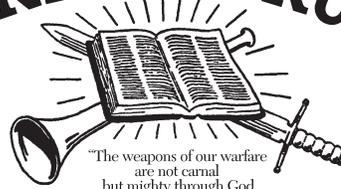


The SWORD and TRUMPET



"Blow ye the Trumpet and warn the People."

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

"Take the Sword of the Spirit which is The Word of God."

Founded in 1929 by Geo. R. Brunk I

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

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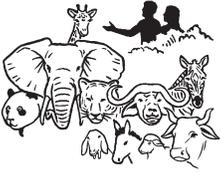
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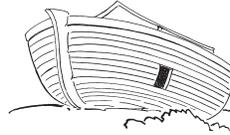
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Beginning Issues



Dinosaurs and the Bible - Part 2

by John Mullett

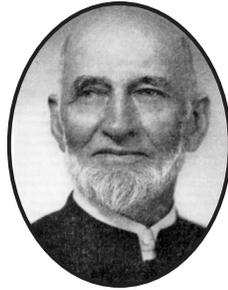
Regarding dinosaurs, maybe the first question we should address is, What should we be knowledgeable of and able to explain about the dinosaurs? Because of the way they have been portrayed by mainstream science, the media, and Hollywood, coupled with their “absence” in the present world, the subject of dinosaurs has been shrouded in an aura of mystery and imagination. When they have appeared in movies, it’s frequently been as terrible monsters either destroying or thoroughly terrifying everything that had the misfortune of crossing their path. They have been portrayed as giants who once ruled the earth for millions of years only to mysteriously disappear.

Much attention has been given to their disappearance, with theories ranging from the sun becoming too hot or cold, the earth’s climate becoming too wet or dry, and various comet/meteorite-related events involving either a collision or poison/chemical release upon passing nearby, just to name a few. But why all the mystery and all the theories? None of these have been observed. Their disappearance is only a mystery when you start with an evolutionary foundation. If we start with the Bible, it is clear God created the sea-dwelling dinosaurs on Day 5 and the land-dwellers on Day 6. Then approximately 1600 years later at the time of Noah there was a global flood

that wiped out all the land-dwelling dinosaurs (and all other land animals as well) except for those on the ark, which explains the vast majority of the fossil record we find today. The post-Flood environment would not have been nearly as “survival friendly” especially regarding food sources and climate stability. While the earth still has abundant vegetation in most areas, it is likely that some plant food sources were lost in the Flood, while others may have remained greatly depleted, thus making it harder for dinosaurs to thrive. It is likely that man killed dinosaurs (more on this later) for a number of reasons, and perhaps that is largely responsible for their extinction. One example of such an occurrence is the American bison (buffalo). Where once millions roamed the vast prairies of 19th-century North America, with the settling of the West and the building of the railroads, in just a few decades they were hunted almost to the point of extinction. Loss of habitat is also a common problem for many species. When changes come, they are unable to adapt for they lose out. Many other species have gone extinct and our endangered species lists are long (more are being added all the time), with many more on the brink of extinction. Without intervention many of them would certainly disappear forever. Perhaps
(continued on page 40)

Person of the Month:

Daniel D. Troyer (1870–1953)



Born in Stark County, Indiana, near Knox, on January 12, 1870, Daniel D. Troyer was the fifth child of Noah L. and Mary Schrock Troyer.

When Daniel was seven his family moved to Lagrange County, where they lived until Daniel was fifteen. The family moved again, this time to Coffee County, Tennessee, where Daniel lived the next four years of his life.

Daniel's entire schooling consisted of seven years of grade school. During his time in Tennessee he worked on the farm with his father.

For a year of his life Daniel Troyer lived in Alabama where he worked in a bakery. In 1889, the Troyers moved back to Indiana and Daniel decided to move back with them.

In 1890, at the age of 20, Daniel accepted Christ as his Saviour and Lord and, after baptism, was joined to the Clinton Frame Amish Mennonite Church. Shortly after his conversion, the church went through much difficulty, resulting in a division. This time of testing did not shake Daniel Troyer's faith in the Lord. At the age of 22, on September 23, 1892, Brother Troyer was ordained as a minister at Clinton Frame.

At his church he had met Mary Elizabeth Pletcher, whom he then married January 8, 1893, a little over three months after his ordination. Their home was a place of hospitality to all. As the years progressed, the Troyers took care of their parents in their home, as well as a niece, and later a granddaughter, after their married daughter passed away.

In 1893 Daniel also held a series of meetings at the nearby Salem Mennonite Church.

Brother Troyer was also very active in the Indiana-Michigan Amish Mennonite Conference. In 1894 and 1900 he served as conference Corresponding Secretary. In 1896 he was appointed as Home Evangelist for the conference, and in 1903 he was elected as the State Evangelist. As State Evangelist he had the responsibility of visiting all the conference churches in Indiana during that conference year.

A farmer, Brother Troyer had rented a farm for many years, but in 1905, at the age of 35, he bought his own farm a few miles east of Goshen.

In 1920, at the age of 50, Daniel Troyer was ordained bishop to assist the rural mission work of the conference District Mission Board. This responsibility was very time-consuming. As a result of his work a number of new congregations were organized.

In 1932 Brother Troyer was ordained bishop again: this time for the Clinton Frame Church.

From 1931-1942 Troyer served as a member of the Executive Committee of the Mennonite Publishing Board and was the board president for two years and vice president for nine.

Daniel was a reader and student of God's Word. He also had learned well, at an early age, the value of hard work, saving, and managing finances well. As a result, he was a competent, sought-out financial counselor and helped many people make good financial choices as he matured.

In 1946, when Brother Troyer was 76, his wife of fifty-three years went home to be with the Lord. At this time Daniel retired from active ministry but still preached occasionally for the next four years.

In 1948 Daniel Troyer married Mrs. Ada Lehman of Oregon.

On July 18, 1953, Daniel D. Troyer died in his home at the age of 83. His funeral was held at the Clinton Frame Mennonite Church with burial at Clinton Union Cemetery. —*Gail L. Emerson*

Lies Mennonites Believe

by Chester Weaver

Now Mennonites will strongly declare that they believe no such things. The Word of God is clear on these matters. Mennonites go by the Word of God. We have a long history of going by the Word of God. Why say such a terrible thing? Why make such a blanket statement?

Facts are stubborn things. Statements have as much weight as the facts behind them. Facts persist when all the statements are silent. Facts are embarrassing sometimes. And sometimes we say in our hearts, "Don't confuse me with the facts."

Jesus said, "By their fruits [facts] ye shall know them." He also said, "Where your treasure is, there is your heart also." In other words, facts and more facts accumulate around us by virtue of where our heart is. I might say that my heart is one place, but if the facts accumulate at another place, the facts tell me where my heart really is regardless of what I say.

We could examine the historical record to gather facts about the past. After all, Mennonites have been Anabaptist for nearly five hundred years. We have a long story already and have piled up quite a few facts during those five hundred years. The accumulation of facts from the past are what they are and can either be ignored or reckoned with. They can be explained away, swept under the rug of pious statements of belief, conveniently ignored, twisted to make a better appearance, or looked at for what they actually are. To face problems head-on, to reckon honestly with problems (facts), is always a virtue. Some historians have done so—commendations to them.

But we live in the present. We most definitely are products of the past and that includes some lies we have inherited.

Lies we have a problem being honest about. Lies that we have been comfortable with. Lies that we have chosen to live with. Lies that continuously exact a toll among us. Lies that we could correct. After all, truth is of God. Truth will remain when all the lies have wilted to hay. What will we do about these lies?

Now some Mennonites will deny the lies. Good Mennonites have the truth in their corner. The weak Mennonites may be struggling with lies but not the good ones. The good Mennonites thank God that they are not like the weak ones who believe the following lies.

A Little Worldliness Will Never Hurt Anybody

God's ways are far above human ways; His thoughts are far above human thoughts. So it is admittedly a challenge to think and act like God would have us to. We are so human and we live with humans whose ways are earthly. We are earthly. Can we be honest about that? We simply are prone to think and do like humans, not like God. We must break out of our earthliness to think and behave in heavenly ways. And that is just why the Holy Spirit is in the world, to help us think and live in heavenly ways.

Who among us would claim to be free of earthly ways of thinking and doing? None. At least we are that honest. And I see evidence of heavenly thinking and doing when I look closely at Conservative Anabaptist people today. I wish I could see more, but I rejoice in what I see.

Have you ever heard statements like, "What's wrong with that?" Have you ever heard, "What's right with that?" Being honest, the first statement is usually the product of earthly thinking, trying to

justify something questionable. The second statement is more likely to be a product of heavenly mindedness. Its immediate thought is about God, not me.

The earthly mind is forever trying to find ways to be earthly and heavenly at the same time. God thinks such seeking is sick, a non-understanding of His pristine ways. He spends no time or energy trying to figure out what is wrong with Satanic devices. Satanic devices are a non-issue for His consideration.

But Mennonites wonder about Contemporary Christian Music, shrinking head coverings, sports of all kinds, snowboarding, water skiing, entertainment DVDs, shorts, chewing gum in church, and hunting trips. After all, a little worldliness never hurts anybody. Let's get the good and leave the bad.

Jesus simply says, "Friendship with the world is enmity with God." Some Mennonites believe Jesus is lying. After all, a person must have some fun. Fun is good. We must make progress. Some of this outmoded stodginess is downright sickening. God expects us to be fulfilled as persons. Love and relationships are more important than making issues out of what is worldly or not.

Jesus simply says, "Fine. Pursue your line if that is what you want. I have better things, unworldly things, heavenly things, delights that surpass by far the best of worldliness. My ways, my delights, my secrets will remain with those who know Me for Who I Really Am. I am unworldly, I am solid substance, I am eternal, I am everything that is pure, right, and good. I will not force anyone to choose his own best interest."

God and Mammon Make a Good Combination

Older Mennonites who would not think of being worldly in other ways believe Jesus could use some economic enlightenment. Jesus' teaching, taken literally, just isn't practical. Who gives to everyone who asks of him? Who sells what he has

to put in bags that do not wax old? Who follows Jesus when there is work to do? We cannot be so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good.

And so our businesses get bigger and better. We say we have "Business with a mission," or better yet, "Mission with a business." And we play with our money. We enjoy making money work. The money is Christ's money. The money goes to worthwhile causes. It is really nice to have so much fun contributing to good causes. God is blessing us.

Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Mennonites think that where a person's heart is, that is where his treasure is. Jesus disagrees. He says it the other way. "Where your treasure is, there your heart is." Ouch!

Mammon simply means "riches." Jesus says, "You cannot serve God and mammon." But Mennonites do not serve riches; they use riches to serve God. How many Mennonite and Amish millionaires exist today?

And so we work hard from morning to night. We get the work done. The businesses are well cared for. They thrive; they prosper. At what price?

Why do many Mennonite young people leave the church of their parents? Why do many young people go to Bible schools with a poor or mediocre relationship with their parents? Why are young people so woefully ignorant of sound doctrine? Why is church a secondary issue? Why do Mennonite youth gravitate to technology gadgets? Why are Mennonites often shallow? Why do Mennonites have the number of marriage problems they do? Why does Contemporary Christian Music or Country music or Rock music appeal to Mennonites? Why is a young man judged by the price of his pickup truck? Why are sports so important? Why are cell phones the rage? Why is it said that Mennonites know how to raise gardens but they do not know how to raise boys?

Riches matter most. Money is the

priority. Time with God, meditation, interferes with work time. Reading is an unmanly thing to do. Family time comes at the end of the day when the work is done. But even then we must hurry to bed, so that we hurry to sleep, so that we can hurry to get up and hurry off to work. And at work we must focus on our work so the work gets done right. Then we hurry home for supper and hurry to church.

Is this what Jesus had in mind when He said, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon"?

The conservative Mennonite world is disturbed today. The disturbedness is manifesting itself in a multitude of church problems that no one knows how to deal with. These problems extend across the entire conservative Mennonite spectrum. No group is exempt.

Lots of crying; who is praying? Lots of activity; who is laboring for the Master? Lots of riches; where is the eternal gold? Lots of material things to show for; where are the spiritual giants? Where is God? Maybe He is just leaving us to our own devices.

Brothers Are for Fighting

A person of non-Mennonite background who sent a son to a Mennonite school said to a Mennonite one day, "Mennonites may be nonresistant but they sure know how to fight."

How is that?

Is it possible that "concerns" have become the "fiery darts of the wicked"? Have we become "accusers of the brethren"? Have we become expert "note pullers"? Have we shot our wounded? Is our pride causing "contentions"? Have we backed into the corner of exclusiveness?

What would happen if *my* group of Mennonites got together with the express purpose of discovering and learning what *other* Mennonite groups are doing to further the Kingdom of Heaven? Could my group come up with a list of a dozen evidences of what others are doing? One

step farther, what would happen if a cross section of conservative Anabaptist groups got together to address the problem of failing to benefit from each other? Could such a meeting happen?

Is it possible to make a list of all the positive qualities of a church group I do not belong to? Is it possible to seriously commend a brother not of my group for cooperating with God? Is it possible to visit other church groups to discover the positive qualities there (not the negatives)? Are our minds really humble enough, honest enough, to be objective with the qualities of others?

It has been said that conservative Anabaptists are at war with each other. Too true. Civil war is the worst kind of war to have because it directs energy toward destroying a people who should be united in facing a common enemy from without. How effective are we battling the forces of evil while we are directing destructive energy toward other Anabaptist groups? What more could be done for the Kingdom of Heaven if we could stand shoulder to shoulder with each other in The Common Cause while at the same time respect each other with our differences?

Certainly real differences do exist. Certainly some Mennonite churches have done better than others in fighting the perennial problem of worldliness and personal selfishness. Some have done better at keeping apostasy at bay than others. But do conservative Anabaptists have more in common with each other or more in common with non-Anabaptist churches? If commonality exists, why tear down? Why not seek to build, to contribute?

The Anabaptist legacy is at risk today. The liberal Mennonites have lost the Anabaptist Vision. Yes, they talk about it but where is it lived and practiced? Their version of the Vision is peacemaking, even on the political level, a denial of the basic Anabaptist premise of separation of church and state.

What about the conservatives? Honestly, they seem to be doing better than the liberals but unfortunately, they too, have lost much of the original vision. Many of the conservatives could not give an inquirer a simple, concise answer as to the essence of their own historic vision. Furthermore, in practice they are too often denying the basic Anabaptist principles of love and nonresistance. Are Anabaptist churches known universally for their internal brotherly love? Yes, when it comes to Brotherhood Aid. Yes, when it comes to humanitarian assistance. I wish it were Yes, when it comes to Brotherhood function.

After five hundred years of existence we ought to be experts on reconciliation by now. Are we? Do we not need rather someone to teach us how to reconcile? Are we known as healers, restorers? Or are we known for our factions? Are we well practiced in forgiveness? Praise God the whole world received a lesson in forgiveness from the Amish at Nickel Mines. Are we that exemplary among ourselves? Are we giving the whole world a lesson there? Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one for another."

Restoration work, reconciliation work, is hard work. It cuts across the flesh. A reconciler automatically runs the risk of being sucked into the negative dynamics he is seeking to reconcile. He will likely be considered a meddler or being partial. He may fail at the reconciliation. If so, the whole project may end up worse than it was. Who wants to take on risks like that? Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

If we can take calculated economic risks, can we take risks here?

Second Timothy 2:1 commands us to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Are we obedient to this command? We have all received strong measures of grace but are we extending strong measures of grace to our brothers and sisters?

What does it mean to be Christlike with grace? Are Mennonites overflowing with grace? Observation indicates that Mennonites are better with truth than they are with grace. Without letting truth slip, could we become just as strong in grace?

One of the saddest facts of this generation is that the Mennonite side of the Anabaptist people and the Amish side of the Anabaptist people seem to have little interest in learning from each other. Or even being gracious with each other. Each side has a wealth of quality it could offer the other side. But each side seems to be threatened by the other. Is it insecurity? Is it pride? Is it spiritual laziness?

Whatever the problem, we need to get over the problem quickly. Both sides are losing today because of the lack of wholesale learning from each other. Think of the potential of the opposite. Is it even thinkable to have a meeting where each side publicly blesses the other side for its preserved qualities and asks humbly for help with its struggles? Or are we hopelessly locked into the old mentality of getting off the boat coming down the Rhine because the other side is on board? Can we learn from each other without a strong measure of grace?

Is such a dream ecumenical? To some Mennonites it is. The dream will be labeled compromise. But does such an effort need to sink to the lowest common denominator? Or could each help lift the other up? An undertaking like this would require enormous amounts of humility. With our legacy of humility, could we collect enough to make this happen? Or are brothers for fighting?

The Anabaptist contribution record is impressive. The early Anabaptists refused to believe the biggest lie of their day—church and state must be united in order to have a cohesive society. By cooperating with the strong grace of Christ working within them, the course of history was changed. The historical record indicates that the Anabaptist people have

(continued on page 7)

From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

What Should I Read?

Our reading may be taken as a rule, as the great indicator of our moral, intellectual, and spiritual condition. Hence the seriousness of the entire question of Christian reading.

There is a growing distaste for solid reading, specially amongst young Christians—though alas it is not confined to them. Newspapers, religious novels, sensational tales, all sorts of poisonous and trashy literature are eagerly devoured, while volumes of weighty and precious truth lie uncut and neglected on the book shelf.

All this is most deplorable. Indeed it is difficult to conceive how anyone possessing a single spark of divine life can find pleasure in such defiling rubbish as one sees nowadays, in the hands of many who occupy the very highest ground of Christian profession. The inspired apostle exhorts all Christians, “As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:1). How can we grow if we can neglect the Word of God, and yet devour newspapers and light worth-

less books? How is it possible for any Christian to be in a healthy condition of soul who can barely find a few hasty moments to run his eye over a verse or two of Scripture, but can give hours to desultory reading? We may depend upon it, our reading proves, beyond question, what we are, and where we are. If our Christianity is of a solid and earnest type, it will be distinctly evidenced by our habitual and voluntary reading to which we turn for our recreation and refreshment.

The extremely low spiritual tone of Christianity among us is owing, in many cases, to the reading of light and worthless literature. How can a soul prosper, how can there be growth in divine life, where there is no real love for the Bible or for books which unfold the precious contents of the Bible to our souls? All truehearted, earnest Christians—all who really love Christ, will be found diligently reading the holy Scriptures and thankfully availing themselves of any good, helpful books which may come within their reach. They will have

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neither time nor taste for light literature. With them it will not be a question as to the right or the wrong of such reading; they simply have no desire for it, they do not want it. They have something far better.

It may be, however, that some of our friends would repudiate altogether the habit of reading human writings. Some there are who take the ground of reading nothing but the Bible. They tell us they find all they want in that peerless volume, and that human writings are rather a hindrance than a help.

We certainly cannot take this ground. We bless the Lord, each day, more and more, for all the gracious helps vouchsafed to us by means of the writings of His beloved servants. We should just as soon think of refusing to hear a brother speak in the assembly, as of refusing to read his writings, for what is either but a branch of ministry given of God for our profit and edification?

We are, none of us, self-sufficient. It is the divine purpose that we should be helpful one to another. How many will have to praise God throughout eternity for blessings received through books and tracts! How many there are who never get an atom of spiritual ministry save what the Lord sends them through the press. It will be said, "They have the Bible." True, but all have not the same ability to fathom the living depths, or seize the moral glories of the Bible.

Human writings, if not clothed with the power of the Holy Ghost, are just so much wastepaper. And in like manner the voice of the public preacher or teacher, if not the living vehicle of the Holy Ghost, is but the sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. We have rarely met anyone who refused the help of human writings who did not prove exceedingly narrow, crude, and one-sided. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Evangelist of Truth*, June 2008.

Lies Mennonites Believe . . . cont'd.

made a positive impact on the history of Western civilization and on non-Roman Catholic Christianity. Many Mennonite young people have no idea that this has happened. It is unfortunate that many older Anabaptists do not know these facts either. If more Mennonites would spend more time discovering them, a perspective about their peoplehood would change. When these facts are discovered, an automatic respect settles in for the Anabaptist Vision. And more importantly the Anabaptist Vision becomes relevant for today—the Anabaptism of authentic New Testament Christianity working the New Testament vision out in the world today.

People who know where they came from know where they are going. Anabaptism has a positive record like very few groups have. Anabaptism has recently made some important impacts on history. Will this continue and even increase? If increase is to happen, Mennonites must stop believing their own lies. They must steadfastly refuse to believe many of the popular lies around them.

What will happen? ■

Chester Weaver is the administrative dean of The Shepherd's Institute.



THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

SEPTEMBER 7, 2008

The Call to Repentance

Mark 1:1-8; Matthew 3:1-3

September's lessons are taken from Mark and Matthew, focusing on the beginning of Jesus' ministry and principles of His kingdom. Today's lesson focuses on Jesus' forerunner and his announcement of the coming Deliverer. He also gives a hint of the nature of Jesus' kingdom. John's work was preparatory, but it was essential in establishing groundwork for Christ and His message.

The phrase "The beginning of the gospel" indicates the start of something new. Mark goes on to identify what that was as explained and heralded by John the Baptist. It was the coming of the Son of God to fulfill God's purposes for His people, to provide salvation and deliverance from sin. He was announcing the long-awaited Messiah.

Mark establishes the authenticity of his statement by referencing the prophets who had spoken of this event and identified the herald. (Our text from Matthew 3 identifies Isaiah as the prophet.) The prophecy described the venue and the content of the message. This "voice in the wilderness" was to prepare men's hearts for the more complete message of the Messiah.

The effectiveness of John's preaching is evidenced by several things. His message was pointed and clear (Matthew 3:2). The people understood the message and accepted the call to repent (v. 5). The people were not primarily attracted to John. He was a simple man (v. 6), but his

message was in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17), that great Old Testament prophet revered by all Israel. And, obviously, the people were ready for a new era of spirituality. The prophets had been long silent. The people were in expectancy and their now heightened awareness through the preaching of John opened their hearts to respond.

No doubt a large part of John's success can be attributed to his humility. He recognized his role as subservient and secondary to that of Messiah (v. 7. See also John 3:30). But that he fulfilled his role faithfully is evidenced by Jesus' statement of approval in Luke 7:28. John was truly a great man, but he was only a player in God's overall plan.

The One to whom John pointed and the scope of His message are the highlights of this passage from Mark. As Mark began expounding "the gospel of Jesus Christ" he laid groundwork to verify that this Jesus of whom he was writing was indeed the promised One sent from God, proclaimed by the prophets of old, and verified by His forerunner John.

That "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" focuses on repentance, speaks also of the beginning step to new life in Christ, that of repentance. The rest of Christ's gospel builds on that premise.

For thought and discussion

1. Find examples in the Old Testament to verify Mark's statement of the coming of Messiah, "as it is written in the prophets."
2. How did John prepare the way for the coming of Jesus? Why was this preparation necessary?

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3. What was the difference between John's baptism (vv. 4, 5) and Jesus' (v. 8)?
4. Be sure to note the servant attitude of John. His attitude carries a pertinent message to all in prominent roles.
5. What does it mean to repent? What are the evidences of repentance? Discuss.

SEPTEMBER 14, 2008

The Birth of Messiah

Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-15

Today's lesson drops back in time 30 years from last Sunday's and focuses on the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. Last Sunday's lesson focused on "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ"—today's on the (human) beginning of the Messiah Himself. He was the One "mightier than I" of whom John spoke. Our lesson from Mark established the basis of entrance into the kingdom. Today's establishes the Person through whom one gains entrance.

We know the story of Jesus' birth well. We rehearse it every year at Christmas-time. Our lesson today will focus on His impact on the world and His verification as God's Messiah for the people of Israel. Joseph lent Him legitimacy; the prophecies gave Him authenticity.

Jesus' birth was very inauspicious, occurring in humble surroundings, of humble parentage, in an obscure corner of the world. But it carried earth-shaking implications, not only for the Jews of His time, but for mankind in all eras of time. He was the only One of all time to perfectly model God's requirements. He came to live among men and to show them the way to please God. (The next two lessons provide examples as to how this is done.)

Jesus' mission, as stated by the angel to Joseph, was to bring salvation to His people, the Jews. Matthew, in this passage, verifies that all that was happening was in direct fulfillment of prophecy

and under the protecting care and guidance of the heavenly Father (see 2:13-15). His plan was moving toward fulfillment.

We notice in this passage how God used common people to forward His plan. That He used human beings in His plan gave credibility to His purposes. If people like Joseph and Mary could be useful in God's plan, maybe we, too, can be of some use to Him. This would be logical and accurate human reasoning.

Notice how Joseph's obedience both enhanced and enabled his role, and also (2:13-15) preserved the life of the newborn Messiah. Mary's obedience, too, figured largely in God's plan. Both Mary and Joseph had much to lose socially and emotionally by becoming participants in God's plan, but they laid aside personal feelings and willingly entered into God's will for them. Their example provides an important lesson for us.

So what does all this mean for us—for mankind? Jesus came to bring salvation for mankind. Through His completed work and by personal repentance we can experience spiritual deliverance and put ourselves into position to practice kingdom principles in our lives.

For thought and discussion

1. Explore the implications and impact of the Son of God coming to earth and the resulting blessings for mankind. Discuss with your class.
2. Explore Old Testament prophecies related to the coming of Messiah and their fulfillment in today's lesson. What does this tell us about prophecies yet unfulfilled?
3. Joseph in today's lesson shows us a model of obedience to God even though it may have been personally costly. How can we best model his example?
4. Have you ever stopped to ponder why God chose this method to bring the world's Saviour to earth? Why do you think He did it this way?

5. Reflect again on the impact Christ's birth on earth has had on your life. Then thank God for the privilege of being His child.

SEPTEMBER 21, 2008

Principles of Christ's Kingdom

Matthew 5:1-16

We've learned in the past two lessons that the way into Christ's kingdom, which we here define in the narrow sense of becoming a Christian, is through the act of repentance and faith in the work of the Saviour, God's Son. This lesson, and the next, outline some principles of behavior expected of those in that kingdom. Every organization has behavioral guidelines for its members. The kingdom of Christ is no different in this regard. Christ's followers will behave in certain ways. In this passage He outlines in broad terms some of those life-defining behaviors.

It should be noted here at the outset that these are not "kingdom of the world" principles, but "kingdom of heaven" principles, and delivered not to an unbelieving multitude, but to those whom Christ had chosen to follow Him (v. 1). To attempt to apply these principles broadly in society, as some today are attempting to do, is to miss the point that these are behavioral guidelines for those who have turned from a self-life to one that honors God by attitude and action. They are impossible standards for the unregenerate mind. As Eerdman puts it ". . . aside from the truth of the divine person and redeeming work of Christ [these principles] would fill the heart of the hearer with bewilderment and despair."

You will notice that the Beatitudes speak first of all to the inner life, attitudes of the heart, the development of personal spirituality. But they also speak

to one's relationship to others—showing mercy, making peace. Jesus says that those who live by these principles will be blessed, happy, and fulfilled. The implication is also inherent that such a life will be noticeable because that person will be blessed by God (see v. 16).

However, a life guided by these principles will not always be understood or appreciated by others. Jesus warns that there will be persecution, reviling, and false accusations against those who embrace His kingdom's principles as a way of life. But we are not to be deterred by such threats or actions on the part of detractors. Not only will God enable us in the present—there awaits a glorious reward in heaven for the faithful (v. 12). We should, in fact, consider it a privilege to suffer shame and abuse for His name.

The Christian life is to be proactive, not passive. Christians are called to "flavor" the world and to provide light in the midst of darkness. Just as a candle is lit to provide light, so a person is saved to illuminate men to what one can become in Christ. To hide that light is to deny its purpose and power. We are to be witnesses to the saving grace of Christ and living examples of the transformation this brings. The purpose is to attract others to our heavenly Father.

For thought and discussion

1. Why are the principles taught in this passage not valid for the unbeliever? What essential element is missing?
2. The practice of these principles comes with a promised blessing. Do we sometimes miss the full blessing promised? If so, why?
3. Salt flavors and preserves. Apply these principles to the Christian's impact on the world.
4. Doesn't it seem that at times Christians are more adept at hiding their light than at putting it on display? Why is this so? Discuss.
5. Look at verse 16. Where do we tend to miss it in light of this verse?

SEPTEMBER 28, 2008

Servants of the Kingdom

Matthew 20:17-28

Jesus' life and ministry were drawing to a close. He was on the final leg of His journey to Jerusalem where He would face the suffering and death He knew awaited. On this trek He again reminded His disciples of this impending trauma. He had repeatedly told them of this before, but they had not understood nor comprehended what He meant (see Mark 9:32; Luke 18:31-34).

To mitigate the impact of His suffering and death, Jesus also informed the disciples that He would rise again to life. But, again, the total concept of what Jesus was saying escaped them. It did not fit with their current thinking and only came to mind following the resurrection (see Luke 24:6-8).

Just following this discourse on the ultimate cost of servanthood, two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, came with their mother Salome to make a request of Jesus. They came as supplicants with a professed attitude of humility, kneeling before Him, but their motive was wrong. They were seeking positions of honor, not of service. Also, their concept of the nature of Jesus' kingdom was misunderstood. From their perspective they desired positions of honor in an earthly kingdom (see Acts 1:6).

Jesus did not condemn their request; He simply asked if they were prepared to face the consequences of that request. They responded, "We are able," little comprehending the implications of that statement. Jesus assured them that they would indeed drink of His cup. James suffered martyrdom, John banishment, for their commitment to Christ and their work in His kingdom. The positions of honor these men sought will be decided by the Father.

These men were only human and not only did their humanness show through

in their request, but it also surfaced among the other ten disciples. Human nature seeks personal prominence, and it is difficult to see others advance above ourselves. Jesus did not condemn James and John for their request, nor the ten for their indignant response. Rather, He used the situation as a teaching experience.

Jesus began His lesson by referring to how secular rulers govern, with authority, subjugation, and lordship. In the secular realm, people are ranked by their importance and position. But, Jesus said, that is not the way it is to be in His kingdom. The way to greatness there is through service, humble service, by thinking of others above oneself. This principle was taught throughout the New Testament (see Romans 12:10; Philippians 2:3).

To cap His argument, Jesus referred to Himself, the very Son of God whom they acknowledged as such, as the ultimate in servanthood. He did not come to be served, but to serve by giving His life to ransom mankind from sin. Disciples are to take a lesson from their Master.

For thought and discussion

1. Why did the disciples have such difficulty understanding Jesus' comments about His suffering and death? Why was this foreign to their thinking?
2. What was the relationship between Jesus and James and John that would have seemed to add legitimacy to their request?
3. Why were the other disciples upset over James and John's request?
4. It is, of course, futile to speculate on who might be given the seats of honor in Christ's kingdom. However, it might be interesting to discuss whom we think might be on God's short list. Who do you think might qualify, and why?
5. A valid question for us today could be, Are we willing to drink Jesus' cup? What might that involve for us? Discuss.
6. Why is servanthood so difficult? 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

Coming Persecution: Europe, Turkey, Canada

Because the Muslim world lives a life that is in many external aspects more similar to the teachings of Christ than that of mainstream Christendom, it has received the brunt of the increasing religious persecution in the West. However, those that follow the teachings of Christ in a consistent manner are also in danger. France already bans religious symbols, including veilings and head-coverings, from the classroom. This is a gross violation of religious freedom.

Fuel was added to the fire when a Muslim in France sought a marriage annulment because he found that his bride was not a virgin. She had lied to him and told him that she was a virgin. This was a clear breach of trust and the marriage was initiated under false pretenses. French law says that if the “essential qualities” of a spouse are misrepresented, nullification is allowed. The French courts logically ruled that the marriage could be annulled. However, a huge outcry (on the left and the right) was raised in France because, as an expert on French secularism said, “In a democratic and secular country, we cannot consider virginity as an essential quality of marriage.” The rector of the Paris Mosque, Dalil Boubakeur, added, “Today, the judicial system of a modern country cannot hold to these savage traditions [of expecting virginity at marriage], completely inhuman for the young woman.”

Other incidences of increasing religious

persecution include Canada and most European countries criminalizing as “hate speech” sermons, literature, and other speech that criticize homosexuality. An MP (member of parliament) in France was fined \$6000 for saying that homosexuality was “inferior” to heterosexuality and that homosexuality would be “dangerous for humanity if it was pushed to the limit.” LifeSiteNews.com writes: “The introduction of ‘hate speech’ laws in France and Britain symbolize the dismantling of democracy that is rapidly underway in Europe, a former Soviet dissident and key witness against the Soviet Communist Party warned last fall in Brussels.

“Comparing the ideologically-driven policies of the European Union with the record of Communist Russia, Vladimir Bukovsky said the EU’s enforcement of political correctness was a symbol of the Union’s slide toward a similar oppressive regime.

“The Soviet Union used to be a state run by ideology. Today’s ideology of the European Union is social-democratic, statist, and a big part of it is also political correctness,” Mr. Bukovsky said in an interview with Paul Belien for the Brussels Journal. ‘I watch very carefully how political correctness spreads and becomes an oppressive ideology . . . Look at this persecution of people like the Swedish pastor who was persecuted for several months because he said that the Bible does not approve homosexuality.’

“While he acknowledged that a significant gulf still separated EU policy enforcement from the oppressive control of the Soviet

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

regime, Mr. Bukovsky warned that European countries are nonetheless under enormous pressure to conform to EU ideology.”

The latest example is the very secular and Western country of Turkey passing a constitutional amendment reversing a decades-old constitutional prohibition on wearing headscarves in colleges. Ironically, the extremely powerful and secular judiciary ruled that *the constitutional amendment was unconstitutional* and is considering whether to disband the current government and ban them from politics for five years.

Several Belgian municipalities have “prohibit[ed] covering the forehead, the cheeks, the eyes, the ears, the nose and the chin” in public. The Netherlands has legislation pending (66% of the population supports it) which bans clothing that covers the face. In Germany two students were suspended for “disturbing the peace” when they came to school wearing a burqa. The city/state of Berlin in Germany has banned all religious symbols in public institutions.

Boubakeur concluded his remarks by saying, “We ask Muslims to live in their era.” Indeed, Muslims and Christians are being asked, yea coerced, to not only live in their era, but to adopt the moral values of their era—atheism, secularism, and humanism—as their guiding light. The only way we will survive this persecution is with an alive, daily, active, healthy, involved relationship with Christ that includes surrender to Him and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

—Sources: *AP*, *BBC*, *Wikipedia*; Excerpt from “France MP Fined for Criticizing Homosexuality Under ‘Hate Speech’ Law” in *LifeSiteNews.com* (<http://tinyurl.com/544uwn>); Further reference: “Laws against hate speech” in *Wikipedia* (<http://tinyurl.com/dr26z>)

Israel Likely to Strike Iranian Nukes

Senior Pentagon officials and Israeli military sources have indicated that once one of two red lines are crossed, Israel will launch strikes against the Iranian nuclear facilities. The two red lines are the imminent completion of the enrich-

ment of enough uranium for a nuclear bomb or the imminent delivery of the new, advanced SAM (surface to air missile) systems ordered from Russia by Iran. The latter would make the strike much more difficult. Israel underlined its ability to carry out such a strike and elevated its preparedness by recently carrying out a huge air strike exercise over the Mediterranean. The exercise simulated striking a target at roughly the same distance that Israel has to Iran’s nuclear facilities. —Sources: *ABC News*, *Reuters*

Afghanistan Heats Up, Iraq Cools Down

The Taliban has been rebuilding in Afghanistan and has been ratcheting up attacks on coalition and Afghan troops. For two months in a row, coalition deaths in Afghanistan have exceeded those in Iraq. This reflects both a rise in violence in Afghanistan and a drop in Iraq.

—Source: *CNN*

The High Price of Inflation

Americans for Limited Government’s *GetLiberty.org* and Steve Forbes of *Forbes* business magazine make a compelling argument that the Fed (the Federal Reserve Bank, which sets the interest rates and how much money is in circulation) should only work to control inflation, not try to boost the economy or solve the subprime mortgage crisis (which was brought on by poor investment/banking decisions). If you want to better understand some of the economic (especially monetary) issues that face the U.S., yea the entire world, I would suggest you read the entire thing: <http://tinyurl.com/3jzf38>

—Sources: *GetLiberty.org*, *Forbes*

Suggested further reading: “The Return of Inflation?” (<http://tinyurl.com/486mxq>) by Robert Samuelson in *The Washington Post*, “Banker warns over Fed’s credit moves” in *The Financial Times* (<http://tinyurl.com/6osu37>)

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Marine Acquitted in Haditha Killings

Anti-war and anti-US groups used the Haditha incident as a trumpet blast to proclaim U.S. atrocities in Iraq. The first Marine charged in the incident has been declared “not guilty on all counts” by the jury. Seven more Marines will be tried.

—Sources: AP, AFP

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9/11 Mastermind Asks Judge for Death Penalty

“GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba – Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the reputed mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks, told a military judge at his arraignment Thursday that he welcomes the death penalty as a way to martyrdom and ridiculed the proceedings as an ‘inquisition.’

“One defendant said he deeply regrets not joining the hijackers who crashed passenger airliners into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a Pennsylvania field.

“I have been seeking martyrdom for five years,’ said Ramzi Binalshibh, the alleged main intermediary between the 19 hijackers and al-Qaida leaders. ‘I tried for 9/11 to get a visa but I could not.’

“Asked if he understands that he could be executed if found guilty, Binalshibh said: ‘If this martyrdom happens today, I welcome it. God is great. God is great. God is great.’ ”

—Excerpt from “Accused 9/11 mastermind asks judge to be executed” in the AP (<http://tinyurl.com/4uy6o3>)

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Dole to McClellan: You're a 'Miserable Creature'

“Bob Dole is furious with Scott McClellan’s public criticisms of the Bush administration, telling the former White House Press Secretary in an e-mail

Thursday he is a ‘miserable creature’ who is ‘spurred on by greed.’

“There are miserable creatures like you in every administration who don’t have the guts to speak up or quit if there are disagreements with the boss or colleagues,’ Dole wrote in the personal e-mail. ‘No, your type soaks up the benefits of power, revels in the limelight for years, then quits, and spurred on by greed, cashes in with a scathing critique.’ ”

—Excerpt from “Dole to McClellan: You’re a ‘miserable creature’ ” on CNN (<http://tinyurl.com/5w42px>)

Suggested further reading: “McClellan gives no new evidence” (<http://tinyurl.com/6gq929>) in *The Washington Times*

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Obama Makes Hawkish Comments on Iran, Israel

“Democratic presumptive presidential nominee Barack Obama vowed Wednesday he would work to ‘eliminate’ the threat posed by Iran to security in the Middle East and around the globe.

“The danger from Iran is grave and real and my goal will be to eliminate this threat,’ he said, adding loudly to add emphasis that he would do ‘everything’ to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

“US Democratic presumptive nominee Barack Obama said Wednesday that Jerusalem must remain the ‘undivided’ capital of Israel, in a speech to a powerful US-Israel lobby group here.

“Addressing the group in almost his first act since claiming the Democratic nomination late Tuesday, Obama said he was a ‘true friend’ of Israel and that the US bond with the Jewish state was ‘unbreakable.’ ”

—Excerpts from “Obama says goal ‘to eliminate’ Iran threat” (<http://tinyurl.com/3pc64z>) and “Jerusalem must remain the undivided capital of Israel: Obama” (<http://tinyurl.com/429c9x>) from AFP

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"Pray for a nice car!"

As we (a group of pastors, leaders, and mission-minded individuals from conservative Mennonite churches in the US) were staying at a hotel in an Arab nation, we met two young hotel clerks with whom we spent several hours explaining the gospel. The one man was relatively open, but the second man (whom I shall call Muhammed) was very condescending and dismissive. Eventually they had work to do and we had to terminate the conversation while still in the middle.

The next day, due to a double booking, Muhammed had to arrange a different hotel for us. He walked us to the other hotel and was detained by the police on the way because it is illegal to walk with tourists without a permit. He was allowed to go with us to the hotel, but they took his identity card and he had to later go to the police station to face charges. He was very unhappy and expected to spend several months in jail.

As we were waiting in the lobby of the second hotel for our rooms to be arranged, we all knelt on the floor in a circle around him and prayed in Jesus' name that the charges would be dismissed. Three minutes later he got a call on his mobile that they indeed had been dismissed! He was ecstatic, saying, "Prayer works! Please pray for a nice car for me too!"

While his materialism showed itself, his heart had been incredibly softened; his humility and openness was a diametric opposite of the previous day. Our group leader and I spent the next hour or so answering his many questions about the gospel and sharing our own testimonies. Through it all he asked thoughtful questions, which were not "gotcha" questions as before, but rather questions that had an attitude of a hunger to learn.

Toward the end of the conversation, he told us that he sees his sin and understands and needs Jesus' forgiveness, but demurred on making a decision because it was such a big decision and he didn't feel right making it quickly. Later that

night he called us and asked if he could come over and we could teach him how to pray. Muhammed is very close to the kingdom; please pray for him!

This is only one story of dozens we have from traveling around the Middle East. If you would like to request a booklet containing this story and many like it, drop me an email at hansmast@hansmast.com.

Further suggested reading: "Soccer, Kebabs, and Injil, 07: Witnessing to Muslims" in *Momentum Magazine* (<http://tinyurl.com/43watk>) which gives more stories similar to ours.

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Voice of the Martyrs Offers Free Copy of *Tortured for Christ*

Go to <http://tinyurl.com/3gyko2> to claim your free copy of *Tortured for Christ*. VOM describes the book as "the book that shocked the nation. After surviving fourteen years in communist prisons, Pastor Richard Wurmbrand came to America to proclaim the trials and testimonies of our persecuted brothers and sisters.

"In *Tortured for Christ*, Wurmbrand tells of his imprisonment for his work with the underground church and introduces the work of The Voice of the Martyrs."

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Suggested Reading

"[Obama's] Strategy Was Based On Winning Delegates, Not Battlegrounds" (<http://tinyurl.com/59txj6>)

"In Defeat, Clinton Graciously Pretends to Win" (<http://tinyurl.com/3sqynj>) in *The Washington Post*

"Is Bush Becoming Irrelevant?" by Patrick J. Buchanan in *Human Events* (<http://tinyurl.com/6yvwza>)

"Learning from the Oil Shock" (<http://tinyurl.com/5458by>) by Robert Samuelson in *The Washington Post*

Feedback: hansmast@hansmast.com

Challenging The Lord's Prayer

I cannot say *OUR* if I live only for myself.

I cannot say *FATHER* if I do not endeavor each day to act like His child.

I cannot say *WHO ART IN HEAVEN* if I am laying up no treasure there.

I cannot say *HALLOWED BE THY NAME* if I am not striving for holiness.

I cannot say *THY KINGDOM COME* if I am not doing all in my power to hasten that wonderful event.

I cannot say *THY WILL BE DONE* if I am disobedient to His Word.

I cannot say *ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN* if I will not serve Him here and now.

I cannot say *GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD* if I am dishonest or seeking things by subterfuge.

I cannot say *FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES* if I harbor a grudge against anyone.

I cannot say *LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION* if I deliberately place myself in its path.

I cannot say *DELIVER US FROM EVIL* if I do not put on the whole armor of God.

I cannot say *THINE IS THE KINGDOM* if I do not give the King the loyalty due Him from a faithful subject.

I cannot say *THE POWER* if I fear what others may do.

I cannot say *THE GLORY* if I am seeking honor only for myself.

I cannot say *FOREVER* if the horizon of my life is bounded by the things of today.

Bringing Up Children as Servants

by Simeon Rudolph

Christian parents must accept and apply some paradoxical truths to faithfully fill their God-given calling. In personal experience, we die to live and we give to gain, and in parenting we chasten to love and we rear our children as servants to develop sons and daughters.

By divine inspiration, Paul wrote that “a child, differeth nothing from a servant, . . . until the time appointed of the father” (Galatians 4:1, 2). This parenting principle seems foreign to the natural man, but easily aligns in the spiritual mind. “Before honour is humility” (Proverbs 15:33), and “The last shall be first” (Matthew 20:16) are similar Bible truths.

What does this principle teach Christian parents?

1. Our sons and daughters are servants. This divinely planned role for mankind at Creation was not changed by the Fall. But fallen man denies and resists servanthood, still trying to claim the liar’s promise “Ye shall be as gods.” Christian parents must work to weed this falsehood from the mind of every child.

Children “go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies” (Psalm 58:3). This Bible truth is evident in the nature of a crying infant, demanding to be lord over others. Teaching the young child that he is a servant in the home is life’s first and most important lesson. Gently, yet purposefully, Mother works to establish a schedule in his life. The child soon learns that loud and long crying is not the key to happiness.

Our children are not *our* servants, but God’s servants. When children help us, they are serving God with us. Just as “the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli” (1 Samuel 3:1), so our children learn to serve God by our side and under our direction. To effectively teach ser-

vanthood, how important it is that Father and Mother understand their role as servants of God!

2. Good parents build lasting relationships. A physical relationship is inherent between parents and children at birth. But physical relationships alone are shallow and short-lived. Lasting relationships are built with enduring spiritual virtues—love and respect for God and others.

True love cannot be contained in thoughts and words; it is expressed in service. Teaching our children to serve is helping them learn how to love their parents and lays the foundation for other good relationships in their lives.

When children are young, Father and Mother determine the quality of the parent-child relationship. But when our children, like Moses, come to years, they will decide whose son or daughter they will be—a child of God or of the world. The foundation of Moses’ choice to identify with Israel rather than Egypt was laid in childhood when Amram and Jochebed taught Moses to be a servant. Pharaoh’s daughter only taught him to be a son. Even after years in Pharaoh’s household, the faith and teaching of Moses’ godly parents remained the strongest influence in his life.

A servanthood mentality builds moral fiber into the character of children. Serving together cements the parent-child relationship and engraves parental teaching and example in their lives. Our success or failure in teaching our children to be servants will determine the strength of our family ties and the endurance of our family faith.

3. Servanthood precedes sonship. This basic Bible truth applies in the natural and spiritual family. No person knows God as Father, or Christ as Lord, until he,

like Saul, is ready to bow and say, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

Think of the younger son in the prodigal parable: viewing himself only as a privileged son and heir ruined his relationship with the Father, and separated him from home and godliness. But when he was ready to return and say, "Father, make me a servant," the relationship was restored—Father gladly received him and called him "my son" (see Luke 15:11-24).

Our children and youth will not understand and appreciate the blessing of godliness and a Christian home until they are ready to serve beside their godly parents at home. Parents with vision teach children to be servants in the natural family long before they can grasp the value of service and sonship in the family of God.

4. *The best time to teach service is in childhood.* When children are young, the desire to help usually surpasses the ability to help. But wise parents harness and encourage this desire, turning it into a lifelong service mentality. Under parental direction, lacking ability soon wanes if the blossoms of desire are not stifled and ruined.

Teaching service in childhood requires parents and children spending time together. Faithful mothers, like Hannah, are keepers at home with the young children, and fill a primary service-teaching role. Much purpose and patience is required. But Mother's work will surely be rewarded. Her children, who have learned to serve, will "arise up, and call her blessed" (Proverbs 31:28).

Providing work and service opportunities for growing children is Father's responsibility. The best teaching occurs when instruction and example are combined as Father and sons work together. This need sometimes calls for Father to adjust his occupational interests, even sacrificing some business opportunities and income to provide work and fathering for his sons. How sad if fathers in the church today are like David—men after God's own heart—but are rearing

Amnons and Absaloms, sons who have never learned the value and discipline of service.

5. *Teaching children to serve is a delicate matter.* Few parental responsibilities call for more concern and carefulness. Loading young shoulders with too much work will discourage children, even provoking them to wrath. Requiring too little allows slothfulness and idleness to grow up beside the virtues of diligence and servanthood. Asking children to outperform parents is demanding too much; thinking our children will never surpass us is expecting too little. Both criticism and commendation are helpful when balanced, but if given carelessly, both will ruin the child. Especially challenging is keeping pace with the rapidly expanding capacities of our growing sons and daughters.

Teaching children to serve is rewarding, but not easy. No lasting lessons are learned quickly. Diligence grows among the disciplines of schedule, order, and routine (Isaiah 28:10). Complaining about difficult tasks or school assignments may not be allowed. We should willingly assist children when help is needed, but never pity them when work tests their ability.

Every Christian parent should expect his children to go beyond parental levels of ability and attainment. But we cannot set our children on the path to excellence in service by pushing them beyond us. As the Scripture commands, we "bring up" our children, lifting and leading them upward to stand beside us as equals in Christian service. Then, like Paul, we confess to them that we have not yet attained, and inspire them onward by pointing to higher goals of service and sacrifice in the great cause of Christ's kingdom.

Bringing up sons and daughters as servants prepares our children for a lifetime of service and an eternity of honor. "If any man serve me, him will my Father honour" (John 12:26). ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Home Horizons*, July 2008.



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 expositional 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.

Stand Fast

by J. Otis Yoder

Christians have a sure foundation for life as described in Deuteronomy 32:4: "He is a Rock, his work is perfect . . ."

The Apostle Paul encouraged believers to **stand fast** when he wrote 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17.

In these verses Paul encourages believers to stand fast by calling attention to certain **realities**.

Our Calling

Our calling is the first reality upon which we stand. "God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation." You are not an afterthought with God. We have been rescued from constant change and brought into security.

This came about through the sanctification of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit began to deal with us and brought us out of this state of utter confusion and uncertainty into a place of salvation and security.

It also came about through belief of the truth. Our perception of truth may change but truth never does; it is absolute. We have been chosen to salvation through the Spirit and belief of the truth.

We are also called to discipleship. He called us by the Gospel, God's Word to us, the good news of salvation. We are sure of certain realities and one of them is our calling. The Gospel is our good news to come and follow the Lord.

In addition, we will obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nobody in the flesh can appreciate all that means. Peter, James, and John once got a glimpse of it on the Mount of Transfiguration.

We have a reality that makes it possible for us to stand fast because of our calling. We have been chosen to salvation and called to discipleship. We were made for fellowship with the Lord. We don't have to be moved about all the time because our calling gives us security. By this reality we stand fast.

Our Condition

Our condition is another reality enabling us to stand fast. Our condition stands on tradition. Certain truths are tradition; that is, they have been given over to us and we have no right to alter them. A good example is the truth of only one way of salvation. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes unto the Father but by me." That is a tradition, a true truth.

We are not to alter the message but to transmit it. Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father's house and the only way to the Father's heart. That's it. Our condition is rooted on tradition. The Apostle Paul said we are to hold the traditions, basic truths that cannot be changed.

Our condition is promoted by teaching. There is no teaching until there is

learning. I can say all I want, but unless you accept what I say as the truth, you haven't learned anything. The truth must come into your mind. The Thessalonian believers were taught, for they have received the Word.

The Apostle recognized several ways by which this teaching may take place. He said, I was there among you by word, I taught you face to face. You heard me speak and you accepted the truth as I gave it. Now you also have received our letter, our epistle. He had written a first one and this is now the second one. There are at least two ways by which teaching may take place: face to face by the spoken voice, and by using the written page.

In reality we are first called to stand fast. Then we find our condition rooted on tradition and promoted by teaching.

Our Consolation

Our consolation is the reality by which we stand fast. Our consolation springs from God's love. Paul says, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us. . . ." Our consolation springs from God's love in giving His Son.

Jesus expressed that love from the cross with these words: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." What wondrous love! God gave His Son; the Son gave His life.

Our consolation issues from God's grace. God's grace is His favor toward us. Ponder again the marvelous grace of God. How rich and free, how abundant! It is amazing grace, for "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." That is the favor and grace of God.

His good hope for us goes beyond the now. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:19: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." Our hope goes beyond this life. We rest in the consolation which issues from God's grace. Our consolation also rests upon God's purpose and that

should be a comfort. We are not looking around for all kinds of change. We are looking around for a place on which to stand. Our consolation rests on God's purpose because He is going to work out in us every good word and work.

We have every reason to stand fast because these realities are sure: our calling, our condition, our consolation. Do you know these realities in your life? ■

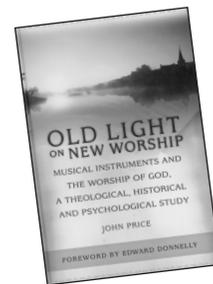
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God in Man's Image

by Rut Etheridge III

Wild at Heart, by writer and counselor John Eldredge, is a book dedicated to helping men recover a biblically based self identity. Though it contains some helpful insight and commentary, especially on the damage done to gender roles by cultural forces of political correctness, the key principles of this book are sorely lacking in biblical integrity. Eldredge's desire to help hurting people is obvious and commendable, but his mishandling of Scripture and the consequent misguided advice he gives are too serious to ignore.

Eldredge's basic thesis is that males are wild at heart because God is wild at heart, and that both men and women need to understand this in order for men to live the kind of daring, adventurous lives for which God has created them. Eldredge's explication of this thesis reveals his alarmingly un-biblical view of four fundamental aspects of Christianity: 1) God's sovereignty and authority, 2) the person and work of Jesus Christ, 3) the purpose and substance of the gospel, and 4) the nature and content of God's direct revelation to man. As will be demonstrated in this critique, many of the views expressed in *Wild at Heart* are, beyond issues of denominational preference, irreconcilable with biblical Christianity. Those seeking help from Eldredge's words, if they accept his theology, will be damaged in their understanding of God and thus actually be led away from the only One who can truly help them.

Eldredge knows that any real understanding of masculinity must begin with the Creator of masculinity and all things, the Lord God as He is revealed in His Word, and Eldredge attempts to do just that. However, when Eldredge expounds on this point, his guiding philosophies become apparent and he begins to falter. We'll examine first Eldredge's view of God, and move more specifically to his view of God's sovereignty and authority.

In the opening pages of his book, Eldredge portrays God as one who loves wildness. Eldredge argues that the fierceness of certain animals (killer whales, white sharks) and the untamed nature of certain parts of creation (the woods at night, the Great Barrier Reef) reflect the fierceness and untamed nature of God (p. 29). Eldredge contends that the wildness of creation is God's way of "letting us know he rather prefers adventure, danger, risk, the element of surprise" (p. 30).

Eldredge sees God's innate wildness especially exemplified in men. The inside jacket of *Wild at Heart* reads: "Deep in his heart, every man longs for a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue. That is how he bears the image of God." Considering the complexity of Scripture's teaching on the *imago Dei*,¹ Eldredge gives us an overly simplistic understanding which is geared toward and probably results from his own love for rugged, romantic individualism.² One wonders how his understanding would be received by Christians in foreign cultures which do not prize the same ideals, and further if men who are shy, quiet, and nonviolent in temperament would be considered in Eldredge's model adequate image bearers of God.

Eldredge writes that Adam was created outside the Garden of Eden ("the outback," as it were) and infers from this that man was meant to be undomesticated, wild and free (p. 4) like "the wild one whose image

1. An exposition of the Image of God is far beyond the scope of this critique. Systematic Theologies will almost invariably have much to say on this topic. For a credible, readable handling of the topic, I recommend Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology, an Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI 1994.

2. This is a constant theme in *Wild at Heart*, seen especially in the heroes Eldredge admires.

we bear” (title for chapter 2). This thinking, however, ignores several key details about the creation of man and what it reveals about God’s character.

Adam was *in a sense* created outside the garden. He had to be, because according to Genesis 2, Adam was created before the garden was planted (Genesis 2:7, 8).³ So really, the phrase “outside the garden” does not apply to Adam’s origin. It is more faithful to the text to see that the garden was made *for* man, as his ideal place of dwelling. Even given the idea that the garden existed before Adam, Eldredge implies that the placement of man in the garden is less than ideal, and somehow contrary to man’s true nature. “Only afterward is he brought to Eden. And ever since then boys have never been at home indoors, and men have had an insatiable longing to explore” (p. 4). Apparently, even God does not really understand the wildness of man’s heart; He forces man into the garden and quells his God-given desire to explore.

But what of the fierceness of other parts of creation, the tigers and killer whales? Do these not reveal God’s love of wildness? It would seem that much of the ferocity of these creatures is due to their desire to kill and eat flesh, arguably a result of the fall. Even given the idea that the pre-fall world contained the killing of animals for food,⁴ Scripture still gives the distinct impression that the new heaven and earth will be an even more tranquil version of Eden, for the wolf will graze with the lamb (Isaiah 65:25).

It seems that the lack of ferocity and battle in the eternal state would crush the very heart and soul of Eldredge’s ideal man, that something intrinsic to the image of God and therefore true masculinity would be missing in heaven. Though worshiping our God and basking in His presence could perhaps be

described as an adventure, there will certainly be no battle to fight or beauty to rescue. The violence and pain of post-fall creation will be forever gone. This is clearly God’s understanding of a perfect relationship between Himself and His creation, and it stands in stark contrast to Eldredge’s definition of God’s image and the masculinity that reflects it.

So how “wild” is God’s heart in reality? We must remember that God was wholly satisfied in Himself before He created the universe (John 17:5). There was nothing inherently wild about God because He was all there was! Certainly God does not develop new attributes (Malachi 3:6), so the creation of the world or any part of it cannot be understood as a reflection of a characteristic God does not possess. God created the universe and interacts with it to display His attributes (Psalm 8), to rule over and conform it to His glorious, eternal purposes (Ephesians 1:11). Through creation we see God’s grandeur and glorious imagination, not His need for adventure.

What Eldredge claims about God reduces the Lord of heaven and earth to the wild man upstairs. Consider Eldredge’s perspective on God’s sovereignty and authority.

Eldredge’s theology as reflected in the book makes unmistakable overtures toward the Openness of God theory. Though he gives a glib denial that his book endorses Openness Theism (p. 32),⁵ the brevity of his disavowal and the fact that he felt the need to mention it indicates that he is aware of how closely his views come to Openness Theism. In fact, in earlier editions of *Wild at Heart*, Eldredge cited for support of his views on God’s sovereignty Professor John Sanders, an avowed Open Theist.⁶ That quote is missing from newer editions. A critique of Openness Theism as a whole is

3. All Scripture citations in this critique are taken from the New American Standard translation.

4. In Genesis 1:29, 30 God gives plant life as food for the man and beast, but some theologians would argue that man had the implicit authority to kill and eat animals before the fall. This, however, does not imply the desire of the animals to kill and eat each other.

5. “Trying to reconcile God’s sovereignty and man’s free will has stumped the church for ages. We must humbly acknowledge that there’s a great deal of mystery involved, but for those aware of the discussion, I am not advocating Open Theism. Nevertheless, there is definitely something wild in the heart of God” (p. 32). A serious study of Open Theism and Eldredge’s book will leave the discerning reader scratching his head as to any abiding, substantial difference between Eldredge’s view and that of Openness Theology.

6. “Yet as John Sanders says, God’s own character ‘keeps him in the game despite the risk.’” This is from page 32 of a copyright 2001 edition of *Wild at Heart*, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

beyond the scope of this work, but it is important to demonstrate the proximity of Eldredge's views to this heresy with which he apparently does not want to be identified.⁷

The idea that God takes risks, integral to Openness Theism, is profoundly offensive to Scripture's description of God's sovereignty (Isaiah 46:9, 10; Ephesians 1:11). Eldredge, however, heartily endorses this notion of a risk-taking God, seeing it as reflective of God's wild nature. On page 32, Eldredge writes, "God's willingness to risk is just astounding—far beyond what any of us would do were we in his position" (p. 32). Also, "And unlike some hyper-controlling parents . . . God gave us a remarkable choice. He did not *make* Adam and Eve obey him. He took a risk. A staggering risk, with staggering consequences. He let others into the story, and he lets their choices shape it profoundly. . . . It's not the nature of God to limit his risks and cover his bases. Far from it. Most of the time, he lets the odds stack up against him" (p. 31). From here, Eldredge cites God's handling of the confrontation between David and Goliath and the downsizing of Gideon's army as examples of risks that God has taken.

A risk implies uncertainty and the possibility of failure. If Eldredge means what he says, then there must have been some degree of uncertainty in the mind of God as to the outcome of these events. This, of course, is monumentally inconsistent with Scripture.

God chooses the "long shots" in order to

display His power and draw attention to Himself as the real combatant in those battles. He is so certain that He will prevail that He deliberately creates what seem to be unbeatable odds. But these instances do not reveal God as an adventurous gambler who likes to take on the house to prove His skill. Rather, they illustrate God's absolute power and knowledge and His desire to display those attributes to His weak and often doubtful people.

Eldredge agrees that God acts to display His power, but he insists that there is an element of chance involved. This he says is the case not only in the battles which are recorded in Scripture, but even in the central theme of Scripture itself: the gospel of Jesus Christ. "Have you thought about his handling of the gospel? God needs to get a message out to the human race, without which they will perish, forever. What's the plan? First, He starts with the most unlikely group ever: a couple of prostitutes, a few fishermen, . . . a tax collector. Then, he passes the ball to us. Unbelievable."

The idea that the Lord would somehow risk the salvation of His people is not only unbelievable; it's reprehensible. Yes, God does entrust the spread of the gospel to fallible human beings, but the success of God's plan of redemption is never in question (Philippians 1:6; Romans 8:29, 30). Again, God shows His glory, particularly in this case the power of His Word to save (1 Peter 1:23), by using sinful people to accomplish His eternal, undefeatable purposes.⁸

7. For a sound and extensive critique of Openness Theology, I recommend *Bound Only Once: The Failure of Open Theism*, ed. By Doug Wilson. Canon Press, Moscow, ID. 2001.

8. Not only is Eldredge's emphasis on God's risk-taking irreconcilable with Scripture, but it is also inconsistent with his own views expressed in his book. On page 31, Eldredge writes: "God seems to fly in the face of all caution. Even though he *knew* what would happen, what heartbreak and devastation would follow upon our disobedience, God chose to have children."

If God knows what genuinely free creatures will choose in the future as well as the consequences of those choices, then how can it be said that God is a risk taker? As stated earlier, risk-taking involves a lack of certain knowledge of the future. Perhaps Eldredge believes that, as Openness Theology claims, God knows some details of the future but not others, but he never makes this claim. Rather, he abandons his arguments to internal inconsistency.

Or perhaps we are meant to interpret the quotation above as saying: "God knew what would happen *if* they decided to disobey." But even this does not help. That statement implies that God did not know what Adam and Eve would choose, but He did know what would happen if they chose to disobey. Here, God's knowledge of the future would be relegated to contingencies and not actualities. None of this is biblically tenable. To deny God's knowledge of any aspect of the future is completely un-biblical (Psalm 139:16; Isaiah 46:9, 10; John 21:17). Though God may be grieved at our choices, His knowledge of the future, and of all future contingencies, is exhaustive; therefore, no real risk is involved.

The only way for Eldredge to have avoided incoherence in his description of God's sovereignty was to adopt the Openness position on the issue. Openness Theology maintains that for true human freedom to exist, certain aspects of the future are unknowable and therefore even God cannot know them. If Eldredge held this view, he would still have been entertaining a drastically un-biblical notion of God, but at least his position would not contradict itself. For unexplained reasons, though, Eldredge does not want his views labeled as Openness Theology. Ironically, endorsing a heresy would have actually helped Eldredge in terms of clarity and internal consistency, though certainly not in terms of biblical accuracy.

Missing from Eldredge's scanning of Scripture are all the passages emphasizing God's absolute control over and knowledge of all things. Ephesians 1:11; Isaiah 46:9, 10; Acts 2:23-37, and the witness of the whole Bible teach us emphatically that there is no element of chance involved in God's dealing with His creation.

If God is a risk taker, then faith in such a God would also be a risk, and this is what we find in *Wild at Heart*. On page 200 Eldredge writes that God: ". . . rigged the world in such a way that it only works when we embrace *risk* as the theme of our lives, which is to say, only when we live by faith." Here, faith is not "the certainty of things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen" (Hebrews 11:1), but rather the blind existentialist leap into the unpredictable, a necessary adventure of ignorance.

Eldredge makes no mention of the historical, objective work of Jesus Christ on which our faith is grounded and sustained. Rather, he presents faith as the ultimate and defining risk of life. Granted, living a life of faith leads us into uncharted waters. But we go into those waters not seeking or embracing risk, but rather grasping through faith God's certain and steady hand. Our faith is the anchor in life, not the boat rocker.

The nature of true faith is that it is unshakable and certain. This is because God Himself, the object of our faith, is an unchanging Rock of fidelity. Though Eldredge would not dispute God's faithfulness, he does contend that God has no set pattern of activity. On page 209, he writes: "There are no formulas with God. Period. So there are no formulas for the man who follows him. God is a Person, not a doctrine.⁹ He operates not like a system—not even a theological system—but with all the originality of a truly free and alive person."

Scripture teaches that God's actions are always in keeping with His character, thus rendering God quite predictable. In fact, the

very reason He gives us His Word is so that we can know Him and what He expects of us (Exodus 20:1-17). He always acts in conjunction with His Word (Hebrews 6:18), and He never fails or falters. Thank the Lord that He is predictable! Otherwise, how could we trust His promises? Some of God's providential activity will undoubtedly astound us, but there are definitely formulas with God. Further, God gives us formulas by which we are to live and to expect God's blessing (Genesis 4:6, 7; Joshua 1:8; Proverbs 3:5, 6; Malachi 3:10).

It would be well if Eldredge's point was merely that we do not know the details of life and that from our vantage point, things seem risky and God seems unpredictable. Indeed, on page 213 he tells us that he is not suggesting that the Christian life is chaotic or irresponsible. This would be fine, but the rest of his writing indicates that he means more than this.

On page 213 again: "What I *am* saying is that our false self demands a formula before he'll engage; he wants a guarantee of success, and mister, you aren't going to get one. So there comes a time in a man's life when he's got to . . . head off into the unknown with God." Further, on page 214: "The only way to live in this adventure—with all its danger and unpredictability and immensely high stakes—is an ongoing, intimate relationship with God. The control we so desperately crave is an illusion. Far better to give it up in exchange for God's offer of companionship, set aside stale formulas so that we might enter into an informal friendship."

Eldredge claims that for the Christian, there are no guarantees of success in life. However, Scripture absolutely does guarantee success! (Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 1:6). This is the case unless success is defined in purely worldly terms, but that definition is foreign to the values of Scripture (Matthew 6:19-21). This is indicative of a major flaw in *Wild at Heart*. It emphasizes the earthly aspect of our existence to

9. Who would call God a doctrine? Obviously, what Eldredge intends is that God is not bound to a system or teaching. He has erected the unfortunately popular false dichotomy between doctrine and the knowledge of God. And yet again, God Himself tells us in His Word that doctrine is essential (2 Timothy 4:1-5). Doctrine is merely what the Bible teaches on any given topic. We must know the unchanging truth of Scriptural doctrine to know God.

the complete neglect of the heavenly, and never makes an attempt to understand the former in light of the latter (Matthew 6:33). The only true success for the Christian is pleasing God, and as previously mentioned, God has certainly given us in His Word the formulas for success.

Though we are to work with all our heart at our earthly endeavors, and pray for God to bless our work, we will face failure along the way. But those failures are, in Christ, triumphs that lead us closer to Him. If the earthly is defined by the heavenly, then the Christian can rest in his soul, even in the most discouraging circumstances, because in Christ there is no ultimate risk and no possibility of ultimate failure (John 10:28, 29).

Eldredge's handling of the alleged "risks" of a walk with God is emotionally evocative but lacking in biblical truth. For some, it will have the enticing appeal of a locker room pep talk before the big game: everything's on the line and it's time to see what we're made of. But as exciting as that kind of situation may be, it is not truly akin to the kind of excitement, intensity, and depth of a true walk with Christ.

The understanding expressed in *Wild at Heart* of what it is to walk with God never reaches beyond what could be experienced in merely earthly situations; it never looks above by way of Scripture to see the real thing. As people of another world, we must look beyond the temporal aspects of life to truly understand our union with Christ, and how we are to live and understand this life in light of that union (Colossians 3:1-4).

Scripture is voluminous in its commentary on the Christian's identity in Christ, their true selves, as it were, and what it means to walk with our Saviour. One of the most encouraging and faith-affirming studies I've ever done is to study through the pages of Scripture, noting how Scripture describes Christians. Here is but a sampling of these kinds of passages: Jeremiah 31:27-34; Ezekiel 36:26, 27; Romans 6:1-11; 7:4;

1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:3-7, 13; Colossians 1:13, 22; 2:13; 3:3; and Hebrews 2:9-18. These are words that truly heal and inspire. To plumb the depths of these passages is to immerse ourselves in God's love and emerge strengthened against any false, damaging lies about our identity and value as God's children.

Though Eldredge would certainly advocate the study of these passages, they and anything connected to the foundational truth of our identity in Christ are conspicuously underemphasized in *Wild at Heart*. The near absence¹⁰ of this kind of biblical teaching implies that Christian men can understand what it is to be men without understanding much about the most crucial and defining aspect of their existence. In a book attempting to recover a biblical view of men, this is a crucial and telling oversight.

With the assault on God's sovereignty comes the consequent attack on God's authority. Eldredge embraces the notion that our relationship to God is basically a partnership between nearly equal parties than anything else. Of course, he considers God the superior partner, but not by much. He quotes Dallas Willard as saying: "The ideal for divine guidance is . . . a conversational relationship with God: the sort of relationship suited to friends who are mature personalities in a shared enterprise" (p. 215). While the immediate context of Willard's words is not explained, what Eldredge means by this thinking is illustrated in his recording of various "conversations" he has allegedly had with God. Eldredge's view of God's revelation will be dealt with in the following sections, but it is instructive to highlight one of these conversations here because it shows so clearly the humanization of God inherent in Eldredge's theology and the attack on God's authority resulting from it.

On page 202, Eldredge remembers: "I went to the mountains for the weekend to sort things out. . . . The tentacles of the

10. On page 136, which will be alluded to later, Eldredge does encourage his readers to answer doubts about our self worth with the fact that we are forgiven. This is good and helpful along the lines I've been suggesting, but this kind of thinking is eclipsed by the emphasis on un-biblical ways of relating to and understanding God and our relationship to Him. Further, Eldredge's handling of this line of reasoning, when it does appear, is questionable. See footnote 21.

world and my false self seemed to give way as I climbed up into the Holy Cross Wilderness. On the second day God began to speak. *John, you can take that job if you want to. It's not a sin. But it'll kill you and you know it.* He was right; it had False Self written all over it. *If you want to follow me,* he continued, *I'm headed that way.* I knew exactly what he meant—'that way' headed into the wilderness, frontier."

This incident does not describe a Christian struggling to find God's will for his life, not sure which way is God's way. Rather, it presents a Christian who has been clearly informed by God Himself as to the right path, and yet one who is under no compulsion to choose that path. Imagine telling this story to Jonah! God has apparently over time become much mellowed in calling His servants to follow Him. In fact, to blatantly walk away from God is not even considered sin! God expresses no concern for His own glory or purposes, only concern for Eldredge's "true self." Eldredge does not consider this relatively casual mood from God to be a result of his facing less significant decisions than the biblical prophets. On pages 213-215, he cites Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David as normative examples of conversational, chummy relationships with God.¹¹

Scripture teaches that God is not at all ambivalent in the matter of our obedience, in a broad sense or in the specific details of life; nor does He kindly offer us His desires as merely one way to go. The reason that God saves His people is so that they will accomplish in obedience the specific works that He has planned for them to do (Ephesians 2:10). Thus, to walk away from God and His desires is to violate the very purpose of our salvation. This straying yields

dreadful consequences, far beyond a lack of self-fulfillment. Again, Eldredge is not writing about the typical Christian struggle to find God's will in the particulars of daily life, nor is his example merely to be understood as indicative of a choice between two morally acceptable options.¹² In his case, he claimed to know God's will, thus rendering this choice a moral choice between following God (always good) or not following God (never good); but in his mind God gave him the option to follow his own path.

Eldredge has presented us with a truncated version of God, a God who risks and whose purpose for our lives is not enforced by any real authority. The massive irony of Eldredge's view of God is that he is unwilling to let God be as strong as God claims to be. Far from revealing the vigor of the Almighty, Eldredge removes it. In seeking to unleash the wild strength of the heart of man, Eldredge has attempted to shackle the power, authority, and knowledge of the only One to whom all strength and glory are rightly ascribed. Eldredge has employed the reverse of John the Baptist's axiom: in order for men to increase, God must decrease.

An assault on the character of God is of course an assault on Jesus Christ, the God-man. To this point, we have examined Eldredge's Theology Proper, and now we will examine Eldredge's view of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

According to Eldredge, men must be "initiated" into manhood and then be taken on a journey of self-discovery. Jesus, he claims, was no different. On page 104: "Jesus shows us that initiation can happen even when we've lost our father or grandfather. He's the carpenter's son, which means Joseph was able to help him in the early days of his

11. Eldredge never considers the special role that these men and other people played in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. Abraham is the father of our faith, and Adam, Moses, and David clearly possess, by God's design, unique relationships to God. They are types and their lives are foreshadows of Christ (2 Samuel 7:8-16; Psalm 22; Romans 5). In fact, Miriam and Aaron are the subjects of God's burning anger because they complained against Moses, with whom God had and defended a unique relationship (Numbers 12:1-10). *Wild at Heart* evidences very little if any concern for understanding Scriptural passages in their context, and thus the true meanings of the passages cited are distorted.

12. This is why it is so helpful to remember that, as Deuteronomy 29:29 teaches, there are some things in life that the Lord does not want us to know. God tells us what we need to know directly from Him in Scripture, and we are to use Scriptural principles to make decisions in our daily lives, trusting that as we acknowledge Him in all our ways, He will direct our paths (Proverbs 3:5, 6). Looking for God's direct word beyond Scripture violates the purpose and sufficiency of Scripture, and in the end only creates or contributes to confusion about God's will. See the discussion on special and general revelation starting on page 12.

journey. But when we meet the young man Jesus, Joseph is out of the picture. Jesus has a new teacher—his true Father—and it is from him he must learn who he really is and what he’s really made of.” It is true that Jesus “kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52).

The fact that the omniscient Jesus learned is one of the profound mysteries of Scripture and must be handled with great care so as not to misunderstand the deity or the humanity of Christ.¹³ What Eldredge gives us is not the careful handling of mysterious truth, but his own less developed version of the denial of Christ’s messianic self-awareness, an idea popular in liberal, non-Christian theology.

We can safely assume that God has given us in His Word all that He wants us to know about Christ’s earthly life (John 21:25; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Any silence from Scripture on the topic ought to encourage our own. Scripture gives very little detail about the first thirty years of Christ’s earthly life. What we *are* told about Jesus’ childhood in no way indicates that Christ ever had to discover His purpose or identity. On the contrary, Luke 2 tells us that as a twelve-year-old, Jesus was in the temple dialoguing with the “teachers.” Verse 47 says: “And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.”¹⁴ Farther along in the text, Jesus actually rebukes His worrisome parents on the basis of His knowledge of exactly who He is and what He came to do. “Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?” (v. 49). The chapter ends with the aforementioned verse 52, which emphasizes Christ’s pro-

gression in the fulfillment of His redemptive task. Even in the rare glimpses we have of Christ’s childhood, Scripture never presents Him as in the process of discovering who He is; rather, He is always described as consciously following the path laid out for Him from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8; John 12:27; Matthew 1:21-23).

Eldredge essentially summarizes his view of Christ on page 203 by calling Him “fierce, wild, and romantic to the core.” Christ is certainly fierce; zeal for His Father’s house consumes Him (John 2:14-17; Psalm 69:9). However, Christ is never the marauding renegade that Eldredge wants Him to be. Christ’s fierceness is a holy desire for the glory of God and the good of His people. Eldredge, though, likens Christ’s fierceness to that of movie heroes such as William Wallace from *Braveheart*.

Eldredge makes much of his comparison of Christ and Wallace (pages 22-25). For instance, he writes that Christ’s battles with the Pharisees are like Wallace’s battles with cowardly Scottish nobles. This kind of comparison along with the disproportionate amount of space given to loving descriptions of Wallace, is indicative of a problem in Eldredge’s view of Christ.

Often in film or literature, characters are given Christlike qualities such as a transcendent courage and sense of destiny. It could be argued that *Braveheart* intended to portray Wallace as a Christlike figure in the film.¹⁵ In that case, Wallace would be complemented by a comparison to Christ, but Eldredge goes about this comparison backwards. He wants our view of Christ to be enhanced because of Christ’s likeness to William Wallace.

God says of Himself in Isaiah 46:5, “To

13. The fact that Jesus gained wisdom as a human in no way contradicts His omniscience as God. Granted, much like the Trinitarian nature of God’s being, we are at a loss as to the ability to explain such apparent paradoxes. But we must never violate Scripture by denying Christ’s eternal possession of all of God’s attributes. God cannot change (Malachi 3:6) and Jesus is God (John 1:1-14). Thus, if God is omniscient, and unchangeably so, our Saviour possesses as God the same attribute. Christ’s “emptying” of Himself described in Philippians 2, contrary to the soundly refuted Kenotist theories of the 19th century, should be understood as a willing disavowal of His rights and privileges as God, and not a disavowal of His essential being as God.

14. Verse 46 describes Jesus listening to and asking questions of the teachers. Given verse 47, the implication seems to be that Jesus is testing the knowledge of the teachers!

15. While the movie version of Wallace may have had admirable qualities, his adulterous tryst with a French princess should cancel him out right away as being a Christlike figure in the way Eldredge deems him to be.

whom would you liken Me, and make Me equal and compare Me, that we should be alike?" There is no one worthy of comparison to our Lord. Christ's greatness is insulted through Eldredge's portrayal of Him as a William Wallace figure.

Is Christ wild? Since Christ is in absolute control of all things (Mark 4:39-41), the term *wild* just does not apply to Him. Further, when we examine the distinctive personhood of Christ and His Messianic role, we see not wildness, but pure and complete submission. Jesus said and did only what the Father wanted Him to (John 8:28, 29; Philippians 2:7, 8), and He lived in complete submission to the Law (Matthew 5:17, 18). Our very salvation depended on Christ's lack of wildness! (Romans 5:18, 19). Sure, Christ railed against Pharisaical hypocrisy and drove moneychangers from the temple, but are those things really indicative of wildness . . . or self-controlled, passionate obedience to the Father? How can the very personification of meekness, humility, and absolute power be considered wild?

Eldredge's point, of course, is not that wildness implies a lack of submissiveness. However, especially given his previous association of wildness with immense risk-taking, his emphasis on the wildness of Christ obscures and distorts the biblical teaching of Christ's sovereignty as God and His dutiful humility as the Suffering Servant.

Is Jesus romantic? Eldredge never seems to expound on this particular point¹⁶ and therefore he does not seem to advocate anything inappropriate in this regard. However, given the rest of his theology, the suggestion that Christ is romantic needs to be carefully explained.

Eldredge's postulation of a fierce, wild, romantic Christ is accompanied by his postulation of a Christ who can be thwarted, if even a little, by demonic powers. On pages

165-166, Eldredge draws our attention to Christ's encounter with Legion, the group of demons ravaging a man in the country of the Gadarenes (Luke 8:26-33). According to Eldredge's interpretation of this passage: "In fact, when he encounters the guy who lives out in the Gadarene tombs, tormented by a legion of spirits, the first rebuke by Jesus doesn't work. He had to get more information, really take them on" (p. 166). Eldredge's point is that if Jesus had to step it up to fight demons, we must be willing to as well.¹⁷ Again, Eldredge's exegesis not only misses, but also completely reverses the point of the passage.

The only possible inference that Jesus' first rebuke had failed (though there is no explicit reference to this) would come from verses 29 and 30. "For He had been commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times" (NASB). In verse 30, Jesus asks the spirit its name. Eldredge infers from this progression of events that Jesus' first method of attack was insufficient, a conclusion completely unwarranted by the text.

The text reveals that the demonic group was already in agony because of Christ's mere presence. Verse 28 says: "And seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before him, and said in a loud voice, 'What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me.'" Rather than assume that Christ had already tried to cast the demons out once and they were too strong, it is more natural to see that Christ was in the *process* of casting the demons out. The Greek which begins verse 29 can be translated either as it is above, or as "For He was commanding the unclean spirit . . ."; either reading gives the sense that Christ was in the process of the exorcism. The demons, as if grasping for a continual hold on the poor man, were

16. On pages 32-34, Eldredge writes that God's romantic nature is seen in His institution and approval of physical romance between husband and wife. On page 32 he writes: "And all his wildness and all his fierceness are inseparable from his romantic heart." Whatever legitimate points he makes about God's relationship to romantic human relationships are blurred by his faulty, humanistic conception of God's wildness and fierceness. Here, Eldredge is walking on thin ice without showing the biblical caution necessary to keep the reader from coming to faulty and potentially blasphemous conclusions.

17. At this point in the book, Eldredge is describing his wife's battles with dizzy spells. He considers them a demonic oppression that must be conquered by fierce opposition in the name of Christ.

screaming for mercy as they were being dragged away by the irresistible force of Christ's holiness. Jesus then asks the demon its name, and after the demon reveals itself (themselves), it asks to be cast into the nearby herd of swine rather than the abyss. This implies that the demonic group knew it was on its way out, and further that it was in complete subjection to Christ as to where it would be sent.

The sense of present action in verse 29 could only yield one of two conclusions: that the demon was in the process of being cast out by Christ's words, or that Jesus had actually tried several commands, all of which had failed. The second option, of course, is absurd, and rendered void by even a cursory study of Christ's power and His dealing with Satan's forces. Eldredge holds to neither option, maintaining the one-failed-command view that cannot be solidly supported by any aspect of the text. As a result, he purports an insulting view of our Saviour.

This may seem like a lot of wrangling over one passage of Scripture, but it is precisely this kind of wrangling that would keep Eldredge from misinterpreting God's Word so often. He seems far too willing to skim the surface of a text in order to justify his theology. This kind of careless interpretation pervades the book, and this is no small matter. A careless handling of God's Word leads to and supports a faulty perception of God's character. A right understanding of Scripture includes the fact that Jesus knew exactly who He was and what He was doing, and furthermore, that He always did it to perfection.¹⁸ He is the almighty, triumphant Lamb of God, not the fallible wild man Eldredge presents.

With the humanistic reduction of the person of Christ comes the humanistic

reduction of the gospel itself. Eldredge presents the salvific work of the Messiah as one aimed primarily at the discovery and release of our true, inner selves. The gospel of salvation from sin is traded in for the gospel of masculine self-realization.

Though Eldredge does make brief allusions to the forgiveness given us by Christ,¹⁹ it becomes quickly apparent that this defining theme of salvation will not be his focus. He wants to move beyond it to what he sees as the primary purpose of Christ's coming: the healing of our emotional scars. The best case scenario here is that Eldredge wants to focus on not just our justification, but on our daily sanctification as well, that He wants to show us the gradual outworking of our salvation. This would be fine, except that he all but ignores the issue of sin and our daily battle against it and muddies the waters with talk of "the wound."

The "wound" is a crucial concept to *Wild at Heart*. Though he focuses primarily on men, Eldredge believes that every person is given a wound by someone in their lives. On page 60: "Every boy, in his journey to become a man, takes an arrow in the center of his heart, in the place of his strength." The wound could be the result of verbal, emotional, or physical abuse; the defining element of the wound is the communication to the victim that the victim is no good, that he or she does not "have what it takes" to be a real man or woman. Eldredge relates heartbreaking stories of how individuals he knew received their wound, and sadly, many of his readers will no doubt be able to relate to those stories. Eldredge rightly decries the injustice done to these people, himself being one of them. Again, Eldredge's heart for the hurting is obvious, but his theories about how this wound must be dealt with and healed are dangerous and un-biblical.

18. It has been argued that Jesus, being fully human, could well have made some carpentry errors or the like growing up, and that these errors would not be tantamount to sin or failure. Again, I am impressed at Scripture's silence on the issue. However, even if we grant that point, it would be hard to compare a carpentry miscalculation to a fundamental error in exerting power over Satan. We must be careful what we assume when we read that Jesus was made like us in all things (Hebrews 2:17).

19. Given the proportionally great amount of writing in the book about God and how we can only truly find ourselves if we are in a relationship to God, Eldredge never explicitly says that one must be saved through faith in Christ or what it even means to be saved. That one must be saved to benefit from *Wild at Heart* may be an assumption made by Eldredge, but given his blurred view of the gospel, the reader is left without the ability to make that assumption with the author.

Eldredge writes of the fall of Adam and Eve into sin and its vital connection to the wound (pages 55-57), and here we see the beginning of Eldredge's distortion of the gospel. On page 57: "Adam and Eve's fall sent a tremor through the human race . . . Thus every little boy and every little girl comes into the world set up for a loss of heart. Even if he can't quite put it into words, every man is haunted by the question: 'Am I really a man? Have I got what it takes . . . when it counts?'"

There is no talk here or elsewhere of spiritual and physical death, the true results of the fall (Genesis 3:1-24; Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:20-24). Eldredge bypasses Scripture's teaching about the fall in order to replace it with the focal point of *Wild at Heart*, masculine and feminine self-realization. If the primary nature and effect of the fall were what Eldredge conveys, then the primary nature and effect of the saving work of Christ would be to restore to people their masculine or feminine confidence, and this is precisely what we find in *Wild at Heart*. What Eldredge gives us is a pop-psychology-driven reduction of the gospel.²⁰

Consider Eldredge's view of the ministry of Christ, as given on pages 128-129. He writes: ". . . we invite Jesus into the wound, we ask him to come and meet us there, to enter into the broken and unhealed places of our heart. When the Bible tells us that Christ came to 'redeem mankind' it offers a whole lot more than forgiveness. To simply forgive a broken man is like telling someone running a marathon, 'It's okay that you've broken your leg. I won't hold that against you. Now finish the race.' . . . No, there is much more to our redemption. The core of Christ's mission is foretold in Isaiah 61: 'The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners' (v. 1). The Messiah will come, he says, to bind up and heal, to release and set

free. What? *Your heart*. Christ comes to restore and release you, your soul, the true you. This is *the* central passage in the entire Bible about Jesus . . ."

Eldredge fast-forwards past the issues of sin and death and hell, issues whose existence and importance are barely even implied in *Wild at Heart*, to get to the healing of the "wound." The passage in Isaiah 61 is not understood as it should be as Christ delivering us from the pains and punishment of sin, but rather as Christ restoring our true masculinity and femininity. Apparently, the people Isaiah prophesies about are brokenhearted not over their sin, but over their lack of gender-based self-actualization. Again, Eldredge wrenches a passage from its context, from its home in the great, progressive Scriptural narrative describing redemption in Christ. The passage is thus bled dry of its God-established meaning so that it can serve Eldredge's own felt needs.

On pages 124 and 125, Eldredge cites a portion of dialogue from the film *Good Will Hunting*. A psychologist brings a troubled young man to the tearful admission that his life circumstances and the trouble that has resulted were most emphatically *not* the fault of the young man. Eldredge uses this dialogue as a way to point out to us that our wound is not our fault: "It is no shame that you need healing; it is no shame to look to another for strength, it is no shame that you feel young and afraid inside. It's not your fault." Certainly, the kind of abuse Eldredge writes about is not the fault of the victim. But relating this back to Eldredge's idea that Jesus' primary work was to heal us of our wound, we must then conclude that Jesus' primary ministry was to come and heal us of something that is not our fault!

The wound cannot be equated with our own sin; and if this is the case, then according to Eldredge's understanding of Isaiah 61 and similar passages, Jesus' primary mission in coming to this world is separated, if not divorced, from the deliverance of His people from sin. Scripture teaches

20. Indeed, his views come perilously close to the Robert Schuller school of theology which teaches that sin is not a moral rebellion against God, but rather a lack of self-esteem.

that the primary purpose of Christ's coming and dying and rising again was the salvation of His people from sin (Isaiah 53; Matthew 1:21; John 3:16 . . . the whole Bible!) so that they would show forth His praises to the rest of the world (Ephesians 2:10; Matthew 5:13, 14). But there is none of this biblical rhetoric about salvation in *Wild at Heart*.

Instead of treating the healing of the wound as one aspect of Christ's ministry to His people, subsequent to their salvation, Eldredge treats it as the all-encompassing, defining element of the gospel.

This is a blatant violation of Scripture's teaching on the gospel and thus an attack on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How is it, then, that Eldredge comes to these un-biblical conclusions? Clearly, he is not paying careful attention to Scripture, nor limiting Himself to Scriptural texts to come to his conclusions about the texts. In addition to interpreting Scripture in light of his felt needs rather than according to a passage's inherent context, Eldredge claims and cites many other avenues of hearing from God, and these all seem to influence his mishandling of Scripture.

As alluded to earlier,²¹ Eldredge obviously believes in extra-biblical revelation, the idea that God directly and verbally (though not necessarily audibly) communicates to us outside of Scripture. Many Christians embrace that notion today. Hopefully, the un-biblical views galvanized by Eldredge's belief in extra-biblical revelation will cause these Christians to rethink their own beliefs on the topic.

Scripture teaches that God is revealed in

all creation (Psalm 8; Romans 1). As Augustine is quoted as saying: "All truth is God's truth." We can learn of God through every aspect of life, but the idea of God actually speaking to us is another matter. Once that is the issue, the categories have shifted and the stakes have become infinitely higher.

We must recognize the qualitative difference between Scripture and the rest of the world in terms of God's communication to us. Scripture is God's special revelation, His direct Word to us. This Word tells us how to interpret the rest of life, wherein God does not directly speak. To fail to make this distinction is to attack the purpose, sufficiency, and authority of Scripture (Deuteronomy 4:2; 29:29; Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17). For if God speaks outside of Scripture, then He is continuing His direct revelation to man. If this is the case, we should be adding text to the end of the Bible as often as God speaks. Most Christians will rightfully balk at the idea of adding to Scripture, but many still insist that God speaks directly to them outside of Scripture. These Christians either fail or refuse to see the inconsistency of their belief. Eldredge, too, falls prey to this inconsistency.

On page 136, after relaying many incidents of extra-biblical revelation, Eldredge cites a friend's tale of hearing from God: ". . . I heard God say to me, 'You're doing great. I am proud of you, right where you are.' But I could not believe it. It just doesn't seem true. That is why we always rest on propositional truth. We stand on what Scripture says about us. We are forgiven. Our heart is good."²² The Father's voice²³ is *never* condemning. From that place we ask God to speak personally to us . . ."

21. See page 25 of this critique.

22. Eldredge never specifies who the *we* is. Again, we would hope that he is referring only to Christians, but he gives us no real evidence of that. Further, though Christians are new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), we still have the innate sin nature to deal with (Romans 7). Calling our heart good is a statement in need of much qualification; Eldredge does not provide it. The statement that the Father *never* speaks to us in a condemning manner also needs much qualification. True, there is no condemnation for those in Christ (Romans 8:1), but the Father still rebukes and chastens us in our temporal lives. Much of Scripture contains the rebuke of God directed toward believers (Isaiah 1; Galatians 1:1-9; Hebrews 5). If we have it in our heads enough that God will never condemn us, we may miss much of what He is in fact saying to us for our protection.

23. Eldredge emphasizes here the Father's voice. One wonders how this fits with Christ's role as the lone Mediator between God and man or the Spirit's role in teaching us God's Word and sealing its truth on our hearts. Typically, those who embrace Eldredge's idea that God speaks directly to us outside of Scripture attribute that communication to the Holy Spirit, or less often to Jesus. It is rare that the Father is credited with direct speech to His people.

Notice that Eldredge refers us back to the Scriptures because sometimes we're unable to believe what God says outside of it. This assumes a qualitative difference between the words God has spoken in Scripture and the words He allegedly speaks to us outside of Scripture. But how could there be that difference? After all, Scripture is the recording and assembly of what God directly said to His prophets throughout the ages! (2 Peter 1:20, 21). Does God *sort of* speak to us outside of Scripture and *really* speak to us inside? Those who claim that God speaks to them outside of Scripture are forced to maintain the strange idea that God's extra-biblical words to them, in comparison to His spoken words in Scripture, are somehow lessened in clarity, authority, or both.²⁴

When God speaks, worlds are created and souls are raised from spiritual death. His Word is sacred, and He completely revealed His Word in the past to and through prophets of His own appointment (Hebrews 1:1-4).²⁵ The Scriptures are God's very words and any claimed direct revelation beyond Scripture is inherently false and must be rejected (Jeremiah 23:23-32). Scripture, and Scripture alone, is God's complete, authoritative, direct revelation to us—His people.²⁶

Though Eldredge maintains some distinction between Scripture and his other claimed sources of God's direct revelation, he does so inconsistently. Really, there is no reason for Eldredge to maintain that distinction, for he considers himself to have heard the words of God through these other venues.

On pages 200-201, Eldredge describes a time when he was browsing through a bookstore. One volume in particular jumped out at him. He picked it up, read the introduction, and was convinced that God had spoken to him: "Reading the counsel given to Bailie I knew it was God speaking to me. It was an invitation to come out of Ur. I set the volume down without turning another page and walked out of that bookstore to find a life worth living."

No doubt all of us have been moved and inspired by books, some perhaps so moved as to change plans and goals for our lives. But these experiences are common, not supernatural, and they occur among the unregenerate as well as the regenerate. To call these experiences direct communication from Almighty God is to drastically diminish the sacred nature of God's Word and to exalt the mere words and experiences of man to the threshold of Holy Scripture.

Eldredge also claims to hear directly from God through movies, or more precisely that God uses movies to address Eldredge's needs. Eldredge writes profusely of his love for movies²⁷ and he draws many of his illustrations and explanations for his opinions from films. On pages 134-135, Eldredge writes of his desire to be like Henry V or Maximus from the movie *Gladiator*: One day, on a plane trip home from England, Eldredge doubts as to God's approval of him and his work. This is allegedly what God says to him: "You are Henry V after Agincourt . . . the man in the arena, whose face is covered with blood and sweat and dust, who strove valiantly . . . a great warrior . . . yes, even Maximus."

24. The problem could not be, as is sometimes suggested, our struggle to listen, or perceive God's voice outside of Scripture, because that same problem would have to apply to Scripture. How do we know Scripture is indeed the voice of God? Once you claim that God speaks to you outside of Scripture, you have removed any objective standard by which you could truly discern the voice of God. And that's the point. Scripture, and nothing else, is meant to be God's direct Word, His direct revelation to us.

25. God's direct revelation to man culminates and terminates in the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament prepares us for His coming; the New Testament chronicles His coming and prepares us for His next coming. How, after we have received the crowning glory of God's direct revelation, the Lord Jesus Christ, can we look for more?

26. Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word (John 1:14), and Scripture gives us from Genesis to Revelation the story of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ Himself is the fulness of God's revelation to man, and as the New Testament tells us of Christ from one end of eternity to the other, how could we desire any direct word from God beyond the magnificence of what He has given us (Hebrews 1:1-4)? To desire more is to be ignorant of the nature and depth of Scripture, and ungrateful toward the One who gave it.

27. Eldredge has a great deal of experience in the theater industry. It seems that his love for film, though, has blurred his judgment as to God's mode of direct revelation. For a brief biographical sketch of Eldredge, see his profile at *Thomas-NelsonPublishers.com*.

Christ's words in Scripture about His love for His people are apparently not, at least in that moment, sufficient to comfort Eldredge. Instead of counseling Eldredge from His Word, God tells Eldredge that he is Maximus! This cannot be the voice of God. Besides the fact that this alleged revelation is way beyond the scope of Scripture, Maximus, a brave man to be sure, is also a worshiper of false gods! Would the true God try to inspire His people by comparing them to legendary idolaters? This is, of course, completely out of step with the God of Scripture, and that is what is so frightening about Eldredge's theology. God and His Word are reduced to such a low level as to be no better, and sometimes apparently worse,²⁸ than the products of Hollywood imagination.

It is at these points in the book that the true nature and origin of Eldredge's view of God and God's Word becomes clear. On page 200, he writes: "God is intimately personal with us and he speaks in ways that are peculiar to our own quirky hearts—not just through the Bible, but through the whole of creation. To Stasi he speaks through movies. To Craig he speaks through rock and roll. . . . God's word to me comes in many ways—through sunsets and friends and films and music and wilderness and books."

Eldredge is postulating a tailor-made religion for the individual. Whatever you want or need, God will provide, and provide it in such a way that it is consistent with your favorite pastimes. Eldredge wants to be Maximus; so God tells him that he is Maximus. Eldredge wants to climb Mount Everest, so God tells him that in following his dreams, he is climbing Mount Everest (pp. 216-217). God's voice has become to Eldredge the voice of his own felt needs, or rather, the voice of his own felt needs has to him become God's voice. Eldredge is listening to his own psyche and treating it as God's direct communication to him. He recognizes

needs in himself and then interprets Scripture in light of those needs (thus distorting Scripture's teaching about God), or even goes far beyond the scope of Scripture to hear what he needs to. He has made God the idol of his own psychological, emotional cravings. This is why *Wild at Heart* is so dangerous; it leads hurting people into idolatry.

Of course, in rejecting the dangers of Eldredge's view of God, we must never forget that God does in fact meet our needs and speak to us, and He does this through the counsel and comfort of His infallible Word (Psalm 119:50, 82). But Scripture deals not necessarily with our felt needs, but our real needs. We must begin with and learn from Scripture what those true needs are; Eldredge begins with his felt needs and reads them back into Scripture as well as everything else he claims to learn from in his life. Additionally, though he does make some valid points as to the nature of men and their needs, the needs Eldredge is most concerned with often fall more in line with a rugged individualistic mindset in need of psychological validation than anything Scripture addresses.

Eldredge severely mishandles Scripture and drags it down to the level of any other medium of communication. The result is that Eldredge reinterprets God and His Word, Jesus Christ and the gospel which centers around Him, in order to get the kind of healing he thinks he, and everyone else, needs. This reshaping of God and His Word to fit our needs is the essence of idolatry and as such must be opposed and rejected.

Wild at Heart is a heartfelt, emotionally moving, but ultimately dangerous book, because it is severely lacking in biblical truth. In it, John Eldredge seeks to help free the hearts of men and women who have been hurt by people in their lives and made to think that they are less than what

28. On page 13, Eldredge compares the thrill of a James Bond movie to the apparently boring nature of Bible study. Perhaps Eldredge has never experienced a good Bible study, but for God's people, what could be more enticing and thrilling than knowing the mind of God and being taught by Him?

they are. Eldredge rightly points out that men and women have fallen prey to culturally popular but deplorable ideas about masculinity and femininity. Eldredge wants men to be real men and women to be real women. But Eldredge's un-biblical methodology of helping people along this road is what necessitates the rejection of the key principles of the book. In seeking to help people he is in fact leading people away from the true God, the only One who can truly help and heal.

Some may object to this critique on the grounds that perhaps I have not been through the kind of hurtful situations described in *Wild at Heart*. Though personal experience is not the test for truth, let me assure the reader without going into the details, that my life experience is precisely the kind of experience Eldredge had in mind when writing his book. Regardless of how this critique is perceived, the attack on the true character of God in *Wild at Heart* was simply too much to ignore, and the immense and growing popularity of this book makes the need for a critique all the more urgent.

We live in a day and age in which sincerity is valued more than truth, and in which the ends of social and psychological pacification justify whatever means are employed to get them. Undoubtedly many have benefited from *Wild at Heart*, but at what cost? To buy completely or even partially into the core principles of this book is to abandon crucial aspects of biblical Christianity for an ill-conceived masculine self-realization. A work cannot be judged by its superficial benefits; after all, many cults boast of happy families and fulfilled lives, but they are rooted in false teaching and thus are deceiving those who look to them for help. We must look beneath the surface to the biblical integrity of a work or movement to determine its true value, and *Wild at Heart* is sorely lacking in biblical integrity.

Some may also feel that this critique is an example of what Eldredge would call "doctrinal Nazism" (p. 27). Tragically,

fidelity to sound doctrine is ignored by many in the church who are more concerned with pragmatic social or personal reform. To criticize popular movements within Christianity, especially movements that seem to have done so much good for so many people, is to be labeled as divisive and unloving. Of those who would view this critique as unnecessary and harmful, I ask, *Can something be truly helpful if it is not based on and guided by God's truth?* Jesus criticized those who judged merely on external appearances, those who did not understand what was truly happening spiritually behind the scenes (John 7:24). We must follow our Saviour's command and be biblically discerning as to what is truly good (Hebrews 5:12-14), and we must have the courage to reject what is not.

Another more fundamental question must also be asked: *If something is not true according to the Scriptures, should we as Christians want anything to do with it, regardless of how much we think we get from it?* If the price of our happiness is the violation of God's Word, and we are willing to pay that price, then we have revealed ourselves as worshipers not of God, but of ourselves. Nothing is worth an assault on God's truth.

I hope, as worshipers of the One who is the way, the truth, and the life, that we cling to that truth no matter what falls apart around us, and in so doing prove that we love our Saviour and His Word more than we love ourselves. God has given us what we need to know from Him in Scripture, and if we would just take the time to truly know His Word, we will, as I've seen in my own life, find the true help and healing that we need. Men will learn how to be real men, women how to be real women, and we will be working toward a goal beyond our own personal feeling of fulfillment. We'll be working toward the goal to which every Christian aspires, the glorification of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. ■

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Counseling From the Word

Meet the Christian Counseling Education Foundation

by Deepak Reju

In the late 1960s, pastor and author Jay Adams published *Competent to Counsel*, and its essential message was a battle cry to the Christian counseling world. While thousands of Christians received counseling training through secular schools and the Christian counseling movement warmly embraced secular psychological models, Dr. Adams made a bold statement about our need to return to the Bible to learn how to do counseling in a godly fashion. I had never heard Dr. Adams speak until a few years ago, but I can just imagine him saying, “Where is the Bible in all this? Why are Christians turning to secular psychology to teach us how to counsel people? Have we forgotten that we, the chosen children of the Almighty God, already have been given everything we need for life and godliness in the Scriptures?”

Dr. Adams was right. The Bible needs to be the beginning, means, and end of our counseling. Along with writing books, Dr. Adams wanted to be sure that pastors and laypeople were adequately trained in counseling from the Scriptures. So, he founded the *Christian Counseling Education Foundation* (CCEF) in Glenside, PA, in 1968. CCEF’s mission statement summarizes their goal: “To partner with those who counsel and who need counseling help, so the power of Christ is expressed in our lives and relationships.” For thirty-nine years now, CCEF has been the leading catalyst in biblical

thinking in counseling. Over the years, their staff and counseling ministry has continued to grow. Now CCEF’s counselors and staff on average provide Christ-centered counseling to more than 110 people per week and more than 6,200 hours of counseling per year. Along with counseling, they offer church seminars, an annual conference (which last year hosted 2000 people), seminary-based and church-based training, and a wide variety of publications (including eighteen books, thirty-six booklets, and *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*). Some of their key leaders have become well-known in the Evangelical world: David Powlison, Ed Welch, and Paul Tripp.

If you’ve never heard of CCEF, let me encourage you to pick up one of CCEF’s books or booklets. I think you will find they will be a huge help to your ministry. And if you enjoy what you read, consider taking staff and laypeople to their national conference and training seminars, read some more of their books and journal publications, and maybe even think about taking some of their on-line classes.

This side of heaven, there is no such thing as a perfect organization. CCEF, like any other institution or para-church organization, has strengths and weaknesses. Though not perfect, I do consider a partnership with CCEF a good thing for any pastor to pursue. ■

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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.

My God, I Thank Thee



by Procter/Maker

Lyrics: Many philosophers in the history of the world have spent large amounts of time thinking about and discussing the presence of evil in the world. The well-known question is, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Since we are not God, no human will ever be able to come up with a completely satisfactory answer to that question. However, Biblical Christianity offers by far the most logical and complete understanding of the dynamics behind this confusing and complicated question. In addition, a relationship with Jesus Christ gives the believer the opportunity to find a joyful meaning and purpose in suffering that is impossible for anyone else to achieve. “My God, I Thank Thee” does not even begin to deal with all the theological issues of suffering, but rather expresses very simply the Christian’s attitude about suffering: it is something to be thankful for.

The format of this hymn is very simple. Each verse begins with “I thank Thee” and then proceeds to explain what we are thankful for. The first two verses are filled with things that anyone would be thankful for: the earth, splendor, light, joy, etc. In the third verse, the tone shifts as the author thanks God that “all our joy is touched with pain.” Even though we know that we are supposed to

be joyful and endure suffering, thankfulness is not something that we often feel when we are faced with pain. Adelaide Procter reminds us that one of God’s uses for suffering is simply to keep us from becoming too comfortable where we are. If life were all roses and no thorns, it would be much harder to commit our lives completely to Jesus and live with an eternal perspective. In that sense, God has actually made it easier for us to be the people He wants us to be by not sheltering us from pain.

Another point that this hymn brings out is that all earthly pleasures, even the ones that God has sanctioned and even commanded, will never be completely satisfactory. As long as we are on this earth, we will have a “yearning for a deeper peace, / not known before.” All the good things that God has created for us are not there *only* for our current enjoyment. In reality, they exist to whet our appetite for all the good things “which God has prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). The words of this hymn state it best: “So that earth’s bliss may be our guide, / And not our chain.”

Music: Frederick C. Maker was not a very prolific composer, but had a mastery of the hymn genre that rivals many of

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

My God, I Thank Thee

Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving. – PSALM 107:22

WENTWORTH 8. 4. 8. 4. 8. 4.

MISS ADELAIDE A. PROCTER, 1825-1864

FREDERICK C. MAKER

1. My God, I thank Thee, who hast made The earth so bright—
2. I thank Thee, too, that Thou hast made Joy to a - bound—
3. I thank Thee more that all our joy Is touched with pain;
4. I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast kept The best in store;
5. I thank Thee, Lord, that here our souls Though am - ply blest,

So full of splen - dor and of joy, Beau - ty and light—
So man - y gen - tle thoughts and deeds Cir - cling us round;
That shad - ows fall on bright - est hours, That thorns re - main—
We have e - nough, yet not too much To long for more—
Can nev - er find, al - though they seek, A per - fect rest—

So man - y glo - rious things are here, No - ble and right.
That in the dark - est spot of earth Some love is found.
So that earth's bliss may be our guide, And not our chain.
A yearn - ing for a deep - er peace Not known be - fore.
Nor ev - er shall, un - til they lean On Je - sus' breast. A - MEN.

the more well-known composers. Although he composed a few rousing hymn tunes (e.g., “Angels Holy, High and Lowly”), his speciality was in crafting more peaceful and contemplative hymns. Most of Maker’s hymns are “through-composed,” meaning that the music does not repeat phrases or return at the end to a musical theme from the beginning.

“Wentworth” begins with a rousing unison phrase for the exclamation of thanks at the beginning of each verse. Through the course of the hymn, Maker somehow finds a way to shift back to his default “contemplative” setting, and finishes the piece with a thoughtful quietness that calls us to pay special attention to the last phrase. ■

Three Missing Characteristics in the MODERN CHURCH

To a large extent, some of the Bible principles that regulated the early church are missing in the church today. The purpose of this article is to encourage us to follow the pattern of the early apostolic New Testament church. We suggest three characteristics of the New Testament church which, generally speaking, are out of style today.

The New Testament Church Was an Intolerant Church

If there is anything that is in style in the modern churches, it is the word *tolerance*. *Tolerance* largely means “a willingness to let people do and think as they choose.”

Preachers are majoring today on being broad-minded and are claiming to have received “new light.” But, brother, beware of popular “deluxe” brands of Christianity that are streamlined to suit a generation of people who cannot endure sound doctrine.

There is, of course, a pharisaic intolerance that criticizes everyone who does not dot his *i*'s or cross his *t*'s just like we do. This should have no place in the church. But there is a proper Scriptural intolerance toward letting people do and think as they please in the church.

The New Testament church was intolerant of any way of salvation except through a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Acts 4:12 says, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among

men, whereby we must be saved.” This verse makes the way of salvation straight and narrow. But many churches today say that all religions are but different roads that will finally lead to God.

Brethren, we need to be intolerant of liberal-minded people, who think that any man can build his own road to heaven, and that he does not have to go through Jesus Christ.

The New Testament church was intolerant of anything that compromised the plain teaching of the Gospel.

In Galatia, men were trying to mix in legalism. In Colosse, they were slipping in a bit of mysticism. Paul could have been stylishly tolerant and said nothing about these things, but instead, he warned against yielding to the compromisers of the Gospel. He could have told Timothy to play ball with the apostates of his day, but instead, Paul wrote Timothy these words: “Men shall be lovers of their own selves . . . having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Timothy 3:2, 5). That sounds uncomfortably intolerant. Paul further commanded Titus to reject a man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition. We are not advised here to scold false teachers or to throw rocks at them, but certainly this leaves us no room for the present-day, fashionable fellowship with people regardless of what they teach and believe.

Many of the churches today compro-

mise the Gospel until they become giant, ecclesiastical morgues—places for spiritually dead people.

The New Testament church was intolerant of open, unconfessed sin in its midst.

When Ananias and Sapphira lied, they were dealt with in no uncertain terms. When immorality cropped up in Corinth, Paul delivered the offender to the devil for the destruction of the flesh, and commanded: “Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Corinthians 5:13). That does not sound very tolerant, does it? Surely it was to be done in love and tenderness, with broken hearts and weeping. But sin was not glossed over, excused, and tolerated, as some condone in our day, until liars, gamblers, drunkards, and even divorcees fill prominent places in the church.

The Bible calls the people of God sheep; and He warns about the presence of other animals, such as the wolf, the dog, and the goat among the sheep. But today many churches have become so broad-minded, that what was once a sheepfold has become a spiritual zoo because of the presence of all these other animals.

The early church was intolerant of sin in the camp. Are we going to lower that standard today?

The New Testament Church Was a Repelling Church

Instead of attracting everybody, the early church repelled. Now “to repel” means “to drive back or to turn away.” In Acts 5, trouble had arisen in the church, and God cleaned house. Ananias and Sapphira were carried out dead, and the church remained pure. Acts 5:11 says, “Great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.” Here was a Spirit-filled, united church that did not tolerate revealed sin. Now notice verse 13: “Of the rest durst no man join himself to

them.” People did not join this church carelessly! They were afraid to. There was a holy awe about the early church that kept unholy and insincere people at a distance. People did not rush into this fellowship because it was a nice thing to do. There was a holy repulsion about the church.

Churches today are always trying to attract. Programs, picnics, and prizes are all aimed at drawing the people in. But the New Testament church caused people to stand back! You say, “But what will the people say if we take such a stand against sin and demand full consecration to God as the early church did?” Acts 5:13 says, “The people magnified them.” The church that stays with the Word of God still wins the general respect of the people.

We observe some churches today that make clowns of themselves, trying to run a third-rate amusement center, playing bingo and putting on rummage sales. The preacher and the congregation that stand for God and preach the blackness of sin, the horror of hell, the certainty of judgment, the greatness of free salvation, and the holiness of God’s people, will still be magnified.

You say, “But no one will ever join if we don’t let down the bars and start attracting people instead of repelling them.” But look at Acts 5:13, 14: “Of the rest durst no man join himself to them . . . and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” The New Testament church was so on fire for God that superficial people were afraid to join it, and yet true believers were added. This is the only Scriptural way to increase church membership.

I know there is a false repulsion. Too often we may drive people away by our unholy conduct, lack of love, and bitter attitudes—but there is a repulsion that goes with being a Christian. When a fine Christian woman—beautiful and charming in face, mind, and spirit—comes into

a gathering, she is attractive, but there is also something about her that makes it out of the question to use profanity in her presence. People just do not curse or otherwise misbehave in the presence of such persons. There ought to be that holy repulsion about every Christian when he walks into a gathering. And holy awe will rest upon the church that abides by the Word of God.

The New Testament Church Was a Sensational Church

Something was always happening. On the day of Pentecost, the multitude was amazed, confounded, and perplexed. The early church held a prayer meeting that ended in angelic action. Paul exceedingly troubled Philippi. He created no small stir at Ephesus. He even won for himself the title of “world upsetter.”

We know that there is an extreme sensationalism. We are not advocating mere noise and uproar. But I use the word *sensational* because the word *sensation* refers to stimulation—stimulation to a response. We need to be sensational to the point that we will respond to the message we hear.

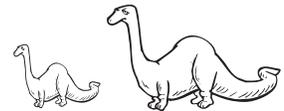
Chief among the besetting sins of professing religious people is hearing without doing. God forbid that we should be like the listeners of Ezekiel’s day, complimenting the messenger without conforming to the message. The cause of Christ has been severely hurt by these Sunday morning bench warmers who pretend to love Christ yet do not obey His commandments. The Lord pleads with us as He did with the Laodicean church, “Be zealous therefore, and repent.” Offer God a surrendered heart, and let Him rekindle a sacred flame on that altar. If the fire has died down in your heart, rake off the ashes and rekindle that flame until you can say with David, “I delight to do Thy will, O my God.”

Just belonging to a church cannot assure one of salvation. We must learn to

know and love the Lord, and to obey Him.

We are living in the day of “the falling away” from the truth. Many denominations do not accept the Bible as God’s infallible Word anymore. It is a modern thing to doubt the Bible, or at least parts of it. The same thing happened in many other denominations and could happen in yours if you are not alert. ■

—Adapted from an article in the Nov. and Dec. 1982 *Christian Contender*.



DINOSAURS . . . cont’d.

endangered-species programs were not developed soon enough.

When we start with the Bible and interpret the evidence we observe today in science through Biblical “glasses” there really is nothing so mysterious about the extinction of the dinosaurs. While the Bible helps us to understand the fate and history of the dinosaurs, understanding the dinosaurs can help us, too, in our mission to bring the good news to the lost. We live in a broken and dying world because of the intrusion of death through the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden (and subsequently all mankind—Romans 5:12). The fossil record, of which many dinosaurs are a part, is a testimony of the truth of God’s Word and the surety of His judgment. But while the first Adam introduced death into the world, the last Adam (Jesus), brings life and redemption (1 Corinthians 15:45) to the world He created.

Next month we will look at biblical and extra-biblical evidence for man and dinosaurs living at the same time within the past few thousand years. ■