. Twelve inspired psalms from the pen of Asaph are included in the Scriptures. Psalm 73 is one of them.

As we begin reading Psalm 73, we sense that Asaph was thinking seriously about life and its obligations. His thoughts were rooted in the great truth that God is good to all His people. In verse 1, he says, “Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.” Here is a man who was radiant and happy—happy with the certainty that God is good to His people, and that life is filled to the brim with good things for those who have clean hearts. But Asaph at times was deeply troubled! The problem was that God also seemed to be good to those who are not pure in heart! It seemed like good things were happening also to bad people, and so the psalmist’s question was, “Why do the wicked seem to get along so well?”

Job wondered why *the righteous* suffer. Asaph wondered why *the unrighteous* do not suffer. We ourselves sometimes wonder why bad things happened to good people, and at the same we have trouble understanding why good things seem to happen to bad people. James 1 helps us deal with the first question: good people have severe trials. Psalm 73 helps us deal with the second question: wicked people often seem to enjoy life to the full.

All of us have struggles with understanding God’s ways. If God is a God of power, and if He can do all things (as Chris-

tians say He can)—then, some argue, He cannot be a God of love, or He would do something to correct the injustices in the world about us. Asaph had much to learn about God’s justice, and what he learned should be of help to us also. The 73rd Psalm can easily be divided into three parts. The Psalmist looked around (verses 2-12); he looked within (verses 13-16); and he looked up (verses 17-28).

### ***1. The Psalmist Looked Around With Distress (73:2-12)***

As Asaph looked around and reflected on life, he became deeply disturbed. How could a just God allow unrighteous people to prosper, while upright people often struggled with trials and frustrations? Asaph admitted (in verse 2) that his fretting about God’s way of dealing with the wicked came very close to wrecking his faith. He says (verses 2, 3), “My feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped, for I was envious at the foolish.” Asaph almost stumbled, and almost fell away from the path of truth and godliness.

Asaph was remarkably honest. He stated how he felt deep down inside. What really upset him (and almost caused him to lose his faith), was the fact that he saw people breaking God’s laws, and yet they still seemed to succeed in life. Asaph sometimes felt that maybe striving to do right and to live an upright life, really did not seem to benefit him.

Asaph had trials and discouragements every day (verse 14). The foolish and wicked enjoyed greater prosperity than he did. Those who ignored God seemed to be

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getting along just fine.

The disobedient and wicked people around him were *wealthy* (verse 3). He says, "I saw the prosperity of the wicked." They were living in luxury and their wealth seemed to increase.

The wicked were *healthy* (verse 4). The psalmist says, "Their strength is firm." Their bodies were sound and sleek and strong and healthy.

The wicked were *untroubled* (verse 5). Asaph says, "They are not in trouble as other men." Their eyes sparkled because everything was going well for them.

The disobedient were *violent* and *filled with pride* (verse 6). The psalmist says that pride was like a chain around their neck, and violence covered them like a garment.

The wicked were *disrespectful in speech* (verse 8). They scoffed and boasted and threatened. Asaph says that they spoke wickedly and with lofty words.

The ungodly were *blasphemous* (verse 11). "They say, How doth God know?" How does He know what is going on?

The very same people who seemed to prosper (in verses 3-5) often were given over to pride and boasting and violence (verses 6, 8, 11). The ungodly seemed to be comfortable and successful. Their children were well fed; they enjoyed good health; their riches seemed to multiply—while the godly sometimes suffered sickness and sometimes hardly had enough to pay their doctor bills.

## **2. The Psalmist Looked Within With Disappointment (73:13-16)**

As Asaph pondered the dilemma in his mind, he decided to examine himself, and see where he stood. In verse 13, Asaph says that he cleansed his heart—but it seems like he did it in vain, for in verse 14, he says, "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning."

When Asaph compared his own life with that of the ungodly, he saw people who were prospering in this world. They seemed to "have it made." They didn't seem to have many troubles. Asaph's first reaction was that perhaps he had made a big mistake by

trusting God and by trying to keep his life clean.

Is it really worthwhile to be a believer, and to seek to live the Christian life? Asaph was a faithful Jew; he tried to obey the laws of God; he had a pure heart and he was working on maintaining clean hands. But his godless neighbors were in better shape materially and physically than he. What should he do? Was he wrong in his theology? Was there something wrong in his life that he couldn't see? This troubled Asaph so much that, already in verse 2, he sensed that he was "slipping" spiritually because he was envious of wicked people around him.

Asaph did not want to abandon his faith in God, for he knew the truth of Psalm 24: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart" (Psalm 24:3, 4). Neither did Asaph want to be a poor example to younger saints who had not yet faced some of these deeper problems. In verse 15, he says in essence, "If I falter, and give up on God, I may mislead and offend others of God's people (especially the younger generation)."

Likely all of us at some time or another have had similar thoughts. "What's the use of being a Christian? I read the Bible, and go to church, and try to obey the Word. And what happens? Some days everything seems to go wrong." The purpose of Psalm 73 is to tell us how one man solved this problem so that when we get into a similar difficulty we can profit from what he learned.

## **3. The Psalmist Looked Up With Delight (73:17-28)**

Finally, Asaph went into the temple of God and pondered his case. When he did that, he began to see things from God's point of view. His mind shifted from thinking like a natural man to thinking like a spiritual man. The natural man considers only the things which he sees. His focus is on the visible things of earth. The spiritual person sees other truths besides those things that are visible to the human eye.

When Asaph went into God's house for

meditation and instruction and prayer, he began to see the final end of those whose hearts are far from God—and it wasn't a very pretty picture. From God's point of view, things look different from the way they look from an earthly point of view.

In verse 17, Asaph says, "I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end." God showed him the horror which lies ahead for the wicked, the disobedient, and the unbelieving. God uses the words *destruction* (verse 18), *desolation* (verse 19), *consumed with terrors* (verse 19), and *despised* by the Lord (verse 20). All these things are confirmed elsewhere in the Scriptures. Proverbs 13:9, for example, says, "The lamp of the wicked shall be put out."

Asaph now comes to the place where he has cleared up his thinking about the ungodly and disobedient, and about the fairness of God. He sees that indeed God is ruling over the affairs of men, and that the disobedient and ungodly are not in such a favored spot after all! In fact, in light of this revelation, who wants to change places with them?

The psalmist discovered that without God, people cannot have inner strength. This is why we hear of a person who seems to be doing well, and all of a sudden we learn that he has committed suicide. Outwardly, they put on an appearance of happiness, but inwardly they're falling apart—and can no longer stand life!

Unbelievers often appear to be composed and at ease, but they are frequently gripped deep down inside by terrible fears. William Randolph Hearst was a talented and wealthy newspaper and magazine publisher. He built a huge mansion on 240,000 acres of land in California overlooking the Pacific Ocean. He searched the world for beautiful works of art and many of them are displayed in his mansion. But he had a rule that the word *death* was not to be mentioned in his presence. He was tormented by the fear of death. Friends, the important thing for all of us is not how good or how bad we have it in this life, but **where we are going after this life is over**. Those

who are disobedient and unbelieving live in lust and pleasure. They spend time playing the stock market. They waste hours in silly entertainment, and everything seems to go well for them. But the psalmist says (in verse 20), that their present life is only *like a dream that is gone when they get awake*. It seemed so real, and suddenly it is gone. That's how quickly those appealing material things of life will vanish.

In verse 21, Asaph expresses grief over the fact that he once charged God with injustice, and even contemplated joining in with sinners. His attitude was so foolish that it was almost animal-like. He was "as a beast" before God (verse 22).

But in verse 23, Asaph begins to look at the bigger picture. The word *nevertheless* (verse 23) indicates a change in his thinking, and a note of satisfaction with the truth that he discovered. He found that God is just and fair after all, and that God had really been good to him too—even though he had some sicknesses and frustrations in life that the ungodly did not seem to have.

Note the three tenses in verses 23 and 24:

In the present—"I *am* continually with thee" (verse 23a).

In the past—"Thou *hast* holden me by my right hand" (verse 23b).

In the future—"Thou *shalt* guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (verse 24).

Even though Asaph (in his worst moments) had almost fallen to the level of beastly stupidity (verse 22), God had not cast him away. God had held his hand in the past, and would guide him in the future. God still loved him, supported him, and would continually be with him.

For the believer, the promise is that after this life, our heavenly Father will "receive [us] to glory" (Psalm 73:24). Romans 8:17 says that believers are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." An "heir" is one who has not yet received his inheritance, but he is going to receive the inheritance some day. Paul says that those who are children born into God's family are heirs of

God. One of these days we are going to possess the inheritance which is reserved in Heaven for the people of God. The hymn writer says,

I once was an outcast stranger on earth,  
A sinner by choice and an alien by birth;  
But I've been adopted, my name's written  
down;

An heir to a mansion, a robe, and a crown.

*By Harriet E. Buell/John B. Sumner (Public Domain)*

Paul continues in Romans 8, however, to remind us that between the present moment and the time of future glory, many things might happen. Suffering comes to Christians. The road might become rough and stormy and hazardous before we reach the end of the journey, but in spite of the worst that can happen to us—we can be sure that the glory of the future far surpasses any pain that this present life can ever bring. Sufferings and trials may be hard and painful here in this life, but the sum total of them all (rolled up in one great big bundle) will be nothing when compared with the glory which is still to be revealed. Romans 8:18 says, “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Good things may seem to happen to bad people, but for God’s people, the best is yet to be!

In verse 25, the psalmist responds with an expression of pure love for God. He says, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.” I don’t know much about Heaven, but Heaven is where Jesus is—and that’s enough. In verse 26, Asaph says, “God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.”

In verse 27, we are reminded again about the destiny of those who are unfaithful. Asaph speaks of those who “go a whoring from thee,” or “those who play the harlot.” This refers to those who commit spiritual adultery—those who disobey God’s Word and follow after the world. Asaph declares that they shall perish; they shall be destroyed.

Disobedient and unsaved people may

have health, and wealth, and worldly success, but they don’t have God. And no matter how much material success you may have, if you don’t have God, you don’t have anything. The worldly crowd may seem to have an easier time on the road of life, but they are heading in the wrong direction. In fact, they are like people lounging around on easy chairs. They are having a great time—but they are sitting on the deck of the ill-fated Titanic!

Asaph concludes the Psalm by saying, “It is good for me to draw near to God” (verse 28). This is his final testimony. Earlier, he had focused on the wicked—and how they were faring in life. Now, he was looking at the Lord—and he found satisfaction and strength for life.

When people first become Christians, some have the feeling that life ought to be easier for them. After all, they are now the objects of the heavenly Father’s love and care. But it does not usually happen that way. Instead, they often find that things become worse. Satan is angered when he loses grip on one of his followers. Sometimes new believers (and older ones as well) feel depressed, especially when they see disobedient and ungodly people around them that are enjoying life to the full.

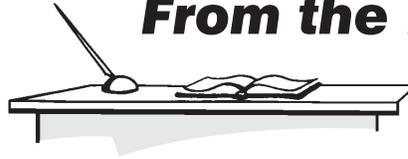
When good things seem to be happening to bad people—don’t envy them. Remember all the good things that God does for you, and keep in mind the terrible destiny that awaits those who mock God’s Word, make light of His commandments, and reject the way of salvation.

The 73rd Psalm speaks of the conflict in the psalmist’s mind as he faced the temptation to envy the prosperity and well-being of the wicked. It ends with a note of assurance that God delivers the righteous, and allows the wicked to perish. The disobedient are building their houses on the sand (Matthew 7:26, 27).

We don’t understand why sometimes bad things happen to good people. And we don’t always understand why sometimes good things happen to bad people. But a great

*(continued on page 7)*

## From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

# Counting Heads or Changing Hearts?

by Justin Lonas

According to a 2003 Barna Group poll, approximately 60 percent of American Protestant churches have fewer than 100 people in attendance each Sunday (while only 2 percent attract 1,000 or more), and just over 40 percent of American churchgoers attend those small churches.

In an era where numerical (and financial) growth seems to be the driving force behind most churches' development, however, small churches are often viewed as inferior, unsuccessful, and even unspiritual. Because they lack the programs and services of larger congregations, they are often stereotyped as irrelevant. This is, more often than not, an untrue indictment. Still, many churches (large and small) have taken it to heart, leaving many small churches thinking that they must grow or die.

We need to ask ourselves why our first instinct for a church or ministry that starts and begins to fill a successful role is to expand it. As a society, we feel as though anything that is not growing is automatically receding. While this may be true in

terms of business and finance, the same measurements cannot be applied to dealings with people.

Think back to the Great Commission. Christ's command was to make disciples. As I brought out in an article in the February issue of *Pulpit Helps* ("Remembering the Great Commission"), the sense of the command is that it is a process, not an event. We can't allow a focus on church size to supplant our true mission. There is a great temptation to focus on rapid and highly visible numerical growth instead of the gradual and internal nature of disciple-making. When we hold up growth as the higher goal, we believe it's somehow better to reach a large number of people at a cursory level than it is to reach a few very deeply and effectively.

The small church is uniquely equipped to make a move away from prevalent "dog & pony show" methods of growth and focus on cultivating a Christian community that builds real disciples.

Numerical growth can be a good thing, too, when it happens for the right reasons.

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From 1998-2006, I attended a Christian & Missionary Alliance church in North Carolina that grew from around 250 to 1,200 in weekly attendance in a matter of 3-4 years as the pastor made a decision to be less focused on “doing church” and more focused on sound, exegetical, expositional preaching and missions. The church never did anything specifically directed at “growth”—the pastor faithfully preached the Word and people came in the midst of the spiritual growth of our members.

Such Spirit-directed growth should be our only desire in terms of church size. Any growth pattern aimed simply at increasing a church’s numbers instead of a comprehensive focus on the spiritual health of the body can lead to stagnation and a loss of vision. People that come to a church that’s reaching out to them won’t stick around if the “advertised product” isn’t delivered. Sustained growth requires a commitment to the Word and to the church community.

We need to let that pattern of growth in Christ determine our outreaches, programs, services, etc. How we understand the importance of church growth will ultimately determine how we approach many areas of the Christian walk. If missions is about head-counting, then we don’t need to be actively involved when we hear encouraging reports from the field. It’s enough to give occasionally and pray when we remember to. If evangelism and discipleship is about head-counting, distributing tracts, street preaching, and big-tent meetings ought to have conquered the world for Christ long ago.

Unfortunately, that’s not the case. We have to be committed to Christ and let our numbers rise and fall as He moves people. If we are faithful to His model of disciple-making, our numbers won’t matter.

While I do want to encourage our readers in small churches, we also have to remember that just because a church is small doesn’t mean it’s fulfilling its role as a community of disciple-makers. Whether your church has 50 members or 5,000, the

success of your ministry has to hinge on how well you’re following Christ’s example (i.e.—how the fruits of the Spirit are worked out in your congregation). Is your church going to be in the business of counting heads or of changing hearts? ■

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### **When Good Things Happen to Bad People . . . cont’d. from pg. 5**

truth to keep in mind is this: **Christians do not live by explanations; we live by promises.**

George Matheson was the writer of the hymn, “O Love That Will Not Let Me Go.” Matheson was blind; he had a lapse of faith, and was dealing with doubt. But the counsel of his elders was to wait and pray before God. He took their advice, and Matheson’s faith was rekindled again. In the hymn, he says:

O love that will not let me go  
I rest my weary soul in Thee;  
I give Thee back the life I owe—  
That in thine ocean depths—  
Its flow may richer, fuller be.

*By Albert Lister Peace/George Matheson*  
(Public Domain)

Our prayer is that God will teach each of us the same truth that Asaph discovered, and that those who are disciples of Jesus Christ will not be envious of the disobedient and ungodly. May the Lord help us to say, “God is the strength of my heart” (verse 26).

If you do not know Jesus Christ as Saviour, trust Him. He gives eternal life. First John 5:12 says, “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6). Receive Jesus into your heart, repent of your sins, and confess Him openly (Romans 10:9). Receive Christian baptism, and then make a commitment to continue on living for Jesus (John 8:31, 32). ■

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# THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



## A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

**APRIL 6, 2008**

### ***Daniel Keeps Covenant in a Foreign Land***

Daniel 1:8-20

The setting for the April lessons is the city of Babylon, capital of the Chaldean empire. Daniel and his three cohorts had been taken captive from Jerusalem in 605 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar and carried to Babylon. There they were selected to undergo a three-year period of training and preparation to enter into the service of the king. The first seven verses of Daniel 1 give the background for today's lesson and set the stage for the conflict which plays out between Daniel and the king's servant, Melzar, regarding the king's culinary provisions.

Daniel and his three friends were just young men when taken captive, perhaps around 16 years old, but they were intelligent and capable young men (see verses 3 and 4). It is also obvious that they had had excellent teaching and training at home. They knew who they were and the principles their people stood for. Even though far from home and in a potentially compromising situation, they refused to bend to the dictates of their captors in the area of dietary restrictions.

Note the diplomatic way with which Daniel approached the situation, a skill which served him well in his future relationships in various kings' courts. We also note here, and in subsequent events in Daniel's life, the significant role God played in his life and experiences. Daniel proves the truism that one with God is a majority. God helped Daniel because he honored Him.

Instead of flatly refusing to cooperate

with their captors on the matter of food, Daniel proposed a test to determine the validity of their concerns. This test would endanger no one (see verse 10), and give time to verify Daniel's proposition. Whether the king's food was such as was forbidden by the Law, or not prepared according to Jewish regulations, or even previously offered to idols, is not known. However, God honored Daniel and his friends by making their test a success. By not compromising their principles they enhanced their standing both with God and the prince of the eunuchs who was in charge of their training.

When their period of training was over and they stood before the king to give account, these four young men stood out above all the other trainees. Their secret was not in the food they ate but that "God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom." God blessed their stand and enabled their learning. Daniel was given additional skills in the understanding and interpretation of dreams and visions. These young men were set to become outstanding witnesses to the God of Heaven in a pagan setting. We'll note their further exploits in following lessons.

These young men provide a glowing example for young men of all ages and circumstances. When principles taught at home and church are upheld in challenging circumstances, God provides strength and courage and blesses the individual and uses him as a witness to His grace. Daniel's stand enhanced his usefulness and brought honor to God.

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

1. Please note from this lesson the tremendous importance of careful and adequate

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**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

- parental training and teaching of children regarding basic life principles of respect, conviction, diligence, etc. Discuss how these are best passed on.
2. Have you ever faced a situation where a deep-seated conviction was challenged? How did you handle it? What was the result?
  3. What is the difference between a preference and a conviction? Which can be changed without compromise?
  4. There is an unspoken advantage with Daniel and his friends. What is it?
  5. Daniel gives us a good example of how to handle difficult situations. Diplomacy and respect go a long way to mitigating potential conflict. Be sure to understand this principle and determine to work it out in your experiences.

## **APRIL 13, 2008**

### ***Standing for the Truth***

Daniel 3:8-26

In this lesson we have the same king, Nebuchadnezzar, and three of the four young men we met in last Sunday's lesson—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel is not in focus, perhaps because of the responsibilities and position given him in 2:48, 29. Daniel had explained and interpreted the king's dream in Chapter 2. Perhaps it was in response to this interpretation that Nebuchadnezzar, the head of gold in the image of the dream, set up the golden image which provides the setting for today's lesson.

Some years had no doubt passed since Daniel and his three friends had come into prominence with the king. Nebuchadnezzar, exhibiting the pride which eventually led to his downfall, had erected a 90-foot image of gold in the plain of Dura, south-east of the city of Babylon. For the dedication of this image he invited all the officials of his kingdom to attend. Furthermore, in honor to Nebuchadnezzar, they were all

commanded at the sound of the music to bow before this image in worship (read verses 1-7).

To bow in worship to this idol was of course something these Jewish young men could not conscientiously do. So, in spite of the announced consequences for not bowing, they remained standing when everyone else prostrated themselves before the image. This brought swift accusation against them by certain Chaldeans, very possibly men who were jealous of these foreigners for the positions they held in the kingdom. Here was an opportunity to get back at them. So they reported them to the king.

King Nebuchadnezzar was enraged. Here was open defiance to his authority and position. He could not allow it to go unchallenged or unpunished. But just in case there was some misunderstanding, he gave Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego a second opportunity, along with a threat for non-compliance, and a challenge to any God who would dare interfere with his plan.

The three young men responded courteously but firmly. Regardless of the consequences, they would not compromise their faith. They expressed confidence in God's ability to deliver them but refused to bow to the image or serve Nebuchadnezzar's gods. "To these men the outcome was irrelevant, for what was at stake was not God's ability or their own lives, but their faith and obedience to serve Him regardless of the cost" (*Nelson Bible Commentary*).

So into the furnace they went—clothed and bound. Even the soldiers who threw them in were overcome by the intense heat and perished. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego lived, and were accompanied in the fire by a divine protector. Their claim had been vindicated and Nebuchadnezzar now realized that there was a God more powerful and capable than his gods.

The result was that these men received even higher promotions, and Nebuchadnezzar issued an edict protecting the honor and worship of the God of Heaven. God honored the stand of these men. He always honors

those who stand for the truth.

***For thought and discussion***

1. This lesson provides valuable insight into the problem of God's people living in an unwelcoming society. What principles can we learn from this story to help us cope with situations today where our faith and its positions may be challenged? Discuss.
2. Are there any circumstances under which we as Christians may compromise our stand? Explore. Discuss.
3. Name several factors which helped these three men remain stable under very trying and threatening circumstances.
4. How do you respond when someone belittles your God? What are some effective responses? (A good topic to share with your class.)
5. Many of our ancestors died rather than give up their faith. The question confronting us today is, would we be willing to do the same? It's a sobering and searching thought.

**APRIL 20, 2008**

***Serving God Without Fear***

Daniel 6:1-27 (For purposes of background we have included more verses than found in the International Lesson text.)

Again today we are studying a very familiar story from the Old Testament—Daniel in the lions' den. There are lessons to be learned here other than bravery, consistency, and God's protecting care. Be sure to look for them as you read the text. Daniel, now in his 80s, was serving in the Medo-Persian empire under Darius, the Medes having conquered Babylon as depicted in Chapter 5. Daniel's abilities and integrity enabled him to survive changes of government by remaining above the political fray and thus continue to serve various kings in various dynasties throughout his lifetime.

Daniel was a prominent figure in Darius' court and because of his personal integrity and administrative skills Darius planned to set him over the entire kingdom. However,

this aroused jealousy from among the other provincial governors. Daniel was a foreigner and a man of integrity and strict honesty (see verses 2 and 4). His accusers soon realized they could find no fault in him regarding the discharge of his duties so they turned to his religious life for censure.

These men were shrewd and hid their real purpose from the king. They approached him with flattery, veiling their intent to get rid of Daniel. The king, taken in by their smooth talk, readily agreed to their scheme and signed the decree, which, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, became unalterable. They then set out to trap Daniel.

Daniel, keenly aware of the royal edict (v. 10), nevertheless did not alter his routine. Three times a day, windows open toward Jerusalem, down on his knees he continued to pray to the God of Heaven. He knew that the God he served was greater than the king, more powerful than the king's lions, and would not be intimidated by bloodthirsty politicians.

When Daniel's accusers reported to the king they again approached him with an appeal to his ego (see v. 12). Then they dropped the bombshell: "That Daniel, a captive from Judah, does not regard thee, O king, nor honor your decree." Daniel stood accused. And the king realized, too late, that he was trapped. In spite of his position and distress over his ill-conceived decree, he was forced to follow through in order to uphold the integrity of the Medo-Persian legal system.

So Daniel was cast into the lions' den—and the king spent a restless night. The king, however, must have had some knowledge of the power of Daniel's God (v. 16). But to show his concern and remorse he spent the night fasting. Early in the morning, with at least a glimmer of hope, he approached the den and called out to Daniel (see v. 20). Imagine his joy and relief of the suspense he was enduring when Daniel answered. Daniel's faith and integrity had been vindicated. The king learned a lesson. And the jealous accusers paid for their folly. Above all, however, was the honor given to

Daniel's God—all because of a faithful and consistent follower.

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

1. How should we respond when we become victims of jealousy? How have you responded?
2. Did Daniel's position in prayer have anything to do with Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple? See 2 Chronicles 6.
3. How does Daniel's refusal to compromise instruct us in living out our faith today? Discuss with your class.
4. Reflect on the many lessons included in this story: the folly of hasty decisions, the burning hatred resulting from jealousy, the power and witness of a consistent life, the providential care of God for His children, etc.
5. Daniel in today's lesson, and his three friends in last Sunday's lesson, were willing to put their lives on the line in order to be faithful to their convictions. How does one develop such deep faith and commitment?

## **APRIL 27, 2008**

### ***Daniel Prays for His People***

Daniel 9:1-7, 17-19

Daniel was serving in the court of Darius, vice-regent for Cyrus, in the fourth administration he served in the court at Babylon. Darius, the Mede, took the kingdom from Belshazzar, grandson of Nebuchadnezzar under whom Daniel had begun his service at Babylon 69 years previously (see 5:2, 30, 31). Darius was the king who threw Daniel into the lions' den (last Sunday's lesson). It was during the first year of his reign that Daniel, through reading the prophets, understood that Jeremiah's prediction of a 70-year period of captivity was drawing to a close (see Jeremiah 29:10; 16:14, 15; 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23).

Daniel knew that his people's sins had

precipitated their captivity and his concern now was whether they had sufficiently repented and were ready to be restored by God's favor to their homeland. So he poured out his heart to God in fervent prayer and supplication. Interestingly, Daniel's prayer models Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple some 400 years previously (see 1 Kings 8:47, 48).

Daniel recognized the importance of approaching God in a proper manner and attitude. He fasted (see Daniel 10:2, 3), donned sackcloth, and sat in ashes. He completely humbled himself before the Lord whom he was entreating. Daniel was a righteous man (Ezekiel 14:14), but he identified himself with his fellow countrymen in recognizing their sin (verses 5 and 6) and waywardness, and in beseeching God's mercy, forgiveness, and blessing.

Daniel understood that for his people to return to Jerusalem and be restored in their homeland they would need to be in a right relationship with God. They had failed to heed God's prophets in the past and as a result suffered captivity and exile. For God to act favorably on their behalf they now needed a change of heart, a return to obedience, and performance of the Law. Verses 8-16 spell out in more detail the disparity between God's will and their actions. "Daniel pleaded with God in prayer and petition that the people might be prepared by the grace of God for the deliverance that God was about to work out for them" (Matthew Henry).

Daniel's prayer is a model of confession, supplication, and entreaty. It shows his concerns, his humility, his desires, his earnestness, and his anticipated response. He begs God to hear, to open His eyes and observe, and to look favorably upon the city where He had been pleased to place His name (see 1 Kings 11:36). Certainly God would want to restore the city of His dwellingplace, would He not? Daniel was appealing to God's sense of respect and ownership.

Daniel ends his prayer with an appeal to God's great mercies, recognizing that as sinful people they have no merit of their own

with which to appeal for His help and are utterly dependent on Him. His final appeal is for God to hear, to forgive, and to act—for His own sake, on behalf of His city, and for His people. Before Daniel was finished praying, the angel Gabriel appeared with a message from God concerning the future of His people.

***For thought and discussion***

1. Notice from this lesson, as well as last Sunday's, that Daniel did not spend all his time in service to the king. He also

took time to pray to God and read the writings of God's prophets. His example provides a lesson for God's children today.

2. Was it necessary for Daniel to identify with the sins of his people? Why?
3. Perhaps here is a good time to outline the elements of successful prayer.
4. What does fasting add to the effect of prayer?
5. What does this passage tell us about the relationship between leaders, people, and God? ■

## ***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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### **Jesus Shines at Funeral for Martyred Palestinian Christian**

GAZA CITY, GAZA (ANS)—The motorcade carrying the body of a martyred Palestinian Christian displayed a huge cross of Christ as it wound through Gaza City—a rare constellation of light in the midst of darkness.

Rami Ayyad, 32, the manager of Gaza City's only Christian bookstore, was abducted October 6th and found stabbed to death the following day. He left behind a pregnant wife, Pauline, and two young children.

The attack came six months after his Palestinian Bible Society bookshop was bombed, and nearly daily threats of violence thereafter. No arrests have been made in the killing.

"He was a dear friend, the sweetest person you would ever meet," says Brother

Ahmed, one of an estimated 2,500 Palestinian Christians living in the troubled area.

In the midst of Ayyad's funeral motorcade—led by Hamas gunmen—there was a rare sight in Gaza City. "In the front seat of the vehicle carrying his body there was a Christian carrying a huge cross as they paraded through the streets of the city," Ahmed says. "People on both sides of the street could see it," he notes. "I don't believe Gaza City ever saw anything like that.

"The glory of God was shining so much," Ahmed says. "There were many Muslims who showed up for his funeral who knew him."

—Excerpt from "Jesus Shines at Funeral for Martyred Palestinian Christian" from *ASSIST News Service* (<http://tinyurl.com/26p9av>).

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## **Kenyans Continue Rioting, Violence in Wake of Election**

More than a month after a hotly contested presidential election in Kenya, there is still much rioting and violence in the streets.

Kibaki was the incumbent President of Kenya and is a member of the Kikuyu tribe, 22% of Kenya's population. His opponent Odinga was a member of the Luo tribe, 12% of the population. Polls in the last months of the election campaign showed Odinga leading Kibaki by about 4%. On the day of the elections, the electoral commission showed Odinga leading by a large percentage, but toward the end of the day Kibaki showed a huge jump. Odinga's party caught Kibaki supporters smuggling in busloads of ballots marked for Kibaki. Also, numbers given by the election commission mean that for some areas, election turnout would have been 115%. Internal observers decry the election as rigged.

My friend Ruth Kuepfer, a missionary in Kisumu, Kenya, writes on her Xanga (Dec. 29, <http://tinyurl.com/2tl52o>), "Today the Luos are rioting in town because of the delay in counting votes. They aren't happy either that Raila [Odinga] was ahead by a million votes, and now he's only ahead by a very small margin. Continue to pray for our safety and that God's will might be done."

She also says (Jan. 26, <http://tinyurl.com/2qqos9>), "The [Mennonite] missionaries [in neighboring Nakuru] are petrified by the sounds of mob violence and gunshots. They are helpless to give food to their hungry church people or shelter them, since it's not safe to go anywhere without a police escort. (The Nakuru missionaries were able to shelter quite a number of church families in their compound and also at Lamp and Light office.) Please pray for the safety of the missionaries in the Nakuru. Pray for the peace of Kenya."

Two days later she wrote (<http://tinyurl.com/27eyo3>).

[com/386qog](http://tinyurl.com/386qog)), "The women and children from the Nakuru mission station contemplated fleeing here to Kisumu for a while, but it's not safe enough for them to travel over here. Today there has been a fresh uproar in Kisumu—there is burning, gunshots, and the sound of rioting. The reason for this is that gangsters stopped a bus, pulled the Luos off and killed them. This stirred the Kisumu folks to revenge. They, in return, have stopped a Molo bus, pulled off the rival tribe's people and did the same. Nakuru has transferred those in hiding at the Lamp and Light office to Nakuru's center of town to join the masses that are awaiting evacuation. That way they can move with the main refugee flow instead of being an isolated target."

The *New York Times* says, "In Nakuru, furious mobs rule the streets, burning homes, brutalizing people and expelling anyone not in their ethnic group, all with complete impunity."

"On Saturday, hundreds of men prowled a section of the city with six-foot iron bars, poisoned swords, clubs, knives, and crude circumcision tools. Boys carried gladiator-style shields and women strutted around with sharpened sticks.

"The police were nowhere to be found. Even the locals were shocked.

"I've never seen anything like this," said David Macharia, a bus driver.

"One month after a deeply flawed election, Kenya, despite international pressure on its leaders to compromise and stop the killings, is tearing itself apart along ethnic lines."

—Sources: *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wikipedia*, *chai with Ruth Xanga*. Excerpt from "Mob Violence Is Tearing Kenya Apart" in the *New York Times* (1/27/08) (<http://tinyurl.com/27eyo3>)

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## **Former Pakistani PM Bhutto Assassinated**

A gunman shot former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto as she was campaigning for the upcoming election. When security guards tackled him, he detonated

himself, killing 28 people and wounding over 100.

During her two tenures as PM, Bhutto tried twice to purge the ISI—Pakistani intelligence—of terrorist supporters and she twice failed, with the ISI fomenting the coups that ejected her from power. Her supporters claim that elements of the ISI are behind her assassination. The government of Pakistan blames Al Qaeda.

Bhutto was a strong voice for democracy in Pakistan and her assassination further threatens the stability of the country. Former General Pervez Musharraf's (who is a strong U.S. ally) popularity has dropped precipitously over the last year and Bhutto was offering a popular alternative to Musharraf on one hand and the fundamentalist Muslims on the other.

—Sources: *McClatchy News Service, CNN, The Raw Story, PARADE*

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### **"A Wrong Must Be Righted"— An Interview with Benazir Bhutto**

"Dust spirals from village to village across the countryside of Pakistan. Drums lead men to dance in the streets as they witness the reappearance of their revered leader. No matter how long and hard I look, there are no women. Except her.

" 'Ben-a-zir, zindabd!' the men chant. 'Long live Benazir!'

"Benazir Bhutto has returned to her fractured country to run for prime minister this Tuesday. She has ruled twice before—and twice been overthrown. Her caravan continually switches direction to foil suicide bombers. Only a few weeks earlier, she narrowly escaped blasts that slaughtered 170 of her supporters. Now I watch her stand tall atop a truck, waving, white-scarved. Serenely smiling.

"That evening, Bhutto invites me to her ancestral home in Larkana, where she still presides over several thousand acres of feudal lands. Meeting me alone on the men's side, she is ready to let down her veil.

"Today I saw you campaigning essentially unprotected, I say. How do you do it?"

*This is the first part of a very good in-depth interview of Benazir Bhutto that went to press just before she was assassinated. I would recommend reading the whole thing.*

—Excerpt from "A Wrong Must Be Righted" in *PARADE Magazine* (12/27/07) (<http://tinyurl.com/ytwglq>)

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### **GPS-Equipped Baby Jesus Statue Recovered**

In Florida a nativity scene had GPS trackers in their Joseph, Mary, and Jesus statues. When they found the Jesus statue missing Wednesday night, they activated the GPS tracker and found it was in a house across the street. Thursday morning deputies showed up at the door and arrested the 18-year-old thief. The statue is valued at \$800.

—Source: *Engadget*

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### **Venezuelan Spy Ring Uncovered in U.S.**

An airport security scanner noticed \$800,000 in cash in the suitcase of a passenger on a plane chartered by Argentina's national oil company. According to American officials the passenger, Guido Alejandro Antonini, was carrying the money from Chavez's leftist regime in Venezuela to the election campaign of Argentina's new president, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner—part of Chavez's efforts to increase his influence. Two days after having been caught with the cash, Antonini was seen in the presidential palace in Argentina celebrating new business deals signed with Venezuela.

FBI agents convinced Antonini to wear a microphone and they recorded conversations with four Venezuelan agents in the U.S. trying to persuade Antonini to keep quiet about the cash's destination. First they tried offering him \$2 million in hush money then threatened to harm his children if he didn't cooperate. At one point

when a Venezuelan agent was meeting with Antonini, he drove a circuitous 43-mile route to his destination instead of a seven-mile direct route and made many sudden turns to try to detect and/or evade any U.S. counterintelligence agents shadowing him. The FBI stayed with them the whole time.

The men have been charged in U.S. courts with being unregistered foreign agents. One of the agents has pleaded guilty and may strike a plea bargain with U.S. prosecutors, shedding further light on Chavez's influence-peddling machine of bribery.

—Source: *New York Times*

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### **95 Churches, 730 Christian Homes Burnt in Orissa, India**

Hindu militants used Christians' Christmas celebrations as an excuse to execute a large-scale attack on Christians across Orissa state. Four people were killed, and hundreds of families were displaced to refugee camps. Many were forced to convert to Hinduism—in one church in Jargi village, 41 of 45 families in the church converted. Hindus forced many to drink cow urine—a Hindu initiation rite.

The Christmas attacks have sparked a continuous chain of attacks against Christians in Orissa state and have spawned attacks in neighboring states as well. In Chhattisgarh state on Jan. 16, around 100 Hindus attacked 2500 Christians who were holding an open-air prayer meeting. They beat them mercilessly with swords and clubs and lobbed petrol bombs, burning their tent to the ground. They also kidnapped two native Gospel Echo Mission Society missionaries.

In related news, Hindu militants burned down another church more recently (Jan. 15) in Pochapalli village (Bhudhan town) which is 35 km (22 mi) from Hyderabad, where Sam and Becca Gunti are. Pray for the Guntis and other Christians in India.

—Sources: *AsiaNews.it*, *ChristianNewsToday.com*, *Christian Post*, *ASSIST News Service*. See *AsiaNews.it*'s article for many witnesses' accounts compiled in story form (<http://tinyurl.com/yqasa8>).

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### **Iraq: Serial Attacks on Churches Continue**

LOS ANGELES (Compass Direct News)—“A car-bomb exploded outside a Chaldean church in northern Iraq yesterday, injuring two people, a Baghdad bishop said. The blast is the 10th reported attack on Iraqi churches in two weeks.”

—Excerpt from “Iraq: Serial Attacks on Churches Continue” in *Compass Direct News* (<http://tinyurl.com/2ys52d>)

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### **Movie: *Saving Sarah Cain* Garner Two Award Nominations**

“*Saving Sarah Cain*, the heartwarming story of a self-absorbed big city newspaper columnist who discovers that she is the legal guardian of her five Amish nieces and nephews after the death of her sister, has been nominated for best picture of the year, in television, by *Movieguide*.”

*Saving Sarah Cain* is the movie adaptation of a Beverly Lewis novel.

—Excerpt from “*Saving Sarah Cain* garners two award nominations” in *ASSIST News Service* (<http://tinyurl.com/3xyr6e>). This is a news item of interest, not an endorsement or review.

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### **Recommended Reading**

“The Coming Apostasy” by Greg Stier in *The Christian Post* (<http://tinyurl.com/yojoql>).

“Stunned by an Act of Love” on Persecution Blog (VoM) (<http://tinyurl.com/yqegm4>).

“If Churches Cannot Preach Against Abortion, They Should Just Close Their Doors” by Phil Magnan, Director of Biblical Family Advocates (<http://tinyurl.com/2bwzjy>).

“Christians in Chiapas, Mexico, Resilient, Despite Persecution” on Persecution Blog (VoM) (<http://tinyurl.com/2ff2mr>).

Feedback: [hansmast@hansmast.com](mailto:hansmast@hansmast.com)

# Do You Love Your Church?

*It was only when a pastor honestly answered this question that he saw his church move ahead on the journey toward unity and peace.*

by Paul Smith as told to Jerry Wall

As a recent Bible college graduate, I entered my first pastorate wide-eyed and eager to serve the Lord. I had already experienced a variety of ministry settings and looked forward to pastoring my first church. And, best of all, I would be aided by my beautiful new bride of two weeks, Heather. What could go wrong?

When we first met with the church, they told us they'd come through some rough times, and that the previous pastor had resigned in the process. But in the interview, the church assured us that those conflicts had been worked out. In retrospect, I'd say that while they never intended to be dishonest, many unresolved issues and wounded people remained in the church.

After we arrived, it didn't take long to see that there wasn't true peace in the church at all—just a desire to “forget the past and move on.” There were still lots of conflicts among certain people, and lots of blaming over why the former pastor had left. Heather and I knew that this was a church that needed peacemaking. What we didn't understand was that we needed peacemaking too.

The church was divided over its past: Why did the former pastor leave? It was also divided over its future: Should we be contemporary or traditional? Should we serve the new generation or the older generation? What do we think of this new pastor and the direction he wants to take our church? Within a few

months, people were actually starting to leave the church.

We undertook a comprehensive program to introduce peacemaking in the church through elder training, Sunday school classes, sermons, and a new membership covenant. A key breakthrough moment came during a communion service when I spoke about God's command to believers to take communion in a worthy manner—specifically, being reconciled with your brother or sister in Christ. We made phones available for people to call persons they needed to be reconciled with, as well as office space for private reconciliation. It was an incredible time. God's Spirit was moving in the hearts of His people, and the biblical peacemaking principles in His Word were penetrating hearts. Soon people were going to each other with tears, confessing, asking for, and receiving forgiveness.

Though it was an amazing time of seeing God work, I later realized that there was one conflict still unresolved: mine. Heather and I both still felt stung by what had happened at the start of our ministry. We also bore the brunt of some individuals' residual anger as old and new conflicts bubbled to the surface. Behind the closed doors of our apartment, we cried many tears, and our hearts were becoming hard.

At this time, we also received an unsolicited job offer from out-of-the-blue. We decided to talk to our friend and mentor

(and Peacemaker Ministries board member), Don Bubna. We were tired and ready to let someone else care for this church. Don was a retired pastor—surely he would understand our pain, and see how it would be better for everyone if we moved on. Our meeting with Don was fairly simple. He asked us, “Do you love your church?”

We admitted, “No, we don’t. We’ve been hurt by them, we feel lonely, tired, and frustrated, and we want out.” We waited expectantly for the affirmation from Don that we were right.

Instead, he simply said, “God hasn’t called you to leave your church, but to love it.”

God used those words to break us. We had not loved this church. *While we wanted them to “love peace” and become a “more effective” church, we had only implemented these things because we wanted a church more to our own liking, not because we truly loved the people.*

The next Sunday, Heather and I both addressed the entire congregation. We thoroughly and honestly confessed our lack of love for the church. We asked for the church’s forgiveness, while affirming that we wanted to go forward with the work that God had called us to as a church—together.

That day was the turning point for *all of us*. Our confession led to hugs, affirmations, and recommitments to one another, both by leadership and laypeople.

I love being the pastor here now. It’s hard to believe that I’m the same pastor who started here seven years ago, and it’s hard to believe that this is the same church. But of course, I’m *not* the same pastor and we’re *not* the same church. God has been changing us into new people who respond to conflict in a whole new way.

We still teach peacemaking principles in our new members class and in Sun-

day school. We want to see peacemaking implanted into the very DNA of the congregation so we can build a strong foundation for a Culture of Peace in the church.

God has been so good to us. The church has grown significantly in the last few years, and we’re looking for creative ways to minister to the growing numbers the Lord has given us. But more important than numerical growth, it’s been a privilege to see God growing His people spiritually. I’ve seen marital situations that would have ended in separation or even divorce without the foundation of biblical peacemaking. I have also seen business disputes that could have easily ended up in court or with broken relationships, but instead, have been resolved in the local church. Biblical peacemaking now is a key part of our discipleship of all believers.

We still have conflict in our lives, in our marriages, and in the church. But it’s handled in a completely different way. Today I can’t think of one person in the church or in our town whom I’d feel uncomfortable running into in the grocery store. God has granted us this peace, and we never want to go back to a life without His peace—His *koinonia*. ■

—This article was originally published in *Peacemaker Magazine*, a publication of Peacemaker Ministries ([www.Peacemaker.net](http://www.Peacemaker.net)). Copyright 2007. Reprinted by permission.





# 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.*

## The Lord Is Risen Indeed



by Kelly/Haydn

**Lyrics:** Thomas Kelly (1796-1854) lived in Dublin, Ireland, and was involved in some type of ministry for most of his life. He graduated from Trinity College Dublin and went on to study law, but upon his conversion decided to become a preacher. He served in the Anglican Church until he was silenced by the Archbishop for preaching justification by faith.<sup>1</sup> Kelly was not about to let the Archbishop stop him, so he continued preaching in other venues, eventually leaving the Anglican Church altogether. Kelly wrote over 760 hymns, which he published in a book called *Scripture Hymns*.<sup>2</sup> “The Lord Is Risen Indeed” was first published in one of the earliest editions of this book.

Although this hymn originally contained eight stanzas, most current editions use only four or five of the verses. The first four verses of this edition open with the line that is also the title of the hymn: “The Lord Is Risen Indeed.” This phrase comes from Luke 24:32, when the two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus have just returned to Jerusalem. They found the disciples gathered together, saying, “The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.”

**Music:** This sprightly little tune originates from Franz Joseph Haydn’s most famous oratorio, “The Creation.” The movement from which it is extracted consists of three distinct parts, describing the poet’s view of the creation of light. The first section features a tenor solo telling how the creation of light chased away the “dismal shadows of black darkness,” and the associated evil spirits. In the second section, the chorus enters with a harsh and turbulent passage describing the “despair, rage, and terror” with which the spirits of darkness fell at the creation of light. The third section is a quiet but spirited version of this hymn tune, almost exactly as it appears here, telling of the “new created world” that arises at God’s Word.

Considering the original context of this music, it is perfectly suited for a text about the resurrection of Jesus. At the time of Jesus’ resurrection, there were many of the same dynamics present that Haydn’s “Creation” depicts at the creation of light, but to a much greater extent. The “dismal shadows of black darkness” that were chased away at the creation of light were dealt a death blow

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

# The Lord Is Risen Indeed

LUKE 24:34

THOMAS KELLY, 1809

BENJAMIN S. M. 51

FRANZ J. HAYDN

1. "The Lord is ris'n in - deed," And are the ti - dings true? Yes, we be - held  
2. "The Lord is ris'n in - deed," Then Jus - tice asks no more; Mer - cy and Truth  
3. "The Lord is ris'n in - deed," Then is His work performed; The cap - tive sure -  
4. "The Lord is ris'n in - deed," At - tend - ing an - gels hear; Up to the courts  
5. While on their gold - en lyres, They strike each cheerful chord, We join the bright

the Sav - iour bleed, And saw Him liv - ing too, And saw Him liv - ing too.  
are now a - greed, Who stood opposed be - fore, Who stood op - posed be - fore.  
ly now is freed, And death, our foe, disarmed, And death, our foe, dis - armed.  
of heav'n, with speed, The joy - ful ti - dings bear, The joy - ful ti - dings bear.  
ce - les - tial choirs, To sing our ris - en Lord, To sing our ris - en Lord.

by the resurrection of Jesus. The "despair, rage, and terror" that was felt by Satan's kingdom with the first rays of light at the dawn of creation was nothing compared to the trouncing that it received when the stone was rolled away. However, the great-

est victory of all was that Jesus' resurrection opened the door for a "new created world" to arise in the hearts of people who put their trust in Him. ■

1. <http://chi.gospelcom.net>
2. [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org)

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## Beware of an *Unbalanced Gospel*

The Apostle Paul closed his first letter to Timothy with an admonition,

*O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith.*

What did Paul have in mind? What was he warning against? What was this “science falsely so called”? We are told that the Greek word Paul used here is *gnosis*. It is translated in the King James version as “science,” but more recent translations give it as “knowledge.” History tells us about a sect known as the Gnostics. They had several false beliefs, and it is some of these beliefs that Paul almost certainly had in mind.

What was Gnosticism, and why was Paul alarmed? According to history, the early church was greatly threatened by the doctrines of the Gnostics. Many of the early church writers, who lived in the generations after the Apostles, wrote against the errors of the Gnostics.

One of the marks that distinguished the Gnostics from the true church was their emphasis on a “special knowledge” that was, in their minds, a requirement for salvation. While the true church accepted the Gospel’s teachings as they had been received from the Apostles, the Gnostics were not impressed but were looking for something more. They sought proof of some mystical, heavenly connection, totally apart from any external application to daily life. They sought something more grand than simply believing and obeying the Gospel.

One of the results of this unbalanced gospel was a rejection of baptism and communion, doubtless seeing these out-

ward ceremonies as less than spiritual because of their visible nature. They emphasized the invisible realm and downplayed the role of the church in the salvation of the believer.

This overly-spiritualized view also caused the Gnostics to object to the idea that Jesus came in the flesh. John warned against this heresy when he wrote in his epistle, “And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is in the world” (1 John 4:3).

We can assume that this false belief would have caused them to abandon the concept of an organized, functioning church in favor of a less-defined, nebulous ingathering of the elect. Jesus Christ in the flesh, personified by real people as His followers with all their failings and weaknesses would have seemed decidedly unspiritual to the Gnostic mind.

The error of the Gnostics, unfortunately, is alive and well today. There are few dangers facing the church so subtle and yet so real. Just because it is hard to get hold of this error does not make it less dangerous. In fact, quite the opposite. It is often only recognized by looking back upon the disastrous results once they become evident.

There are different labels that apply: Pietism, individualism, Protestantism. Whatever the name, the effects are the same. On the surface, such teachings may appear to truly be more spiritual. But something beneath the surface is unbalanced and distorted. This something slowly binds the hands of the church in matters of discipline and in discerning right from wrong. It exalts the feelings and emotions of the individual

until they become an end in themselves and an authority to settle all controversy. This appeals to people because it promises them freedom. Right and wrong are decided by the individual Christian, who is accountable to no one but God and gets to interpret what even He requires.

The thing that makes the Gnostic error so subtle is the mixing of truth with untruth. Indeed, it is true that to be acceptable to God, one needs to believe in his heart. The Christian will surely experience a peace that comes from trusting his sins to be forgiven. And yes, it is right to obey God rather than man. These truths are central in the life of the Christian. It is only the undue emphasis on them that leads astray.

It can be likened to a man who sits down to draw a map of the United States. He may be very familiar with the state of Pennsylvania and be able to draw its outline exactly right. If, however, he draws it two or three times too big, it is only logical that he will crowd out some other state. The finished map will be misleading and harmful to those who use it, even though the state of Pennsylvania has been drawn very well.

Just so it is with Biblical truth. As soon as we focus on one point and emphasize it out of proportion, we begin to err. A doctrine out of perspective becomes a dangerous thing, even when it is correct in its proper place.

A boat may tip even though the load is not too heavy. Balance is just as important as content. With all the weight on one side, a perfectly good boat with the finest cargo will surely capsize.

We can tell if a boat is listing to one side. But how do we know when a church is unbalanced? In this brief article, we will not try to point out all the ways in which this can happen. Instead, we will focus especially on the danger of Pietism, a threat that is very real in our day and in our circle of churches.

What are the earmarks of unbalanced doctrine that is tainted with Gnosticism?

The evidence can be observed in at least three areas:

### **1. A Fear of Tradition**

People who overemphasize and are overly-dependent on the personal leading of the Holy Spirit have an aversion to the Scripture passages upholding tradition. They will use the Bible freely to support their beliefs, but you will not hear them quoting the verses in the New Testament on keeping the traditions and being faithful to the Gospel that was received.

Paul wrote to Timothy, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (2 Timothy 3:14).

He also encourages Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Timothy 4:16).

There are other similar verses. The epistles are full of the idea that the Gospel is true, and that our confidence of this comes at least partly from having received it from those we trust. We are in turn responsible to hand it on to faithful men (see 2 Timothy 2:2). The church of Christ continues and is passed from one generation to another by the established, visible, functioning body of believers.

A church that is out of balance will be uncomfortable with this concept.

### **2. A Fear of Church Authority**

A group that measures a man's spiritual condition too much by his own feelings and testimony will shrink from church government as exemplified in the Scriptures.

*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy . . . (Hebrews 13:17).*

Among these people there will be many testimonies about the Lord's leading in

the life of the Christian. People will do things or go to places because God told them to do so. This might be Scriptural if they were referring to something God asked of them through the counsel of the church. But it would be unlikely for people with this concept to hold the church in such high regard as to consider its decision to be the Lord's will. It is more common for them to speak of their own decisions, based on their own discernment as to what is "God's will."

These groups have abandoned the orthodox concept of reverence for the visible church. Not that the church is perfect, but simply because, contrary to what the Gnostics taught, Jesus Christ did come in the flesh and His church today is His representative in the flesh. Instead, the church has become to many just a convenient extra, a fellowship of Christians who meet in the same place for worship. All the real substance—the discipline, the accountability, the responsibility to each other, the order of church government—these are missing.

Modern Christianity places its trust in an idea, where historically that confidence was in an institution.

A group minded like this will almost surely have a problem with excommunicating a member for a sin he confesses to be sorry for. When personal testimony is held in such high regard, then the question of whether or not the sin is sufficiently repented of is decided, not by the congregation, but by the sinner himself.

Paul's conversion experiences would fit in much better in such a church if the details could be changed a little. If he could have gotten up after the light had struck him down and gone his way with a song in his heart, it would seem more in keeping with modern theology. After all, he had had his talk with Jesus.

But no, instead of that he was sent stumbling, blind, to wait for three days for a man from the church to give him further instructions. Of course, it was all God's doings and in His control, yet the

point is that He did work through His people.

### ***3. Failure to Draw Lines in Lifestyle Issues***

The church that is out of balance in its view of personal salvation will be reluctant to give clear messages about what is acceptable in lifestyle choices.

The theory is that each person will develop convictions that take away the need for church standards concerning dress and conduct. The Spirit-filled person will have a Spirit-led walk. Once more, this is a beautiful truth that is being used wrongly. God will not give direction to the church that He wishes to give each member separately. Neither will He give knowledge individually where His plan is to present it through the church.

It is good to rely on the Holy Spirit, but when the Spirit desires to give discernment by leading the church in its decisions, then to reject that and look for separate leadings direct from Heaven is neither wise nor Scriptural.

We are living in a world in which the surrounding society has a lot of influence and exerts a great deal of pressure upon everyone to conform. It is nearly impossible to entirely withstand this pressure. To maintain a line in technology and lifestyle is difficult. Take any church group and examine it over a ten-year period, and most will have drifted at least a little bit. Even the ones with clear lines will have drifted. This is testimony to the strength of the influence from outside.

Let us not imagine that those groups who make no attempt to have a unified standard do not drift much faster. Even though they may not have clear rules, they do have unwritten limits all the same, and the change then becomes less visible because there is nothing with which to gauge the movement. Not only is it hard to recognize the extent of drift, it is also not acceptable to focus on it. No voice is raised, seeing that to spend time

and energy on something outward would be carnal.

Those who are heavy on personal experience will emphasize conviction and rarely if ever address the everyday issues of technology and lifestyle. The result is almost certain assimilation into the culture and value system of the world's masses.

### **Conclusion**

Paul wrote to Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." In his office as a church leader, Timothy was responsible for those in his spiritual care. The admonition to "rightly divide the word of truth" was given in the context of an organized church structure rather than to

an individual's personal walk in the faith.

There are church groups today whose teachings are reminiscent of the Gnostics of old, and who are very zealous in winning followers to their cause. Our martyr forefathers in the faith, the Anabaptists, understood the Scriptures to give the church a central role in their lives as Christians. A careful study of the hymns in the *Ausbund* will bear this out.

To let ourselves be swayed now by the "good words and fair speeches" of those who would water down the role of a disciplined and structured brotherhood is to reject the precious heritage that has been preserved for us down through the ages, and that is based on a balanced interpretation of the Scriptures. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Family Life*, July 2002.



## ***For Youth Today!***

### ***A Message to the Young People of the Conservative Mennonite Church***

by Kaitlyn Gerber

This post was going to be a message to the young men of the Conservative Mennonite Church, but I decided that wouldn't be fair to them because they aren't the only ones at fault in these matters of life. This will be rather biased because I'm female, so it's difficult to support a guy's perspective when you don't have one. So fellows, tell me what *you* think. It's your voice I want to hear.

Ladies, how do you feel when you hear guys make comments about girls who aren't Mennonite and don't dress modestly in the way you've been brought up? Or what do *you* think when a girl you've gone to church with, perhaps were baptized with, suddenly sheds her veil/covering, cuts her hair, and starts wearing pants? I understand some people leave

the church due to personal convictions, or family matters, but I'm talking about the spiritually adept. My focus is on the young ladies who are so insecure about themselves and about being Mennonite that they'll literally change who they are because they think that's what guys want.

Gentlemen: You are the spiritual leaders. You are the Pants. As far as we ladies are concerned, you are the ones who are supposed to be in charge. And despite what you feel is implied towards you from the opposite gender, every woman wants the man to be in charge. It's in our nature. It's the way God made us. It's a lot of responsibility on your shoulders, true, but this is the headship ordained by Jesus Christ Himself. It's up to us

whether we choose to do what we're told.

I've heard from guys that if we ladies knew what went through their heads we would want to dress differently (modestly). Men are sexual whereas women are more emotional. Our wires are different. Not wrong, just different. As far as I'm concerned, that's no excuse for making comments around the conservative women you're with about the non-Mennonite girls around you. Consider for a moment what it's like to look different from others. You are a male and even as a conservative man you look like the non-Mennonites around you. However, we young ladies look very different. We wear that "funny thing" on our heads and always wear skirts or dresses. We are noticed as different and we know it. Sometimes it's a blessing and other times it feels like we're being rejected and despised. Trust me, I have heard some very nasty comments shot in my direction! We need the support of other girls who are like us (which is why we like to be in a church that supports our convictions) but we also, and maybe even more so, need the support and encouragement from our young men, the spiritual leaders. When these same young men look at girls in tiny skirts and tank tops what do we think but that you like women who look like that? Do you want us to dress that way? Girls are taking notice and they're beginning to question whether or not you like them dressed modestly, and they're answering that question for you in an affirmative reply. Be supportive of us. Be the leader. It's what we want.

Ladies: The men are responsible for being the leader. So what happens when they lead and we don't follow? Just as they have to be supportive of us, we have to be supportive of them. When they want to lead out, let them. Encourage them. Show them you're behind them and beside them and you're willing to help if or when they need it. Help out even if they don't know they need it!

I mentioned that we ladies can become insecure about ourselves and about the way young men view us. But you should be confident enough in your own convictions that you know where you stand. If you're doubting your veiling, think strongly about why you are wearing it. Is it because you go to a church that enforces it, or because you **choose** to go to a church that enforces it? Despite what you may think, there's a difference in the two. Think for yourselves. While it's the guy's job to be the leader, it's up to you to make your personal decisions. A man does not choose what you believe for you. It is entirely up to you.

Be aware that guys are aware of the way we look. How are we being supportive Christian women if we dress in a way that gives a guy an impure thought? I'm not saying it's black cape dresses from now on. I'm saying be mindful, and while you should try to look attractive, you should remember that you're responsible for what you wear. If you have pure intentions, then that's fine. But once your intentions become less than pure then you become a stumbling block for your spiritual brother. In short: You are accountable for what you wear.

You're Mennonite, not wrong, but different.

Men: Be supportive of your sisters. Encourage them in their modesty. Be aware of how highly they consider your opinion of them. Think of Joseph who declined Potiphar's wife when she basically threw herself at him. His integrity and godliness were rewarded.

Ladies: Be supportive of your brothers. Encourage them in their leadership. Be aware of the way you dress. Think of Esther who chose a more modest way and didn't choose all the gold adornments the others did when given access to such jewelry. She was the one the king chose and she was the one who is remembered. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Mid-Atlantic Informer*, July 2007.



# Counseling From the Word

## Perspective

by John Coblenz, Sr.

### *How about a test on your perspective?*

1. Is your cup half-empty or half-full?
2. When clouds are in the sky, is the day “partly sunny” or “partly cloudy”?
3. Do you speak gratefully about what you have, or do you complain about what you don’t have?
4. Do you look to your friends for what they can do for you or what you can do for them?
5. Do you look back with regret or forward with anticipation?
6. Do you focus on a young Christian’s shortcomings or on his potential?
7. Do you worry about what trouble might happen, or do you enjoy the blessings you have?
8. Do you consider a day well spent when you have made earthly gain or when you have advanced Christ’s kingdom?
9. Do you tell others how terrible the enemy is or how glorious your Lord is?
10. Do you wonder why God doesn’t do more for you, or do you wonder why He has done so much for you?

Perspective really does make a difference!

When the twelve spies returned from searching out the land of Canaan, ten of them focused on the strong walls of the cities and the height of the giants. They put the whole Israelite community into a crying spell.

The other two spies focused on the power of God, and said, “They are bread for us!” After all, God had destroyed the land of Egypt with the plagues, parted the waters of the Red Sea, and then drowned

the Egyptian army. Surely He could take care of walls and giants!

Why do we have trouble seeing clearly?

There are a number of spiritual diseases that affect our spiritual eyesight.

**Selfishness** makes us cross-eyed—we can’t see beyond our own nose. We expect every situation to work out for our advantage. We want everyone we meet, including God, to cooperate with our plans. We are a mess to live with—cross, complaining, manipulative, and quick to blame.

**Worry** filters our sight to see only the dark side. We expect trouble, predict trouble, eat trouble, sleep trouble, and make trouble. We don’t seem to learn, even when most of our worries don’t come to pass. We simply assume they are a day late, and we go on expecting the worst.

**Unbelief** prevents us from seeing beyond this life, this time, and our own resources. In unbelief, we become blind to the grace and power of God. We try to work everything out according to our own understanding and our own strength. We are blind to God’s purposes. We ignore His power. We doubt His goodness. And we miss experiencing His presence.

**Discontent** causes us to want what others have and turn up our noses at what we have. We compare ourselves with those who have more, we ignore those who have less, and consequently, we spend our days in misery. Discontent keeps us from enjoying the blessings we have and likewise keeps us from enjoying seeing others blessed. We are unhappy, ungrateful, and difficult to live with.

***So what helps us to gain a right perspective?***

Joseph Tson, a Romanian pastor who suffered beatings and interrogation under Communist leaders, says one of the first things God must do when we become His children is to heal our eyes.\*

***We must see God.***

God is bigger than any trouble or difficulty we face. God is the giver of all good gifts. God can show His goodness even in difficult and trying times. God is able to cause situations that devastate us to turn to our advantage. He can bring gain out of loss, produce character out of difficulty, turn sorrow into joy, and give us peace in time of trouble.

One day, the King of Syria surrounded the city of Dothan because he had heard that Elisha the prophet was telling the king's secrets. The Syrian king no doubt had murder on his heart.

The next morning, Elisha and his servant saw the Syrian army, and the servant cried out, "Alas, my master! How shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15). Logical question! Frightful situation! Wrong perspective!

Elisha had his eyes on God and he calmly replied, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (v. 16). And then Elisha prayed a prayer that we all need at times: "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see" (v. 17).

Is God in your perspective? Do you panic, complain, worry, doubt, or run yourself to a frazzle?

Maybe it's time to take a morning walk, turn to God, give thanks, lay your troubles at His feet, express your trust, and ask God to heal your eyes. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Deeper Life Ministries Newsletter*, Feb. 2007.

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## **Divorce**

by David L. Burkholder

I remember the time when divorce was rarely spoken of in polite circles. It was socially taboo and looked upon as a disgrace. Now, however, it seems to be on everybody's lips. This most tragic of broken relationships has become the accepted norm in our society and has made devastating inroads into the church. A commitment once held as sacred now seems as worthless as the paper on which the vows are written. "Till death do us part" has given way to "till the slightest whim drives us apart." This mass movement away from God's standard of one man and one woman joining together in mutual commitment for a lifetime has become the norm rather than the exception.

But not incidental to this rise in broken homes and relationships (half of all marriages end in divorce by secular count) is the

alarming rise in broken mental health, ADD among victim-children, and other associated social ills. In spite of the professed "freedom" many tout as the result of relaxed marriage laws, there seems to be growing, rather than diminishing, interpersonal as well as personal struggles. Severing of relationships once thought to be binding has a damaging effect on emotions and self-esteem. This is especially true where separations are surprising and sudden.

The sacred sexual union between a couple committed in a lifelong relationship and for procreation has degenerated into a sexual free-for-all barely above the level of animal behavior. Instead of a spiritual contract with lifelong implications, couples now enter into relationships with a temporary mindset, with the intent of getting rather than

giving. And getting out if or when excitement wanes. In such relationships the partner becomes a tool, not a co-worker toward a common goal. And people are “burned” in the process. And society sinks ever deeper into moral and spiritual degeneracy. And Satan is satisfied that his goals are being met—the disruption of the social fabric and the eternal damnation of many souls.

And what does a holy, righteous God think of all this? He who established the marriage relationship to be a lifelong commitment in which each partner supports and encourages the other, where children are born and raised in an environment of love and acceptance, says, “I hate divorce.” It is because He, much better than we humans, sees the devastating personal and societal effects of His principles gone awry. Divorce undercuts His plans for stable marriages, a stable society anchored by stable homes, and where the oncoming generation learns principles of respect, responsibility, and commitment from their parents.

The rise of violence among today’s teenagers may well be attributed in part to the instability fostered by multiple parents, rivalries resulting from blending families, and the feelings of frustration and rejection when families split up. We are most surely destroying the fabric of society, the stability of developing minds, and the security of all involved by allowing this ruinous blight to overtake society.

I have several boyhood friends who are in their second and third marriages. I’ve often wondered where any security is to be found in such relationships. Entering into a marriage commitment with someone who has already proven their untrustworthiness seems to me a sure invitation to disaster. And disappointment. And frustration. And rejection. And instability. And on and on. No wonder God hates it. Divorce destroys people—people for whom He gave His Son to redeem from eternal destruction and death. And, heedless to His claims, they rush headlong toward that which He would save them from. Sad indeed.

And where is the church, the represen-

tative of God on earth, in all of this? God has given to the church, and her leadership, the responsibility of teaching and applying His Word to the needs of mankind. He has not given the right to interpret according to human desires, but to apply its eternal principles as directives for faith and life. God has spoken and His Word is plain and unchanging. It is not to be disregarded to satisfy human desires but rather used to mold and direct the character of man toward the likeness of Christ.

However, too often the church takes her directives either from society or from the demands of outspoken individuals wishing to formulate their own standards of life and morality. Instead of a firm stand on biblical principles and moral uprightness, many church leaders are bending their convictions to accommodate those who defy God’s principles and wish to write their own rules for living. Churches, and leaders, who will not proclaim a bold “Thus saith the Lord” on clear Bible teachings, have lost their authority to proclaim God’s Word and their right to be His vicars on earth. The church in many cases has lost its moral authority to speak out clearly against the ills of the world because it has largely accommodated itself to the standards set by the world and not those set by God. All of this is contrary to God’s plan, that the church call men away from evil and into a life of holiness and separation from the world and its patterns of living.

How can the church lead men to salvation, telling them that some things are wrong and against the teachings of God, when they are willing to compromise certain other principles in order not to offend those who are transgressing those principles? Refusal to take a firm stand and to speak out renders the church ineffective and unattractive. Certainly some will flock to her doors in a misguided attempt to find blessing and freedom, but not those seeking release from binding sins of which they have been convicted and are outside the will of God. In many cases the church has compromised her mission. And lost her voice.

Divorce should not be a questionable or negotiable issue in the church of Christ. Certainly some marriages are much less than ideal and unspiritual things are often done by less-than-Christian partners. It is also true that at times second marriages are much smoother than the ones the partners left. But none of this should be allowed to argue for that which God despises. Divorce has made insidious inroads into our thinking. It is easy and cheap. Its prevalence has dulled our sensitivity to its faults and failures and perhaps led us to a tacit acceptance of it as an acceptable evil. This should not be. We must, as God's followers, reaffirm our understanding and acceptance of His Word as the final authority for life and practice. Deviations should be looked at for what they are—deviations. And deviations from God's Word fall under

His condemnation.

Divorce should not be looked upon as a first resort for troubled marriages. In fact, it should not even be looked upon as a possibility. Counseling, teaching, reconciliation, healing—all are designed by God for troubled marriages. He has set forth guiding principles and enabled men to give guidance in these areas. Marital counseling, loving commitment, a desire to know and do God's will should be the guiding principles for getting a marriage back on track in accordance with God's plan and will. There can be healing and restoration of relationships where there is sound, biblical advice and a willingness to work toward reconciliation. Divorce destroys. It breaks bonds, it damages self-esteem, it disrupts families, and may well send souls to hell.

God hates divorce. I'm with God. ■

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## *Children With a Mind to Work*

by David Faus

Under the scorching rays of the sun, strong backs bent to the task before them. Stone upon stone, the insurmountable became possible. The last layer of mortar was spread, the last course of stone placed, the last joint smoothed, and the wall was completed, "for the people had a mind to work" (Nehemiah 4:6). The success of the daunting project of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem hinged not so much on the circumstances of the work as on the attitude toward it.

The attitude of having a mind to work is developed early in childhood. Parents have the responsibility and privilege of shaping their children's attitude toward work. Because of the child's sinful nature, Biblical principles regarding work must be engrained early.

The Lord does not leave us ignorant of His plan for work. The Bible is full of direction on this subject. Parents must accept

their God-given responsibility to teach the proper concept of work. Following are some Biblical principles regarding work that we should seek to instill in our children.

***Work is necessary, commanded, and good.*** Everyone with the ability to work must work with his own hands and with his might. We need to sense that our work contributes to a worthwhile cause. Even the mundane becomes rewarding when we have a long-range goal in mind. We are then motivated to envision the outcome of the work and the time frame to accomplish it, thus capitalizing on the day of opportunity.

***All worthwhile projects require effort.*** "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat" (Proverbs 13:4). Although modern conveniences have made work less strenuous, we may not avoid labor because it is hard.

***Happiness in work is not found in***

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**gaining possessions but in serving and giving.** “That he may have to give to him that needeth” (Ephesians 4:28) is a Biblical reason for labor. Even “the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (Matthew 20:28). Finding joy in labor is a Scriptural work ethic that expresses itself by willing service. Work done grudgingly bypasses God’s blessing.

**Work is to be done in the time of opportunity.** Like the ant, we are to gather in harvesttime in preparation for the future. Working diligently in the assigned time allows us to fully enjoy our rest and the fruits of our labor. In contrast, procrastination is stealing time, our most irreplaceable commodity.

How can these concepts be taught practically?

**Evaluate your own parental attitude.** Do you complete a task yourself because it is less frustrating than teaching it to your child? To do so will hinder your good intentions. Persevere in teaching your child to do the task. Also, parents must understand that “foolishness is bound in the heart of a child” from birth and is a hindrance that must be overcome.

**Begin early.** Teach proper work ethics before sluggard habits are engraved. Even toddlers can put away toys when play is completed. Begin with simple tasks: putting away toys, emptying wastebaskets, and rinsing dishes. Start with one-step directions, and then go to two-step, and finally multiple-step directions.

**Introduce work as a privilege.** Emphasize the dignity of toil. True greatness is measured by a willingness to labor for others. Do not tolerate whining and protesting, even in toddlers.

**Work with the child when teaching a new concept.** This accomplishes several things: the child is encouraged by your companionship, he learns the proper way to do a task, and he learns to establish good work habits such as following directions and practicing stewardship of time. Also, it allows you to check that the work is completed. The eventual goal is for the child to

master the task unsupervised.

**Set reasonable time limits for the completion of chores.** A list of chores helps the child learn to plan and organize his time. It also gives a sense of accomplishment as each task is completed. This is essential to finding pleasure in labor. Emphasize that effort always precedes true reward, the unpleasant must precede the pleasant, and work must precede play.

**Insist that duty, not circumstances, must guide their activity.** Work must be done in spite of the weather, our feelings, or the allure of pleasure. This priority of duty helps discipline selfish impulses.

**Train the child to proceed in an orderly manner, thus increasing efficiency.** For example, first clear the toys, then dust, and last sweep the floor. Require the child to finish one project before starting another, cleaning up as he goes.

**Teach the discipline of habitual promptness.** Promptness in rising time, mealtime, and worship time is taught best by parental example and sets a standard for meeting all deadlines. Recognize forgetfulness as a habit which can be overcome.

**Instruct the child to maintain and repair possessions.** Insist that toys be well cared for and put away when play is done. This teaches the child to value what he already has (Proverbs 12:27) and to develop good stewardship.

**Teach the child to expect and accept occasional failure without becoming discouraged and to “try, try again.”** Perseverance is a key virtue to develop. Do not allow a child to give up in discouragement. Rather, give advice, help, and encouragement as needed.

Teaching children to have a mind to work builds temperance, self-control, diligence, character, and contentment. This work ethic is engrained “precept upon precept; line upon line.” The task is great, but, when coupled with the Lord’s strength, having a mind to work yields success as in Nehemiah’s day. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Eastern Mennonite Testimony*, July 2006.



## Sermon of the Month



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

# A Biblical Formula for True Success in Life

by Michael J. Easley

Some time ago I was privileged to go on a two-day retreat with a friend I highly respect—a former CEO of a very large corporation. I had asked this friend to help me define true success in my life, so for two days we studied God's Word and talked together as we tried to determine what real success would look like in terms of serving Jesus Christ with the gifts and resources He has given us.

Out of that study emerged some principles I want to share with you that I believe will give you a biblical formula for true success. But before we look at these, I want you to think about the issue of success. You'll discover that it is one of those concepts that is hard to define. A lot of people would equate success with the so-called American dream of owning a home, having a well-paying, satisfying job, and raising children who turn out to be well-adjusted adults.

There is nothing wrong with those things, but let me ask you a challenging question: If you were to pull the "American dream" threads out of the fabric of what you consider to be success, would that fabric unravel before your eyes? I'm afraid it

would for many Christians. So we need to consider what success might look like from God's standpoint—and in turning to His Word, we discover that true success is radically different from the picture we find in the world.

I want to look at four ingredients of success from 1 Timothy 4:6-10, a key passage in which Paul as the elder apostle and statesman writes to Timothy, his son in the faith. These verses help us understand what it means to be successful in God's eyes.

OUR JOB AS  
CHRISTIANS IS TO  
MAKE SURE THAT  
THE DIRECTION OF  
OUR LIVES IS  
BASED ON THE  
DIRECTIVES OF  
SCRIPTURE.

### *True Success Demands the Right Directive*

If you and I are going to be successful in serving Christ, we need to have the right directive. Paul wrote to Timothy: "If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed" (1 Tim. 4:6). The word Paul used for "point out" means to "lay it down" as someone would lay down the directives for a project.

What is the directive we need to follow as Christians? Clearly, it is "the truths of the faith." The context of Paul's statement is the "deceiving spirits" and "hypocritical

liars” the apostle warned Timothy about in verses 1-5 of this chapter. The role of students and graduates at Dallas Seminary as preachers and teachers is to lay down the principles of God’s Word in such a way that His people can clearly see the truth over against what is false.

This means it is also our job as Christians to make sure that the direction of our lives is based on the directives of Scripture. If you want to know what a life anchored in God’s Word looks like, Paul gave us this portrait earlier in 1 Timothy: “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1:5). If these qualities describe you, you are well on your way to being successful in God’s eyes.

### ***True Success Demands the Right Diet***

The verb “brought up” in 1 Timothy 4:6 can also be translated “nourished.” The meaning is to provide with food or to feed. It can even refer to a nursing child. The idea is that we are to feed and nourish ourselves on the Word of God so that we may grow strong in faith.

What’s interesting is that the particular form of the verb used here suggests that we are to nourish ourselves, which I think is the idea Paul was after. Timothy was to feed himself on two things: “the truths of the faith and of the good teaching.” Again, the content of our nourishment is the Word of God.

I don’t know about you, but I nourish myself every day. No one has to remind me to eat every day. Most of us are faithful eaters—but I wonder how we as Christians are doing in the area of our spiritual diet, feeding ourselves daily on God’s Word.

Whenever I speak at a retreat or other location, I get some funny looks when I ask people if they are spending time in their Bibles every day. I encourage you to consider your Bible as important as the food you need to live. It’s not that we *have* to read the

Word every day; it’s that we *get* to. It’s our privilege to have the Word in our hands by which we can read and study and grow.

When we lived in Texas, we used to go to an Asian buffet restaurant where you can eat yourself into oblivion. I remember eating there one day when the thought suddenly hit me that I had never denied myself a meal. But when I don’t feed on God’s Word, I am denying myself a feast

that will nourish my faith and help me be truly successful in life.

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“IT’S NOT THAT  
WE HAVE TO READ  
THE WORD EVERY  
DAY; IT’S THAT  
WE GET TO.”

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### ***True Success Demands the Right Discipline***

Here is the third ingredient in a biblical formula for success.

“Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 Tim. 4:7, 8). We are to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness.

I recently heard a physician who was talking about aging and medicine, and he said that exercise is the “magic bullet” to most maladies in our older years. We all know the importance of bodily discipline for health in this life. Yet Paul says that spiritual discipline holds value not only for this life, but also for the life to come.

Many successful people would tell you that not very much of lasting value is accomplished without discipline. Good spiritual discipline follows logically from having a healthy spiritual diet. Paul knew that it wasn’t enough for Timothy just to know the truth. He also needed to practice it, again and again, the way an athlete continues to train and practice the fundamentals of his or her sport. Elsewhere Paul taught that if athletes are willing to discipline their bodies to receive a perishable prize, how much more should we as God’s people be willing to discipline our lives to win the eternal prize from Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

***True Success Demands  
the Right Desire***

The right desire is also important for true success. Paul continued, “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe” (1 Tim. 4:9, 10).

Here Paul talks about our motivation in life and service. I want to focus on the words *labor* and *strive*. *Labor* means work that is exhausting and sweaty, which reminds me of growing up in the hot, humid biosphere of Houston, Texas.

My father was not afraid of hard work. I can remember as a small boy on sweltering Houston nights, holding the light for my father as he worked under his 1966 Plymouth. “Hold the light, boy,” he would say to me. “I can’t see a thing if it is shining in my eyes.” My task was to hold the light, and when we were done, we would both be drenched with sweat and smelling like grease. Dad would smile and say, “We did it.”

In fact, my father would often tell me, “The reward of work is not the end of it, but the work itself.” He taught me never to be afraid of working hard.

I have to be candid with you and say that one of my greatest fears as I watch this culture is that we have adopted an entitlement mindset. As a pastor for 20 years, I hired a lot of people. It is sad to say that the first thing many of them wanted to know was what they were going to get—what they had coming to them because they had a degree.

My friend, we are serving the King of kings! Don’t come to Him with your hand held out, but with your sleeves rolled up, ready to work hard. And if you work hard, God will take care of what you need.

*Strive* is the other word I want to emphasize in this area of our desire to

serve the Lord and be successful in His eyes. It is the basis of the word *agonize*, and it means to “fight” or “struggle.”

I played football in junior high school. I was no good, so they made me into a lineman. There I found out that I did one thing well: hit people. I loved to play defense because I could use my hands, and once in a while I would break through the line and crush the quarterback—in a Christian sort of way! I would look up and my coach would tell me, “Way to go, Iron Mike.”

I didn’t like the agonizing and the struggle of practice, but I loved flattening the opposing quarterback and hearing my coach say, if you will forgive me, “Well done, well done!”

Are you laboring and striving to serve the King of the universe, or are you looking for what you have coming to you? We can have the right desire to serve the Lord with everything we have because we have a living hope! “We have put our hope in the living God,” Paul reminds us. Because our hope is fixed on God, it is not a temporal but an eternal hope. As the hymn says, we serve a living Saviour who is in the world today—not a dead God we read about through dead words on the pages of a dead book.

So let me ask you: What are you doing with what God has given you? Are you laboring hard, agonizing in your work to do and be your best for Jesus Christ? You and I need the right directive, which is the Word of God and the truths it contains. To be truly successful, our direction must come from God through His Word.

Then we need the right diet. We have to feed and nourish ourselves on the Word of faith and of sound doctrine. The right discipline is also required to ensure that we are doing each day the things we need to do. And when these things are in place, having the right desire to work hard and give God our best will be easier to attain.

All of us want to be successful in life. Having the right formula and pursuing the right kind of success are important all the

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time, but this really makes the difference in those tough times when you are worn out and find yourself saying, "Why am I doing this?"

I had one of those times in 1987 when I almost walked away from my ministry as a pastor. I told myself I was done with this church stuff. It was too hard, people didn't care—and besides, sheep are stupid anyway. To be very honest, for two years I hated sheep. But the real problem wasn't

with the sheep—it was with the sheep dog. I had to step back and get things in focus.

So I can tell you that without the right directive, the right diet, the right discipline, and the right desire, you will be confused about what success in life really is. But once you start getting these priorities in line, you will begin to discover the wonderful plan God has for your life. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Veritas*, April 2006.

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***The most surprising fact to emerge from current statistics about cyber-sex is that the percentages of churched and unchurched people involved appear to be about the same.***

## Christian Women in a Post-Porn Culture

by Steve and Kathy Gallagher

Immorality has always been there, of course, simmering just under the surface of society's accepted norms. But Satan envisioned an America free from all moral restraints. Using select individuals, like Alfred Kinsey and Hugh Hefner among others, he has successfully transformed the moral landscape of the U.S. into a sexual playland where practically the only behavior frowned upon is abstinence.

This is the thoroughly sexualized culture the average 25-year-old Christian girl has been raised in. Consider this: By the time she entered puberty, *Playboy* magazine had already celebrated its 40th birthday, the marriage of the adult entertainment industry to America was enjoying its Silver Anniversary, and a new generation of pornographers were already entrenching themselves in the shadowy realm of the worldwide web. Unquestionably, the mainstreaming of pornography has warped the thinking of

today's young people.

However, it would be wrong to give the pornographers all of the credit for the new morality of our day. For instance, feminism has told young women to go after what they want and to live for themselves. The media has been conditioning girls—from a very early age—to the lie that their value is their sexiness. Even our culture of prosperity has taught young women that it is their right to indulge every desire and to experiment with every curiosity—"I wonder what it would be like to . . ."

The moral climate of today's young people is much different even than that of the Baby Boomer generation. It is true, we Baby Boomers rebelled against the morality of preceding generations, but at least this moral mindset was in place to reject. Although we challenged it, we grew up in a day when there was a basic understanding of right and wrong behavior. Once we experienced the season

***The willingness of girls to give up their virginity because they believe their boyfriends love them is nothing new—although the high percentage might be.***

of pleasure that comes with sin, many of us came to the Lord and returned to the morality of our forefathers.

But today's young woman must navigate her way through a plethora of enticements without the moral foundation most of us Baby Boomers take for granted. Of course, many Christian girls have avoided these traps and are faithfully following the Lord. Nevertheless, many others are falling to these sensual allurements—apparently a frightening number of them.

Desiring to get a sense of exactly what these girls are struggling with, we recently conducted a survey through the Pure Life Ministries website in which nearly 500 women (who acknowledged having struggled with sexual sin) participated. The results—which are included in our book for struggling women, *Create in Me a Pure Heart*—shocked even us.

#### ***Foundational Factors***

As we conducted our research, we narrowed the problem of sexual sin down to three primary, underlying motives.

The desire for the attention of men has lurked within the hearts of women from time immemorial. From the earliest age, girls inherently understand that, to a large degree, their beauty establishes their value as a person in our society.

In the past, a woman who wanted to be noticed might consider wearing a low-cut blouse or perhaps a clinging skirt. Today's young women are operating on an entirely different level. They have been raised on the Internet—a world with its own activities, culture, and value system. For instance, female exhibitionism (via webcam) is becoming an increasingly common practice. Even church girls are privately admitting to posting provocative photos of themselves online.

The longing for intimacy is another avenue into promiscuity. The willingness of girls to give up their virginity because

they believe their boyfriends love them is nothing new—although the high percentages might be.

What is certainly new is the number of girls who are willing to step outside of conventional expressions of sexuality in search of that intimacy. Judy was one such person: "I just wanted to be held . . . to be loved," she recalls. She soon discovered that guys were more than willing to hold her but offering true love was another matter. In her desire to connect emotionally, Judy eventually turned to other women—a phenomenon which is escalating among young girls.

In the 1970s and 1980s, a girl might rebel against the norms of society and opt for the lesbian lifestyle. But she understood that her decision would very likely mark her behavior as being aberrant—perhaps even bizarre. However, in our current MTV-anything-goes culture, girls who opt for sexual relationships with each other are considered chic; they are venerated as trendsetters.

There is one other factor that is affecting the sexual morality of this generation of young women: the Internet. Unquestionably, pornography dominates the landscape of the Internet, boasting upwards of 5 million websites. And according to one source, 28% of visitors to adult websites are female. This is not limited to the unchurched, either: a poll conducted by *Today's Christian Woman's* online newsletter found that 34% of its readers admitted to intentionally accessing online pornography.

Nor is this all. Many women are becoming involved in chatrooms; in fact, women are twice as likely as men to visit chatrooms.

Here, too, exists an entire culture unto itself. There are chatrooms that revolve around all kinds of innocuous interests, but the most popular are those which focus on romance and sex. Basically, people meet in chatrooms and then check out to carry

***One thing has become abundantly clear: sexual sin is not just a man's issue anymore.***

on their private conversations via instant messaging.

Some women are attracted to (and often become addicted to) this kind of romance because it is strictly anonymous and they don't have to concern themselves with messy breakups, STDs, or an unwanted pregnancy. One pastor's daughter who valued her virginity gave the following as an added benefit to her online romance: "It was beautiful for me, because I didn't have to give him my body in return."

The most surprising fact to emerge from current statistics about cyber-sex is that the percentages of churched and

unchurched people involved appear to be about the same. This seems to indicate that the lifestyles of multitudes of evangelicals are not much different than those of flagrant unbelievers.

One thing has become abundantly clear: sexual sin is not just a man's issue anymore. Pastors, Christian counselors, and women's ministry leaders are going to have to equip themselves to respond much more effectively to the rising challenges facing Christian women in a post-porn culture. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *unchained!*, Fall 2007.

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## God's Provisions for His Church

by Dr. W. Wilbert Welch

The Lord is not unaware that His church has been placed in a foreign environment. Not all tension is from within. Beyond the tension of being in a friendly worldly system, which Jesus Himself said would hate us (John 15:18), the church is composed of people who, though redeemed, are still "saints in process." The standards are high, but the progress toward "saintly" behavior is slow. Has the Lord made adequate provision for His people to be the light and salt He intended?

Let us remember that the Lord who said to His disciples, "Give ye them to eat," also supplied all that was needed to feed the hungry five thousand. Would the Lord do less for His people who represent Him today on planet earth? The provision has been made. May we list a few for our encouragement and for our victory over unnecessary divisions?

1. *The "all things" graciously provided by our heavenly Father* for "life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3, 4). Here is an inex-

haustible resource. Imagine stepping into eternity with a divisive unresolved conflict and seeing a check in our heavenly mansion's mailbox for "all things" which we never cashed!

2. *The indwelling, enabling Holy Spirit.* This wonderful truth sets Christianity apart from all the religions of the world. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer. Contention is the fruit of the flesh, but love, gentleness, and patience are the fruit of the Spirit. What we demonstrate is the product of our choice, whether to walk after the flesh or in the Spirit.

3. *A divine energizing.* Believers have a wonderful resource, a supply of strength, which enables us both "to will and to do his good pleasure." Paul said, "It is God who worketh [*energizes*] in you" (Philippians 2:13) which makes Christian living possible. The Lord not only transforms our wills, but then adds His strength for performance.

4. *A new operational law* (Romans 8:2).

Here is a most neglected truth that, if appropriated in faith, enables believers to rise above the downward pull of the flesh. Not only is a believer set free from condemnation (Romans 8:1), but also with the same stroke of his pen, Paul states there is a new operational law, which provides victory over “the law of sin and death.”

We all know the truth of gravity, but we may rise above (not eradicate) that law when we step into a plane and commit our body to the law of motion and aerodynamics. The Holy Spirit has not eradicated the works of the flesh, but has made provision for His children to rise above the pull of our fleshly nature.

5. *The transforming power of His Word.* The psalmist wrote, “Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11). Here is a resource that touches our external relationship and our internal attitude. When tension in the Lord’s family begins to rear its head, let us read and apply some neglected truths: “Have peace with one another” (Mark 9:50); “Follow after things which make for peace” (Romans 14:19); “Let him seek peace and pursue it” (1 Peter 3:11); and “Be at peace among yourselves” (1 Peter 5:13). These are the Lord’s “Robert’s Rules of Order” for every congregation.

#### ***Essentials for Preventing and Resolving Conflict***

In my experience with broken churches or with churches on the verge of a division, I have encouraged the leaders and the total congregation to consider some helpful and healing steps. May I in closing recommend seven tested operational principles for resolving conflicts, whether personal or within the church family:

1. *Refocus on the primary mission of the church.* There are many important ministries in a healthy church. Normally these ministries play an important role as tributaries feeding into the main stream. Paul taught the divided Corinthian church that each member of the body is significant and very important, but the “one” member is

not the total body.

Tension is generated when some quality function assumes it is the more significant member of the body. It may be a Sunday school class, or the youth department, or the music ministry, or any one of a dozen important programs, but unless all the programs focus on a major target, tension may be generated. A church must occasionally examine its focus.

2. *Allow diversity of ministry gifts.* Like a great symphony, a church is composed of many instruments. Each instrument is unique and important, whether timpani, trumpet, or violin, but each must be in harmony with the 440 concert “A” pitch. A quality violin can be very discordant if playing in the wrong key.

3. *Engage the total church in prayer.* Well-equipped soldiers must “put on the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:13). This is best accomplished in the dressing room of prayer. Here is where the total church becomes inoculated against internal tensions and criticisms.

4. *Practice the grace of forgiveness.* There is no greater expression of Christian love than when we forgive someone. When we extend forgiveness to someone we feel has wronged us we are saying the debt is paid and there is now no barrier between us.

5. *Practice pliability.* The grace of pliability is essential for preventing friction when people of diverse preferences meet or walk together. Our preferences are not always to be identified as biblically-based convictions, but rather may stem from our culture, our personality, or even from the level of our maturity. Pliability is a grace, which enables us to divide our preference by the preference of others.

Pliability is a mollifying ointment in our church family when certain debatable matters need to be resolved graciously—the color of the carpet, the length of the sermon, the music format, and more.

6. *Carefulness in our dress.* Believers should dress appropriately, scripturally. No, I don’t mean casual or more formal

styles of dress, but rather putting off the old garments that characterize the former life: anger, wrath, deception, lying, and more (Colossians 3:8, 9), and putting on the new garments that speak of our life in Christ: kindness, humbleness, meekness (Colossians 3:12), and to these we must add the topcoat of love, the evidence of our maturity. It is then the “peace of God” will rule in our hearts (v. 16) and in our churches.

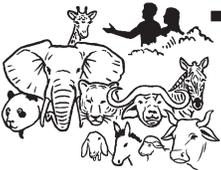
7. *Humbly seek counsel with spiritual leaders.* Such ones will assist the total body to refocus on what is best for the present and future health of the church, and what practices or adjustments can be made in harmony with the Scripture and which would protect, even enhance the testimony of the church in its community.

This article is the product of a deep concern for the testimony of the local church. Through the ministry of dedicated believ-

ers, the church was planted in a given community by the Lord, commissioned and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a witness of His saving, transforming, and keeping grace. To allow Satan to eclipse or mitigate that testimony by internal tension is a tragedy of the first magnitude. Regrettably, the net product, the total cost of a divided church, we will meet when we see Christ, the Head of the church. Especially is this true when we recognize that He has given us “all things for life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3).

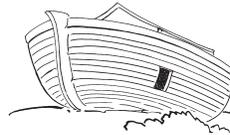
Now “thanks be unto God who always causeth us to triumph in Christ” (2 Corinthians 3:14). Let us recall daily the divine imperative to “let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Colossians 3:15). ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Biblical Evangelist*, July-August 2006.



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## *Beginning Issues*



# **The Genesis Flood: Was It Global?**

by John Mullett

Until fairly modern times the Genesis Flood of Noah's day had generally been accepted as a global flood with most of the fossil record being attributed to it, but with the adoption of evolutionary philosophy the Genesis Flood has increasingly been reinterpreted to have been a local flood or mythologized to say it never occurred at all. With the belief that the fossil record

formed over millions of years came the need for old-earth advocates (compromising Christians) to reinterpret the Genesis Flood to fit their paradigm. Is it crucial what we believe about the Flood? Does it really matter or make a difference one way or the other? I want to suggest it is important; let's take a look at why.

First, let's look at what the Bible says.

While many have tried to reinterpret the Bible to make a local flood fit, and regardless of what we think the evidence points to, it is very clear the writers of the Bible intended to portray a global flood. When we look at wording and context there is never any other notion portrayed. Through language the Bible specifies there was something unique about the Genesis Flood. While a number of different words in the Bible are translated as *flood* in English, the words *mabbuwl* (Hebrew) and *kataklysmos* (Greek) are only ever used in reference to the Genesis Flood.

Jesus clearly believed and taught that the Genesis Flood was global and that all who weren't on the ark with Noah perished (Matthew 24:37-39), and He likens it to the coming judgment when all men shall be judged. In 2 Peter 3 the coming judgment by fire is likened to the former judgment by water. Genesis itself makes it clear the waters covered all the earth (Genesis 7:19, 20). God also promised there would never be another watery event like the Genesis Flood (Genesis 9:8-17), and if it were a local flood then God has broken His promise many times and cannot be trusted to mean what He says. That would undermine the authority of the Bible entirely and the only parts we could believe for sure would be those things that could still be verified today.

The second thing I want to look at is the earth itself. In cases where scientists have been able to observe and record eyewitness accounts of catastrophic events (such as Mt. St. Helens) involving water and flooding, the results have been startling for those who thought long ages to be a necessary part of things like fossilization, canyon formation, and the formation of the sedimentary layers in the geologic column. When we consider what we might expect to see if such a global flood occurred, the evidence fits well. As sung by Buddy Davis, we would expect to find "Billions of Dead Things Buried in Rock Layers All Over the Earth," and that is exactly what we find. In fact these processes *require* catastrophic events in order to form at all. This is a problem for those who hold the geologic column and the fossil record as evidence for an old earth. If these formations are formed suddenly as evidenced in the eruption of Mt. St. Helens, and other similar events that present-day scientists have been able to observe, then long ages are not needed to explain the fossil record, canyon formation, and the geologic column. They are better explained by a global flood just as the Bible describes. For more information read the article found at this link: <http://www.icr.org/article/261/>.

This article will be continued in the next issue.

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## Cremation and the Bible

1. God formed man from the dust of the ground, and says that he shall return to the dust, implying a natural process of decay after death of the body, not destruction by burning (Genesis 2:7; 3:19).
2. Saints of the Bible in both Old and New Testaments practiced burial of their dead. Abraham purchased a burial place for his wife Sarah (Genesis

23:19, 20); Jacob commanded his remains to be carried out of Egypt and buried in the burying place of his fathers (Genesis 47:29, 30); John the Baptist was buried after he was murdered by Herod (Matthew 14:12); Lazarus lay in a grave four days before being raised to life again by Christ (John 11:41). Many other instances can be cited.

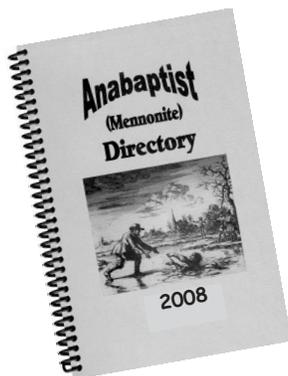
3. Examples in Scriptures of those who were cremated serve as warnings of God's judgments and His vengeance upon sinners, not of His acceptance and blessings toward His children. Achan, the man who stole and hid the accursed spoil from the battle of Jericho, causing the army of Israel to suffer defeat and loss of lives in their next battle, was stoned and cremated for his punishment (Joshua 7:25); the body of Saul, the disobedient king of Israel, was cremated after he had committed suicide in his last battle with the Philistines (1 Samuel 31:12); in purging idol worship from the nation of Judah, King Josiah killed the idolatrous priests in his land, then burned their bodies (2 Kings 23:20).
4. Burning of human sacrifices was a practice associated with idolatrous worship, and condemned by God (2 Chronicles 33:6).
5. God, to prove His faithfulness and His power on behalf of His own, did not allow the three Hebrew children to be consumed in the burning fiery furnace

into which they were thrown by King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon (Daniel 3:25).

6. Hell, the place of eternal punishment, is called the lake of fire where the wicked will burn forever, yet not be annihilated so as to escape their sufferings (Revelation 20:15).
7. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Christian's example in all things, was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea (Matthew 27:59, 60).
8. The Apostle Paul, when giving a definition of the gospel of Christ, includes His burial as an essential part (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4).
9. Baptism, a church ordinance commanded by Christ, portrays burial. As a Christian is baptized, he shows his death to his old life of sin, followed by his rising to a new life of righteousness and holiness with Christ (Romans 6:4).

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# Sick Children

by Duane L. Witmer

Tonight, I am missing the evening service. There are sick children at our house. My wife could have stayed home with them and I could have gone; but she stayed home this morning while I went to church.

Sick children are not fun. The flu bugs make their presence known in different ways and none of them really enjoyable. The care given to sick children is usually far less pleasant than the care given to “well” children. Sick children do fewer cute and endearing things. In fact, most times they don’t do any at all. Sick children cry more and laugh less.

All this can wear the parent down. No, they don’t always get the sickness of the child, but they can catch the disposition of the child. It is a temptation to get shorter tempered with the shorter-tempered child. The crying and whining can weasel its way into the soul of the parent and bring out the weasel of them.

Actually, one of the sick children appears to be acting good enough right now that I really wonder if they shouldn’t have gone along. This can have a subtle effect on me as a parent. Why did I have to miss the outdoor song service for someone who appears to be just fine?

Children have a way of bringing out the true colors (the character) of the parents. Sickness is just one of the ways that this happens. A wise parent will take note of this. In a story book, the parents would always react to a child’s sickness with compassion and tender loving care. But, since we don’t live in story books, our stories don’t always read this way.

Sick children are inconvenient. They get sick when travel is planned, when friends whom we haven’t seen for several years are getting together, and when the beans need to be picked. All this adds up to the simple picture of broken plans, missed gatherings, and waiting beans. If a parent is selfish, they will note the interruption and feel

frustration. What can really add to the frustration is in the back-of-the-mind knowledge that tomorrow or yesterday would have been a much more convenient window to have the 24-hour flu. But today is the day of sickness and . . . it can’t be changed.

Sick children can be expensive. While wise parents don’t trot to the doctor for every sniffle, some of the sickness requires more than home remedy. This in itself can lead to frustration. Most homes don’t have a coffer that is stuffed for doctor visits. Therefore, when a doctor visit is made, some other budget is infringed upon. What if the bill is so large that the “kitty” for a new kitchen is skimmed?

Sick children can be embarrassing. What if our children are under the weather more than yours? What if mine appear to mend slower? In our fallen state, we are too prone to fall for these silly comparisons.

So what is the Christ-like response to sick children? Have you ever wished you could be like Jesus and just heal them? Just lay on the hands and the fever leaves? It must be our compassion that yearns for such things. It is probably silly to wish for that which is beyond our ability. One of the things a godly parent can do is lay on his hands and pray. There is no absolute, miraculous power to be had in such times, yet it is quite honorable to cast these burdens upon the Lord. And it is not beyond His superintending hands to grant this request.

Sick children are part of the fallen world that we live in. Sorrow, sickness, and death are all a result of Adam and Eve’s failure and the distinct changes which came upon man and his generations.

But let us not waste our child’s sickness. This is a time to exercise the love of God which is in our hearts. May it come forth with hands of gentleness, voices of tenderness, and a total body language of patience.