

Person of the Month:



“Jacob Ammann as depicted on Behalt. Artist Heinz Gangel presented Ammann in heroic proportions.”

Jacob Ammann: Restoring Right Doctrine

Why would anybody write about Jacob Ammann? Everyone knows he was no good. This view of many Mennonites and some Amish exists today.

Jacob was born on February 12, 1644, in Erlenbach to Michel and Anna (Rupp) Ammann. His grandparents were Uli and Catherina (Platter) Ammann from Erlenbach. He was baptized on February 12, 1644, which means he was not born an Anabaptist.

He later lived in a place called Bowil, which is northeast of Erlenbach, and is called Friedersmatt near Bowil. In 1673 he fled Switzerland to Alsace in France.

The first mention of Jacob in France is in a government document listing all the Anabaptists living near Saint-Marie-Aux-Mines in Alsace, France. This document can be seen in the Archives of the Upper Rhine in Colmar, France.

In 1703 and 1708 he is listed in the Archives of Colmar as a resident. Then in 1712 a lot of Anabaptists were expelled from the Colmar region.

The last government document found states that he was an Anabaptist minister in 1730 near Erlenbach in the Simmental Valley, south of Thun. This document states that he died out of country at an unknown age. This information was supplied by his daughter on April 12, 1730.

Some Mennonites came across a book that Jacob gave to his Baltz Ammann. They thought it was a German songbook, but David Luthy got a photocopy of the book and discovered it was a book of Psalms.

The name *Ammann* comes from a word *Amtmann*, which means “a bailiff, administrator, or steward.”

Alsace is a French province that was German up to 1697 and also from 1871 to 1919, and lies on the west bank of the Rhine River. These people lived around Strasbourg, which was a refuge for Anabaptists. Some early Christians living here were Hubmaier, Wilhelm Reublin, Michael Sattler, and Hans Denck. Important Anabaptist conferences were held at Strasbourg in 1555, 1557, 1568, and 1608.

The earliest Swiss Brethren Anabaptist confession of faith was the Seven Articles of Schleithem. It demanded Believers Baptism, The Ban, Closed Communion, Separation From the World and Worldly Churches, Disciplined Ministers, Nonresistance, and the Non-Swearing of Oaths.

Already in 1531 the Anabaptists had established clothing standards and a way of life. So it was not the Amish who invented clothing rules. The issue of *meidung* (excommunication) was brought in long before Jacob Ammann was born. When Jacob moved to Alsace in France he discovered that the early Anabaptists had practiced these rules, so he restored them to their original meaning.

During the Thirty-Year War from 1618 to 1648, most of these Anabaptist people were ravaged, murdered, or enslaved by marauding armies. There were times after that one could walk twenty miles and not see a single person.

(continued on page 27)

A Significant Religious Meeting

RETHINK: A New Kind of Conference

by Ralph G. Colas

Descriptive words like *unprecedented*, *life-changing*, and *thought leaders who will become your thought partners* were used to promote this RETHINK meeting held on the 150-million-dollar property of the Crystal Cathedral.

Co-hosts were Dr. Robert H. Schuller, founding pastor, and Rev. Erwin McManus of the Mosaic Church in Los Angeles. RETHINK connected the 2,500 who attended, with tens of thousands of others who watched the simulcast programs beamed across North America in 44 major cities.

More than 30 speakers, identified by Schuller as being “Cultural Icons in media, politics, science, business and faith,” were given their “30 minutes of fame” as they instructed everyone to become “Top Thinkers and Innovators.”

These included Former President George H. W. Bush; Chuck Colson of Prison Fellowship; Larry King, the broadcaster; Rupert Murdoch, a Global Media Executive; H. B. London, vice president of *Focus on the Family*; Nancy Ortberg, former teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church; Emerging Church Leader Dan Kimball; George Forman, world heavyweight boxer; Kay Warren, wife of Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, along with three members of the Schuller family.

Dr. Robert A. Schuller, who succeeded his father as Senior Pastor, offered these suggestions: 1. Don’t go to work and do a job—go to your destiny and fulfill your calling; 2. If you have the faith, God has the power; 3. Success is not a destination, it is a journey. The journey itself is the success.

Lou Holtz, famous football coach, gave

three rules. They were: 1. Do right; 2. Do everything to your ability; 3. Just show them you can. Holtz concluded his remarks by saying, “Yes, I believe in Jesus, but I sure do not go around preaching about Him!”

Donna Schuller, wife of the Senior Pastor at the Crystal Cathedral, who is also identified as the Guest Pastor in that church, began by asking everyone to stand and then turn to everyone around them and tell them, “YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD!” She then advised her listeners to: 1. Reframe yourself; 2. Reframe others; 3. Reframe God—and she added, “Before you know God you must know yourself.”

Larry King was interviewed by Dr. Schuller via live hookup. Larry said he had been born into a Jewish home in 1933. As the interview drew to a close, Dr. Schuller asked him to tell everyone something they could remember that he said at this meeting. Larry said he would like to tell a joke and he did—but it was an *off-color joke!* (No one from the platform apologized for letting such an offensive “joke” be a part of this RETHINK Conference.)

Rupert Murdoch, the media giant, said absolutely nothing that was even close to spiritual truth. He promoted free trade and the need to help people who are depressed. His final statement was “Always promote interfaith dialogue.”

Observations by This Reporter

1. RETHINK was a mishmash of liberalism, New Age teaching, self-esteem philosophy with a lot of psycho-babble thrown into the mix.
2. It was the exception and not the rule when God’s Word was referred to in any way. A few speakers mentioned the

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need of receiving Jesus Christ, but very few. The subject of “sin” and “Hell” apparently were off limits.

3. Co-host Erwin McManus declared, “For too long we have focused on making sure people believe the right things and have left their concerns alone. I know it may sound like heresy, **but it is more important to change what people care about than what they believe.**”

What this “emerging church” leader failed to understand or communicate is that what we **believe** will affect the way we **behave**. McManus put the proverbial cart before the horse. Second Corinthians 5:17 and Ephesians 2:8-10 give the proper order.

4. Another speaker and a leader of the emerging church movement, Miles McPherson, was identified as a “transformation evangelist.” His Rock Church grew from a handful to 10,000 in seven years. McPherson related that the women in his church go on a regular basis into the strip clubs “to minister to the women there.” As he concluded his address, he sought to answer the question of why you will go to Heaven. His answer was, “You have finished your life’s purpose or God thinks you never will do it.”
5. George Forman, the world heavyweight boxer champion, ended his speech by telling how after he had lost a fight and while lying there in his dressing room, he heard a voice but no one else was in the room. George said it was Jesus, and George offered Jesus some money. However, the voice said, “I do not want your money, I want you.” George said that he was “out of this life and I learned that the world needs for me to show that I love them. I learned from Jesus not to punch anyone out of anger!”
6. Dan Kimball, pastor of the Vintage Faith Church in California, promoted his book *The Emerging Church*. Kimball recommends that churches use

chanting, arts, and dancing. By this way the church leaders emphasize the sense of smell, touch, taste, hearing, and sight. He minimized preaching but encouraged dialogue. He even told of a time when he permitted a man, who was an agnostic, to stand up during a Sunday morning worship service and tell everyone why he was not a Christian!

7. Exhibitors at RETHINK were Fuller Theological Seminary, The Barna Group, California Graduate School of Theology, American Association of Christian Counselors, Prison Fellowship Ministries, along with others.
8. A phrase often heard was “People tell us they love Jesus but they hate Christians.” Another favorite was “We are moving into a post-Christian culture, so it is time to rethink how we ‘do church.’” “Evangelism is more dialogue than preaching.” “You cannot effectively evangelize by your preaching.”
9. At no time was it emphasized what 1 Corinthians 1:18 teaches—“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God”—nor what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:2—“Preach the word . . .” Instead, the way to do God’s work, according to these “religious icons,” is with candles, incense, chanting, dancing, and “open time” where everybody is free to share what is important to them.
10. The old erroneous teaching that “humanized God and deified man” was plainly seen in the flippant practices and methods of worship that were promoted at the Crystal Cathedral. This large Cathedral is itself a place where psychology reigns as king. Believers do not need to “rethink” God’s truths but should “rethink” accepting the multiplied errors offered by those like Robert Schuller. ■

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From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

For What It's Worth

by Stan Mitchell

“They sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the lamb” (Revelation 15:3).

Jerry McDade and his wife were out walking one Sunday morning when they heard singing so beautiful that they just had to stop and listen. Both were from the Church of England, and had heard beautiful choirs sing. What made this so startling was that it was congregational singing. Ordinary Christians raised their voices in adoration with such feeling that it compelled visitors to come in. It wasn't long before they met Christ.

Some time ago I was in a church building that had a screen in the front where words were projected for songs without printed music. This seems to be a brotherhood-wide trend. I spoke to one of the members and this is what he said: “We might as well have only the words to songs. Most people can't read music anyway.”

I thought: *When did we concede the point?*

I know this is only a preference, but permit me, please, to express one.

You must remember that I have worshiped many times in Africa with neither hymnbooks nor multimedia capability! For most African congregations meeting on a

rock under a tree, hymns on power point is not a controversy. It's not the technology that worries me.

As a song leader, I am afraid we will lose our capacity for congregational singing. We need to train our young people to sing. We can develop our own ability further. We can learn new songs. There are singing schools that would benefit our young people greatly. It is important to remember our objective. We aren't training members to sight-read Gregorian chants or Bach's quartet music. In congregations across the land, however, we have always had this ability; when a song leader introduces a song, there have always been enough members with the ability to pick out the harmony so that the new song takes hold and becomes a part of our worship in song. That's a precious heritage indeed.

And one more thing. A century ago, when the organ was brought into churches of Christ, the reason given was: “Our singing is so bad that this will improve it.”

I never want that to happen again to this fellowship that I love, do you? ■

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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

Introduction to August Lessons

The five lessons for August are taken from the Book of James, one from each chapter. These lessons are intensely practical, dealing with a variety of life issues. *Nelson's Bible Commentary* says: "The Epistle of James is the 'how-to' book of the Christian life." Eerdman says of James: "He does not attempt to teach Christian doctrine, but to stimulate Christian life." Another says of James, it is "a wake-up call to all Christians [to] get your life in line with what you believe."

James could have added to his credentials in verse 1 by saying, "And brother of our Lord" (see Matthew 13:55; Galatians 1:19). Though James likely did not believe Jesus was the Christ (John 7:5) until after the resurrection (see Acts 1:9-14; 1 Corinthians 15:7) he nevertheless became an outstanding leader in the emerging church at Jerusalem (see Acts 12:17; 15:13). He served perhaps thirty years as leader and stabilizing influence in this nascent movement. James' purpose with this epistle is to encourage those going through trials and hardships (1:2, 3, 12) and to give advice in living out their faith.

These lessons will help us see faith in action, the outworking of our profession in observable ways. Read and re-read the Book of James in your study and seek for practical applications to your life of the principles found therein.

May God reward you with an enhancement of Christian character as you study and apply these lessons.

AUGUST 3, 2008

Doers of the Word

James 1:17-27

It's so easy to give lip profession to our faith without understanding or applying the principles of faith to daily life. This lesson challenges the believer to integrate the principles of God's Word into the actions of life. That is the only way God's Word becomes effective in our lives, as it makes a positive difference in our attitudes and actions. Eerdman says this epistle "demands reality in religion, rebukes all pretense, self-deception, sham and hypocrisy, and insists that faith be tested by works."

Our text begins with the statement that all good and perfect gifts come to us from

our heavenly Father—the One who does not change. The implication in verse 18 is that our redemption by His Word of Truth is by far the best gift man can receive. James then uses the Old Testament parallel of the offering to God of the firstfruits to indicate the future ingathering of souls to be redeemed by this "word of truth."

As His redeemed ones, we must be eager to hear God's Word, slow to speak our own opinions, and to hold in check our anger. The expression of anger militates against the righteousness God desires to see in us and expressed by us in daily living. We must purposely lay aside or deny the impulse to sin in all its impurity and be receptive to the soul-saving Word of God.

Here is where doing supersedes hearing. We may intellectually know God's will for our

behavior, but unless it is evidenced by our actions it is hollow and worthless. We only deceive ourselves by believing otherwise.

James solidifies his argument by using the illustration of a man looking into a mirror, then walking away and promptly forgetting what he saw. We are just as bad if we look into God's law, discover a life-principle, but then fail to apply it. By contrast, the one who looks, understands, and applies these life-principles from God's Word will be blessed. He is a doer, not just a hearer. There must be a life-changing connection between what we hear, or see in God's Word, and what we do. Otherwise we fail to achieve God's will for our lives and miss the blessing He wishes to bestow upon His obedient children.

In the last two verses of our text, verses 26 and 27, James gives several tests of the truly religious man. Is he able to bridle (control) his tongue? Does he show compassion to the needy members of society? And is he living above the allurements of sin? Control of the tongue stems from the inner impulse to have one's life under God's control. Compassion on the needy stems from one's gratitude to God for His bountiful gifts and mercy. Keeping oneself unspotted from the world is to remain aloof from all contacts or associations which may lead one into sin and end in separation from God.

All of these speak of action—inner motivation resulting in outward expression. They are the impetus and result of hearing, then doing, God's life-changing Word. James' message speaks to men of all eras. Are we listening? Are we doing?

For thought and discussion

1. Enumerate the many good gifts that come to us as children of our heavenly Father.
2. Verse 19 speaks also to guiding principles in human relations. How can those principles be integrated into life, and what will be the result in terms of interpersonal relationships? Discuss.
3. Verse 21 speaks to laying aside and receiving, two distinct actions relating to two distinct qualities—one evil, one good. Just how does one do that? What is the key?

4. We can easily identify with the illustration in verses 23 and 24. We are all forgetful. However, this illustration speaks to something deeper than forgetfulness. What is it?

5. How does pure religion work itself out in daily living? How can we ascertain a person's religious nature? Discuss.

AUGUST 10, 2008

Impartial Judgment

James 2:1-13

One serious fault of unregenerate man is the categorizing of individuals according to place, position, or possessions. And, obviously from James 2 and current experience, that fault has not totally escaped the followers of Jesus. In this passage James addresses the issue and calls believers of all time to respect and love all men, for all men are special in the eyes of God who gave His Son for their salvation. It is clear that one cannot hold the "faith of our Lord Jesus Christ" and at the same time be guilty of violating the law of love by showing partiality toward one's fellowmen. Love and partiality are not compatible.

James uses a vivid illustration to drive his point home. Two worshippers arrive, one dressed in finery, the other in shabby clothes. Purely human tendency is to evaluate character by outward appearances and give respect to the one who exudes wealth and denigrate the one who appears of lesser social status. But that, James says, is absolutely no way to accurately judge a man's character. James says that such evaluation says more about us than about the persons we judge (v. 4). It reveals wrong attitudes.

James goes on to explain differences between the poor and the rich from God's perspective. Often those poor in material terms are rich spiritually. This may be due to their sense of dependence on God to supply all their needs while the rich exhibit an independent and self-sufficient attitude. The upper crust of Jewish society was guilty

of blaspheming the name of Christ by their mistreatment of His followers (vv. 6, 7). Christians were no less despised in the early days of Christianity than they are in today's world. This reinforces James' argument to not judge character by outward appearance.

James caps his argument by appealing to the royal law of Scripture, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." To do so, he says, is to do well. It is not an easy law to observe, and can be practiced only by those whose inner being and motivation have been transformed by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory and love. This royal law of equal treatment and equal love was established by God in the Levitical Law given by God through Moses many centuries prior to James' writing (see Leviticus 19:15, 18). It has been a requirement for God's people ever since.

James points out the seriousness of failure to keep the law of love by pointing out that transgression of the law on one point makes one an offender and thus guilty of breaking the intent of the entire law. Showing respect of persons is sin and brings one under the condemnation of God for breaking His law. While not all sins carry equal social consequences, all are violations of God's intent for the individual.

We will be judged by the law of love, whether or not we have kept that law. Therefore, to avoid judgment, all our words and actions must be motivated by love, compelled by an inner desire to please and emulate the One who so loved us to forgive us our sins. But, on the other hand, "he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy." We must allow the law of love to rule our lives and govern our judgments.

For thought and discussion

1. Why do we have a tendency to cater to the wealthy and ignore or look down on the poor? What do such attitudes reveal about ourselves?
2. Why is outward appearance not a valid gauge of character? Discuss.
3. Is it easier for a poor person to follow Christ than it is for one who is rich? If so, why? Discuss the issues involved.

4. What should motivate our attitudes and actions toward our fellowmen? What is the stimulus for that motivation? Why does it seem to be so difficult to achieve?
5. James points out that it is more important to keep the intent of God's law than it is to simply observe its various "points." Do we need, perhaps, to re-focus our intentions?

AUGUST 17, 2008

Control of the Tongue

James 3

How well we know the truth of James' statement that "the tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." Who of us has not suffered the burning shame of an unleashed tongue—either our own or someone else's. This passage describes vividly how the power of the tongue is out of all proportion to its size. It also shows us, what we already know, that only a greater power, a power outside of ourselves, can control the tongue for useful purposes.

James begins this chapter by warning that teachers will come under stricter judgment due to the wider scope of their influence. The man so in control of his speech that he causes no offense is the man who has all of life under control and is called "a perfect [mature] man" (v. 2). The implication, of course, is that a teacher must be a mature, self-controlled individual because he influences not only by what he teaches but also by his total manner of life.

James then proceeds to show the power of the tongue, a relatively small member of the body, by comparing it to other small things which exert great power relative to their size. A small bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole animal. A small rudder turns a mighty ship. So the tongue has the potential to start a large conflagration. The untamed tongue is sparked by evil impulses, boasts great things, defiles the whole body, and affects the whole of life.

So what hope is there for the tongue?

Man has gained dominion over birds, beasts, and serpents, but the tongue, that small member of the body, remains untamed and untamable—by man. It is unruly, full of poison. We use it for mixed purposes, to bless God and curse man. James pointedly says, “My brethren, these things ought not so to be!” Unthinkable. Just as trees bear fruit consistent with their nature and a spring spews water of consistent quality, so the tongue speaks consistently with its master’s basic character.

But there is hope for the tongue. What man cannot tame, God can, or man can with God’s help. The implication from verse 13 on is that the truly wise man understands his need and appropriates the transforming power of God to control his entire life—speech, works, attitudes. This is in contrast to those controlled by earthly wisdom, whose lives are characterized by envy, strife, confusion, and evil works.

The wisdom from above, God’s wisdom, sets men free. It is pure in its motives, peaceable in its actions, gentle and easily entreated in relationships, full of mercy, fruitful, impartial, sincere. What a contrast to the wrath of man (1:20) and its fiery result through the uncontrolled tongue.

The fruit of righteousness is peace. The seeds of peace are sown by peacemakers, those who have experienced God’s controlling power in their lives and are going about to spread that peaceful influence in the lives of others. That peace is expressed by the controlled tongue, a marvel of God’s capability in the life of man.

For thought and discussion

1. Are you a teacher? James has some sobering words for you.
2. I’m sure you have had some trouble with your tongue. All of us have. What measures have helped you most in dealing with your tongue? If not too embarrassing, perhaps class discussion can be of benefit to all.
3. What does the consistent expression of the tongue say about the life underneath? Is there anything more expressive

of basic character than the tongue?

4. How do we acquire the “wisdom that is from above” to serve as a guide for life?
5. We can sow either peace or confusion with our tongue. What is the message from your tongue?

AUGUST 24, 2008

Godly Servants

James 4:1-12

In this passage James speaks to relationships—interpersonal, and with God. He sets forth very clearly the motivating factors which govern all relationships. Basic human selfishness is the force that causes conflict and unrest between individuals. A love for God and a desire to live in close communion with Him motivates in an entirely different direction. Godly behavior is expected of God’s servants.

In verses 1 and 2, we note that “the passion of desire becomes the master of man’s soul, but the heart is never satisfied with anything the world offers.” Interpersonal conflict has its roots in selfishness, the desire to please oneself even at the expense of others. But selfishness doesn’t satisfy. Neither are one’s prayers answered, because the motive in asking stems from impure desires.

James goes on to explain that those who commit spiritual adultery, as evidenced by wrong desires, personal conflicts, and selfishness, are at enmity with God. That is a very dangerous position to be in. Scholars disagree on the interpretation of verse 5, but taken in context it seems to imply that the unregenerate nature of man is continually bent toward satisfying personal desires. But for the one desiring instead a relationship with God, grace abounds, grace which enables one to overcome human tendencies and live a life pleasing to God (v. 6).

Therefore, submit yourself and your desires to God, resist the temptations from the devil, and yearn earnestly toward God. In such a frame of mind and purpose, Satan

will be defeated. However, this bent Godward is not to be a passive exercise, but active, sincere, and with purpose. There must be godly sorrow for sins, an humble, teachable attitude, and purposeful growth in sanctification. There are requirements for receiving God's grace, abundant and free though it be.

Verses 11 and 12 warn against censoriousness. Brother is not to judge or speak evil of his brother. A critical attitude does not befit a child of God. Also, it is not in man's place to pass judgment upon another; that is God's role for He is the Lawgiver and He alone has the right to interpret and apply His laws. These verses also speak to the issues mentioned in the first two verses of our text. Speaking unkindly to or about another sows seeds of disharmony and strife. And that is in opposition to God's desire for peaceful, harmonious relationships among His people.

So, what are the characteristics of godly servants? What qualities define and govern their lives? And, most importantly, does my life measure up to the standards set by God? These passages from James speak in very practical terms and help us honestly evaluate our lives against the order established by God. To be a godly servant one must embrace God's will and way. This passage shows us how.

For thought and discussion

1. What is the source of interpersonal conflict? Is it always the other person's fault? How do we address the problem?
2. Does James help us understand why sometimes our prayers are not answered?
3. Understand the concepts of the world kingdom and the heavenly kingdom and you will understand the impossibility of loving both. And why would anyone try?
4. What are the steps to sanctification as outlined by James in this passage?
5. Are we never to judge another? If so, what are the parameters within which judgments may be made?

AUGUST 31, 2008

The Prayer of Faith

James 5:13-18

The poet Tennyson said, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." In our text today we see that prayer to be effective must be coupled with faith. The word *pray* and its various forms is found seven times in these six verses, showing its importance in the life of the believer. The text closes with the example of Elijah, showing that the power and effectiveness of prayer is available to every man.

The passage begins with the injunction that those suffering hardship or trouble of any kind should pray. That is in contrast to the mere human response which is to complain. We who know God should submit our troubles to His benevolent care. James also has an appropriate word for those who are happy: sing praises.

Those who are sick are instructed to call the leaders of the church to pray over them and "anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord." Now there is no magical healing power in the oil. Healing is effected through the prayer of faith. The oil is symbolic of God's grace, and it is in submission to God's will that one finds comfort, peace, and satisfaction of soul. Physical healing may come, but more important is the healing of soul which comes from spiritual cleansing and the recognition of well-being with God. This wholeness of being which comes from a oneness with God is of far greater importance than the mere healing of the body.

Christians are to be open with one another and supportive of each other at all times, but especially during times of spiritual struggle. The confession of faults and the mutual praying bonds believers together and provides the support and encouragement needed to endure and survive. In an individualistic age we should take a practical lesson from this passage. As believers, we need each other and we must be humble enough to admit our need and open ourselves before our brother/sister.

James tells us that the earnest, fervent prayer of a righteous man is effective. Persistence in prayer is taught in the Scriptures (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18; Luke 18:1, etc.). To reinforce his statement he gives the example of Elijah. The story is found in 1 Kings 17 and 18. James emphasizes that Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, not superhuman, but righteous and fervent in his praying. His accomplishments reflected his spiritual fervor—not some supernatural power. He lived close to God and God honored his commitment. (That Elijah was very human is portrayed in 1 Kings 19.)

The prayer of faith is the theme of our lesson today. We see in this passage from James the effects of prayer from the heart of righteous people. There is healing, both physical and spiritual, and there is interruption of nature in order to bring honor to God. All of these are the results of fervent, earnest, sincere, and unselfish prayers. God

is capable and willing to unleash His power for man's benefit, but He responds most readily to the "effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man [or woman]." Let's meet His requirements so we can enjoy His blessings.

For thought and discussion

1. There are many kinds of prayer. Several are spoken of in this passage. Define them. And let's be sure that the majority of ours are not selfish ones.
2. Whose faith heals the sick? Discuss.
3. What is the secret to effective prayer? List the requirements. What made Elijah's prayer effective?
4. Explain the rationale behind the rite of anointing with oil. Do we practice this ordinance as frequently as we should?
5. Don't we admit that we have access to the same power Elijah did? Are we utilizing it to the fullest extent? If not, why not? What is lacking? Discuss. ■

Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

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

Countries in Profile: Oman and the United Arab Emirates

I have spent the last while traveling around the Middle East with TDW. We are seeking to capture and transmit a vision for the need of workers in the Middle Eastern harvest. I will start by quoting from an article written by TDW entitled "The Call to the Harvest: Conservative Anabaptist Ministry in the Muslim World."

"Due to the incredible wealth of the United Arab Emirates it has been suggested that their true religion is money. In only

thirty or forty years the UAE has gone from a Bedouin land of desert, camels, and tents to a country of wealthy Arabs who are currently building the world's tallest building. Hundreds of new high-rise buildings are rising from the desert of Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Only about one in three people living in the UAE are actually Emirati. Several million expatriate workers, some of them workers for the Kingdom of God, allow the people of the Emirates to live lifestyles of ease and extreme luxury. Despite the great changes in the UAE over the last few decades, Islam and the tribe still have a tight hold on the people.

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Stories of young women who disappeared from society after causing shame to their families makes one wonder how deep the changes have actually gone. Very few Emiratis have met the Prince of Peace. I remember visiting a city to the south of Oman where the pastor described the terrible suffering of an MBB in their village. As we walked out of the restaurant the pastor informed us that the man next to us was listening to everything we said. As in most Arab/Muslim countries the secret police work hard in Oman. 'Anyone can go to the police with information and get paid for it,' we were informed. As a result, no one can really be trusted."

I would echo what TDW said about extreme wealth and add several factoids that further illustrate. Half of the world's stationary cranes are in Dubai (in the UAE). The Mall of the Emirates is the largest mall in the world outside of North America and the third largest in the world. Its most striking feature is its indoor ski slope. Emirati citizens share in the oil profits and receive a monthly stipend from the government. College is free and they are paid extra to attend college. Highways through the middle of the desert are lined with trees and irrigated at great expense. Someone made the comment that the UAE is the only nation in the world with a more extravagant consumer culture than America.

One of the highlights was visiting Oasis Hospital, a believer-run hospital that is the recipient of patronage (to the tune of a \$100-million grant to expand) of the ruling sheikhs. Oasis came to the UAE back when the metropolises were collections of tents, and they reduced the infant mortality rate from 50% to under 1%. Also, before they came, the maternal mortality rate was 35%. Oasis has Gospels of John and Luke in Arabic all over the hospital, along with Jesus films on DVD. We saw an Emirati man reading the Gospel of John in the waiting room.

Another highlight was meeting with missionaries and learning from them. A very interesting observation that a South Korean missionary made—one which rein-

forces my ever-strengthening belief that we as conservative Mennonites are ideally positioned and have a huge responsibility to reach out to Muslims—was this: when he heard we had visited the Yoders, he said, "You are the same as them!" He went on to tell us that he has observed that conservative Mennonites are much different than most Americans. "You are more peaceful, or something. You are much more like us." This was coming from an Eastern—a South Korean.

TDW writes that "Oman is a relatively modern country in terms of infrastructure with vast spans of empty desert lands. Oil is not as plentiful in Oman, leaving them with the need to have to work harder for their own living. Omanis are more traditional than Emiratis and sometimes difficult to reach. Very few Christian workers have remained as the government is very quick to dismiss those who actively share their faith. Some areas are also known to be strong centers of witchcraft, making the spiritual strain very strong."

Oman is difficult to get into long-term without at the very least a Bachelor's, but usually a Master's or a Ph.D. is needed. The believers there are severely persecuted by their families. We were told the story of one believer who was sharing the gospel with his friends and family. His family declared him insane and sent him to a reprogramming camp in Saudi Arabia where he was treated with shock "treatments" which indeed did render him insane.

Despite the danger to Muslim converts, Omanis are an incredibly friendly and hospitable people. Everywhere we went, people invited us in for tea; they love to talk. Western visitors tend to be welcomed and safe.

—Sources: Interviews with missionaries and "The Call to the Harvest"

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Earthquake in China's Sichuan Province

On May 12, an 8-magnitude quake hit the Wenchuan county of Sichuan province. As of May 25, there are 62,664 dead,

358,816 injured, and 23,775 missing. Millions more remain at severe risk of aftershocks (a strong aftershock killed six and injured 1000), floods (many landslides blocked rivers forming huge lakes that could give way at any moment), and dams collapsing (69 are prone to immediate collapse, and 310 are in danger). The city of Chengdu (50 miles from the epicenter), the home of several conservative Mennonite workers, was severely damaged as well. Chinese people and the international community have been very happy with the Chinese response—including a fast, big response, unprecedented open acceptance of international aid and rescue workers, and freedom of press in reporting the event. There has been justified criticism of the Chinese government of shoddy construction of schools in poorer neighborhoods. Photos show hundreds of children crushed as poorly constructed government kindergartens totally collapsed while nearby buildings (including a school for the elite) are nearly untouched. (The *New York Times* has good details about this: <http://tinyurl.com/58bq42>). Suggested reading: “Can the new, open China outlive the huge relief effort?” in the *Times* of London (<http://tinyurl.com/6265gl>).

—Sources: *BBC*, *New York Times*, *Wikipedia*

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Muslim Ladies in Iraq Commit Suicide Because of and to Protest Abuse

I am currently in the northern Iraqi city of Dohuk. In an interview with a local mission director, he told me that many ladies across Iraq have been going into the streets, dousing themselves in gasoline, and burning themselves to death because their lives are simply so hard under their husbands. In the city of Dohuk alone, 29 women per month commit suicide in this manner. This despair has made a field that is ripe for harvest. Islam has brought the Kurds nothing but suffering.

—Source: Interview with mission director

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Six Tribes of Bacteria

“The crook of your elbow is not just a plain patch of skin. It is a piece of highly coveted real estate, a special ecosystem, a bountiful home to no fewer than six tribes of bacteria. Even after you have washed the skin clean, there are still one million bacteria in every square centimeter.

“But panic not. These are not bad bacteria. They are what biologists call commensals, creatures that eat at the same table with people to everyone’s mutual benefit. Though they were not invited to enjoy board and lodging in the skin of your inner elbow, they are giving something of value in return. They are helping to moisturize the skin by processing the raw fats it produces, says Julia A. Segre of the National Human Genome Research Institute.

“The bacterial cells also outnumber human cells by 10 to 1, meaning that if cells could vote, people would be a minority in their own body.”

—Excerpts from “Bacteria Thrive in Inner Elbow; No Harm Done” in the *New York Times* (<http://tinyurl.com/5zplb8>)

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Burma Cyclone

Wikipedia writes (paraphrased), “Cyclone Nargis was a strong tropical cyclone that caused the deadliest natural disaster in the recorded history of Burma (officially known as Myanmar). The cyclone made landfall in the country on May 2, causing catastrophic destruction and at least 134,000 fatalities with a further 56,000 people still missing. However, Labutta Township alone was reported to have 80,000 dead and some have estimated the death toll may be well over 1 million. Damage is estimated at over \$10 billion (USD), which made it the most damaging cyclone ever recorded in this basin. It was also Burma’s worst natural disaster overall, as well as being the deadliest.

Nargis is the deadliest named cyclone in the North Indian Ocean Basin, as well as the second deadliest named cyclone of all

time, behind Typhoon Nina of 1975.

“Relief efforts were slowed for political reasons as Burma’s military rulers initially resisted aid. U.S. President George W. Bush said that an angry world should condemn the way Burma’s military rulers are handling the aftermath. Burma’s ruling party finally accepted aid a few days later from the U.S. after India’s request was accepted. Burmese militants were found to be selling aid to the highest bidder, and Myanmar’s junta warned on May 15th that legal action would be taken against people who trade or hoard international aid.”

—Excerpt paraphrased from Wikipedia (<http://tinyurl.com/5a67so>)

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Iraqi Kurds Love Americans, Tolerate Christians

On the political side, a Kurd told one of the men that I am traveling with, “The Arabs hate us, the Turks hate us, the Iranians hate us—if it weren’t for the Americans, we would have no friends in the whole world.” Mohammed, a Kurdish man I sat beside on the flight to northern Iraq, said, “It would be a disaster if the Americans left!”

On the Christian side, a prominent political Kurdish leader said, “We do not care whether Kurds are Muslim or Christian, as long as they are loyal to Kurds.” Another leader said, “I would rather that someone is a Christian than a terrorist.” The horrible way in which Sadaam gassed, killed, and displaced the Kurds has made the Kurds despise Arabs and by extension at many times, Islam. The door is wide open in Kurdish Iraq for the Gospel. The unique thing about northern Iraq is that the doors are open both in ease of entry and in the hearts of people. Iran has wide open hearts, but closed access. The UAE has open access, but in many cases, closed hearts.

There is persecution of Christians that convert in northern Iraq, but primarily by family members. A number of converts

have disappeared—simply taken out by their families and shot.

—Source: Interviews with Kurds and Christians

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Court: Texas Had No Right to Take Polygamist Sect Children

AFP writes, “The state of Texas had no right to remove hundreds of children from a polygamist sect because it has not proven they were in imminent danger, an appeals court ruled Thursday.

“Officials raided the sprawling compound of the reclusive sect on April 3 and took 250 girls and 213 boys into state custody amid allegations of systemic sexual and physical abuse.

“But the Texas Court of Appeals ruled that the state’s Child Protective Services agency overstepped its authority by removing children who were not in ‘immediate’ danger of harm.

“‘Evidence that children raised in this particular environment may someday have their physical health and safety threatened is not evidence that the danger is imminent enough to warrant invoking the extreme measure of immediate removal prior to full litigation of the issue,’ the ruling said.”

This is an important win for parents everywhere who don’t raise their children in a way that is conformable to the post-modern, licentious norm of America. I certainly don’t condone polygamy, but all indications seem to indicate that these are some wrongly accused parents. The original tipster was arrested for giving false statements to police.

—Excerpt from “Texas had no right to take polygamist sect kids: court” in AFP (<http://tinyurl.com/6kzwcw>)

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The Importance of Forgiving Others

A Study of Matthew 18:21-35

by Harold S. Martin

All of us use many words during the course of a day. Linguists say that the ten most *pleasant* words in the English language are *dawn, hush, lullaby, chimes, tranquility, golden, luminous, murmuring, mist, and melody*. The ten most *expressive* words are: *alone, mother, death, love, revenge, tranquility, forgotten, friendship, no, and faith*. But of all the words used in the Bible—the word *sin* is the saddest, and the word *forgive* is the most beautiful.

The word *forgive* is used 109 times in our English Bible. *Forgiveness* means ceasing to feel resentment for wrongs and offenses done toward us. It includes pardon and the restoration of broken relationships. Forgiveness is the act of renouncing anger and ill feelings against others.

The greatest forgiveness of all is *an act of God*, by which He releases sinners from judgment, and frees us from the divine penalty levied because of our sins. But forgiveness is also *a human act* toward one's fellow human beings. God's forgiveness, because of the death of Christ in our behalf, is to become an incentive for us to forgive others who offend us.

The *rule of revenge* is still practiced in some societies. *Getting even* does not always involve using a gun; sometimes revenge means taking people to court. Sometimes getting even involves doing to others as they have done to us. That is retaliation. One tee shirt had these words imprinted on it: "I don't get mad; I just get even." Others insist that those who have wronged them must make things right—or they will suffer the consequences. One man says, "I'll never forgive that woman—not to my dying day." But remember: one who seeks to get even with another, makes *himself* even with the enemy.

All of us are familiar with feuding relatives or neighbors—who, because of some real (or imagined) offense, refuse to have anything to do with each other. Some hold grudges, even to the day they die—apparently without considering how their lack of forgiveness affects their lives, and the lives of those around them. Think of all the misery that results in our communities (and sometimes in our churches) from disputes and quarrels and lawsuits over matters that are trifling, compared with the way each one of us has offended God.

In Matthew 18, Peter had learned from his traveling with Jesus that it is important to forgive—but surely, he reasoned, there must be a limit to *how often we forgive!* How long must one keep on forgiving? Jesus had just been talking about one brother sinning against another (in verse 15 of Matthew 18). Now, Peter asks whether forgiving such offenses *seven times* is sufficient.

The Scripture for the study in this article is Matthew 18:21-35. In verse 21, Peter had a question about the frequency of forgiveness. He said to Jesus, "*How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?*" Forgiveness is one of the highest of human virtues, because it reflects the character of God. God has freely forgiven us, and He expects us to be quick to forgive others. Jesus taught that Christian compassion *forgives—over, and over, and over again*.

Then Jesus tells a parable about *a compassionate king* and *an unforgiving servant*. There was a man who owed a king an enormous sum of money, and when the king demanded that the huge debt be paid, the servant begged for mercy. In response to the man's pleading for mercy, the king forgave his debt.

But the servant, who was forgiven the large sum, went out and refused to forgive another man who owed him a trifling few dollars. He went to the man who owed the trifling amount and began to choke him, and said, "Pay me what you owe!" The man who owed the trifle got down on his knees and begged for mercy, and promised to pay the debt, but the unforgiving servant threw him into prison "till he should pay the debt."

Jesus clearly condemned this spirit of unforgiveness. All of us have received boundless forgiveness from our heavenly Father. In response, we should never be slow to forgive even the smallest infractions committed against us. The parable in this lesson shows us that forgiveness ought to go both ways. All believers have received it, and we should be willing to give it. Following are some clear marks of true forgiveness.

1. Forgiveness should have no limits

(verses 21, 22).

"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."

Readiness to forgive others is a sign of repentance, and no limits should be set on it. We are to forgive, not merely seven times, but seventy-times-seven times. The Jewish practice was to forgive only three times. Rabbi ben-Jehuda said, *"If a man commits an offense once, forgive him. If he commits an offense a second time, forgive him. If he commits an offense a third time, forgive him. But the fourth time, do not forgive."* This concept was based on a statement found in the Book of Amos, chapter 1, verse 3.

In light of the Jewish practice, Peter thought that forgiving a man *seven times* was being generous. But Jesus says that there should be no limit to our forgiveness. We are to forgive (even the same person) over and over again—even *seventy-times-seven times* (verse 22). Some of the manuscripts say *"seventy-seven times."* Either way, Jesus expects a lot of forgiveness; in fact, forgiveness must be a constant attitude.

2. Forgiveness, a blessing God bestows upon those who accept Christ

(verses 23-27).

"Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And . . . one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt."

In this section Jesus told a parable to teach His disciples the unlimited scope of forgiveness. Jesus told about a king who wished to settle the accounts with his servants. In the course of the audit, the king decided to collect his outstanding debts.

One servant was brought before him who owed ten thousand talents. A *talent* was a large piece of silver that was worth 6,000 pence. A pence (or what *then* was called "a denarius") was the amount of money an average laboring man could earn in one day—and so to pay even *one talent* would require many years of work. It would be impossible to ever pay off ten thousand talents.

And so the king ordered that the servant (actually "a slave") be sold; he and his wife and family (and their possessions) were to be seized and sold (verse 25). For the king to get partial payment was better than *not getting* anything as repayment.

But the slave fell on his knees and begged the king to have patience with him. He pleaded for mercy and promised to repay the king (verse 26). Such a promise could never have been kept, but the king was moved by the man's request, and he agreed *to forgive* the debt. Out of pity for the man, the king released him and forgave him the debt (verse 27).

Surely, this part of the parable is a picture of our gracious God. It is entirely within His nature to show such abundant mercy.

3. Forgiveness should make us generous toward those who wrong us
(verses 28-33).

“But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?”

The servant who had just been released and forgiven of the debt he owed, went out from the king’s palace—and soon came upon one of his fellow slaves, a man who owed *him* a mere one hundred pence.

The servant who had just been forgiven grabbed the startled man by his throat, and demanded payment for the relatively modest amount of money. This second servant said essentially the same thing the first servant had said to his master: “Have patience with me and I will pay you all that I owe” (verse 29). But the man who had just been forgiven of so much, refused to forgive the second servant, and had him thrown into a debtor’s prison.

God has forgiven every one of us a great debt of sin, and therefore we should graciously forgive those who offend us. Ephesians 4:32 says we are to be kind and tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God has forgiven us. It is this awareness of the tremendous cost of our own forgiveness that keeps us *from refusing to forgive* those who mistreat us.

4. Failure to forgive others will bring terrible consequences (verses 34, 35).

“And his lord was wroth [angry], and

delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”

We must consider what unforgiveness does to us. In addition to corroding our disposition, it also elevates the blood pressure, upsets and ulcerates the stomach, and can lead to a nervous breakdown. Some have even experienced heart attacks. But much worse than those results is the fact that the Bible says that God will not forgive us if we refuse to forgive others.

In Matthew 6:15, Jesus says, *“If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* We can attempt to water down those words if we want, but Jesus plainly says that there will be no forgiveness for unforgiving people.

Every one of us is indebted to God. He forgives when we repent—but only if we practice forgiveness toward others. If we are holding *grudges* and *malice* and *bitter feelings* toward other persons, we had better quickly take some steps toward making peace.

To “forgive” does not mean that we excuse the sinful offense. When we forgive another person, it does not mean that we are excusing the sin. Sin is always sin, and true love never tries to make sin anything less than what it is. But forgiveness ends the bitterness, the anger, and the resentment which usually accompany an offense against us.

To “forgive” does not mean that we must shrug off the injustices that we have suffered. We need not say, “Oh, it was nothing,” or “No harm was done,” etc. True forgiveness does not ignore the wrong. True forgiveness says, “What you did really hurt me—but I value you as a person, and I value our relationship over whatever I may have lost, and so I forgive.”

To “forgive” is not necessarily “to forget.” The truly forgiving person *will refuse* to dwell on the offense, and will choose not to keep bringing it up—but sometimes there are reminders that we can’t control. When a matter is forgiven, then we must

not dwell on it—but it is possible that *the scars* will not soon be forgotten.

In Philadelphia in April 1958, a young Korean college student left his room to go only a short distance to mail a letter at a mailbox along the street. He was attacked by a gang of eleven local boys who were looking for excitement.

The young man (In Ho Oh) was badly hurt and died shortly after being taken to the hospital. Police apprehended the boys who had committed the senseless act; they were charged with murder and placed on trial.

When In Ho's parents heard about his death, the family met together and agreed to petition that lenient treatment be given to those who had committed the crime. The family, in fact, started a fund to be used for the religious, educational, and vocational guidance of the boys when they would be released from prison—hoping, they said, that they could do something to help minimize such brutal crimes in the future.

Ho's father was an elder in the Korean Presbyterian Church, and though the family was in deep sorrow over the loss of their son—they, in the maturity of their Christian faith, were willing to forgive those who committed the crime.

In January of 1999, an Australian missionary and his two sons fell asleep in their jeep in a village in India. During the night, an anti-Christian mob attacked the vehicle with clubs and sticks. They stuffed straw into the broken windows (and underneath the vehicle) and then set it on fire. They ignored the screams of Graham Staines and his two sons. The mob refused to let them out of the burning jeep. A report in the *New York Times* described the scene—calling it “a burning inferno.” The mob stayed to watch the victims die.

The wife of Graham Staines (and the mother of the 6- and 10-year-old sons) is still grieving over the loss of her husband and two sons—but she has chosen to forgive the men who destroyed three of her family members. In fact, Gladys Staines continues to carry on her husband's work. She has settled again into the village where they

operated a facility to care for people who have leprosy. The *New York Times* reported it this way: “She will continue to tell people the ‘good news’ (as she calls it) that the blood of Jesus, God's Son, can cleanse the world of sin.” The *Times* continued by saying that Mrs. Staines believes that “God is fair and just, and that divine purposes exist in all that goes on, even if those purposes are at times beyond our ability to understand.”

Gladys Staines continues to grieve and hurt deeply. Time and again, agony must sweep over her when she reaches for her husband who is not there, or when she yearns to hug her sons one more time—but their bodies are now in the grave. Yet she understands that we must forgive without questioning the goodness of God.

A fine Christian girl was telling some friends about a woman who had taken the seat beside her on a crowded train. The woman insisted on cramming a bird cage, a basket of apples, and two other small bundles in the small area between them. It was kind of crowded and uncomfortable for the girl. Some of her friends said to the girl who described her experience, “Why didn't you tell the woman that she was taking more than her share of the space?” The Christian young lady answered: “You know, it really wasn't worth making any trouble about it; we only had a little way to go together.”

That girl spoke a great truth with those words. “It wasn't worth making any trouble; we had only a little way to go together.”

That's how it is with life! When we tend to be frustrated and upset about some of the things that we face in our daily experience, remember:

- Most annoyances are only small things, and are not really worth noticing.
- Most unkindnesses should be passed over silently.

If our hearts are filled with a spirit of forgiveness, we won't quickly get upset when someone does things that cross our path. After all, we only have a little way to go together. Our life is only like a fragile blade of grass—and then it's all over here on earth.

(continued on page 23)



Counseling From the Word

Sin: An Often Misunderstood Construct of Counseling

by Jeremy Lelek

Highlighting sin as a legitimate variable causing emotional, relational, or mental problems with counselees has often been viewed as taboo within the counseling field. Even among Christians, to tell a counselee that issues of anger, depression, anxiety, or marital conflict most likely stem from sin in one form or another is labeled simplistic, and therefore of no use for the serious-minded counselor.

Complicating the situation are the “scientific” psychiatric labels that have been openly assimilated into an evolving “Christian” worldview. Such diagnostic labels include Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, Kleptomania, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, and Bi-Polar Disorder to name a few. The logical ramification that unfolds when such labels are naively accepted as objective scientific diseases is that Scripture itself becomes irrelevant as an appropriate means of counsel. Furthermore, to assume that sin is the etiology (i.e., root cause) of such complex disorders is viewed as archaic and biased. In the face of such criticism, the biblical counselor holds a special responsibility to develop an adequate knowledge base to explain these “labels” from the basis of Scripture. Such a venture will most certainly require an accurate theology of sin that moves beyond a one-dimensional behavioral view to a more complex understanding of the true nature of sin at work in the lives of believers.

The Law at Work

Worth noting on this discussion is Paul’s mention of his own struggle with sin and its impact on human motivation:

“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. So I find this to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand” (Romans 7:14-21).

Paul is painfully transparent here, and refers to sin as a “law” at work. It is a law incessantly motivating the heart against the person of God. One Bible teacher explains the “law” at work this way, “While the faithful strive after what is good, they find in themselves a certain law which exercises a tyrannical power; for a vicious propensity, adverse to and resisting the law of God, is implanted in their very marrow and bones.” Notice how he describes sin as “exercising a tyrannical power” over individuals (including believers). As such, sin is not diminished to merely the consequential or behavioral (e.g., drunkenness,

anger, adultery, etc.), rather it is conceptualized as the very origin of the consequential. Specifically, it is conceptualized as an inner law perpetually working on and in the heart of man. Parallel to this idea is to view the law of sin much like the law of gravity. For example, it is common knowledge that what goes up must come down. When a person sleeps, eats, or reads a book, gravity is a “law at work.” It is a constant force. The same is so with sin. Sin is a “law at work” within a broken universe, and it influences sinful behavior even in moments of attempted resistance. This reality is reflected in the words of Paul who confesses, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Romans 7:19).

If one misses the complexity of this aspect of depravity, it is no wonder the concept of sin would be so easily ruled out by psychology and psychiatry as a viable explanation of human behavior. Furthermore, if sin is only a matter of what one is “doing” then the answer alone is to “stop doing.” Yet, the words of Paul in the cited text highlight the futility of such an approach when he laments, “For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out” (Romans 7:18). Mere willpower cannot create a cessation of sin’s influence. Something, or more accurately, Someone alone stands sufficient for this task, namely Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the change process is not limited only to stopping sinful behavior (and this too is a significant aspect of counseling), but also to recognize how the “law of sin” permeates one’s thoughts, perceptions, responses, emotions, desires, and motivations. Then, upon understanding the universal permeability of sin’s influence on the entire scope of the human experience, this approach unpacks the nuances of sin, and helps specify detailed components that tend to influence the obvious behaviors often associated with sinful conduct. In other words, instead of focusing on behavior alone (i.e., drinking, arguing, etc.), this view of sin facilitates a deeper understand-

ing of the particulars within the heart that drive the behavior in question (i.e., desires, thinking, etc.). In essence, it places sin as a significant variable of motivation: a construct always ignored by secular models of human nature.

The Spiral Depravity

Sin always begets sin. The more a person gives him/herself over to sinful desires, thinking, and behavior, the more he/she will be given over to sinful desires, thinking, and behavior. Referring again to Paul, he writes, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Romans 1:21-23, ESV). He explains elsewhere, “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity” (Ephesians 4:17-19). While Paul is specifically referring to unbelievers in both of these passages, the patterns of degradation found within are applicable to believers. In Ephesians he is actually warning Christians against living as unbelievers, implying that the patterns of the old self are still prevalent for the person of faith. As one reads further in Ephesians, he even addresses this directly (Ephesians 4:22-24).

In these passages, Paul illustrates the seeming ability of sin to morph into greater and deeper sin. He speaks of individuals’ “futile thinking” moving their hearts toward darkness. He alludes to them becoming “calloused” due to their “hardness of heart.” These descriptors expose a process of evil that unfolds when

people give themselves over to sin. From this point of view, engaging in a sinful act does not end once the act has ended. Sin begins to nudge and urge and tempt the believer with greater intensity. It is a spiritual process that breeds corruption and hostility against God (Romans 8:6, 7; Ephesians 4:22). It is a process that often consumes the partaker. Unfortunately, the road to restoration, once given over to sinful patterns, can be quite arduous as a result. Willpower alone will most certainly prove to be insufficient to overcome the newborn struggle. Therefore, only addressing sin at the behavioral level (e.g., “Just stop acting sinfully”) is to miss much of the battle that is waging within the heart: the battle of thoughts, desires, lusts, and perceptions to name a few. Skilled counselors will seek to expose the entire labyrinth of sin that pervades these components of the soul. Not as a therapeutic means of “healing” akin to uncovering the unconscious, but as a means to self-knowledge that will assist in equipping the believer in fighting the war against the flesh.

This dimension of sin reveals the complexity of sin. Indulging in sin unleashes a horrible process in which darkness begins to cover the soul. The more that darkness covers the soul, the more the partaker of sin desires such darkness to dominate. The more this dynamic develops, the more difficult it will become to “put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). Sin, therefore, is one of mankind’s greatest enemies!

Conclusion

To assume that addressing sin is a simplistic approach to counseling is to reveal one’s lack of understanding of this doctrine. It reveals a poor view of anthropology. Sin is complex, pervasive, intentional, constant, hostile to God, corrupting, and deceitful. It is the essence of evil in man. In one way or another, it is the very origin

of all of man’s inner struggles. While this article does not even begin to scratch the surface of sin’s influence on human nature and motivation, it points to two critical components worth considering when counseling others: the component of sin as acting as a perpetual “law at work” and the capacity of sin to multiply once indulged by an individual. May this article serve not as an end, but a beginning, among pastors, counselors, and laity in continuing to develop a proper and biblical view of human nature that includes an accurate and thoughtful conceptualization of this essential component called sin.

It is also worth noting that methods of counseling are also insufficient to overcome this inner foe. Counselees, while learning the powerful influence of their own depravity, must simultaneously seek to recognize that hope is found in a Person—not a process. Jesus, and the hope found within His finished work alone stand sufficient to provide the hope and power to war against sin. Sin will celebrate momentary victories even for the most devout saint. But, it is in the face of this seeming victory, that believers may bask in the glory of Christ’s death and resurrection to spare them from the ultimate defeat of sin: eternal damnation and separation from God. The Christian tends to be too self-sufficient in this area, assuming he or she can add, by supposed good works, to the sufficient work provided in and by Jesus Christ. The battle against sin is only worthy to fight when it is fought on the stable foundation of the Cross. Any attempt to engage in this battle without this foundation will prove to be futile and devastating in the end. Therefore, pastors and counselors wield a profound responsibility to evidence the glory of God in the midst of this battle so as to facilitate deeper trust and hope in Him over and above “getting it all right” in the end. For the biblical counselor, there is simply no other way. ■

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TORN CONNECTIONS

by Daniel K. Carpenter

Have you ever experienced a bad storm where trees fell across the electric wires and tore them apart, putting your place or others “out of connection” with the power source? Or have you ever turned the key to start a piece of equipment only to find out it would not start because some safety wires had become disconnected? The good thing about these problems is that with a little physical effort, the problem can be solved by those who understand how such things work.

But a problem that is facing Christian families of today that is of a much greater magnitude and of a far more devastating effect is the problem of spiritual storms that are producing “torn connections” between the individuals and their Maker. Along with these “torn connections” comes a wave of influence such that Christian families now are forced into making decisions about how they will relate to such close family members (brother, sister, husband, wife, child, etc.). The purpose of this article is to give some Scriptural admonition and encouragement to any who are in the middle of such situations.

In looking at this subject, one is made keenly aware of the fact that a proper response in one situation may be improper in another situation. For instance, how parents with younger children at home may need to deal with a rebellious “teenager” may be totally different for another set of parents who have no younger children at home. Why? *“Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes”* (Song of Solomon 2:15). The one set of parents have more at stake in their response to this “torn connection.” Such situations behoove us to fall on our knees and beseech God for heavenly wisdom [James 1:5] to make the best choices.

Primarily, the goal of all our actions to such “torn connections” should be of a redemptive nature. Consider the story of Abraham and Lot. What did Abraham do

when Lot was taken captive? He and his servants went after the enemies and rescued Lot. What did Abraham do later on when God dealt with Sodom and Gomorrah? He interceded before God for Lot and his family. Abraham’s continued concern and response to “worldly” Lot was that of a redemptive nature. Though time and distance may have brought physical separations, his main concern was Lot’s well-being. As the people of God, we too must maintain this concern and not just totally write off the “torn connections” that we relate to. Oh, for more concerned intercessors as Abraham!

Second, we must maintain a clear vision of God’s interest in holiness. *“Be ye holy, for I am holy”* (1 Peter 1:16). This verse comes in the context of “putting off” the lifestyle of the unregenerate about us. Many people have made the mistake of trying to heal “torn connections” by moving the dividing lines of separation that God’s Word has already established in hope that social relationships can be restored. But what side wins in such situations? *“Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners”* (1 Cor. 15:33). That verse is a clear reminder of the fact that we cannot win the world by being “like the world.”

Third, we need to continue to practice and proclaim what God’s Word promotes. In Ephesians 5, we read about the need to reprove wicked living by not having part in their deeds (v. 7) and by speaking out clearly and kindly against such doings (v. 11). This has often produced opposition, but as children of God, we cannot stop doing this. In fact, for Noah, this must have been a very real challenge when we consider how none of his extended family went in with him into the ark. Surely, some of his family heard him tell why God was going to send the flood, and they probably went home convicted of their own lifestyle even though they did not change. Are you willing to be a

"preacher of righteousness" even to your close relatives? In relating at times to such, we'll find that very harsh accusations are voiced against the church leaders, etc., that we may be shocked to hear. It is very important that we are not unnerved and become sympathizers with them but rather that we refrain our lips from "sowing discord among brethren."

Another area that can be a real mountain to climb over comes in our response to their irresponsibility. For instance, wife and children may have to struggle along financially because of a "torn connection" where the father is wayward. This calls for the need to "forgive men their trespasses" so that God can forgive us. Joseph forgave his brothers for their wrongdoing and left their accountability for such doings in God's hands. As followers of Jesus, we too must take the road of forgiveness and dig out any root of bitterness that buds forth.

Proper priorities can be tested when we relate to visits from wayward family members. Should family worship be laid down because they are around for a day or two? Should their interest in sports, entertainment, etc., be the main conversational piece at the supper table? Should we take great interest in the sports car they may show up in and just have to check it all out?

What if they invite you over for a birthday party or something else? Should you always go so their feelings are not hurt? Remember, parents: do not step into such situations without some proper forethought. Romans 13:14 calls us to "make not provision [forethought] for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof." Suppose you get there and country music is playing or a TV is on that they do not turn off. What will you do? Should you just put up with it for a little while and then leave? I think not. Why not kindly remind them of your convictions and tell them you will need to leave if that is what is going to be happening? As spiritual life is quenched in a life, such situations can and may happen. Such happenings require some reasonable questioning before going, should there be a repeat invitation. Remember to "hold fast

that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21), no matter what situation you may face.

Since time, distance, and opposite directions of travel may bring less and less contact with our close family, I think it is still valuable to keep up a little bit of contact. Though prayer is probably the most effective agent in reaching out to them, an occasional letter, card, or phone call reveals the fact that we still love them as a person. May we follow our Master's example in going forth and seeking those sheep that have gone astray. ■

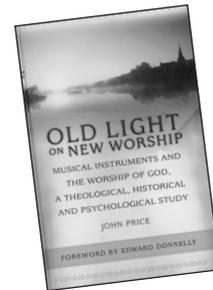
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SWORD AND TRUMPET

Job #10582
Signature

The Purpose of Sex

by Haven Bradford Gow

As Northwestern University professor of humanities Richard Kraut points out in his new work *What Is Good and Why: The Ethics of Well-Being* (Harvard University Press), it is wrong and mistaken to base the morality or immorality of any human relationship on the amount of pleasure given and received. Doing that shunts aside truly significant questions and considerations regarding respect, dignity, love, moral right and wrong, and God.

Any good human relationship is and should be based on respect: self-respect, respect for others, mutual respect. We cannot truly love or be friends with another unless we respect his/her God-given, intrinsic moral worth, and dignity.

Even so, Hugh Hefner has become an extremely wealthy and successful man by promoting the false and pernicious notion that the sole purpose of sex is to give and receive pleasure. Mr. Hefner, founding father of Playboy Enterprises, Inc., long has recognized that “recreational” sex can be and is an immensely profitable business. Thus, in his popular and successful magazine, he has emphasized photos of naked women in sexually suggestive and graphic poses and editorials, articles, and cartoons trying to provide “philosophical” justification for premarital and extramarital sex, oral and anal sex, sex with underage girls, voyeurism, incest, homosexuality, and abortion.

The Playboy lifestyle reduces sex to a plaything, human beings to mere bodies, and human bodies to sex machines. It denigrates the sacredness of sex, marriage, family, and human life. It is a lifestyle designed for insecure men and sexually-frustrated women who view sex not as a communion of life and love within the sacrament of marriage but

rather as a mere tool of masturbatory and voyeuristic gratification.

The results of the Playboy philosophy and lifestyle are everywhere to be seen: broken hearts, broken lives, broken homes, broken marriages, broken families. ■

The Importance of Forgiving Others ... cont'd from page 17

The person who follows Christ forgives because he himself has been forgiven of God. We have been forgiven of so much that forgiveness should be a way of life for us. In fact, we should forgive immediately even before we are asked to forgive; Jesus forgave even while enemies were driving nails into His hands.

It usually is not easy to forgive. A Jew (for example) finds it hard to forgive Adolph Hitler for the atrocities committed against the Jewish people during World War II—but when our hearts are transformed by the presence of Christ, we take a new attitude toward those who abuse and misuse us.

Mark Twain used to say, “*Forgiveness is the fragrance which the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.*” When people observe how we have been unjustly treated, and yet how forgiveness radiates from our lives—they sense the fragrance of Christ flowing from us. We are to be “the aroma of Christ” says the Apostle Paul (2 Cor. 2:15).

For Christians, forgiveness is not an option. It is a requirement (Luke 17:3, 4). No matter how difficult it may be at times, we are to forgive people and what they do to us. No matter how deeply we have been wronged, those offenses pale into the background compared to *our debt of sin* which Christ has already paid! ■

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Sermon of the Month



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

The Art of Balanced Discipline

by David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” —Ephesians 6:4

Notice that [Paul] mentions the fathers only. He has just quoted the words of the Law—“Honour thy father and mother” — but now he singles out the fathers because the whole of his teaching has been, as we have seen, that *the father is the one who is in the position of authority*. That is what we always find in the Old Testament; that is how God has always taught people to behave; so he naturally addresses this particular injunction to the fathers. But the injunction is not to be confined to the fathers; it includes the mothers also; and at a time like the present, we have reached a position in which the order almost has to be reversed! We are living in a kind of matriarchal society where fathers, alas, and husbands, have *so abdicated their position in the home* that almost everything is being left to the mothers. We have to realize therefore that what is said here to the fathers applies equally to the mothers. It applies to the one who is in the position of having to exercise discipline. In other words, what we are introduced to here in this fourth verse, and it is involved in the previous verse, is the whole problem of discipline.

We must examine this subject carefully, and it is of course a very extensive one.

There is no subject, I would say once more, that is of such urgent importance in this country,¹ and in every other country,² as this whole problem of discipline. We are witnessing a breakdown in society, and it is mainly in connection with this matter of *discipline*. We have it in the home, we have it in the schools, we have it in industry; it is everywhere. The problem confronting society today in every walk of life is ultimately the problem of discipline. Responsibility, relationships, how life is to be conducted, how life is to proceed! The whole future of civilization, it seems to me, rests upon this . . . I venture on this assertion, this prophecy: If the West goes down and is defeated, it will be for one reason only: *internal rot* . . . If we continue to spend our lives in jollification,³ doing less and less work, demanding more and more money, more and more pleasure and so-called happiness, more and more indulgence of the lusts of the flesh, with a refusal to accept our responsibilities, there is but one inevitable result—complete and abject failure. Why did the Goths and the Vandals and other barbarians conquer the ancient Roman Empire? Was it by superior military power? Of course not! Historians know that

1. England.

2. Especially in the United States of America—*Editor*.

3. **jollification** – merrymaking; boisterous celebrations.

there is only one answer: the fall of Rome came because of the spirit of indulgence that had invaded the Roman world—the games, the pleasures, the baths. The moral rot that had entered into the heart of the Roman Empire was the cause of Rome’s “decline and fall.” It was not superior power from the outside, but internal rot that was Rome’s ruination. And the really alarming fact today is that we are witnessing a similar declension in this and most other Western countries. This slackness, this indiscipline, the whole outlook and spirit is characteristic of a period of decadence. The pleasure mania, the sports mania, the drink and drug mania have gripped the masses. This is the essential problem, this sheer *absence* of discipline and of order and of true notions of government!

These matters, it seems to me, are raised very clearly by what the Apostle tells us here. I shall proceed to present these further to view and to show how the Scripture enlightens us in regard to them. But before doing so, let me mention something that will assist and stimulate your whole process of thinking. One of our problems today is that we no longer do our own thinking. Newspapers do it for us, the people interviewed on radio and television do it for us, and we sit back and listen. *That is one of the manifestations of the breakdown of self-discipline.* We must learn to discipline our minds! So I will give two quotations of Scripture, one on the one side, and one on the other side of this whole position. The problem of discipline lies between the two. Here is the limit on one side: “He that spareth his rod hateth his son” (Prov. 13:24). The other is, “Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.” The whole problem of discipline lies between those two limits, and they are both found in the Scriptures. Work the problem out in the Scriptures, try to get at the great Scriptural principles that govern this vital, this urgent matter, this greatest problem confronting all the Western nations, if not also others, at this hour. All our problems result from our going to one extreme or the other. That is never found in Scripture. What characterizes the teaching

of the Scriptures always and everywhere is their perfect balance, a fairness that never fails, the extraordinary way in which grace and law are divinely blended . . .

We come now to the question of the administration of discipline . . . Discipline is essential and must be enforced. But the Apostle exhorts us to be very careful as to how we exercise it because we can do more harm than good if we do not do it in the right way. . . .

The Apostle divides his teaching into two sections—the *negative* and the *positive*. This problem he says is not confined to the children: the fathers, the parents, have also to be careful. *Negatively*, he tells them, “Provoke not your children to wrath.” *Positively*, he says, “But bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” As long as we remember both aspects all will be well.

We start with the negative: “Provoke not your children to wrath.” These words can be translated, “Do not exasperate⁴ your children, do not irritate your children, do not provoke your children to become resentful.” That is always a very real danger when we exercise discipline. And if we become guilty of it we shall do much more harm than good . . . As we have seen, both extremes are altogether wrong. In other words, we must exercise this discipline in such a manner that we do not irritate our children or provoke them to a sinful resentment. We are required to keep the balance.

How is this to be done? How is such discipline to be exercised by parents? . . . Once more we must go back to Chapter 5, verse 18 [of Ephesians]. “Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.” That is always the *key*. We saw when we were dealing with that verse that the life lived in the Spirit, the life of a man who is filled with the Spirit, is characterized always by two main things—*power* and *control*. It is a *disciplined* power. Remember how Paul puts it in writing to Timothy. “For God,” he says, “hath not given us the spirit of fear; but

4. **exasperate**—enrage.

of power, and of love, and of a sound mind [*discipline*]” (2 Timothy 1:7). Not uncontrolled power, but power controlled by love and a sound mind—*discipline!* That is always the characteristic of the life of a man who is “filled with the Spirit” . . .

How, then, am I to exercise this discipline? “Provoke not your children to wrath.” This is to be the first principle governing our action. We are incapable of exercising true discipline unless we are first able to exercise self-control and discipline our own tempers . . . People who are filled with the Spirit are always characterized by *control*. When you are disciplining a child, you should have first controlled yourself. If you try to discipline your child when you are in a temper, it is certain that you will do more harm than good. What right have you to say to your child that he needs discipline *when you obviously need it yourself?* Self-control, control of temper is an essential prerequisite in the control of others. . . . So the very first principle is that we must start with ourselves. We must be certain that we are in control of ourselves, that we are cool. . . . There must be this personal discipline, this self-control that enables a man to look at the situation objectively and to deal with it in a balanced and controlled manner. How important this is! . . .

The second principle arises, in a sense, out of the first. If a parent is to exercise this discipline in the right way, he must never be capricious.⁵ There is nothing more irritating to the one who is undergoing discipline than a feeling that the person who is administering it is capricious and uncertain. There is nothing more annoying to a child than the kind of parent whose moods and actions you can never predict, who is changeable, whose condition is always uncertain. There is no worse type of parent than he who one day, in a kindly mood, is indulgent and allows the child to do almost anything it likes, but who the next day flares up in a rage if the child does scarcely anything at all. That makes life impossible for the child. . . . Such a parent, I say again, fails to

exercise a true and helpful discipline, and the position of the child becomes impossible. He is provoked and irritated to wrath and has no respect for such a parent.

I am referring not only to temperamental reactions, but to conduct also. The parent who is not *consistent* in his conduct cannot truly exercise discipline in the case of the child. A parent who does one thing today and the contrary thing tomorrow is not capable of sound discipline. There must be *consistency*, not only the reaction but also in the conduct and the behavior of the parent. There must be a pattern about the life of the parent, for the child is always observing and watching. But if he observes that the parent is erratic⁶ and himself does the very thing that he forbids the child to do, again you cannot expect the child to benefit from any discipline administered by such a parent. . . .

Another most important principle is that the parents must never be unreasonable or unwilling to hear the child’s case. There is nothing that so annoys the one who is being disciplined as the feeling that the whole procedure is utterly unreasonable. In other words, it is a thoroughly bad parent who will not take any circumstances into consideration at all or who will not listen to any conceivable explanation. Some fathers and mothers, in the desire to exercise discipline, are liable to become utterly unreasonable; and they themselves may be very much at fault. The report they have received concerning the child may be wrong, or there may have been peculiar circumstances of which they are ignorant; but the child is not even allowed to state the position or to give any kind of explanation. Of course, one realizes that advantage can be taken of this by the child. All I am saying is that *we must never be unreasonable*. Let the explanation be given by the child, and if it is not a true reason, then you can chastise for that also as well as for the particular act that constitutes the offense. But to refuse to listen, to prohibit any kind of reply, is inexcusable. . . . Such

5. **capricious** – guided by whim or fancy, not settled judgment; given to sudden changes.

6. **erratic** – given to sudden unpredictable change.

conduct is always wrong; that is to provoke our children to wrath. It is certain to exasperate and irritate them into a condition of rebellion and of antagonism. . . .

That leads inevitably to [another] principle: Discipline must never be too severe. Here is perhaps the danger that confronts many good parents at the present time as they see the utter lawlessness about them, and as they rightly bemoan it and condemn it. Their danger is to be so deeply influenced by their revulsions as to go right over to this other extreme and to become much too severe. The opposite of no discipline at all is not cruelty; it is balanced discipline, it is controlled discipline. . . .

Let me summarize my argument. Discipline must always be exercised in love; and if you cannot exercise it in love, do not attempt it at all. In that case, you need to deal with yourself first. The Apostle has already told us to speak the truth in love in

a more general sense; but exactly the same applies here. Speak the truth, but in love. It is precisely the same with discipline: it must be governed and controlled by love. "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." What is "the fruit of the Spirit"? "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22). If, as parents, we are "filled with the Spirit," and produce such fruit, discipline will be a very small problem as far as we are concerned. . . . You must have a right view of parenthood and regard the child as a life given to you by God. What for? To keep to yourself, and to mold to your pattern, to impose your personality upon it? Not at all! But put into your care and charge by God, that his soul may ultimately come to know Him and to know the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Free Grace Broadcaster*; Summer 2008.

■ JACOB AMMANN . . . cont'd from page 1 ■

Jacob Ammann became a converted Christian and practiced an outward appearance. Some people like to think of him as a mere "clothes Christian," but they should think about the statement he made: "Without a truly regenerated faith it is impossible to please God."

But he noticed that some people who were long-standing members were becoming complacent. He said they were "professing but not practicing, conforming but not transformed, having an outward form of godliness but denying the power thereof."

Hans Reist was an elder in the Emmental. In 1670-1671, he was expelled from the country with his wife, and his property was sold. He later moved back. But he was lax in disciplining sinners in his church.

In 1693, the Markrich congregation had a split. Jacob Ammann and Hans Reist were the ministers, with the larger group going with Jacob Ammann. Over the years church splits were known as "Anabaptist Disease." The Ammann group was not to serve in any political office. They paid 55 pounds a year to be exempt.

Jacob decided to have Communion twice a year. Reist opposed this and it resulted in severe church problems to the point that he had to get outside ministers, Niklaus Moser and Peter Giger, to help resolve this matter. The result was he had to go along with the practice.

Jacob also condemned the use of tobacco and immoral courtship standards.

One of the reasons Hans Reist resisted Jacob was because he was not born an Anabaptist but was a "Jünger" or "convert." The converts were usually more zealous than the birthright members. This caused some envy and other problems.

Hans claimed that he was the senior bishop and had more authority, but Jacob only said that the offices were equal.

—Atlee D. Miller

Sources: Personal visits to the Archives in Colmar, France, and interviews with Leroy Beachy and James Lowry.

This account of the life of Jacob Ammann was presented by Atlee D. Miller at the annual Amish Ministers' Meeting last November. Atlee is a trustee of AMHC and tour guide. Article originally published in Spring 2008 issue of The Flame, the newsletter of the Amish and Mennonite Heritage Center, Berlin, Ohio. The center is the home of Behalt, the 265-foot long circular mural depicting the heritage of Anabaptists as painted by the late artist Heinz Gaugel. More information can be obtained by visiting the website: www.behalt.com, or by calling 877-858-4634.



Song of the Month

Douglas A. Byler, Music Editor

This column welcomes the submission of original hymns. Please send hymns, as well as applicable information about the author and/or composer to: Douglas A. Byler, Sword and Trumpet, Box 575, Harrisonburg, VA 22803.

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

by Dyke/Beethoven

Lyrics: Although the original text for this famous tune was also on the subject of joy, it is much different from the familiar hymn that is printed here. The poem that Fredrich Schiller composed in 1785, which was the original text for this tune, is primarily written in praise of joy itself, with only passing mention of the God who alone can bring true joy. Schiller spends most of his poem discussing all the things in the world that should cause us to be joyful, including friendships, marriage, and nature. Towards the end of the poem he discusses the sun and the stars, and then concludes that “. . . over the starry firmament / A beloved Father must surely dwell.” He finishes the poem by exhorting his readers to “Seek Him above the starry firmament / For above the stars He surely dwells.”

The scenario of this hymn is a bit like the encounter that the Apostle Paul had with the Athenians on Mars’ Hill. Paul had observed an altar marked “to the unknown god.” Like Fredrich Schiller, the people of Athens had come to the conclusion that there was one God who was different from all the others in their Pantheon. Paul told them, “Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.” Henry Van Dyke’s “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee” has the effect of “declaring” more accurately the God referred to in the closing phrases of Fredrich Schiller’s “Ode to Joy.” It seems

almost that Dyke was working from the original “Ode to Joy,” because he uses many of the same ideas (“brother-love,” images from nature, and a reference to “Joy Divine”). The only difference is that instead of singing in praise of the joy that springs from these things, Dyke draws our hearts and minds to worship the God of the universe that created all these things.

Music: Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony is definitely one of the best-loved and most well-known musical works of all time. It was Beethoven’s last completed symphony, but he never got to hear it, even though he conducted its premier. He had begun having hearing problems while still in his twenties, and by the time of his Ninth Symphony, he was completely deaf. There is a story that after the first performance of the Ninth Symphony, one of the soloists had to turn Beethoven around for him to realize the tremendous applause of the audience. The fourth movement, from which this tune comes, is the biggest and grandest of the whole symphony, and usually lasts around twenty-four minutes. The main theme of the movement is the hymn tune as we know it, with only one minor rhythmic alteration. Edward Hodges arranged and harmonized the tune into a hymn in 1824, the very year the symphony was completed. ■

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob. —Psalm 81:1

HENRY VAN DYKE, 1908

HYMN TO JOY 8. 7. 8. 7. D

ARR. FROM BEETHOVEN, 1826



1. Joy - ful, joy - ful, we a - dore Thee, God of glo - ry, Lord of love;
2. All Thy works with joy sur-round Thee, Earth and heav'n re - flect Thy rays,
3. Thou art giv - ing and for - giv - ing, Ev - er bless - ing, ev - er blest,
4. Mor - tals, join the might-y cho - rus Which the morn-ing stars be - gan;



Hearts un - fold like flow'rs be - fore Thee, Hail Thee as the sun a - bove.
Stars and an - gels sing a-round Thee, Cen - ter of un - bro - ken praise;
Well-spring of the joy of liv - ing, O - cean-depth of hap - py rest!
Fa - ther - love is reign-ing o'er us, Broth - er - love binds man to man.



Melt the clouds of sin and sad - ness; Drive the dark of doubt a - way;
Field and for - est, vale and moun - tain, Blossoming mead - ow, flash - ing sea,
Thou the Fa - ther, Christ our Broth - er, All who live in love are Thine:
Ev - er sing - ing, march we on - ward, Vic - tors in the midst of strife;



Giv - er of im - mor - tal glad - ness, Fill us with the light of day!
Chant - ing bird and flow - ing foun - tain, Call us to re - jice in Thee.
Teach us how to love each oth - er, Lift us to the Joy Di - vine.
Joy - ful mu - sic lifts us sun - ward In the tri - umph song of life.



From Poems of Henry Van Dyke. Copyright, 1911, by Charles Scribner's Sons. Used by permission of the publishers.

What Difference Does It Make?

by Mark D. Avery

The Bible makes it quite clear. When a person comes to Jesus as Lord and Saviour, a sudden and dramatic change takes place in that person's life. Throughout the Scriptures, the message is that those who have a right relationship with God live a lifestyle quite different from the lifestyles lived by sinners.

Sin makes a radical difference. Yet we can also state that grace makes a radical difference. The Scriptures emphasize that we are children of someone, and our family relationship demonstrates itself in our lives. Jesus told one group of people, "Ye are of your father the devil." His statement took into account the attitude (lack of love) and the actions of those to whom He spoke; they were reflections of the attitude and actions of their father.

John was teaching this truth in 1 John. He taught that those who sin are of the devil, yet the character of righteous people was not simply that they had quit sinning, as important as that is. Accompanying the end of sinning was also the practice of righteous works and love. Was John teaching salvation by works? Absolutely not! Instead, John was teaching that our works, our whole manner of living, testify to the change that has taken place in our hearts. Paul emphasized this same truth in 2 Corinthians 5:17. The person who is saved has experienced a change of heart and life.

We do need some balance here. Neither Paul nor John nor Jesus was teaching that upon exercising saving faith a believer immediately becomes fully mature. Instead, the message was that a relationship with Jesus Christ trans-

forms sinners into saints.

This teaching seems quite different from the practical outworking of faith in the lives of too many. Rather than making a positive difference, statistics often indicate that "evangelical Christians" and the rest of society are very similar. Moral issues seem very important until the issue gets close to home. Moral lapses and soaring divorce rates among church people tend to contradict the teaching of the church.

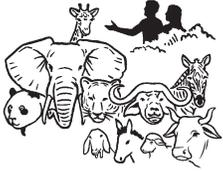
The solution is not as far away as it may seem. Believing that the Bible is still our final authority, we accept and believe its teaching regarding sin. Never does the Bible teach that we are so well saved that we cannot sin. Instead, the teaching is that we are so well saved that we need not sin. John said that Jesus' purpose in coming was to "destroy the works of the devil," to loosen sin's hold.

While believers will fight against Satan and sin for as long as this life lasts, the sacrifice that Jesus offered at Calvary is sufficient to give us victory in the fight.

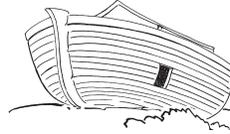
Does it make a difference? Sadly, much of the world of Christianity has too small an idea of what Jesus has done. His sacrifice is sufficient to overcome and destroy sin. Sin's hold is loosened and released when we savingly believe on Him.

Does it make a difference? Indeed! Jesus came to make this difference. What a privilege it is to live with this kind of victory. ■

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Beginning Issues



Dinosaurs and the Bible

by John Mullett

They have been glamorized by science, the media, Hollywood, and other sources, all the while capturing the imaginations of thousands. Some species have been portrayed as terrible monsters while others as docile vegetarians. Mainstream science says they died off some 65 million years ago and flatly declares they never lived alongside man. What is it about dinosaurs that's so intriguing, why all the fascination? Perhaps it was their size, although only relatively few kinds were actually very large. Maybe it's the mystery of finding the remains of creatures we have never seen and we're left to wonder what they were like? Certainly their existence and their extinction have been dramatized even to the point of creating a mystical aura about them, and this has been used frequently to promote (both blatantly or subtly) the teachings of an old-Earth and evolution.

I distinctly remember sitting in my sixth grade class trying to harmonize the existence of dinosaurs and the "fact" that man never lived alongside them and consequently had never seen one (alive). In my feeble attempts to rationalize a biblical timescale and this supposed fact that they were not contemporaries, the best I could come up with was a question about Adam and Eve being only two people, and if dinosaurs lived on the other side of the world, could they not have lived at the same time without man ever

seeing them? Of course my logic was flawed as it didn't account for the supposed millions of years of time since the dinosaurs supposedly died out, but because I accepted as fact the assumption that man never lived alongside the dinosaurs, I was in a quandary with no logical explanation if I was going to hold to a biblical timeframe. If we begin with false presuppositions, we are forced either to hold illogical positions in trying to defend the authority of the Bible or to compromise our position and reinterpret the Bible around fallen man's ideas. This is exactly what many have done in their attempt to explain dinosaurs and their existence. Some have compromised and believed they lived millions of years ago and died out long before man was on the scene, just as mainstream science teaches, while others have taken illogical positions like declaring that dinosaurs never existed. On one hand, accepting the millions of years means undermining the authority of the Scriptures, while stating they never existed may leave you trying to fabricate fanciful explanations for some of the fossils that have been found.

Does the Bible make any mention of dinosaurs? Is it possible to harmonize them with the Biblical timeframe and record of history? What should we be able to explain about them and what do we actually know about them for sure?

Did they look like the pictures we see? Do we know what their diet consisted of? Why are they extinct and how did it happen? We can research a variety of resources that answer any or all of the above questions stated as a matter of fact, but can they really be so certain and

how did they obtain that information? Does the position of mainstream science match up with all historical evidence? These are all things we will be examining in the next article or two, as well as looking to the Bible to see what insights it has for us. ■

“Purpose Driven” or *Patent Distortion?* (concluded)

by Larry Pauley

Verses are used out of context and placed in the author’s own context throughout the book. These are only a few small examples. The author does provide additional reasons for his use of Scripture in this way. In the appendix mentioned earlier Warren says he does this for the following two reasons:

1. He wants his readers to avoid missing nuances and shades of meaning.
2. He wants his readers to “see God’s truth in new, *fresh* ways.” (*Italics* his)

How interesting that his second reason contradicts the first. If you look at objective truth (which the Word of God is) in new, fresh ways, you are almost surely introducing additional nuances and shades of meaning. This is especially true when you choose to use paraphrases of Scripture and translations as though they were equals in their treatment of the text.

God’s Word deserves the best handling and treatment of which God’s people are capable. It is not seemly or right for those who would purport to be servants of the Lord Jesus to distort His Word in order to make a point in a book. Even a well-intentioned point is dangerous to God’s

children when it comes from truth that is twisted. Just ask Eve.

Distortion of the Gospel

I understand that the above point may leave some thinking, “It seems minor to me.” I am sad for that, but I know nonetheless that it is a probability. However, even a young believer in the Lord Jesus will grasp the significance of the trouble that comes when the very Gospel itself is distorted. And, though I hate to say it, this book distorts the gracious Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Briefly stated, the problem I have with the Gospel presentation of this book is that it does not mention biblical repentance, the reason Jesus died on the cross, or the eternal consequences of sin! Instead, the reader is simply asked to “whisper the prayer that will change your eternity: ‘Jesus, I believe in You and I receive You’ ” (p. 58). Warren continues by writing, “If you sincerely meant that prayer, congratulations! Welcome to the family of God” (p. 59). The author’s definition of the “Good News” later in the book goes no deeper—emphasizing the benefits of grace without

explaining man's desperate condition or God's command to repent (see pp. 294-95).

Friends, I am hopeful that you know the difference between the Gospel of grace as presented in God's Word and the travesty that is quoted in the paragraph above. Just a few relevant passages of Scripture ought to make the differences jump out at us.

James 2:19—*"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."*

Luke 9:23—*"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."*

Romans 10:8-13—*"But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

Acts 17:30-31—*"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."*

Consistently this book provides only a "soft" emphasis of the fact that man is dead in his sins. Infrequent mention is made of the holiness of God, the human flesh nature, the cross, absolute truth, commands of God, His sovereignty, and other concepts which are emphasized in the Bible—but which might interfere with making people comfortable. There is an

emphasis on family, on relationships, and even a section on how to be a global Christian. There is a warm, heartening, feel-good message, emphasizing what a person should be able to "get" from God. But it is not the Gospel!

The book uses an appeal to what the Christian life will secure for a person as opposed to leading a person to faith in Christ alone. This is dangerous because the way of a disciple doesn't always promise satisfaction in this life or some of the other things that are touted in the reviews of this book.

Temptation is discussed, yet the blame seems to be placed on Satan (instead of the sinner's own lusts as according to James 1:14-16). In addition, the first steps in a Christian's response according to Warren's advice is to begin "refocusing your thoughts" (p. 210) and joining a "support group" (p. 212)! Not only that, but patterns of sin are reduced to "a repeating cycle of good intention-failure-guilt." Then, compounding the errors of this pop psycho-babble approach, Warren takes a passage concerning physical healing from James 5 and says that people need "to be healed of that persistent temptation" as if they were sick instead of sinful! (pp. 212-213). What a travesty.

The intended audience of *The Purpose Driven Life* appears to include both believers and unbelievers. However, the book does not maintain a distinction between the two. In fact, several of God's promises, which apply only to believers, are discussed as if they apply to both groups. With such an approach unbelievers can become deceived and believe they are saved, when they have not even heard the Gospel that *does* save.

Such a candy-coated approach to the message of Scripture is distorted because it overlooks the fact that an unbeliever *does* have an identity, as well as a purpose in his life outside of a relationship with Christ. God's Word teaches, in fact, that man's purpose, nature, and identity are hostile to God. Man is fallen and totally

depraved apart from salvation. The declaration of these things is what makes the Gospel good news! When any so-called Gospel approach glosses over, minimizes, or ignores realities such as the seriousness of sin before a holy God, the need for salvation, that God is righteous, just, holy, etc., it removes any biblical reason for coming to Christ. In this case those right motivations for conversion are replaced with “fulfilling your life’s purpose.” And thus, as with so much that exists today, **it is a man-centered approach to the Gospel rather than one that is true and God-honoring.**

In contrast, the declaration of the Gospel and the teaching of Christ and His apostles placed proper emphasis on the full counsel of God—not just its most popular elements. Jesus, for example, talked more about hell than heaven, demanded that His followers repent (Matt. 4:17; Luke 5:32), insisted that believers take radical steps to deal with sin (Matt. 5:29, 30; 18:8, 9), and argued that true discipleship may cost a person everything (Matt. 10:32-39; Mark 8:34-38). The apostles, too, emphasized repentance (Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38; 20:21), highlighting the importance of doctrinal purity (Gal. 1:6-10; James 3:17), theological depth (Heb. 5:11-14), and total obedience (1 John 2:3; 3:24). While *The Purpose Driven Life* does not deny these themes explicitly, in failing to give them the weight and explanation Scripture indicates they deserve, it devalues them implicitly. And in a purportedly biblical discussion on the overall purpose of life, this is a distortion too great to overlook.

Distortion of the Purpose

It also cannot be overlooked that the book’s stated appeal is not that it accurately reflects Scripture or that it rightly proclaims the truth. Rather, it promises to “transform your life,” enabling “you to discover . . . how all the pieces of your life fit together” (pp. 9, 10). At the very outset the book claims that it will reduce the stress of its readers, simplify their decisions, and

increase their satisfaction while it helps them prepare for eternity. Warren even says, “I know all the great things that are going to happen to you. They happened to me, and I have never been the same since I discovered the purpose of my life” (p. 12).

The strategy seems clear: follow this book and you’ll be happier—look at what the Christian life can do for you. Not only are such claims emphatic and inflated, but they seem somehow different than the “advertisements” of Christ and the apostles—where following the Lord had a high price, meaning that it cost everything—including relationships, comfort, and even life itself.

While I have no reason to doubt the author’s sincerity or intentions, nor do I doubt that his life has improved dramatically since discovering what he believes is God’s purpose for him, I cannot help but be saddened by the claims that are made. What if God’s will for a Christian reading this book includes suffering? What about martyrdom? First Peter 3:13-17 makes this a distinct and biblical possibility. And the contemporary experience of tens of thousands of Christians around the world testifies that it is true!

This is a significant portion of the distortion that *The Purpose Driven Life* gives to its readers. It is another book written on the basis of current American Christianity as if it were the norm and the goal of what God has been doing in redemptive history. But take the book and its message to the huddled believers in countries controlled by Islamic extremist law and see how it works there. Ask the North Korean Christians meeting in underground churches how themed journals, compact discs, Bible covers, and resin figurines help them.

Please do not think that I have just taken a cheap shot. On the contrary, I am seeking to be restrained as I consider the distortion of purpose that the marketing of this movement has brought about. After the “success” of Warren’s earlier book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, his ministry made sure that “Purpose Driven” is a registered

trademark. This is a far distance from the example of the Apostle Paul who would not even take appropriate gifts from the Corinthian church so that he might be totally free to minister the truth to them! The many Purpose Driven™ products for sale leaves me with a very uneasy feeling. Scripture warns about those who would peddle the word of God for profit (2 Cor. 2:17, and chapters 10–13). While I am not trying to accuse the Purpose Driven™ movement of that particular sin, I am aware of how it appears and you should be too.

In a somewhat related vein, when churches get on board with the *40 Days of Purpose* campaign they gear virtually all of their congregational activities—the Sunday sermon and music, the Scripture focus, prayers, even e-mails—to each week’s theme. This is a tenuous practice as the Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit are potentially set aside while the church follows this program.

The distortion of the purpose of God in the Christian’s life goes on throughout the book. Chapter 5 is a case in point. Warren asks his readers, “What is your life metaphor?” and suggests that they replace whatever metaphor they currently have with one of three “Biblical” metaphors. He states, “The Bible offers three metaphors that teach us God’s view of life: Life is a *test*, life is a *trust*, and life is a *temporary assignment*. (*Italics his*) The problem is that while each of these items are true to one degree or another, NONE of these is ever stated in Scripture to be what life is primarily about. To reduce life to these items is simply shallow and simplistic and missing much of what God has for His people. Two things in particular come to my mind regarding this.

Isaiah 43:7 makes it quite clear that God created man for His own glory. God did not create man for man’s glory. The model of test, trust, or temporary assignment places man in the middle of everything, and that is the place reserved for God alone.

Secondly, God has already told us what

His “view of life” is, if you will see it. It doesn’t get mentioned much because it centers all on God and His plan and His purposes and His power to get it accomplished.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:28-39).

Now *that’s* God’s view of life!

If I wanted to be very picky there is much more in this book and movement to cause me concern as a pastor responsible for the souls of God’s people. An entire chapter discusses unity in the church as a primary goal, but there is no mention of doctrinal purity or truth as the basis of biblical unity. And the ecumenical drive of this

movement should not be overlooked. Ask a simple question to see why: what has to be sacrificed so that 4,000 churches of almost all denominational stripes (except Roman Catholic as far as I know) may use the same material?

The Purpose Driven Life is not outright heresy. In fact, it teaches many biblical concepts, but sadly it attempts to do so without genuine biblical support and teaching. And, as you have read, there are at least three areas of severe distortion that are dangerous for sinners to hear and for saints to believe. At the same time, its approach is typical of much of what is offered by the contemporary church—fluffy, feel-good, and watered-down.

Some might counter that this book would be a good starting point for new believers. However, I ask you to consider a couple of things. As demonstrated in this article, some of the teachings in *The Purpose Driven Life* are incomplete at best, and wrong at worst. Any new Christian who reads this (or any old Christian who

subscribes to it for that matter) may feel benefited in the short term but will need to “unlearn” some principles from this book in order to learn what is truly biblical in a relationship with God.

It is like this: a child may far prefer hot dogs and cotton candy to any other food that is available. And, as a treat at a county fair, these *may* not be bad for the child in measured amounts. But any decent parent would refuse to let their child’s diet consist of only those two items! The child would grow sick. And the child, if left to only eat those foods, would gain a very distorted idea of a proper diet. Perhaps a fatal idea. That is the problem with this book. It is not out and out poison (though the elements to create the poison can be found), but it is not anything healthy for the child of God to eat. Especially when that child has been commanded, “*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious*” (1 Peter 2:2, 3). ■

—Selected



Good Things From God

by Daniel E. Miller

I still remember the days. Test time in school, and there was nothing I wanted more than a perfect score. Somehow I had decided that a prayer before the test would be helpful, so as inconspicuously as possible, I would scrunch over the test, squeeze my eyes shut, and implore, “Please, dear God, please help me to make a good grade on this test. Please help me to make 100. Please, please, please. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

These days I don’t take many tests. But today I’m thinking about those test days again. Why did I pray those prayers for academic success? Did God really

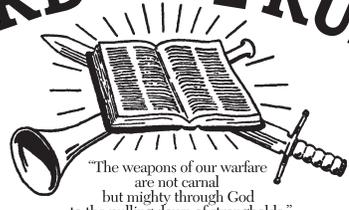
choose to answer them? What about the prayers I’m praying now, the requests I currently make of God? Do they bear any similarities to those test prayers of school days? What am I asking of God? What do I expect from Him anyway?

As I look at the concept of God that we as Christians sometimes embrace, it seems that too often we fall into the trap of wanting God for the sake of the things we hope to receive. Like common beggars we come into the presence of God, palms upturned for a handout. In doing so, we turn God into a benevolent Grandpa intent on passing out cosmic candy in the

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form of good health, financial prosperity, beautiful families, and overall success. In our prayers, we thank God for His “blessings,” using that as a code word for earthly ease and trouble-free days.

But God does delight in blessing His children, right? Don’t the good things of life come from Him? Doesn’t God tell us that He will give us the desires of our heart? Doesn’t God want us to enjoy the good and perfect gifts of which He is the author? Aren’t we told that He is the one who gives us richly all things to enjoy?

Dueling questions like these bring us to a dilemma. We know that God does want us to bring our requests to Him. We know that He does give good things to those who ask Him. At the same time, we know that we are called to think of others and not ourselves, to be selfless in spirit, always putting others first. So how should we pray, and what should we pray for?

An account from Scripture that is instructive in this dilemma is the story of a man with palsy who came through the roof to reach Jesus. Surrounded by spectators, Jesus reached out first to the spiritual need of the invalid man and forgave his sins. As the skeptics charged blasphemy, Jesus confirmed His power to work the eternal by performing the temporary. Speaking to the man again, He told him to take up his bed and walk. Why did He heal the man physically? So that you, He told the on-looking crowds, may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

Jesus’ first concern was not a better earthly life for the infirm man. Rather,

the One who could see from eternity past to eternity future knew that physical healing would only be a brief reprieve for an otherwise dying soul. Naturally then, He reached out first to the man’s primary need—forgiveness from sin. Only as proof of His authority to miraculously forgive sin, an invisible action, did He perform the visible action of miraculously healing the man physically.

What does this teach us about what we should ask from God and what we should expect Him to give? I believe that God wants our most urgent requests to be prayers that impact eternity—forgiveness for ourselves and the people we love. We must never be content to request Tylenol to endure life on this planet while ignoring the cure that will last forever.

While God does ask us to bring our concerns and needs to Him, including the tangible needs of everyday existence, His purpose in meeting those needs is always that He may be glorified. When He answers these prayers, His desire is that the onlookers, those who observe our faith from the outside, may know that our prayer-answering God also has power to forgive sins.

We must never present God to others as a mystical source of health and happiness, but rather proclaim Him for who He is, the healer of that spiritual disease—sin. Good things from God must point beyond themselves to reveal the power of One who can bring eternal life to a dying world. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *LIFE LINES of the Southeastern and South Atlantic Mennonite Conferences*, May-June, 2008.

As I look at the concept of God that we as Christians sometimes embrace, it seems that too often we fall into the trap of wanting God for the sake of the things we hope to receive.